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AN INTERPRETATION OF DOCUMENTARY AND ORAL
PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIALS FOR THE PERIOD
SEPTEMBER 1945 UNTIL MAY 1946 IN THE REGION
OF COCHINCHINA AND SOUTHERN ANNAM.

BY

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had to be broken — there are no USAF written procedures to provide for such a situation. I must agree with General Poe who wrote that despite "all the problems with the bureaucracy... I have great faith in the Air Force, and my experience is that if you can get the attention of people who have the ultimate authority, you will usually get a reasonable decision."

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to place in historical perspective the Allied (mainly British) occupation of key areas in southern French Indochina in 1945-1946. This occupation was of profound importance in the subsequent course of history in Vietnam. Although this work is concerned primarily with events in Indochina in 1945 and 1946, earlier material is introduced in order to place these events in historical context.

The relevant research spanned three continents, and was conducted in Saigon, France, Great Britain and the United States. Sources include newly-released archival material in the Public Record Office, London, and official and unofficial published material in the British Library, Imperial War Museum and the French Army's Historical Service in Paris. Personal interviews were also conducted with key contemporary British, French and Vietnamese military and civil officials. Of vital importance were the personal papers of the British Force Commander in Saigon, the late General Sir Douglas Gracey. These papers have never previously been examined, and they shed a great deal of light on events in Saigon in 1945-1946; they also refute much of what has been written on this period by various historians.

It will be seen that divergent Allied policy, especially the narrow US "anticolonial" views which compelled America actively to support the Communists in Vietnam, were of fundamental importance to the formation and ultimate victory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. It should also be apparent that the British Commander in Vietnam, General Gracey, who has consistently been inaccurately portrayed as a politically ignorant throwback to a simpler colonial past, was in fact a shrewd and farsighted officer of considerable ability who was fully attuned to the shifting tide of historical forces. It would not seem unreasonable to suggest that, in some measure, Douglas Gracey was directly responsible for South Vietnam enjoying three decades of freedom from Communist rule.

This thesis is perforce based on predominantly British source material. This is because the occupation was primarily a British operation, and not to have observed this constraint would have resulted in a study of encyclopedic proportions.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABCD	American British Chinese Dutch
ACSEA	Air Commander South East Asia
ADM	Administration, Admiralty
AFLD	Airfield
ALFFIC	Allied Land Forces French Indo China
ALFSEA	Allied Land Forces South East Asia
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
APWI	Allied Prisoners of War and Internees
ARGONAUT	Crimea Conference [here]
BDE	Brigade
BIBBER	Occupation of Siam
BIRDCAGE	Leaflet drops on POW camps, Far East
BMA	British Military Administration
BN	Battalion
BRITCHIN	British Forces China
CA	Civil Affairs
CAS	Civil Affairs Service
CCS	Combined Chiefs of Staff
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
C-in-C	Commander in Chief
CLI	Corps Leger D'Intervention [French Light Intervention Corps]
COMD	Commander
COS	Chiefs of Staff
COSSEA	Chiefs of Staff to South East Asia [message designator]
COY	Company
CSDIC	Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre
CT	China Theater
DB	Division Blindée [French Armored Division]
DGER	Direction General des Etudes et Recherches
DIC	Division Infanterie Coloniale
DIV	Division
FCNL	French Committee of National Liberation
FFR	Frontier Force Rifles; Frontier Force Regiment
FIC	French Indo China
FO	Foreign Office
FORCE 136	SOE in the Far East

HMG	His Majesty's Government
HYBAD	Hyderabad
IBT	India Burma Theater
IEME	Indian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
IND INF BDE	Indian Infantry Brigade
INTSUM	Intelligence Summary
JPS	Joint Planning Staff
LAD	Light Aid Detachment
MASTERDOM	Reoccupation of southern French Indochina
MG	Machine Gun
MASTIFF	Medical Supply Drops and POW Evacuation, Far East
NEI	Netherlands East Indies
OO	Operational Order
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PAO	Principal Administrative Officer
PHPS	Post Hostilities Planning Staff
PIAT	Projector Infantry Anti-Tank
PID	Political Intelligence Department [Foreign Office]
PN	Platoon
POW	Prisoner of War
PRO	Public Record Office
PYTHON	Repatriation of British forces personnel to UK after a defined period of overseas service
QUADRANT	First Quebec Conference
RA	Royal Artillery
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAPWI	Repatriation of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees
REME	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
RN	Royal Navy
RIC	Regiment d'Infanterie Coloniale
SA	Service D'Action
SA(A)	Small Arms (Ammunition)
SAC	Supreme Allied Commander
SACSEA	Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia
SD	Special Duty [RAF]
SEAC	South East Asia Command
SEACOS	South East Asia to Chiefs of Staff [message designator]
SEXTANT	Cairo Conference
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SR	Services des Renseignements

SWPA	South West Pacific Area
TIDERACE	Plan for rapid occupation of Singapore
TPS	Troops
TPT	Transport
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USG	United States Government
VCO	Viceroy's Commissioned Officer
VP	Vital/Vulnerable Point
ZIPPER	Plan for capture of Port Swettenham and Port Dickson areas
4/10 GR	4th Battalion, 10th Regiment, Gurkha Rifles
4/17 DOGRA	4th Battalion, 17th Dogra Regiment. etc.

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND - THE COMMUNISTS AND THE VIET MINH

The struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Soviet Russian Republic, around which are inevitably grouping, on the one hand, the movement for Soviets among the advanced workers of all countries, and, on the other, all the national liberation movements in the colonies and among the oppressed nationalities, whom bitter experience is teaching that there can be no salvation for them except in the victory of the Soviet system over world imperialism.

Lenin.

While the primary focus of this study is on the postwar Allied occupation of Saigon, it is necessary to place the Viet Minh in context as one of the major contenders for power during this crucial period. And since the Viet Minh was a classic example of a Communist umbrella organization, the supreme role played by Indochina's first Communist, Ho Chi Minh, must be examined.

Ho Chi Minh was most widely known as Nguyen Ai Quoc until 1940, 1941 or 1943 (opinions differ on this). For simplicity he shall be referred to as Ho Chi Minh throughout this paper.

A good many authorities agree that the final challenge to France in Indochina began, ironically, in France just after World War One. The young Ho Chi Minh was there in the course of extensive travels which are well documented elsewhere. He had left Indochina in 1911 at the age of 21, and was not to return for 30 years.

In 1920, after Lenin had published his "Theses on the National and Colonial Questions" at the Second Congress of the Comintern, Ho was in Paris. A friend gave him a copy of Lenin's Theses, in which he hoped to find the answer to his question as to which International (the Second or Lenin's Third) sided with the peoples of colonial countries.¹ When Ho had earlier raised the question at a meeting, he was told that it was the Third, and given the Theses.

He read and reread the paper, making sure that he clearly understood every line of it. Then, to use his own words:

"What emotion, enthusiasm, clear-sightedness, and confidence it instilled in me! I was overjoyed to tears. Though sitting alone in my room, I shouted aloud as if addressing large crowds: 'Dead martyrs, compatriots! this is what we need, this is the path to liberation! ' After then, I had entire confidence in Lenin, in the Third International!"²

Here was the fountainhead of this inspiration, the source which became a trickle, then a torrent which washed the French and then the Americans out of Southeast Asia. The Theses addressed 15 groups of peoples, from the Polish-Jewish problem to Ireland and the Negroes in America. One of the 15 groupings was less specific, a sort of catch-bag labelled "Colonies", in which fell places like Indochina.³

Lenin warned that the Western bourgeoisie was perpetuating inequality and class differences by "pretending that all men are absolutely equal." The Communist Party must base its national policy

on solid principles based on local (economic) situations. The revolutions would overthrow the landowners and holders of wealth, and fifty years later much of that plan has been fulfilled. Lenin's words are still valid:

"... all events in world politics are inevitably revolving around one central point, viz., the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Soviet Russian Republic, around which are inevitably grouping, on the one hand, the movement for Soviets among the advanced workers of all countries, and, on the other, all the national liberation movements in the colonies and among the oppressed nationalities, whom bitter experience is teaching that there can be no salvation for them except in the victory of the Soviet system over world imperialism." ⁴

Only the Soviet system could grant real equality to nations, and it was "necessary that all Communist Parties render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and subject nations (for example, in Ireland, among the Negroes of America, etc.) and in the colonies."⁵ This last statement was of prime importance; the Communist Parties must assist the revolutionary movements. It set the Third International apart from the Second.

What most impressed the young HỒ Chí Minh were the comments directed specifically "to the more backward states and nations, in which feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant relations predominate." There were six main points. First, all Communist Parties must involve themselves in the liberation movements, which must be led by workers, not peasants. Second and third, to combat the clergy and Pan-Islamism. Fourth, to support peasant against landlord, to lend the peasant movement "the most revolutionary character" and to set up "Working People's Soviets". Fifth, to enter alliances with anybody, provided the Party kept its own distinct character. Sixth, to remind the toilers that independent states created by the imperialists were really anything but that, being tied to their creators by economic or military bonds. There was "no salvation for dependent and weak nations except in a union of Soviet republics". Lenin went on to recall how Socialists had behaved during the Great War of 1914-1918.

In the "Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions," 26 July 1920, Lenin particularly stressed the distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations. The emphasis was on the idea

that the world was divided into two camps, a small group of imperialist countries being ranged against the Soviet system headed by Russia. Lenin wrote with unambiguous clarity: "If we let this escape us, we shall not be able correctly to pose a single national or colonial question, even if it concerns a most remote corner of the world."⁶

Since peasants make up most of the population in backward countries, the peasants must be won over. But they would not be allowed to lead the revolution -- only the workers could do that. And, importantly, it would be possible for backward countries to pass straight over to the Soviet system without going to the capitalist stage. This was an early unilateral twisting of Marxist theory, for even at that early stage, its flaws were readily apparent. Such, very briefly, was the teaching which so profoundly affected HỒ Chí Minh.

It was thus patriotism which brought HỒ to Lenin; after that it was a Messiah-disciple relationship. To HỒ, only Lenin had the answers to the problems of the oppressed, and Lenin's program would provide the vehicle by which HỒ's goals would be realized. At the 18th Congress of the French Socialist Party, held in Tours in December, 1920, Ho aligned himself with the Marxists and voted to join the Third International. He thus became not only a founder member of the French Communist Party, but the first Vietnamese Communist.

In 1923 HỒ went to Moscow, where he became deeply and totally wedded to the Party, learning Bolshevik theory, history, agitation, organization, self-criticism, dialectics and tactics at the Eastern Worker's University. In return he wrote for Pravda and handled the Comintern's international correspondence.⁷ HỒ, recognized as a bright and industrious young man, became head of the Southern Section of the Eastern Department of the Comintern.

In early 1923, also, the Sun-Joffe agreement brought Kuomintang-Soviet cooperation. Sun Yat-sen had turned in vain to the West for help in his struggle against the Peking government.⁸ Sun permitted communists to join his revolutionary movement as individuals, but not as an organized party.

The early Comintern Congresses had paid scant attention to the problems of peasants in Far Eastern colonial countries, being exercised almost exclusively by the industrialized capitalist countries, but the unrest in China appeared to Russia to offer scope for profitable intervention.

Lénin, the communist Messiah, died in 1924, and within half a century his disciples would have brought over half the world under Communism. In December of that year HỒ was sent to China in his first major assignment as a Comintern agent.⁹ He was officially designated as interpreter to Mikhael Borodin, Comintern adviser to Chiang Kai-Shek; his real mission was to organize Southeast Asia movements which would be directed by Moscow. There were scattered and splintered revolutionary groups in existence, and they provided Ho with ready recruits as he began his task of building Communism in Southeast Asia.

The memorable achievement of this period in South China was the formation of the Việt Nam Thanh Niên Cách Mạng Đồng Chí Hội (Vietnam Association of Young Revolutionaries), or Thanh Nien, which eventually became the Indochina Communist Party.

The most promising new Party members were sent to the famous Whampoa Military Academy, from which graduated such people as Chou En-lai and Phạm Văn Đồng. Ho lectured on politics at this institution. According to Fall, HỒ established 200 cadres between January 1925 and July 1927; these were infiltrated back to Indochina.¹⁰ Those who pursued their own nationalistic courses, rather than the Communist line, were betrayed by the Communists to the French security forces. The money received from the French for these tips was used by HỒ Chi Minh to build up his own units.¹¹

In 1927 Chiang broke with the Communists and HỒ was obliged to leave China. His mysterious and varied travels, and his arrest in 1931 in Hong Kong by the British, have been the subject of considerable interest. It is worth emphasizing here that in this early period his talent for survival and his unmatched sense of opportunism are amply illustrated. In 1925 he betrayed Vietnam's greatest contemporary patriot, Phan Bội Châu, to the French for 100,000 piasters, a sum whose magnitude can be appreciated when it is understood that 5 piasters would have bought a water buffalo.¹²

There were other groups competing for power during this period. The VNQDD, or Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng (Vietnam Nationalist Party) was probably the first and best known of these modern nationalist movements. Nguyen Thai Hoc was the force behind the new party, which was based roughly on the Kuomintang in China.¹³ The ever-essential publishing house was set up in Hanoi, and this provided cover for an internal

clandestine group. Hoàng Văn Chí¹⁴ stated that, early in 1929, the group had already grown to some 1500 members, organized in 120 cells. However, the murder of a French labor recruiter named Bazin provoked swift response from the French security forces. The murderer was never found, but when the Sûreté commenced systematically to apprehend the group's more important members, Nguyễn Thái Học ordered an armed uprising (planned for a later date) to commence immediately while the VNQDD still possessed the capacity to implement it.

But confused orders for executing the rising resulted in only one garrison revolting, the famous Yên Bái Mutiny of 10 February 1930. French reaction was predictable and what was left of the VNQDD leadership was beheaded or fled to China. They tried to come back in 1945, but were liquidated by the Communists.

While the VNQDD was scattered after Yên Bái, the Thanh Niên had built up a solid core of workers. However, there were now two other Communist organizations competing for recognition, the "Indochinese Communist Party" and the "Indochinese Communist League". But although these parties were in competition their messages were similar and falling on receptive ears. In the late twenties, factory workers, miners and plantation workers were being organized by the thousands into Red Unions, and strikes were carried out throughout Annam and Tonkin primarily. Each nation without exception has its share of citizens who for their own reasons promote an alien and often hostile philosophy, and France was no exception, for French Communist agents played important parts in organizing the early Communist movement in the Far East.

In 1929 the Thanh Niên became the Annamese Communist Party; the Tonkin branch of the Thanh Niên had coalesced into the Indochinese Communist Party.¹⁵ Each of the three Communist Parties claimed recognition by the Comintern, which understandably would not tolerate this fragmentation and overlapping for long.

In 1929 Ho Chi Minh was in Siam, subverting the 30,000 or so Vietnamese emigrés there. In early 1930 the Comintern ordered him to Hong Kong, where he was to make one party out of the three. In February 1930 he imposed the Comintern will on the unification meeting, and the result was the single Viet Nam Communist Party. When the documents were sent to Moscow for examination and verification, the Party was directed, through the Southern Bureau in Shanghai, to rename itself the Indochinese Communist Party to embrace all Indochina and not just Vietnam.¹⁶

The new, unified Party (with a total of 211 Communists) was admitted to the Comintern in April, 1931.

Although this high-level direction from Moscow was gratifying, central Party interest was not exactly transfixed on Indochina, which was thought to be politically in the stone age ("politically inert").¹⁷ The Vietnamese, of course, were anything but that.

The depression years brought the Party's first major test -- the well-known Nghệ-Tĩnh soviets and what is generally called the Red Terror of 1930. The Sixth Comintern Congress had concluded that this capitalist crisis was a good time to rise, but that decisions would have to be taken locally. Thus, along with widespread strike activity, Communist cadres organized the peasants of Nghệ An and Hà-Tĩnh to take land from the landlords (the "Land to the Tiller" slogan). A good deal of secondary source material, often based on questionable documentation, has established this scenario.

These self-run mini-communes were called "xô-việt" (soviets), and some lasted for over a year before the French security forces, stretched and busy elsewhere, were able to deal with them. For while these xô-việts were easily created, Party histories record that no means of self-defence were simultaneously formed. Peasant associations were set up under the hammer and sickle, guided by local cadres, and richer peasants were executed.¹⁸

The Communists were joined at first by more moderate elements who saw an opportunity to hit the French, but the Communists preferred to operate alone at this time. The alliances came later, when the Party were wiser. On 12 September, 1930, thousands of peasants were mobilized to march on the provincial capital at Vinh. They were repulsed by a small detachment of less than a hundred troops (a dozen Frenchmen and 77 Vietnamese tirailleurs),¹⁹ and over 170 Vietnamese were killed by the troops and a couple of aircraft.

The Sûreté picked off the leadership, and when the Foreign Legion was brought in they exacted a hideous and often sadistic revenge, known as the White Terror of 1931. The Communists fled, leaving the poor peasants to bear the brunt of the retaliation in the area. It is estimated that 90 per cent of the ICP was destroyed in the French reaction. According to the Party, the Comintern did not appreciate this effort and admonished the ICP for the poor planning and results which had cost them so dearly. But the experience of the soviets was regarded by the Party

as a trial run for the August Revolution of 1945. As the Party's own historians put it, speaking of the Nghê-Tĩnh soviets:

It affirmed the leading role of the Indochinese Communist Party towards the Vietnamese Revolution. Indeed though new-born, our Party was clearly fully able to launch a broad mass movement, and especially succeeded in mobilizing and heading the peasant masses... During and after the Nghê-Tĩnh Soviet movement, although it suffered heavy losses, our Party was steeled and tempered in the fire of revolutionary struggle and accumulated experiences in seizing revolutionary power for the people. 20

Anyway, new cadres were being trained at the Stalin school in Moscow, the University of the Toilers of the East. The training lasted from one to three years, and men like Trần Văn Giàu were soon to be introduced to Indochina (in his case to Cochinchina).²¹

While the Party was recovering, the Trotskyists were building up, primarily in the South. Ironically, as with the Marxist-Communists who were exposed to the new doctrines in France during the First World War, the Trotskyists were motivated early in 1932 by Tha Thu Thau, a university man who had recently returned from France. Although small Trotskyist groups had appeared a few months earlier, Tha Thu Thau became the leader. Rebuilding, like the Stalinists, after Sûreté action, they merged with Trần Văn Giàu's Party in 1933 to work openly through the system.²² Together they published that most famous of revolutionary papers, La Lutte (the Struggle, or Fight). As a matter of fact, the Communist coalition legally elected three members to the Saigon municipal council in 1937. From then on the Trotskyists refused to conform to central Stalinist direction from Moscow and took over La Lutte. They grew stronger, but the Japanese entry into Indochina changed everything.

Although the ICP was following Comintern instructions to the letter, to form alliances with anybody if it furthered Party plans, Hồ wrote the Stalinist line from afar:

"With the Trotskyists, no compromise, no concession, is possible. Every means available must be used to unmask them as fascist agents, who must be politically annihilated." ²³

As it turned out, most of the Trotskyists were later physically liquidated, which certainly "politically annihilated" them.

During the rebuilding the Party "severely criticized" almost everything: "leftist deviation, such as isolationism, narrow-mindedness, failing to use legal and semi-legal forms to push the movement forward,"

as well as "rightist deviations", such as "legalism, overrejoicing at partial successes...lack of vigilance, Trotskyists, and reckless cooperation with them." Not cooperation, but reckless cooperation.

The major Communist program of the thirties was the United Front; even the Trotskyists were for it. As the Nazis consolidated their power in Germany, and fascism was on the rise in Italy and Japan, the Comintern directed a broad world-wide strategy of anti-fascist alliances. The pressure on the Communists in Indochina eased somewhat when in 1936 the Popular Front government assumed office in France, supported by the Communists and Socialists, and the French signed a mutual defence pact with Russia. In this new atmosphere the Trotskyists secured 80% of the votes cast in the 1939 elections in Cochinchina.²⁴ But hoped for changes in the colonies never came about.

Local Party workers worldwide had a difficult time in explaining Russia's complete policy reversals, for in 1939 Stalin signed his pact with Hitler, which surprised cadres everywhere. It should have surprised no one, given Lenin's dictum of signing a pact with the devil if it would further the Party's interests. Even the Party's writers admit to the perplexity of the cadres. The old enemy was now an ally. Following the Soviet-German treaty "a number of our Party members became confused and wavering,"²⁵ and to rectify this a book had to be written, the title (and explanation) being, "The Soviet Union is Always Faithful to Peace."

In 1938 the Popular Front government in Paris fell, eventually resulting again in increased pressure on the revolutionaries. When the Soviets and the Nazis signed their pact, the Soviets and the French were no longer allies and the move was on again to root out the Communists everywhere. By now Party slogans emphasizing class struggle were replaced by messages concentrating on the imperialist war and national liberation. The 1936-1939 years had given the Party invaluable experience with broad front strategy.

The prewar years had also given rise to two other groups in Cochinchina which became important because of their rapid growth. These were the Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo sects, eclectic religions indigenous to the south; they were centred around Tây Ninh and Cần Thơ respectively. The Cao Đài were later armed by the Japanese, who also protected the Hòa Hảo founder, the "mad bonze" Huỳnh Phú Sổ, from the French. When the Japanese were later disarmed and the Allies confined to key areas around Saigon, the Việt Minh "honour units" killed him and chopped up

his body by order of Trần Văn Giấu, who showed a distinct propensity for solving his problems in this manner.

The Japanese entry into Indochina brought new trials and opportunities for the Party, which suffered further damage from more premature revolts. An uprising accompanied by an assault on the French fort at Bac Son in 1940 was quickly quashed, and when 1500 native troops in Saigon rebelled against orders to move to the Thai border the local Party cadres decided to start a revolt. Hà Nội forbade the planned uprising, but such few of its emissaries as avoided arrest by the ubiquitous Sûreté were ignored and the insurrection took place on 23 November 1940. By December the revolt had been crushed, for the local native troops had been disarmed earlier. The Party was again badly hurt in the French repression, and Trần Văn Giấu whose invariable inclination was towards violence, was in official disgrace. A smaller uprising in Nghệ An was similarly suppressed.

Again, after the failure of the 1940 risings, the Party analyzed the reasons for the failures. As they wrote later, the Party must be more careful about the timing of the revolt. It must organize where the enemy was weak (that is, in the countryside), and then gradually move out (a sort of Communist version of the old oil-spot technique). And the Party was reinforced in its view that the peasants must be mobilized and led by the workers,²⁶ but there were precious few workers in Indochina, however, (reflecting the peasant-based economy).

The German attack on Russia in June, 1941, caused the Party cadres worldwide to once again accommodate an abrupt reversal in strategy. Earlier, in November 1940, the Seventh Plenum of the Indochinese Communist Party changed the name of the front from the "Indo-Chinese Anti-Imperialist National United Front" (of the Sixth Plenum) to the "National United Front Against the French and Japanese Fascists in Indo-China", to reflect the fact that overnight the fascists (and one imperialist) had again become the main enemy.²⁷

The Sixth Plenum had already subjugated the main theme of class struggle to that of national liberation. There was no more talk of worker soviets -- the slogans were now of a Vietnamese government, a Democratic Republic. It was a shrewd and powerful appeal, which could hardly fail to attract support from patriotic Vietnamese of all political hues.

Hồ's whereabouts during the period are a matter of conjecture, and most "authoritative" sources have been compelled to rely on second-hand information to support their conclusions. For this study, the 1941-1945 years are of particular importance.

On February 1941, Ho, still better known as the veteran revolutionary Nguyễn Ái Quốc, finally went to Indochina. For the first time since 1923 he was acting largely on his own, the Russians being too pre-occupied with their own survival in the West to bother with anything else. To use his own words, his life to now had been mapped out for him, and he had simply followed orders.

Ho now went to Pác Bô, in Cao Bằng province. During the period of 10 to 19 May 1941, the Eighth Plenum of the Party Central Committee was held. This is of more than passing interest because the Party took a hard look at the political situation and made a decision of profound importance; this was recognized as the start of the Party's most vital period, and which was for the Party, as Trường Chinh later wrote, the chance which appears but once in a thousand years, made possible by the war.²⁸

The Party Central Committee traced the course and causes of the war and expected Germany to attack Russia, no doubt as a result of intelligence received from Russia. War would flare up in the Pacific and the imperialists would be hit badly, but the antifascist alliance would survive and eventually win. As Party histories noted in hindsight, as the First World War brought the USSR in being, so also would the Second World War bring other Socialist states into being. It reaffirmed the policy of subordinating the class struggle to the call for independence, as this would produce a wider response from the masses. With Ho personally guiding the Plenum, a more urgent sense of purpose was impressed on the Party members. But the Sûreté were still effective, and several Party members were ambushed and captured while returning from the meeting.

The Eighth Plenum was of great historical significance for another reason. The decision was made to form a broad front alliance which would reach more people and be more effective than a purely Communist organization. This was to be the Việt Nam Độc-Lập Đồng-Minh Hội, or Việt Minh. This is the Party's version, although most sources say that the Việt Minh was formed at Chingshi, across the border in China. In

any case, represented were the Communists, the new Viet Nam Party, the Viet Nam Revolutionary Youth League, what was left of the Viet Nam Nationalist Party (VNQDD), and a few smaller groups.²⁹ These made up the Viet Minh.

By now Nguyễn Ái Quốc (Nguyen the Patriot) was "HỒ Chí Minh" (He Who Enlightens), although again authoritative sources say he took the name when he left prison the following year. His Viet Minh included something for everyone. To organise the masses, a forest of "National Salvation" associations sprang up. There were Workers for National Salvation, Peasants for National Salvation, National Salvation Associations for Old Folks, Women, Army men, Youth, Buddhist Bonzes, and more. Everything was National Salvation, not anti-bourgeois, or proletarian, or anti-imperialist or anti-capitalist. Everything was aimed at the right time to rise, and the training of cadres took on top priority. Lenin's idea of "less foes, more allies", was being put into practice.

Not only were there associations for everyone, there were slogans and songs for everything. For traditionalists, there was a neat Party twist to the old three-syllable Confucian ode on ethics; this was the "Ngũ Từ Kinh", or five-syllable ode, and it was sung:

To have a solid foundation
Our association should start with small cells
Having three to nine members
Who elect a leader for themselves.
A group of two, three cells
Should elect an executive committee.
Strict discipline must be maintained
And bi-weekly meetings well attended....³⁰

Bernard Fall described this start as a "private political venture (with economic overtones) of the Kuomintang warlord of Kwantung province, General Chang Fa-kwei."³¹ Chinese influence was undoubtedly great, but the idea certainly coincided with HỒ's thoughts on making alliances. While the Bắc Sơn base area was being built up, Ho went back to China (the Party histories say he went to the Chinese for help). But on 29 August, 1942, he was arrested in the market town of Tukvin, in Tsinsi district, Kwangsi province. For months the Party thought he was dead. These events, like almost everything else before about 1945, are open to conjecture, and a reader's opinions will be formed by what and who he reads. HỒ's whereabouts, the site of the Eighth Plenum and the formation of the Việt Minh, when Nguyễn Ái Quốc became HỒ Chí Minh,

and even whether or not he was really in prison³² -- there will be variations and contradictions from source to source.

It remains unclear as to why Ho was arrested in the first place. Certainly his Communist and revolutionary background were fundamental to his arrest -- some even say that the reason went back to his old days with Borodin. Whatever the reason, it seems clear that he was in jail, sustained largely by his beliefs and keeping his mind active by writing poetry of questionable quality. His party had suffered greatly at the hands of the French. In 1931 the Party had about 1500 members,³³ and at this time the membership was about the same.

According to Party sources, Ho was released from prison on 16 September, 1943.³⁴ His release was partially the result of the failure of the Đông Minh Hội to supercede the Viet Minh. On 4 October 1942, Chang Fa-Kwei (military governor of the Fourth War Zone, in Kwangsi), had sponsored a political congress in Liuchow. By 10 October the Việt Nam Cách Mệnh Đông Minh Hội was formed.³⁵ It was composed primarily of the old VNQDD, Phúc Quốc, and seven other groups. The Đông Minh Hội was to provide information for the Chinese and eventually perhaps assume the form of a government in exile. The Đông Minh Hội could not compete with the Communists, and a network of cells and organization could not be created overnight. After all, the Communists, in assiduously building their Party over a period of 15 years, had through stern trial and error accumulated an experience against which other groups were largely unable to compete.

Somewhere at this point, enter the Americans. The accepted story is that Ho wrote to Chang Fa-Kwei from prison, offering the services of his organization in exchange for his release. Bernard Fall cites a source which stated that the U.S. successfully intervened with the Chinese on Ho's behalf, and "the Americans handed the Soviets, as often elsewhere during the war years, another trump card."³⁶

According to Chang, the reorganization (which saw Ho's apparatus incorporated into the overall Vietnamese group) had two main objectives: to help the revolutionists gain independence, and to help the Chinese military advance to Vietnam at a later date.³⁷ Ho, biding his time, accepted a lesser role in the group.³⁸

In 1943 the Cao Bằng base areas had been developed and intensive work carried out in the provinces of Hà Giang, Bắc Cạn and Lạng Sơn.

In August 1943, converging "columns" led by Giáp and Chu Văn Tấn met, and what the Party called a "political corridor" was created,³⁹ which formed the basis of the future "liberated zone" and joined the base areas of Cao Bằng and Bắc Sơn.

In 1944 a thirst for direct action almost moved the Party into a confrontation with the French, a confrontation for which the Communists were not yet wholly ready. However, Hồ was released from prison in time to stop any premature rising, although he did direct the establishment of an armed force. Thus the forerunner of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) was created by Giáp later in the year (on 22 December 1944). It was called the Vietnam Propaganda and Liberation Unit.⁴⁰

It was not surprising that the ICP was able to build up its base areas in the Bắc Sơn - Lạng Sơn regions. The haute régions of Tonkin, among others, were never fully pacified by the French, and the Viet Minh found ready recruits among the Thổ[?] tribesmen. In May, 1955, the Commander-in Chief, French Forces, Indochina, issued a three-volume work which was distributed to a limited number of officials and is not generally available. These volumes summarized the French experiences of the war and sought to provide guidance for similar wars in the future. Volume Two explained, in part, Giáp's success in recruiting in the base areas:

What we have observed in Indochina confirms a fact known in our African possessions: there exists a permanence or continuity in the centers of unrest. History and geography reveal that certain regions are traditional cradles of insurgent movements, and these later serve as preferred areas for the guerillas.

It is in the provinces where the population has always shown itself to be proud, bold and independent that the revolt has taken on the most acute and intense forms (the Plain of Reeds, the region of Vinh, the mountains of Lạng Sơn, etc.) It is striking to compare some recent engagements with the history of certain battles which recurred during the conquest. The events were often the same and even happened in the same places. Some of the writings from Tonkinese and Mandarin to our forces were written in the same vein as Việt Minh pamphlets.⁴¹

In late 1944 a U.S. pilot was shot down and somehow fell into Ho's hands. It was a great chance for a formal introduction to the Americans, and the OSS eventually arranged to set up a liaison unit with the Việt Minh. There is no widely known effort of the OSS to

actively work with or train any non-Communist groups, even though the main focus was obviously on the established Party network. It is one of the assertions of this paper that Ho's recognition of the political immaturity of his OSS colleagues, and the manner in which the Communists were able to manipulate the schoolboy anticolonialism of the U.S. officers, was a major factor in their eventual ultimate triumph. It is one thing to make temporary alliances with the enemy of an enemy, but the real damage was done after the war with Japan had ended, when the OSS, with little political experience and training, were simply not in the same class as the Communists and were unable to look ahead. The OSS, for those crucial postwar weeks in Southeast Asia, appeared to be acting independently, certainly indulging in what Donald Lancaster calls their "policy-framing proclivities"⁴² in contradiction to State Department policy -- and doing it clumsily, with terribly damaging results for the West and, eventually, the Vietnamese.

Earlier, although General Chennault had been warned of Ho's Communist background by the KMT and advised not to see him, Ho secured an interview by a trick. Charles Fenn described it as follows:

... then Ho said he had a small favor to ask the General... But all HỒ wanted was the General's photograph. There's nothing Chennault likes more than giving his photograph. So he presses a bell... In due course its another girl who produces a folder of eight-by-ten glossies. 'Take your pick,' says Chennault. Ho takes one and asks would the General be so kind as to sign it?... Chennault writes across the bottom, 'Yours Sincerely, Claire L.Chennault.' And out we all troop into Kunming's sparkling air.

As we shall see, it was by waving this photograph like a magic wand that HỒ was later to produce a magnificent rabbit.⁴³

HỒ's later meeting with Colonel Helliwell is well documented elsewhere. OSS men were dropped in to Ho, and supplies followed. The small OSS group trained Giap's troops in the use of small arms, grenades and crew-served weapons. One of the American medical corpsmen may have even saved the veteran revolutionary's life when Ho came down with a bad fever.⁴⁴

All this OSS activity was supposed to produce a force to fight the Japanese. As with their Chinese ideological comrades in Yenan, the Viet Minh were noted for their ability to avoid the Japanese. Bernard Fall could only find a single recorded instance of a Viêt Minh attack

attack on the Japanese, and this was when a battalion-sized group of Việt Minh, attacked a Japanese outpost of 40 men; 8 Japanese were killed.⁴⁵ As in China,⁴⁶ the OSS were apparently pretty much in the dark as to Communist activity in Tonkin, for Hồ had no intention of wasting his troops against the Japanese, who he knew would lose the war and leave anyway. It was heady stuff, but not quite behind the lines, given the studiousness with which the Việt Minh apparently avoided the Japanese.

On 9 March 1945 the sword, which had been hanging over the head of the French for more than four years, fell. This coup by the Japanese will be discussed elsewhere in this work. Suffice it to say that it was one of the major reasons for the ultimate success of the Communists. For now the French security forces were completely neutralized, and the Japanese evinced interest in the Việt Minh only when they threatened the Japanese lines of communication. There followed that single known Việt Minh attack on the Japanese in July, and in August the Japanese laid down their arms. This was the historic moment the Party had been waiting for: the Allies were slow in arriving, the Japanese were neutral and the French were helpless. The Japanese had earlier declared Vietnam independent, and Trần Trọng Kim had formed a government at the request of Emperor Bảo Đại.[?] At about this time the terms of the Potsdam Conference became known.

On 13 August 1945 the Indochinese Communist Party held its Second National Congress at Tân Trao village, to discuss strategy and the coming rising. News of Japan's surrender was spread rapidly, and the Insurrection Committee⁴⁷ issued General Order Number One, the "Call For a General Insurrection". It proclaimed the surrender of the Japanese Fascists and called for a general uprising.⁴⁸ Political and military tasks must be carried out simultaneously, and an ultimatum was sent to the Japanese Army.⁴⁹

In the call for general insurrection the ICP, in the excitement of the moment, could be excused a Freudian slip in forgetting the emphasis on nationalism by declaring that "the Party expects you to make great sacrifices."⁵⁰

On 16 August, to give the uprising a semblance of legitimacy, a Việt Minh People's Congress was convened at Tân Trao, the famous "Lightning Session," so called because by the time the non-Communist

element of the Việt Minh heard about it the Congress was over.⁵¹ The Congress rubber-stamped the decisions taken by the Party a few days earlier, and approved the gold-star red flag and the National Anthem "March to the Front". It indorsed the insurrection and the ten point domestic and foreign policy statement of the Việt Minh League.⁵² It also adopted the National Liberation Committee, which became the Provisional Government under President HỒ Chí Minh; the Provisional Government made its first appearance on 17 August.⁵³

The tremendous urgency and instant bursts of activity of the Việt Minh may be imagined when one considers that on 17 August the Việt Minh, with carefully planned tactics, infiltrated and took over a mass rally in Hanoi. The Việt Minh flag replaced the imperial flag of the Bảo Đại government, and on the next day the Japanese permitted the Việt Minh to seize the arms of the Garde Indochinoise.⁵⁴

The Party puts the events of 17 August somewhat more euphemistically:

On August 17, 1945, the General Association of Functionaries held a meeting in favor of the Trần Trọng Kim puppet Government. Answering the Front's call, the people of Hanoi protested energetically and turned this meeting in favour of the Việt Minh front.⁵⁵

On 18 August the Revolutionary Military Committee (Uprising Committee of the Party Committee in Hanoi) moved their office from a village in the suburbs to inside Hanoi.

On 19 August a huge demonstration in Hanoi, orchestrated by the Việt Minh, sealed the Front's ascendancy. A mass meeting was called for 1100 hours at the Municipal Theatre Square. A military contingent fired a salvo, the new national flag was displayed and the anthem played. A member of the Revolutionary Military Committee repeated the call for general insurrection, and the Viet Minh cadres fanned out to seize the organs of the government. The same thing happened at the provisional capitals of Yên Bái, Thái Bình, Phúc Yên, Thanh Hóa, and others. On 20 August it was the turn of Bắc Ninh, Thái Nguyên, Ninh Bình, and on 21 August, Cao Bằng, Tuyên Quang, Sơn Tây, Kiến An, Nghệ An, Ninh Thuan, and so on as the cadres went flying out from the capital. The early 19 August scene in Hanoi is described well by Nguyễn Đức Minh, as two platoons of Việt Minh troops strode through the populous quarters of Hanoi, marching to "một, hai! một, hai!" (one, two! one, two!):

Though still poorly dressed and ill-equipped these men were the first Vietnamese troops not commanded by foreign officers to march in Hanoi since the end of the 19th century! In a country which sets as much store by symbol and myth as Việt Nam does, the effect upon the masses was very great indeed...⁵⁶

The shock waves burst upon the imperial court at Huế on 23 August. The Viet Minh sent an ultimatum to Emperor Bảo Đại, with a deadline of 1330 hours.⁵⁷ At that time a large Viet Minh crowd appeared, making a fearful noise outside the court. While the cabinet discussed the issue, news just happened to arrive which confirmed that two leading mandarins had been brutally murdered by the Communists -- this was to assist the debaters to reach a speedy solution, and it did. The shocked court disbanded and Bảo Đại's abdication marked the end of the long and sometimes glorious Vietnamese monarchy. One of the murdered mandarins was Ngô Đình Khôi, brother of the future South Vietnamese President Ngô Đình Diệm; he had served Bảo Đại and was said to have been buried alive with his son, just one of the many victims of an unparalleled campaign of assassinations carried out at this time by the Party led by that gentle "little old man sitting on his hill."⁵⁸

Sacks described the abdication as an event of great significance, as the Vietnamese people, great traditionalists, saw in this the passing of the Mandate of Heaven from the Emperor to the Việt Minh and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.⁵⁹

On 25 August the Việt Minh cavalcade reached Saigon. Things were quite different in the South (Nam Bộ), and the Việt Minh did not have things their own way. Trần Văn Giấu, another alumnus from the Moscow school for revolutionaries, had been put out of action by the French after the abortive 1940 Communist uprising. The Japanese coup of 9 March had resulted in the release of many experienced cadres of all parties, and rival groups were rebuilt. On 14 August a wide spectrum of parties had formed the United National Front (UNF), in which the ICP was on paper a minority;⁶⁰ but like the Viet Minh itself, the UNF was a vehicle for Communist ambition. Membership included the (Stalinist) Indochinese Communist Party of Hồ Chí Minh and his southern lieutenant Trần Văn Giấu, the Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo sects, the Advanced Guard Youth (later described by British Intelligence as militant and dangerous), the Trotskyists and the Vietnam Independence Party. It turned out that the leader of the Advanced Guard Youth (or Vanguard Youth, as it is also called), Dr. Phạm Ngọc Thạch, was really a member of the Indochinese

Communist Party, and his organization supplied most of the early "muscle" for Việt Minh manoeuvres.⁶¹

The Japanese attitude in the south was markedly different in technique, if not in substance, from that of the Japanese northern command; the high concentration of senior commanders and staff officers accounted for a somewhat less parochial outlook. While the Japanese were willing to turn the reins of government over to the Vietnamese, they preferred to exclude the Việt Minh, which was indistinguishable from its Communist brain and backbone. So the Japanese permitted the UNF to take over a number of public buildings and assume a posture of control.

Trần Văn Giàu immediately confronted the UNF, telling them that since they appeared to be a Japanese creation they would not be recognized by the Allies. Only the Việt Minh, free from Japanese taint, would be acceptable. Lacking the broader historical perspectives of the Communists, the UNF collapsed in uncertainty and by 25 August the Provisional Executive Committee for the South was formed, with Trần Văn Giàu in charge. As at Huế 48 hours earlier, huge demonstrations on 21 and 25 August helped the UNF members to make up their minds.⁶² Of 10 members of the Committee, 4 were listed as Communist and 2 as Việt Minh,⁶³ although at least one of the listed Việt Minh (Phạm Ngọc Thạch, of the Advanced Guard Youth) was a Communist. As Party histories say, the formation of the Provisional Executive Committee (PEC) completed the "August Revolution". In victory, the Party reiterated one of its most fundamental principles: "To make full use of the contradictions among the enemy ranks and take good aim at the main enemy",⁶⁴ a principle which proved its value in the next 30 years.

"The success of the Revolution does not come by itself, it must be prepared and won. The August Revolution took place within the span of only fifteen days but it had been prepared through fifteen years from the first days of our Party!"⁶⁵

The Party was now in control in the big three cities of Bắc Bộ, Trung Bộ, and Nam Bộ: Hanoi, Hue and Saigon. McAlister offers a good summary of the event:

While one of the key factors in the launching of the Vietnamese revolution was the destruction of the colonial authority by the Japanese, their material assistance to the Việt Minh was also vital. By ceding French arms to them instead of the nationalist government of Tran Trong Kim and by helping the Việt Minh to establish arsenals,

the Japanese seemed to be acknowledging that the Communist-led movement was, in their view, the most capable of Vietnamese factions to thwart the return of the French. 66

Most of these arsenals were in the north, and in the last analysis the Japanese would have turned the government over to the devil rather than see the French return (provided the devil was Asian). The difference between the Japanese and the Chinese was that the Japanese would not be bribed.

The Party's critique of the August Revolution revealed that a major failure was their inability to seize the Banque de l'Indochine, which was the one institution the Japanese held back from the Viet Minh; another was the Party's failure to seize more arms from the Japanese, although General Numata, Chief of Staff at Headquarters, Japanese Southern Army, later stated that the Japanese turned over quantities of arms to the Viet Minh. As the Party noted, Karl Marx acknowledged that one cause of the failure of the Paris Commune in the 18th century was the failure to capture the Banque de France (the "nerve center" of capitalist activity).⁶⁷

On 26 August Lieutenant General Numata flew to Rangoon to negotiate the Japanese surrender to the British, a session attended by Brigadier M.S.K. Maunsell, Chief of Staff to the newly-formed "Japanese Control Commission" (as it was then called) and former Chief of Staff to General Sir William Slim of the famed Fourteenth ("Forgotten") Army; Slim was now Commander in Chief, Allied Forces South East Asia. The Control Commission was placed under the command of Major General Douglas D. Gracey, Commander of the 20th Indian Division, a man about whom much second-hand misinformation was later written, as first-hand evidence very strongly suggests today.

While the two Supreme Commanders, Lord Mountbatten and Field Marshal Count Terauchi, were working over their terms of reference, Hồ Chí Minh was moving into Hanoi, now rapidly being cleared of opposition by Viet Minh "honour units"⁶⁸ (assassination squads). As the Party later noted, these liquidations were fundamental to the Viet Minh success.

It was vitally important that the Viet Minh seize power before the Allies arrived, and thus appear as a de facto government to the occupying forces. They were under no illusions as to what would happen under any sort of Allied occupation (other than Russian). As early as December 1941, the Party had issued a communique which stated that "We must not nurture

the illusion that the Chiang Kai-Shek or British-American troops would bring us freedom."⁶⁹ The Việt Minh would seek out allies everywhere, "even if they are only temporary, wavering or conditional ones." If the British-American forces helped the Việt Minh, "we could give them some economic advantages in Indochina."⁷⁰

On 2 September 1945 (which happened to be the day on which the Japanese formally surrendered to the Allies in the person of General MacArthur), Hồ Chí Minh formally proclaimed the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Half a million people heard him make the announcement from the balcony of the opera house, and some reports say that a couple of American fighters flew low over the celebration, their white-starred insignia visible. The Việt Minh wasted no time in declaring that this was proof that the U.S. Government supported the new DRV. It was only now that many Vietnamese people discovered that their new leader was the old revolutionary, Nguyễn Ái Quốc.⁷¹

A similar Việt Minh demonstration in the south ended in disaster. It was also called for 2 September to celebrate the ascendancy of the Việt Minh; in fact, it proved the reverse, and the tragic results figured heavily in the actions of the future Allied commander in Saigon, General Gracey.

Although the Việt Minh were nominally in control, several groups marched under their own banners. The Trotskyists especially were violently hostile to the ICP and Trần Văn Giàu, for they preached a more violent line. The Cao Đài, Hòa Hảo and Bình Xuyên bandits among others, were their own masters. It was a huge rally, with perhaps a quarter of a million people taking part. Given the loose overall control of a mob of this size, it was almost inevitable that violence would occur, and it did. It got out of hand near the red-brick Catholic cathedral, when shots were fired from an unknown source. It has been suggested that French agent-provocateurs were responsible, but this is questionable,⁷² given the internment of most of the French security forces and the high state of fear of the French civil population. What seems more likely is that provocateurs of all hues were involved. A massive mob attack on a helpless French community was not an unlikely event in this atmosphere (and this in fact happened three weeks later).

A Catholic priest who was watching the demonstration, Father Tricoire, was dragged from the Cathedral after the first shots had been

fired. He was stabbed repeatedly, then finished off with a revolver.⁷³ The mob moved on, leaving a darkly dramatic scene behind. Father Tricoire's body lay on the steps of his Cathedral for over an hour, arms outstretched in the shape of the cross he served. Five other French people were killed, and many were beaten and dragged off to prison. A great deal of damage was caused, both political and physical.

Trần Văn Giàu was embarrassed by the breakdown of march discipline and spent the next couple of days racing around Saigon to release as many imprisoned Frenchmen as he could find. But the harm was done and the carefully cultivated myth of Việt Minh control was shattered in a tragic way. This myth was to be shattered again and again over the next few weeks. Just four days later the first Allied representatives arrived, in the form of a small British Repatriation of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees team; they received a first-hand report of the riot from the now liberated Allied POWs, many of whom had formed units to protect the French civilians. These reports were sent back to Allied Headquarters and passed on to Rangoon to the senior officer most directly concerned, Major General Douglas Gracey, who from that moment on, in his 4 September message to Field Marshal Terauchi, reminded the Japanese of their obligation to maintain order under President Truman's General Order Number One. As it turned out, he was not alone in insisting that the Japanese maintain order, for American and British local commanders from Korea and China to Southeast Asia relied on the Japanese security forces for some time to come.

At Hồ Chí Minh's admission, there were only 5000 Communists in Indochina at the time of the August Revolution. And there is little argument that Communist ideology repelled the vast majority of Vietnamese people, hence the Party's constant use of cover organizations, fronts, alliances, and so on. How then did he do it? Irving, quoting Danielle Hunebelle in Le Monde, provides the following pithy comment:

When we say: 'Ho Chi Minh is a Communist', the Vietnamese replies: 'Ho Chi Minh is my father - in the rice-paddy, my brother in the maquis. Do you wish me to take up arms against my father and my brother?' When we say: 'But your father and your brother are fighting for Communism', the Vietnamese replies: 'I am fighting for my independence. My father and my brother are fighting for their independence. As for your Communism, I have no idea what you are talking about.' 74

In the end, that may be as good an answer as any. Whatever the reason, it was especially during the August Revolution when HỒ Chi Minh, short on material and manpower but long on boldness and intuition, showed just what a magnificent political animal he was.

Footnotes: Chapter I

- 1 Ho Chi Minh on Revolution, ed. by Bernard B.Fall (New York: Signet Books, 1968), pp.23-24.
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- 4 Ibid., p.23.
- 5 Ibid., p.25.
- 6 Ibid., p.31.
- 7 Robert F.Turner, Vietnamese Communism, Its Origins and Developments (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1975), p.7.
- 8 Charles B.McLane, Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), p.34.
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- 10 Bernard B.Fall, The Two Vietnams (New York: Praeger, 1967), p.93; see also Hoang Van Chi, "From Colonialism to Communism" (London: Pall Mall, 1964), p.19.
- 11 Turner, p.11, and Hoang Van Chi, p.18.
- 12 Hoang Van Chi, p.18.
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- 17 McLane, p.105, quoting "Boi-Shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia, pp.773-776.
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- 29 Fall, The Viet Minh, p.1.
- 30 Nguyen Duc Minh, "A Study of the Literature of Political Persuasion in North Vietnam" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1973), pp.42-43.
- 31 Fall, The Viet Minh, p.1.
- 32 General Chang Fa-Kwei, for instance, denied that Ho was ever in prison. Chang, speaking to King Chen, said that Ho had been sent to Kunming at the request of the OSS (Fall, The Two Vietnams, p.99).
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- 36 Fall, The Two Vietnams, p.99, quoting Wolfgang Appel, "Sudostasien im Brennpunkt der Weltpolitik" (Wurzburg: Marienburg Verlag, 1960).
- 37 King Chen, Vietnam and China, 1938-1954 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p.71.
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- 42 Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indochina (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.143.
- 43 Charles Fenn, Ho Chi Minh (London: Studio Vista, 1973), pp.78-79.
- 44 Ho Chi Minh's long and active career as a key Communist revolutionary (he was 55 now) should have been well known to the OSS, who should also have had at least a nodding acquaintance with Lenin's works, the Party's fundamental program of eternal struggle against non-soviet systems, their treatment of dissidents, the history of bloody purges

and group liquidations, the "Gulag Archipelago" of concentration camps, the use of temporary alliances and *détentes* to further Party goals, and more. If they were ignorant of all this they had no right to be called an intelligence agency. If they were not, a large question mark must hang over the Southeast Asian branch of the OSS, particularly in regard to the actions of some of their personnel in the weeks immediately following the Japanese surrender.

As Fall has suggested in turning the accusations around, to point at the accusers, "anticolonialism" was a questionable cover for the excessively pro-Viet Minh actions of the OSS in Hanoi, given America's well-publicized record in the Philippines at the turn of the century and the treatment of her own ethnic minority groups like the Indians and Negroes, which were more difficult to explain than the French treatment of the Vietnamese. But OSS files of this period remain closed at CIA Headquarters and are unlikely to be opened in the foreseeable future.

- 45 P.J.Honey, in an interview on 18 May 1977, recalled the conversation he had with a former OSS officer who had worked with the Viet Minh. The officer said that the Viet Minh generally would not allow the OSS to observe their attack on the Japanese. The Viet Minh units would leave in the morning on a "raid", and return in the evening looking none the worse for wear. The suspicion grew that they were not fighting the Japanese, but merely storing their arms and ammunition. Finally, on American insistence the OSS were allowed to observe a raid in which a horde of Viet Minh guerillas, firing wildly, descended on a small Japanese supply column. The Japanese took one look, put the spurs to their mules and departed; no appreciable harm was done to either side, and it was apparent to the OSS man that the Viet Minh had very little experience, if any, at this sort of thing.
- 46 See Vice Admiral Milton E.Miles, U.S.N. A Different Kind of War (Garden City, New York: Doubleday), pp.342-343.
- 47 The National Insurrection Committee was composed of Truong Chinh, Vo Nguyen Giap, Tran Van Dong, Le Thanh Nghi, and Chu Van Tan (from "Historic Week Before 1945 August Revolution", Vietnam Youth, No.124, August 1976), p.9.
- 48 Documents of the August 1945 Revolution in Vietnam, trans. by C.Kiriloff, ed. by Rima Rathansky (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1963), p.54.
- 49 Ibid., pp.58-59.
- 50 Ibid., p.54
- 51 On 16 August, also, a Liberation Army unit under Vo Nguyen Giap held a departure ceremony under the Tan Trao banyan tree, then proceeded to seize its first objective, Thai Nguyen; some sources say that Giap was accompanied by an OSS section. ("Historic Week", Vietnam Youth, August 1976), p.10.
- 52 Hô's 10-point program may have been the most effective handbill ever produced in Vietnam. According to Nguyễn Đức Minh, "The brief platform answered the perennial popular complaint against heavy

taxation, touched on the sensitive issues of religion and political restriction, considered the needs of all groups, professions, and walks of life, and promised to fulfil them." (Nguyen Duc Minh, p.51).

The Ten Point Domestic Policy of the Viet Minh Government is as follows:

1. Abolition of all tax, which was required by the imperialists; new taxation very light and just. Freedom of belief and freedom of assembly.
2. Every peasant will have rice fields to cultivate and sufficient help to be prosperous in agriculture.
3. Eight-hour day for workers with sufficient salary for their families.
4. Obligatory schooling: state aid for all children.
5. Free commerce for all citizens, abolition of miscellaneous taxes like sea tax, streetside tax, market tax, and so forth.
6. Civil servants will receive worthy remuneration according to their talents.
7. Women are equal to men in every field; political, economic as well as cultural; equal pay for equal work.
8. Soldiers will be highly esteemed for the defense of the fatherland.
9. The old and the sick will be given help.
10. Infants will receive care, aid and protection from the state.

(Nguyen Duc Minh, p.53).

53 "Historic Week", Vietnam Youth, August 1976, p.9.

54 Lancaster, p.117 (quoting Devillers).

55 Thirty Years Struggle, p.95.

56 Nguyễn Đức Minh, p.59.

57 Ibid., p.60

58 Robert Shaplen, in his book "The Lost Revolution", p.29, tells how one OSS officer described Ho Chi Minh. Ho was flattering the OSS men, innocently asking them about their Declaration of Independence. The youthful OSS man reported that Ho was "an awfully sweet guy. If I had to pick out one quality about that little old man sitting on his hill in the jungle, it was his gentleness."

59 Sacks, op.cit., p.153.

60 Turner, p.39.

61 An official SRVN source states: "At the outset, the 'Vanguard Youth' movement was one of Japanese inspiration, but unfortunately for the aggressors, they placed this organization in the hands of the Party sympathizers, intellectuals and students who, most of them, had entertained close relations with our Party." Led by Party cadres in key positions, "the Vanguard Youth movement developed at an unprecedented pace." These cadres met weekly, and were members of the Youth Organization for National Salvation. The Party went on to state that after meeting all evening, "the youth practised military drill overnight without feeling tired, and fearless of danger," which denotes an unusually high condition of fitness and stamina for the

- youthful cadres. The Vanguard Youth was the first group in Saigon to receive weapons from the Party.
(From "Saigonese Youth in the 1945 Insurrection", Vietnam Youth, No. 122, March 1976, p.20.
- 62 On 20 August 1945 a car flying the Viet Minh flag toured the city, "rousing a bustling insurrectionist atmosphere among the population" in preparation for the demonstrations of 21 and 24 August. (From "Saigonese Youth", March 1976, p.21).
- 63 Turner, p.40.
- 64 Thirty Years Struggle, p.102.
- 65 Ibid., p.97.
- 66 McAlister, p.253.
- 67 History of the August Revolution, p.135.
- 68 Nguyễn Đức Minh, pp.56-57.
- 69 History of the August Revolution, pp.36-37.
- 70 For comments on the allegations that senior OSS officers were privately negotiating business deals with the Party, see Devillers, Histoire Du Vietnam, 1940 à 1952, p.202., Lancaster, The Emancipation of Indochina, p.143. For a different view see Buttinger's generally anti-French/British work, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, Vol.I (Pall Mall Press, London), pp.343, 628-629. Devillers and Lancaster both had considerable first-hand experience in Indochina.
- 71 Jean Sainteny, Histoire D'Une Paix Manquée (Paris: AMIOT, Dumont, 1953), p.92.
- 72 Robert Shaplen, for example, leans to this view ("The Lost Revolution, p.5), that the Japanese were used as agent-provocateurs by the French. Archival material and interviews with British and French officials who dealt with the Japanese at this time suggest that this would actually be the least likely explanation. The reason is that the Japanese so strongly despised the French that they refused to work with them, let alone for them, and the Kempei Tei were the most virulently anti-French of them all.
- 73 Devillers, p.154.
- 74 R.E.M.Irving, The First Indochina War (London: Croom Helm, 1975),p.136.

CHAPTER II

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

"We saw Hanoi airport, with no flak at all, no Japanese planes, a very peaceful atmosphere. I told the Captain, the pilot, 'Drop me here, this is a good place.' His response was 'I am ordered to drop you over Tam Dao.' If we had decided to land at Hanoi with the plane, it would have been alright. But he had orders and he decided not to disobey orders -- but it was the day and the place to disobey orders! "

Pierre Messmer
Former Prime Minister of France.
Personal Interview, 1 September, 1977.

In order to appreciate the emotional and unyielding postwar French attitude toward the future of Indochina, it is necessary to have at least a passing knowledge of the historic ties between France and Indochina. The following is only a brief introduction.

In the 17th century French missionaries, mostly Jesuits, began to arrive in Vietnam and pose a challenge to the long established religions and philosophical beliefs. During the 18th century some of those French missionaries found their counsel sought by the imperial court. However, there were times when xenophobic emperors forced the missionaries into hiding during periodic purges.

In France, the influence of the Catholic Church (and especially the Paris Society of Foreign Missions, founded by the 18th century Apostolic Vicar of Indochina, Pigneau de Behaine) was so strong that the court was induced to send French warships to repeatedly bombard the Vietnamese. This was to secure the release of imprisoned missionaries (and to facilitate trade arrangements).

During the reign of Napoleon III, the French government contemplated annexing Vietnam, as it was anxious to be included in the race for colonies in the East. The spreading of Catholicism remained a major factor, and French control really began when Napoleon invaded (against a good deal of advice from many of his military and foreign affairs advisers). Napoleon was also encouraged to invade by his wife, who in turn was influenced by the Church. The first French landings (the Spanish were briefly involved as allies) took place at Tourane (later Danang), then turned to the south. By 1862 Cochinchina had become a colony, with Saigon as the major city.

The rest of the French conquest, culminating in the final Franco-Chinese treaty in 1885, was a patchwork and haphazard affair, often resulting from the independent action of local commanders and swash-bucklers. The experiences of Dupuis, Garnier, Riviere and the Black Flags, among others, are well recorded elsewhere.

France took inordinate pride in Indochina. Of all the colonies, Indochina took pride of place. The military officers, engineers and administrators who closely followed the missionaries left their permanent memorials: the civil service, Vauban citadels, rail and road networks, education, industry, medicine, the immense feat of draining the Mekong marshes, the complex system of dykes in Tonkin, and more. All of this provided livelihoods for untold numbers of Vietnamese

families. The Emperors were restored to their throne, despite the limitations imposed on them, and Vietnamese militia raised.

Heroes were created during the course of the French conquest, and French schoolchildren eagerly read of them to this day. The French wrote of Garnier's achievements:

What were the reasons for the rapidity with which this first conquest of Tongking was effectuated? The superiority of our arms was certainly not enough to compensate for our inferiority in numbers. The fact is that the population welcomed our fellow-countrymen as liberators. They knew that they would put an end to the exactions and piracy... In addition to popular sympathy, which facilitated our task, one must note the astonishing audacity of our troops, the qualities displayed by our men not only on the military plane, but also on the human, which enabled them to understand the local situations immediately and to learn the art of governing...¹

Indeed, so proud was France of her vaunted mission civilisatrice (civilizing mission) that she held regular and elaborate exhibitions to display to metropolitan Frenchmen the enormous benefits bestowed on her colonial subjects.

The first four decades of the twentieth century saw the French settling in and consolidating their affairs in Indochina, which comprised one directly ruled colony (Cochinchina) and four protectorates theoretically ruled by native kings (Cambodia, Laos, Annam and Tonkin). Despite periodic unrest and revolts which were routinely suppressed, the French progressively made Indochina a sort of "closed shop" which effectively tied all Indochinese trade and commerce to France, excluding other foreigners.

Unlike other colonial administrations (the British, for example), the Vietnamese were confined to routine and generally menial jobs, for even lower ranking civil service and police positions were filled by Frenchmen; it was a source of great local discontent.

The outbreak of World War II found the French armed forces in Indochina extremely weak and ill-equipped. In 1940 the Vichy government replaced Governor General Catroux (who joined de Gaulle) with the controversial Admiral Decoux. Cut off, and under increasing pressure, the French continued to bow to Japanese demands and opened up Indochina for transit, for appeals to the United States and Britain produced no

aid. Although some Frenchmen sympathized with the Allies, the colons remained generally Vichyite and cooperated with the Japanese, so that throughout the war Indochina remained the only colony in the Far East to keep the mother country's flag flying. It would have been better had the flag fallen gloriously, for (apart from matters of honour) that would have later defused many of the Việt Minh's propaganda broadsides, which played effectively on this Franco-Japanese collaboration.

The French were beset with other problems in addition to the matter of the Japanese. The Communists were grievously wounded in the early thirties, but not quite finished off. Communist leaflets in Saigon in 1939 alerted the Sûreté, who discovered a clandestine press in Cholon and netted 28 Trotskyists in raids throughout Saigon; 26 more were caught in Mỹtho. The Chinese caused a shortage of bronze by hoarding one cent pieces (which were pressed in San Francisco). But otherwise life in Indochina was not too bad as 1940 approached.

Although French military reservists were not permitted to leave the country until further notice, the approaching war caused no alarm. On 12 December 1939 the authorities conducted a civil defense air raid exercise, with miserable results.² Visitors to Indochina in December, 1939, included Major General Bond, the British General Officer Commanding in Malaya, and Admiral Sir Percy Noble, Commander in Chief of the China Station who arrived in Saigon on a cruiser; both held out little encouragement to the French concerning the possibility of British help in case of extreme Japanese pressure. Britain was locked in desperate combat with the Axis powers in the West, and it would be a couple of years yet before America would enter the war. And the United States was not offering the French much moral support at this time, either. Another visitor at this time was General Tsuchihashi, new chief of the Japanese Second Bureau, who visited Hanoi en route to Japan from Canton. He would be returning.

On 22 June the Chinese, reeling under the Japanese invasion, showed little sympathy for the French dilemma by bitterly criticizing the decision to close the frontier. The French ambassador in Tokyo told the British to expect the same pressure from the Japanese, as public opinion in Japan was solidly behind the Japanese expansionist policies. The ambassador also advised the French in Indochina to submit to Japanese pressure for a Japanese mission in Tonkin. The Japanese had seemed to have gone mad with ideas of their superiority and importance, and would not be sobered by platitudes and appeals to reason.

The Chinese had asked the French envoy in Shanghai to discuss the Indochina situation, and when no reply was received they passed the request to the British for referral to the French. The British regarded the request for their intervention as improper, and "even more embarrassing when the unfortunate French Ambassador could hardly know what government he represented."³

The French in Indochina felt obliged to follow the advice of their ambassador in Tokyo, and on 29 June 1940 Major General Nishihara and 35 staff officers arrived in Hanoi to keep an eye on the borders and to collect intelligence. Four days earlier the Japanese had announced that part of their South China Seas Squadron would patrol the Gulf of Tonkin to monitor the embargo on goods to China. The collapse of France and the indecision of the new Governor-General, Admiral Decoux, contributed to the defeatist attitude of the French Armed Forces, which did not exactly inspire confidence anyway. The French Army had a total of 24 tanks (of 1918 vintage) in Indochina, while the Air Force had a grand total of 85 planes, including 20 Morane 406s, 3 Potez 63s, 6 Potez 542s, 4 Fournier 222s, 2 Communications aircraft and 50 Potez 25s; all this added up to about 25 reasonably first line planes.

While this was going on, and word of France's defeat arrived, hundreds of Frenchmen besieged and wrote to the British Consulate in Indochina to volunteer for the British forces in order to carry on the fight against the Germans. On 17 July the Germans warned the French in Indochina of reprisals against French families in France if the terms of the armistice were not adhered to.

In February, 1940, the British Air Ministry instructed the Air Attache in Bangkok, Group Captain A.G. Bishop, to visit Indochina and render an assessment of the worsening situation. Bishop arrived in Hanoi on 20 February to investigate Japanese violations of Indochinese territory, and immediately saw the French Commander in Chief, General Martin, and Colonel Maupin, the Chief of Army Intelligence.⁴ He was specifically interested in knowing if the Japanese were overflying Tonkin en route to or from Waichow island in the course of their operations against the Haiphong-Kunming Railway. It appeared that the Japanese initially avoided French territory, but not for long. Whether emboldened by French feebleness or exasperated by the cumulative effects of the China Incident, which resisted solution, they soon began to operate openly over French airspace. As the railway had already been

successfully interdicted by Japanese air strikes, they now confined themselves to regular reconnaissance flights.

Bishop asked Martin what he was doing about the problem. The answer was, "We send lots of paper to Tokyo about it." Tokyo responded with replies of regret, but little changed. Paris forbade French forces in Indochina from taking action against the Japanese, permitting observation and reporting only. Only one case of Japanese bombing had occurred recently, a raid in conjunction with operations against Nanning, and this was investigated by a mixed Franco-Japanese commission. The Japanese accepted blame and paid compensation.

In early March the Japanese blockaded the border of Tonkin in an effort to choke off supplies to the Chinese. The flow of goods stopped on the two main routes to China (the Haiphong-Kunming Railway and the Hanoi-Nanning road), and the third route via Kweiyang was being looked at. The French stated that all munitions traffic was forbidden and imports limited to food, machinery, petroleum, and so on. The whole exercise was questionable as under policy from Paris food could be in the "Munitions" category to the same extent as ammunition. Rumours were also spreading that the Thais were considering granting bases in northern Siam to the Japanese to facilitate strikes on the Burma Road.

On 26 June 1940, a BOAC pilot brought out a verbal message from the British Army Liaison Officer in Hanoi to the British Ambassador in Siam, Sir J. Crosby. The message reported that the French Army and Air Force were in serious unrest due to the political uncertainties and the switch in Governors-General. The FAF were said to be considering a plan to seize and fly out their aircraft to Burma or Singapore. Part of the French Navy were later about to sail their ships to Singapore when stopped by Decoux.

In July, 1940, the French asked the British for two training planes from the Far East Flying Training School, which were provided, at which time the French asked for 7 Tiger Moth trainers. What the French needed was a couple of wings of modern fighters, but the RAF was in a fight to the finish with the Luftwaffe over the skies of Britain itself, and even the British forces in the Far East were sacrificed to concentrate fighters for the air battles at home.

In August, 1940, the British Commander in Hong Kong received a letter from a French officer in Indochina, saying that French morale was declining

with the rising tide of Annamite discontent, and the Vietnamese troops may be unreliable. At about the same time the Chinese announced that they had amassed 17 divisions on the border to invade Tonkin should the Japanese enter.

Early in August the French referred Japanese demands to the U.S. and Britain; these demands included the right of passage for Japanese troops and the use of naval and air bases in Indochina. The Foreign Office attempted to enlist American support to put up a joint strong stand against the onrushing Japanese whirlwind, but the best they could get at this time was reflected in the bitter Foreign Office minutes: "The U.S. refusal to do more than make a statement about the status quo seems categorical."⁵ Added M.E. Denning, always the prophet in elaborating what was not yet called the Domino Theory (and who will figure prominently in this story):

"I am afraid we must assume that the U.S. will do nothing, as usual... Nevertheless I hope the American press will make free play with this news... In that way the American public may be brought to a better conception of what is likely to happen in the Far East before long... But we should be under no illusions. From Indochina it is but a step to Siam, and bases in Siam will at once put Malaya in grave danger. What we must do urgently is to stiffen up our defenses as best we can in Malaya, and prepare for the worst. Because the worst is likely to happen."⁶

Ashley-Clarke added that Britain could not allow Japanese bases in Indochina without doing something, although the British, with the Nazis just 22 miles away across the Channel, could not do much alone. But there were two possible courses: Britain could tell the Japanese that the Burma Road (closed under Japanese pressure) would be reopened, and quiet economic pressure could be applied (a not inconsiderable argument, given the make up of the Commonwealth at this time).⁷ But nothing could be done at this moment, since there was a risk of jeopardizing the withdrawal of the British garrison from Shanghai, an operation which was now underway. Sterndale-Bennett agreed, adding that although Britain was in no position to threaten Japan, "We cannot afford to let Japan take one strategic position after another, unhampered, so that at the end we are left to fight with every disadvantage, with our backs to the wall, at Singapore."⁸

Before long the United States would join Britain in freezing Japanese assets, but, as too often happens, it was too little too late.

For the present, business was business;⁹ Britain was about to become bankrupt through paying hard cash for American war supplies, and the Japanese onslaughts relied heavily on supplies of American petroleum and iron, also received on a cash and carry basis.¹⁰

On 4 August, Lord Lothian, the British Ambassador in Washington, advised the Foreign Office that the Vichy Government felt that if Indochina were lost now it would be lost forever. On 5 August the Yugoslav Government passed on the Soviet information¹¹ that the Japanese intended to seize Indochina and the Netherlands East Indies. On 14 August, His Majesty's Consul in Saigon received a report from a Chinese secret society that the Chinese had offered 300,000 troops to the French for defense against the Japanese; all the French had to do was to feed them. The Governor-General appealed directly to the United States for help, but the Japanese intercepted the message and confronted him with it. In the manner of Hitler and Vienna earlier,¹² they went on to add that they would destroy Hanoi by bombing if their demands were not met. Strangely enough, the German hand was seen behind a slight Vichy resistance in Indochina at this time.

In September, 1940, the British Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee compiled an estimate of French forces available to defend Tonkin.¹³ The French Army had one division in the north, plus two "weak" divisions in Cochinchina and Cambodia. The two southern divisions were unavailable for transfer to Tonkin because of the necessity to garrison Saigon and the Siamese border, and because the internal political situation, especially in Annam, was deteriorating. Even the pretender to the Annamese throne was in the Japanese army. The long French lines of communications were vulnerable, and French communications facilities were primitive.

The Tonkinese division consisted of 6 infantry regiments, 1 colonial artillery regiment, 1 company of light tanks (1918 models); only 50% or less were white troops. In a statement which reflected the general remoteness of Tonkin, the report stated that "The remainder are Tonkingese of fighting value possibly equal to the Japanese." The French had no anti-aircraft defenses and about 20 modern fighters; this fighter estimate was later revised to 11. Against these forces the Japanese had immediately available 8 infantry divisions (and possibly 3 more), plus modern land-based aircraft. Against the French Navy's total of 8 river gunboats (4

of which were still in China), 6 minesweepers, 2 minelayers, 2 sloops and 1 light cruiser (6 inch guns), the Japanese could amass a frightening force of 8 battleships, 24 cruisers, 5 aircraft carriers, 60 destroyers and 40 submarines. Each carrier had a complement of 50 modern fighters and 150 bombers.

Although the French commander thought that he could hold out against three divisions for a limited time, the British estimate was not so optimistic. On 4 September the Japanese Consul in Saigon advised all Japanese citizens to leave Cochinchina on the S.S. Saigon Maru, which was now anchored off Cap St. Jacques (which later became known as Vungtau).

Japanese demands now centered on the use of three airfields between Hanoi and the Chinese frontier, and the right to have 5000 troops in Tonkin to defend the bases. They also wanted the use of all railways and set a deadline of 5 September for their ultimatum. The Foreign Office in London was following the drama, with difficulty, from long range. On 4 September, Denning noted that "The situation in Indo-China is at best obscure."¹⁴ It was not obscure to General Martin in Tonkin, who on that day conceded to the Japanese demands.

To emphasize their seriousness, the Japanese sent their aircraft on "show-of-force" missions over Langson, and two companies of Japanese troops in battle formation crossed the frontier (but withdrew without making contact).

The Chinese Ambassador in Bordeaux, Dr. Quo, thought that if the United States and Britain took a hard line over Japanese threats to Indochina, "they [the Japanese] would hesitate not once or twice, but thrice."¹⁵ In fact, the Japanese seemed to be loosening up slightly, as their Foreign Ministry appeared to repudiate Nishihara's ultimatum (impressed perhaps by the RAF resistance in the Battle of Britain). In fact the French and Chinese did discuss joint defense plans, but nothing came of it.

The problems encountered by the French team which travelled to the United States to buy aircraft are well documented elsewhere, and generate controversy to this day, with both nations trading acrimonious accusations over the affair.¹⁶ In any case, one interested onlooker (Britain) was hoping that the planes remained in Martinique where they sat, having been taken off the carriers Bearne and Ile de France; the British did not relish the thought of that material going to Indochina and falling

into the hands of the Japanese. It was unlikely that there were enough trained pilots in Indochina to fully man the proposed new squadrons.

The rest is well enough known. The Japanese pushed on, and when all hope of reasoning with them was lost the United States suspended the trading of vital war materials to Japan, which unfortunately at this late stage just about guaranteed the outbreak of war, for the occupation of Indochina was now absolutely essential for the Japanese. Japan's overriding concern at this time was to seize the Dutch oilfields in the East Indies (now Indonesia), for the Allied embargo would immobilize the armed forces, and without the Navy Japan's growth, and even her existence, was in jeopardy.

About ninety days before Pearl Harbor, in mid-September 1941, the French had exhausted their delaying tactics and the Japanese demanded the right to permanently garrison Indochina with a force of about 32,000 troops, and would move in whether the French liked it or not. Again the French, marooned from Europe, could only agree. However, to make a point, on 25 September a Japanese division commander attacked the French garrison at Langson, on the border, and wiped it out in a bloody battle. The incident appeared to have been the result of independent action by the Japanese commander (a not unusual occurrence), and peace was restored and apologies offered after a vigorous French protest.

Her position in Indochina secured, the Japanese sprang south and west, to destroy forever white rule in Asia. The British were driven back to India, the Dutch locked up and the Americans were swept back to Hawaii. The French were later to prove that they could fight well in Indochina, but their collaboration with the Japanese now brought them no honor.¹⁷

The year 1942 saw the Japanese triumphant everywhere. The conquest of the American posts throughout the Pacific, the fall of Bataan and the fortress of Corregidor, the hasty British surrender at Singapore (brought on in large measure by terrible British generalship), the rapid collapse of the Dutch and the subservience of the French -- all heaped up the fires of Japanese invincibility. In Europe a junior French general, whose war material consisted mainly of large charges of pride, was gathering together the scattered remnants of what was once France. The French found refuge and strength in their African possessions and it was from these bases that their long struggle to recovery was launched.

But although the French in Indochina were as tightly locked in as a ship in the ice pack, there were those Frenchmen who attempted to set up a resistance organization. This was an extremely difficult undertaking given the long distances from Allied territory and the non-existent sources of supply. One remarkable man was involved in the resistance efforts from the start, and provides an insight into the difficult beginnings of the movement. This was François de Langlade, a Frenchman who had been a rubber planter in British Malaya for nearly two decades. The small French staff left free in Asia were working closely with the British in Singapore, and were under the head of the French Military Mission, Colonel Tutenges. There was a feeling throughout the Malay archipelago during this period in 1941 that war was just around the corner.

De Langlade was in the first class put through the first Commando school, which was set up by two British Army officers.¹⁸ His fellow students were from the Ministry of Economic Warfare, which at this time had responsibility for Special Operations; these would later be assumed by Force 136.

Upon de Langlade's completion of the course, it was decided to send him into Indochina to assess the situation there. The two designated reasons for the mission were to choose a few reliable people in Indochina and supply them with resistance materials (radios, special arms, etc.), and to get information on the Japanese.¹⁹ When Singapore fell the Ministry of Economic Warfare wanted to parachute de Langlade back into Indochina, but no planes were available and he and a British officer drove through Burma from Rangoon to Lashio during the British retreat. They blew up several bridges along the way and finally arrived in Yunnan. He waited four months in Yunnan for Chinese permission to move to the border to contact French frontier units, and waited six more months at Chen Tu, where he was still refused permission to contact the French. His colleague here was a former French administrator, Pierre Boule (who later immortalized Force 136 in his novel, "Bridge Over the River Kwai").

Finally, both men decided to enter Indochina secretly, but on the day before the start of their journey de Langlade was called to London by General de Gaulle, the start of a close collaboration between the two men. Pierre Boule went in by himself via their planned route along the Black River, but broke his leg along the way and was captured by the Japanese.

De Gaulle capitalized on de Langlade's experience as an administrator (he was Director of a large rubber concern while in his twenties) by asking him to start up wood-based factories (from Canada) in the Cameroons and Brazzaville. When this was done de Gaulle sent de Langlade back to the Far East. When de Langlade arrived in India he became the French Indochina (FIC) section of Force 136, working for Colin Mackenzie, its ubiquitous director, and collaborated closely on Force 136 plans for Indochina.

With de Langlade in Delhi for the moment, a unique unit was being formed by the French in North Africa. This was the Corps Leger d'Intervention (CLI), later renamed the 5th RIC, which missed its golden opportunity in Indochina, where it might have altered the course of history, because of the determination of the United States to eject France from Indochina.

The Corps Leger was modeled loosely on the Chindits and was formed in Algeria during December,*1943, by Lieutenant Colonel Huard, who had seen long service in Asia. It was composed of 1200 men who were specialists in various skills and Indochinese languages. The CLI would not be committed to combat as a unit, but would be dispersed throughout strategic areas of Indochina, its small parties forming cadres for an expanded resistance later. The camps of the CLI were in the hills of Kabylia, on the coast separating Bougie and Djidjelli, for the hills in this area (according to the French) closely resembled the Annamite chain and high Laos.²⁰

At the end of January 1944 the men were divided into commandoes and dressed in the manner of British paratroopers, but with the Australian-style felt hats. Two groups of three commandoes were formed, which were reinforced in July 1944 by the Special Air Service (SAS) Navy parachutists formed in England. Its makeup and mission was similar to the US Special Forces in Vietnam a generation later. In a letter to Admiral Mountbatten, its prospective Theater Commander, Mackenzie outlined the CLI's charter, which included political and military action. Its military tasks were as follows:

1. Form guerilla zones in the hinterlands.
2. Sabotage strategic communications.
3. Work for the advantage of the principal Allies, primarily by assisting the initial cadres for units introduced by air.
4. Make contacts with and restore the fighting morale of suitable elements of the old Corps d'Occupation and among the Police Force.

* Some sources say November.

The Corps Leger's political tasks included the following:

1. Direct the operations of resistance groups which had already been organized in country.
2. Report on the developing political situation in Indochina after the Corps Leger had commenced operations.
3. Take the preliminary essential measures in territory returned to Allied control which would restore French sovereignty, and to facilitate the eventual reestablishment of the regular civil authorities.

With the French thus laying the groundwork for reentry to Indochina and the structuring of the latent antipathy of the Allied sympathizers there, de Gaulle ordered de Langlade to return to Indochina and go straight to Decoux. There was no definite course of action for Indochina at this time, but de Gaulle wanted information on the current state of affairs there.

De Langlade's first try in 1944 was aborted when the United States authorities refused to permit him to leave from Kunming, so he was forced to return all the way to India and use Force 136 facilities. The RAF flew him from the great Special Duty base at Jessore and dropped him into Indochina. It was, as de Langlade commented, "An 8 hour flight to go over there, instead of half an hour."²¹ De Langlade's mission was unsuccessful because of internecine disputes within senior French colonial ranks. But [as will be discussed later by Colonel Mingant] General Aymé would have nothing to do with Free France and left it to Mordant to see de Langlade. De Langlade returned to de Gaulle and reported on the unsatisfactory results of his mission.²² The meeting was brief. De Gaulle asked de Langlade, "Well, did you see Decoux?". De Langlade said no, at which point de Gaulle said, "Well, go back!", which he did.

This time de Langlade was allowed to stage from Kunming, for the OSS was now interested in Tonkin, and he arrived at Dien Bien Phu by aircraft, being spared the rigors of parachuting in again. He now was taken to Decoux in Hanoi by Colonel Robert (who was beheaded in the coup of 9 March 1945 by the Kempei Tei for his part in the resistance), and gave the Governor-General de Gaulle's message.

De Gaulle asked Decoux to keep completely apart from the resistance and refrain from interfering in any way. In return France was prepared to forgive and absolve him from postwar retribution. As it turned out Decoux was unable to resist the impulse to involve himself, and in de Langlade's words, "Instead, he meddled -- and went so far as to communicate with Vichy with a code we knew was bad. I had to stop the cables and go back and tell him."²³ This pretty well summarized the greatest problem

of the resistance throughout the war -- the glaring security compromises.

De Langlade was unhappy with the loose organization he found in Hanoi, and on the authority invested in him by de Gaulle he separated it from the fence-straddling senior officers and gave full control to the brave Robert; thereafter they preferred to work with younger men.

The resistance movement had two major purposes. The main reason for its existence was the hope of bringing over a large part of the French Army in Tonkin to China. These troops would later join the Allies in the war against the Japanese, as de Gaulle desperately wanted to get every man he could into the fight. There was no hope of getting the troops out from the south. The second purpose was the collection of information for Allied intelligence.²⁴

A letter from the English wife of a Vichy embassy official in Tokyo, written to the wife of a Swedish diplomat, provided an insight into everyday life in wartime Indochina.²⁵ She said that Indochina had been their chief preoccupation for the past three years. Japan itself was dirty and the people hungry, and Canton was about the same. But Saigon was very nice, one of the few places where the visitor could still find clean sheets, well dressed people and the shops were still stocked; the same was true for Hanoi. Due to the petrol shortage the cars were running on rice alcohol and lubricated by castor oil.* Local industries were flourishing and a program of road building was underway, but the Japanese had taken over 2 of every 3 trains running between Hanoi and Saigon. They had the same problems with boat travel, and the rice was not being moved well as a result. The Japanese were never seen except in the streets and had no contact with the white population "who simply ignore them". In Tokyo, corruption and black marketing were rife.

Without warning, the Japanese brought Australian prisoners of war through the Annamite quarter, and were visibly displeased when the Vietnamese showered the prisoners with flowers and began to help them. A local baker drove by their camp each morning, slowed up and threw fresh loaves of bread over the wall, and parcels of clothing were smuggled in by devious means.

The inter-Allied infighting over French involvement in the Far East is discussed later; suffice it to say that in January 1944, the French Committee for National Liberation took the first positive steps

*no pun intended.

in that direction.²⁶ General Blaizot was named Chief of the French Expeditionary Forces, Far East, and would head the French Mission to Mountbatten's South East Asia Command Headquarters in Ceylon. Two mixed brigades would be immediately formed of black troops with white cadres, and when circumstances were favorable these brigades would be reinforced by a number of colonial infantry divisions, plus navy and air forces. A Corps Leger was also being formed to operate exclusively in Indochina. The French stressed that two conditions were necessary: immediate contact between Blaizot and Mountbatten, and the introduction of French military representation in the Chiefs of Staff organization in Washington.

Contemporary Chungking could well have been a Hollywood creation. The British senior military representative there was General Sir Carton de Wiart, a released POW, who had had an arm and an eye shot away, wore a black patch over the eye and held Britain's highest award for valor, the Victoria Cross. He was now joined by the new Free French Ambassador, General Pechkoff, who was late of the French Foreign Legion, of Russian descent and also had one arm. General Pechkoff broke journey in Kandy en route to Chungking. At SEAC Headquarters, Pechkoff said that while he was in the US he spoke to General Marshal and Mr. McCoy, "both of whom had expressed sympathy for France and the restoration of the Empire." Asked of White House feelings, he stated that "a good friend" [reputed to be General Donovan of the OSS] had recently seen FDR and implied that "the wind in that quarter was not too unfavorable".²⁷

If true, it was a cynical play on Pechkoff's fears, for the wind from the White House could not have been more unfavorable. The French were subjected to the type of transparent delaying tactics which the Soviet Bloc later applied as a matter of course to the West, and the French Mission at South East Asia Command, stalled in Europe, could only peer into Indochina from a distance and watch passing opportunities slip slowly away.

Mountbatten continued to press for the installation at SEAC of the French Mission. His view was that the end of the war was in the foreseeable future, and, as reported by Denning, "these interminable delays will, if they result in General Stilwell obtaining strategic control of Indo-China, have a disastrous effect not only on the future operational prospects of his [Mountbatten's] Command, but on the whole British position in the Far East."²⁸ In a memo to Denning, Mountbatten

said that

"poor General Blaizot, eventually driven nearly as mad as I have been by these delays, appears to have persuaded Mr. Eden, through M. Massigli, to allow him at least to come out on a visit pending a final settlement between the President and the Prime Minister of the question of the Mission."²⁹

As Mountbatten heard it, the British could not deal with Blaizot because he was de Gaulle's nominee, and de Gaulle was persona non grata with Roosevelt. Then when Roosevelt accepted the facts of life and came to terms with de Gaulle, the British, noted the Supreme Allied Commander, still could not have the Blaizot Mission "just because". The time had come to act if future operations were not to be jeopardized.

On 1 September 1944, de Gaulle, enraged at the American refusal to accede to moving the Corps Leger to the Far East, and the personal humiliations being heaped on him by US officials from the President on down, ordered Frenchmen in Indochina to cease all cooperation with the Americans and to channel all intelligence information to the D.G.E.R. in Calcutta. This caused some problems, but the French resistance continued to supply the US 14th Air Force with vital target intelligence "because only the Americans could bomb the Japanese in Indochina at that time. We were military, and not concerned with the politics of it."³⁰

The French in Indochina referred to the resistance efforts prior to 1 September 1944 as the "old" resistance, and the organization after that date was the "new" resistance, reflecting the change of policy and direction from France. To the resistance in Indochina, conditions in Indochina and France were similar, with Decoux being a Japanese puppet much as Pétain was Germany's. After 1 September de Gaulle ordered Mordant to be his representative.

When Decoux heard that General Mordant was to be de Gaulle's representative he retired Mordant from active service, saying he was too old to continue in his post as Army Commander. Mordant was replaced by General Aymé, who wanted nothing to do with the Gaullists or the resistance. Aymé then told Mordant that since the Gaullist instructions stated that the Army Commander was to be in charge, then obviously it was Aymé, the General, and not "Mister" Mordant who would be the boss.

Mordant then wired de Gaulle for clarification, asking who was to be in charge: Mister Mordant or General Aymé. De Gaulle replied that Mister Mordant was in charge and not General Aymé, who was now to be

considered as number two. Decoux remained at the top in name only. Therefore at that time the resistance ceased to be a "true" resistance, because the government was no longer hostile and in fact received instructions from de Gaulle through the resistance. This was the "new" resistance.³¹

As it happened, General Blaizot did go out to SEAC technically as a visitor, but he stayed, arriving in Colombo on 26th October 1944 aboard the French warship Dumont d'Urville. In Europe, de Gaulle, anticipating the move to Indochina, told General Eisenhower at SHAEF that the coming of winter made it desirable for the makeup of the 9th Colonial Infantry Division (DIC) to be altered, as blacks composed two-thirds of the division. The black troops would be sent to garrison duty along the Mediterranean coast, and later be included in follow-on units to the Far East. SHAEF did not like the proposals for they did not even like the idea of forming new divisions, claiming that the two proposed new divisions destined for the Far East would drain resources from the main effort against the Germans.³² This stand was later modified, for the divisions were forming in southern France, an area hardly known for pivotal combat in this war. As it was, the 9th and 3rd Colonial Infantry Divisions were among the first French troops to land in Indochina in late 1945, but the first detachment from France comprised the shock troops of the Groupement de Marche of the Deuxième Division Blindée (Leclerc's crack 2nd Armored Division). It was known as Groupement Massu, after Lieutenant Colonel Jacques Massu, its commander -- a man destined to become a full general and a legend among soldiers.

The high feelings at South East Asia Command about the Blaizot Mission and the uneasiness regarding future developments are summarized by Dening. "I am sure the step is politically sound even though the Americans may shriek to high heaven at its impropriety." SEAC was envious of MacArthur's independence in the Pacific, for while Mountbatten adhered closely to guidance from the Chiefs, MacArthur was independent to a degree

"not dreamt of in our philosophy, and I often think that we might on important occasions remind ourselves that we are not yet the 49th of the United States.

I learn in strictest confidence that General Wedemeyer is destined to succeed Stilwell in China. He was with SAC in Cairo and knows of the decision. He is hardly likely to be on our side. So there may be trouble ahead."³³

While Blaizot was on the high seas bound for Ceylon, General Juin, on behalf of the French Committee of National Liberation, summarized the role and composition of the French expeditionary forces for the Far East.³⁴ French forces would be used mainly in actions leading to the liberation of Indochina. French ground and air units would initially be divided into two groups, one to operate in the Pacific (from New Caledonia) under US command and one to stage from India under British command. Ground forces available were as follows:

- a) The Corps Leger d'Intervention and the Brigade d'Extrême-Orient (BEO). The BEO was in Madagascar, and was to be completed with the addition of 1 AAA Light Mobile Group (Groupe Leger Mobile DCS).
- b) A Reconnaissance Squadron (Escadron de Reconnaissance), British type.
- c) One two-brigade division, British type, based in India with elements from France, ready to embark in March 1945 -- a total of 26,000 men.
- d) One division, US Marine type, for the Pacific -- of 26,000 men, including reinforcements. This division would draw Senegalese cadres from the 9th DIC and personnel from France, and would leave in January 1945.
- e) The CLI and BEO were already fitted out with British equipment.

But getting political approval to equip and move these forces to the Far East, in time for the Japanese surrender if not the March coup, was akin to rolling a large snowball up the Matterhorn, as will be seen. The Combined Administrative Committee thought that the only proposals specific enough to send to the Combined Chiefs of Staff concerned the CLI and the BEO. Their considered opinion was that forming large units in France prior to the defeat of Germany would interfere with existing military operations and should be disapproved, and that forming them elsewhere was not feasible for lack of shipping and equipment. And it was not possible to foresee when it would be practicable from a logistical view to use French ground forces in the Far East. This predominantly American practice of separating military and political objectives, a policy not adhered to by any of the major powers on either side, was to be an error of historic proportion from which the faces of Europe and Asia may not recover during our lifetimes.

Other arguments put forward were that the British equipment sported by the CLI and the BEO was designed for internal security (as in Madagascar), and not for operations in the Far East, and Eisenhower reported that the French plans would detract from the efforts of the Southern Group of Armies. When the problem was elevated to the Combined Chiefs, they generally approved the move of the CLI to the Far East, with the proviso that SEAC withhold regular military information and intelligence from the CLI. Additional French units would only be accepted in the later stages of the war, and if they were good and experienced fighting men.

The Combined Chiefs of Staff Planners arrived at the following conclusions. French forces might be formed in time to take part in the war in the Far East. India-based French forces could mount operations in Southeast Asia in Autumn 1945, and Pacific-based forces might perhaps take part in the assault on the Japanese mainland in late 1945. There would be no French participation in operations in the South West Pacific Area (SWPA), but limited Allied amphibious operations (shore to shore) in the Netherlands East Indies would continue. No major French units would be formed before the defeat of Germany, and for the present no operations were planned which required special knowledge of Indochina or other French possessions. There was no point in forming and equipping French forces anyway because the same problems of shipping, shortage of service troops and specialist equipment would remain.³⁵

When Blaizot and his staff docked in Colombo Mr. Denning and the SEAC Headquarters Assistant Chief of Staff, Major General Kimmins, went on board to welcome him. They all lunched in Colombo, then drove up to the pleasant hill station at Kandy, where Mountbatten's headquarters was located. Mountbatten received Blaizot at 1800 hours; after this the French were entertained to dinner, when Mountbatten made a short welcoming speech. Blaizot sat next to Wedemeyer. Some of the French wore "FEFEO" shoulder straps, denoting Force Expeditionnaire Francaise Extreme Orient. What Blaizot had brought out with him was the nucleus of a force headquarters. Blaizot himself was described as "pleasant but colourless, a description which on first acquaintance would appear to apply as well to his staff."³⁶ Wedemeyer left for Chungking a few days later. Again wistfully mentioning MacArthur's assumed independence, in which he informed his Chiefs of Staff, rather than consulted them, Denning wrote that "the extent to which he [Wedemeyer] will cooperate is anybody's guess."³⁷

As to Blaizot's mission, Dening and Mountbatten were of one mind and their views were reflected in a message from Colin Mackenzie, the Force 136 Commander, to SEAC:

Every step which registers a further fait accompli with regard to the basing of French activities in the Far East on S.E.A.C. as opposed to other Far Eastern theatres provides General Blaizot with an additional argument. S.A.C. expressed his desire not long ago that we act in this sense, always provided that progress was made with the minimum of fuss. 38

This much was true. But the rest of the memo probably reflected a bluff on Mackenzie's part, or at best the age-old oral authorization from a senior officer to perform a risky task with the proviso that if the operatives were caught they were on their own. Trying to force the issue, Mackenzie went on:

"The F.O. has expressed quite recently the same view to our London Hq and from the diplomatic point of view has authorized us to assist S.A.C. in getting the 5th Colonial Regiment out to Ceylon as quickly as possible as long as this is done discreetly. The draft signal we have submitted is in terms recommended by London as being least likely to cause repercussions.

Additional to the policy reason set out in the above paragraph is the fact that the men to be called forward include certain elements essential to the continuation of our preparatory work in the immediate future. I refer to W/T operators, officers and men for Special Groups to act as Reception Committees, etc."39

The Foreign Office was prepared to be reasonable in this delicate matter, but this was a bit too much and Sterndale-Bennett stopped it as soon as he heard about it.

In January 1945 the Resistance in Indochina sent out word that the Japanese had moved in 4000 troops to Tonkin from Kwangsi, with possibly a division to follow.⁴⁰ The Japanese were pressing for piaster payments so exorbitant that the very stability of the piaster was threatened. The French authorities in Indochina saw these events as a hardening of Japanese attitudes and a warning signal of an impending crisis.

Captain Doignon, Blaizot's Chief of Staff, passed this information to Mountbatten, who repeated that it was not yet possible for SEAC to intervene directly in Tonkin. Guided by his Political Affairs staff (principally MacDermot, as Dening was in Calcutta), Mountbatten agreed that the Japanese actions may threaten the piaster, but were really not as ominous as they seemed to those on the spot. He also sent word back to the Resistance that the French must not release American aviators to

the Japanese, who were demanding their handover.

MacDermot downplayed the significance of the Japanese troop movements by telling Doignon that these transfers were sensible Japanese responses to the threat of possible American landings. The Foreign Office commented internally that it was not within Allied power that this time to prevent a Japanese takeover of Indochina, but the Japanese did not appear to be about to topple Decoux.

The French Resistance had a difficult time in starting up and in carrying out concrete plans. Their source of support, Force 136, had to fly tremendous distances to reach Indochina and the OSS, just across the Tonkin frontier, could have made all the difference had they supported the French. But they refused to have anything to do with the French resistance movement, and indeed to this day it is difficult to tell whether some of their operatives were more interested in defeating the Japanese or the French.⁴¹

Yet another rebuff was suffered by the French in their request to assign a liaison officer to the Air Force headquarters bombing Indochina.⁴² On 7 February 1945 the USAAF struck targets in Saigon, with heavy loss of life in the French and Vietnamese quarters.⁴³ A hospital and barracks for French troops were bombed and the French Provisional Government feared the results on population morale of a repeat visit by the bombers. Also, some US aircrews downed in an earlier raid (12 January) were fortunately in French hands, although the Japanese were pressuring the French to hand them over. The Americans, however, were passed through French channels to the Chinese border, where they were returned to US control. To Admiral Fenard's request, the US Chiefs replied that the damage was not the result of a lack of "technical opinions of well informed sources". The target for attack on 7 February was the Naval Yard and Arsenal in Saigon. The target was "adequately identified and described in intelligence material, and was of a strictly military character."⁴⁴ The attack was part of a series designed to inhibit repair and rehabilitation of "Japanese naval vessels damaged, or seeking haven following, naval action in connection with the Allied recapture of the Philippine Islands. Bombing was performed by standard procedures." Therefore, the presence of a French liaison officer was not required, "the performance of missions being governed largely by the weather, operational considerations and the degree of resistance encountered at the target." But the US Chiefs expressed regret at the collateral damage

and loss of life and their appreciation for the safeguarding and return of the downed American aviators.

The Foreign Office demurred at this latest blow to the French, but deferred to the British Chiefs on this point since wider issues concerning the French were now being examined. A Foreign Office memo noted that it was not the first time that the British Chiefs had been asked to join in shutting out French operations in the Far East, and every time the British went along with the US they committed themselves a little more to the US objective of opposing France everywhere in the East. However, the Foreign Office asked the British Chiefs to amend the Combined Chiefs' reply to the French to show that the US saw no advantage in having French liaison at US headquarters. Fenard's additional argument was that 50,000 French troops could provide a useful resistance if they had reasonable liaison and air support available, and the 14th Air Force in China was best suited for striking targets called in by the resistance. The Combined Chiefs' reply, in effect, said that the 14th Air Force was pretty busy and French liaison was not needed. Or was it?

Until the advent of electro-optical and laser guided weapons a generation later (the "Smart" bombs), it was, for a variety of reasons, impossible to avoid collateral damage by conventional bombing. And an unfortunate by-product of Allied bombing raids was the death of a good number of Allied prisoners of war, for the Japanese made a habit of holding POWs in danger areas, adjacent to lucrative targets. Since locating and identifying camps was an ongoing exercise, would a liaison with French forces, who were generally closer to the problem, have resulted in more updated information? Perhaps -- but it would not have completely spared such casualties, for it was British policy, anyway, that POW camps were not to deflect the air forces from necessary tasking, (although the final decisions were referred to the Supreme Allied Commander).

The Japanese coup of 9 March 1945 is examined in greater detail later, and it came as the French Provisional Government was beginning to slowly but firmly arrive at some practical measures for taking part in the war against Japan. Suffice it to say that the Japanese had an easier time of it due to what can only be described as the astounding, lackadaisical attitude displayed by senior French officers to security matters, and it took no geniuses in the Kempei Tai to piece the jigsaw

together.⁴⁵ So surprised were the French authorities that a delay of 8 hours occurred before the Tonkin units were informed of the ultimatum handed to Decoux in Saigon.⁴⁶

The French, with great difficulty, succeeded in extricating about 5000 troops into China, while scattered remnants found refuge in Laos.⁴⁷ As expected, there was nowhere for the southern units to go. The Tonkin formations made the sort of fighting retreat which would have been immortalized elsewhere, but they were not later brought into the fight against the Japanese due to Chinese and American political objections. They remained in China, actually if not technically interned by the Chinese in less than pleasant circumstances.⁴⁸

The British Embassy in Chungking, sympathetic to the French, recorded the Franco-American friction over the exhausted French columns. When these troops first arrived across the frontier, the French Ambassador, General Pechkoff, had a "stormy interview" with the American Ambassador, General Hurley, for the first American reaction to the arrival of the French was "to get rid of them as speedily as possible."⁴⁹ The Americans, reported the British Embassy, called the French "undisciplined, unequipped and destitute refugees and almost useless." The French hotly flung back that "despite all appeals for help they had had no assistance from the Americans in their own two-months fight with the Japanese," and what little help they did get from the British South East Asia Command had been the subject of American criticism.⁵⁰

It was made clear to the US Ambassador and US Army Headquarters that the French would strenuously resist evicting these troops from China. Pechkoff was further depressed on receiving a message from General Juin, who reported that the Combined Chiefs of Staff could foresee no immediate operations in Indochina and that the two French divisions may not be moved to Indochina in the immediate future. But, reported the British Ambassador, there had lately been a "sudden (and not explained) change of heart on the American side" to keep the French in China.⁵¹

When it became evident that Allied help to the harassed French would be too little too late, the British and French began to concentrate on the problem of getting the Corps Leger to the East. There were limits to everything, and finally the US chiefs agreed to the shift, provided that the British move the CLI and take all responsibility for the operation -- although by March 1945 the US Chiefs had still not replied to the request made in August 1944.

In April the Combined Administrative Committee presented the Combined Chiefs of Staff with a proposal to overhaul and reequip the Free French forces.⁵² It was a proposal emanating from the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces (SCAEF), and aimed at increasing French ground forces (in Europe) from 8 divisions and 213 supporting units to 8 divisions and 1128 supporting units. The United States would supply the basic forces, while the British would be responsible for equipping the security battalions, worker units, gendarmes and garde mobile. The Canadians were also involved to an extent, as the Canadian Chief of Staff had requested to help. Equipment for 3 divisions and 336 support units had already been shipped from the US to Britain, but a possible delay might be expected due to shortages in supplying artillery, anti-aircraft and cavalry reconnaissance units. With this the French could more realistically look ahead to returning to Asia. The French rearmament program quite likely reflected the realization that it was folly to wish for a weakened France at a time when the Soviet monster was devouring everything in sight.

Despite the fact that the time had passed when the Corps Leger could have done its best work, the British Chiefs thought that the CLI cadres could still inject fresh blood and needed technical expertise to the French units slogging out of Tonkin, but even that moment passed with the CLI still stuck in Algeria.

The British and Americans grew further apart over this issue, and the French Military Mission in Washington may as well have been in a revolving door, with their requests being tossed out as fast as they were submitted. Observing the situation, the Joint Staff Mission reported the position of the hapless French in trying to build up their armed forces, including the naval air arm:

In the replies they have been given from the Combined Chiefs of Staff they have received no encouragement whatsoever to think that their cooperation will be welcome, no promise that they will be given due warning when operations are being planned to liberate territories in which they are interested, and no indication that this situation is likely to improve in the future... we do feel that the attitude that has been adopted by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, largely of course on American insistence, is quite out of keeping with the current policy of our two governments to the French in Europe where they have been admitted to the E.A.C., the German Control Council and given a share in the occupation of Germany. It seems only logical that this policy should be extended to the Far East...⁵³

In April the US Chiefs at last agreed to moving the CLI, but warned Fenard that due to shortages of transport this was not a firm commitment as to time or scope of their use in Indochina, and they assumed that their use would be coordinated with Wedemeyer. The Corps Leger, now the 5th Colonial Infantry Regiment,⁵⁴ left their camp at Djidjelli for Algiers and embarked on 13 May for Southeast Asia aboard the SS Strathedan for Ceylon, arriving on the 28th. Their new base was the "French camp" 20 kilometres from Trincomalee.

Now that the 5th RIC was actually in Ceylon, Blaizot, acting on instructions from the Chief of Staff of the French National Defense Committee, asked for information regarding the use of the First Far East Brigade at Madagascar and the type of equipment to be supplied to it.⁵⁵ The brigade was complete less a reconnaissance troop and a light anti-aircraft battery (which had been trained under Blaizot's supervision in North Africa and were now in France). Mountbatten asked for guidance from the War Office, and back came the familiar reply: the War Office "can give no information" on the BEO as HMG was committed only to provide it equipment, and the US Chiefs of Staff had expressed no view as to the use of French formations in the war against the Japanese.

The French added to their own problems with the diversity of their chains of command, which their principal ally, the British, on occasion found confusing -- as did, no doubt, some Frenchmen. Mountbatten finally asked Blaizot for a diagram of the lines of command, which on inspection does not appear to justify its complexity by the numbers involved.⁵⁶ A week later Force 136 submitted a paper to the SEAC Assistant Chief of Staff on the French command and operations structure as seen by the British.⁵⁷

Blaizot's paper to Mountbatten was based on a telegram from de Gaulle, which in British judgement resulted in no less than 5 equal French authorities:

1. General Blaizot, Chief of the French Mission at SEAC, reporting to the Chief of Staff in Paris.
2. General Sabattier, Chief of the French Mission in China, reporting to the Chief of Staff, Paris.
3. General Pechkoff, French Ambassador in China, reporting to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris.
4. Colonel de Raymond, Inspector-General of Colonies, reporting to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris.
5. Colonel de Roos, in charge of SO₁ and SI, with Headquarters in Calcutta, reporting to DGER⁵⁸ in Paris.

Any dispute regarding the services of SO and SI would be settled by de Gaulle through DGER in Paris. Blaizot and Sabattier in China had equal rights to direct clandestine operations in Indochina. As Force 136 (who were working with Blaizot) saw it, Blaizot had no authority over Sabattier, who was controlled directly from Paris through DGER, whereas Blaizot reported to General Juin and the National Defense Staff. The SA (Service d'Action) section of DGER was at the disposal of Blaizot (who routinely dealt with it), but not under his command. Blaizot worked with SA through Lieutenant Colonel de Crevecouer, whose office was located in the Force 136 section at Kandy.

According to Force 136 the reason why the resistance in FIC was not under Blaizot was that their activities were not yet at an overt stage, when it could be under the command of a regular soldier. Force 136's assessment to the ACOS was that the French setup was "extremely confused", with the differing organizations at times holding contrary views.

On 15 June de Gaulle approved the initial composition of the Expeditionary Corps for the Far East. He selected Philippe Leclerc, commander of the crack 2nd Armored Division, as its commander, despite Leclerc's objections. Although Leclerc wanted to go to Morocco de Gaulle told him: "You will go to Indo-China, because that is more difficult."⁵⁹ Leclerc's title was Commander of French Forces in the Far East, and he was eventually to replace Blaizot at Kandy, en route to Indochina. The British Chiefs had no objection to Leclerc's title but, in consonance with the grayness of the French command structure, requested that he clear it with the French Commander in north French Indochina (Sabattier), who still appeared to be Leclerc's equal. The British Joint Planning Staff submitted a paper to the Chiefs of Staff in which the role of the French in the Far East was discussed:⁶⁰

The French have available 2 Colonial Divisions and one Brigade. These can be ready for movement as soon as they are fully equipped. The United States Chiefs of Staff are not prepared to agree to the provision of further equipment until their future role has been decided.⁶¹ We do not consider that there is any military advantage to counterbalance the political disadvantage of employing these forces elsewhere than French Indo-China.

We therefore consider that French forces should be reserved for the clearance of the mainland of Indo-China, for which they are particularly suited, after bridgeheads on the coast have been established by British forces. If we are to participate in 'Coronet'* in any form it is unlikely that operations against FIC could take place before the second half of 1946. We do not, however, think that doubt regarding time should stop the Americans from completing the equipment.

* The invasion of Honshu and the Tokyo Plain

In July the Potsdam Conference ("Terminal") was held; And like Solomon in his wisdom, the politicians cut the Indochina baby in half, and as may be hardly surprising it was damaging to the baby's health. Planning dates for the invasion of Kyushu and the Tokyo Plain were 1 November 1945 and 1 March 1946 respectively, and a target date of 15 November 1946 set for the end of organized resistance by Japan. In August the two atomic strikes against Japan thus shortened the war by well over a year and saved casualties on both sides in the order of millions -- a million American casualties alone were estimated to have been avoided, and the Japanese casualties which would have been incurred in defending the homeland are almost incalculable. The US Chiefs hesitated at returning to Washington via London because the Russians might accuse them of "ganging up" on the USSR.⁶² The British could not accept that argument, pointing out that the war with Germany was over and Russia was not at war with Japan. General Marshall had wondered if he should even attend the conference, as most of it was political.

The French wanted to use the broadcasting facilities in Delhi, and the Foreign Office asked the Political Intelligence Department (PID) for their opinion.⁶³ The PID questioned the wisdom of this as they could not furnish an officer capable of reading and writing "Tonkinese and Cochinchinese" to act as a monitor and check on the French and Annamite broadcasters. And anyway, they said, with the liberation of French Indochina imminent the French would soon regain Saigon radio and should not need New Delhi. Finally, a favorable reply to the French request may well be "mis-interpreted" at this date. As it was, a nucleus of French civil administrators was now attending the Civil Affairs training school in Wimbledon.

In Chungking Sir H.Seymour reported that the anxious French Chargé d'Affaires had, without instructions, told the US Army Headquarters, US Embassy and the KMT Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs that "he considers

it absolutely necessary that in the event of a Japanese surrender French troops of General Sabattier's command, now in Yunnan, should accompany any forces which may be moved into FIC from the Chinese Theatre". Wedemeyer replied that it was up to Chiang Kai-Shek.

In early August the French Military Mission at SEAC was asked to furnish details of their future civil administration in French Indochina and emergency plans in case of an early Japanese surrender.⁶⁴ The Chief of the French Colonial Mission, Inspecteur des Colonies de Raymond, was in Calcutta. With him was Major Pierre Messmer, the High Commissioner-designate for Tonkin, while Captain (soon Colonel) Cédile, the acting High Commissioner for CochinChina, was in Kandy.⁶⁵ Cédile at the moment was in Burma observing the British Military Administration (BMA) there. The British would (in addition to the 8 Civil Administrators undergoing training in Wimbledon) mobilize and train French administrators in Ceylon, but in deference to US attitudes the British did not give any firm commitments regarding operations in Indochina, forces which might conduct such operations or the eventual use of the Civil Affairs trainees (numbering about 100).⁶⁶

Mountbatten was in London in early August, and M. Massigli, the French Ambassador, asked to see him. Mountbatten thought it would be more courteous if he called on the Ambassador, and on 9 August the two men discussed the events unfolding in Southeast Asia.⁶⁷ Massigli said that the French Government was becoming "increasingly worried" about French Indochina and the possibility of French troops taking part in the liberation of that country. The French felt that the war against Japan would soon end, and thought that under a new adjustment of Far East theaters French Indochina would fall under South East Asia Command. If so, would Mountbatten welcome French troops in his command?

Mountbatten replied that the question of boundaries was sub judice with the Combined Chiefs of Staff and he had received no instructions from them. As to the troops, he believed that French forces should be used to reconquer French Indochina. Massigli responded that France had offered the Corps Leclerc, but had not specified how it should be used. Mountbatten said that he would welcome the Corps if it came fully equipped and had a "tail", but said that the main difficulty would be with shipping. Present allocations to Mountbatten only sufficed to carry British forces, but there was always a welcome for French forces provided, as with the Corps Leclerc, they came with support troops as the British could not

supply them. Reported Mountbatten, "I got the impression that the Ambassador is determined to push French interests in Indo-China, also that he has a very shrewd idea of what the present position is regarding the division between theaters. He feels, however, that logically FIC is bound to fall into SEAC sooner or later".

The French now had some firm ideas of their actions in case of an immediate Japanese capitulation. Group Captain Fay of the French Air Force (a future Chief of Staff and now acting head of the French Mission) advised Mountbatten that should the Japanese lay down their arms the French would, with Allied cooperation, want to take immediate possession of Hanoi, Saigon, Hue and Phnom Penh in order to establish French authority, insure order and release Allied prisoners of war and internees.⁶⁸ Six DGER teams were standing by in Calcutta to parachute into the above four locations, each team being composed of 4 Frenchmen and 2 Vietnamese. These were reconnaissance teams, and on receipt of their reports further civilian and military officials would follow.⁶⁹ Hanoi and Saigon were to receive two reconnaissance teams each, with single teams destined for Hue and Phnom Penh. They would all be dropped under Force 136 aegis by RAF Special Duty B-24 Liberators from Jessore. Should Wedemeyer decide to cooperate, General Alessandri would enter Hanoi from China.

There were already scattered resistance groups of French and Vietnamese left in the field, including 100 men (codenamed "Nuisance") north of Luang Prabang, 45 northeast of Luang Prabang ("Herbage"), 140 in the Paksane area ("Glazier"), 69 northeast of Thakhek ("Calcaire"), and 150 in an area within Savannakhet-Saravane-Hue ("Hostile"). DGER could now scrape together an additional 1000 men from various resources, including naval parachutists, and 200 men of the 5th RIC were parachutists.

By 15 August the awaited Japanese capitulation occurred, and Mountbatten's staff were frantically attempting to cope with their new and crushing responsibilities throughout Southeast Asia and the Netherlands East Indies. On 15 August Mountbatten asked London to send out Civil Affairs officers with experience in France. "Regarding FIC while planning here does not envisage occupation of any large areas we are considering [the] composition of [a] projected SACSEA control commission to Japanese Southern Army Headquarters at Saigon/Dalat which may have to control the area surrounding those Headquarters." It is worth emphasizing the words control the area surrounding those headquarters, for this is exactly what the Allied commander was directed to do, and latter day critics of the

British Commander, still largely Americans, discounting the Communists, somehow cannot yet understand why he did not disregard his instructions, which included a directive that the Administration was to be French, and turn the country over to the Viet Minh.⁷⁰

On 18 August Mountbatten received a message from General Juin, Chief of the General Staff for National Defense, in which he was informed of the nomination of Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu for the position of High Commissioner and Governor-General. D'Argenlieu was the first French disaster in Indochina.⁷¹ In his capacity he would be over Leclerc, a turnabout from their respective positions in Africa. He later personally wrecked the delicate negotiations being carried on between HỒ Chi Minh and the French Government, but that part of history has been adequately described elsewhere. Suffice it to say that a terrible mistake was made in appointing D'Argenlieu to that supreme post at such a crucial time.⁷²

We shall soon follow the course of events in Cochinchina, but it is necessary to follow, briefly at least, the initial French actions in Tonkin in order to keep the story in perspective. The key man in the French operations was Pierre Messmer, who was designated High Commissioner for Tonkin, the dangerous and crucial protectorate which France must control as quickly as possible. Here the race with the Viet Minh was on.

The appointment of administrators like Messmer and Cédile began a controversy which continues today. These were the Gaullists, untainted by Vichy collaboration but new to Indochina. The question was whether to sweep the Vichy officials completely out and replace them with the new breed or keep them on and use their experience in the Far East.⁷³

The original plan for reconnaissance teams was now modified in that the teams to be parachuted into Tonkin would restore French sovereignty to their areas. All teams passed through the SA (Service d'Action) section of DGER for final preparation before being sent in. Seven 3 man teams were readied for Tonkin, and they were all dropped by RAF Special Duty B-24s from Jessore. Their training had been given by Force 136. There were two missions among the new arrivals, a military mission and an administrative mission (of which Messmer was head). Messmer's civil mission wore uniforms for security reasons. As it cannot be improved upon, let Messmer tell the tale in his own words:⁷⁴

We were sent, 7 small troops of 3 people, over North Vietnam (Tonkin and Annam) -- 2 or 3 in the South. I was dropped at the foot of Tam Dao,⁷⁵

a large mountain not far from Vinh Yen. It was an awfully bad place to drop people because it was what was called the Moyen Région, the Middle Region -- that is to say not the mountains and not the plains -- a kind of country with small hills, terribly complicated, with numerous calcareous caves, trees. An awfully bad place, and moreover a place where we always had a very bad political situation.⁷⁶ The French were always in heavy difficulties in the Middle Region -- it was simply a bad place to drop us.

Of the men sent in to Tonkin, few lived to tell of their experiences. All 7 groups were captured by the Việt Minh, and only two survivors in Messmer's group escaped. Only two teams were returned by the Viet Minh after the Leclerc operations in Tonkin; the 4 other teams (12 men) were executed, and one man in Messmer's group was poisoned.

This was one of the many excruciating "might have beens" which characterize these few breath-taking weeks bracketing the Japanese cease-fire. Messmer himself is best qualified to pick up the story:

We left from near Calcutta -- Jessore; RAF Liberator with Australian pilots.⁷⁷

[A built-in time pad brought the bomber to its target area one hour ahead of schedule, so to kill time and make good his TOT (Time over Target) the pilot gave the team a look at the coast along the Gulf of Tonkin and lazily swept inland to view Hanoi. It was a daytime flight with the drop scheduled to be made at dusk].

We saw Hanoi airport, with no flak at all -- no Japanese planes, a very peaceful atmosphere. I told the Captain, the pilot, 'Drop me here, this is a good place.' His response was 'I am ordered to drop you over Tam Dao.' If we had decided to land [at Hanoi's Gia Lâm airport] with the plane it would have been alright. But he had orders and he decided not to disobey orders -- but it was the day and the place to disobey orders!⁷⁸

Since all the Tonkin teams were captured by the Viet Minh, the question of a tip-off immediately came to mind. Messmer said that there simply was no proof, and mentioned a fact well known to later US aircrews shot down by the Việt Minh successors: it was very difficult for Caucasians to evade for any length of time in an oriental country. He then made the following dramatic statement:

As a matter of fact, if our seven groups had dropped together, that is to say 21 people, we could get through them because they [the Việt Minh] were not well organized, and we should have succeeded in entering Hanoi. No question. From a military point of view

there is no doubt at all in my mind. They were not organized -- they had small groups with old weapons, and no wireless, no telephone, no communications. With 20 people we should have passed through. 79

Had they dropped together and broken through to Hanoi, what perhaps would have happened? A strike at the citadel would have released several thousand French soldiers being incarcerated in appalling conditions, the capable Sûreté would have reestablished their networks. Ho Chi Minh would not have made his effective independence speech in Hanoi and the French could have dealt with the Chinese on more or less an equal basis. But for want of a nail the kingdom was lost. Who made the decision (against some questioning by the teams involved) to scatter and drop the groups separately? It was the old problem of officers in the field trying to present a realistic picture of conditions to the headquarters staff. It is an insoluble problem which in the West has resulted in huge tail, small dog, and the French were no exception. Messmer was not impressed with the plan and was not sure who approved such a scheme. De Langlade, de Gaulle's right hand man as Secretary-General for Indochina, thought that the decision was probably taken collectively by Crevecoeur and Roos, of the Service d'Action and Services des Renseignements sections. Messmer was told by Roos to do it. Interestingly, the decision was taken before 9 March 1945, and never changed, despite the fact that after the Japanese coup the French no longer controlled the country.⁸⁰ [Pierre Messmer's previously unpublished account of his experiences, given generously to the author during an interview in 1977, appears in full as Appendix A].

All French teams were dropped by Jessore-based RAF Liberators, including Governor Cédile's, of whom we shall speak later. Messmer verified previously published reports of his team being poisoned by the Viet Minh. Of Brancourt's death, Messmer said:

But as a matter of fact Brancourt was older than we were, and I think that he was very tired by the kind of life we had, and he was weak. Brancourt spoke very good Vietnamese, and it was the reason they decided to poison him. It is a good reason for that. I did not speak any [Vietnamese]; my wireless operator, Warrant Officer Marmont, only spoke a few words -- not fluently. Brancourt spoke fluently. 81

When Messmer disappeared Sainteny was sent in to replace him as Commissioner de la République. Sainteny knew that Messmer had been captured by the Viet Minh and came down from Kunming as fast as possible, obstructed and

humiliated at every step of the way by the OSS during those crucial days. Some of the personal treatment given to Sainteny and his team exceeded the norms of professional collaboration.

Sainteny's experiences are set down in his absorbing story, Histoire d'une Paix Manquée (Story of a Failed Peace). Briefly, after some desperate attempts at finding a way to Hanoi, the OSS finally promised the French a Liberator. All previous attempts had met with last minute excuses. Finally, on 16 August all seemed set for a dawn take off on the 17th when at 0400 Major Archimedes Patti,⁸² OSS, presented Sainteny with a telegram from Wedemeyer forbidding any aircraft departing Kunming for Hanoi. Patti apparently knew it all along but waited until their expectations were at a peak before breaking the bad news to the French, who trembled with fury at this treatment.

Sainteny attempted to play on the wording of the telegram and emulate "Wrong-Way" Corrigan in a French C-47 which had just arrived from Calcutta, but well-briefed Chinese sentries turned the French away at bayonet point from their aircraft, and more precious moments slipped away as the Việt Minh and its communist leaders were rushing to enter Hanoi. Sainteny had intended that Fulachier, the pilot, would make an error in navigation and find himself over Hanoi, at which time Sainteny and team would bail out.

Sainteny and Patti's crew finally got to Hanoi, after another staying order had arrived too late to prevent the flight. At 1330 hours on 22 August they approached Hanoi, the French with "Notre émotion est profonde".⁸³ After breakfast, a few days after reaching Hanoi, they saw 3 young French women walking side by side in dresses of all red, white and blue. Sainteny and his colleagues, after their countless tries and failures, watched with throats constricted at this gesture by the women; Patti, observing the emotional Frenchmen, mocked them by saying it was the first French flag they had seen in Hanoi. There were, of course, no French flags flying because thousands of Frenchmen were still locked up in terrible conditions which saw several dying in the citadel every day.

Patti covered his antics by saying that the Potsdam agreements made no mention of French rights or sovereignty in French Indochina. The rest is well enough known. The OSS men, including senior officers, were easily seduced by the Việt Minh who succeeded in maintaining the chasm between Americans and French. The usual "Friendship Society" was formed, this one the "Vietnamese-American Friendship Society", which promised to "send

students to America". The OSS men thought all of this so terrific that at the VAFA's inaugural party the audience was treated to the spectacle of the senior American officer and his aide going on stage to sing songs:

Lieutenant Unger, aide-de-camp to General Gallagher, sang a French Romance and was thunderingly applauded. But the greatest success was General Gallagher's, who by order - once in a lifetime - of his aide-de-camp, went before the microphone for a lively performance.⁸⁴

From a senior Western military officer it was an astonishing performance at a blatantly political party. Sainteny's pungent comments sum it up:

... the American mission no longer concealed their hostility. Their position, in fact, is very clear. Kept and flattered by the wily members of the new Annamite government, swollen with arrogance by the importance the French themselves accorded to them, convinced of the necessity to deliver the poor Annamites crushed under the yoke of French colonialism, absolutely ignorant of all the relative problems, not only of Indochina, but moreover the Far East, the representatives of the United States in Hanoi played, without the least caution -- perhaps involuntarily -- the game of the Annamite nationalists.⁸⁵

According to Sainteny, a man who personally held Ho Chi Minh in high esteem, the Americans in Hanoi, in playing the "anticolonial" and "anti-white" game, helped to pave the way for Asiatic Communism. Sainteny asked himself why the OSS, "so rich in men of valor", sent such "shortsighted amateurs" to Tonkin during the critical months of August and September, 1945. He prophesied that one day the United States would pay for their mistake, which was not confined to the local area.⁸⁶

And what was the Viet Minh reaction to the ease with which they were manipulating their American colleagues? Vo Nguyen Giap had no idea why the Americans had turned so venomously on their French allies, but he was amused:

Soon after we returned to Hanoi... we also noticed that the Americans and the French in Hanoi seemed to dislike each other ... the American officer by the name of Patty [sic], for some reason we don't know, showed sympathy for the Viet Minh's anti-Japanese struggle.⁸⁷

Of Potsdam even Giap wrote, "Under American pressure, the French were left out of the operation", but "Gradually the Americans came to realize that we were not pro-Western 'Nationalists' as they had expected."⁸⁸ From that period was born a deep contempt of the United States by the then North Vietnamese which was reinforced over the years.

The rest is well recorded. The Chinese arrived in Hanoi and complicated the issue while the French were still off balance and the moving finger, having written, moved off, never to return.

In the south it was a different story. The southern half of the two-pronged French reentry into Indochina was led by Jean Cédile. As Pierre Messmer had responsibility for the north, Cédile was designated Commissioner for Cochinchina, or south Indochina. He had been sent by the Gaullist government to represent it at Mountbatten's headquarters and to study the British Army and British Military Administration. He was attached to the staff of the Director of Civil Affairs, Brigadier Gibbons, and travelled up and down Burma looking at Civil Affairs administration. He was on such an inspection trip when the atomic bombs exploded over Japan and the war ended. A C-47 was hurried over to pick him up and return him to headquarters in preparation for his entry to Indochina.

It was de Gaulle's wish that since the Japanese had laid down their arms a French presence must immediately be felt in Indochina. As Cédile recalled:

General de Gaulle insisted that I be parachuted immediately so that there should be a Frenchman looking after French interests, and that the British would not be left solely in charge of the situation. This was not to imply a mistrust of the British, but obviously the situation required a French officer to be present.⁸⁹

The British asked Cédile whether he had ever previously made a parachute jump. "I said, obviously, I had," recalled Cédile. Two days before he jumped he was taken to Jessore, where the other small teams were being assembled, and put into the capable hands of Force 136 and the RAF Special Duty people. Some of his NCO instructor jumpers gave him a crash course in landing-fall techniques, and he made a few practice jumps from a height of two meters. Then on 24 August, the RAF took several teams under Cédile, a total of about 21 men, in two or three aircraft and dropped them at their scattered drop zones all over Cochinchina and Annam. Said Cédile:

It was my first jump, and my only jump. I landed in a triangle between Soc Trang, Tây Ninh and the Cambodian frontier. We landed near some lakes, and it was the season of flooding. Our presence must have been revealed and in the middle of the night, at about eleven o'clock, we were attacked and captured by a Japanese company. ⁹⁰

Cédile's team comprised four men; three extra parachutes contained arms, medical supplies and their baggage. At that time there was no question of Franco-Japanese cooperation. Cédile's mission, according to his instructions, was to reestablish French authority as quickly as possible and to show Frenchmen in Indochina that France had not abandoned them and was coming back. On landing, Cédile knew that he could rely on little more than his own wits:

We had virtually nobody, and the only Frenchmen on whom we could count were the prisoners of war. The Allies, too [POWs], such as the Dutch, the Australians and the British, were exceedingly cooperative. The first French troops only arrived at the beginning of November, the Groupement Massu troops, whereas I was parachuted on 24 August.

Looking ahead, Cédile said,

"The British sent units of the 20th Indian Division under General Gracey. There was never any doubt about cooperation with the British -- there was 100% cooperation. There was absolutely no problem and they helped us very, very much."

In picking up the chronological order of events, Cédile recalled that one member of his team had jumped a little sooner and was not immediately found.

The Japanese interrogation of Cédile and his men was not a gentle one. The Japanese wanted to know if there were any more parachutists in the area, to which Cédile replied no, there were just the three of them plus the seven parachutes. [It must be kept in mind that the war was over now]. They were then marched to the local brigade headquarters, fording rivers en route:

And then when we marched through the river they tied our hands behind our backs and beat us quite cruelly. We had to march all night to arrive at the local Japanese brigade headquarters. The division which captured us was a Manchurian division,⁹¹ an elite division. They were only in transit, passing through that area. We stayed with them about two days, and after two days a lorry came and took us to Saigon.

Cédile has never forgotten his treatment at the hands of the Japanese at the time of his capture:

They were beating us with their fists and kicking us, and tied our hands very tightly behind our backs, and as we were marching through the rivers we were falling down into the mud. Yes, we were in the lorries, but when we were crossing the rivers we had to march --and these were two very painful and difficult days.

When we saw two high-ranking Manchu officers -- we saw first a colonel, then, I believe, a general -- they were of course much more human. They understood that the game was up, but the troops -- if we had stayed with them, things would have turned out very badly for us. They were not yet aware of the state of the war, very much. They probably hadn't heard many speeches or radio broadcasts, so they still believed that things were going to get better for them and that they would win. They believed that we were spies who just had to be eliminated. But the higher up the hierarchy one went, the more correct was the behavior.⁹²

When Cédile and his team arrived in Saigon they were kept in a school, along with some other parachutists who had been picked up by the Japanese. They stayed there for a few days, with little to eat or drink. But Cédile puts it in perspective, saying that there was little food to spare and the Japanese themselves were suffering shortages. Again, their stay at the school was not a pleasant one, and after a few days Cédile and two others managed to escape. He was precise in emphasizing that his breakout from the school was an escape, since the Japanese had them under what amounted to house arrest. Continued Cédile:

We then went to the Governor-General's palace, it was on that day in fact that the Japanese guards were just leaving, to be replaced by the Vietnamese.

My friends and I had taken a machine gun from the Japanese. We went to the top of the palace stairs and opened fire from there, and somehow, luckily, the three Vietnamese guards just ran off. I then asked the Japanese to send us some guards to guard us and the palace, and they did so, and gradually the [Allied] troops began to arrive.⁹³

It seems quite likely that Cédile and the French were now benefiting from the firm line being taken with the Japanese by Gracey in Rangoon.

The political situation in Saigon at this time [the beginning of September, 1945] was extremely fluid and confusing. In Cédile's words, there were Japanese officers like Colonel Imano* [a French-speaking Japanese officer], who knew that they had lost and had little to say. On the other hand, there were other Japanese who were defying the official position of the government in Tokyo:

One mustn't forget that these Japanese had in fact formed and armed some Vietnamese guerillas. They armed and trained them against us. And that is why we very quickly found Vietnamese guerillas fighting against us, and in many places we even saw the Japanese commanding the Vietnamese commando troops.

* The author's phonetic rendition of the Japanese name, from Jean Cédile's account.

I'm not sure if the [Japanese] government knew anything about that; I am convinced that they must have had some inkling of it, but they always denied it when asked.⁹⁴

Cédile and his two companions broke out on the day before the massive demonstration of 2 September:

We escaped from prison on perhaps the first; it was on the eve of Father Tricoire's death. The Việt Minh believed that they would win and come into power and they were having demonstrations. We escaped on 1st September -- we escaped, you know -- we were not freed, we escaped.

Of the disturbances of 2 September, Cédile said:

... I'm convinced there were provocateurs among the French, but also especially on the part of the Vietnamese. It was the Vietnamese who were provoking the French, and the French reacted to these provocations instead of remaining quiet as we'd ordered them to do. Because, after all, we were not fools; we knew we were not the strongest, but they didn't take heed of that and they retaliated by provoking the Vietnamese.

Cédile went up to Lạc Ninh as soon as possible, to see the former Governor-General, Admiral Decoux. The Japanese were reticent about allowing Cédile to go there, but Cédile demanded to go, and by now Mountbatten had telegraphed the Japanese, saying that Cédile represented him and General de Gaulle; Mountbatten also stated that he was responsible for Cédile's safety. Said Cédile, of Decoux:

I wanted to tell him that he had nothing further to do in Indochina and that he could go away. In fact, we sent him away in a very correct manner.

When the Japanese learned I was going they said, 'All right, but you can't go alone', and gave me two cars full of soldiers for my protection; and in fact on that day they even returned my own revolver. And there were also two grenades in my car -- they told us the road was not free and there were Việt Minh commandos. They never talked much about politics, and if one asked them they never replied.⁹⁵

Cédile had a great deal of trouble in simply communicating with the Japanese, and Imano appeared to be the only French-speaking Japanese officer available. There were other Japanese officers who spoke English, but "I didn't speak very much English, but their English was even worse than mine." Imano traced the course of events for Cédile, including the atomic explosions. He said that American troops were moving across the Pacific and Burma had already been liberated, and a part of Siam was being attacked, so really there had no longer been any hope for them:

They had no boats left, they had no provisions, in fact they were living off the land, off the population, and that is probably why they committed certain excesses against the population -- they simply had to feed themselves.

In Saigon, "We immediately understood that things were going very badly." Cédile had great difficulty in establishing contact with the Viet Minh authorities:

There were Vietnamese authorities, and although they were not official they did exist to give orders, and this became obvious when we tried to free Saigon in September.

But Cédile inherited problems from other quarters:

As for the French, they realized we were just a few officers with no arms, nothing. As soon as they saw a French uniform they thought that everything was fine and there would be no more problems now, nor more occupation.

There were provocations from both sides, and there are many books written about all this.

Cédile was explicit in recalling the fundamental problem: a lack of hard intelligence:

We [earlier] were convinced that the Allies were winning [in Asia], but on arrival there we really had very little information. We had very little information about what was going on in Saigon, and especially after the events of 9 March, when a lot of Frenchmen were eliminated; all our agents were either captured, imprisoned, killed or went into hiding. So we could get very little information, indeed. In fact, some British officers in Lord Mountbatten's headquarters had asked us to send them what little information we could. But unfortunately I couldn't do very much about that, for when I was captured by the Japanese I managed to throw away all my coding instructions and cards and couldn't send them what little information I had.

Cédile reiterated his difficulty in getting the Viet Minh to a conference table:

I found it very difficult to meet any of the authorities. The Committee for the South used to send me emissaries to tell me a few things and ask me what my government was going to do, but I really was not in any position to enter into negotiations because I myself didn't know what the situation was as I had left France some months before -- but I found it very difficult to see them.

This thesis draws attention to several critical lost opportunities, and this is one of them. Although there now appears to be little doubt that de Gaulle fully intended to grant independence to Indochina,⁹⁶ he can be

faulted for not making his plans known to his emissaries, his Allies and the Vietnamese. In any case, the Việt Minh initially avoided the French envoys:

They didn't want it to be said that they were subjecting themselves to the French government. They just wanted to ignore the French. What they said was, 'We don't want to know anything about the French; as far as we know they are no longer here. We're not going to accept them and if they are here they can go and jump in the sea.' They didn't want to have anything to do with us.

On the few occasions that Cédile did meet the Việt Minh representatives, his main efforts were directed to preserving the safety of the French civil population in Saigon. In the meanwhile, he formed "a kind of embryo police force and intelligence force," preparing for the French arrival. Cédile provides a valuable clue as to why the Viet Minh appeared reluctant to meet him:

They [the Việt Minh] were not very sure of themselves. They often gave out proclamations, many of them, and very often these contradicted each other.

And referring to the period just prior to the arrival of the Allies, Cédile remarked to the author, "One of your compatriots was there, Peter Dewey;" a good many people would soon have a great deal to say about Dewey.

The first substantial French troops to arrive in Indochina were commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jacques Massu, a soldier's soldier, whose Groupement Massu, of the 2nd Armored Division would soon be disembarking in Saigon.⁹⁷ Massu had been hand-picked by Leclerc for the task.

Leclerc went on to Tokyo to represent France at the Japanese surrender on the Missouri, after which MacArthur told him to rush as many French troops as possible immediately to Indochina in order to reestablish French sovereignty. De Gaulle knew the difficulties facing the French in Indochina, and although he had resolved to grant the Vietnamese autonomy within the French Union it was unfortunate that his plans to grant them outright independence were not widely heralded.

Wrote de Gaulle:

Throughout Indochina the population which had recently seen the French lose face now appeared hostile toward our compatriots there... Lastly, the Allies, applying their preestablished plan for the occupation of the country -- Chinese north of the 16th parallel, British south, American missions everywhere -- had fatally compromised the effect which the immediate arrival of French troops and officials and the disarmament of the

Japanese by our forces might have produced... the arrival of our soldiers, the departure of the Japanese, the withdrawal of foreign troops -- these conditions would have to be fulfilled for France to recover her status in Indo-China.⁹⁸

To summarize, history has now rendered its verdict on the gross errors in judgement committed by some (but not all) of the OSS representatives in North Vietnam. Hồ Chí Minh has emphasized the supreme importance of the American support at this time. By morally and materially supporting the Communists, and by actively blocking the return of the French, they insured the survival of the Communists in Indochina.

Hồ Chí Minh used the Americans during the last year of the war and continued to use them during his seizure of power in Hanoi. It would be no exaggeration to say that he made the American officers dance to his tune with embarrassing ease; he simply had to trot out the "anticolonialist" tune. It was truly astonishing, and would be humorous were it not for the iron curtain which ultimately fell over Vietnam, an iron curtain and 50,000 American deaths a generation later. He used them, simply, to legitimize his revolution, for the sight of American officers at Ho's beck and call had a profound, if not decisive, influence on the Vietnamese masses. There are few Vietnamese today who would dispute this. The obvious question which arises is whether or not the United States has learned anything from all this.

To those writers, and what is called the "news media", mainly Americans, who so bitterly criticized the French (and later the Americans and South Vietnamese) in Indochina now falls the task of explaining the improvements in liberty, political freedom and what are now fashionably called "human rights" in Vietnam.

Another short-sighted policy was the continued veto by the U.S. over the transfer and employment of the Corps Leger in Indochina at a time when they quite probably would have destroyed the Communists.

Also, was the fight against the common enemy, Japan, rendered even a little less effective because of the American anti-French prejudice? The USAAF was more than willing to receive and react to target information from the French resistance in the field, as stated explicitly by François de Langlade and Marcel Mingant, but would not be seen having a Frenchman officially assigned to a US staff agency. For it was the French, and not the Viet Minh, who possessed the technical expertise, who knew intimately the factories, lines of communications and vital installations in Indochina, and how to inflict maximum damage to the Japanese. And

although the French colons collaborated to an unconscionable degree with the Japanese, there were enough Gaullists to form an effective resistance if properly supported and exploited. Certainly the Viet Minh contribution to the anti-Japanese effort is now seen as minimal and ineffective at its best.

Perhaps worst of all was the American policy of frequently humiliating the French on a personal level, starting with Roosevelt's treatment of de Gaulle and going down to open American contempt of the French in postwar Indochina. France has never forgotten it, and most Americans have never understood it. For both the Americans in that particular sphere and the Communists formed an unholy alliance of fanatics; the Communists classically illustrated their maxim that the end justifies the means, while the Americans exhibited their own brand of fanaticism in their rigid and nearsighted views of colonialism, reflecting a foreign policy which, as a Foreign Office official noted, was based on an event which occurred two hundred years ago. And where fanaticism in any form enters the field, reason is often the first casualty.

One feature which stands out clearly in any discussion of this period was the apparent autonomy of the OSS, and the danger of permitting an agency of this sort to operate beyond the control of the theater commander. As will be seen, the OSS defied US Government policy under both wartime presidents. They overtly cooperated with the French resistance when ordered not to do so by Roosevelt, and refused to cooperate with the French during the postwar period when ordered to do so by Truman. It appears that Wedemeyer did not have firm control over their activities in his theater; it is also likely that he was unaware of some of their operations.

Although it is not generally known, the OSS did in fact supply the official French resistance movement with arms from as early as 1942,⁹⁹ although on a smaller scale than the Viet Minh received later. Since OSS archives remain closed, the evidence of their activities must come from participants¹⁰⁰ like Captain (later Colonel) Mingant, who remembers the names of his OSS contacts.

Although the British, especially, did their utmost to facilitate the return of the French, de Gaulle was never reconciled to the fact that France did not reappear with "suitable dignity". But there was no question that de Gaulle knew that France could never again establish direct political control over Indochina, and he also foresaw that the French

people themselves would ultimately provide the answer. On Indochina and related issues would they share his vision and see "the beams of a new dawn or the last rays of the setting sun?"¹⁰¹

Footnotes: Chapter II

- 1 Great Britain, Public Record Office, FO371/46308, French publication, Volume I, "Political Achievements."
- 2 Saigon was supposed to be blacked out from 2030 hours (8.30 p.m.) to 2230 hours, but a pilot observing Saigon from 5000 feet reported numerous lights on throughout the city.
- 3 GB, PRO, FO371/24719, June 1940.
- 4 GB, PRO, FO371/24319, Report by Bishop, 1/2 March 1940.
- 5 GB, PRO, FO371/24719, Foreign Office minute by B.Gage, 6 August 1940.
- 6 Ibid., FO Minute by M.E.Dening, 6 August 1940.
- 7 Ibid., FO Minute by Ashley-Clarke, 6 August 1940.
- 8 Ibid., FO Minute by J.C.Sterndale-Bennett, 6 August 1940.
- 9 Roosevelt had recognized the Soviet Union in 1933 largely "in the mistaken hope that he could thus promote trade." [Encyclopedia Brittanica, Vol.15, 15th Edition].
- 10 This vital oil, iron and other supplies continued to be sold to Japan until very late in the day, and it is not inconceivable that American metal sold to the Japanese was used in the carriers, aircraft and bombs which inflicted such damage on Pearl Harbor. During the US involvement in Vietnam in the sixties and seventies, American big business again came under criticism.
- 11 The Soviets had a successful spy ring in Tokyo, under the great spy Sorge.
- 12 Personal conversation with Dr. Schussing, 1957.
- 13 GB, PRO, FO371/24719, Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee Report, 4 September 1940.
- 14 Ibid., Dening minute, 4 September 1940.
- 15 Ibid., letter from Dr. Quo, September 1940.
- 16 See, for example, Deux Actes du Drama Indochine, by General Catroux, and The Two Vietnams, by Bernard Fall. The French claimed to have bought and paid for about 100 aircraft, but delivery was blocked when American officials opted for non-involvement. The U.S. counter-charged that the French had moved the aircraft to Martinique, where they sat and rusted. Whatever the case, both countries were guilty of renegeing on their agreements a generation later, when the French refused to furnish Israel with 50 Mirage fighters (paid for), and the United States did the same to Turkey with F-4 Phantom fighters and other material.

17 On 14 March 1944, Pierre Francfort, the Free French Ambassador in London, wrote to Ashley Clarke at the Foreign Office. In it he traced France's record in Indochina from 1939 to the time of his departure from that colony in July 1942. Part of his information was received in a letter from M. Laurentie, former Directeur des Affaires Politiques in French Equatorial Africa and now in Algiers as Directeur des Affaires Politiques in the Colonial Commissariat, who described the Japanese attack at Langson.

The following is Francfort's report to the Foreign Office [and is to be found in PRO, FO371/41723]. Any errors in the translation are mine.

The Chinese-Japanese Incident of 1937, which was a sequel to the Manchurian affair of 1931-33, directly concerned Indochina from the first months of 1939. On 9 February 1939, Japanese troops occupied Hainan island, which controlled the Gulf of Tonkin and was less than 300 miles from the developing French naval base at Cam Ranh. France had long recognized the strategic value of Hainan, and in 1897 had obtained a promise that China would never cede it to anyone. In 1907 the Japanese had acknowledged the Franco-Chinese agreement.

In September 1937, when the China Incident was heating up, 3 Japanese battleships and an aircraft carrier attacked Hainan; another bombardment followed in January 1938. On 9 February 1939 the first troops disembarked at Hainan.

The Japanese recruited thousands of coolies and built airfields, submarine bases, casernes and seaplane moorings. Despite French protests, Hainan became a "pistol aimed at the heart of Indochina." Japanese plans for southward expansion were now perfectly clear, especially when the Spratleys were occupied, to which French rights had been claimed in April 1933 by the visits of the French sloops Astrolabe and Alerte. But on 31 March 1939 the Japanese disputed the French claim by saying that the islands had not been settled, and took possession. (At this point the Foreign Office minuted that the account later omitted all discussion of the July 1941 Agreement, and was incorrect in some areas).

The encirclement of Indochina was completed when 3 elite Japanese divisions from Shanghai were moved to Kwangsi province. On 17 June 1940 the Japanese Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, a "notorious Francophobe" named Masayaki Tani, declared in a press conference that the arms traffic to Chungking through Tonkin must cease (this was the only supply route to China since the fall of Canton in 1938). [Presumably this was one of the errors noted by the FO]. To emphasize this point, two weeks later Japanese aircraft bombed Thatkhé in upper Tonkin.

On 20 June, the Vichy Ambassador to Tokyo, M. Arsène-Henry, signed an agreement with Japan, and in early July, General Nishihara and his staff arrived in Hanoi to monitor the Haiphong-Laokay route.

On 17 July the Yonai cabinet fell, and Matsuoka became Foreign Minister in the new Konoyé Cabinet. On the same day, the British were obliged to shut down the Burma Road and prohibit interchange

with Chungking through Hong Kong. While the pressure was being applied to Britain and France, the United States continued to fuel the Japanese war machine by sending enormous amounts of aviation gasoline to Japan.

General Catroux sent an arms buying mission to the United States. The team was headed by Colonel Jacomy and had left Indochina before the Metropole had fallen. His directive was to order two million dollars worth of war material, mostly aircraft. He received a cool welcome in Washington because the Americans neither wanted to help a Vichy colony nor did they wish to unduly excite the Japanese. To console the Colonel the US told him that the material did not exist, to which Jacomy responded that perhaps the planes and tanks going to the Philippines could be diverted to Indochina. This suggestion was received with hilarity, and the feeling arose that Japanese involvement in Indochina would give the United States time to manoeuvre. Anyway, nothing came of Jacomy's mission and Indochina was left with its 11 to 25 modern planes (depending on which source is relied on). [The author's estimate would be nearer the dozen mark].

Catroux had earlier outlined his problems to Admiral [Sir Percy] Noble. The French were outnumbered, had no modern guns... and the Japanese could quickly assemble 200 aircraft on Hainan. The French had but 1 light cruiser to put against the Japanese Navy. Catroux asked for aircraft and submarines but, as the saying goes, he was preaching to the choir. Noble said that his 15 submarines had been ordered to Europe and he had no aircraft to spare. Furthermore, he only had three cruisers left.

In the US, Cordell Hull was reputed to have orally told the French Ambassador, M. de Saint Quentin, that the US understood the French position and would not object to France appeasing the Japanese in Indochina. [This may have been another of the errors noted by the Foreign Office, for the remark was reputed to have been made by Sumner Welles].

The French preoccupied with Japanese pressure, Siam moved in to settle old scores and claim disputed territory, and the Siamese dispute and brief war bled off troops from Tonkin to the south, so that the French were not even up to strength to meet the Japanese. [While in the south the French troops were also obliged to deal with a sizable Communist insurrection].

On 20 July General Catroux handed over to Admiral Decoux and departed soon after to join de Gaulle.

In late July and early August the Japanese presented the French with new requests. On 28 July General Nishihara returned to Tokyo to report on his control commission, leaving Colonel Sato (from the Canton Army) in charge. Sato thought himself empowered to play a grand game in Nishihara's absence. Nishihara was a diplomat, but Sato was as impatient as General Ando [whose troops later attacked Langson] on the Kwangsi-Indochina border, and was eager to exploit the situation. He demanded to use the port of Haiphong and set up naval and military bases in Tonkin, and reserved the right to seize material in Haiphong which was supposedly en route to China.

It was a rugged initiation for Decoux, who said he would have to refer to Vichy. At this time Nishihara returned and sent Sato back to Canton, but he was secretly pleased with the results. Nishihara continued the game and set 3 September as the deadline for French submission. [Although 3 September may have been the original deadline, 5 September is generally recognized as the time limit set by Nishihara]. Decoux refused to consider it and called Washington three times. [These probably were the cables intercepted by the Japanese and laid in front of Decoux, accompanied by threats of force]. Hull responded by saying that the Japanese ultimata would have serious repercussions.

But the Japanese were not yet finished. On 15 September [1941] a Japanese plane landed at Gia Lam airport, Hanoi, bearing a set of "draconian demands" for naval bases, free movement of aircraft and unlimited troop passage. The bases would be on the Gulf of Tonkin, to include Cam Ranh Bay and Kouang Tcheon Wan, and the Japanese would take over airfields at Lao Kay, Phu Tho and Hanoi. Furthermore, the tentacles of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere now began to fasten on Indochina, for the French were also requested to restructure their customs and finances to mesh with the Japanese union. The French had three days to think it over, from 19 to 22 September.

French agents on the border reported that General Ando was gathering his division at Dong Dang, and Decoux submitted to slightly modified terms. But on the night of the 22nd, Nishihara's troops attacked Dong Dang first, then Langson. [Another minor error, for the troops were not Nishihara's]. Dong Dang fell, then Langson. Lieutenant Colonel Lonnet was killed in an ambush. More than 45000 Japanese troops, supported by tanks and planes, attacked Langson through Loc Binh [the Japanese attacking force was actually smaller than this]. Lieutenant Colonel Lovat, Lieutenant Dennery and Commandant-aviateur Schertzer "found a glorious death". [These were officers presumably known to Francfort]. Langson fell on 25 September and France, isolated, accepted 20,000 Japanese in Tonkin.

Goaded by the Japanese, Siam disavowed the non-aggression pact signed with Britain and France on 12 June, claimed frontier revisions and attacked. Siamese planes bombed French troops (Indochinese) in the Porpet region. Later, on 16 January, Capitaine de Vaisseau Berenger in the Lamotte Picquet, with two smaller vessels, attacked and defeated a superior Siamese fleet at Kochang.

The day after Langson was overwhelmed Japanese troops made a triumphal entry into Hanoi, parading their flags at the head of their columns. [They left soon after]. General Nishihara then returned to Tokyo, having brilliantly fulfilled his mission of securing Japanese rights in Indochina and aligning the Indochinese economy with Japan's. General Sumita remained behind. An Indochina economic mission led by the old Governor-General Robin (who was sent from France) travelled to Tokyo to negotiate the economic situation. On returning, one of the French said, "We gave them a lot, they took the rest..." [The preceding account is correct in substance, if not in its entirety. A blunt Foreign Office comment stated that most Frenchmen agreed that France was not to blame for the disaster of 1940, want to keep their empire intact and make any excuses they can find].

- 18 Personal interview with M. de Langlade, 3 September 1945. One of these British instructors was Spencer-Chapman, who stayed behind when the Japanese came and who later wrote his excellent account, "The Jungle is Neutral". The other was Tim Gavin, who became a Major General.
- 19 De Langlade brought out the news that the Japanese had very much exceeded their limit of about 32,000 troops, and now had close to 80,000 troops in Indochina. The British Ambassador in Bangkok refused to believe de Langlade's account of the Japanese build-up.
- On this first trip out of Indochina in 1941, de Langlade left Hanoi by rail in the status of "French soldier, second class". Halfway through the journey to the border he fell asleep and awoke with his head on the shoulder of a Japanese soldier. De Langlade's pockets at the time were stuffed with secret papers of the resistance, positions and numbers of Japanese troops, and so on. He was met at the frontier by a British and a Chinese officer.
- 20 France, Service Historique de L'Armée de Terre, Revues de Troupes Coloniales, March 1946; Great Britain, PRO, WO203/5611.
- 21 François de Langlade, personal interview, 3 September 1977.
- 22 M. de Langlade stated that de Gaulle's memoirs give an accurate account of this episode.
- 23 François de Langlade, interview. 3 September 1977.
- 24 In this regard the resistance was extremely successful. Hundreds of thousands of tons of Japanese shipping were sent to the bottom by the China-based U.S. 14th Air Force on information passed by the French. Other lucrative targets were similarly struck. De Langlade reported a spectacular operation in 1944 when he asked for the bombing of a Japanese brigade assembled at the Hanoi railway station, and personally saw it carried out by the USAAF. As with the conduct of operations during this period, pervaded by American francophobia in the crucial north, the severest critics of the French today are still American writers, a good many of whom have written voluminous works based largely on secondary sources. In another tragic irony the USAAF pioneered Azon bombing at this time, much as the USAF did with the "Smart" bombs in many of the same target areas not many years later.
- 25 G.B, PRO, FO371/41723, 28 August 1943.
- 26 Ibid., Kingsley Rooker (Office of the British Representative to the FCNL, Algiers) to the Foreign Office, 11 January 1944.
- 27 GB, PRO WO 203/5610. Keswick to Foreign Office, 20 March 1944.
- 28 Ibid., Dening to Foreign Office, 30 September 1944.
- 29 Ibid., Mountbatten to Dening, 30 September 1944.
- 30 Colonel Marcel Mingant, personal interview, 26 October 1977.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 GB, PRO, CAB 88/30, SHAEF to War Department, 19 October 1944.
- 33 GB, PRO, WO 203/5610, Dening to Sterndale-Bennett, October 1944.
- 34 GB, PRO, CAB 88/38, 20 October 1944.

- 35 In March, 1945, the Combined Chiefs finally turned the French down on their request to equip a Marine-type Colonial Infantry Division. The British Chiefs, desirous of letting the French down as gently as possible, wanted it made absolutely clear to the French that they were refused because of supply shortages and not for political considerations. The British Chiefs' statement said, "We have every sympathy with the desire of the French Government to strengthen their Colonial forces." In deference to the hostility of the U.S. Chiefs these words were omitted and the final British comment was "The Combined Chiefs of Staff very much regret that they cannot at present accede to this French request owing to the supply stringency, but this requirement will continue to be borne in mind." [GB, PRO, CAB 122/1171, Memo by British Chiefs of Staff to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, 15 March 1945]. On 26 March the U.S. Chiefs responded; in their view, the reply to the French was not tough enough and they objected to including the statement "This requirement will continue to be borne in mind."
- 36 GB, PRO, WO203/5610, Dening to Foreign Office, 27 October 1944.
- 37 Ibid., Dening to Sterndale-Bennett, 27 October 1944.
- 38 GB, PRO, FO371/46304, Memo by Commander, Force 136 to ACOS, SEAC, 10 January 1945.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid., MacDermot to Foreign Office, 24 January 1945.
- 41 One of the main arguments which seem to be popularly projected is that the OSS supported Ho Chi Minh because of the potential assistance his people could render in returning downed Allied aircrews. If this was true (and it makes sense), then the case for supporting the French is strengthened, for a vastly greater number of American fliers were cared for and returned at risk by the French than were by the Communists, who for 30 years have viewed American fliers as bargaining chips.
- 42 GB, PRO, CAB 88/35, Memo from Head of French Naval Mission, Admiral Fenard, to Combined Chiefs of Staff, 21 February 1945.
- 43 Ibid., French Military Mission, Washington, to Joint Staff Mission, 20 February 1945.
- 44 A generation later the USAF was still defending itself (against a good many other Americans, among others), as this time it was the Hanoi docks which were struck.
- 45 When de Langlade, on his second journey into French Indochina, was brought to General Mordant, he had to stop Mordant from openly discussing highly confidential information of the resistance in front of the native household help. [Personal interview, 3 September 1977].
- 46 M. de Langlade, interview, 3 September 1977.
- 47 See Bernard Fall, The Two Vietnams, for example, for an account of the French retreat; see also the book by the French commander, Sabattier.

48

[The following is from Great Britain, PRO, FO371/46272. "French Troops in China", July-August 1945].

Again, as with the initial RAF Special Duty airdrops, the initial relief work for the French survivors was undertaken by a tiny but enthusiastic British branch of SOE [the Ministry of War Production Unit in Yunnan-fu, whose work was normally secret]. In early April, with the powerful Americans apparently doing their best to ignore the French, the French Ambassador appealed in desperation to this small British unit for help in victualling the exhausted French columns. There were about 5500 French troops said to have reached China, but when the relief operations were over the actual figure was thought to be nearer 7000. The official figures were as follows:

<u>Camp</u>	<u>French</u>	<u>Vietnamese</u>	<u>Total</u>
Szema	1250	550	1800
Muong Sing	200	950	1150
Tsaopa	311	121	432
Wenshan	123	125	248
Makwan	156	772	928
Tsingsi	50	350	400
Fengshan	200	300	500
Wun Shan	29	-	29
	<u>2319</u>	<u>3168</u>	<u>5487</u>

These camps were for the most part in wild and inaccessible districts of Yunnan, and it was to the small Kunming office of the Ministry of War Production [MWP] that the French appealed after being turned away by the U.S. Headquarters in Kunming. This was about the time when it seemed that Sabattier would be forced to retire to China. Mr. Lionel Davis, the British MWP representative in Kunming, immediately responded and through his office the British Embassy asked the supreme U.S. Headquarters in Chungking for transportation "on purely humanitarian grounds." The answer was delayed, but help was finally authorized on 24 April.

There was no food in the areas in which the French were now camped, and Davis's immediate concern was to keep the French from starving. His entire office staff consisted on 5 British officers, 1 British lady, 3 Chinese clerks, 7 drivers and mechanics and 11 Chinese servants. With this organization Davis collected 3 three-ton trucks, 2 fifteen-hundredweight trucks and 1 jeep, and by mid-May had delivered to the ragged and hungry French and Vietnamese survivors about 100,000 pounds of food, medical supplies, blankets and clothes. A further 14,000 pounds of supplies were airlifted by the RAF from India, at which time the U.S. authorities began to drop in supplies to the camps. Of the totals listed, 52,000 pounds were sent by rail to the Mengsze area [which was on the Hanoi-Kunming rail line], and 15,000 pounds were carried forward by road and muleback over the 80 hard miles to where the first French columns were staggering in.

Through 15 June the US Army was caring for 1 camp, at the same time Davis's tiny band was looking after four (more inaccessible) camps with a French population of 3000. The US camp had the best location, on the railway at Tsaopa, and had a camp population by now of 1900.

By June special camps had been built, including the Tsaopa transit camp for 2000 men, which was handed over to US authorities after the arduous tasks of getting it underway were completed. As the British report said:

The most important point, and one which over-rode every other consideration, was the obtaining the goodwill of the local Guerilla General, and the subsequent placing at our disposal of many thousands of coolies. It must not be forgotten that the writ of Chungking only runs lightly in this area, and that the active good will of local authorities must be obtained by other means.

With the British struggling in the shadows of the vast and [in this case] relatively dormant American organization, it is not surprising that British bitterness is added the French anger when writing of the episode. Sir H. Prideaux Brune noted, in a Foreign Office memo of 7 May 1945:

It is most invidious for the Americans, who are training Chinese troops, possibly inter alia, to invade Indochina, to cold-shoulder these French troops who succeed in escaping to China.

Mr. Sterndale-Bennett commented that "this is a very tangled story which I find it difficult to piece together." And the British Ambassador in Chungking, Sir Horace Seymour, telegraphed: "American military are obviously acutely embarrassed by these developments."

As for the remarkable Mr. Lionel Davis and his doughty little band, the secret nature of SOE prevented their receiving special recognition for these herculian humanitarian labours. Their role was by necessity never publicized, although the French were well aware of what they had done for those desperate French columns. But Mr. Davis and his unit won the admiration of both the Foreign Office and the local officials in China and were warmly congratulated for their remarkable operation.

49 GB, PRO, WO203/5561A, British Embassy, Chungking to Foreign Office and M.E. Dening (SEAC), 18 May 1945.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 GB, PRO, CAB 88/35, "French Metropolitan Rearmament Program", 5 April 1945.

53 GB, PRO, FO371/46321. Joint Staff Mission to London, 12 April 1945.

54 The Corps Leger D'Intervention came into being on 4 November 1943, was renamed the 5th Regiment Infantry Colonial (RIC) in May, having been granted the colours of the 5th RICM (Colonial Infantry Regiment of Morocco) in November 1944. The old 5th RICM had originally been created for the pacification of Morocco, and had distinguished itself in World War One. In 1940, as part of the 2nd Army's 6th Colonial Infantry Division, it had met the German thrust south of Sedan and Argonne, suffered heavy casualties and had burnt its flag when the unit was surrounded and destroyed. It was composed as follows, with personnel strengths in brackets:

Headquarters Company: Regimental Headquarters, medical branch, signals, engineers and supply detachments [total of 105].

Group One: One Group Headquarters [30], plus 3 companies, or Groupes de Detachments [165 each]; total equalled an understrength infantry battalion [570].

Group Two: Same as Group One, but with 2 companies [405].

Note: Each group contained 1 parachute detachment attached [45].

Also, a special core of 81 men was being trained at Poona, India, by Force 136 specialists, to be used by Service D'Action. On arrival in Ceylon in May 1945 the training of the 5th RIC was strengthened by this core, and the French carried on intensive training in small arms and mortars, booby traps, mines, demolitions, signals, elementary jungle training, physical training, map reading, language training, river crossings and navigation. Some of the training was given directly by Force 136 instructors.

The operational priorities of the 5th RIC were as follows:

- (1) Moi country south of Pleiku, and north of the Great Lake, Cambodia -- to enable landing operations in south Annam or the Cambodian coast and interrupt Japanese Lines of Communications areas and reserve troop movements.
- (2) Annam Quadrilateral [Vinh-Thakhek-Savannaket-Quang Tri], plus the Tran Ninh Plain [Sam Neua-Paksane-Vientiane] -- to enable Allied operations in Indochina to be insulated and to intercept Japanese movements between Siam, Annam and Tonkin.

The operational regions must have a low density of Japanese troops and open country for movement, but where adequate hideouts existed, ready access to the Japanese lines of communications, and where the operations could facilitate Allied operations.

55 GB, PRO, WO203/5561A, SACSEA to London, 30 May 1945.

56 Ibid., Dening to Field Marshal Wilson, 31 May 1945.

57 GB, PRO, WO203/5610, Force 136 to ACOS, SEAC, 5 April 1945.

58 DGER (Direction General des Etudes et Recherches) had replaced the old Deuxième Bureau. It consisted of the CE (Contre Espionage), SR (Service des Renseignements) and SA (Service d'Action).

59 Charles de Gaulle, The Complete War Memoirs (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), P.926.

- 60 GB, PRO, FO371/46323, "Allied Participation in the War Against Japan", 15 July 1945.
- 61 This posed an apparently insoluble problem, as the U.S. Chiefs were objecting to moving French forces east; there was no doubt in anyone else's mind as to the future role of these forces.
- 62 GB, PRO, CAB 119/12, "Terminal" and the Combined Chiefs of Staff, 24 July 1945.
- 63 GB, PRO, FO371/46323, Foulds to PID, 4 August 1945.
- 64 GB, PRO, WO203/5598, SACSEA to War Office, 8 August 1945.
- 65 Cédile at the moment was in Burma observing the British Military Administration (BMA) there. His tour was interrupted and he was flown back to Kandy when the Japanese collapse appeared imminent.
- 66 GB, PRO, WO203/5598, Brigadier E. Gibbons (Civil Affairs Officer) to General Blaizot, 1 August 1945.
- 67 GB, PRO, FO371/46323, Mountbatten-Massigli Meeting, 9 August 1945.
- 68 GB, PRO, WO203/5611, Fay to Mountbatten, 13 August 1945.
- 69 About 100 parachutists were introduced to Indochina by DGER in August and early September. Most were picked up by the Japanese and General Gracey was asked on 6 September to affect their release. Most of those in Viet Minh hands were executed.
- 70 A good deal of questionable material has been written about General Gracey, by relatively weighty writers who should know better. It may be that his harshest critics have never had the privilege of serving their country in uniform and are unable to comprehend what an Operations Order means to a Commander. Gracey's directives left not the slightest provision for him to leave administrative control to the Viet Minh, for he was told bluntly that the French were responsible for the administration of Indochina. His surviving senior officers, however, say that Gracey without question would have dealt with the Viet Minh if they were really exercising effective control of Saigon, but in reality, as we shall see, their occupation of the City Hall and a few administrative buildings was very transparent window dressing.
- 71 Pierre Messmer, a brilliant man who went on to become Army Minister, Defense Minister and Prime Minister of France had this to say about the appointment of D'Argenlieu. On being asked why D'Argenlieu had been picked he replied, "I never understood it. Maybe de Langlade [de Gaulle's right hand man on Indochina] could give an answer. I'm not quite sure. Anyway, I think it was a bad choice. He was an old man, and before the 1st World War he was a Navy Officer. Navy officers in the French Navy were very hard on colonial questions." [Personal interview, 1 September 1977].

François de Langlade provided an insight into the de Gaulle philosophy. De Langlade had met D'Argenlieu several times, and all correspondence between de Gaulle and D'Argenlieu passed through him. D'Argenlieu was "a bit of a disaster. But that was [the philosophy of] de Gaulle. The man didn't matter -- what was important was the job, and [in de Gaulle's view] any man should have been able to fill it." It was a view not shared by de Langlade who added, "We didn't have a very great choice, don't forget." De Gaulle was hesitant to give jobs to new people, and he "tried to help an old pal at the same time." [Personal interview, 3 September 1977].

72 Thierry D'Argenlieu was an amazing choice for the job. After the First World War he had entered a severe order of monks, rising to the head of the order. As Pierre Messmer said, "It was a strict order, and he was strict when he came back into service." At the start of World War Two, after about 20 years in the monastery, he joined de Gaulle and resumed his Navy rank. He was named Governor of New Caledonia in the French Pacific, and scandalized society by openly having an affair with the wife of his private secretary, both of whom were English. To make matters worse he presented her as hostess by his side for official functions, to the consternation of society in New Caledonia. A report sent to London by a British Naval liaison officer contained the following unflattering information:

He was sent, it seems, to 'prepare the French colonies for war' and settle the disunions that existed in the Pacific possession. He would announce that he went out to calm agitation and confront traitors, to exhort the lukewarm, and establish firmly the authority of General de Gaulle. He failed everywhere in his aims. He succeeded, however, in annoying the British, antagonizing the Americans and maddening the New Caledonians, who finally took him, at the climax of the disturbances in May 1942, into captivity.

Instead of pacifying, he stirred up; instead of raising the prestige of Free France, he lowered it among his own countrymen and in the eyes of foreign nations.

The report went on to say that fighting the enemy seemed to be the last thing the French wanted, judging from his conduct in the Pacific. The officer continued:

It is entirely regrettable that the Admiral's undoubted courage was overshadowed by his unbalanced nature... It is hoped, too, that he will not have to be treated as he was by the New Caledonians. If he is locked in a room for some hours, he apparently agrees to anything. As a last resort, it may be considered the one infallible method. When he left the New Caledonians were delighted, and said that if he came back they would throw him into the sea.

GB, PRO, FO371/46307 (F5231).

73 Did the French send back too many of the old civil servants? Messmer answered this question in an interview with the author on 1 September 1977:

A very good question. Many people think, even now, it was a mistake. It is not my opinion.

The old civil service in Indochina, as with the Indian Civil Service, had certain strong ideas about policy to follow in Indochina, and were very strongly against people like Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, and all the people who are dead now -- Duong Bach Mai in Cochinchina. It was quite impossible to have through them any kind of cooperation with the Viet Minh. It was quite impossible.

De Gaulle's idea was, first, to replace French sovereignty in Indochina, and then to negotiate a new status with the government which had been in function then. It would have been more difficult to do this with the old civil servants from Indochina. To negotiate a new status would have been quite impossible.

The French Government was short of civil servants in Indochina, as all available administrators were returned to France at the start of the war. Only ten or twenty were available, so new administrators were sent from other parts of the French Empire. Many with long service in Indochina were sent back to France for health or political reasons.

- 74 Pierre Messmer, personal interview, 1 September 1977.
- 75 USAF officers and members of the River Rat Society in America's Vietnam War will never forget the Tam Dao massif; it will always be known to them as "Thud Ridge". [See Colonel Jack Broughton's book of the same name (Thud Ridge).] It was a gigantic knuckle of a ridge which pointed straight to Hanoi, and at the base of which was located Phuc Yen airfield, the main North Vietnamese Mig base.
- 76 See Chapter I, Note 44.
- 77 This is one of the many inaccuracies in the portion of Ellen Hammer's The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955, relating to this period in which she credits an American C-47 (implying the OSS) with dropping Messmer's team into Tonkin. It is a fundamental error, for the OSS were hostile to the French and the Force 136 organization was forced to attempt to check the Viet Minh and support the French from long range.
- 78 Pierre Messmer, Personal interview, 1 September 1977.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 François de Langlade, personal interview, 3 September 1977. The author believes that the basic principles of the operation (to scatter teams) was unchanged, for minor changes in executing the plan were effected. The point is that the basic assumptions were no longer valid after 9 March 1945 but were not altered, with fatal consequences, for after 9 March the French forces no longer had freedom of movement.
- 81 Pierre Messmer, personal interview, 1 September 1977. Messmer stated that Ho Chi Minh knew of Brancourt's death, if he had not specifically authorized it, for he wrote two letters to Ho after Brancourt had died. He found these letters in Ho's desk after the French returned to Hanoi.
- 82 At the time of this writing Patti had not broken a thirty year silence. However, see note 100.
- 83 Jean Sainteny, Histoire d'une Paix Manquée (p.71)
- 84 U.S. Government Printing Office, The United States and Vietnam: 1944-1947 Staff Study No.2 for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 1972.
- 85 Sainteny, Histoire, p.95.

86 Messmer summed up the effects of the OSS actions and the memorable feat of Ho playing off the various factions against each other in what some authorities regard as Ho's finest hour:

We had heavy difficulties [with the OSS]. The problem was not easy. All our French problems in Indochina at that time, in '45-'46, are clear when you know that Roosevelt had decided to bar the French. I suppose he gave orders to the Officer Commanding in China, it was Wedemeyer, to manage the thing so we had as many problems as possible. As a matter of fact we had awfully bad problems in north Indochina. At the same time we had no real problem at all in the south, where the British were in charge of the mission, especially in Cochinchina and Cambodia.

But in the north the OSS sent an officer to Hanoi, a Major Patti, who was sort of a counsellor to Ho Chi Minh. And Ho Chi Minh thought it was easy for him to play American off against French, and later to play French against Chinese when Leclerc was there. At the time the main idea of Ho Chi Minh was to bar the French, especially new French civil servants, from coming to north Indochina.

[Personal interview, 1 September 1977].

87 Võ Nguyên Giáp, Unforgettable Days [Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1975], pp.18-19.

88 Ibid., pp. 17 and 59.

89 Jean Cédile, personal interview, 26 October 1977.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., A British Intelligence summary of the period contained a report of a Manchurian division in this area.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

96 As he did with Algeria when he returned to power, de Gaulle intended to grant complete independence to Vietnam. But he was obliged to retire from politics in 1946 and the rise and fall of a succession of weak French governments made it impossible to effectively prosecute the war, although the Expeditionary Corps gave an amazingly good account of themselves despite the political problems with which they were saddled.

Both Pierre Messmer and François de Langlade, who shared de Gaulle's innermost thoughts, are emphatic on this point. Both separately stated that de Gaulle had made up his mind to grant Vietnam independence (as opposed to letting them take it), but it would first be necessary to temporarily reestablish French sovereignty exactly as it had been.

De Langle had this to say:

... as of Brazzaville, de Gaulle wanted to give all the colonies independence. His aim was to reestablish France exactly as before the war, and then be able to set policy of independence. He was stopped from doing this in 1945-46 for two reasons. First of all, we were only up to the 16th parallel [in Indochina], not all the way up; and secondly quite a part of the public opinion in France, including the Socialists and extreme right, were dead against it for two different reasons. One was for the status quo, to go back to the old ideas, and the Socialists were for quite a philosophical idea that you find again sometimes with Soustelle about Algeria and so on, where they say that the ordinary man is better off under a good colonial regime than he is under their own law.

[Personal interview, 3 September 1977].

- 97 Massu went on to become a four star general in the French Army and a legend in his lifetime. He commanded the French paratroopers during the Suez invasion of 1956 and was instrumental in recalling de Gaulle to power. In a now classic operation [described by Jean Larteguy in The Centurions, from which the film "The Lost Command" (with Anthony Quinn) was made], his airborne division, in a coldly efficient operation cleared Algiers of the FLN and urban terrorists. During the leftist uprisings in 1968 Massu and the Army sustained de Gaulle in the Presidency. His iron-fisted methods of turning the tactics and techniques of urban terrorists and Communists against themselves have made him the bane of liberal writers, but his methods as a very tough and successful soldier and commander may well be studied in the Age of the Terrorist.
- 98 Charles de Gaulle, War Memoirs, Salvation, 1944-1946. From R.Howard (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson) p.225.
- 99 Colonel Marcel Mingant, personal interview, 26 October 1977.
- 100 As this thesis neared completion the British Broadcasting Corporation presented a penetrating series of radio programmes dealing with the American involvement in Vietnam; the series was titled "Many Reasons Why", and directly parallels this work. The distinguished commentator, Michael Charlton, interviewed the leading figures of the Indochina drama, going back to the 1945 period. Archimedes Patti of the OSS apparently broke a thirty year silence to take part in the series. Charlton began the study with the Communist-led seizure of power in Hanoi on 2 September 1945, commenting:

By the side of the new communist leaders that day, also saluting the flag, were American officers in uniform. This episode is a first landmark in the American involvement in Vietnam. At first hand, it is a largely untold story. It concerns, essentially, three men: The communist leader, Ho Chi Minh, who died eight years ago; and two of our contributors, the American intelligence officer who helped Ho..., Major Archimedes Patti, and Frenchman Jean Sainteny, commissioner for Indo-China, who watched that day, while what he calls

the 'infantile anti-colonialism of the Americans' assisted to power a movement dominated by communists with incalculable consequences.

At the Yalta Conference [which many knowledgeable Vietnamese see as being disastrous for Indochina], Roosevelt told Stalin that he was "unable to find any ships to transport French troops back to Indochina".

Continued Charlton:

The British ...supported France, and engaged in what can only be called a running battle with the Americans over the postwar order in Asia...

In the resultant Balkanising of the old imperial systems, the peace would be kept by the authority of a new world body, the Security Council of the United Nations, a concept which was soon to be doomed by the onset of the Cold War and by the Russian veto. But in 1944 and 1945, with victory approaching, the Americans considered it their international right and in their national interest, where possible to thwart the return of the colonial powers, by getting back into South-East Asia first...

In the northern provinces on the Chinese Frontier, the communist-led guerilla bands had begun agitation and armed propaganda campaigns with assassination of government officials. In the months before their [Japanese] final surrender, Indo-China was drifting into a state of anarchy. This was the wind Ho Chi Minh rode to political power... The Americans, who controlled the air transport at K'un-ming in China, prevented the quick return to Hanoi of the representative of France and the head of their intelligence, Mission Five, designated commissioner for Indo-China, Jean Sainteny.

Sainteny faulted his own government for being caught short by the sudden Japanese collapse, for his instructions were essentially to use his wits and do the best he could. Charlton asked Sainteny about photographs showing Major (later Colonel) Patti, OSS, shaking hands with the Communists as they announced their claim to power, and what Patti's role appeared to be. Replied Sainteny:

There is an even more startling photograph*, showing Patti with his two aides by the side of the famous General Giap, saluting -- but you can't see what they're saluting. I can tell you what they are saluting. It is the unfurling of the Communist colours over the Hanoi citadel.** And so the American mission endorsed this communist takeover by being at the side of Giap, who was not minister of war at the time, but minister of the interior.

* Shown in The Listener, 22 September 1977, p.359.

** Sainteny's bitterness is evident here, as at the time of this photo, there were still thousands of Frenchmen imprisoned in concentration-camp circumstances in the citadel, with perhaps a dozen dying each day.

Sainteny then confirms the view reached by the author during the course of this study regarding Patti's actions:

What was Patti's role at K'un-ming? He was, I believe, very much on his own... clearly, the United States' hostility towards France's eventual return to Indo-China went through Patti. Did Patti do it spontaneously? I don't think so, because this hostility was such that it could only have been the result of general directives issued much higher up.

The very selection of Patti to head an intelligence section in Indochina must also raise some questions. In a vast and varied nation like the United States, the OSS found it necessary to bring in an officer from Europe to go to Indochina, an officer who first had to check the map to find out where Indochina was. Said Patti, of Indochina: "I had an idea it was out in Asia, somewhere." Patti, in breaking a long silence, indicates that General Donovan, OSS chief, instructed him to steer clear of political involvement. He was also aware of Ho's communist background, but Ho convinced him that he was more nationalist than Communist. Asked by Charlton if he was aware that American support was vital to Ho in establishing his authority, Patti replied:

Yes, that is true. He did use us, and I knew it. I didn't mind, frankly, because the use he made of us was more one of image than substance.

The last statement is perhaps the most telling sentence of this whole story, for it reveals just how little the Americans really knew of Vietnamese culture; they should have known by now that to the Vietnamese, symbolism is everything, and image is substance. And while the Americans [one of whom accompanied Giap into Hanoi] were blocking the French they knew that the Viet Minh under Ho would reach Hanoi first.

Charlton drew attention to the fact that some of the history disputes the statements that the Viet Minh were attacking the Japanese, saying that the Viet Minh were more intent on burning villages and intimidating the local population, and hinted that this was more of what the OSS saw than attacks on Japanese. Patti replied that "there might have been some of that" [burning of villages]. But Patti is right in saying that Ho Chi Minh more correctly filled a power vacuum than seized power, a vacuum caused in part by MacArthur's forbidding the Allies to enter Indochina until 2 September [the day he personally accepted the Japanese surrender in Tokyo]. The trouble was that although this tied up the Allies it left a clear field for the communists and their OSS followers who tagged along. Through Patti an explanation is at last offered for the fly-past of a flight of USAAF P-38 Lightnings as Ho Chi Minh announced his seizure of power in Hanoi. It was, he said, "a quirk of fate; just one of those things that happens once in a million years, I suppose." Said Patti:

During the speech that Ho was delivering from the rostrum, way up high, a flight of P-38s (I believe they were) came overhead. They were curious of the huge crowds below, and I can imagine what a pilot might do: 'Say, what's going on down there?' And he must have dipped down to look, and many people interpreted that to be a dip of a salute. That was simply an accident.

Patti's version of the disbandment of OSS activities in Vietnam made no mention of the fundamental reason for their departure: the new American consul in Hanoi was so appalled at the results of OSS activities that he demanded they be removed at once, before they could do further damage.

Charlton stated that "The apparent American benediction on Ho Chi Minh's men deeply impressed the Vietnamese," one of whom later became an important figure in the late South Vietnam's military and political spheres, General Tran Van Don. Don stated that he, along with all the other Vietnamese, had never heard of one Ho Chi Minh before 1945:

People like myself discovered that there was a leader, who came back and took over control of Hanoi, with the name of Ho Chi Minh, leading an organization -- we didn't know how big, but we knew that this organisation was backed by the Americans, that was the crucial fact.*

Michael Charlton pressed Trần Văn Đôn on this key point of American support, saying:

So you think the principle reason for Ho Chi Minh's sudden acceptance as a national leader for North Vietnam was due more or less entirely to the fact that he was visibly being supported by the victorious Americans, rather than any popular sentiment or uprising among the people?*

Trần Văn Đôn confirmed the author's conclusions in replying:

I am convinced about this. Even Emperor Bao Dai resigned very fast. He said, there is nothing to say against these people, because they are fighting for independence and the Americans are supporting them.

Charlton mentions how the enthusiastic American support of the Việt Minh, and Major Patti's zeal in particular, shocked the French. Sainteny continued:

He had instructions, but went beyond his orders... the fact remains that he behaved towards us as a deliberate enemy. I was incarcerated by the Japanese and by the Viet Minh, together with my associates, in the governor general's palace. I was permanently guarded by Japanese sentries with fixed bayonets, and Patti used to come regularly to make sure we were really properly guarded by the Japanese -- our common enemy, who had capitulated two weeks earlier. When

*All italics in this footnote are added.

you come to think of it, it really was abnormal.

Charlton's narrative continued:

There seems little doubt that he [Patti] and other American intelligence officers succumbed when they were with him, not just to Ho Chi Minh's impressive determination and abilities, but to his charm and flattery of them, too. Ho perceived that it would be the Americans, not the Russians, who would determine events in the immediate future in Indo-China... The fact is, that it was the Americans who literally took revolution by the hand and accompanied it into Hanoi.

Dennis Duncanson, an authority on Vietnam affairs and author of the book, "Government and Revolution in Vietnam", has the last word in this particular program:

During the course of the war, of course, the Chinese element becomes less and less significant [to Ho Chi Minh] and the Americans move in, and they become the Allies. But there was no question of the communist party, of Ho Chi Minh personally, or anybody else, actually winning power in Indo-China simply by sentimental appeal to the mass of the people. Politics is not of that kind, and no communist has ever supposed that it was; politics grows out of the barrel of a gun...

I would put Ho Chi Minh's capacity in the actual exercise of power as more remarkable than Lenin's. Of course, Lenin was a great literary figure. Ho Chi Minh wrote very little and was not a great intellect. But, in his narrow field he was, I would say, as a political manipulator, supreme.

[The Listener, British Broadcasting Company, London: 22 September 1977, pp.357-360.] Italics added.

101 Charles de Gaulle, War Memoirs, Salvation, p.931.

CHAPTER III

THE JAPANESE IN VIETNAM

"Where," asked the Emperor, "is the Strike-South commander going to set up his headquarters?"

"In Saigon," replied Sugiyama. ¹

In all the discussions about Vietnam in recent years, the role of the Japanese seems to have been largely ignored or downplayed. Yet it was the Japanese who ultimately destroyed forever the position of the French in Indochina (and the white man in Asia, for that matter). By occupying Indochina and successfully forcing their demands on the French, they finally demonstrated the fact that the French were very ordinary people. When Japan collapsed, she did everything in her power to impede France's reclaiming her former possession. The Japanese turned over large stocks of arms, ammunition and money to the Vietnamese revolutionaries, and in many cases Japanese deserters fought beside the Vietnamese rather than surrender to the Allies.

In March, 1945, the Japanese dispensed with the trappings of French colonial rule and swept the French armed forces and civil administration into jail. In August, when Japan surrendered, the French were still locked up, and the Việt Minh were presented with the improbable spectacle of their former masters helpless, the Japanese silently cooperative, and all of Indochina ripe for the plucking as it had never been before and would never be again. Thus the August Revolution was made possible. It was not until later that the Japanese in the south were ordered to retain their arms and go into action against the Việt Minh. The Japanese Army thus continued fighting for several months after the end of World War Two, but this time under the orders of the Allies -- in rapid succession the Japanese had changed from former enemy to active ally.

Indeed, it was the initial Japanese occupation of Indochina which was eventually responsible for the postwar British insistence on returning Indochina to France. The effective use that the Japanese had made of Indochina as a springboard to all of Southeast Asia was not lost on the British. In discussing the role of the Japanese in postwar Saigon, it is first necessary to understand the reasons for their presence there.

The Japanese political situation in the mid-thirties was marked by turbulence, uncertainty and assassination. In the middle of the decade the militarists got the upper hand and the idea of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere took shape. In the thirties the Japanese invested Manchuria and created the vassal state of Manchukuo. If Japan's grandiose ambitions for empire and influence were to be realized she would have to have access to a wider variety of raw materials than her own meagre resources could provide.

In July, 1937, with further Japanese encroachment into China, there occurred the famous "China Incident", in which Japanese troops fired on the Chinese at the Marco Polo Bridge, near Peking. Henceforth, the Japanese referred to the larger Chinese war as the "China Incident". By 1940 the Japanese had pushed the surprisingly stubborn Chinese to the southern border, beyond which lay French Indochina.

The French in Indochina were naturally apprehensive at the bellicose Japanese behavior (especially since they eventually became politically marooned with the defeat of their homeland by Germany). With the fall of Canton to the Japanese, the only reasonable supply route to Chiang Kai-Shek was via the Indochinese port of Haiphong, the Tonkin rail system, and the railway from Yunnan to Kunming (which was French-owned). The Japanese exerted pressure on the French to close these routes, and finally took matters into their own hands by interdicting the Yunnan route by tactical air strikes.

The French government was not prepared to forcibly resist the Japanese unless the British and American governments promised support. The British replied that they would only go as far as the United States, and no farther. However, Cordell Hull of the U.S. would have none of it, and felt that the British were shifting the burden of responsibility to him. The result was that the French were forced to become more flexible in their dealings with the Japanese, who fully appreciated the tenuous position of the French. On 19 June 1940, the Japanese bluntly demanded that the French seal off their border with China and permit Japanese inspectors to oversee the embargo on Chinese traffic. The French were prompt to respond to the Japanese demands, and on 20 June they replied that the border had in fact been closed a couple of days earlier to gasoline supplies and trucks, and that they would expand the list of prohibited goods. They would, however, welcome the Japanese.

The Japanese accepted the French offer, and on 29 June a Japanese mission under General Nishihara landed at Hanoi; from there they fanned out and set up a number of checkpoints at Haiphong, Hagiang, Laokay, Caobang, Langson and Fort Bayard. Most of these same places would later become the scenes of bitter battles between the French and Việt Minh.

The Chinese, of course, protested vigorously to the French and threatened to send their own armies into Tonkin. The French were now in the uncomfortable position of possibly being in the middle of the Sino-Japanese War. The Japanese were not at all satisfied with what they

considered the lukewarm cooperation of the French, and the Japanese ambassador in Berlin was trying to persuade the Germans to pressure Vichy into closer cooperation in Tonkin.

The Japanese made clear their need for new materials and rice, and the pro-Allied Governor General, Catroux, asked the Allies for some tangible support. The British Far Eastern Naval Commander sailed up from Singapore and quashed any hopes that Catroux may have cherished. The British simply had no power to spare.

The British ambassador in Tokyo, Sir R. Craigie, was fully aware of the dangers inherent in the diplomatic manoeuvring in Southeast Asia, and was himself subjected to considerable pressure from the Japanese. On 24 June 1940, the Japanese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs told Craigie that Japanese public opinion was solidly against the British because of the British support of the Chinese with war materials and because British troops were still in Shanghai. Furthermore, the Japanese were in no mood to bargain over the Burma road, over which supplies for China were moving. The British Foreign Office were trying to determine whether [in the worst case of hostilities commencing] the war would be a local or general conflict, for the Japanese were giving the British little room to manoeuvre.² The Foreign Office was now satisfied that whatever happened they would be going it alone, for the United States was not prepared to take a firm stand against the Japanese. If the British were to give in to the Japanese demands over closing the Burma Road, further pressure could be expected. The British hoped to use the Burma Road as leverage in their efforts to extricate their Shanghai garrison, but they were under no illusions as to the difficulties involved for the Japanese, in their clashes with the Russians, had demonstrated that they could wage violent local war without generalizing the conflict. To Craigie it was apparent that the younger group of Japanese officers were beyond reasonable control and might well murder the more cautious senior officers. The momentous issue of war or peace depended on the outcome of the struggle between the moderates and extremists in Japan.

The British, aware of their weakness in the Far East while they were concentrating on the fight for survival in Europe, fell back on their traditional diplomatic skills in order to buy time. Craigie told the Japanese that reports of arms shipments to China over the Burma Road were greatly exaggerated, and the amount was in fact declining. Craigie asked the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Was not Japanese public opinion, under guidance from an interested party, making a mountain out of a mole-

hill of this whole question?"³ The Vice Minister was ready to agree with Craigie, but "it was obvious that Japanese public opinion, which had become greatly stirred," would not settle for less than a complete ban on Burma road traffic to China. The British were asked to put a halt to this flow of materials and to show "concrete evidence" that it had stopped, or further unspecified pressure would be applied. "Concrete evidence" would consist of permitting the Japanese Consul-General in Rangoon to go up and see for himself. The important point in this whole exercise was the American attitude. A firm American commitment to resist further Japanese aggression would very largely decide the British reaction, but the Foreign Office predicted that they would get nothing but goodwill from the United States, and in this they were correct. The U.S. continued to preach to the Allies but refused material support.

Craigie correctly advised the Foreign Office that this was not an opportune time to take on the Japanese. The British had just extracted their Expeditionary Force from the beaches of Dunkirk while the Royal Air Force and the Luftwaffe were building up to the decisive air campaign of the war in the Battle of Britain. Craigie reluctantly recommended that the British accede to Japanese demands to close the Burma Road temporarily, but faced opposition from some of his colleagues. Sir A. Clark Kerr in China, for example, did not relish the idea, for while the Chinese may understand the French reaction to Japanese pressure, they might not forgive the British, who were not "beaten to our knees", and suggested archly that the Orientals demanded a higher standard of morality from the British. His suggestion was to use the Shanghai garrison as a bargaining chip, and keep the Road open.

Craigie, nearer to the mood of the Japanese, disagreed, saying that the Japanese Army was determined to close the Road at all costs. The discussions on this subject were fascinating. Sir F. Leith Ross, of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, disagreed with Kerr and favoured retaining the Shanghai garrison, while a majority in the Foreign Office agreed with Kerr. Mr. Amery, of the India Office, told the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that the British position in the Far East was so weak that their only chance lay in a policy of boldness. If the Japanese started to fight now, Hong Kong must hold out as long as possible in the hope that the United States would come in before Singapore fell and the Navy sunk. "To ask the United States for help beforehand is to my mind a waste of breath."⁴ Lord Lothian, in Washington, advised keeping the Road open. The

War Cabinet reflected Amery's view that the U.S. was not prepared to increase pressure on the Japanese or take the initiative in a policy of conciliation.

Craigie, knowing that the Japanese would plunge recklessly into a fight, continued to press for closing the road. The idea was repugnant to him, but he thought that the Japanese could be taught a lesson when the Germans were defeated. The Burma Road was closed for three months as a compromise, but it was closed during the monsoon season when supplies to China would have been minimal.

In mid-July, General Nishihara raised the inevitable question of air bases in Tonkin. The Strike South faction in Tokyo, of which more will be said, was prevailing. The French, desperately stalling for time, replied that they would deny entry to Chinese troops, but the matter of air bases and transit rights for Japanese troops was a matter for negotiations between the French and Japanese governments.

In August, 1940, a French delegation travelled to Tokyo to engage in negotiations with the Japanese. Matsuoka, the new Japanese Foreign Minister, was not taken in by French stalling tactics and threatened force. The French finally gave in under these threats and recognized Japanese economic and political dominance in the East; they also granted the Japanese sweeping economic privileges while agreeing to permit about 5,000 Japanese troops to be based at three airfields in Tonkin and transit rights for the Japanese army along the Tonkin rail system. The Japanese claimed that these provisions were only to facilitate a favorable conclusion to the war with China, but it is doubtful if the French were satisfied with that explanation, even though the Japanese promised to recognize French sovereignty in Indochina. Despite these Japanese assurances, the French were still justifiably reluctant to allow the Japanese foot in the door, and continual French delays in carrying out the accord were met with a threat by Nishihara to bring the Japanese Army into Indochina in early September. On 4 September, the day before the Japanese deadline, the French commander, Martin, signed an agreement which clarified the technicalities.

The Governor General, Admiral Decoux, frustrated by the inexorable Japanese pressure, accused the British of subversion in Indochina by assisting Gaullists to leave Vichy territory. The Foreign Office, not wishing to give Decoux an excuse to act against British missions in Indochina, advised their consulates to suppress their natural inclinations

to help the anti-Vichy French. However, any Frenchmen who managed to reach British territory on their own would be given help in reaching Britain or Free French forces in Africa. This again reflected Craigie's advice, for he had advised against making an issue out of the problem of Gaullists in Indochina, and the British were still contemplating "discreet" assistance to groups in Indochina. Decoux was also quite concerned about a possible Gaullist coup by the army, fears which the army commander assured him were groundless. He was even worried about possible agitation from Singapore by Catroux, and the Chinese were threatening to blow up the railway at the Dedkay frontier station.

After Catroux left Indochina he made the sort of assertions which became the common rationale for the French collapse: "It was not the French nation that was conquered, but its leaders. The crisis came too quickly for the people as a whole to assert itself. It was sold into bondage by men unworthy of a great and noble country."⁵ In Indochina at least, Catroux was himself one of the leaders.

The British Commander in Malaya reported that the situation in Indochina was "extremely confused,"⁶ and thought that there was a small possibility that General Martin would carry out a coup in Cochinchina, and oppose both Decoux and the Japanese. The British were in no position to help Martin and were unsure as to whether the coup would be in the British interest or provoke further Japanese advancement to the south. It was finally decided not to send a British liaison officer to Indochina, although there were no reliable channels for receiving information from Martin. The British did have a bargaining chip in that the most important source of industrial salt for Japan was Eritrea and Italian Somaliland (250-300,000 tons a year), and the Japanese had informed the Foreign Office that they were concerned for the safety of their vessels in Middle East and European waters since sharp naval actions had occurred between the British and the German/Italian navies. So although the British were blockading Italian exports they replied that truly neutral shipping would not be endangered, and suggested that although the blockade on Italian exports would continue, perhaps the Japanese could switch to British sources.

By January, 1941, pro-Gaullist literature was passing from Shanghai through Singapore for Indochina. Although the British censors were withholding much of the Gaullist propaganda Decoux protested that the British Consul in Saigon was anti-French and supporting Thai claims to Indochinese territory. The British then entered into a "Gentleman's Agreement" with

Decoux (the forerunner of a later, and better known Gentleman's Agreement over Indochina of which much will be said later), in which the British would fully ban all Free French propaganda to Indochina provided no Vichy propaganda were distributed in the Free French territories in the Pacific.

From Tokyo, Sir R. Craigie reported that the French Mission there was under strong pressure from the Japanese for alleged rapprochement with the British over Indochina. The Japanese declared that they were concerned that Anglo-French talks were going on in secret while the Japanese-French negotiations were in progress, and hinted broadly that Japanese Army commanders on the spot in Indochina may be hard to control.

In early 1941 Admiral Decoux, beginning his long and controversial double game, authorized the passing of military information to the British in Hanoi; there were now about 8,000 Japanese troops in Tonkin. Increased unofficial Japanese activity in the area was reflected in their aircraft loss rate, when from 17 October to 1 December they lost 36 aircraft (7 of which were accidents while 14 were lost over the Burma Road), a loss rate of nearly one aircraft a day.⁷

Significantly, evidence of Japanese interference in local politics was uncovered even at this early stage. Pamphlets inciting the Tonkinese to rebellion were found in the baggage of Japanese officers, and there was "no doubt"⁸ that the Japanese were giving arms, clothing and money to the Vietnamese resistance against the French. The French were considered to be especially vulnerable because of their long lines of communication and the increasing pressure being applied by the Thais, and the Foreign Office thought that the Japanese now regretted their promise to respect the integrity and sovereignty of French Indochina.

The Foreign Office noted that the profile of the French administration in Indochina was not one to inspire confidence. In their view incompetence, corruption and defeatism were rife in high French circles, and most officials seemed to be blind to wider issues being concerned mainly with their own salaries and pensions. The British Consul at Haiphong reported that as of January, 1941, the Japanese command structure in Tonkin was as follows: General Nishihara commanded the division in Tonkin, General Sakaruda commanded the brigade at Haiphong, Colonel Kumabi had the air/land forces at Gialam airfield [Hanoi], while Colonel Ozonoe commanded artillery and tank troops at Bac Ninh.⁹ Even Catroux was recommending a cautious policy in Indochina, for the Gaullists were in the minority. The "Gentleman's Agreement" also extended to the British and French naval commanders in the

Far East, who refrained from firing on each other.

In Tokyo, Japanese policy was formulated by a series of Liaison Conferences between the Government and the service Chiefs of Staff.¹⁰ The Emperor, Hirohito, also had a large part in influencing Japanese policy.¹¹ These Liaison Conferences were started in late 1937, for by then the armed forces were so strong that the government had to secure service approval for policy decisions. Before long these conferences became paramount in the decision-making process, especially regarding foreign policy. The Cabinet business was now confined largely to domestic affairs. Major decisions reached at these conferences were referred directly to Emperor Hirohito for imperial ratification.

At the 21st Liaison Conference, 3 May 1941, Foreign Minister Matsuoka discussed his trip to Germany.¹² The Germans told him that in their view Japan should conquer Singapore now, but the Japanese War Minister cautioned that before operations could be undertaken in Malaya, Thailand and French Indochina would have to be occupied.

In April 1941, Churchill (aware of the growing intransigence of the Japanese and the current crucial discussions on war policy) wrote a remarkable letter to Matsuoka, in which he asked Matsuoka to consider the answers to the following questions.¹³ Would Germany, without control of the air or sea, be able to invade and conquer Great Britain, and would they even try? It would be in Japan's interests to wait and see. Did Japan's joining the Triple Pact (the "Axis") make it more or less likely that the United States would enter the war, and if the former was the case, would not the "naval superiority of the two English-speaking nations enable them to deal with Japan while disposing of the Axis powers in Europe?" Was Italy a help or hindrance to Germany, and was the Italian fleet as good at sea as on paper; moreover, "Is it as good on paper as it used to be?" Would the British Royal Air Force be stronger or weaker in the coming year? Would the countries "being held down by the German Army and Gestapo, learn to like the Germans more or will they like them less as the years pass by?" The United States and Great Britain had a combined steel-production capacity of 90 million tons; if Germany was defeated again would the 7 million tons of Japanese steel production be enough to sustain a "single-handed war?" Churchill concluded by saying, "From the answers to these questions may spring the avoidance by Japan of a serious catastrophe..."

At the 30th Liaison Conference of 12 June 1941, a policy document called "Acceleration of the Policy Concerning the South" was presented for

discussion.¹⁴ The main points of discussion were the need for a military union with French Indochina in order to facilitate the movement of Japanese troops to Cochinchina, and for diplomatic preparation to be made in case force was used to achieve access to south Indochina. Furthermore, the Japanese must not shrink from war with the so-called A B D¹⁵ powers should they interfere with Japan's need for access to the south, including the coveted Netherlands East Indies soil. In any event, an early decision was necessary, for the rainy season was approaching and much work was needed to bring existing Indochinese airfields up to heavy bomber standards.

Dutch East Indies oil was one of the main reasons for the relentless Japanese drive to secure bases in Indochina. In the face of a belated Allied embargo on oil shipments to Japan the Dutch oilfields took on an overriding importance. Without them the Imperial Japanese Navy would be immobilized, and without the Navy the growth of the Empire, or even its very existence, would have been in jeopardy.

The only reason the Japanese did not move even more swiftly was the bitter infighting going on within the highest councils in Tokyo over whether to advance to the north or to the south. The Strike South faction won when Hirohito approved the General Staff paper on "Acceleration of the Policy concerning the South." The right wing army faction, bolstered by important politicians such as Foreign Minister Matsuoka (who had spent some of his formative years in the United States) favoured an attack on the Soviet Union rather than risk a war with the U.S. and Britain. This "Strike North" group lost influence when the Red Army inflicted a bad beating on the Japanese Kwantung Army in the Mongolian border area and official opinions held that the raw materials in the south were more important than allying with Germany against Russia. Moreover, 75% of the Japanese Army were in China, and the Navy advised that they would need about 50 days in order to switch their preparations from south to north. The remarkable Soviet spy, Sorge, had also advised Russia that the Strike South faction was gaining influence, and the Soviets sealed the decision by promising to remain neutral in any future conflicts in the Pacific regions.

The debate sharpened when Germany attacked Russia in June 1941, for Matsuoka thought that the Germans would win, and if Japan attacked Russia from the East she would have a say in the postwar settlement. Tojo said that if Japan did not do something before the end of the year she may

as well abandon the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. All the heady talk of going north or south received a slight dampening when Mr. Kobayashi, Minister of Commerce and Industry, gave his opinion that the Japanese were not strong enough for war anywhere, if its resources were used as a guide to strength.

The Strike South group finally won when at the Imperial Conference of 2 July 1941 the decision was made to go into Indochina, regardless of the risk of war with the United States and Britain.¹⁶ Matsuoka himself was ousted when the Cabinet was asked to resign and Admiral Toyada replaced him as Foreign Minister. The French were to be immediately told that Japanese forces would move south by 20 July. The French again had little option and agreed, and on 24 July 40,000 Japanese troops advanced southwards to establish air and naval bases in south Indochina, including Saigon. As a result of this Japanese defiance in the face of warning by the Western powers, Japanese assets in the British Empire and the United States were frozen and sweeping economic sanctions were applied. The Dutch also curtailed Japanese financial dealings in the East Indies, so that the Japanese were basically left with the choice of stopping their advances or pushing on and probably going to war with the Western powers. The Navy Chief of Staff, Admiral Nagano, thought that if there must be war with America, victory would go to the Japanese now, but Japanese chances would decrease as time passed.¹⁷ The Japanese were never fully confident of victory against the U.S., but thought that if war were inevitable this was the best time to strike.

On 6 September 1941, eight weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor, a set of general principles was laid down at the Imperial Conference. To the question of the aims of a war against the United States, Britain and the Netherlands the conference stated:

The purposes of a war with the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands are to expel the influence of these countries from East Asia, to establish a sphere for the self-defence and the self-preservation of our Empire, and to build a New Order in Greater East Asia. In other words, we aim to establish a close and inseparable relationship in military, political, and economic affairs between our Empire and the Southern Regions...¹⁸

The Director of the Planning Board, Suzuki, spelled out Japan's situation in stark terms:

At this stage our national power with respect to physical resources has come to depend entirely on the productive capacity of the Empire itself, upon

that of Manchuria, China, Indochina and Thailand... therefore, as a result of the present overall blockade imposed by Great Britain and the United States, our Empire's national power is declining day by day. Our liquid fuel stockpile, which is most important, will reach bottom by June or July of next year... I believe that if important areas in the south were to fall into our hands without fail in a period of three to four months, we could obtain such items as oil, bauxite, nickel, crude rubber, and tin...¹⁹

The conference agreed that preparations for a war with Britain and the United States must be completed by the last 10 days in October, at which time the weather in the north would be unsuitable for military operations. It was felt that to delay preparations past October would permit the United States to grow too strong.

"A war with the United States and Great Britain will be long, and will become a war of endurance... it would be well-nigh impossible to expect the surrender of the United States."

Then in a prescient statement which revealed a keen insight into the nature of American politics, the Japanese continued.

"However, we cannot exclude the possibility that the war may end because of a great change in American public opinion, which may result from such factors as the remarkable success of our military operation..."²⁰

In mid-September, 1941, French fears were realized as the Japanese now demanded the right to garrison Indochina with a force of about 32,000 troops, and threatened to move in whether the French liked it or not. The hapless French, beaten at home and beset by scattered native unrest in Indochina, could only accept the Japanese demand. However, on 25 September, a Japanese division attacked the French garrison at Langson, on the Chinese border, and annihilated it. The incident appeared to have been the result of independent action by the Japanese divisional commander, and peace was restored after a vigorous French protest. But the lesson was well taken.

The new Japanese ambassador to Indochina, Kenkichi Yoshizawa, left Kobe for Haiphong on 31 October 1941, arriving in Tonkin on 8 November. He was met by the Secretary General in the absence of Admiral Decoux, and proceeded to Hanoi. There Yoshizawa announced that relations between the two countries had entered into a new phase of cooperation and mutual prosperity.²¹ With Yoshizawa were a strong staff composed of Mr. Uchiyama (a man of wide diplomatic experience), Mr. Kuriyama (former ambassador to Belgium), Baron Hayashi (former ambassador to Great Britain and Consul-General in Hanoi), Mr. Minoda (formerly with the Saigon consulate, with wide service in French-speaking countries), Colonels Cho, Nakada and

Lieutenant Colonel Hayashi (former assistant military attache in Poland in 1937), and Captain Horuichi and Commander Sasaki, both of the Navy and assigned to intelligence duties. Yoshizawa was described by the press as an "able and patient negotiator", although he had had little success with the stubborn Dutch in the East Indies negotiations. Colonel Cho had taken part in negotiations on the Manchurian border following the Changkufeng incident in 1938.

On 4 November, 1941, at a meeting of the Supreme War Council, General Doihara asked: "What is the official excuse for this war against America, Britain and the Dutch?" In a remarkable statement the answer was given:

This is a clash between nations which have different world philosophies. The basic purpose of the war is to make the Americans do obeisance to us against their will -- that and the Co-Prosperity Sphere to make us self-sufficient. Before we achieve these ends we must be prepared for a long war. Our immediate short-term ends are to break out of encirclement, undermine the morale of Chiang Kai-Shek, seize the raw materials of the south, expel the Anglo-Saxon race from Asia, make the Chinese and the peoples of the Southern Regions depend on us rather than the United States and England, open a southern route for closer ties between Asia and continental Europe, and get a monopolistic corner on the rubber, tin, and other raw materials which the United States needs for military purposes.²²

At the same meeting General Terauchi, Supreme Commander for the Southern Regions, betrayed a hint of anxiety in posing a written question to the Council in which he asked if there was not some way that a prolonged war could be avoided.²³ He also called for some guidance in asking what were the most important points to remember in Japanese administration of the occupied areas. The answer was:

First, secure raw materials; second, insure freedom on transport for raw materials, and personnel; third, in accomplishing these two objectives, we must not hesitate, as we did in China, to oppress the natives. On the other hand, we will not interfere in the details of government, as we did in China, but will make use of existing organizations and show respect for native customs.²⁴

This explained why the Japanese allowed the Tricolor to fly in Indochina until 9 March 1945, when Allied pressure and an increasingly bold French resistance movement compelled the Japanese to round up and intern the French military and civil service units. The French had been doing an excellent job of running the country for the Japanese while

effectively quashing native unrest. The rest is history. The Japanese used Indochina and Thailand and as firm bases from which to attack Malaya, Burma and the East Indies.

Admiral Decoux had reasonable relations (under the circumstances) with Yoshizawa, but the latter was replaced by Matsumoto in late 1944, when the Japanese were being pushed back everywhere. Matsumoto was not the gentleman that Yoshizawa was, and he immediately pressed the French to increase Japanese occupation expenses to 110,000,000 piasters per month,²⁵ a large increase and far in excess of what the Japanese really needed. The question still remains unanswered as to what the Japanese did with this excess cash, though some clues may be found in the postwar report by Lieutenant Colonel T.H.Sweeny, British Army Pay Corps, after his detailed inspection of the records of the Bank of Indochina (discussed later).

Yoshizawa had earlier told Decoux that the Japanese would alter their policy in Indochina if Manila fell to American forces.²⁶ In February 1945 Decoux, for a number of reasons, moved the seat of government from Hanoi to Saigon, and since the Japanese Supreme Headquarters was also in Saigon it facilitated the Japanese coup. To ensure Decoux's presence in Saigon when they struck, the Japanese suggested that the Japanese-French Indochina rice agreement be renegotiated on 9 March 1945. On 4 March Decoux travelled to Dalat to visit his wife's grave, and (much to the relief of the Japanese) returned to Saigon on 7 March.

On 9 March, General Tsuchihashi hosted a Japanese-French dinner, in return for a party at the Governor-General's residence a week earlier. At 1915 hours on the 9th Tsuchihashi left his dinner and went to Army Headquarters. A few minutes earlier Matsumoto had met Decoux and said that a U.S. landing was imminent and there was now an urgent need for closer cooperation between Japanese and French forces. What he meant was that French forces must be placed under Japanese control. At 1900 hours Matsumoto presented the ultimatum to the stunned Decoux, demanding an unequivocal answer by 2100 hours. At 2121 hours the orders went out to all Japanese units to execute their contingency plans, the signal for execution being a continuous 7-7-7 message.²⁷ At 2125 hours Navy Captain Robin delivered a reply to Matsumoto, who called the note a rejection.

In the south, the French were neutralized fairly easily, and the Japanese, during postwar interrogation, correctly blamed General Delsuc, commander of the Cochinchina division, for the French debacle during the

early stages of the coup.²⁸ He had not only ridiculed Decoux's apprehensions, but had ignored a crucial piece of information unwittingly supplied by the Japanese. A Japanese airfield company commander had unthinkingly told his employees that he would be on duty during the night of the 9th,²⁹ and these, suspecting something was afoot, reported it to their superiors. Delsuc, however, failed to perceive the significance of the information. And when the Japanese ultimatum finally arrived, no one bothered to notify immediately the French Army in Tonkin.

In Tonkin the French reacted more intelligently thanks to the independent action taken by General Sabattier. A double agent at Cao Bang had warned the French of the Japanese plan and, under the pretext of holding manoeuvres, Sabattier had moved several battalions into the field when the blow fell. These troops made a fighting retreat to China.

On 9 March 1945, Domei (Japanese Telegraph [News] Service) broadcast the following announcement from Imperial Japanese Headquarters in Tokyo:

Our forces stationed in French Indochina, owing to the utter lack of sincerity on the part of the French Indo-China authorities, realized that the joint defense of French Indo-China has finally been rendered impossible. Consequently, with a view to eliminating hostile influences, our forces decided to assume the duty of defending French Indo-China on their own responsibility and commenced to take necessary measures on the night of 9th March.³⁰

On 10 March the following momentous statement was released by Tokyo through a broadcast in German by the Japanese Overseas Service, which included the usual platitudes of the sincerity of the Japanese and the treachery of the French:

We herewith also assure them (the Indochinese) that we shall unconditionally support what for many years has been their keenest desire, but suppressed desire; i.e., the desire for national independence -- according to the main stipulation of the Greater Asia declaration.³¹

Regardless of the stipulation, this was it -- a first concrete promise of independence. This was something from which the French never fully recovered although it was later in their power to turn the tide of independence in a more propitious direction. Consequently, on 11 March 1945, Emperor Bao Dai proclaimed the independence of Vietnam.

In the British view there was more to the coup than the reasons advanced by the Japanese. Having dispensed with the French the Japanese now gained full control of the Hanoi-Saigon Railway; they had previously been allotted only 2000 tons per month (of a total railway capacity of

5000 tons per month). They now also seized outright all coasters, junks, buses, and so forth, for Allied air attacks had now severely dislocated all Japanese shipping and movements. But more important was the French refused to make an open-ended commitment and pay out an unlimited amount of piasters for the Japanese occupational expenses. To British intelligence this was the actual occasion for the military proposal to take over the country.³² In January and February the French paid out enough to cover actual Japanese expenditures, but it was only one-third of the sum demanded by the Japanese.

Following the coup the French were forbidden to leave town without authorization from the Japanese. All firearms, munitions, radios, cameras, binoculars and typewriters were to be handed in to the Japanese, and the sale and exchange of these items were forbidden. The French were also forbidden to be out between sunset and sunrise, and meetings of more than 3 people were banned. Outer doors of houses and apartments must be left open, and even an announcement was made "To Frenchmen who wish to become Quislings." Since the Japanese could not entirely manage on their own, an appeal was made to the civil servants to keep them on the job by promising to maintain their salaries.* Severe punishment (including death) was promised for any actions deemed detrimental to the Japanese Army, such as espionage, destruction of communications and power plants; actions prejudicial to Japanese Army officers, economic life, and other actions subsequently mentioned by the Japanese Commander-in-Chief could also receive this severe retribution.³³

On 11 March, General Nagano and the 37th Division moved south from Kwangsi to Hanoi to reinforce General Mikuni and the 21st Division. By 13 March, the Japanese in Tonkin claimed to have captured 8500 POWs (plus 1000 killed), and a booty of 54 aircraft, 274 trucks, 62 cars, 46 heavy machine guns, 164 light machine guns, 87 artillery pieces, 6672 rifles and 327 revolvers.³⁴

On 14 March the Japanese announced that the post of Governor-General was now held by the Japanese Commander. Matsumoto was Supreme Adviser in Indochina, Yokoyama was Adviser to the Annamite Government, Consul-General Kubo was Supreme Adviser to Cambodia, Consul-General Minota was Governor of Cochinchina, and Consuls-General Tatsuichi, Kawano and Kobase were Mayors of Saigon, Cholon and Hanoi. Spreading false rumours and removing Japanese posters were added to the list of punishable offences.

* This included 5000 French and 23000 Vietnamese civil servants; also, the important railway workers, amounting to 300 Frenchmen and 16000 Vietnamese.

The Japanese listed 10 "Glaring Incidents of Treachery" which led to the coup. These had occurred over a period of months, and were as follows:

1. French military preparations against the Japanese (by deploying garrisons in the major cities).
2. Attacking Japanese shipping in cooperation with the USAAF.
3. French military leaders had urged [at a Hanoi conference on 20 February 1945] that the Japanese be attacked.
4. The U.S. was dropping supplies to dissidents at Thai Nguyen.
5. The French were sheltering Allied airmen.
6. Petain elements were being purged.
7. The French had planned on holding a prayer meeting for the liberation of France, and "went so far as to send an invitation" to Yoshizawa, the Japanese Ambassador (who banned it).
8. In government debates, the term "French Republic" was replacing "French State", and Gaullist articles were becoming more conspicuous.
9. Decoux had refused to recognize the Chinese Nanking Government.
10. Decoux had expressed a hope for liberation during his New Year's broadcast.³⁵

After the coup the Japanese administered the country directly. They did, however, permit lower-echelon French officials to continue functioning. Despite the arrest and imprisonment of their compatriots (many of them in appalling conditions), many Frenchmen did continue to work for the Japanese. In Saigon, the Opera House was turned into an interrogation and torture chamber by the Japanese, and some Frenchmen continued in their positions as prison warders.³⁶

But France's "mission civilisatrice" in Asia was at an end. The Japanese coup had, said Sainteny, "wrecked a colonial enterprise that had been in existence for eighty years and that, despite its detractors, remains one of the glories of the French civilizing action in the world."³⁷ Worse, the blow fell just three days before the French were to execute an ambitious operation to destroy the Việt Minh. Thus, as HỒ Chí Minh is reputed to have said of the August Revolution, the Việt Minh did not really seize power, for there remained no power to seize. Continued Sainteny:

... the Japanese... may not have disliked the idea of leaving behind them this time bomb represented by a Communist Vietnam. Besides, at this point the Japanese may have felt that political color was less significant than racial color. Then, as now, "Asia must be left to the Asians: Thus, the Japanese would not have lost the war completely, as Marshal Teroki [Terauchi] was later to declare."³⁸

*See Appendix for the Japanese version of the coup.

Louis Allen echoes this view in succinctly summing up the significance of the Japanese in Vietnam:

At its fullest extent, Japan's Empire in Asia must be one of the most short-lived in history: three and a half years. Yet its impact was very great. Either as a direct result of Japanese conquest, or in the disposition which followed Japanese defeat, the pattern of history in Asia was irrevocably altered. Arms taken from the Japanese forces fed the armies of Mao Tse-tung... Hesitant and belated though it was, a taste of independence was given to Burma, Vietnam, and Indonesia. In the long perspective, difficult and even bitter as it may be for Europeans to recognize this, the liberation of millions of people in Asia from their colonial past is Japan's lasting achievement.³⁹

The defiant Count Terauchi,⁴⁰ promoted to Field Marshal, was in Saigon when the Japanese Empire came to its cataclysmic end, and when General Gracey arrived with the leading elements of his 20th Indian Division to secure the Supreme Headquarters of the Japanese Army in Southeast Asia.

Footnotes: Chapter III

- 1 David Bergamini, Japan's Imperial Conspiracy (New York: Morrow, 1971) p.818.
- 2 Great Britain, Public Records Office, FO371/24666, Sir R.Craigie to Foreign Office, 24 June 1940.
- 3 Ibid., 25 June 1940.
- 4 Ibid., Amery to Foreign Office, 28 June 1940.
- 5 GB, PRO, FO371/24342, Interview by G.Ward Price, Daily Mail, 26 September 1940.
- 6 GB, PRO, FO371/24345, 10 October 1940.
- 7 GB, PRO, FO371/27759.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 GB, PRO, FO371/27759, Craigie to Foreign Office, 19 January 1941.
- 10 Japan's Decision for War, Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences, Trans/ed. by Nobutaka Ike (Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press 1967). This is the primary source of information for the discussions in this chapter on the making of Japanese policy and the decision to advance southwards.
- 11 See David Bergamini, Japan's Imperial Conspiracy (New York: Morrow, 1971).
- 12 Ike, Japan's Decision for War, p. 26.
- 13 GB, PRO, Premier 3/252-2, Churchill to Matsuoka, 1 April 1941.

- 14 Ike, p.51.
- 15 Japan's major antagonists were referred to as the "ABCD" powers, meaning American-British-Chinese-Dutch.
- 16 Ike, p.77.
- 17 Ike, p.106.
- 18 Ibid., p.152
- 19 Ibid., p.141
- 20 Ibid., Italics added. This was a remarkable prophecy in the light of the short-lived Communist success during Tet, 1968, which was the beginning of the end for America in Vietnam.
- 21 GB, PRO, FO371/11278, Craigie to Foreign Office, October/November 1941.
- 22 Bergamini, Japan's Imperial Conspiracy, p.812.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Louis Allen, The End of the War in Asia (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1976), pp.98-99.
- 26 Ibid., p.99.
- 27 Ibid., p.105.
- 28 Ibid., p.109.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 GB, PRO, FO371/24719.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 GB, PRO, FO371/46305, Enemy Branch, Foreign Office, and Ministry of Economic Warfare, 10 March 1945.
- 33 Ibid., [New Delhi monitor of broadcast in French from Saigon].
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Interviews with British officers in the Control Commission and Allied Land Forces French Indo-China.
- 37 Jean Sainteny, Ho Chi Minh and his Vietnam, trans. Herma Briffault (Chicago, Cowles, 1972), p.38.
- 38 Ibid., p.60.
- 39 Louis Allen, The End of the War in Asia, p.262.
- 40 The following notes are from Laurens van der Post, The Night of the New Moon [Hogarth Press, London 1970].

Teranchi was described by Lauren van der Post as "a Japanese aristocrat of the oldest Japanese military school, a fanatical Imperialist of great independence of mind, imperious character, and with complete confidence in himself and in his own rightness of decision." He had independently "made it quite clear to all his subordinate commanders in the various theatres of the vast strategic area under his command, that they would be expected to

resist the enemy in the classical samurai manner, if necessary committing harakiri in the event of defeat rather than falling alive into Allied hands." [p.57]. Van der Post while a POW was told by a Korean camp guard, a Christian, that he had seen Terauchi's secret order to execute all POWs when the Allies closed in on the various camps throughout Southeast Asia. The Japanese were to first kill the prisoners, then themselves.[p.59].

Terauchi frequently acted independently of Tokyo, and it was rumoured that he planned to ignore Hirohito's peace efforts and fight on. Hirohito's brother, Prince Chi-Chi-Bu had to go to Saigon and talk to Teranchi.[pp.128-129]. Major General Penney, SEAC Director of Intelligence, reported that the Control Commission in Saigon had seized plans for killing Allied prisoners of war and internees when the Allied invasions began.[p.145].

CHAPTER IV

BITTER HARVEST - ROOSEVELT AND INDOCHINA

"It would look very bad in history if we failed to support isolated French forces in their resistance to the Japanese to the best of our ability, or, if we excluded the French from participation in our councils as regards Indo-China."

Churchill to Roosevelt, 30 March 1945.

Roosevelt's active opposition to the return of the French to Indochina ultimately made the heralded Communist "August Revolution" a foregone success. In Asia, as a glance at the map will confirm, United States policy was not an unmitigated success if the object was to maintain friendly governments and open new markets. In the two main areas of U.S. influence on the Mainland, China and what became North Vietnam, the United States ended up fighting bloody wars against those two countries. South Vietnam's recent history is too sad and well known to relate here, and the domino theory suddenly regained respectability. As Lyndon Johnson later sarcastically commented, some American people thought that by talking to each other they had repealed the Domino Theory.

To the majority of Americans (including a large number of professional military officers, among them the author) who never quite understood the fundamental reasons for de Gaulle's ejection of U.S. forces from France in the sixties, France's withdrawal from active military participation in NATO, the expulsion of NATO Headquarters from France to Belgium, and the lack of cooperation or sympathy by the French and British Governments during America's Vietnam War, the following should be a modest source of enlightenment in the search for the answers to these and other annoying questions.

In June, 1940, de Gaulle began to organize the Free French, and was recognized by the British as the leader of all Frenchmen who were fighting the Germans. Even Russia, on 26 September 1941, recognized de Gaulle,¹ who was an archenemy of the Communists. Only the United States failed to recognize that unique Frenchman. Roosevelt could not conceal his dislike for de Gaulle, and was said to have made jokes about him at the Casablanca Conference in 1943.² In fact, the U.S. did not recognize de Gaulle until well after D-Day.

In the early days of the war it was the Vichy regime which merited U.S. support, and with the passing years Roosevelt's support for the re-establishment of the French Empire waxed and waned in direct proportion to the U.S. need for French support. On 7 December 1941, Pearl Harbor Day, Roosevelt wrote to Petain saying that it was essential to U.S. vital interests that the French Empire be preserved and that France continue to exercise jurisdiction and control over her colonies. As the war turned in his favour, Roosevelt became more confident in asserting his ideas for postwar political settlements, much of it disadvantageous to his Western Allies.

But he toned down his plans to frustrate the restoration of the French when their vitally needed cooperation was sought for the North African landings in 1942.³ On 20 January 1942, Roosevelt, through Ambassador Leahy, sent a message to Marshal Petain, in which the President said that it was important for the French to realize that he was "about the best friend they have; that one of his greatest wishes is to see France reconstituted in the post-war period in accordance with its splendid position in history. The word 'France' in the mind of the President includes the French Colonial Empire!"⁴ The note also warned the French Government and people against helping the Axis. However, as soon as the Torch operations succeeded Roosevelt returned to his theme of stripping France of her possessions.

Roosevelt's note was disquieting to many Cabinet officials. Mr. D. Morton sent a note to Churchill saying that:

"Unless the American language differs from our own more greatly than I suppose, I find most disturbing the President's personal message to you of January 29 about Vichy. I feel that the linking-together of the 'French' Government and the French people by the President throughout his telegram is not accidental. The State Department have signally failed so far to comprehend what is going on in France; that the Vichy Government is acting without the consent of the great majority of the French people. It looks as though the President has not the situation clear either."⁵

It must be said that Churchill viewed the U.S. contacts with Vichy with mixed feelings, for they did provide him with useful information on occasion.

Roosevelt particularly disliked de Gaulle, calling him some nasty names, and actively backed his rival, General Girand. De Gaulle, in turn, reciprocated, and thought that Roosevelt was trying to run the world.

It was true that Roosevelt had grand plans for everyone else's territory, and even touched on reshaping India's future, but backed off when Churchill became angry.⁶ De Gaulle could not be influenced by F.D.S., and knew that Roosevelt was actively working to undermine the French everywhere. Given this attitude at the top in America, the French could really expect to return to Southeast Asia only through the British, who took perhaps a more pragmatic view of things. One of the main problems was the deeply-rooted anti-colonial instincts of Americans,

whose early history began with the breaking away of their colonies from the mother country. This tendency, reinforced through the school years, led many Americans to generally regard all colonialism as evil and to instinctively oppose it, regardless of the consequences.

Roosevelt had mapped out a sort of grand scenario of world events, and part of that great plan was the elimination of the British and French Empires.⁷ As La Feber and others have pointed out, the British became financially strapped early in the war; alone, outnumbered and outgunned everywhere, and in the war longer than anyone else except the Germans, Britain was forced to pay in hard cash, securities, and trade arrangements for American war supplies until Pearl Harbor and Lend-Lease.

A week after F.D.R.'s election to a third term, Churchill sent an urgent message to Roosevelt. In it Churchill described the desperate situation in Europe and told Roosevelt the stark fact that Britain was going bankrupt by having to pay so heavily for American supplies, and would soon run out of money. Wrote Churchill, "The moment approaches when we shall no longer be able to pay cash for shipping and other supplies."⁸

To quote La Feber, "The United States had tried to weaken British rule and gain postwar American access to the colonial and Dominion areas at the Atlantic Conference of August 1941, but a compromise had to be devised when Churchill refused to be cornered."⁹

Roosevelt's comments on the French in Indochina, how the French had "milked" that colony and how the Indochinese deserved better, are too well known to repeat. But his attitude adversely affected Allied cooperation in the war effort, and was reflected in the Mountbatten-Wedemeyer disputes which began almost from the creation of the British South East Asia Command (S.E.A.C.) in 1943. Wedemeyer was initially the deputy to Admiral Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia (S.A.C.S.E.A.). The dispute flared up when Stilwell was removed from China and Wedemeyer was promoted to the job as U.S. Commander, China Theatre. It is not so much that the Chinese, or China Theatre, could do all that much in Indochina, it was more a matter of keeping the French (especially) and the British out.

In July, 1943, Anthony Eden, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, prepared a note for Cabinet discussion on his views on "the French position and the American attitude thereto."¹⁰ Earlier that year, on 2 January 1943, Eden had informed the United States of the British view of

the central French administration of the French Empire. This administration was to be formed in Algiers, a move privately supported by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who knew that Roosevelt opposed it. The U.S. never replied to Eden's message, and Eden concluded:

"...I would say that they did not wish to see a strong central administration for the French Empire built up in Algiers... They dislike the growth of an independent spirit in any French administration anywhere and consider that any French authority with whom they deal should comply without question with their demands. The fusion of General Giraud's and General de Gaulle's administrations has been unwelcome to them and they would have wished, if this had been possible, to disrupt the Committee of Liberation, to eject de Gaullist members from it, to set up in its place a puppet committee..."¹¹

Eden went on to recall the strong U.S. pledges to the French on the restoration of the French Empire, and the fact that F.D.R was now going back on his promises. What was worse, Roosevelt now wanted to remove part of metropolitan France itself, including the province of Alsace-Lorraine, and incorporate it into a new buffer state to be called "Wallonia."¹² It appeared that the United States had "little belief in France's future," and, continued Eden:

"Dr. Benes has told me, since his return from Washington, that the Americans are not so much anti-Gaullist as anti-French... and that they class France with Spain and Italy as a Latin power with no great future in Europe... Such views are at variance with those of His Majesty's Government..."¹³

Eden then went on to outline the main reason why Britain supported the restoration of the French, a position which would be the basis of a firm commitment to help the French, and a position from which the British would not waver in the coming crucial three years.

"Our main problem after the war will be to contain Germany. Our treaty with the Soviet Union for this purpose on Germany's eastern flank needs to be balanced with a powerful France in the west. These arrangements will be indispensable for our security whether or not the United States collaborate in the maintenance of peace on this side of the Atlantic.

Our whole policy towards France and Frenchmen should therefore be governed by this consideration. France has twice stood between us and the assault of the German aggressor. In 1914 to 1918 she was bled to exhaustion; in 1940 she was struck down. In all our dealings we should have due regard to French susceptibilities in matters of prestige and sovereignty; we

should do everything to raise French morale and promote French self-confidence. In dealing with European problems of the future we are likely to have to work more closely with France even than with the United States... There is evidence that feeling against the Americans is growing, not only in North Africa but in Metropolitan France itself as a result of their repeated affronts to French susceptibilities, their protection of doubtful personalities and their open hostility to the Gaullists. It is not to our interest that this feeling should become directed against ourselves.

Europe expects us to have a European policy of our own and to state it."¹⁴

Finally, Eden noted that the U.S. appeared to harbor a "deep resentment against de Gaulle and seem to have little sympathy for the more active of the resistance movements," while appearing to support the collaborationists. Eden had tried his "best to bring the United States Government to a more sympathetic outlook towards Gaullists, but without success."¹⁵

At that time, in presenting his own views on the situations to the War Cabinet, Churchill took exception to a remark made by Roosevelt during a Press Conference, in which F.D.R. had said that there was "no France at the present time,"¹⁶ a remark which was made with the knowledge that the other Allies (Britain and Russia) did not agree with him. As Churchill mentioned, recalling his visit to Washington not long ago, "... the President almost every day gave me some paper or other showing his annoyance with de Gaulle."¹⁷

However, since then de Gaulle had gained strength and was gradually politically eliminating Roosevelt's favourites in the Free France movement. Roosevelt's response was a high-handed order to Eisenhower in North Africa to forbid the Committee of National Liberation (Free France) to meet, but this was going too far and Churchill persuaded Roosevelt not to send it. As Churchill put it, "I have repeatedly stated that it is in the major interests of Great Britain to have a strong France after the War and I should not hesitate to sustain this view. I am afraid lest the anti-de Gaullism of the Washington Government may harden into a definite anti-France feeling." Churchill was trying to impress Roosevelt with the complex problems to be faced after the war, and the fact that there were difficulties enough in fighting the Germans and Japanese without alienating

his closest Allies, while indirectly warning Roosevelt not to go to the point of no return with his friends.

Roosevelt counted heavily on the Chinese, but his feelings were not universally shared; in fact, he was pretty much alone on this. At the Tehran Conference Stalin told Roosevelt that he (Stalin) had no use for the Chinese. He thought that they had fought badly, but the problem probably lay in their poor leadership (which, unfortunately, Roosevelt was backing).

Stalin also had no time for the French generally, saying that they had collaborated with the Germans. Roosevelt agreed (although he had officially recognized the collaborationist Vichy regime), and went on to say that "no Frenchman over 40, and particularly no Frenchman who had ever taken part in the present French Government, should be allowed to return to position in the future... the first necessity for the French, not only for the Government but the people as well, was to become honest citizens."¹⁸ Stalin, of course, was delighted and agreed with Roosevelt. Word of Roosevelt's ideas spread rapidly. Far away, in Southwest China, Mr. John F. Brewis, Acting Consul-General of the British Consulate in Kunming, wrote to Sir H.I. Prideaux-Brune, Charge-d'Affaires at the British Embassy in Chungking. In his note Brewis transmitted the leading article from the "Yunnan Jih Pao", dated 16 December 1943.¹⁹ The article was titled "The future status of Indo-China", and advocated independence for that colony after the war. The paper may well have represented the views of General Lung Yun, who was believed to have a controlling interest in the "Yunnan Jih Pao;" in view of the support the Kuomintang Government was now giving to "disaffected Annamites" in China, this could also be the view of the Government. The feeling was that after the war Indochina would no longer belong to France. Brewis noted that this sort of comment could apply to Hong Kong and Burma. The paper noted the brevity of French rule as compared to the centuries of Chinese rule in Indochina, and that the French had used political intrigue and force against the "feeble and incapable Ch'ing Government;" this situation would be changed. The article went on, "This is a shameful page of history; but now the world has changed, and it follows that this page of history must be rectified." Furthermore, "French strength was insufficient to oppose the aggressive influence of a third party, and that third party was none other than China's enemy -- then China was exposed to a very severe military presence. The Japanese entry into Indo-China serves a

very useful lesson." The paper went on to suggest that three courses were now open: to return Indochina to France, to return Indochina to China, or to promote Indochina's independence. The Chinese would promote the last option, and hoped that the future Indochinese Government would be democratic; "Such a government would be able to cooperate closely and confidently with all other democratic countries, and in particular with China. This, and only this, is what China hopes."²⁰

In keeping with his own peculiar concept of the postwar world, Roosevelt now engaged in a somewhat bizarre performance. On 16 December 1943, he received the Chinese and Turkish Ambassadors, the British Minister Sir R.I. Campbell (Halifax was sick), the Egyptian Minister, and the Soviet and Persian First Secretaries. During this now famous meeting Roosevelt made the following statements, saying that the assembled ministers "must not repeat to anyone what he said!"²¹ He said that "he had been working very hard to prevent Indo-China being restored to France," who during the last hundred years had done nothing for the Indo-Chinese people under their care. They were still as poor and as uneducated as ever and this state of affairs could not be allowed to continue. Roosevelt thought that the Indo-Chinese were not yet ready for elective institutions of their own, and should be put under some sort of U.N. trusteeship, under which they would begin to govern themselves, something in the Philippine manner. Roosevelt acknowledged future trouble with the French, but said it must be done. He said that peace must be kept by force and world policemen were necessary who would need certain bases from which to operate without bringing up questions of sovereignty." As La Feber has pointed out in his excellent article, "F.D.R.'s anti-colonial idealism was firmly rooted in the determination to protect American spheres of interest with military force."²² He went on to mention Dakar, which could be a threat to the whole Western hemisphere if in weak hands.²³

Eden immediately flashed the message to Churchill, who replied from the Mediterranean: "I have frequently heard the President express these views about Indo-China and Dakar and have never given any assent to them... One can hardly suppose any intention on the part of the United States to take territory from France forcibly without agreement with France after a French Government has been formed on the basis of the will of the French people."²⁴ Churchill then intimated that Roosevelt did not know what he was talking about in regard to Dakar, "as it was only made available to the Allies by the voluntary action of Admiral Darlan and had hitherto

resisted all other shocks."²⁵ Furthermore, said Churchill, "For the above reasons I am of the opinion that if we are officially apprised of these declarations we should give immediately a perfectly clear indication that we have no part in them... You should also recur to the various declarations on behalf of the integrity of the French Empire which have been given by the President from time to time."²⁶

Eden completely agreed with Churchill, and hoped that the British would resist any American action to deprive France of both Dakar and Indochina.²⁷ Eden then instructed Halifax to speak confidentially to Secretary of State Cordell Hull about it, and to ascertain whether it was a concerted White House-State Department policy, and whether F.D.R. remembered the many American promises to France and had considered all of this "in the light of a possible post-war security system in that region."²⁸

Halifax saw Hull on 4 January. Hull said he knew no more about all this than did Halifax. Halifax, thus assuming that this was not a concerted American diplomatic effort, pointedly reminded Hull "of the fact that United States Government had given various undertakings concerning the French Empire in terms more explicit than any which we had employed."²⁹ Hull acknowledged this "and said that he did his best from time to time to remind the President of this." Halifax concluded with his own opinion, "This is all a bit woolly."

In Southeast Asia, as elsewhere, Roosevelt's words were noted. Lord Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia, and his Chief Political Advisor, Esler Dening of the Foreign Office, both viewed Roosevelt's remarks with alarm.³⁰ Not only would a hostile France make the future Allied invasion of Indochina an extremely difficult operation, but it would be impossible to establish resistance nets in the country (an operation which Mountbatten was now secretly conducting).³¹

Mountbatten immediately sent word of Roosevelt's comments to his Chief of Staff. "I attach an astonishing telegram. I am afraid that, by speaking to the Chinese, Turks, Egyptians and Persians, the President is scarcely likely to achieve that degree of secrecy which he enjoined upon his hearers."³² The operational aspect was particularly disturbing, as it cut right through SEAC future planning. If the French were now to be excluded from Indochina, "then I think the French should be told now, since not to tell them would be an act of treachery. To tell them now would be to prejudice forthcoming operations in Europe, as also in

due course in Indo-China." Hostility could be expected in Indochina, and the French, "far from collaborating half-heartedly with the Japanese as they are now will do all they can to obstruct our entry." This new policy would adversely impact on intelligence and subversive activities there. "We are already faced with the arrival of the Corps Leger d'Intervention, and if we are not going to give Indo-China back to France we had better be chary about using Frenchmen."

Besides SEAC, SOE in Europe were upset with Roosevelt's remarks, as they now feared a hostile French population both in metropolitan France and in the colonies. From Asia Denning wrote of his concern over the American Asian policy, for he saw Indochina becoming the key area in Southeast Asia in the future. "In view (of) the hopelessly unsatisfactory position of Americans' activities in and from China ... consider vital that we should do everything in our power (to) prevent destruction of our cooperation with French." ³³

Mountbatten was concerned also in that Japanese broadcasts were already making big of the fact that the major Allied powers were ignoring the French. They were now bound to seize on these remarks by Roosevelt.

Again up in Yunnan, Mr. Brewis sent another clipping from the "Yunnan Jih Pao" to the Embassy in Chungking. The semi-official paper returned to the problem of postwar settlements in the area, and Brewis commented that "The argument is that peace in the Far East can only be assumed if all peoples of the Far East are allowed after the war to choose their own form of government. Throughout the tone and content of this article betray a racial inferiority complex which is no doubt the perfectly natural outcome of thirty years of Kuomintang teaching." ³⁴ The implications for the British colonies were unmistakable.

Roosevelt's Indochinese trusteeship plan was to involve around half a dozen members of various nationalities, including a Russian, an American, and perhaps a Chinese, "to educate them for self-government." ³⁵ Presumably it would be a democracy based on the Philippine model; it is not clear what the Russian would contribute to the idea of representative government.

Halifax next went straight to Roosevelt, and on 18 January 1944 the two met over lunch. Roosevelt had, in the meanwhile, received a note from Hull describing his talk with Halifax. Hull's note mentioned Halifax's question as to whether the President's comments "represented his considered view." ³⁶ The President, reported Halifax, "gaily inter-

jected" that they did. And on Halifax's comment that, in view of the company in which Roosevelt's remarks had been made, they no doubt would get back to the French, Roosevelt again cut in with "I hope they will." Roosevelt then went on to expound "the usual case" for depriving the French of Indochina, and said that Stalin thought it was a good idea. Churchill, continued Roosevelt, had refused to discuss it, as Roosevelt said that he had discussed it 25 times with the Prime Minister, "or perhaps discussed is the wrong word. I have spoken about it 25 times but the Prime Minister has never said anything."³⁷ Halifax pointedly reminded Roosevelt of the President's promises to restore the French, but "The President did not think that his pledges about the French Empire were of importance." Halifax told Roosevelt that "quite apart from his pledges which were primarily his own affair," he did not like the trusteeship plan. Halifax also told Roosevelt that the next time the President spoke with the Prime Minister, Halifax hoped it would not be a monologue. To the Foreign Office Halifax wired, "He might one of these days have the bright idea that the Netherlands East Indies or Malaya would go better under international trusteeship."

When pressed on British and Dutch possession Roosevelt said that the cases were different. Halifax said "I then asked him whether he did not think that however long it might take, it was all in our interests to get France on to her legs again as a great power and that if she started off with a good slap in the face like this she would be permanently resentful which would not at all be helpful."³⁸ Halifax persisted, but Roosevelt "was not taking it all too seriously", and kept on about the hopelessness of the French. Roosevelt concluded by remarking, "Well tell Winston I gained or got three votes to his one as we stand today." Halifax left a worried man, saying that "I am left feeling that he has got this idea in his mind a bit more than is likely to be wholesome."

Halifax's paper was circulated through an equally worried Foreign Office. A memo by Mr. Foulds noted that "President Roosevelt continues to push his idea that France should not be allowed to recover Indo-China and evidently pledges are not to be allowed to stand in the way... the President's assertion that the French have been 'hopeless' in Indo-China is a gross exaggeration."³⁹ Mr. Butler, referring to F.D.R.'s remarks on three votes to one, commented, "I don't understand the President's remarks about gaining votes," to which someone pencilled in "U.S., U.S.S.R., China = 3; U.K. = 1."

Churchill was not too impressed with this sort of alignment, or voting. He and Stalin represented irreconcilable ways of life, and as for Chiang Kai-Shek, "I cannot regard the Chungking Government as representing a great world-power. Certainly there would be a faggot-vote on the side of the United States in any attempt to liquidate the British Overseas Empire." ⁴⁰

Mr. Ashley-Clarke then suggested that the Dominions be consulted before the Foreign Office began to "develop a strong movement with the State Department."

The Foreign Office Research Department was asked for some information on Indochina and reported that "There is not now, and there never has been, an 'Indo-Chinese' State or an 'Indo-Chinese' people; there have always been various different kingdoms with diverse and mutually antagonistic peoples. Political unity can be conferred only by an outside Administration such as the French, of one native people over the others." ⁴¹ The French had built 30,000 kilometres of roads, 3372 kilometres of railways, and had dug a complex series of canals which had drained the Indochinese marshes. This drainage system had exceeded the work done on the Suez Canal in terms of earth moved, and their Tonkinese dyke system was one of the greatest in the world.

Despite the strong British opposition to Roosevelt's trusteeship scheme, the Foreign Office was trying to avoid being forced into a needless confrontation with the United States over France, and as a sop to Roosevelt tentatively agreed to the idea of "police station" bases in Indochina. The Post Hostilities Planning Sub-committee reiterated the case for a strong France in the heart of Europe, and ended by saying that "our policy for Indo-China should be to encourage American co-operation in its defence, without prejudicing our friendly relations with France by laying ourselves open to the charge of conniving at an infringement of her sovereignty. This might best be achieved by the establishment of some system of United Nations bases in Indo-China, rather than by depriving France of her possessions." ⁴²

This was a reference to Roosevelt's idea of four great "Policemen" keeping world order after the war. The four were to be the U.S., U.S.S.R., Great Britain and China. The Policemen would need certain strategic bases from which to operate, and may have to take what they needed by force if necessary. Recalcitrant nations would be brought into line by economic sanctions, and if that was not enough then aerial bombardment and invasion would occur. Roosevelt was now even thinking of keeping law

and order for the world.⁴³

When Churchill was approached by the Foreign Office to go straight to Roosevelt over this impasse about France and her possessions, the Prime Minister declined to do so at this time. In a letter to Eden and Viscount Cranborne, the Dominions Secretary, Churchill said, "I think it a great mistake to raise this matter before the Presidential election. I cannot conceive it is urgent. On this point the President's views are particular to himself. The war in the Far East may go on for a long time. I do not consider that chance remarks which the President made in conversation should be made the basis for setting all this ponderous machinery in motion. Nothing is going to happen about this for a long time."⁴⁴

Churchill advised Eden to "develop a very strong movement on this issue from the Foreign Office through the State Department and leave till a later stage any direct communication between me and the President." He then went on to compliment the report by Dening* (who had suggested this policy to Churchill through the Foreign Office) as "a pretty good piece of work."⁴⁵ In other words, the problem would be faced later, at a more opportune and critical time, but there were more urgent problems to deal with at the moment. As Churchill told the Cabinet at the same time, "It would be better to delay. One can always concede."

Ironically, the Soviets were supporting de Gaulle. It may be that, desperate for a second front to be opened, which must draw off at least 40 German divisions from the Eastern Front (or the future of the Red Army would be in doubt), Stalin looked to de Gaulle as the man who would rally the French and insure the success of the invasion of France, and the French were permitted to broadcast from Moscow to Indochina.

Many people in the State Department shared the Foreign Office's alarm over Roosevelt's hostility to France, but Roosevelt would not be moved by any argument at this time, and the Foreign Office was frustrated at what they considered the President's blinkered view of the future. Wrote Sir Alexander Cadogan, "I cannot follow the purpose of a policy of estranging progressively, and often to our own disadvantage, the only French authority that at present exists. I don't understand it - I don't know what is at the back of it... I can only infer that the Prime Minister, knowing as we all do President Roosevelt's -- or Admiral Leahy's -- sinister intentions regarding Indo-China, is careful not to do anything that might imply recognition of French rights there."⁴⁶ Eden, fast losing patience, wrote that he agreed with Cadogan and did "share his

* Mountbatten's Foreign Office Political Adviser.

concern at consequences of treating (the) French Committee in this way in every sphere;"⁴⁷ he planned on drafting a memo to Churchill about it.

Eden wrote to Churchill, and mentioned, among other things, that Lord Selborne (of S.O.E.), the Chiefs of Staff and Mountbatten were all in favour of the French taking part in political warfare in the Far East. To this end they wanted the Corps Leger D'Intervention moved to the Far East for operations against the Japanese. The French were also pressing the British to move the Corps East, and to permit the establishment of a French Military Mission at S.E.A.C. Headquarters. Churchill demurred, noting American opposition to these moves. It was pointed out that the Dutch Mission was established at S.E.A.C. without referring to Washington, but Churchill was unmoved as the President had peculiar feelings about Indochina. The time was not yet ripe.

In the Pacific, U.S. Government pledges to Plevin and Giraud were repeated "word for word" to the French leader, Admiral d'Argenlieu (of whom more will be said later). These were relayed by the U.S. Consul at Noumea , and were authorized for publication by the State Department. "The fact that this statement was issued in New Caledonia is perhaps of interest since the ports of the French Empire, the future of which is debatable are, in addition to Indo-China, the French islands in the Pacific."⁴⁸ These French islands, of course, figured prominently in the U.S. Pacific invasion strategy, and again French cooperation was needed here.

It was becoming difficult to keep up with Roosevelt's views. The British Ambassador to Free France, Duff Cooper, wrote to Churchill that de Gaulle had been surprised by a visit from Admiral Fenard of the French Military Mission in Washington.⁴⁹ Fenard said that he carried a personal message from Roosevelt to de Gaulle, which said that the President knew that de Gaulle thought that Roosevelt did not like him, but that the opposite was really the case and the President would be pleased to receive him in Washington. De Gaulle told Cooper that he was "completely mystified" by it. This was one week before the vital D-Day invasion at Normandy. Yet four weeks earlier Roosevelt had told Churchill (when Churchill had pressed the President to receive de Gaulle), "I will not ever have it said by the French or by American or British commentators that I invited him to visit me in Washington. If he asks whether I will receive him if he comes I will incline my head with complete suavity and

with all that is required by the etiquette of the eighteenth century." ⁵⁰

A few days later Roosevelt wrote to Churchill, commenting on the latter's forthcoming talks with de Gaulle: "All good luck in your talk with Prima Donna...please for the love of Heaven do not tell de Gaulle that I am sending him a 'friendly message to come over to see me...' I decline absolutely as Head of the State to invite him to come over here." ⁵¹ However, if de Gaulle persisted in going to the United States, Roosevelt would see him. Furthermore said Roosevelt, "Don't worry about chit chat over here in regard to France. It is an old controversy and soon I hope that he will not be able to worry us much one way or the other." Churchill in reply referred to American press attacks on his references to Spain, and said that Britain was closer to these problems than America and had no wish for a hostile Spain after the war. In a pertinent and prophetic statement Churchill wrote that "We should not be able to agree here in attacking countries which have not molested us because we dislike their totalitarian form of government. I do not know whether there is more freedom in Stalin's Russia than in Franco's Spain. I have no intention to seek a quarrel with either." ⁵²

Roosevelt's crude personal attacks were not confined to de Gaulle. In 1942 Vice President Wallace had passed a message from Roosevelt to Chiang Kai-Shek in which the President had said that Britain did not think that China was a world power and that "Churchill is old", and a new British Government without him would be more sympathetic to China, and perhaps even give Hong Kong to China. When Roosevelt suggested to the British that they should think about giving up Hong Kong as a gesture of good will, Eden swallowed and noted caustically that he had not heard of any similar offers of self-sacrifice from the Americans. ⁵³ F.D.R. also said that "We shall have more trouble with Great Britain after the war than we are having with Germany now." ⁵⁴

On 22 June 1944, when the Normandy landings appeared to have some chance of success, Halifax wrote a personal note to Churchill and Eden. He mentioned that the French delegation in Washington, long on the receiving end of American scorn and dislike, now had copies of correspondence between the U.S. Government and Vichy in the 1940-1942 period concerning Indo-China. These were reported to show that Sumner Welles "consistently urged Vichy to make every concession to Japan and to acquiesce in all Japanese demands. After Pearl Harbor, fearing that Vichy might publish the correspondence, the United States Government gave an unqualified

undertaking that they would support the return of Indo-China to France in all circumstances."⁵⁵ The U.S. Government was probably unaware that these documents were in de Gaulle's hands, but now that the tide of war was turning the Vichy officials were trying to make amends by passing anything of importance to de Gaulle. Eden said that he was unaware of this, but did reiterate to Churchill that the U.S. had, on several occasions, guaranteed the territorial integrity of the French Empire, but Roosevelt seemed "to make little of guarantees." ⁵⁶

This brief political overview facilitates an understanding of the military problems in Southeast Asia, of which Indochina was the sticking point. In 1943, spurred in part by Roosevelt's apparent desire for post-war supremacy in Southeast Asia, the British created a new major command in the area, South East Asia Command (S.E.A.C.), with Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten as Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia (S.A.C.S.E.A.).

S.E.A.C. was an Allied command, although primarily British. As directed by the Chiefs of Staff,⁵⁷ S.A.C.S.E.A.'s prime duties were twofold: to wear down the Japanese Forces, especially the Air Forces (and force the Japanese to divert resources from the Pacific Theatre), and to maintain and broaden contacts with China in the joint effort. S.E.A.C.'s task, thus, was to fight a grinding war of attrition against the Japanese and to keep them tied down as much as possible on the far flank while the really spectacular operations were conducted in the Pacific by the U.S. forces. By now all American hopes that China would be the place to defeat Japan had long since vanished and the Pacific strategy was proving to be tremendously successful under some great American commanders.

When the Japanese thrust to India was stopped during the desperate battles at Imphal and Kohima, and General Slim's 14th Army began to push the Japanese back, Mountbatten began to think ahead to the days when a final assault would eject the Japanese from all of the Southeast Asia mainland. But before any Allied landings could take place in Indochina it was necessary that a great deal of "preoccupational" groundwork be done, resistance nets organized, native levies raised, intelligence data gathered, and so on. One problem lay in the fact that Chiang Kai-Shek, supported by the U.S., regarded Thailand and Indochina as lying within the Chinese area of operations, and Chiang was reluctant to omit these areas from his theatre because of the adverse affect this move would have on the morale of the Chinese people and forces.⁵⁸ It was a matter of "face."

Since the U.S. Chiefs of Staff in 1942 had complicated matters by

unilaterally declaring that Siam and Indochina lay in the U.S. (and thus Chinese) sphere of operations, Mountbatten had to see Chiang Kai-Shek about working out an arrangement whereby Indochina could be considered open territory for military operations. Since it took years to develop resistance nets, Mountbatten could not afford to wait much longer before doing something in Indochina. He proposed to Chiang that the Chinese and British be free to attack Indochina from the north and south respectively, the political boundaries to be decided later in accordance with the progress of advance of the forces.⁵⁹ Chiang agreed and suggested that a political commission be set up in Chungking to settle political problems, the commission to be composed of Chinese, American and British representatives. Mountbatten would not concur in this, as he had no desire to further complicate, or publicize, the issue. Mountbatten followed up by asking Chiang if he objected to the British sending agents into Indochina and Siam; Chiang had no objections provided he was kept informed.

This was the famous "Gentleman's Agreement", which was worked but through the good offices of Lieutenant General Brehon Somervell, Chief of the U.S. Army Services Forces, who was visiting Chungking from Washington at the time.

The U.S. Chiefs of Staff had no objection to this arrangement, for they thought that the Chinese would get there first anyway, and were in general agreement with the views expressed by the Generalissimo at Sextant:

When the time comes for the two theaters to launch assaults upon the enemy in Thailand and Indo-China, the Chinese troops will attack from the North, and the troops under the commander of the South East Asia Theater, Mountbatten, are expected to make full use of facilities afforded by the ports and air bases under its control and attack from the South. If the troops are landed in those countries, the boundaries between the two theaters are to be decided at the time in accordance with the progress of advances the respective forces made.⁶⁰

Admiral Leahy, noting the changed conditions, now advocated a recognition of French desires in Indochina, and even MacArthur, despite Roosevelt's publicized antagonism, had written to de Gaulle, backing the French with moral support.

S.E.A.C., as could be expected, had some teething troubles at first, not the least of its problems being the Deputy Commander, the U.S. General Stilwell. With the senior Allied political leaders openly at odds over

Southeast Asia, the antagonisms were often reflected to and below the commanders in the field. Among the troops, some Americans sneered at S.E.A.C., saying it had been formed to "Save England's Asian Colonies." The British in turn wondered where the Americans were until 1917 and nearly 1942. These feelings were not universal in Southeast Asia, but were prevalent enough to be of real concern.

There were also major difficulties at higher levels; Stilwell was wanting to control operations in Burma. At about that time Mountbatten had been informed by COSSEA No.80, 24 March 1944, that the U.S. Chiefs of Staff intended to seize the Palaus in late summer as an intermediate base for an assault on Mindinao, followed by landings on Formosa or Luzon. Mountbatten was asked to capture Myitkyina in order to increase the air transport capability to China and provide "a suitable diversion for the Pacific advance." In May 1944 a stunned Mountbatten wired London of a new and grave problem which had suddenly emerged. The U.S. Chiefs of Staff had offered SEAC 400 transport aircraft; it was originally an unconditional offer, but CBI (the U.S. China-Burma-India Theater) had now attached strings to the offer, saying that the aircraft could only be used as they saw fit. CBI appeared to be exceeding the directions of the Combined Chiefs, and major SEAC plans were in jeopardy. Churchill's reaction was prompt: "This is a very serious telegram, casting its shadow forward upon the whole of our affairs in S.E.A.C... The American method of trying to force particular policies by the withholding or giving of certain weapons, such as carrying airplanes or L.S.T.s, in theatres where the command belongs by right of overwhelming numbers to us, must be objected to at the right time and strongly protested against."⁶¹ While it was not yet "the right time" he sent a rocket back into SEAC by demanding to know why only 10 divisions were in action against the Japanese in Burma from a pool of nearly two million men in India. It was a good question.

By early 1944 SEAC was aware that Stilwell had been conducting a press campaign in the United States to undermine Mountbatten's strategy while advancing his own plans to defeat the Japanese with Chinese troops under his command. Dening expressed his deep concern, saying:

"... the latest animosity of General Stilwell, which has made the existence of S.E.A. Command so uneasy ever since it was established, is now manifesting itself in a more virulent form. I have discussed the telegrams

with General Wedemeyer who said that, whatever else his faults, he had always been given to understand that General Stilwell was at least honest. It now appeared that he was not even that, and General Wedemeyer found that very hard to forgive. I have in my own mind no doubt that, in spite of Admiral Mountbatten's defence of him in Chungking last October, General Stilwell has been disloyal to him throughout... and there have been strong suspicions that General Stilwell has been active in trying to undermine our position with Chiang Kai-Shek." 62

Eden immediately sent a draft of the message to Churchill, in which Dening ended by saying, "Such activities on the part of an American officer holding the position of Deputy Supreme Commander are difficult to excuse... There is little doubt that the general attitude of U.S. troops in this theatre is influenced by the Commanding General. It is doubtful whether this very unsatisfactory state of affairs can continue indefinitely without doing active harm to the cause for which British and American troops are fighting together."

Stilwell, a man of great ability, was his own worst enemy, and everyone else was out of step when it came to fighting the war. Mountbatten had earlier intervened with Chiang Kai-Shek on Stilwell's behalf. When Mountbatten went to Chungking in October 1943, Dr. T.V. Soong told him that the Generalissimo was finding Stilwell intolerable and wanted to be rid of him. Mountbatten supported his deputy and refused to be associated with a campaign to remove Stilwell, and indeed insisted that Stilwell be informed of all this. When told, Stilwell was crestfallen, but cheered up when Mountbatten assured him of his support. Things did improve in China after that, and Stilwell expressed his "gratitude and devotion" to the Supreme Allied Commander -- but it did not last long. He soon continued to undermine Mountbatten, submitting papers to the U.S. Chiefs on SEAC, without Mountbatten's knowledge. At Delhi, at a meeting of senior officers to discuss strategy, Stilwell publicly humiliated Wedemeyer, who had discussed a paper, and went on "in a very ill-tempered manner" to describe his own strategy -- a drive on Canton. He refused an invitation to meet the Viceroy and left.

As Dening noted, the great danger lay in the growing inter-Allied friction which was being openly inflamed in Stilwell's Headquarters, and which was embarrassing to the U.S. officers at S.E.A.C. 63

Wedemeyer said that Stilwell was now an American hero, and the British

must not agitate against him in an election year, even though he agreed that it was outrageous for Stilwell to send his representative to the United States to begin a press campaign without informing Mountbatten, the theatre commander, and called Stilwell "mean."⁶⁴ Stilwell was warned by General Marshall to stop it or be fired, and the S.E.A.C. representative in Washington met divergence of South East Asia policy "round every corner". It was not clear to the British exactly what the U.S. Southeast Asia policy was, except that in general it concerned the liberation of subject peoples and the impossibility, in American eyes, of Britain and the U.S. ever seeing eye to eye on anything East of Suez.⁶⁵

Stilwell's grand plan appeared to call for everyone else to cease activity while he mounted a drive to seize the port of Canton. Dening was not sure what good that would do as the Japanese controlled the seas in that part of the world and could mount devastating counterblows -- and it was no good having a port if one could not sail in and out of it. Dening philosophized, "It may be that all alliances carry with them the seeds of disillusionment and discord, and the third year of marriage is proverbially the most difficult."⁶⁶

The French, meanwhile, though rebuffed and humiliated by the U.S., never gave up. They were in the unenviable position of having to go for help, begging bowl in hand, asking for some ships here, a few planes there, perhaps some equipment for a couple of divisions or transportation to move troops to a crucial area. In late 1944 the French offered a marine division of colonial troops to be used in warm climates, but the U.S. Chiefs declined the offer. In January 1945 the French requested six Liberty ships and two tankers to move their own people, and were turned down. The British, in the war for a very long time, could now only refer them to the U.S. for major supplies. But de Gaulle never accepted a reduced role for France.

In August 1944 the French Committee of National Liberation requested the British Chiefs of Staff to sponsor a more active French role in the war against Japan.⁶⁷ The British, sympathetic, forwarded the request to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, who were still dominated by Roosevelt's ideas. The French proposals contained the following suggestions:

- (1) a French military mission be established under S.A.C.S.E.A.;
- (2) French forces should take an active role in the war against Japan;
- (3) the French should participate in planning the war;
- (4) they should participate in planning political warfare against Japan.

The British

Chiefs passed it on to the Joint Staff Mission with the following comments: (1) The French Military Mission would help the operations of the S.O.E. and O.S.S., and would serve as the nucleus of an operational headquarters to be formed later; (2) If the mission was not accepted at S.E.A.C., the French would probably try to get it established at Chungking, where it would be harder to control; (3) The mission would be confined to Indochinese matters only, and not participate in general strategy, in the manner, for example, of the Dutch mission's interest in the Netherlands East Indies; (4) It would stimulate French resistance to Indochina; (5) The mission would be restricted to planning operations against Indochina; (6) it would be involved in political warfare; (7) The presence of the French battleship "Richelieu" meant that the French were already participating in the war in the Far East. On 30 August 1944 the U.S. Chiefs concurred, with the exception that the French participation in political warfare be confined to S.E.A.C. The pendulum was slowly swinging in favour of the French -- very slowly, but moving, at least.

S.O.E.'s arm in Southeast Asia, Force 136 (immortalized in Pierre Boulle's "Bridge Over the River Kwai"), had proposed three possible courses of action in Indochina, Courses A, B, and C. Course A involved a lower level of risk and investment, calling for pure sabotage. Course B was a bigger development embracing certain units in the French Army, while Course C called for substantial support for French regular troops in Indochina and a widespread resistance movement throughout the country, with the main elements in the Northwest. Mr. J. Keswick, on Dening's staff, sent these proposals to the Foreign Office and asked for political guidance.⁶⁸ He received the following reply: (a) French Indochina was not within S.E.A.C., but, in view of the "Gentleman's Agreement" to attack when ready, it was a sort of "no man's land" in which the Chinese had an interest; (b) The Prime Minister had delayed a decision on the Chiefs of Staff earlier recommendation that a French mission be sent to S.E.A.C.; (c) Roosevelt was against the French in Indochina, and had made no decision about it; (d) the British should make no promises to the French which could not be kept. However, the Foreign Office could not be absolutely sure on a couple of these points, as they added that they had now heard rumours of Roosevelt receiving de Gaulle in Washington as "my friend". Based on this reply it was decided to adopt Course A, and to defer Courses B and C until a later date.

French support in Indochina would go a long way to ensuring Allied

success when the time came to invade. It was thus becoming more difficult to exclude the French from "reasonable military participation," for they would not be willing to keep S.O.E. (Force 136) fully informed pending acceptance of the Blaizot Mission. Anyway, the French would soon leap-frog SEAC control by broadcasting from Metropolitan France direct to French Indochina. Wrote Dening:

"The situation in Indo-China has grown very delicate with the disappearance of the Vichy regime, and I feel that the F.C.N.L. will wish to take early steps to influence it to the advantage of France. The Japanese on their part have as yet shown no signs of wishing to take drastic action to forestall a French move against their partial occupation and my guess is that they would prefer not to extend their commitments if they can avoid it. The Chinese may not remain idle watchers of a situation from which they may hope to derive ultimate benefit. The Americans seem to have no constructive ideas on the subject except that they want to exclude us." 69

According to Dening, it made no difference who really attacked Indochina, but French help would certainly be needed in any case; the main point was to strike a blow against Japan. "If we are prevented from doing this by American obstruction, then I think the outlook is gloomy both militarily and politically."⁷⁰ Could Dening have been looking ahead to 1954 in the North, and 1975 in the South?

Mountbatten had been urging Eden to push for the establishment of the French Mission at SEAC, and Eden in turn had been pressing the Combined Chiefs for a decision. Since SEAC was an Allied Command it was necessary to consult the Combined Chiefs. Eden's prompting took on more urgency as he foresaw the Japanese coup of 9 March 1945: "With the progress of the operations in France the days of the Vichy regime are numbered and, when it disappears, it is possible, though I am not prepared to say certain, that the Japanese will eject Admiral Decoux's government in Indo-China and take over the administration themselves. Should that happen there would be added scope for subversive operations by the special corps."⁷¹ However, the problem was complicated because "the United States Government have given more specific guarantees than we have ourselves about the restoration of the territorial integrity of the French Empire,"⁷² but now Roosevelt's about face was well known to the French. Eden then suggested to M. Massigli, the French Ambassador, that the French Committee of National Liberation (FCNL) may as well take up the matter directly with the Americans, since the War Cabinet was already

generally supporting the French. About this time, too, French reports coming out of Indochina supported Eden's view of a possible Japanese coup.

Roosevelt's problems were growing in this area. The French, whom he had publicly despised and humiliated at every turn, were growing stronger, and "Uncle Joe" was not as nice as he had been when his back was to the wall. The Chinese were soaking up prodigious quantities of American supplies without doing an awful lot with them. As for Stalin and the Russians, this is what Roosevelt received in return for his lavish support for them:

"Since the end of the war is in sight our relations with the Soviets have evinced a startling turn during the last two months. They have shown an unwillingness to discuss pressing problems and have held up our requests with complete indifference to our interests... I have received no acknowledgement even of my letters or numerous discussions... We have received no answer or permission to transport trucks to our Air Forces in China. Our request presented a week ago to allow General Eaker's bombing appraisal party to visit Ploesti, which was followed by urgent conversations with Molotov, is unanswered. The indifference of the Soviets to world opinion regarding this ruthless attitude toward the uprising in Warsaw and their unyielding policy toward Poland are best described by the statement of Molotov that the Soviets would judge their friends by those who accept the Soviet position... These are only a few examples... It seems to be the general attitude that since Russia has won the war for us it is our obligation to help her and accept her policy.

This trend can be diverted, I am convinced, but only if our policy toward the Soviet Government is materially changed. Evidence has come to me that our generous attitude toward them has been misinterpreted as acceptance of their policies and as a sign of weakness... There is every indication the Soviet Union will become a 'World Bully' wherever their interests are involved unless we take issue with their present policy. When they turn their attitude in that direction this policy will reach into the Pacific and China as well....⁷³

It was distressing that the United States, an abundantly generous, brave and resourceful nation, could be afflicted with such political myopia.

At SEAC, Mountbatten was trying hard to prod the politicians into a decision on Indochina; the day was not far off when his planners would be concentrating on that area. Both Siam and Indochina were vital

to him because Japanese reinforcements and supplies had to transit those countries to reach Burma and Malaya. Although he had been supporting minor covert operations in Siam and Indochina it was now urgent that he commence full scale preoccupational activities. It was important that resistance forces be in position to tactically interfere with Japanese Lines of Communication as required by British offensive operations in Burma, and be ready to promote large scale resistance and revolt in conjunction with future operations following the reconquest of Burma. He requested an early decision on the boundary question,⁷⁴ especially since the Allied leaders were meeting in Quebec.

As it was Churchill did not raise the Indochina issue with Roosevelt. Events were moving swiftly and the impasse could go on indefinitely. Churchill gave up on Roosevelt in this matter and had decided to do what he thought best. He had had a great deal of trouble in just getting the United States to accept British support in the Pacific fighting. Although the conference itself was a success, "the only difficulty here has been to persuade the Americans to give space and facilities to deploy in the Pacific. Some of them wanted to keep it all to themselves. However I have offered a British Fleet capable of fighting an action single-handed against the whole Japanese Fleet, to share in the main operation, and this has been accepted."⁷⁵

In October, 1944, the British Chiefs of Staff received a copy of a message which Churchill sent to Roosevelt. Churchill urged the President to support the Mountbatten-Chiang Kai-Shek verbal agreement. When queried by Eden about pursuing it further, Churchill decided that there was no need to do so and instructed Eden to proceed with proposals by the Chiefs of Staff and to inform Mountbatten accordingly so that he could get on with his work.⁷⁶

At noon on 28 October 1944, Roosevelt announced the recall of General Stilwell and the splitting of CBI into two new theatres, China Theatre and India-Burma Theatre (IBT). Major General A.C. Wedemeyer was to head China Theatre, and Lieutenant General D.I. Sultan would command IBT. Stilwell had antagonized everyone in sight by his intemperate remarks, and his usefulness was at an end; there were enough competent generals to replace him. It was a pity that such an obviously technically capable man was unable to exercise a measure of self control.

For SEAC, the end of CBI meant the start of new problems. When

China Theatre was formed the U.S. Chiefs had unilaterally decided to place French Indochina in the new command in contradiction, thought Dening, of the agreement made by Mountbatten and Chiang Kai-Shek in November 1943. Mountbatten wanted the British Chiefs to contest the point about French Indochina, since the announcement unfortunately coincided with the arrival of the French Military Mission to his SEAC Headquarters in Kandy, Ceylon. As Mountbatten put it, the British position "would be made quite ridiculous in the eyes of the French if, after this official acceptance, we had immediately to walk back on the arrangements and say that the French would not be able to participate against Indochina from Southeast Asia."⁷⁷ So the U.S. Chiefs had allowed the French mission to go out to SEAC, then had neatly unilaterally excluded French Indochina from SEAC's area.

French and British officials at SEAC were angered, for the U.S.-Chinese partnership would now have veto power over SEAC plans in Indochina, plans which had taken months and years to formulate and which were now being put into operation. The French teams which had planned to drop in and set up resistance groups in the North, and who could possibly have stamped out the still small Communist groups in the hills, were now stymied by active U.S. opposition to their plans. It was to be one of the most costly errors of judgement yet made by the United States, one of many transparent political decisions which misfired badly.

Dening thought that if this action was unilateral the British were not bound to accept it. If the stalemate over Indochina could not be resolved, then none of the Allies would achieve any results.

"There is less than a fortnight to go before the Presidential election and perhaps this vexed question will become easier to discuss after that event, but the arrival of the French Mission on the one hand and the action of the U.S. Chiefs of Staff on the other have complicated the issue still further and unless it can be argued out I foresee a hopeless tangle which may not only adversely effect military operations, but Anglo-American as well as Anglo-French relations."⁷⁸

It was, however, a fait accompli.

Wedemeyer had been relatively reasonable while in his former position as Deputy Supreme Allied Commander at SEAC. But as soon as he assumed command of China Theatre and became deputy to Chiang Kai-Shek he began to actively oppose SEAC in Indochina, with far-reaching consequences.

Mountbatten reported that Wedemeyer now not only opposed the

"Gentleman's Agreement" but "went so far as to declare that General Somervell had no authority to negotiate (which is interesting when one recalls that in the early days of this Command General Wedemeyer was in complete support of the Supreme Commander's attitude). He seemed to have forgotten that the President and the U.S. Chiefs of Staff favoured this agreement (see COSSEA 6 of 1943)."79

On 27 October 1944 Mountbatten announced the arrival of General Blaizot and the French Mission. By November 1944 Blaizot, anticipating a Japanese move against the French, wanted to send small parties to Indochina to organize resistance and sabotage. But none of this could happen unless the Chinese (and that meant the Americans) would cooperate. But Wedemeyer was adamant, and his attitude placed an increasing strain on inter-Allied relations. And none of this was helped by the American press which too often belittled the British effort in the Far East. Conditions in Burma were atrocious; Merrill's Marauders had disintegrated after ten weeks in the jungle, and it was rumoured that a British regiment had refused to go back into the line when ordered. Many of the British troops had been in the Far East for five years, and some had had no leave and no prospect of getting home.

In this atmosphere Dening met Wedemeyer for a discussion of the problem and was taken aback by the intensity of Wedemeyer's animosity.

"Until General Wedemeyer told me with conviction that there would not be a British Empire after the war I had hoped that the tension would be eased out here with the removal of General Stilwell and the conclusion of the Presidential election. Now however I fear that the situation may well deteriorate further.

At present the question of whether to prop up a tottering China with props which may not hold; or to hit the Japanese hard where we have the forces to do it, seems already resolved in favour of the former. If props hold, America will get the credit and if they do not, we shall get the blame...."80

So the Allies went their separate ways in Southeast Asia. The USAAF and US Navy were doing most of the bombing of Indochina; ironically, many of these same targets were to be struck again just twenty years later when the man the Americans had protected, Ho Chi Minh, was killing a hundred American soldiers a week.

The USAAF were bombing rail communications, docks, and factories in French Indochina. However, in late 1944 the Japanese staged an

offensive which captured the U.S. bases in Hunan and Kwangsi, but the strikes continued from the Yunnan bases. No amount of American prodding, from Roosevelt himself on down, could persuade Chiang to commit his numerous well-rested and American equipped divisions to battle to save the bases. He knew that the war would have but one ending, and then the problem of Mao and the Communists would be faced. So it did not matter really if a couple of provinces went in the meanwhile, or some American bases, or even some American or British units.

By December 1943 daily passenger train service between Hanoi and Saigon had been stopped. In December 1944 it was up to one a week, each way. Freight service was down, and used almost exclusively by the Japanese military, and it was going from bad to worse. Attacks on the big Hongay mines in the north had resulted in a severe shortage of coal, and rolling stock was decreasing. In early 1943 there were 22 heavy freight locomotives in Indochina; by June 1943 thirteen had been destroyed and could not be replaced incountry, and the Japanese had none to spare.⁸¹ In April 1944 the trip from Saigon to Hanoi took 6 days; it was normally a two day journey. Passengers had to cross rivers in small boats, since many bridges were down. Trains were full of badly behaved Japanese troops. Sea transport was worse, being open to attack by aircraft and submarine. Haiphong's docks and piers were out of action, and two out of every five ships diverted to Saigon were lost. The Japanese were now unable to fulfil their economic agreements, and nothing had arrived in French Indochina since early 1943; the country was living off its stocks. It was a good time to review operations in Indochina.

At a meeting held on 7 December 1944, chaired by Mountbatten's Chief of Special Duty Operations, Air Vice Marshall Whitworth-Jones, it was decided to ask Force 136 to update their proposals for preoccupational activity in French Indochina.⁸² There were, however, certain ground rules within which they must confine themselves. Due to the delicate situation in Indochina between the French and Japanese forces, all operations which may provoke the Japanese into action against the French were prohibited. Furthermore, no act of resistance was to be initiated without orders from General Blaizot, acting with the authority of SACSEA.

A review of past and present operations was conducted. During three series of operations, codenamed "Belief", "Polka" and "Radical", 18 RAF B-24 Special Duty Liberator sorties had been flown into French

Indochina up to 1 December 1944, out of 46 which had been planned and approved.⁸³ The "Belief" sorties dropped transmitters and receivers to form a communications net, while the "Polka" operations were designed to introduce demolition stores into the country. These operations had succeeded in: (a) establishing a W/T network within French Indochina, with 12 stations now in communication with the Force 136 War Station in Calcutta; (b) introducing a certain very limited number of stores for training purposes (1595 pounds of High Explosives and ancillary equipment, plus 17 limpets; (c) carrying out three pickup operations by which leaders of the Resistance Movement inside French Indochina had come out for discussions, and one of General Blaizot's staff officers had been sent in to hold discussions within Indochina.⁸⁴ These modest operations were conducted at the maximum possible range of the aircraft, and in addition to the support given to the extensive Force 136 operations in Burma, Thailand and Malaya. It is almost too much to imagine what could have been accomplished with a coordinated Allied resistance policy, given the unlimited U.S. supplies and many USAAF squadrons sitting just across the border, a stone's throw from the operational area.

Force 136 objectives in Indochina were to continue the buildup of the internal organization of the Resistance Movement, and establish Reception Committees in remote, sparsely populated districts in the north, west, and south Indochina, in which guerillas could assemble and establish bases. In these areas instructors and supplies would be dropped. These objectives would be accomplished by: (a) introducing specially trained French Officers and NCOs who would set up the Reception Committees and train others; (b) paratropping special stores and explosives for demolition training; (c) maintaining and expanding the existing W/T network. The air commitment needed was 33 Liberator sorties per month from January to December 1945. The operations to date, in addition to the H.E. and limpets mentioned, had resulted in the dropping in of 13 radio stations, 6 midget receivers, plus the following arms and ammunition for the Reception Committees: 194 Sten guns, 40 carbines, 522 grenades, plus medical field dressings, supplies, and a few compasses and watches. The new operations would build on this small beginning.⁸⁵

In late 1944 a new "Indo-China Council" was imposed on Admiral Decoux by the Resistance Movement to make sure that he did not act in a manner contrary to the interests of the French Provisional Government

of de Gaulle.⁸⁶ It was a brazen act, carried out under the noses of the Japanese. The council was composed of the following members: General Mordant, former Commander of French Forces in Indochina; General Ayme, present Commander of French Forces; M. Bodin, railway engineer; M. Boissanger, diplomat; M. Marche, former magistrate; M. Thorel, Director of Political Affairs for the Government; M. Dallez, planter. As yet, there had been no Japanese reaction to the Council, the formation of which was announced by a broadcast in Vietnamese on 3 December 1944. At that time the Supreme Federal Council of Indochina was dismissed and the new Indochina Council formed, which was to be "responsible for all interests of Indochinese countries and advise the Governor-General on efficient methods for ruling the country. All decrees and laws issued by the Governor-General will be discussed and assented to by this council before execution." The Council would meet twice monthly, and the number of members would not exceed ten. The Japanese very likely knew what was happening, but were not yet ready for a showdown with the French as they were pressed with bigger problems everywhere else.

The British were given responsibility for Southeast Asia at the Quebec Conference in September 1944, in which the United States decided to concentrate on the Pacific strategy. At "Argonaut", the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided on the following strategic objectives. Mountbatten, as SACSEA, was directed first to liberate Burma (Operation "X"), then Malaya, and finally to open the Straits of Malacca (Operation "Y").⁸⁷ Mountbatten could not do this without the continued use of the U.S. transport squadrons which had done outstanding work in SEAC, and attention was drawn to the "agreed policy" of use of India-Burma theatre forces. In the Mediterranean the Germans were able to make a voluntary withdrawal from Italy as Allied forces were being withdrawn to Western Europe. In Europe, SHAEF plans concerned operations north of the Moselle, to close the Rhine north of Dusseldorf and destroy the enemy west of the Rhine, and to seize bridgeheads over the Rhine. Allied forces would then deploy east of the Rhine and north of the Ruhr, while gathering the maximum number of divisions (about 35) for the capture of Frankfurt and advance on Kassel to draw the Germans down from the north.

In the Far East the U.S. was to continue operations in the

Philippines (Luzon, Mindoro, Leyte), and assault Iwo Jima, with a target date of 19 February 1945. Target dates for the invasion of the Ryukus was 1 April to August 1945. The final assault on the Japanese homeland, the invasion of Kyushu-Honshu, was set for the winter of 1945-1946. There was also the possibility of seizing a position in the Kuriles to maintain and defend the sea route to Okhotsk (when Russia entered the war); the possibility of protecting the sea routes from bases in Kainchatka was studied. With the U.S. abdication of interest in Southeast Asia, Force 136 now came to life in Indochina. In January 1945 the plans were put into effect to try to build up the French in the interior by dropping in arms and supplies to resistance groups.

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The RAF had 10 squadrons available for Special Duty; 7 squadrons were equipped with B-24 Liberator bombers, modified with dropping slides, long range fuel tanks and navigation homing equipment. One squadron had B-24 and Halifax bombers, one was a Catalina flying boat squadron, and one had B-24s, C-47s, and Lysanders for short field take-offs and landings. There were eight other squadrons which could make special supply drops when called upon: seven C-47 squadrons and one Halifax squadron. The special dropping slides on the Liberators made it possible for a stick of up to four men to be dropped on the same run. The C-47s were used for the narrow valleys of Burma, which were hazardous for B-24s.

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These Special Duty squadrons did tremendous work and deserve a study of their own. They were directed at that time from the Special Duty operations section in Calcutta by Wing Commander J. Blackburn and Squadron Leader T.R.Lee. These hazardous missions produced their casualties. In April 1944, before China was closed to them, an attempt was made to stage a B-24 operation to Hue, in Annam, using Kunming as an alternate destination. It was a disaster, as one fully loaded aircraft made a miraculous forced landing on the tiny fighter strip at Fort Hertz; the second aircraft was reported missing and later found crashed in China, with the loss of 13 RAF crew members -- a difficult operation over the Hump. Some missions were unsuccessful when the aircrews did not receive the proper reception signals from the ground, due perhaps to enemy in the area or the drop zone being compromised.

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These missions took their toll of men and machines. The 358

Squadron alone lost 14 Liberators which were listed as crashed or missing on Special Duty operations. Some of the men needed resting as well. Some aborted missions were due to "Lack of confidence of the Captain," while others pressed too hard in dangerous conditions and crashed. In one operations summary, two aircraft Captains were removed from operational duties for "Lack of Moral Fibre". For these crews there was no glamour, no targets destroyed, no rolling stock shot up, no enemy killed. Their missions were secret, involving long, lonely night missions of great technical difficulty, and often were the sole reason that many resistance groups stayed alive, judging from their field reports which were sent back to the aircrews.

Most of these sorties were flown by 358, 357, 8 and 160 Squadrons; 240 Squadron, at Madras and Redhills Lake, India, flew Catalinas for the smaller Special Operations Group in their dangerous infiltration missions.⁹¹ The 358 Squadron was based at Jessore, in Bengal (not far from Calcutta), as was part of 357 Squadron; 358 Squadron had 16 Liberators, while at Jessore 357 Squadron had 10 C-47's, plus 11 Lysanders at Mingaladon, Burma, and 10 Liberators at China Bay, Ceylon. Number 8 Squadron was at Minneriya, Ceylon, with 12 Liberators, as was 160 Squadron, also with 12 Liberators.

One long-standing problem was that huge areas of Indochina were uncharted; some of these areas covered hundreds of square miles.⁹² Since these B-24's were not equipped with airborne radar, tacan, and other sophisticated navigational aids, with which the navigation was difficult enough, it is a credit to their skill and perseverance that they accomplished as much they did.

Given this modest start and the limited resources at hand, Force 136's expanded plans were now put into operation. On the night of 22/23 January 1945, 11 Liberators of 358 Squadron took off from Digri, headed for target areas at Lang Son, in northern Tonkin,⁹³ and Hanoi under Operation "Bazaar". Only two missions were successful, with the appalling winter weather conditions necessitating multiple air aborts. All target areas reported 10/10 low cloudcover, and some aircraft dropped their stores where they estimated the drop zones to be. Three of 358 Squadron's B-24s failed to return. It turned out that at least two (and possibly three) of these Liberators had suffered a terrible fate.

In February, Headquarters SACSEA sent to Headquarters ACSEA (Air Command South East Asia) a study titled "Incidents Involving SD Aircraft."⁹⁴

In it was quoted a message from General Carton de Wiart, the British military representative in Chungking. De Wiart's first paragraph had been originally delivered for circulation the usual way, but the second had been transmitted in a private, sealed letter from Air Vice Marshal Whitworth-Jones to Admiral Mountbatten. The first paragraph said, "It is reported that a few days ago (date not given) three Liberators operated into French Indo China without warning the 14th USAAF in the normal manner. General Chennault has told General Carton de Wiart that had the Americans been carrying out an operation the British aircraft might well have been destroyed." The sealed message reported that "General Carton de Wiart was informed by General Chennault that 'sometime ago' two British Liberators had entered Chennault's area without giving previous warning. As a result the Liberators had unfortunately been destroyed." Whitworth-Jones ended by saying "I am to request that these two assertions be examined and a report rendered. It is possible that the Liberators referred to by General Chennault as having been destroyed by the Americans inadvertently are two of the Liberators lost on a recent S.D. operation. The other incident is not understood."

This was an extremely grave incident indeed. It suggested that China Theatre-Command was prepared to take extreme measures to protect "their" resistance group, the Viet Minh, against the resurgence of the French, who were being supported by the RAF. Because of the secretive nature of the operations the results of the subsequent investigation were not released, but the fact remained that over two dozen RAF crew members were killed by the USAAF under questionable circumstances.⁹⁵

It was true that SEAC did not always notify Wedemeyer of these special operations, for Mountbatten had complained of the notorious inability of China Theatre to keep secrets. It was a problem which continues to plague Americans.

Part of the subsequent investigation revealed that the loss of the two, and perhaps three, bombers was a logical outcome of the Mountbatten-Wedemeyer dispute over activity in Indochina. Earlier, when General Donovan, head of OSS, came through Ceylon he had been disturbed at the atmosphere created by the dispute, and the resulting adverse affect upon clandestine operations, and he strongly urged Mountbatten to personally take up the question of French Indochina with Wedemeyer. While Mountbatten and Wedemeyer were talking, SEAC's Special

Duty Branch chief issued orders to insure that Mountbatten would not be compromised.⁹⁶ No operations to French Indochina were to be staged through China; routine exchanges of information with 14th USAAF were suspended "in the interests of safety", and cover bombing and leaflet drops stopped, although S.D. operations without cover bombing or leaflet drops could continue.

When the talks between the two senior Commanders were over, Mountbatten, having made his point about security, authorized a return to the routine exchanges of information with the 14th Air Force warning system. However, the B-24s were launched just prior to the resumption of this exchange. It was recommended by the Special Duty branch, and accepted by ACSEA, that all concerned adopt a "sealed lips" policy over this tragic incident, and if a detailed investigation was carried out the results remain a secret. Had the news been published that the USAAF had shot down at least two friendly RAF bombers, the consequences on Allied relations, to say nothing of possible ad hoc retaliation, were almost unimaginable.

The security problem in China was considered to have remained a problem for special duty flights to north Indochina were stopped to avoid having to warn 14th Air Force. Blaizot was upset, as over 50 trained French and Vietnamese agents were poised to jump into various areas in Indochina to begin the final work of building the resistance cores. He was also very apprehensive of a Japanese coup, but Dening disagreed with him in this regard. The plan put into effect in January had been flown into Indochina and agreed upon by resistance leaders after careful study; within eight weeks the Japanese made their move.

These difficulties in the field still paralleled the higher level differences in Washington, London and Paris. In January, 1945, Halifax was still fighting the Indochina battle with little success. On 3 January he had seen the U.S. Secretary of State, Mr. Stettinius, who said that the President still thought that any military or political action on Indochina was premature, and that Roosevelt would prefer to discuss the situation with Churchill.⁹⁷ Halifax hung on, telling Stettinius that the President was not considering Mountbatten's urgent military arguments for operations in Indochina. Stettinius said that he could do no more, so Halifax again decided to go directly to Roosevelt; but Halifax was not optimistic, knowing the President's feelings on Indochina, and Foreign Office correspondence now tended to betray a hint

of exasperation that Roosevelt refused to discuss this issue with anyone but the Prime Minister.

When Halifax saw Roosevelt a few days later, he told the President that he was disappointed in Stettinius's reply on the Indochina question based on instructions from Roosevelt. Wrote Halifax, "The President launched off into his general ideas about the future of Indo-China with which we are generally familiar. I said that I was not concerned to argue those at the moment, and the point of our suggestion, to which we attach great importance, was that Mountbatten should be free without delay to get some parties of Frenchmen into Indochina to do sabotage work which might hamper Japanese communications into Burma."⁹⁸ The President replied that if the British thought it important they should tell Mountbatten to go ahead and do it and ask no questions. The Foreign Office were unsure about the meaning of this "off the record" remark by Roosevelt, but thought that it should be quoted to all commanders in the field in order to show that the problem was not, after all, insoluble; however, it was not to be quoted normally, as it did not represent a formal indorsement or commitment by the United States. If Mountbatten was getting by in his challenge to the Americans, Halifax advised, "Let sleeping dogs lie" and press on. If Mountbatten intended to expand his operations, then Halifax would confidentially tell General Marshall of Roosevelt's comments and Marshall could pass it on to the appropriate American commanders.

As Halifax was carrying the banner in Washington, Dening of SEAC, was preparing a political summary for the Foreign Office. Mountbatten, in view of the rapidly changing situation, was asking if it was now worthwhile to continue pressing Roosevelt on Indochina.⁹⁹ On the same day Dening advised Eden that in view of the President's attitude it would now be wiser to stop pressing him and stand on the assumption that the "Gentleman's Agreement" was still valid. Since November 1944, when the Foreign Office were pushing for formal American concurrence, the local situation had changed as follows: (1) reflecting the rapid developments, the British were about to open direct contact with French Indochina regarding preoccupational activities; (2) the French Mission under Blaizot was already established in SEAC, and their work on Indochina was going well; (3) Blaizot's mission was recognized by both the Free French and the resistance groups in Indochina; (4) Coordination of

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intelligence gathering activity with the French was important, especially in the area of naval intelligence (which was of particular use to the U.S. South West Pacific Fleet; (5) the staff at SEAC was fully integrated, with the Americans being kept informed of all developments. Therefore, in Dening's conclusion, if Mountbatten pressed on in Indochina, acting on the assumption that the "Gentleman's Agreement" was still valid and there were no grounds for disagreement, Roosevelt may have to accept "an already firm situation" -- a nice way of saying a reverse fait accompli.

Dening also passed on the strong French request to work on Indochina from SEAC rather than China, as the French were extremely hostile to incursions from China. At the same time he quoted information received from a "private source" in the United States that Admiral Fenard had asked the Combined Chiefs of Staff for a judgement as to which command enveloped French Indochina. Fenard, unlike most French officials, preferred Indochina to fall under Wedemeyer. He thought that the French would need the support of the U.S. 14th Air Force for the resistance in Indochina to secure French control for its future.¹⁰⁰ Fenard had no inkling of the open hostility of the Americans in China Theatre to the French, and before long the same tragic fate would befall French columns, in a fighting retreat before the Japanese, which befell the RAF B-24 crews six weeks earlier -- this time from a deliberate lack of action.

Roosevelt was being reinforced in his Indochina ideas by Admiral Leahy, who now strongly recommended keeping French Indochina out of SEAC. As Sterndale-Bennett noted, "The obstruction seems to be partly the President's political ideas about Indo-China and partly the alleged desire of Admiral Leahy to get Indo-China out of SEAC."¹⁰¹ Within twelve months the U.S. would have done a complete about face and be strongly urging the British to keep Indochina in SEAC, but by then continued American obstruction and subversion in Indochina had made it impossible for the West to stay on.

During the same week, on 9 January 1945, Mr. J.C. Sterndale-Bennett, of the Foreign Office Far Eastern Department, minuted that the Foreign Office had made proposals to the State Department, as far back as August 1944, that the French Military Mission be established at SEAC, the Corps Leger d'Intervention be moved to the Far East and the French be allowed to participate in political warfare in SEAC. To date the United States had not even replied to the proposals. As it happened the British went ahead with the Mission. As Sterndale-Bennett wrote, "After all the war

cannot stand still and we have been waiting 5 or 6 months for the President's reply."¹⁰² So Blaizot's move, originally a temporary measure pending U.S. approval, was now regarded as permanent. On 21 October the Prime Minister, from Cairo, authorized the Foreign Office to simply advise the United States of Blaizot's presence at SEAC.

The French were under suspicion of having a foot in each camp, desperately trying to make sure that they would return to Indochina. Continued Sterndale-Bennett, "it is highly unsatisfactory that we and the Americans should be fencing with each other in this way... it is also high time we knew where we stood with the U.S. Government as regards the broad general principle of whether Indo China is to remain French."

A Foreign Office memorandum of 18 January 1945 reflected this maddening stalemate, noting that theatre commanders could not agree on courses of action in Indochina because of the risk of upsetting Roosevelt, and the British were precluded from taking official action because the President's remarks to Halifax were made off the record.

At the same time, while the Foreign Office and Roosevelt were sticking to their positions, the acrimonious and unproductive sparring continued between SEAC and China Theatre. As reported by Dening, SEAC received a message from Wedemeyer "who, this time, seems to be determined to challenge our whole position."¹⁰³ Wedemeyer said that his directive included French Indochina, and this was recognized by the British Chiefs of Staff (this was news to Dening). Furthermore, if SEAC had bomber sorties available for use to China Theatre he would pick the targets at his own headquarters. Said Dening, "So that is that," and went on, "If there were any prospect at all that his Command could, in the foreseeable future, attack Indo-China, one could see some point in his claim from the military point of view. But this is impossible." Wedemeyer was claiming that he should have full control of all forces and activities in French Indochina. Dening (and the Japanese) thought that MacArthur, using Luzon as a springboard, stood a far better chance of invading Indochina. Had that happened perhaps things may have turned out differently for Vietnam in the long run.

General Blaizot, keeping up the pressure, repeated that it was not a practical proposition to conduct preoccupational activity from China, and Wedemeyer was ignoring the verbal agreement between Chiang and Mountbatten, which the President and U.S. Chiefs of Staff had approved. Dening, alarmed at the long term implications of the U.S. Indochina

policy, was determined that SEAC should hold fast. "I think, therefore, that we should stoutly resist General Wedemeyer's attempt to usurp the sole authority for this job." Although Force 136 was not heavily involved in China, "Indo-China, on the other hand, is another matter. As you know Force 136 have been the guiding light there, and but for them the French, who I believe are now contributing very valuable intelligence, apart from any other activities, would have been unable to get going. The Supreme Commander has just urged that we should let sleeping dogs lie. Unfortunately the dogs have failed to remain asleep."¹⁰⁴

Halifax, however, was making sure that the dogs kept quiet, for he questioned the wisdom of pursuing Dening's complaint of a Washington press leak that the French had a mission at SEAC.¹⁰⁵ Any further publicity may bring the U.S. Chiefs of Staff into the act and the whole business of SEAC's activities in Indochina may be open to question. So it was quietly dropped by the Foreign Office.

The French Mission at Kandy were now becoming worried over Japanese activity in Indochina. They reported that the Japanese had brought 4000 troops to Tonkin from Kwangsi, and there may be a further division to follow. The Japanese were also pressing the French to hand over six U.S. pilots, but the French were resisting the Japanese demands. Mountbatten quickly responded and told the French that under no circumstances were the pilots to be handed to the Japanese.

Dening persisted in trying to find some way out of the jam, but Wedemeyer's obstinence was, if anything, getting worse. "I am afraid it is only too clear that the Americans are, for what are purely political reasons, trying to block something which is militarily sound."¹⁰⁶ Even if MacArthur was able to mount the initial assault from the Philippines, any preoccupational activities in Indochina would be invaluable to him.

At the Têt festivities in Paris, de Gaulla flatly rejected Roosevelt's ideas of trusteeship for Indochina. France, said de Gaulle, would be her own trustee. A Foreign Office planning paper had anticipated his remarks by recalling, a week earlier, that former Governor-General Albert Sarraut had described Indochina as "the most important, the most developed and the most prosperous of our colonies." Any attempts to arbitrarily confiscate it "would be passionately resented" by France and have incalculable results not only in the Far East but in Europe. It would also "put in question the future of all other Far

Eastern colonial possession (including our own) which have been over-run by Japan."¹⁰⁷ French Indochina was of considerable importance to Great Britain. It had been used as a stepping-stone for outflanking Malaya, and British interest, "by means of special strategic agreements within an international security scheme", lay in making sure it did not happen again.

The planning paper mentioned an ominous possibility. If Russia entered the war against Japan she may show an interest in French Indochina. The position of Indochina was peculiar to begin with. De Gaulle was saying that France was at war with Japan, but the Japanese did not recognize his Provisional Government and therefore did not regard herself at war with France. Japan regarded Indochina as Vichy with whom she had certain agreements and rights, but Vichy did not really exist anymore. Roosevelt was guaranteeing trouble in Europe and Asia by persisting in trying to take away Indochina from France, and the Allies were not able to prosecute the war fully in Indochina because of these fundamental differences between the U.S. and British/French senior commanders in Asia. The only people gaining anything out of this unfortunate deadlock were the Japanese and Viet Minh.

The larger problem of the postwar status of Indochina loomed over everything. It was becoming more difficult to see how Roosevelt could go on like this, as de Gaulle's Provisional Government was rapidly gaining strength. Previous U.S. commitments to France were now more than ever in the minds of the French and British governments. In October 1941 Mr. Atherton, of the State Department, had written to M. Plevin outlining the U.S. position. Atherton had said that the policy of the U.S. Government to France was based on maintaining and restoring the French Empire. "I am able to assure you that the restoration of France in its complete independence, in all its grandeur, and the extent it possessed before the war, in Europe as well as overseas, is one of the war aims of the United Nations."¹⁰⁸ Mr. Murphy had given General Giraud the same guarantee just prior to the North African landings.

There were a number of diplomats in the State Department who disagreed with Roosevelt on Indochina and France. Others who could go either way just wished that he would do something, for he now postponed discussions on Indochina. On 6 February 1945 the U.S. Ambassador to China told the British Ambassador in confidence that the absence of any declared American policy on Indochina was embarrassing for him. He had

asked Roosevelt to make a move, perhaps at a three-power meeting, but had had no luck so far. And he was not likely to do much better in the future.

In a memorandum of 1 January 1945 to the Secretary of State, Roosevelt had written, "I still do not want to get mixed up in any Indochina decision. It is a matter for post-war. By the same token, I do not want to get mixed up in any military effort toward the liberation of Indochina from the Japanese."¹⁰⁹

On 12 February 1945 Cabinet officials sent a message to Churchill at Argonaut, asking him to air the Indochina stalemate, but Churchill replied the next day that it was no good bringing it up to Roosevelt as the President had no military advisers with him. If absolutely necessary, however, he would talk generally about it. As it happened, Indochina was not officially discussed at Argonaut, although it is a possibility that Churchill may have privately passed on the Foreign Office request that Wedemeyer be made to live up to the Chiang-Mountbatten agreement of 1943. This is unlikely, however, as Churchill was now essentially going it alone in Southeast Asia.

While General Carton de Wiart was passing Wedemeyer's objections to Dening, the problem was further complicated by a split among the American officers at SEAC, most of whom wanted Siam and French Indochina to remain within SEAC. Lieutenant General Wheeler, now Deputy Supreme Allied Commander, ended up playing a double game on occasion. As a Deputy Supreme Commander he owed a measure of loyalty to his boss, Mountbatten, but as a U.S. officer there were times when he felt obliged to try and block Mountbatten over policy in Indochina. It was a difficult position for him, and on the whole he was held in high regard by SEAC.

In Chungking the British Ambassador Sir H.Seymour was trying to pin U.S. Ambassador Hurley down and find out exactly what the United States policy was, and what lay behind U.S. suspicions of a French, Dutch and British "nefarious 'combinazione' ".¹¹⁰ The lack of a definite area policy had everybody guessing as to what the attitude should be towards the French. Were they "people to play with or to ostracize, whether to encourage their Indo-China activities or the reverse." The British, thought Seymour, should not turn their backs on the French, yet the Americans were uneasy and assuming that the British and French were generally up to no good. "The Americans probably feel left out of this kind of thing; and I should say that this, combined with a general vague

feeling that Powers holding colonies are not likely to be up to much good anyway, would account for the vague suspicions which are certainly current."

The French had now made it clear that they would actively resist the Chinese, even if the Chinese were led by Americans, but if one or two battalions of French or British troops would lead an Allied invasion, that would be acceptable. In July 1944 the resistance in Indochina had advised the French Provisional Government that for effective action they needed a minimum of five to six hundred officers and men familiar with Indochina and trained in modern war -- thus the Corps Leger was formed. However, the U.S. Chiefs had not approved its movement to the Far East, where it could organize groups to take on the Communists (very much a minority group at this time) and Japanese.

Mountbatten scheduled a trip to Chungking to try to thrash this problem out with Wedemeyer, but was informed that Wedemeyer would not be in Chungking at that time; they did meet in Calcutta a few days later. Seymour recommended that Mountbatten come ahead anyway or the Chinese would think that the main reason for the trip was a conference with Wedemeyer (which it was).

Seymour's discomfort over lack of clear guidance concerning the French was shared by Dening, who asked the Foreign Office, "Are we going all out to help or should we hedge every time we receive a request from the French?"¹¹¹ The French were in a bad way and were trying to do their best to hang on. Dening thought that now they were back in France the French should fight their own battles with the Americans. He may well have had Fenard's comments in mind when he said that he was getting the impression that the French were either "mal élevés or just stupid or trying to pull a fast one." The Foreign Office reply repeated their standing view. They wanted stability in the Far East and to build up France. Uncertainty was dangerous for all territories awaiting liberation (including British territories). A strong France was essential for postwar security, and would play a major role in containing Germany from the west. It was thus essential that her ports and air bases remain in friendly hands, and France would be a useful ally with many common European and Imperial interests. It was the British who had continually pressed the Americans to recognize de Gaulle's French Provisional Government, and who had secured a French zone of occupation in Germany and a seat for France on the German Control Commission. France was,

also, to be a counterweight to Russian influence in Europe. The Foreign Office, however, did on occasion express annoyance with the French when the latter tended to be upset because the British were not prepared "to part brass rags" with the Americans in order to get the French what they wanted.

Dening's frustration showed in his increasing correspondence with the Foreign Office. He was by now despairing of convincing Hurley and Wedemeyer of the longterm dangers of their obstructionist policy in Indochina. When Dening saw Wedemeyer on 20 February, Wedemeyer told him that he was "180 degrees at variance" with Mountbatten over Indochina.¹¹² During the conversation Dening said that he had heard rumours of sinister British plots with the French and Dutch, and that the British were supposed to be harboring evil designs on Siam as well. Hurley was quick to respond that he too had heard them, but brushed them aside and said that the U.S. and Britain must not bicker. Dening had thus confronted Hurley with Foreign Office feelings that Hurley was suspicious of British "imperialism" and was lending an ear to stories of the British scheming with the French and Dutch behind the back of the United States. For some time now Sir H.Seymour had been "patiently trying to disabuse him of these suspicions."¹¹³

During the meeting Wedemeyer again openly aired his own suspicions of British intentions everywhere, telling Dening that Britain did not want a unified China. Dening said that he simply had no time to prove him wrong. Wedemeyer next went on to express contempt for the French in Indochina¹¹⁴ and doubted that they would be of any use in ejecting the Japanese. Dening sighed, "Someday some better man than I may find time to convince General Wedemeyer that we are not as sinister as he thinks we are. It will be a difficult but worthwhile task."¹¹⁵

The atmosphere in Chungking must have been something to experience. As negative as the American mission was in general, John Davies was so venomously anti-British that even Hurley was forced to remove him. He was sent to Moscow.

While these talks were taking place General Carton de Wiart sent Churchill a report of his own conversation with General Pechkoff, the French envoy to Chungking. Pechkoff went to see de Wiart "not as a French Ambassador but as a soldier."¹¹⁶ Pechkoff, reflecting French fears of a Chinese move, said he had information that two Chinese divisions and some Americans were on the Indochina border, and the Americans were

known to be helping the Annamite revolutionaries. He said the French would fight if the Chinese entered Indochina.

De Wiart also sent General Ismay further information on the seemingly irreconcilable problem in Southeast Asia. "Wedemeyer was quite frank to me about his plans, and I think he, for military reasons, would like to see the Indo-China question solved. It would simplify military operations and give him an opportunity of doing something big; scattering his army, just to occupy the Japanese is a poor role for a commander, and would leave everything for MacArthur."¹¹⁷ And on a more personal note, "A friend of Hurley's tells me he badly wants an English decoration, as he told him rather sourly that he had been such a good friend of England's before and during the war. This was said in the course of the conversation about Wedemeyer having got a C.B."

De Wiart himself was approached about coordinating clandestine activity on the China side for SEAC, but demurred. It was a full time job, and he would not be able to devote the necessary attention to it and continue to keep up with diplomatic affairs. "I also have to do all the talking with the Americans who, as you know, are very touchy, and have to be carefully handled."¹¹⁸

In London the Foreign Office was wondering about Wedemeyer. He had been an agreeable sort while Deputy Supreme Commander; what now were his motives? Was he merely trying to play a big American role in China and cut the British out? Or was he an extremely conscientious, high-principled and rigid man carrying out the letter of his instructions, regardless of all else? Was he really well-disposed to the British but following contrary orders from Washington?¹¹⁹ Wedemeyer answered the question himself in a later talk with Dening.

At this time, on the other side of the world, the Indochina problem was still very much on the table. A 23 February report by the Combined Chiefs of Staff Joint Planning Staff referred to the French Resistance in Tonkin, and specifically to the French statement that air support would be needed to support the resistance in the north. The French would also like to put a knowledgeable officer on the 14th Air Force staff. The French were advised that 14th Air Force intelligence was good enough and French liaison was not needed. Furthermore, the Joint Planners professed that the reference to an Allied Headquarters in China was "not understood", since Chiang Kai-Shek was the Supreme Commander there and Wedemeyer merely commanded U.S. Forces in China Theatre. The French,

with everyone else, could not tell it by Wedemeyer's actions and words. The French could not be spared any air supply, said the Planners, as everything was needed for more official operations. Finally, there was "No likelihood of major operations against Indochina requiring large-scale assistance from the French resistance movement in the near future," and until the question of Allied Command in Indochina was settled they could not talk to the French about it. In other words, to the French it was the old "Don't call us, we'll call you."

The war was not standing still for SOE either. And while the politicians fenced they decided to help things along with a little sleight of hand which would make the badly needed Corps Leger disappear from North Africa and reappear in Southeast Asia. It was a good try and may well have worked, but the Foreign Office's Sterndale-Bennett was quick to catch on and stopped it. SOE may have been driven to extreme measures by the failure of the political leaders to discuss Indochina at Argonaut. Mountbatten was not surprised at this oversight; in a memo of 25 February to Dening he acknowledged, "Presume that this was done in deference to the President's known feelings."

SOE wanted the Foreign Office to grant visas to certain French individuals from the CLI going from Algiers to Colombo. These French personnel were somehow going to be the whole unit, but when the numbers began to grow someone caught on. The War Office and SOE then owned up. They expressed regret at all the inconvenience and said that they thought the Foreign Office knew all about it; it really was an "oversight" that the F.O. had not been fully informed. So SOE sent a Major Last (probably the junior officer) over to the Foreign Office with the relevant correspondence to try and explain the situation -- which only made things worse, for one of the papers, an internal SOE document, said that the F.O. had "authorized" the move. SOE also said that Dening at SEAC obviously must have known about it.

Sterndale-Bennett expressed astonishment at hearing the poor Major give his defence, saying it was contrary to all the facts. The F.O. had agreed that a small group of CLI men could go out to SEAC as members of SOE, and not as a body. At the time the British were still awaiting American concurrence to moving the CLI, so SOE here and Force 136 in the Far East were trying to pull a fast one. In fact, Sterndale-Bennett was alleged to have been the Foreign Office official to have approved the move. "Major Last put up a somewhat confused defense."¹²⁰ Sterndale-

Bennett was particularly incensed and took Force 136 to task for implicating Dening, saying "It was one of the lamest defences I have ever seen." With reluctance the move was blocked. It was not that Sterndale-Bennett disagreed with the move; he fully recognized the need for the CLI to get to work in Indochina, but their transfer was being actively opposed by the U.S. Chiefs, and to move them arbitrarily would entail a political explosion which at this particularly delicate stage they were not prepared to face.

Mountbatten met Wedemeyer in Calcutta and took up the issue of his "Gentleman's Agreement" with Chiang Kai-Shek. Mountbatten recorded, "I warned him that it was my intention to confirm personally from the Generalissimo in Chungking that he regarded his gentleman's agreement with me as still binding, and I particularly invited General Wedemeyer to have one or two representatives present when I made this statement. After demurring, he finally agreed that he would arrange for General Gross and an American interpreter to be present."¹²¹ Wedemeyer reiterated his opposition to the agreement, and Somervell's lack of authority to negotiate, and now said that he was going to tell his superiors in Washington about it. Rumours had it that Wedemeyer's plans called for training 36 Chinese divisions to attack Indochina, an invasion which Dening thought would be "lamentable from every angle."¹²²

Mountbatten thought he knew one of the reasons for Wedemeyer's suspicions. It went back to the previous year when the "Seed of distrust was firmly implanted in Wedemeyer's mind in July 1944." At that time Force 136 made an "unfortunate mistake" in infiltrating a French officer to Indochina bearing a letter of introduction from General de Gaulle.¹²³ Wedemeyer had some justification for his suspicions, but the quarrel between the two theatre commanders retarded meaningful operations in that vitally important area. When Kunming airfield was closed to Force 136 operations on 24 January 1945, the Saigon area and Cambodia had to be omitted from Special Duty plans due to extreme flying ranges from Jessore.

The War Cabinet took note of the slowdown of operations in French Indochina, and of Wedemeyer's theory that his new position overrode the Chiang-Mountbatten agreement, which at the moment was Mountbatten's bridge to Indochina. "Early in January he told Admiral Mountbatten 'that he would have to inform the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff that the Supreme Allied Commander was still acting on his agreement with the Generalissimo' and he expressed great astonishment on being told by Admiral Mountbatten in reply that instructions to United States Commanding Generals were

of no special concern to the British Chiefs of Staff and certainly did not give General Wedemeyer any Allied rights over Indo-China."¹²⁴

On 13 January SEAC wanted to call forward the CLI, then in Algiers, to engage in guerilla operations in Indochina. Wedemeyer was opposed to this, but there were sound political and military reasons for turning them loose now. When the SEAC staff had reached agreement, General Wheeler, the American deputy, threw a bombshell into the plan; he produced a telegram, which he had been hiding up to now, from the U.S. Chiefs which forbade the movement of French forces to the Far East, and said that "Admiral Mountbatten as an Englishman could do what he liked but as the Supreme Commander of an Allied Command he was not entitled to take such action without the authority of the Combined Chiefs of Staff."¹²⁵

On 4 March 1945 Eden asked Churchill to intervene with Roosevelt to stop "the present sparring" between Mountbatten and Wedemeyer, which would lead to trouble. Churchill always kept his Cabinet replies short. His response was simply "Yes; W.S.C; 6.3.45," referring to Eden's last sentence asking if the Prime Minister would "consider an approach to the President," for "no other course is likely to produce a decision." As the problem was explained to Churchill, the British Chiefs of Staff had asked the Combined Chiefs to approve increased French participation in the Far East. The U.S. Chiefs, reflecting Roosevelt's views, had for several months now refused to reply. But the President had, in the meanwhile, told Halifax that he was prepared to turn a blind eye to Mountbatten's preoccupational activities in Indochina, but now Wedemeyer was the problem. Since Wedemeyer was in Washington at this time it would be a good idea to send a message to Roosevelt.

Unfortunately, in the midst of all this the long-dreaded event occurred when the Japanese on 9 March finally struck down the French, an event of calamitous consequences, for the Viet Minh, with American help, now had a free hand to accelerate the build up of their own movement.

On the day following the Japanese coup Field Marshal Wilson, Chief of the Joint Staff Mission in Washington, reported the results of a meeting he had with General Wedemeyer, who had been in Washington for a few days.¹²⁶ Wedemeyer was hoping to "cannibalize" the Chinese divisions in order to create a few good ones. Most Chinese divisions were understrength and half-starved, despite huge amounts of American aid. It was so bad that Wedemeyer had to attach an advisory staff of about 40 Americans to each division, and was now having a difficult time finding

enough Americans to go around. He hoped to withdraw the U.S. regiment from Burma and considered the French in Indochina "rotten to the core" — it was useless to rely on them, so there was no potential maquis in the country. He strongly objected to Mountbatten's preoccupational activities in Indochina and seemed to have personally nullified the agreement made between Mountbatten and Chiang Kai-Shek.

On 12 March General St. Didier, of the French Mission in Washington, asked the Combined Chiefs to send help to the beleaguered French columns in Indochina. The reply was not very helpful, and no increase in the French staff at Chungking would be permitted.¹²⁷ Wedemeyer would meet Blaizot if necessary, and look into the situation. At this time Wedemeyer was returning from Washington to Chungking, and the British Chiefs and Foreign Office were hoping to persuade him to return via London. He begged off this, and on 12 March Ismay told Churchill that the U.S. Chiefs had probably dissuaded Wedemeyer from stopping off in London lest those crafty British sway him from his plans for a great offensive by the Chinese armies, which would settle the Indochinese question once and for all. Churchill was really preoccupied with bigger things, and this flaring Indochina problem was something of a nuisance. Before writing to Roosevelt he asked General Ismay to "Let me have a short note, not more than one page, on what has happened in Indo-China since the beginning of the war. How is it there are French troops and a Governor-General there now? Are they survivors of the Vichy period? Have they not yet joined up with de Gaulle? I have not followed the affairs in this country for some time."¹²⁸

On 12 March, also, the French Ambassador, M. Massigli, told Anthony Eden that the Japanese coup had been expected. He also said that he understood the Americans were now helping the French. As it was they were not, save for some strafing of Japanese positions. Massigli said that these developments made it more imperative than ever that the Corps Leger be flown to the Far East. He knew that the British wanted this but the Combined Chiefs would not give their approval. If the U.S. Chiefs continued to object, he pleaded, could not the British provide the transport?¹²⁹ After all, the outcome in Indochina may well influence the Burma operations, and Lord Mountbatten had always been anxious to build up and fortify the loyal French underground. Eden could not add much to this, as the matter was now in the hands of the Prime Minister.

On 13 March, on hearing of the inactivity of the USAAF concerning help for the retreating French forces in Indochina, de Gaulle asked U.S.

Ambassador Caffery to see him. The French leader said that he had received word that U.S. forces had refused to assist the French, and the expeditionary forces for Indochina were stalled because the Americans had prohibited their movement to the Far East. He said he failed to understand American policy. In a cold fury he turned on Caffery: "What are you driving at? Do you want us to become, for example, one of the federated states under the Russian aegis? The Russians are advancing apace as you well know. When Germany falls they will be upon us. If the public here comes to realize that you are against us in Indochina there will be a terrific disappointment and nobody knows to what this will lead. We do not want to become Communist; we do not want to fall into the Russian orbit, but I hope that you do not push us into it."¹³⁰

The War Cabinet's initial assessment of the coup revealed that at the moment the Japanese action appeared to be limited to major centres. Eight of the W/T stations, built up originally during the "Belief" sorties, went down, although 15 were still up. Ten new sets recently delivered had not been able to begin operations as yet.¹³¹ There was an urgent requirement for drops of food and arms to the retreating French columns. On 11 March 4 RAF B-24 aircraft loaded with arms had flown to the French in the vicinity of Thai Nguyen, in Tonkin; 2 sorties were successful. One of the few places where the Japanese surprise had not swept the French away was at Moncay, in far northern Tonkin, where the French reported that their troops had surrounded the Japanese and no Japanese reinforcements had yet arrived; but they badly needed supplies there to sustain their fight.

On 16 March the War Office informed the Foreign Office that RAF Liberators were being diverted to drop supplies to the French, but the USAAF just across the border had announced that they would not drop supplies to the French unless authorized by Washington; they would continue their normal scheduled bombing operations in the interior.

On 17 March, with the RAF straining to sustain the French in this fighting retreat, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt.¹³² He told Roosevelt that he had heard that there were "certain difficulties" between Mountbatten and Wedemeyer about operations in Indochina; he went on to bring Roosevelt up to date on those operations:

"Under existing decisions of the Combined Chiefs of Staff Indo-China is still within the China Theatre. But Mountbatten has a vital interest in Indo-China as well as in Siam since it is through them that runs the Japanese land and air reinforcement route to Burma and Malaya; and as you know he has an oral understanding

with Chiang Kai-Shek that both he and the Generalissimo shall be free to attack Siam and Indo-China and that the boundaries between the two Theatres shall be decided when the time comes in accordance with the progress made by their respective forces. The Generalissimo agreed after SEXTANT that this understanding extended to preoccupational activities."

Churchill concluded by saying that General Wedemeyer "feels difficulty in recognizing this oral understanding," and "harmful friction" could come about. He suggested that they clear it up by addressing the oral agreement, "which seems a sensible and workable agreement." Roosevelt replied five days later, but in the interval much happened which affect U.S.-French relations to this day.

As far as Mountbatten was concerned, he was standing fast on his verbal pact with Chiang. On 17 March, as Churchill was writing to Roosevelt, Mountbatten wrote to Somervell thanking him for the gift of a new automatic pistol which was personally delivered to Mountbatten. The Supreme Allied Commander said he hoped to find a Japanese straggler or two, when Mandalay fell ("waiting to be finished off"), and would let Somervell know if he had any luck. Wrote Mountbatten, "I have just got back from Chungking and it brought back many memories of our stay together there. I was delighted to find that the 'Gentleman's Agreement' between the Generalissimo, you and me on S.E.A.C./China Boundaries was still being honoured although it still rests on our words and has not been signed; really rather a wonderful thing and all due to you." 133

Wedemeyer would have disagreed with the prose.

On 18 March the news from Indochina was worse. On behalf of the French Government the Head of the French Naval Mission pleaded with the Combined Chiefs of Staff for help, particularly for the 1000 French troops at Moncay who were resisting the Japanese and crying out for arms and ammunition; the latter was of particular urgency as Japanese policy had been to keep the French Army short of ammunition. In Chungking General Gross (Wedemeyer's Chief of Staff) was asked to parachute Bren guns and 60 cases of ammunition stored there. He refused to do so, citing (it might be thought somewhat cattily) previous French requests that the U.S. stop sending arms to Indochina. These earlier requests had, of course, referred to American support of Communist revolutionaries who were the Viet Minh backbone. The French Government stated that if help were not forthcoming immediately the battle at Moncay would be over. The French, over "Such a misunderstanding... should deeply resent not to see our Allies bring them immediately all possible help in their traditional

brotherhood;"¹³⁴ they urgently requested help from the U.S. 14th Air Force sitting across the border in China. From Washington, in his memo to the Cabinet, Field Marshal Wilson said that if anything was to be done for the French it must be quick. In his view the U.S. Chiefs of Staff would support General Gross and refuse to permit the 14th Air Force to aid the French. Wilson suggested that, in view of the desperate circumstances of the French, Mountbatten should be asked to throw in everything he could spare in order to give the French a chance, while keeping Wedemeyer informed of course.

On the same day, 18 March, as Churchill's message was en route to Roosevelt, General Marshall received a message from General Gross. Marshall passed the message to Field Marshal Wilson without comment. While the French were being cut to pieces across the border by the common enemy, the best Gross could do at this critical juncture was to complain again of SEAC's philosophy that they could operate in Indochina without receiving permission from Wedemeyer, so long as they did not stage out of China. Wilson cabled the British Chiefs:

"From the military point of view, Mountbatten's interest in what goes on in French Indochina is obvious and if military considerations were the only factors that had to be taken into account, no doubt a solution could be found which would be acceptable to both Wedemeyer and Mountbatten. But the difficulty in the background all the time is political and springs from the different attitude adopted by our two Governments to the French position in F.I.C.* H.M.G.** on the one hand wish to foster the French resistance movement and the U.S.G.*** on the other take an entirely contrary view. We want to work with the French and make increasing use of French manpower to increase clandestine resistance to the Japanese but feel that the American inclination is to exclude the French altogether." 135

Churchill had had enough by now. On 19 March he wrote to Wilson asking him to tell Roosevelt and Marshall that "it will look very bad in history if we were to let the French force in Indo-China be cut to pieces by the Japanese through shortage of ammunition, if there is anything we can do to save them." He went on to hope "that we shall be agreed not to stand on punctilio in this emergency."¹³⁶ Wilson immediately saw Marshall and asked him to tell Wedemeyer to help the desperate Frenchmen at Moncay. Should Marshall be reluctant to do so, or Wedemeyer refuse, then the British would tell the U.S. that Mountbatten would do it for them anyway, while keeping Wedemeyer informed. Actually, Mountbatten was already helping the French as best he could, and on the

*French Indo-China ** His Majesty's Government *** U.S. Government

same day (14 March) the British Chiefs wired Mountbatten to ask if he could increase the present scale of air support for the French groups operating in Indochina. "In particular could you, if so instructed, deliver by parachute supplies, ammunition and Bren guns to the French at Moncaï?"

On 20 March Churchill, despairing of an American change of heart and prompted by the terrible condition of the French in Indochina, decided to go all out. He brushed aside Wilson's caution that Indochina was in the U.S. sphere and ordered Mountbatten to do everything he could to assist the surviving Frenchmen. When Marshall heard of this he immediately ordered Chennault to start helping the French. However, several days passed before his order was acted on by China Theatre forces.

On 21 March Mountbatten replied to London. With an eye on the political implications he wrote that it was never his intention to supply French regular forces, but the Japanese coup had now mixed the French regular forces and underground together. His previous policy had been to establish a radio net with the underground and supply selected centres with limited quantities of arms and supplies for training and future use by guerillas. The supply problem had been of the utmost difficulty due to the extreme distances and adverse weather conditions involved. In one month (from 6 February to 6 March 1945) only 28 of 77 Liberator sorties had been successful. He could possibly have done more but political considerations (American objections) had prohibited him from accepting a French offer to man and maintain two squadrons.

Although Marshall (probably the best American officer produced in this century — and perhaps the greatest ever), had ordered U.S. forces to help the French, Wedemeyer had still not acted by 22 March;¹³⁷ for Blaizot forwarded to the French Government a message from General Alessandri in Indochina. Alessandri reported that he expected Son La to fall to the Japanese on 23/24 March, at which time he would fall back to Điện Biên Phủ or Tuần Giáo, and urgently asked for radio equipment, mortars and whatever help he could get from "14 American Air Force" across the border.

On 22 March Roosevelt replied to Churchill's request that Wedemeyer honour the Mountbatten-Chiang agreement. Roosevelt said he knew about the agreement, and "This appears perfectly sound to me." However, he noted the obscurity in the agreement in dealing with preoccupational activities, and thought that Chiang (through Wedemeyer) had insisted on

controlling all non-Chinese clandestine activity in Indochina. So Roosevelt essentially did not accede to Churchill's request, and went on to say that Wedemeyer should have the final say. Since the two theatre commanders were independently running their own air operations and intelligence, confusion may occur which "might result in placing the two theatres unintentionally in conflict."¹³⁸ Actually, it was highly unlikely that Chiang even knew what the OSS was doing in that part of the world. On 24 March 1945, U.S. Ambassador Caffery and Samuel Rosenman called on de Gaulle. As they were leaving de Gaulle said to Caffery, "It seems clear now that your Government does not want to help our troops in Indo-China. Nothing has yet been dropped to them by parachute." Caffery muttered some excuse about the distances involved, but de Gaulle snapped, "No, that is not the question; the question is one of policy I assume."¹³⁹

On 27 March Ambassador Hurley was back in Washington, and Wilson had a talk with him. Hurley told Wilson that "American policy as regards Indo-China was still nebulous,"¹⁴⁰ and he could add no more to that, so that Wilson was unable to discuss the question of subversive activities with him. But Hurley did say that the President and State Department were going to give the British a rough time over Hong Kong, which they wanted to give to the Chinese (but as Eden had noted, FDR had not simultaneously offered to return Puerto Rico to the Spanish). Hurley also predicted future trouble over the use of land-lease equipment being used after the war to recover colonial territories, beginning with the French divisions for Indochina, to be followed by the Dutch and probably the British in Malaya.

Little by little the British were turning away from the Combined Chiefs on this issue, beginning with their giving Mountbatten the green light over going all out to supply the retreating French columns. They were about to take another decision over the Corps Leger. On 27 March a meeting in London (of various planning directors) was held to discuss Indochina. The participants were Mr. Cavendish-Bentinck (Foreign Office), Air Vice Marshal Whitworth-Jones (SD Operations, SEAC), Mr. Dening, Colonel Taylor (SOE) and the War Office Strategical Planning Section. The centre of discussion was the urgent need to move the Corps Leger to the Far East, and the fact that the only objection to its move was political, since it appeared that on military grounds the U.S. Chiefs had no objection to the move. Since 4 August 1944, the British Chiefs had proposed to move the CLI east, and the U.S. had

persistently refused to agree to the move although the U.S. Chiefs had raised no military objections. The U.S. was advised that the British would inform the French why the CLI could not be moved; the British were "reluctant that the odium of this refusal should fall on us." Word had now come in that in Tonkin the column of Commandant Capponi, consisting of 500 Europeans and 1000 Vietnamese troops, had been neutralized by the Japanese on 27 March; only 27 Europeans escaped. In Thakhek, Laos, 250 French troops were wiped out, and the Japanese there had executed all French government officials, including the President de France, two bishops, and the Mother Superior of the convent.

On 30 March the Joint Staff Mission forwarded to the Foreign Office a report of yet another note from Admiral Fenard to the Combined Chiefs in which the French repeated their requests to have the Corps Leger moved to the Far East and their troops and resistance fighting in Indochina resupplied, saying it was "both embarrassing and unfortunate that the Combined Chiefs of Staff should continue to give the French no encouragement whatever with regard to any form of French military activity in this French possession." The note was aimed at the U.S. Chiefs.

On the same day the British Chiefs of Staff examined Roosevelt's reply to Churchill and were not impressed with it. On their strong recommendation Churchill replied to Roosevelt, reiterating Mountbatten's vital interest in Indochina and saying that it made more sense to fly supplies direct to South East Asia from India or SEAC rather than via the long and indirect route over the "Hump", and India was the great base supplying both China and Southeast Asia. But he was now finished with trying to evoke a sense of urgency in Roosevelt and bluntly stated that he was empowering Mountbatten "to conduct pre-occupational activities in Indo-China from whatever base appears to be most suitable" keeping Wedemeyer informed. He did not even say south Indochina. Of Mountbatten's directive, Churchill amended this sentence by hand to read, "You may conduct from whatever base appears most suitable the minimum pre-occupational activities in Indo-China which local emergency and the advance of your forces require."¹⁴¹ Churchill continued, "Now that the Japanese have taken over Indo-China and that substantial resistance is being offered by French patriots, it is essential not only that we should support the French by all means in our power, but also that we should associate them with our operations into their country. It would

look very bad in history if we failed to support isolated French Forces in their resistance to the Japanese to the best of our ability, or, if we excluded the French from participation in our councils as regards Indo-China."

By 30 March, when Churchill's directive was en route to Mountbatten, General Chennault still had not done much to help the French. This is a puzzling part of the story, for in his autobiography written several years ago he wrote that he strongly opposed the policy of refusing aid to the French columns falling back in the hills, and wanted very much to help them.¹⁴² However, the recently opened archives tell a different tale. In a telegram to his superiors, when he was acting theatre Commander in Wedemeyer's absence, he complained that the British were helping the French at Son La and Moncay, and said that the "French continued representations for assistance to their resistance groups in Indo-China." As an excuse he reported that "Fluidity of situation, bad weather conditions, and non-availability of surplus equipment have materially limited action." He then stated that this sort of thing (the RAF B-24s assisting the French) would give a bad impression, as people may think that the Americans were now helping the retreating French columns.¹⁴³ Some of his reasoning was a bit thin, as the couple of hours of weather time his crews would have to face must be contrasted with the 15 to 20 hours the tired RAF crews were already flying.

Chennault went on to say that any assistance to the French must be weighed against a return value for effort expended. However, in a primarily moral issue, as this was, it was not easy to come up with a value for money; a lot of it had to do with conscience. In this astonishing complaint to Marshall, Chennault said that on 14/15 March a shot down 14th Air Force pilot reported seeing British B-24s dropping food and supplies to French forces at Son La. What was more, he reported indignantly, some of the food dropped were cases of American K-rations! Also, on 20 March two Allied (RAF) Liberators had dropped supplies and arms to French forces at Moncay. Some of the supplies had fallen beyond French reach, and luckily, said Chennault, friendly Chinese had picked up these few crates. While protesting that Mountbatten should coordinate operations in Indochina with Chungking, his main problem seemed to be that these actions "may lead to erroneous reports of China Theatre operations in French Indo-China." The supplies he mentioned which may have, but for the Chinese, fallen into Japanese hands consisted of a

few machine guns and 20 Tommy guns, plus of course those K-rations -- all hardly likely to make much of an impact on the Japanese war effort one way or the other.

Marshall agreed that there may be problems if Chungking was not informed of Mountbatten's operations, but did not appear overly upset about the rest of Chennault's protests. And although Chennault thought that if he helped the French it would inevitably lead to a "reduction of effort against the enemy," in fact, excepting the air strikes, this was the only effort against the enemy going on at this time in this part of the world.

On 31 March the British Chiefs pressed Churchill for action on moving the Corps Leger out to the Far East. Churchill replied that he was a bit reluctant to over-burden the President with this as FDR was hard-pressed and "I like to keep him as much as possible for the biggest things," noting also that "the telegram he sent me (on pre-occupational activities) was obviously not his own."¹⁴⁴ On 3 April he told General Hollis of the War Office that he was prepared to bring it up to Roosevelt "in a day or two." What he really meant by all this was that he had decided to act and would tell the President about it -- not ask him, but inform him.

Churchill's attitude reflected the mood of the Foreign Office. On the question of command boundaries and the dispatch of the Corps Leger to the Far East, the Foreign Office noted that it had been over three weeks since the French Ambassador had appealed to the British for help. Wrote Sterndale-Bennett: "The time has come to grasp this Indo-China nettle and to tackle the Americans on the whole issue;" the British had no wish to "lose respect by our subservience in this issue."¹⁴⁵ The next day the British acted.

On 5 April Admiral Fenard again wrote to the Combined Chiefs about the CLI.¹⁴⁶ The French resistance in Indochina needed reinforcement cadres. Since the French troops were obliging the Japanese troops to fight them (Japanese who could be used elsewhere), it was desirable to keep those Frenchmen in good fighting condition. He had thus been instructed by the French General Staff to ask for permission to transport 100 officers and men of the Corps Leger to the Far East; these men were familiar with Indochina and the resistance in that area. The remaining men of the CLI could go on one of two French cruisers, the Suffren or the Georges Leygues. The Suffren was being overhauled and would be ready

for sailing in early May; the Georges Leygues was part of the Allied fleet which, if released, could sail on 15 April. The cruiser would stop at Diego-Suarez on the return leg to bring personnel and supplies from Madagascar to France. The British Chiefs supported this approach, and now the Combined Chiefs had no objections, for this was also the day when the British instructed the Joint Staff Mission to inform the U.S. Chiefs that the British would send the Corps Leger to the Far East.

As the Combined Chiefs were studying Fenard's message, in South-east Asia Mountbatten was preparing for a visit by Wedemeyer. Both their plans were now overtaken by events and a face to face meeting was overdue. Mountbatten asked London how he should receive Wedemeyer: as Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai-Shek, in which case any information given to Wedemeyer would be passed to the Chinese, with the "well-known consequent lack of security", or as the Commanding General of U.S. Forces in a neighbouring theatre (as Mountbatten recommended). The Foreign Office replied that Wedemeyer should be received in his capacity as Chiang's Chief of Staff, and Churchill raised the issue with Roosevelt with this in mind.

When Wedemeyer arrived at SEAC, Mountbatten went over the whole history of the negotiations and clandestine activity, and took Wedemeyer into the super-secret Clandestine War Room to show him the extent of SEAC Clandestine activity in Southeast Asia. The meeting was reported to the Foreign Office by H.N. Brain, of Denning's Foreign Office staff at SEAC. Brain said that the two commanders had had a long talk on French Indochina, during which Wedemeyer was under the impression that the "Gentleman's Agreement" was never approved by higher authority in Washington and was "astounded" when shown evidence that both the President and the U.S. Chiefs had approved it. Wedemeyer admitted that he must have seen these papers while on Mountbatten's staff, but said that the British had accepted the inclusion of French Indochina in his sphere of operations. Mountbatten retorted that the British had never been consulted about it and had thus considered it "purely a question of control of American forces and as such no concern of ours."¹⁴⁷ The talks did much to clear the air, even if they did not ultimately settle the issue; however, Wedemeyer was reaffirmed in his power to veto operations which conflicted with his own. As they parted Mountbatten asked Wedemeyer if he could now tell the Chiefs of Staff that they had "buttoned up" these problems, to which Wedemeyer replied, "Certainly."

Mountbatten reported that Wedemeyer "once more assured me that nothing was further from his mind than to exclude British activities as long as they contributed to the overall effort against Japan."

As Wedemeyer returned to Chungking the Foreign Office was receiving a folder from Colonel Taylor of SOE. Taylor was passing on a message from Colin Mackenzie in Delhi (Mackenzie was Commander of Force 136). Mackenzie's message was an update of the French-Japanese fighting in Indochina, and contained the following main points.¹⁴⁸ The French were continuing to cause the Japanese trouble, and some of the initial sabotage plans were carried out. Three special groups introduced had successfully recruited about 100 guerillas. "If we had (the) 5th Regiment (Corps Leger) thus ensuring further special groups (the) position would have been most promising." The French troops were getting tired and their morale was declining. The main deficiencies now in Indochina were of transport (to carry essential supplies), new blood of young officers (the absence of which was preventing columns from being split into smaller guerilla parties), and the continued hold-back of the Corps Leger (which constituted a breach of faith). Continued Mackenzie, as things stood all the sacrifices and effort would be in vain as the columns faced extermination, with the exception of those falling back to China. Force 136 had requested SACSEA to send in jeeps and trailers, and were wanting to drop in a couple of liaison officers as a gesture, but the real answer lay with the Combined Chiefs of Staff. A particularly depressing incident had occurred on 29 March, when the Americans flew in two sorties (possibly 10th Air Force C-47s), one for their own needs (presumably OSS exfiltration), and one to evacuate 6 U.S. airmen (who had been brought out by the French). For the ragged and desperate Frenchmen around, this studied callousness had its effect: "In neither plane were there any stores, not even medical stores or cigarettes. American name is mud repeat mud with French and British alike in this whole episode." Mackenzie pulled no punches: if the British did not go all out to help, "our position will be little better than that of the Americans."

On 12 April Franklin D. Roosevelt, overall probably one of the half dozen greatest presidents the U.S. ever had, died, worn out by his heroic efforts to carry the terrific burdens of the wartime presidency.

Churchill's disagreements with Roosevelt were political; the two leaders had enjoyed a warm personal relationship. When FDR had earlier

sent a birthday message to Churchill, the Prime Minister responded: "I cannot tell you how much I value your friendship or how much I hope upon it for the future of the world, should we both be spared." And after the 1944 Presidential election Churchill told Roosevelt (8 November 1944),

"I always said that a great people could be trusted to stand by the pilot who weathered the storm. It is an indescribable relief to me that our comradeship will continue and will help to bring the world out of misery... things are afoot which will be remembered as long as the English language is spoken in any quarter of the globe, and in expressing the comfort I feel that the people of the United States have once again cast these great burdens upon you, I must avow my sure faith that the lights by which we steer will bring us all safely to anchor."

Now the Pilot was dead.

On the narrow issue of his Indochina policy, La Feber may be as close as any with his comment that "The President's Indochina policy in 1943-44 is a case study of how supposed idealism, in this instance anticolonialism, can blend perfectly with American self-interest."¹⁴⁹ -- a drive for postwar access to new markets and new materials and Third World influence. But in the end, like many other limited vision policies, it did not work out that way.

The accession of Harry Truman sparked a current debate as to whether he continued or departed from Roosevelt's policies. Although it may be argued either way, what followed appeared to favour the "break" theorists. Regardless, some of the old prejudices lingered on.

Just before de Gaulle visited Washington in 1945 for an initial meeting with Truman, the President asked an experienced newsman to sum up de Gaulle. When told that the French leader could hold his own against any leader, Truman got angry and banged the desk saying, "Dammit, why doesn't anybody ever tell me the truth! The State Department's always been telling me de Gaulle is stupid."¹⁵⁰ As it turned out, it certainly was not de Gaulle who was stupid. Within a few days of his assuming office Truman wrote to Churchill, noting that Mountbatten and Wedemeyer had appeared to have patched up their quarrel, and that Wedemeyer had been instructed to do what he could for the French resistance groups.¹⁵¹ On 20 April General Ismay* wrote to Churchill, referring to Truman's message that the U.S. Chiefs were issuing a directive to

*Later Field Marshal Lord Ismay.

Wedemeyer. That directive had now arrived, and the British Chiefs considered that the directive "although not altogether satisfactory, it is a great advance on anything that the American Chiefs of Staff have hitherto prepared to do in this matter, in that it implicitly recognizes that Admiral Mountbatten is entitled to have plans, intuitions and intelligence as regards Indo-China."¹⁵²

All of this was fine, but a few days earlier Colonel Taylor of SOE had informed the Foreign Office that the French resistance was almost over; they just did not get enough help in the crucial early stages. Some Frenchmen were escaping to China, while those crossing into Siam would be captured. The golden chance to use the Corps Leger had now been lost due to American resistance to its move to Indochina, and it now could not be profitably used. After sharp fights at Apachai and Hon Neua on 29 April General Alessandri had decided to fall back to China. Worse, a couple of weeks later the French survivors were struck yet again, this time by typhus epidemics at Muong Sai and other places.

If Truman had assumed that the Wedemeyer-Mountbatten dispute was at an end, he was wrong. A couple of days after Truman had written to Churchill, Wedemeyer wrote a letter which was "Personal" to Mountbatten and Wheeler (with copies to General Marshall and Cordell Hull in Washington).¹⁵³ It opened all the old wounds. Wedemeyer professed ignorance of the Mountbatten-Chiang arrangement. Also, Hurley had had several conferences with Chiang about theatre boundaries and areas of operational responsibility, during which Chiang had made available his copy of the formal minutes of the meetings in October 1943. Wedemeyer "carefully reviewed" those minutes and reported that he could find "no reference concisely to French Indo-China and Siam." Chiang also passed over some memoranda covering a formal concurrent discussion about French Indochina and Siam. Wedemeyer stated that the basis for his discussions with Mountbatten and Washington was "the so-called gentleman's agreement based on information furnished by Mountbatten."

Chiang Kai-Shek reaffirmed the two stipulations in what Wedemeyer repeatedly called "the so-called gentleman's agreement", namely that both theatres may launch attacks on Siam and French Indochina, with the political questions to be discussed at Chungking. But Wedemeyer insisted that Chiang had stipulated that these arrangements must be made in advance, and had agreed only to that proviso, and had not agreed to operations being conducted by Mountbatten or anyone else from

outside China Theatre into China Theatre's areas (French Indochina and Siam) without Chiang's prior clearance; and Somervell's notes were said to confirm Wedemeyer's claim.

Wired Wedemeyer, "I am now placed in a position of revealing the fact that Mountbatten has either unwittingly misinterpreted the Generalissimo's intention and desire as expressed in 1943 or that the Chinese are attempting to abrogate commitment made in so-called gentleman's agreement." He said that he was thus in a "delicate position", as he did not want to stir things up between Allies (China and Britain -- although the Chinese did not seem to care as much about all this as Wedemeyer).

This was strong stuff. Mountbatten, who was all but called a liar by Wedemeyer, was stung by this and hit back immediately. He wrote to London, saying that since Wedemeyer had sent this message to Marshall and Hull, implying that Mountbatten had deliberately distorted the Generalissimo's wishes and that the question of clandestine activities in French Indochina and Siam were never the subject of a gentleman's agreement between the two, perhaps the Joint Staff mission in Washington would now place the true version before Marshall and Hull and attach a copy of his reply to Wedemeyer.

Mountbatten stated that he understood that the problem of clandestine activity in Indochina had now been settled at the highest level, but:

"As a matter of record, however, I should like to point out that I am not surprised that the formal minutes of the meetings held in October 1943 contain no references to French Indo-China or Thailand. It has never to my knowledge been suggested that they did; and this in fact is why the subsequent gentleman's agreement was ever necessary.

In SEACOS 18 of the 9th November 1943, which was shown to you as my DCOS, I reported that I had made it clear at the informal meeting with the Generalissimo after dinner on 19th October that I reserved the right to gather my own intelligence and to carry out pre-occupational activities.

You will remember that when I noted that this had been omitted in Somervell's written version of the gentleman's agreement, I made a special point of raising this question with the Generalissimo. In my telegram number 89006, addressed personally to you on 30th November 1943 after I had left you behind at the Cairo conference I informed you that I had that same day asked the Generalissimo at Ramgarh to confirm that he did not mind my sending

agents into Siam and Indo-China from then onwards. I further informed you that he had confirmed this, but had asked me to keep him generally informed of my activities, and that I had replied, 'I will of course do the same as you do.'

As I have from that day to this received no information whatever from the Generalissimo or any member of his staff, concerning activities in FIC or Siam conducted by the China Theatre, I have refrained, in view of the known lack of security in China, from telling the Generalissimo anything about our activities.

I have always made a point, however, of seeing that my American staff here, originally headed by yourself, were kept duly informed... of all our activities in Siam and Indo-China." 154

But while the Chiefs fiddled the French resistance sputtered, then died. The U.S. Chiefs, in now agreeing to the move of the Corps Leger, still found it necessary to add the stipulation that although authorizing the move, they could not offer "any assurance as to the timing or scope of employment of the Corps Leger d'Intervention in Indo-China." 155

In May a summary of clandestine operations was prepared at SEAC for Cabinet distribution. It recalled that in January 1945 attempts were made to reinforce the Free French forces in Indochina with arms and ammunition, and to reestablish French influence. 156 The effort increased, and over the next three months over 300 sorties were flown, of which fifty per cent were successful.

"At the end of February the Japanese, well aware of our activities, turned passive occupation of French Indo-China into active military occupation. Regular French units fought the Japanese and in some cases retreated into the mountains, fighting as guerilla bands. Many of the guerilla parties were overpowered although they fought well. It is to be regretted that lack of aircraft prevented us from giving them all the supplies we would have wished. The movement has gone to earth again and is supplied by a modest effort of about 40 sorties a month which is as much as can well be afforded." 157

In the Burma battle area, from 1 January 1945 to 27 May 1945, Force 136 guerilla operations had accounted for 5169 Japanese killed, 735 wounded and 50 prisoners taken; Force 136 losses were 44 killed and 49 wounded.

The SEAC Joint Planning Staff thought that two corps would be needed to clear Indochina of the Japanese; these forces would consist

of six infantry divisions, a tank brigade and a commando brigade in a naval assault role. In April General Blaizot informed Mountbatten confidentially that in his capacity as Commander of French Expeditionary Forces in the Far East, General Sabattier was to be appointed Commander in Chief of French Forces in Indochina; Blaizot wanted permission to contact Sabattier directly, but Mountbatten, cognizant of U.S. hostility, could only refer the matter to the Chiefs of Staff.

For Wedemeyer and Mountbatten, the fundamental reason for their quarrel over Indochina had largely disappeared. In Mountbatten's case, there were not many Frenchmen left to organize, and their ragged and starving remnants had either escaped across "friendly" borders or were killed. The OSS in the north now had a pretty free hand with Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh, although that sad story makes distressing reading in the light of subsequent history.

Mountbatten's sharp earlier reply to Wedemeyer had its effect. After having shown the message to Marshall, Wilson wired the War Cabinet and Mountbatten: "I think you may dismiss from your mind any anxiety you may have had about this verbal agreement."¹⁵⁸ Wedemeyer did not strengthen his case much by asking Mountbatten what the initials "D.G.E.R." meant, in response to Mountbatten's report that DGER personnel and regular troops were mingled in retreat. This must have caused some astonishment at SEAC since it was like asking what "OSS" stood for.¹⁵⁹

Even as Marshall was telling Wilson that the Indochina question was settled, Wedemeyer continued to press his objections, and an apologetic Foreign Office told Mountbatten that "this tiresome question seems to elude all our efforts to reach a satisfactory settlement." And on 6 May 1945 Mountbatten was forced to write to Wedemeyer and remind him that French Indochina had originally been in South East Asia Command, but the U.S., without asking anyone, had decided to give it to Chiang Kai-Shek for face-saving reasons. To Mountbatten, Wedemeyer continued to miss the point that the whole purpose of the gentleman's agreement lay in keeping it unofficial so that the Generalissimo would not lose face with the Chinese people while letting Mountbatten operate; it was a formula designed to permit greater pressure on the Japanese while preserving Chiang's prestige.¹⁶⁰

At the same time Mountbatten sent his deputy, General Wheeler, to see Wedemeyer, after which he wrote to Anthony Eden:

"... I don't think you will be left in any doubt as to the true position, namely, that while Wedemeyer was on my staff, he was supporting me enthusiastically over the question of our operating in French Indo-China. Now that he has gone as U.S. Commanding General in the China Theatre, and Chief of Staff to the Generalissimo, he seems to think it is his duty to try and upset all the agreements which he has subscribed to before, in the mistaken notion that he is looking after American interests, in preventing the British or French from getting a foot into French Indo-China."¹⁶¹

Mountbatten then addressed the emotive issue: "Fortunately for British interests, he has behaved in such an unfriendly manner to the poor French in Chungking, and been so unhelpful about their wretched troops who have been driven across the Chinese border," that the French would be even more well-disposed to the British. Now that Burma was liberated there was a better chance of driving to French Indochina.

The acrimonious exchanges between the two senior commanders gradually took on a more personal note. As the debate continued into May, Mountbatten informed Wedemeyer of his intentions to fly particular clandestine sorties into Indochina, giving details, target areas, and so on, while noting that he had to date failed to receive any reciprocal information from China Theatre. Perhaps the final psychological break came with Wedemeyer's reply of 25 May to Mountbatten, a copy of which Wedemeyer sent to the U.S. Chiefs. Wedemeyer, whose messages to Mountbatten were taking on an increasingly highhanded tone, wrote:

"Your message 106 was referred to me and I regret and express surprise that you have adopted course of action revealed in your message. It has never occurred to me that you would presume that you had authority to operate in an area contiguous to your own without cognizance and full authority of the commander of that area. ¹⁶²

While complaining that Mountbatten was not giving him detailed enough information on clandestine sorties, Wedemeyer continued, "You did show me diagrammatically your plans for Indo China but time was so limited when I was in Kandy, it was impossible to examine or evaluate them in detail." In light of what is now known of OSS activities in his own theatre, little enough as it is, this is a somewhat specious statement as it appears that Wedemeyer was never really well informed on what the OSS was up to in his own command.

Wedemeyer, who failed to see the need for meaningful air support for clandestine activities (as stated in a previous message to Mountbatten), said he found it "difficult to comprehend the urgent operational necessity of your operations in this theatre." By this Wedemeyer, greatly irked, was referring to a message from Mountbatten in which SACSEA had stated that he had given Wedemeyer the necessary information and could wait no longer for a reply as several parties in Indochina depended on the supplies, and the sorties were now being carried out.

After pointing out that Mountbatten was contradicting the Generalissimo's wishes, Wedemeyer finished on a high note. "Your action clearly indicates that we have been unable to agree in what I consider an important matter and therefore I have no alternative but to refer the entire matter to the U.S. Chiefs of Staff."¹⁶³ Mountbatten's attitude, backed by the British Chiefs, was now one of inviting Wedemeyer to refer his complaints to wherever he wished. Indo-China was too important to permit pro-Western elements to be overwhelmed through American obstruction.

As Mountbatten was grappling with these problems, another big headache cropped up, this time from General Sultan of Indo-Burma Theatre. Sultan wanted the return of USAAF units to support the Chinese; these were an important part of SEAC, and included the 7th Heavy Bomb Group, 443rd Troop Carrier Group, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Combat Cargo Groups (which were helping to supply 14th Army), 2nd Troop Carrier Squadron and the 80th Fighter Group. After 1 June there would be no more U.S. units available to SEAC. Mountbatten had nearly lost them a year earlier but had strongly justified his requests for the Air Commando and Combat Cargo Squadron; they were the important ones, for he had enough fighter and fighter-bomber strength of his own.

Mountbatten won a few, too. By COSSEA, 16 May 1945, he was informed that the U.S. Chiefs had told Sultan to place all OSS activities in Thailand under the more experienced Force 136 group; thus in Thailand at least the failures of Indochina were averted (although this obviously was not the only reason). But it is relevant, in the wake of current American efforts to exert more effective controls on the CIA, to reflect on what happened when an intelligence body ran out of control in the periphery -- it ended up making policy, not conforming to it, and the

results were a disaster the magnitude of which has not yet been fully comprehended.

As Allied operations in Southeast Asia were increasingly successful and the focus on Indochina sharpened, the dispute between the two theatre commanders worsened. The British Chiefs of Staff agreed to Wilson's suggestion that he should privately see Marshall again.

"In addition, we suggest that you should point out to General Marshall that Wedemeyer's inquiries... go far beyond what is required from Admiral Mountbatten by his recent directives... and also, if a suitable opportunity presents itself, that the tone of Wedemeyer's telegram is not exactly calculated to promote that intimate collaboration which has before so markedly characterised all Anglo-American dealings."¹⁶⁴

Field Marshal Wilson was talking to General Marshall within 48 hours. Marshall was not pleased over the bickering in Southeast Asia; he deplored it and added that Ambassador Hurley was not helping by sending out "strongly worded telegrams on the subject with a strong anti-British bias." He also thought that the French working both ends may be a problem, and felt it would be a pity if "good relations should be jeopardized over a dispute arising over matters of such low importance as clandestine operations in Indo-China, when placed in relation to the overall primary task of the attack on Japan." Alas for the lack of political foresight -- but in those days the United States was fairly new in the business of Free World leadership. That excuse is less relevant today.

Marshall's comments gave cause for hope, but a week later it was back to square one. Wilson now reported that Marshall had, for some unknown reason, reversed himself on Indochina and had surprised Wilson by sending him a letter saying that the Combined Chiefs of Staff could not do much from this distance. Wrote Wilson, "I have a feeling that there is more in it than meets the eye and he probably does not wish to commit himself to writing."¹⁶⁵ Another week later, on 16 June, Wilson had another talk with Marshall, during which Marshall said that he had heard no more about Wedemeyer, but was now worried about an open feud between the two top American officials in China Theatre: Hurley (who was backing Chiang Kai-Shek "at all costs") and Wedemeyer (who felt that the Communists had some military value against Japan) were now openly warring with each other. Wilson also reported that Drew Pearson, who seemed to have access to anything he wanted, had printed the texts of several secret messages between Hurley and Wedemeyer on that subject,

plus a "graphic description of a 'near fist fight' at a Chinese Cocktail Party between Hurley and Wedemeyer's Chief of Staff."¹⁶⁶

Churchill was disgusted with the continuing leakage of state secrets in the United States. Since Pearson was also printing British state secrets which were passed to him through Washington, Churchill asked Wilson:

"Cannot you persuade General Marshall to press the inquiry into Drew Pearson's betrayal of our secrets...? We have had no satisfaction for our joint complaint and the leakage seems to be continuing. There must be some corrupt connection between Drew Pearson and someone in the United States Departments. I have been repeatedly assured by very high people sent to me by the President and others that the Americans are on the track of these guilty persons, but many months have passed and nothing emerges except that the leakage continues. It is of the utmost importance that we should have the means of sure and secret communications. You must remember that the actual text of the Scobie telegram was published by Drew Pearson, described by President Roosevelt as a 'chronic liar'." ¹⁶⁷

The British were now approached by the French for facilities to train about a hundred French Administrators. As the Foreign Office noted, "The idea is that these men when trained would be available for cooperation with whatever Allied force may eventually go into "French Indo-China."¹⁶⁸ It is likely that the F.O. had a pretty good idea as to which Allied force would go into at least part of Indochina. The British, who had historically been less specific in absolute guarantees to the French, concurred with the request with the proviso that there were no promises to their use or commitment regarding Allied operations in French Indochina. And in keeping with the increasing divergence of views the Foreign Office continued, "We see no reason to consult the U.S. Government, but in accordance with our policy of close liaison with the U.S. in matters affecting French Indo-China we should like to inform them of the French request and of the reply which we are about to return to it." They would thus inform the State Department "without repeat without asking for observations."¹⁶⁹ As Sterndale-Bennett told Denning, this was done so that the British could not be accused of working behind the back of the U.S. and presenting a fait accompli. The French must also have been betting on British forces initially entering Indochina, for back in March 1945

M. Massigli had proposed to Sir Alexander Cadogan that a Civil Affairs agreement be worked out for French Indochina, similar to that agreed for Metropolitan France.

Things were now slowly coming to the boil. A decision on more than just clandestine activities in Indochina would soon have to be made. The U.S. Chiefs of Staff had the scent of victory in the Pacific in their nostrils and were rapidly losing interest in Southeast Asia. It was now a sideshow and as far as they were concerned Mountbatten could go ahead and mop up the Japanese out there; they would concentrate all their considerable energies on the thrust to the heart of Japan. So the U.S. Chiefs agreed to an earlier British suggestion that from the military viewpoint French Indochina should be divided at fifteen degrees north latitude; however, Chiang should be consulted.¹⁷⁰ The U.S. also proposed that, very shortly, they should turn over all their responsibilities in the SWPA (South West Pacific Area) to SEAC, thereby completely freeing U.S. resources for the drive on Tokyo; the turnover date was to be 15 August. Unfortunately as will be seen, no one thought of telling Mountbatten this at the time, with unfortunate consequences. The U.S. Chiefs were thus interested in Southeast Asia only as it impacted on overall Allied operations and Lend-Lease requirements.

On 18 July the British Chiefs responded and concurred, but called on the U.S. Chiefs to support a move to transfer South Indochina to South East Asia Command. On 22 July the British Chiefs, after examining the lines of communication in Indochina, altered their proposals slightly to make the line of demarcation between commands the 16th parallel. As to the politics of it, the French were getting stronger and the United States position now reflected one of its fascinating changes of direction:

"... the discussions on trusteeship at San Francisco, as indeed the whole of the San Francisco discussions, were as you know directed toward the establishment of international machinery and great care was taken to avoid discussing the solutions of particular problems of substance. Subject to that general reservation, however, I confirm that nothing was said by the American delegation during the trusteeship discussion to imply that French authority in Indochina was not acknowledged by the United States Government. Equally, however, no positive assurance on this was given.

I do not know what conversations the United States delegation may have had behind the scenes with the French delegation, but in view of our very close relationship with the French, I think it is certain that if the Americans had said anything which cast any doubt in the minds of the French they would have been around on Lord Cranborne's doorstep at once.

As a matter of fact, Commander Stassen, who is handling the trusteeship discussion for the United States delegation, was at great pains both at the Big Five meeting and in the full committee to emphasize the voluntary nature of the trusteeship system and requested a number of amendments from the Egyptians and others who would have imported a compulsory element into the system.

In particular at one stage the Australian delegation put forward a proposal the broad effect of which would have been that the General Assembly could in certain circumstances decide to put people's colonies under trusteeship whether the colonial power concerned liked it or not. The United States were as firm in their opposition to this as anybody."¹⁷¹

At "Terminal" (Potsdam) the Combined Chiefs of Staff highlighted the shifting emphasis from Europe to the Pacific. "The invasion of Japan and operations directly connected therewith are the supreme operations in the war against Japan... No other operations will be undertaken which hazard the success of, or delay, these main operations."¹⁷² This confirmed SEAC in its secondary role.

The Combined Chiefs also recommended the Russian entry into the war against Japan -- in retrospect not a great idea. The British Pacific Fleet was to participate in the overall operations, along with the RAF Very Long Range (VLR) bomber force of 10 squadrons (increasing to 20 when airfields became available). For the final invasion of Japan a British Commonwealth land force of 3 to 5 divisions would be operating beside U.S. assault forces, along with a small tactical air force. The land force would not include an Indian division because of the language problem. The South West Pacific Area would go to SEAC on 15 August 1945, a decision of profound importance which spared U.S. forces from handling the violent nationalist uprising which erupted in many parts of Southeast Asia -- Indochina, Java, Sumatra; the British got stuck with this bloody, thankless but critically important and complex side of it.

Overall grand strategy called for an intensification of the blockade and aerial bombardment of Japan from bases in Okinawa, Iwo Jima, Marianas and the Philippines; this should create favourable conditions for the assault on Kyushu, which in turn would help in the decisive invasion of Honshu. Resources scheduled for the postponed invasions of Miyako Jima and Kikai Jima were diverted to Okinawa. The Combined Chiefs believed that only the defeat of Japanese forces in the homeland would facilitate an unconditional surrender; hopefully this defeat would convince Japanese in outlying Pacific areas to lay down their arms.

Mountbatten's primary task now was to open the Straits of Malacca. He was also to complete the liberation of Malaya, keep the pressure on the Japanese on the Burma-Siam frontier, capture key areas of Siam and establish bridgeheads in Java and/or Sumatra for subsequent clearance of these areas. But the task of the Commonwealth Force in the main invasion against Japan took priority in SEAC resources and staff effort. For this study a key decision taken here by the Chiefs was to assign operations in southern Indochina to SEAC, "since these are more closely related to those of South East Asia Command than to those of China." The Chiefs recommended an approach to Chiang by the President and the Prime Minister, with a view to perhaps later adding all of Indochina to SEAC. What that would have meant to subsequent history is worth thinking about.

The Potsdam Conference covered a lot of ground: war reparations, Polish frontiers, administration of the Ruhr, Yugoslavia, war crimes, break up of the great German industrial cartels. It also brushed Indochina. Acting on the advice of the Combined Chiefs, the President and the Prime Minister sent a message to Chiang. The Foreign Office had long recommended the direct personal approach, leaving out past history in order to avoid bringing Siam into it. Their suggestion was to emphasize that the division of Indochina was for operational purposes (their italics), undertaken to secure China's flank. The U.S. Chiefs preferred a governmental approach rather than the personal approach from Truman and Churchill, a move which the Foreign Office thought would lead to interminable delay -- and perhaps that was the reason. In fact the British Chiefs, in concurring with the F.O., felt that "further reference to the U.S. Chiefs of Staff, who have now returned to America, on method of approaching (the) Generalissimo would lead to undesirable delay." At any rate, on 1 August a message went to Chungking saying that the President and Prime Minister had agreed to propose to Chiang that southern French Indochina be assigned to SEAC. The two leaders would also send personal notes to Chiang. Midway through the conference an ungrateful British public had thrown the Conservative Churchill, their saviour, out of office and ushered in the highly debatable years of Socialist government with Clement Attlee of the Labour Party.

The personal messages to Chiang were similar. The Prime Minister's was as follows: 173

1. At the Potsdam Conference the President of the United States and I, in consultation with the Combined Chiefs of Staff, have had under consideration future military operations in South East Asia.

- 105
2. On the advice of the Combined Chiefs of Staff we have reached the conclusion that for operational purposes it is desirable to include that portion of French Indo-China lying south of 16 degrees north latitude in the South East Asia Command. This arrangement would leave in the China Theatre that part of Indo-China which covers the flank of projected Chinese operations in China and would at the same time enable Admiral Mountbatten to develop operations in the southern half of Indochina.
 3. I greatly hope that the above conclusions will recommend themselves to your Excellency and that, for the purpose of facilitating operations against the common enemy, Your Excellency will feel able to concur in the proposed arrangements.

At Kandy, SEAC officials were relieved at winning a battle (if not the war) over Indochina. Yet Denning, whose brilliant political prophecies were ultimately nearly always fulfilled, was worried.

"The division of French Indo-China by the parallel of 16 degrees north, if persisted in, is going to cause a lot of trouble... The division is purely arbitrary and divides people of the same race, while raising new and unnecessary problems to divide French civil administration between here and Chungking.

Nor can we ignore that penetration by Chinese forces into Indo-China will seriously complicate the already delicate political situation in French Indo-China. The history of Far Eastern theatre boundaries has not in the past been a happy one. With the termination of hostilities I suggest that a more realistic approach is necessary.

If it should be decided that Indo-China is to be placed in its entirety in Admiral Mountbatten's command, then I hope the position will be clearly put to the Generalissimo, since it has been the failure to notify him in advance of the decisions of the Combined Chiefs of Staff which has been the cause of most of the trouble. I think he should be told quite frankly that Indo-China has been given to Admiral Mountbatten because SEAC is the most convenient theatre from which to dispatch liberating forces, together with the necessary Civil Affairs administration and supplies." 174

The war had been over for three days and Denning's forebodings were well-founded. As we shall see, Mountbatten's urgent preparations to speed a force to Indochina received a setback when General MacArthur, in his capacity as Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), directed subordinate theatre commanders to delay landings in Japanese-held territories until his surrender ceremonies in Tokyo were completed --

this directive, given with some justification, had enormous consequences in Indochina, for a political vacuum was created which was happily filled by Communist leadership. That leadership is still there.

Footnotes: Chapter IV

- 1 Edward R. Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, 1940-1945 (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1970), p.8.
- 2 Ibid., p.15.
- 3 Ibid., p.38.
- 4 Great Britain, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) Premier 3/187, Roosevelt to Churchill, 29 January 1942.
- 5 Ibid., D.Morton to Churchill, 2 February 1942.
- 6 Stalin, incidentally, thought that a new order in India could only come by means of a revolution from the bottom, to which Roosevelt agreed.
- 7 Walter La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina: 1942-1945," American Historical Review, Vol.80, (1975), p.1279.
- 8 Churchill as quoted by Robert A. Divine, Roosevelt and World War II (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p.38.
- 9 La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill and Indochina", p.1279.
- 10 P.R.O., Premier 3/181-8, Eden to Churchill, 13 July 1943.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid., Churchill to War Cabinet, 13 July 1943.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 United States, Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943. (Washington, 1961), p.485.
- 19 PRO, War Office (WO) 203/5559, John F. Brewis to Sir H.I. Prideaux Brune, 21 December 1943.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 PRO, Foreign Office 371/41723, and Cabinet 122/812, Halifax to Eden, 16 December 1943.
- 22 La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina", p.1285.
- 23 Although this unusual performance raised a storm of controversy, the British minister thought that there was no particular reason for the audience or the remarks. Roosevelt seemed to be just

trying to find something to talk about.

- 24 PRO, Premier (Prem) 3/178-2, Churchill to Eden, 21 December 1943.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid., Eden to Churchill, 24 December 1943.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 PRO Foreign Office (FO) 371/41723, Halifax to Foreign Office, 4 January 1944.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Interview with Colonel de Langlade, 3 September 1977.
- 32 PRO, WO203/5610, Mountbatten to Chief of Staff (COS), 28 December 1943.
- 33 PRO, FO 371/41723, Dening to Foreign Office, 3 January 1944.
- 34 PRO, WO 203/5559, Brewis to Prideaux-Brune, 1 January 1944.
- 35 Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, quoting Samuel I. Rosenman (ed.), The Papers of FDR, XIII (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), p.562.
- 36 PRO, FO 371/41723; Halifax to Foreign Office, 18 January 1944.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid., Foreign Office Minute by Mr. Foulds, 22 January 1944.
- 40 La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina", quoting Churchill, p.128.
- 41 Ibid., Report by Foreign Office Research Department, 8 January 1944.
- 42 PRO, FO 371/41723, Draft of Post Hostilities Planning Subcommittee Paper, 15 January 1944.
- 43 At the Cairo conference Roosevelt casually offered Indochina to Chiang. Chiang, far more knowledgeable of the long history of Sino-Vietnamese relations, firmly declined the offer.
- 44 Ibid., Churchill to Eden and Cranborne, 11 March 1944.
- 45 Ibid., Churchill to Eden, 12 January 1944.
- 46 Ibid., Foreign Office Minute by Cadogan, 12 May 1944.
- 47 Ibid., Eden to Cadogan, 13 May 1944.
- 48 PRO, FO 371/41723 Barclay (Washington) to Mack (Foreign Office), 6 January 1944.
- 49 PRO, Prem 3/121-2, Cooper to Churchill, 13 May 1944.
- 50 Ibid., Roosevelt to Churchill, 12 April 1944.
- 51 Ibid., Roosevelt to Churchill, 4 June 1944.
- 52 Ibid., Churchill to Roosevelt, 4 June 1944.
- 53 La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina" p.1280, quoting The Hopkins Papers, box 138, Bk 7, "Memorandum--Hopkins-Eden Visit," 29 March 1943.

- 54 La Feber, p.1279, quoting Charles Taussig Papers, FDR Library Box 52, "Resume of a Number of Conversations with Sumner Welles", 30 November 1942.
- 55 PRO, Prem 3/178-2, Halifax to Churchill and Eden, 22 June 1944.
- 56 Ibid, Eden to Churchill, 2 July 1944.
- 57 PRO, Cab 105/164, COSSEA No.1, 23 October 1943.
- 58 PRO, Cab 105/106, COSSEA No.6, 8 November 1943.
- 59 PRO, WO 203/5608, General Somervell's Notes on the Mountbatten-Chiang Kai Shek Conference, 8 November 1943.
- 60 PRO, Cab 88/30, Admiral Leahy to Cordell Hull, 29 August 1944.
- 61 PRO, Prem 3/472, Churchill memo.
- 62 PRO, FO 371/27861, Dening to Foreign Office, 23 February 1944.
- 63 One example was reflected in a report by Mr. Gage of the British Embassy in Chungking, who passed on the reports of the RAF Liaison Officer at Chennault's headquarters. The officer reported having problems with the OSS, and in particular a Colonel Williams (who had been a Caltex oil man in civilian life). The Colonel was actively blocking Allied cooperation by trying to make sure that no intelligence reached the British (or the French). (PRO, WO 203/5606, Gage to Foreign Office, 10 March 1943). Mountbatten had earlier said that no matter the nationality, all agencies in SEAC would operate under his orders or go out (a reference to a "quasi-military organization", which meant the OSS). It was for this reason that General Douglas MacArthur refused to have the OSS in his Pacific Theatre; their loyalties too frequently were divided, they inclined to make their own policy on occasion, some of their major conclusions were projected on inadequate field intelligence (on the Chinese Communists, for example), and a good many of their appointments seemed to have been based on personal or political connections. The OSS were indeed staffed with brave and technically capable men; it just seems that, in the Far East at least, a knowledge of history and politics was not their strong suit.
- 64 PRO, Cab 122/1162, SACSEA to Eden, 3 May 1944.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 PRO, WO 203/5606, Dening to Foreign Office, 1944.
- 67 PRO, Cab 88/30, "French Participation in the War Against Japan." Memorandum by British Chiefs of Staff to Combined Chiefs, 5 August 1944.
- 68 PRO, WO 203/5559, J. Keswick to Foreign Office, 15 July 1944.
- 69 Ibid, Dening to Foreign Office, 6 September 1944.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 PRO, Prem 3/178-2, Eden to War Cabinet, 13 August 1944.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 PRO, Prem 3/396-4, Harriman to Hopkins and Roosevelt, 12 September 1944; repeated by Churchill to Eden.
- 74 PRO, Prem 3/178-3, Mountbatten to AMSSO, 14 September 1944.

- 75 PRO, Prem 4/75-2, Churchill to Curtin (Australian Prime Minister), 15 September 1944.
- 76 PRO, WO 203/5610, Sterndale-Bennett to Dening, 23 October 1944.
- 77 Ibid, Dening to Foreign Office, 27 October 1944.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 PRO, WO 203/5561A, Dening to Foreign Office.
- 80 PRO, FO 371/41746, Dening to Foreign Office, 9 December 1944.
- 81 PRO, FO 371/46304, Far Eastern Memoranda No. 20, "Effect of Air Attacks," 20 December 1944.
- 82 PRO, WO 203/5559, "Force 136 Future Plans, French Indo China (F.I.C.)," by Colin MacKenzie, Force 136 Commander, 28 December 1944.
- 83 These were professionally tremendously demanding missions, involving from 18 to 20 hours of predominantly evening and night flying to reach pinpoint targets in the most appalling weather and terrain to be found in Indochina. They were scheduled around the monthly full moon periods.
- 84 Major (later Colonel and Gouverneur, France Outre-Mer) Francois de Langlade, a Frenchman and former rubber planter in Malaya; now the personal representative of General de Gaulle.
- 85 The French have frequently been criticized, especially by American writers, for the modesty of their resistance efforts. In fairness it must be realized that the British, adopting Force 136's Course A, contributed to keeping the resistance at a low key, while the United States officially refused to have anything to do with the French in Indochina, before or during the war.
- 86 Interview with Colonel de Langlade, 3 September 1977.
- 87 PRO, Cab 88/35, Combined Chiefs of Staff Report, Argonaut (Yatta Conference).
- 88 After the 9 March coup the initial RAF sorties kept many of the French alive. Each member of one crew of 357 Squadron (Special Duty B-24) was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French for a particularly successful effort.
- 89 Hudson aircraft had been used at first, and the last Hudson flight was made in January 1945, when F/LT J.King, from 357 Squadron, landed and exfiltrated agents from Indochina to Kunming. The aircraft became unserviceable at Kunming and was abandoned there. Hereafter, C-47s were used for long range pickups. The first C-47 landing took place in March 1945, when a Dakota landed at Dien Bien Phu, to evacuate French wounded. These operations were mostly done at night, in high moonlight periods.
- 90 Missions like the one on the night of 5/6 June 1944, when the D-Day invasion fleet was about to cross the Channel, was not uncommon. The mission was scheduled to drop 1760 lbs. of supplies near Vinh Yen, but was aborted in flight by aircraft trouble. The autopilot was unserviceable, and after 45 minutes of manual flying the autopilot suddenly began engaging on its own. At one time the B-24 lost three thousand feet over the fog-shrouded Chin Hills, in a diving port turn which took the combined strength of both pilots to overcome. A successful drop near Hanoi on the night of 29/30 July delivered over 2000 pounds of supplies to resistance forces.

- 91 Sadly, as so often happened with these specialist groups, when SOG was disbanded at the end of the war its members had to be sent back to England; no one wanted them in the Command.
- 92 When the author began flying missions over Laos and North Vietnam in the mid-sixties, much of the area was still uncharted, with huge blank squares on the charts reading "Relief Data Incomplete."
- 93 The author, ironically, flew ECM (Electronic Counter Measures) cover over this area while supporting a strike force on a successful but costly attack on a bridge on the Lang Son-Hanoi supply route 21 years later. The irony is that about the same number of US strike aircraft were shot down by Communist gunfire as RAF planes were earlier destroyed by American gunfire. Had it not been for American support of the Viet Minh in 1944-45, there probably would not have been a need for this strike, or perhaps this war.
- 94 PRO, Air 23/3595, "Incidents Involving S.D. Aircraft," 19 February 1945.
- 95 The destruction of two RAF B-24s must be questioned. Although they had been picked up by China Theatre radar stations there is no evidence that they had intruded into Chinese airspace, and indeed appear not to have done so. The tracks, moreover, had obviously appeared from the southwest or west. And given that S.D. operations were only mounted in full moon periods it would have been a very simple matter for the interceptors to identify the "bagies" as Liberators, and under normal circumstances they should not have been fired on unless positively identified as bandits. Since the fighters would have closed to a distance of some hundreds of yards before firing, this should have been easy to do. The high visibility in bright moonlight was, in fact, a major source of concern to the author and his fellow aircrews while flying night missions over North Vietnam and Laos in the mid-sixties and early seventies.
- Finally, the Japanese did not fly B-24s. By this time there was virtually no Japanese Air Force left in Southeast Asia. Almost all remaining first-class Japanese aircraft throughout Asia had been pulled back to defend the homeland against the great U.S. strategic bombing assault on Japan, and ground fire and some AAA were about all that U.S. and RAF crews now had to put up with in the area.
- One can only surmise the feelings of the unfortunate RAF crews as the U.S. fighters bored in for the kill.
- 96 PRO, WO 203/4331, Memo by Mountbatten to COS and Dening, 7 February 1945.
- 97 PRO, FO 371/46304, Halifax to Foreign Office, 3 January 1945.
- 98 Ibid., Foreign Office Minutes, 15 January 1945.
- 99 Ibid., Dening to Sterndale-Bennett, 6 January 1945.
- 100 Ibid., Dening to Foreign Office, 5 January 1945.
- 101 Ibid., FO Minute by Sterndale-Bennett, 9 January 1945.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Ibid., Dening to Sterndale-Bennett, 12 January 1945.
- 104 Ibid.

- 105 Ibid., Halifax to Foreign Office, 25 January 1945.
- 106 Ibid., Dening to Sterndale-Bennett, 2 February 1945.
- 107 Ibid., Foreign Office Planning Paper, 25 January 1945.
- 108 Ibid., Letter from Atherton to Pleven, 14 October 1941.
- 109 U.S., FRUS, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, Vol. VI, (Washington, 1969), p.293.
- 110 PRO, FO 371/46305, Seymour to Sterndale-Bennett, 13 February 1945.
- 111 PRO, FO 371/46304, Dening to Sterndale-Bennett, 16 February 1945.
- 112 Ibid., Dening to Foreign Office, 21 February 1945.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 In this regard Bernard Fall, among others, has mentioned Wedemeyer's Germanic ancestry and his attendance at the German Army Staff College in Berlin between the wars as possibly contributing to Wedemeyer's ill-concealed anti-French bias. He also appeared to exhibit some anti-British feelings.
- 115 PRO, FO 371/46304, Dening to Foreign Office, 21 February 1945.
- 116 PRO, Prem 3/185-3, General Carton de Wiart to Churchill, 22 February 1945.
- 117 Ibid., de Wiart to Ismay, 23 February 1945.
- 118 Ibid.
- 119 PRO, FO 371/46304, Foreign Office Minutes, 22 February 1945.
- 120 Ibid., FO Memo by Sterndale-Bennett, 2 February 1945.
- 121 PRO, WO 203/5561A, Mountbatten to Dening, 25 February 1945.
- 122 PRO, FO 371/46304, Dening to Foreign Office, 27 February 1945.
- 123 The Officer was Colonel de Langlade. (Personal interview, 3 September 1977).
- 124 PRO, Prem 3/178-3, War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, "French Indo-China," 3 March 1945.
- 125 PRO, FO 371/46304, Dening to Sterndale-Bennett, 2 February 1945.
- 126 PRO, Prem 3/185-3, Field Marshal Wilson to London, 10 March 1945.
- 127 PRO, Cab 88/30, Combined Chiefs of Staff to Chief of French Naval Mission, March 1945 (replying to General St. Didier's Memo of 12 March 1945).
- 128 PRO, FO 371/46305, Churchill to Ismay, 12 March 1945.
- 129 PRO, Cab 3/178-3, Massigli-Eden interview, 12 March 1945.
- 130 U.S., FRUS, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, p.300.
- 131 PRO, FO 371/46305, War Office to Foreign Office, 14 March 1945.
- 132 PRO, Prem 3/178-3, Churchill to Roosevelt, 17 March 1945.
- 133 PRO, WO 203/5131, Mountbatten to Somervell, 17 March 1945.
- 134 PRO, Prem 3/178-3, French to Combined Chiefs of Staff, 18 March 1945.
- 135 Ibid., Wilson to British Chiefs of Staff, 18 March 1945.
- 136 Ibid., Churchill to Wilson, 19 March 1945.

- 137 In later years General Wedemeyer refused to discuss the broad aspect of his operations in Indochina when approached by the historian Bernard Fall, saying that his instructions were still classified.
- 138 Ibid., Roosevelt to Churchill, 22 March 1945.
- 139 U.S., FRUS, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, p. 302.
- 140 PRO, Prem 3/178-3, Wilson to Ismay, 27 March 1945.
- 141 Ibid., Churchill to Roosevelt, 30 March 1945.
- 142 Bernard B. Fall, in The Two Vietnams, quotes a couple of paragraphs of Chennault's autobiography (Way of a Fighter (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1949), p. 342):

... orders arrived from theatre headquarters stating that no arms and ammunition would be provided to French troops under any circumstances. I was allowed to proceed with 'normal' action against the Japanese in Indochina provided it did not involve supplying French troops... General Wedemeyer's orders not to aid the French came directly from the War Department... The American government was interested in seeing the French forcibly ejected from Indochina so the problem of postwar separation from their colony would be easier... While American transports to China avoided Indochina, the British flew aerial supply missions for the French all the way from Calcutta, dropping Tommy guns, grenades and mortars.

I carried out my orders to the letter but I did not relish the idea of leaving Frenchmen to be slaughtered in the jungle while I was forced officially to ignore their plight.

Fall goes on to comment that "Wedemeyer actually complained to the British SEAC commander that the latter's transport planes were overstepping operational boundaries by parachuting equipment to the dying French!" (The Two Vietnams, p. 57). At this time the archives were still closed and Fall was unaware of Chennault's similar complaints, which call into question the alleged soul-searching in Chennault's autobiography).

- 143 Ibid., Chennault to Marshall, 30 March 1945 (repeated Joint Staff Mission to British Chiefs).
- 144 PRO, Cab 122/1171 and Prem 3/178-3, Churchill to General Hollis (British Chiefs of Staff Committee), 31 March 1945.
- 145 PRO, FO 371/46305, Foreign Office Memo by Sterndale-Bennett, 4 April 1945.
- 146 PRO, Cab 122/1171, Admiral Fenard to Combined Chiefs of Staff, 5 April 1945.
- 147 PRO, FO 371/46306, Brain to Foreign Office, 11 April 1945; also WO 203/4331, SACSEA to London 8 April 1945.
- 148 PRO, FO 371/46306, Colonel Taylor to Foreign Office, 9 April 1945.
- 149 La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina", p. 1294.
- 150 Pierre Galante, The General (London: Leslie Frewin, 1969), p. 124.
- 151 GB, PRO, Prem 3/178-3, Truman to Churchill, 14 April 1945.

- 152 Ibid. Ismay to Churchill, 20 April 1945.
On 21 March 1945, Ismay had written to Mountbatten: "We will do our utmost to settle this tiresome business of clandestine organisations... I admit to having some sympathy for Wedemeyer's point of view, although it looks as though he might have tackled the problem on rather different lines. The one thing that must be avoided, at all costs, is friction between your command and his." (Ismay Papers, Letter from Ismay to Mountbatten, 21 March 1945).
- 153 GB, PRO, Prem 3/178-3, Wedemeyer to Mountbatten, et.al, 16 April 1945.
- 154 Ibid., Mountbatten to Wedemeyer (repeated to London and Washington), 20 April 1945.
- 155 Ibid., Joint Staff Mission to London, 22 April 1945.
- 156 An important point in studying General Gracey's operations in Saigon 8 months later. It had always been British official policy to re-establish the French, a policy which even the Labourites sustained. And earlier, before the State Department did one of its many fascinating, leaping changes of direction, it had also been avowed American policy to restore France in her possessions everywhere.
- 157 PRO, Air 23/3594, "Air Operations for Clandestine Organisations," 1 June 44 - 31 May 45.
- 158 PRO, WO 203/5608, Wilson to War Cabinet and SACSEA, 24 April 1945.
- 159 DGER meant "Direction General Etudes et Recherches", or General Directorate of Studies and Research, one of the main French groups promoting underground activity in Indochina.
- 160 PRO, FO 371/46307, Mountbatten to Wedemeyer, 6 May 1945.
- 161 Ibid., Mountbatten to Eden, 8 May 1945.
- 162 PRO, Prem 3/178-3, Wedemeyer to SACSEA, 25 May 1945.
- 163 Ibid.
- 164 PRO, Prem 3/178-3, British Chiefs of Staff to Wilson, 30 May 1945.
- 165 Ibid., Wilson to British Chiefs of Staff, 8 June 1945.
- 166 Ibid., Wilson to British Chiefs of Staff, 16 June 1945.
- 167 PRO, Prem 3/178-3, Churchill to Wilson, 18 June 1945.
The "corrupt connections" continue rampant in a culture where concepts of conscience and morality can display an astonishing elasticity. In September, 1977, Senator Henry Jackson was moved to protest against a "hemorrhage" of vital secrets -- referring in this case to the continuing unauthorized transfer of high technology to the Soviet Union. Another well-known example was the highly publicized theft, receipt and publication of the Top Secret Pentagon Papers which gravely embarrassed the United States and seriously weakened its negotiating position during a critical period.'Leaking' is an incurable American disease.
- 168 PRO, WO 203/4452, Foreign Office to SACSEA and Joint Staff Mission, 14 June 1945.
- 169 Ibid.
- 170 PRO, Cab 88/38, Memo by U.S. Chiefs of Staff, 17 July 1945.

- 171 PRO, FO 371/46323, A Poynton (Colonial Office) to Sterndale-Bennett, 23 July 1945.
- 172 PRO, Cab 88/38, and Cab 119/12, "Terminal", Report by the Combined Chiefs to the President and Prime Minister, 24 July 1945.
- 173 PRO, Prem 8/33, Attlee to Chiang Kai-Shek, 1 August 1945.
- 174 PRO, WO 203/5608, Dening to Foreign Office, 17 August 1945.

CHAPTER V

FIRST ENCOUNTERS

"I remember being met on the runway by all the Japanese generals lined up in their uniforms -- they were all looking very smart with their Japanese swords... All the populace had seen the two Dakotas circling... They knew we'd come to the hotel [Continental Palace] and they were all waiting there, French people as well as Annamite... There was a large number of Japanese soldiers lined up in a row just outside the hotel...

And suddenly they all came to attention with a tremendous rattle of guns... it was a very sharp action and they called out something... And it was such a shock to me that I thought I'd been shot -- I really did! And I was sort of expecting myself to collapse, but I didn't."

RAF Squadron Leader.
Saigon, 6 September 1945.

By early August the staff at Headquarters South East Asia Command were anticipating the cessation of hostilities. Although the war was still going on, and operations planning continued, senior staff officers were beginning to be aware of the immense problems associated with postwar reoccupational duties. Final planning for "Zipper" [the assault on Malaya] was in progress, and the 20th Indian Division, an experienced fighting formation under a singular commander, was marked as one of the spearhead units in the invasion force. During these early August days the division were strung out along a hundred miles of road, rail and oil pipeline north from Tharawaddy (north of Rangoon) to Letpedan, resting but for small-scale patrolling and skirmishing.

On 15 August a telegram had been sent by SACSEA to the Political Intelligence Department in London. It was extremely basic in nature and reported the general guidance given by SEAC to the Civil Affairs staff in planning their reoccupation tasks. The two basic essentials were that SEAC must firstly ensure that the Japanese complied fully with British instructions, and secondly that law and order were maintained "in regard to populations of occupied countries."¹ This was the bedrock which underlay all reoccupation policies.

In Kandy, a meeting was held at SACSEA Headquarters to discuss general future policy in the event of a Japanese capitulation. Attending were M.E.Dening, senior Foreign Office representative at SEAC, the SEAC Joint Planning Staff, Director of Intelligence, Civil Affairs Officer, Political Warfare Staff and others. From all quarters there were urgent demands on SEAC's limited resources, and it was decided that immediate policy would concentrate on three areas, and be dictated by military and humanitarian considerations. The Allies would seize strategic areas with forces ready to deal with any attempt by the Japanese to resume hostilities, disarm and concentrate surrendered Japanese personnel, and recover Allied prisoners of war and internees as soon as possible.² Allied forces (which would be British) would take over Japanese occupied territory as soon as possible in order to disarm and concentrate all remaining Japanese forces, establish and maintain law and order in liberated areas (an important consideration of which much will be heard later), introduce food and other essential supplies and set up appropriate civil administration (another consideration which will figure prominently later in this study).

The sudden cessation of hostilities caught the British unprepared to assume peacetime occupational duties. The situation was best

described by General Slim, Commander of Allied Land Forces South East Asia [ALFSEA]:

"The area of South-East Asia Land Forces had suddenly expanded to include Malaya, Singapore, Siam, Indo-China, the Dutch East Indies, Hong Kong, Borneo, and the Andaman Islands. Each confronted us with special and urgent problems. In two of them, Indo-China and the Dutch East Indies, nationalist movements armed from Japanese sources, had already seized power in the vacuum left by the sudden surrender, and were resisting the restoration of French or Dutch sovereignty — fighting had already begun or seemed inevitable."

Slim described the very heavy burdens placed on his forces, commitments which were expanding almost beyond capability while his forces were being released and demobilized by the Labour government in response to political pressures at home:

"Appeals from our French and Dutch Allies, cries for help, demands for troops, threats of continued Japanese resistance, apprehensions of wholesale massacre, forebodings of economic collapse, warnings of the starvation of whole populations, poured into our headquarters from every quarter."

On 13 August the British Chiefs of Staff had laid down the priorities for reoccupation after Singapore: Indochina, Siam, Java and Sumatra.⁵ Indochina was placed first on the list because Saigon contained the Headquarters of the Japanese Army in that part of the world. According to Air Chief Marshal Portal, the RAF in South East Asia had 12 transport and 14¹/₂ heavy bomber squadrons available for the job.

Earlier, while these discussions were taking place, the Duke of Windsor and a British diplomat had called on President Truman, who said that he had just received a report from the Swiss Chargé d'Affaires in Washington. The telegram received from Tokyo by the Japanese Legation in Berne "did not contain the message awaited by the whole world."⁶ Truman remarked sadly that he now had no choice but to order an atomic bomb to be dropped on Tokyo. As it was, Nagasaki and not Tokyo was bombed, and the Japanese capitulated. But when they agreed to lay down their arms on 15 August, the position was one of an armistice or ceasefire, not a formal surrender.

In mid-August the British and French Governments agreed by memorandum on the broad objectives of Allied Forces in Indochina. These were the disarmament of Japanese forces, the liberation of French authorities and the maintenance of public order. They further agreed that the French would be responsible for the administration of

Indochina, and that this French administration would possess the powers of a state of seige.⁷ The definitive agreements signed later (in September and October) were in the form of five memoranda, and covered such areas as administrative control, currency, and other matters.

At about the same time that Memorandum Number One was agreed to in Paris, Slim, in Kandy, suggested that the head of the proposed Control Commission to the Japanese Headquarters be a divisional commander.⁸ Mountbatten concurred. There was hope that the Madagascar Brigade could increase the size of early French representation in Indochina, but reports of low morale and poor discipline in that unit moved SEAC officers to recommend that it stayed in Madagascar for the time being.

Prior to receiving guidance from the Chiefs of Staff, SEAC had decided independently that the priority of occupation would be Singapore and Malaya first, followed by key areas of Siam and Java, then the rest of SEAC's area of responsibility. Twelfth Army would be charged with providing forces for occupying Burma and Siam (including Indochina), and 14th Army would be responsible for Singapore and Malaya, Java and Sumatra.

The big question was whether speed of occupation or a strong show of force was more important in the establishment of an Allied presence in Japanese-held territory.⁹ And what were to be the priorities of occupation? More specifically, the SEAC Headquarters Joint Planning Staff stated that any occupying force would have a number of tasks in addition to accepting a Japanese surrender. British forces would be faced with the immediate reoccupation of the maximum number of key points, and then would have to dispose of Japanese forces, speedily evacuate Allied prisoners of war and internees, preserve law and order, protect vital installations (and food and arms supplies), prevent sabotage and looting, provide for the relief of the civil populations and take emergency steps to rehabilitate key facilities pending the assumption of these responsibilities by civil authorities.

Long range planning -- in these hectic days four weeks hence was long range -- called for French Indochina to be occupied by one division supported by one fighter squadron, both confined to the Saigon area. This force would be enough provided it were not charged with maintaining internal security far beyond the city limits. One brigade would also

be sent to Tourane (later known as Danang).

Mountbatten's Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General F.A.M. Browning, addressed the Japanese position in a paper dated 15 August 1945.¹⁰ A "Binding Act of Surrender" would be signed by the Japanese at Government House, Rangoon, as soon as possible. The more elaborate formal surrender was to be carried out at a later date, "with the utmost ceremony possible", at Singapore. But before all this could be done it would be necessary to hold a number of meetings with Japanese envoys to agree on principles and clear up various key matters. It was thought that a series of three meetings would probably be needed, the first to establish the Japanese credentials, after which a copy in English of the Instrument of Surrender would be handed to the Japanese; the Japanese would be responsible for the translation from English. The second meeting would be held to clear up points in the document, and the third would be for the actual signing of the document. There would be no negotiations regarding terms, as the Japanese surrender was unconditional.

The Japanese would be treated according to rank. They would not be searched on arrival, and salutes to Japanese officers would be returned but not initiated. One infantry platoon would be assigned to guard the Japanese envoys, while a mobile escort of mounted infantry in jeeps and on motorcycles would surround the Japanese en route to protect them from the local population. The Japanese officers were to have British officer escorts at all times except in the privacy of their quarters.

The Japanese flight plan was to be from Saigon (Tân Sơn Nhứt) to Moulmein, Burma, then to Mingaladon via Elephant Point. A maximum of two aircraft were cleared for the flight, and they were to circle Elephant Point at one thousand feet, wheels down, before beginning the final leg to Mingaladon. The distance from Saigon to Mingaladon was 850 miles. To leave nothing to chance the Japanese would be told to depart at 1030 hours, and the drive from the airfield to Rangoon's Government House was fixed at 27 minutes. "D" day for planning would be when the SACSEA team arrived at Rangoon; this was actually 25 August. The Japanese team was to arrive on D + 1.

The SACSEA team nominated by Mountbatten to meet the Japanese at Rangoon was headed by his Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Browning, the paratroop officer who had been involved in the planning of the

airborne assault on Arnhem the year before, and who had correctly expressed misgivings to Montgomery. Since this primary meeting was to be Chief of Staff to Chief of Staff, Browning was to meet his counterpart, Lieutenant General Tatazo Numata,¹¹ of Field Marshal Count Terauchi's staff. Browning was supported by M.E. Dening, Brigadier Nicholson (Intelligence), and Brigadier Maunsell, former Chief of Staff to General Slim and recently appointed Chief of Staff to Major General Douglas Gracey, who would go to Saigon before very long as Head of the Control Commission to Japanese Headquarters and Commander of Allied Forces in French Indochina. But before the two sides met a number of things happened, one of which may have had profound effects on the course of events to come. This was MacArthur's thunderbolt to his subordinate commander [his general order to hold all reoccupation plans in abeyance until 2 September], which is discussed below.

Since Force 136 operations in Indochina had been severely restricted by the American-British political disputes, it may be worthwhile to ponder what might have been if the two principal Allies had cooperated more fully with one another. Force 136 operations during the period 1 January 1945 to 15 August 1945, a period of only 7½ months, resulted in the killing of 13,055 Japanese soldiers, for a Force 136 loss of 53 killed!¹² But the American and British/French clandestine organizations to some extent had been competing against one another, and the SACSEA Control Commission would soon find itself in a difficult environment created in large part by the dispute.

The makeup of the Control Commission was set forth on 15 August,¹³ as shown in Table 1. A lift of 25 C-47s was planned for the Commission, including one for maps, stationery and a 10 day supply of field rations. General discussions on the functions of the Commission* centred on controlling the Headquarters of the Japanese Expeditionary Forces in the Southern Region (also known as Japanese Southern Army) as a first priority.¹⁴ The Commission would "exercise general control," to include insuring that Allied surrender orders were carried out, to act as a channel for the transmission of orders, to set up a message filter and monitoring service, examine documents and collect operational intelligence and logistical data. As it was, many intelligence or

* "Commission" is emphasized here, as the Allied Land Forces had completely separate responsibilities.

other secretive units were attached to larger, more conventional sections for cover, so that it is difficult to list a precise order of battle for the entire Saigon occupation force.

It was hoped that the Control Commission would accompany General Numata back to Saigon in late August, and the Commission was placed on 24 hours notice to move from 0900 hours on 18 August. Mountbatten had earlier been confidentially told by the Prime Minister at Potsdam about the atomic bomb, and was thus anticipating an early capitulation by the Japanese. His staff were trying desperately to anticipate future movements, but hastily drawn contingency plans were being changed almost as fast as they were conceived. Underlying the changes of plans was the question of Japanese intentions (which could not be assessed until the Browning-Numata talks). But planning could not wait until the last moment. The Joint Planning Staff [JPS] and Dening were agreed that a strong escort was required for the Control Commission, but

"FIC is low on the order of priority for reoccupation, and in view of the number of Japanese in FIC and in particular Saigon/Dalat, an escort sufficient to ensure the safety of the Commission in the event of wholehearted treachery on the part of the Japanese, would in effect reach the size of an occupying force capable of controlling the country and enforcing Japanese disarmament." 15

The report concluded:

"We must either considerably delay the mission so that it has some force to protect it or we must accept that the Commission is sent in earlier with about two companies as escort and that the Japanese can be trusted." 16

The mission would be more effective if it went in early, so the JPS recommended that at Rangoon SEAC extract a promise from the Japanese guaranteeing the safety of the Commission, accept the "risk of treachery" and fly it in with a token escort of one Indian infantry company. The risk would be taken as a test case of Japanese intentions. As it happened, Dening had strong reservations about sending the mission with such a relatively weak escort, and a compromise was reached whereby Gracey and the Commission eventually arrived with slightly more than two companies -- something on the order of a battalion or so, which was enough to protect the mission, but not much else. It certainly could not control the Japanese Headquarters or enforce correct behaviour of the Japanese, and in fact the Japanese were not really brought under control for several weeks, when Gracey finally had his whole division in Saigon.

While all this was going on, and occupation forces assembled and in the process of being dispatched to a number of widespread areas, a message was received from General MacArthur which caused an uproar at Kandy. On 19 August Major General Penney,* visiting MacArthur's headquarters in Manila, cabled Browning that MacArthur had strongly requested that all subordinate commanders (including Mountbatten) delay any operations to or landings in Japanese territory until MacArthur had accepted the formal Japanese surrender in Tokyo on 28 August.¹⁷ MacArthur's reasons were as follows: first, the Japanese had so far only declared a willingness to accept the Potsdam terms, and had actually signed nothing. The Japanese appeared to be stalling and the only orders to date from Tokyo to the field concerned a cessation of hostilities. Second, any unilateral action by theatre commanders would "prejudice the whole peace settlement." Third, Field Marshal Terauchi may not obey any orders from Mountbatten, and the developing situation could have incalculable consequences. MacArthur's blunt final words to Penney were "Tell Lord Louis to keep his pants on or he will get us all into trouble." Mountbatten told his representative in Manila, Lieutenant General Gairdner (and Penney, who was on a visit), to tell MacArthur that Wedemeyer and Malinovsky were contravening MacArthur's orders, and added, somewhat lamely, "Tell him that I will keep my pants on if he will take Hirohito's off."¹⁸

In pressing General Gairdner, Mountbatten was informed that MacArthur was adamant, and precipitate action would jeopardize good relations between the Commonwealth and the United States. In a reply which he kept from MacArthur's view, Gairdner telegraphed, "As a personal view I would urge utmost caution as air is electric."¹⁹

At his 17th (Miscellaneous) Staff Meeting on 20 August 1945, Mountbatten read out the telegram from MacArthur: all reoccupation plans were suspended until 28 August, or until the surrender in Tokyo. As it turned out, a typhoon delayed the actual signing in Tokyo Bay, and the formal surrender was not effected until 2 September. Mountbatten told his staff that

"he was at a loss to understand why General MacArthur should wish to impose such a dangerous delay. It was in the nature of the Japanese that they would concentrate all their wiles on trying to evade the full implications of unconditional surrender and there was already evidence that they were engaged in illegal actions which, although not actually proscribed in the Potsdam Declaration, were entirely contrary to the Allied conception of capitulation.

* Director of Intelligence, Headquarters SEAC.

An instance of this was the movement of Allied prisoners of war from Siam to French Indo-China. The more time that elapsed before the arrival of Allied control forces, the greater were the chances of the Japanese evading the proper fulfilment of the surrender terms. 20

Mountbatten personally preferred to see the Japanese experience defeat in the "unmistakable form of successful invasion of their homeland." The Russians, he noted, had ignored all this formality and had kept on fighting to achieve their goals. He shared MacArthur's distrust of the Japanese, but did not support his reasons. For Mountbatten, the longer the Japanese were given to recover, the harder they would be to control and the more evasive they would become. He particularly drew attention to the fact that only he seemed to be obeying MacArthur, as Malinovsky and Wedemeyer were not acting in accordance with MacArthur's request. Furthermore, Mountbatten could see no reason why a signature in Tokyo would make his task any easier; in fact, to him the reverse seemed to be the case.

As some of Mountbatten's reoccupation forces had put to sea six days before the receipt of MacArthur's telegram, Admiral Power expected a 30-40% casualty rate in small ships due to mechanical breakdown and the adverse winds brought by the monsoons. The forces in the small ships would also run out of food and water, and even the larger ships could not hold at sea for an extended period.

The Control Commission thus got off to a late start. The original plan called for transporting the Commission and one infantry battalion to Indochina by sea on 27 August, to arrive in Saigon on 2 September. [As it happened, 2 September was the date of massive rioting inspired by the Viet Minh, but the British, delayed by MacArthur's ruling, were not in Saigon to prevent or control it]. These first contingents were to be followed within a week by one brigade of the 7th Indian Division; alternatively, the first two groups would fly in on 24 August, providing that "Zipper" [the assault on Singapore] was cancelled by midnight 17/18 August.²¹ On 17 August the plan was amended and 20 Indian Division was nominated instead as the Allied Land Force to go to Saigon after 7 Indian Division had established a staging base in Bangkok. In any event, British/Indian troops would have been in Saigon at an earlier date, before the Viet Minh movement was able to consolidate what power it had.

A perhaps more serious concern was the fatal effect of the delay on the question of life or death for many of the Allied prisoners of

war. Many of the dying POWs were being moved by the Japanese this moment. Terauchi had not responded to broadcasts from SEAC, and MacArthur declined to assist in contacting Terauchi through facilities in Tokyo. Mountbatten felt that he could delay his operations no longer than 28 August, or his dispersed reoccupation forces would have to return to their bases. The peaceful version of "Zipper" might even be affected. If the impending talks with the Japanese in Rangoon proved satisfactory, Mountbatten intended to proceed as planned on 28 August. He requested support for his plans from the British Chiefs of Staff. The Chiefs initially agreed with Mountbatten, but were overruled by the Labour politicians and on 22 August were obliged to direct Mountbatten to conform completely to MacArthur's wishes.

The effect of MacArthur's edict was outlined by the Commander of Allied Land Forces South East Asia. Describing the operations being readied, or already being executed, [to move the 7th Indian Division to Siam, 20th Division to Indochina, 5th Division to Singapore, 3 Command Brigade to Hong Kong, and 26 Division to Sumatra and Java], Slim wrote:

"All these operations were about to begin, indeed the first ships of the Malayan force were already at sea and all headquarters buzzing with activity, when, on 19th August, a very considerable spanner was thrown into their busy works... He [General MacArthur] decreed that the formal surrender in South-East Asia could take place only after it had been ceremonially completed in his own theatre. This, though inconvenient, might not have mattered so much had he not ordered, also, that no landings in or re-entry to Japanese-held territory would be made until he had personally received the formal surrender of the Japanese Empire." 22

Dismayed senior commanders in SEAC, many of whom saw something more personal in MacArthur's edict than the officially listed reasons, had weighed the consequences of his orders to remain in place. After satisfying themselves that the Japanese would obey the imperial order to cease hostilities, which was confirmed at these Rangoon negotiations, they decided, on humanitarian grounds, not to be confined to obeying the letter of MacArthur's edict. Slim led the resistance:

"But the delay could have had most serious consequences for our prisoners in Japanese hands. Admiral Mountbatten ... decided, in spite of the ban on landing, to fly in help to the prisoners. Our men and those of our Allies were daily dying in their foul camps; thousands were at the limit of weakness and exhaustion. Had he delayed for even a few days in sending supplies and relief personnel, many more would have died pathetically at the moment of rescue...

The state of these camps and of their wretched inmates can only be realized by those who saw them as they were at this time... It was horrifying to see them moving slowly about these sordid camps, all emaciated, many walking skeletons, numbers covered with suppurating sores, and most naked but for the ragged shorts they had worn for years or loin cloths of sacking. The most heart-moving of all were those who lay on wretched pallets, their strength ebbing faster than relief could be brought to them." 23

And finally, in a statement which remained the touchstone of his policy towards the Japanese:

"There can be no excuse for a nation which as a matter of policy treats its prisoners of war in this way, and no honour for an army, however brave, which willingly makes itself the instrument of such inhumanity to the helpless." 24

This led to another defiance of MacArthur's wishes, in the matter of the surrendering of swords, which will be discussed later. Still another fundamental disagreement between South East Asia Command and MacArthur's Headquarters lay in the repatriation of the Japanese. MacArthur wanted them out as soon as possible; SEAC thought that the half million Japanese soldiers were a source of labour to be used in rebuilding Southeast Asia. The Japanese, to put it succinctly, should be made to rebuild what they had destroyed. But above all was the race which would mean glorious relief or miserable death for perhaps hundreds of suffering Allied prisoners. Mountbatten has also underlined this overriding problem. In the Preface to Section E of the Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff he wrote, "My first and foremost task was the recovery of the Allied prisoners-of-war and internees." The records of 232 Group (RAF) state that as a result of the sudden delay in operations to occupied territory, POWs were left waiting on the airfield, in hangars and on the taxiways, for up to 36 hours with only a cup of tea to sustain them.²⁵ However, on 28 August a C-47 of 194 Squadron did proceed to land at Don Muang airfield, Bangkok (possibly on the pilot's initiative), and brought out a load of ex-prisoners, who expressed the common disappointment at not being evacuated earlier.

As soon as the Japanese delegates returned to Saigon, Operations "Birdcage" (leaflet dropping) and "Mastiff" (supplies and medical personnel) were put into effect; these will be discussed later. By MacArthur's estimate there were still up to 7,000,000 Japanese under arms. The Japanese armies in the field were still generally undefeated, and they were very much conscious of that fact. It was emphasized at

SEAC that Japan's position was the reverse of Germany. In Japan, capitulation was at the centre first; in Germany, capitulation had been in the field first, when her forces were defeated, and surrender in the centre came later. The Japanese were still capable of stiff fighting and surrendered only when ordered to do so by the Emperor. In the Southern Regions, Luzon fell completely only after receipt of the imperial order to cease hostilities, and Terauchi would not commence negotiations until the arrival of Prince Kanin.

In a response to Browning, Mountbatten stated that although ALFSEA would provide most of the personnel for Saigon, the Control Commission "would be a Hq.SACSEA responsibility." The initial SEAC postwar garrison commitments* were formidable,²⁶ and it was under these pressures that Mountbatten resisted Leclerc's pleas to include all of French Indochina within SEAC's responsibilities. As Mountbatten reported:

"From a purely military aspect I am not anxious for the inclusion at present of the whole of FIC in SEAC for the following reasons:-

- (a) I shall have great difficulty with the resources likely to be available to me in meeting my commitments in my present command, which will be further increased when I take over additional areas from the Australian Command.
- (b) Although the French will in time take over the local and administrative control of FIC, it is certain that I should be called upon to provide some forces, particularly administrative, which would strain my resources even further." ²⁷

Leclerc pursued this point, and M.E. Dening, at Mountbatten's request, called on Leclerc on 22 August to state the Foreign Office and Allied position. The general, reported Dening, "spoke with considerable vigour" on the question of boundaries in Indochina, and preferred that the Japanese stayed on until Mountbatten (with French forces) could take over, rather than let the Chinese in. Even if the boundary question remained unsettled, there would be no problems if the Chinese stayed out of Indochina. Dening replied that the problems were with Chiang and Wedemeyer. But both were in agreement about the overall importance of Indochina, which in the view of the British Chiefs of Staff was the "key to the defence of South-East Asia." ²⁸

*	Burma	3 divisions	6	RAF Squadrons
	Malaya	3 "	10	" "
	Saigon	1 "	2	" "
	Siam	1 "	2	" "
	Java	1 "	4	" "
	Sumatra	1 "	3	" "

The staff at SEAC Headquarters were agreed that a base must first be established in Bangkok before Saigon could be occupied, due to the distances involved. The Halifax aircraft could not do it, so an all-Dakota fleet would have to be gathered. It was still not possible to designate a date of execution for the plan [a "Z" day]. As the plans were discussed over and over, a definite outline took shape. The most likely candidate seemed to be a scenario calling for one brigade group to arrive in Saigon on Z + 8 to 19, with the rest of a division arriving from Z + 27 onwards. As always, the big question which pervaded all planning discussions was the attitude of the Japanese.

Field Marshal Terauchi had informed Mountbatten that he would not negotiate without a royal decree. Since a prince of the royal blood, Prince Kanin, had delivered this on 19 August, there remained the attitudes of fanatical subordinates. However, the planned earlier landings at Penang and Singapore would provide an indication of Japanese attitudes. Someone even thought of moving Terauchi's Headquarters near the sea so that Royal Navy warships could protect the Commission. In any case, the Planning Staff recommended that the Commission be completely formed and concentrated in Rangoon immediately.

On 22 August Mountbatten telegraphed Terauchi, reminding him of Tokyo's agreement to permit reconnaissance flights and supply drops to POW camps and minesweeping in certain waters. Mountbatten repeated the texts of the Tokyo agreements in case Terauchi had not received them from Imperial Headquarters, and advised Terauchi that reconnaissance and supply drops would commence at 1800 hours on 24 August. Terauchi was asked if he was prepared to allow medical teams into POW camps. On 23 August Mountbatten again wired Terauchi, reminding him of the large numbers of POWs and internees in his area: "I rely upon you to ensure that these Allied POW and Internees are treated with every care and attention and that they are not abandoned by forces under your command." Terauchi replied on the same day, by broadcast, that Lieutenant General Numata would travel to Rangoon to negotiate with Allied representatives. Mountbatten, in reply, referred to Terauchi as "Your Excellency;" he also assured MacArthur that these preliminary negotiations would not prejudice the overall surrender at Tokyo.

Terauchi's message to SACSEA was received at 1710 hours by interception of Radio Saigon:

Message to Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Allied Forces in Southeast Asia, from Marshal Count Terauchi, Supreme Commander Japanese Expeditionary Forces in the Southern Region.

Your Excellency, I have received instruction from Imperial Headquarters of August 23rd, and have the honour to inform you that we are sending Lieutenant General Tatazo Numata, Chief of the General Staff of Japanese Forces in the Southern Regions, to Rangoon as plenipotentiary. His mission is conducting negotiations with regard to cessation of hostilities in [the] coastal area within my power and informing you of those details you wish to know. 29

Then, in conformance with instructions previously broadcast by SEAC Headquarters, the message from Saigon continued:

The mission will be carried by 2 planes of M.C. type and will reach Mingaladon aerodrome between 11 and noon Tokio time on August 26th. The plane carrying the military mission will be painted white with a green cross, both on top and underneath the wings and on both sides of the body.

The plane will be flown direct to Moulmein to Elephant Point and then to Mingaladon if weather conditions do not hamper the planes. The planes will fly lower than an altitude of 250 metres and let down their landing wheels over Elephant Point. On arrival at Mingaladon aerodrome they will act in accordance with instructions of your flight. The military mission will comprise of [sic] Lieutenant General Tatazo Numata and his Assistant Chief of Staff.

Let me take this opportunity of paying my respects to your excellency. 30

A separate broadcast cautioned the British not to proceed too fast. The Japanese acknowledged receipt of SEAC's instructions concerning coastal waters and mine clearing, but "... we hope your operation will not continue until perfect mutual understanding is established between your command and ours." Mountbatten temporarily held up his planned overflights of Japanese held areas.

On 24 August Chiang Kai-Shek made the speech in which he disclaimed territorial claims on Indochina, but wanted to see the area independent. Mountbatten's diary noted that SEAC's new area stretched from west of Karachi to halfway through New Guinea, a distance of 6050 statute miles. "This is 150 miles more than the distance from the northwest corner of SEAC to St. John's, Newfoundland!!! " 31 One question arose, that of how the Japanese were going to divide their command to accommodate a surrender to the Chinese in the north. In the meanwhile, SEAC had to disabuse the Chiefs of Staff of the idea that

the African divisions were suitable for occupational duties. In fact, the Chiefs had envisioned using one of the African divisions in Burma and the other in French Indochina. There was unanimous agreement at SEAC that under no circumstances could the African troops be used for the sort of duties entailed in postwar tasking. The problem was that these two divisions would not be replaced; SEAC would just operate essentially with two divisions short.

While all these diverse problems were being tackled, the day arrived for the long-awaited meeting with the Japanese. As Brigadier Maunsell (who participated in the negotiations as General Slim's representative) said:

"British Intelligence had an idea that Japanese Headquarters didn't really know where its units were... Japanese Intelligence and Kempei Tei divulged nothing. The Rangoon meeting was held to learn if it was possible to call a ceasefire which would be effective, and would [Japanese] units respond to it.

The first meeting between the Japanese and Allied in SEAC was to discuss the ceasefire and to tell the Japanese what information the Allies must have now — where forces were, etc., and where the POW camps were." 32

The British sent a 20 man delegation to Rangoon. The main party left Kandy on 25 August in two C-47s. The Dakota "Sister Anne" (Mountbatten's aircraft) carried Lieutenant General Browning, Major General Denning, Admiral Patterson and Chinese Major General Feng Yee. The second aircraft contained M.E. Dening, Esquire [Foreign Office], Brigadier Maunsell and Brigadier Gibbons of the Civil Affairs branch. The Japanese delegation consisted of three officers and two interpreters. Their most junior officer, Lieutenant Colonel Tomura, was later described by Maunsell as a man "around whom everything seemed to revolve," a capable and intelligent staff officer. The other two Japanese officers were Numata and the Assistant Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Chudo. The Allied delegation included representatives from the United States, China, Australia, the Netherlands, France and the East Indies Fleet. Also attending were Air Marshal Sir Hugh Saunders [Allied Air Commander in Chief] and Lieutenant General Stopford [Commander 12th Army].

The Japanese aircraft were met off Elephant Point (at the mouth of the Rangoon River) by Spitfires of 221 Group and escorted into Mingaladon. On landing, the Japanese officers were accompanied by an officer escort from the Royal West Kent Regiment, and 4 men of that regiment remained on guard throughout the meeting.³³

At the beginning of the meeting, which began at 1215, a "Letter of Attorney" was handed by Numata to Browning. Numata identified himself as Chief of Staff of the Japanese Army in the Southern Regions, appointed by Field Marshal Terauchi to represent him at the preliminary negotiations. Numata said that he wished to make his salutations to the representative of the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia on the occasion of the winning of the war by the Allied Forces, and to express his admiration on the manner in which they had conducted it. He also expressed regret that the arrival of the Japanese delegation had been delayed by late receipt of orders from General Headquarters in Tokyo. He had brought with him the data required by the Allies. He felt honoured to be able to attend the meeting with Lieutenant General Browning and the other gentlemen, and expressed gratitude on behalf of the Japanese for the privilege and honour of being permitted to wear swords.

Browning wanted assurance that the Japanese surrender would be smooth and quick, as between two Imperial forces, and in accordance with the traditions and usages of war. Numata responded that Terauchi was confident that the surrender would be accomplished in accordance with the august command of His Majesty the Emperor. He added that the "suspension of arms" was a complete surprise to most units of the Japanese forces, especially at the far posts, and the orders to lay down their arms was received with a disappointment and chagrin which could readily be imagined. It was not so much winning or losing as going against the ancient traditions of Bushido. Terauchi had had a difficult time in getting his subordinate commanders to agree to the ceasefire, but he was sure that it would be done.

Browning asked if Numata knew of the surrender being scheduled for signing in Tokyo on 2 September; he understood that an imperial envoy had brought some information to Field Marshal Terauchi. Numata replied that Prince Kanin had arrived in Saigon on 19 August, but as nothing definite had been decided by then, he had no official confirmation of the exact date. Browning asked Numata when the agreements signed at Rangoon would become effective, and Numata replied that these agreements were separate from the general armistice to be signed in Tokyo and would become effective from the date of signature. Numata's brief concerned only matters pertaining to Terauchi's area of command.

General Browning then listed four Allied requirements which must be met immediately. These pertained to day and night Allied reconnaissance flights over Japanese territory, the sending of supplies and medical staff

to POW camps, free movement of Allied ships in Japanese waters, and minesweeping in Japanese-controlled waters -- all these conditions to be effective from 28 August. Numata agreed to these requests.

Rear Admiral Chudo did not contribute a great deal to the discussions. In his own way he attempted to quibble and delay, pointing to the possible contradictions between SEAC's actions and MacArthur's desires. On this occasion he merely said that the care should be taken in dropping medical supplies, because the natives would probably seize them in areas of civil disorder.

Numata then discussed the prisoners. He said that the Japanese had always wanted to give them the best possible care, and now that hostilities were over they were getting good treatment. There were now some prisoners in Bangkok hotels, a statement which did not impress the British negotiators at this late stage.

Browning wanted to know how many days it would take for news of the surrender at Rangoon to reach all Japanese forces. Numata replied that most of the command could be reached in less than one week, emphasizing that Terauchi's area contained widely scattered forces. The longest delays would be in reaching forces in New Guinea, parts of Borneo, the mountain districts in the Philippines and parts of Burma west of the Sittang River -- these had very limited communications facilities. "We want your sympathy," said Numata, since Terauchi wanted to carry out these orders as soon as possible.

Numata then mentioned that some Allied forces west of the Sittang were still carrying on the war, much to the embarrassment of Japanese troops there. Browning replied that, like the Japanese, the British had a communications problem in that particular area. [Numata was probably referring to clandestine activity].

Browning then said that there were certain other points to be raised, in addition to the four requirements already handed to the Japanese. These concerned the Control Commission's move to Saigon and the moving out of certain areas by the Japanese. Rear Admiral Chudo then asked about the relationship between MacArthur and Mountbatten. He understood that MacArthur was in overall command, and asked whether or not these local arrangements would run counter to MacArthur's wishes. Browning replied that nothing could be done in addition to the four points already discussed until the surrender in Tokyo on 2 September.

Browning ended the first day's negotiations by saying that the two staffs would meet later and work out the details. The Japanese were then handed a number of documents and a list of further information required.

The next day, 27 August, the two sides met again. The Japanese had closely studied the demands of 26 August, and Browning opened the session by asking Numata if he understood the orders given to him on the previous day. Numata replied by saying that Terauchi had given him a note for Mountbatten and asked permission to read it aloud, as it had a bearing on the present talks. In it Terauchi reiterated his intention to cooperate, but expressed concern at the present declining state of law and order in parts of his command. He also wanted advance notice of the arrival of occupation forces. Numata explained that this was necessary because the Japanese had to move out of their present lodgings and build tents and bamboo and leaf huts in the countryside in order to make room for Allied forces.

Terauchi then made a strong appeal to be able to disarm the Japanese forces himself, through the existing Japanese command chain, or problems might arise. He also suggested that certain units of the Japanese forces should retain their arms, "not exceeding machine guns", in order to maintain discipline in the Japanese forces and law and order among the civil population. [This was not an outrageous suggestion, since Truman's General Order Number One called on the Japanese to maintain order until sufficient Allied forces could do so]. Terauchi went on to request that Officers, Warrant Officers and NCOs be permitted to wear swords or bayonets. Other questions touched on concerned places of assembly and quartering of troops, communications equipment, transport facilities, clothing and medical supplies for outlying areas, and leaving the currency systems unchanged in the interest of stability. All the above impressed the British that Terauchi's basic idea was that the Japanese should not be treated as prisoners of war.

Numata then again mentioned the importance of deferring to the special spirit and traditions of the Japanese forces in order to insure a successful conclusion to the negotiations. He said that he had, in fact, just left a sick bed, bringing a doctor with him, to attend the meetings. If these requests were not granted his role would be reduced to one of a messenger and he would be ashamed to return to Saigon; this was his personal plea.

Browning did not respond directly, but asked if the Japanese had further questions. Rear Admiral Chudo then pointed out that things were not so simple. Marshal Terauchi had been given control of all Nippon forces in February 1945, but since naval operations had ceased, responsibility for the Navy now rested upon the Commander of Naval Forces

in Southern Waters. Numata added that as there were no important questions he would like to add some views of his own. He suggested that some of the discussions could conform to Terauchi's note, and a few other points could be amended; He also proposed to express his views on each article of the final document. In the first part of the main body, perhaps the words "in accordance with the direction of General Headquarters, Tokyo", could be inserted at an appropriate place.

Browning interrupted Numata to say that Numata did not seem to understand that he had been asked if he wished to raise questions for clarification, not to criticize the orders. Numata then said that he had no questions and perfectly understood the orders.

Admiral Chudo wanted to know what the term "radar" meant, as that was new to him. Lieutenant Colonel Tomura had a few questions, then Chudo came back and reiterated that negotiations concerning the Navy and Naval Air Command be held with the Commander of the 10th Squadron. Browning replied that Marshal Terauchi was responsible for everything, and to whom he delegated his authority was his own affair. But Chudo would not be put off and once more insisted that Terauchi no longer controlled the Navy, which now came directly under Tokyo. Browning repeated that Terauchi was in command. Numata asked for time to study the documents and met Browning privately for half an hour. The agreement was signed at 1845 GMT on 28 August 1945.

Dening's report of the Rangoon conference reflected his continuing suspicions of the Japanese. The terms of the formal surrender ceremony at Singapore had been worked out, but Dening was convinced that the general Japanese attitude remain unchanged. Except in Burma, the Japanese armies had not been defeated and their outlook was thus not that of a defeated nation. There was, he said, a lot of talk about "Bushido", and regardless of the terms of surrender they would try to preserve its "spurious legend." The high command would obey the Emperor, but he was apprehensive of the lower echelons. The Japanese envoys had at first tried to avoid putting their official seals to the documents, "but this had been speedily rectified." To Dening, it was of overriding importance that Field Marshal Terauchi's authority be supported, and that he be held "personally responsible" in the area of his command.³⁴ It was in the light of this political guidance that General Gracey pinned Terauchi with responsibility for the disturbances in Saigon a few weeks later.

Mountbatten's assessment of the negotiations coincided with Denning's. Mountbatten telegraphed London as follows:

"My mission at the Rangoon meetings gained the very definite impression that the Japanese forces in the Southern Regions do not, repeat not, appreciate the fact that they have been defeated, either militarily or as a nation. The bulk of their force is intact and the Japanese attitude is rather that, in this theatre, the game has been drawn; their armies are undefeated but have been ordered by the Emperor to surrender." 35

Mountbatten reported that Numata had adopted the attitude that it was open to him to negotiate terms with Browning, and Terauchi had asked that the Japanese not be treated as prisoners of war. The Japanese attitude was reflected in a document addressed to Mountbatten by Terauchi and handed over by Numata:

"In this are set forth, in considerable detail, what amount, in effect, to the conditions which are to govern the surrender and the subsequent period. Numata even went so far as to suggest rewordings to the orders which he eventually signed. He said that it did not matter so much to the Japanese whether they lost or won a war; far more important to them was the preservation of the spirit of Bushido, or in other words, the spirit of militarism.

The Japanese, though dignified, were clearly unrepentant; I am informed that Numata, who professed to be sick and was accompanied by a medical adviser, was much discomfited at the end of the proceedings." 36

Actually, Mountbatten would soon have cause to appreciate the lingering Japanese spirit of Bushido, for without their active assistance in Indochina and Indonesia the British casualty rates would have caused a political uproar.

While the staff at SEAC were feverishly preparing for the impending moves by the occupation forces, two more unwelcome problems appeared. The first fell under the heading commonly referred to as "splitting hairs", and which expended valuable staff effort to sort out. This involved the very name of the Commission. When first formed in Rangoon the Commission was referred to as the "Japanese Control Commission No.1, Saigon". The War Office objected to this designation for technical reasons and wanted it changed to "Control Increment Headquarters 20 Indian Division". By this time, as Mountbatten pointed out to the War Office, the Commission was universally known as the "Saigon Control

Commission." As late as 9 September, 48 hours before the actual fly-in to Saigon, the Commission's name was still in dispute, for the War Office did not like "Saigon Control Commission" either, so Mountbatten suggested "Control Commission No. 1, Saigon". That, too, was unsatisfactory, and the official title became finally "Headquarters SACSEA Commission No.1". It was a waste of time and effort all around, for that body continued to be known as the Saigon Control Commission. By 8 September the Commission, unsure of what to call itself, was sending messages from what was now the "No. 1 Japanese Control Commission." As late as 11 September, as the Commission and escort were en route to Saigon, SACSEA telegraphed the War Office, explaining the functioning of the Control Commission in objecting to the "increment" name:

"Saigon Control Commission is an Inter-Service body, including French members, responsible direct to SACSEA. It cannot therefore be regarded as a control increment to Hq. 20 Ind Div. Moreover, 20 Ind Div may be withdrawn before Control Commission has finished its task. [Author's note: this essentially is what happened when Brigadier Maunsell headed a reduced SAC Mission on the departure of General Gracey and Headquarters 20 Indian Division]. It has been possible to deal with Control Matters by adding small increments to existing Hdqtrs in other places [e.g., Singapore] where Hdqtrs of all 3 services exist.

No objection raised so far to title "Saigon Control Commission" and request title be allowed to stand." 37

The second unpleasant surprise lay in the last-minute U.S. withdrawal from the Control Commission. A crucial part of the Commission was its signals unit, which would handle all message traffic, ciphers, and so on. The whole mission revolved around this vital organ. Since South East Asia Command was an Allied command, Mountbatten had designated 9 members of a U.S. Signals Company, which was part of the SEAC staff, to accompany the Control Commission to Saigon. Although it would be two weeks before the Mission actually arrived in Saigon, the American withdrawal came when that body was on daily alert to fly out at a moment's notice. At SAC's staff meeting on 28 August 1945, Brigadier General Timberman, commanding US forces in Southeast Asia, abruptly announced that owing to the rapid demobilization programme and "certain administrative difficulties"³⁸ it was preferable that US signals personnel not accompany the British to Saigon. Mountbatten, knowing his politics, agreed, although it had earlier been made clear to Timberman that there was a desperate shortage of signals units and the tiny American unit [involving less than a dozen men] was scheduled to be in Saigon for only

6 weeks before being replaced by ALFSEA resources. As it was there were absolutely no replacements for these 9 Americans and their equipment, and a fully staffed signals office was unavailable to General Gracey for several weeks.

That this episode left a bad taste all around was evident in Mountbatten's sharp reply during an 8 September staff meeting to another ill-considered objection by Timberman, this time to French involvement in the occupation of Saigon. Timberman thought that the reoccupation of Indochina had "nothing to do with the French". Mountbatten retorted that when he was in Berlin a few weeks ago General Marshall had asked him how soon he could receive French forces for employment in Indochina, and how he proposed to employ them. Therefore "it was not a question of the French being nothing to do with Indochina."

It was apparent at SEAC that the US was avoiding the difficult problems (for reasons of domestic politics) and leaving a hard pressed Britain to do the difficult work of coping with the violent civil explosions in Indochina, Java, Sumatra, Burma and Malaya. With far greater resources at her disposal the United States restricted her responsibilities to garrison duties in Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines, none of them European colonial territories. Later pleas from the United States, herself enmeshed in the Vietnamese war from the mid-1960s until the early 1970s, for understanding and support from Europe encountered no sympathy and no material response in solving a problem which resulted very largely from American actions a generation earlier, for now the men who for years had been actively opposed and humiliated by the United States, the de Gaulles and the Messmers, were now influential Heads of State and Heads of Government. It was, to quote an old American saying, a case of the chickens coming home to roost.

The Control Commission by now had to share equal billing with Headquarters Allied Land Forces French Indo-China [to be referred to as ALFFIC]. The same senior officer headed both organizations, or, to use the military jargon, "wore both hats." Both commands were sailing into what were literally uncharted waters. The Civil Affairs branch at Headquarters SEAC was barely big enough to guide British Military Administrations in the reconquered British possessions, but was completely overstretched when the South West Pacific Area (SWPA), including Indochina and Indonesia [the worst problem areas] were added to SEAC's area of responsibility. The same applied to the Foreign Office representation

on the Political Affairs Staff. As late as 17 August Mr. Dening reiterated his unease over the arbitrary division of Indochina, a division decided upon for no other reason except to "save Chiang's face." Said Dening, prophetically, "The division of French Indochina by the parallel of 16 degrees north, if persisted in, is going to cause a lot of trouble."³⁹ It was Dening's urgent prompting of the Foreign Office, in early August, which had speeded the general agreement on Civil Affairs between Paris and London.

As early as 2 August Brigadier Gibbons had submitted a paper on the severe manning problem in his Civil Affairs branch. In the chain of command the Civil Affairs Officer reported to the Chief of Staff (General Browning). The CA division had a War Establishment [W.E.] strength of 14 officers, and, now that SEAC was about to grapple with some of the most difficult problems ever faced by an army of occupation, only 10 of the CA officer posts were filled; Of 13 other ranks [enlisted] positions, only 7 were filled.⁴⁰ Said Gibbons, "These numbers are very small compared with those of Civil Affairs branches in other commands. They are now becoming inadequate for the efficient processing of the Civil Affairs policy matters which have to be submitted to the Supreme Allied Commander." Worse, there was no Civil Affairs Division at Headquarters Allied Land Forces South East Asia [ALFSEA], the headquarters from which the occupational ground forces would be drawn, forces which would need up to the minute guidance from Civil Affairs experts in their duties. For it would not be the Control Commission personnel who would have to take to the streets to meet the rioters, snipers and guerillas, or protect local populations, or escort food convoys, rescue hostages and mount sweeps and patrols and come into direct contact with the civil populations -- it was the Land Forces which would perform these difficult tasks, forces which had no Civil Affairs personnel whatsoever. The CA branches in Europe [Italy, Germany, etc.] were fully staffed, but in Southeast Asia, where the problems were truly dangerous and the threat of civil war imminent, the Civil Affairs branch was understrength.

Gibbons emphasized the point: "Unless a CA Branch is established there [at Hq. ALFSEA] an essential link will be missing." SEAC Headquarters did not have any adequate knowledge of CA branches in Australian Army Group, either. The French group, though small in number, would help; they were now being trained at SEAC, for "with regard to

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French Indo-China His Majesty's Government have recently agreed, with the knowledge of the United States Government, that French Administrators should be mobilised and trained, by the French authorities, for French Indo-China in this command."⁴¹

One fundamental problem which affected all of SEAC's plans was the acute shortage of transport. As Slim later noted, his air transport capability was halved as soon as the ceasefire was announced. The US immediately prohibited the further use of all lend-lease equipment [unless they were bought by cash, which was unavailable to SEAC].

But US policy continued to cause last-minute annoyances. When the Japanese laid down their arms the USAAF immediately cancelled spare parts for 200 C-47s of the earlier Mark I, II, and III types used by ACSEA; 1600 American aircraft and gliders would soon be unserviceable. Even on a cash and carry basis, under the new rules an aircraft had to be grounded before a spare part could be requested. P-47 Thunderbolts were among 8 types of aircraft affected, although they would soon be engaged in the vicious fighting against nationalists in Java, fighting which, but for the last minute shift of territory from SWPA to SEAC, would have been an American responsibility.

A study by the Chiefs of Staff on the shipping outlook painted another gloomy picture. The "Overall Shipping Review" covering the period 1 October 1945 to 30 June 1946 discussed the situation.⁴² Military movements fell into the following categories: Ex-POW, PYTHON release [the name given to the Labour Government's system of early return of British servicemen], normal reinforcements, repatriation of Dominion and Colonial forces, movements of formations, occupational forces, Allied forces for occupational duties in the Far East, civilians, and enemy POWs. British and Allied ex-POWs received the highest priority. There were complex demands for shipping, and forces such as the 20th Indian Division were carried as and when they could be fitted in.

In October 1945, for example, the British worldwide demand was forecast as 357,800 slots, but only 279,500 could be carried by the totality of shipping available [leaving a deficit of 78,300 in October]. Deficits in November [when French forces would arrive in Indochina] and December were 108,900 and 52,900 respectively. Only in January 1946 could demands be met. By then the British task in Indochina, for example, would largely be at an end. The demands listed above did not include the requirements of the Dutch, Norwegians, Greeks, Yugoslavs, French, and so on, nor did they take into account the capacity of the two Queens

(on loan to the Americans until the end of 1945). However, if the two Queens were included, and the Aquitania [also on loan to the Americans], plus the British share of captured German shipping, the October deficit would still have amounted to 50,800, and November's loss cut to 94,700. However in September, when SEAC was pressed to move forces like the 20th Division to Saigon, and could not, the U.S. was still using the Queens and the Aquitania, as well as the British share of the German shipping, and had not given Britain the 16000 spaces per month agreed to at Terminal [Potsdam].⁴³

It was in the light of this information that Mountbatten estimated that by mid-October he would have lost a lift of 67000 because of RAPWI operations to the UK and Australia. This would leave him with a less than modest lift of 30,000, "which will be insufficient to meet my further reoccupational commitments and routine movements."⁴⁴ In fact, by 5 September he would be down to 10 LSI ships on hand, including 4 of the "Empire" class [which had longer range and carried their own small craft], and the War Office advised him that no more LSIs would arrive at SEAC before the end of November, and some of those could be Red Ensign ships without smaller landing craft. The requirements generated by the violent disturbances in the Netherlands East Indies alone were 3 LSI and 30 LST, which exceeded the total lift capacity available to SEAC.

It was a continuing problem to try and keep track of Allied POWs in Southeast Asia. Prisoners were constantly being moved from camp to camp and across national boundaries. An important source of information was the Swiss consul in Saigon, who did what he could in visiting the camps. He reported that as of November, 1943, there were 1500 POWs distributed between Nhà Bè [just south of Saigon], the immigration building, and the Petrus Ky School. Twelve hundred had been sent to Thailand [probably to work on the Burma-Siam "death railway"], and the remainder were mostly British from Singapore. There were also some RAF Special Duty aircrews (shot down over Tonkin), Australians, South Africans (from Singapore), some Merchant Navy crews and a few Americans from Corregidor. There were reports of some fights between British and American prisoners.

The prisoners worked in uniform, and were generally assigned to three main areas: the loading docks, Phu Thọ and Tân Sơn Nhứt airfields, and the railways and auto repair shops. They went to work under guard in Japanese trucks, often singing, and worked 11 hours a day, usually

hatless and shirtless. The prisoners were fed a diet similar to that received by Japanese troops: portions of rice with a fish base. They were paid in Japanese yen, plus a ten cent daily work indemnity. For Christmas in Saigon, the civil commission in charge of French-Japanese relations asked the Japanese to authorize the distribution of Red Cross gifts of food and cigarettes, with the stipulation that the POWs would receive less than the Japanese wounded. This was permitted by the Japanese, and the commission managed to add 10 pigs to the distribution of gifts. However, escapees were severely dealt with. Two Australians, one of whom was a doctor, had attempted to escape. They were recaptured, beheaded, and their hearts were cut out. The British who died were buried in a common grave near Tan Son Nhut, one on top of another. There were successful escapes. Of an attempt by 7 men to escape, 3 were shot down while running but 4 got away.

That the condition of POWs in Indochina was far better than in other areas, like Malaya and Siam, was due in large measure to some of the French, many of whom smuggled medicines, food and supplies in to the prisoners. One mining engineer named Godard became something of a local legend; he actually periodically took prisoners out of camp at night, entertained them at an out of the way restaurant, then returned them to camp before daybreak. He was never detected. One Frenchman passed on photographs, taken by telephoto lens, to the Allies; these showed prisoners being punished by being stripped and laid out in the hot sun, wrists tied to ankles.

In 1945 the list of POWs and camps in Indochina was as illustrated in Table 2. For a number of reasons, plans to unilaterally drop supplies into the camps during the war were frustrated. After the war a sharp operation was launched to drop leaflets to all known POW camps to tell the inmates and guards, [and local populations] that the war was over and to pass them instructions; this was Operation "Birdcage", which commenced on 28 August, the day after the Rangoon agreement was signed. Seventy-two sorties were flown by P-47s and B-24s to 90 camps and 236 areas spread over Burma, Siam, Indochina, Malaya and Sumatra. Targets as far away as Hanoi, Tourane (Danang) and Saigon were covered. The next effort commenced before the "Birdcage" operations were terminated on 30 August. This was operation "Mastiff", designed to introduce medical personnel, RAFWI personnel and supplies to the camps. This involved 9 squadrons of general reconnaissance and Special Duty Liberator squadrons and one squadron of Dakotas. Camps in Indochina and Siam were covered

by 159,355 and 358 Squadrons, while 8,160 and 357 Squadrons operated to the Netherlands East Indies from Ceylon and the Cocos Islands. The C-47s were from Mingladon. RAAF Catalinas were moved from Borneo to Saigon to help in evacuating the Australians.

Headquarters ACSEA [Air Command South East Asia] felt the consequences of MacArthur's orders to remain in place. The records of 345 Wing reflect the frustration caused by the sudden order to cease activity. On 14 August this Dakota Wing had received a warning order to move from Patenga to Hmawbi [Burma] to get ready for POW evacuation. On 19 August the Wing's advance party, plus 215 and 117 Squadrons, moved to Hmawbi, and the Wing was ready to operate 30 sorties per day as of 0800 hours on 21 August. Because of the demands created by "Mastiff", Hmawbi and Mingladon became the scenes of great confusion. They were small fields of limited capability, and not designed to hold 5 or 6 transport squadrons, each complete with support units; to make matters worse, Headquarters RAF Burma was in the midst of moving from Calcutta to Rangoon, which would overload Mingladon even more.

If there was confusion in the leading echelons at their new forward bases, there was chaos in the rear elements. Vaccilation, last-minute amendments and cancellations of orders, etc., drove morale down, and disciplinary problems, including crime, increased. One Dakota crew had been subjected to so many sudden cancellations that on 2 September, their patience exhausted, they ignored an order from the control tower to hold and took off on their planned mission. According to the records of 345 Wing:

"During the abortive period of false starts, sudden changes and general indecision no explanation was offered by higher authority and the patience of aircrews and ground crews were alike severely strained. A belated statement of the political difficulties involved was ultimately issued by ACSEA. " 45

To make matters worse:

"... few games of football have been possible owing to spasmodic torrential rains which flooded all fields. Games which have been played have been noteworthy for the perserverence and tenacity exhibited by the players in their attempts to adhere to the rules of Association Football under conditions more fitted for water polo." 46

This fairly well summed up the state of affairs in SEAC while the forces waited for MacArthur to get on with his ceremony in Tokyo: troops confined because of torrential rains, ships trying to mark time at sea, morale and discipline deteriorating while civil disturbances erupted everywhere, and scores of weakened and exhausted Allied POWs slowly

dying with help by air just minutes away.

On 1 September ACSEA finally dispensed with the daily "hold" orders and advised all squadrons that sorties to Siam and French Indochina were postponed until MacArthur had completed the ceremony in Tokyo. However, an RAF Dakota dropping supplies to Allied prisoners at Takhli, Thailand, looked the strip over and decided to land. The aircraft brought out 25 happy ex-POWs, and the crew, in explanation, reported that the repeated orders not to land were just "not heard" on their radio. Even "Mastiff" was held up, to be resumed on 3 September.

Main Headquarters, RAF Burma, bombarded with these abrupt orders to suspend air operations to Japanese-held areas, were now confused as to exactly when the fly-in to Bangkok would begin. ALFSEA had told RAF Burma to start on 2 September and follow through on 3 and 4 September. However, ACSEA had alerted RAF Burma to execute the fly-in on 3, 4 and 5 September. Who was correct, ALFSEA's 12th Army or ACSEA? RAF Burma finally cabled ACSEA: "Appreciate difficulties and necessity for changes of plan but would help if ACSEA and ALFSEA were on same wave length."⁴⁷ On 3 September ACSEA replied: "Appreciate your difficulties, but MacArthur, and SAC, state categorically no landings would take place before surrender Tokyo signed 2 September."⁴⁸

The Japanese would remain an enigma until Allied forces actually met them face to face. Some of the Japanese forces were in a truly ghastly state. The Burma Area Army had received no reinforcements whatsoever in 1945 (since December 1944, precisely), and units simply disappeared from the rolls as they were destroyed. The Japanese 18th Army in New Guinea was last supplied with anything in April 1944. Some units were reduced to cannibalism, and records indicate that some U.S. airmen were killed and eaten in New Guinea by starving Japanese soldiers. At the ceasefire the Japanese Commander appealed for food to enable his troops, riddled by starvation, beri-beri and malaria, to march to the concentration areas.

Indochina was in better condition, at least in the south. The north suffered from famine because the transportation system, devastated by Allied bombings, was unable to move surplus rice from south to north.

That the Japanese fought so well was due to the determination and discipline of the Japanese soldier. In the final days, with the Japanese knowing that they had lost the war, Allied aircrews making morale-lifting flights over POW camps reported the most intense anti-

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aircraft ground fire of the war, perhaps a last defiant gesture by the Japanese. The Japanese High Command was hampered by an extremely crude and ineffective communications system. In answer to Mountbatten's query, Field Marshal Terauchi reported:

1. There was no reliable telephone link between Saigon and Bangkok.
2. There was only one radio and one cable link between Saigon and Bangkok, and the Japanese had a continuing problem with communications cables due to "thefts inside Thailand," [a problem not unfamiliar to American forces a generation later].
3. There was no reliable phone link between Bangkok and Singapore; there were one cable and two radio links, but the cable was not very good.
4. There was no reliable phone link between Moulmein [Burma Area Army] and Bangkok; there was one radio link.

In assessing this poor state of communications, it seems clear that Japanese actions regarding nationalist movements in different countries were frequently the result of independent decisions by individual commanders.

On 29 August the day after Numata returned from Rangoon, General Headquarters of the Japanese Expeditionary Forces in the Southern Region sent a message to Headquarters SEAC, requesting that SEAC send two officers by air to make arrangements for the arrival of the Control Commission. However, Terauchi was apparently unaware of MacArthur's ban and he was told that no liaison team was forthcoming. Mountbatten did, however, remind Terauchi of his responsibilities in a telegram in which Mountbatten passed on reports of Japanese in Bangkok burning their barracks, an allegation denied by the Japanese. Mountbatten cabled, "I would remind you that the preservation of property intact and the maintenance of law and order are responsibilities agreed to by your plenipotentiary at Rangoon."⁴⁹ Terauchi was ordered to take disciplinary action against Japanese commanders who violated these strictures. The first warnings to Terauchi on the maintenance of public order thus came from the Supreme Allied Commander, and not from the head of the Control Commission.

Mountbatten ordered Terauchi to return Numata to Saigon, this time with powers to give orders to Japanese forces throughout Southeast

Asia. On 31 August Gracey told Mountbatten that Terauchi had cabled a suggestion that the Control Commission remain in Rangoon for the time being and maintain contact with Saigon through Numata in Rangoon. Gracey agreed with this suggestion:

"It is felt that there is considerable advantage in maintaining contact with the Japanese on our own ground, where we are in strength and where we can impose our will, rather than in enemy occupied territory, where, on present plans, we shall be in a very considerable minority and unable to impose our will if the Japanese choose to oppose it... If they do this, there is nothing which the Control Commission can do, for the time being, to alter the situation which the Japanese have created." 50

Numata was to return to Rangoon on 4 September to stay there and return to Saigon with the Control Commission. SACSEA advised ALFSEA and 12th Army that "The Control Commission will thus begin to fulfill its functions, as enumerated in the Directive issued to General Gracey from this Headquarters on 29th August, at Rangoon instead of Saigon and will act at Rangoon as the intermediary for the passing of SAC's orders direct to such Japanese commanders as he may wish to instruct." 51

Mountbatten was worried about reports that General Itagaki in Singapore, had vowed to fight on rather than surrender, but on 1 September Terauchi denied this by saying that this sort of disobedience to the Supreme Commander could never happen in the Japanese Army. Terauchi also told Mountbatten that he (Terauchi) had difficulty in walking and standing and would not be able to attend the grand surrender ceremony in Singapore. He also delayed sending Numata back to Rangoon because he would not authorize Numata to issue orders in the name of the Supreme Commander.

It should be mentioned that the old British-American dispute over Indochina persisted to the end. On 31 August Mountbatten, who had kept his small clandestine parties intact in the north, received a message from Headquarters BRITCHIN (British Forces China), stating that there was no relaxation of the anti-British/French attitude by US China Theatre Headquarters. BRITCHIN reported that the US attitude was that since the war was over there was no longer any need for SACSEA to support the French resistance movement, and if the French were in need they should contact the Chinese. 52

On 31 August Dening reported the results of the Rangoon conference to Sterndale-Bennett at the Foreign Office. 53 The Chiefs of Staff concurred with Dening's proposal that he start a "war of nerves" with the Japanese by sending them a message saying that the atmosphere at

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British Headquarters was growing worse. They told Terauchi, among other things, that Numata had the temerity to question the wording of the surrender document when he was only asked if he had any questions. A much subdued Numata was to return to Rangoon in early September to plead "with some emotion" for the "aged" Field Marshal Terauchi (who was 66). Numata recounted the incident in the Russo-Japanese War when General Nagi handed back General Stoessel's sword, and urged that Terauchi be spared a humiliation. Browning merely replied that the surrender would take place in accordance with the British tradition.

The Japanese were dignified, but obviously under strong emotional stress. Denning reemphasized his fears: "They do not consider that they have been defeated and say so quite openly."⁵⁴ They reiterated that they had laid down their arms on the Emperor's orders. Wrote Denning:

"We are thus in a position that, in a few days time, we shall be setting out to disarm an undefeated army... There was every evidence at Rangoon that they have not changed in one respect, namely, their capacity for evasion. They will get away with what they can if we let them.

As we are everywhere going in in inferior strength in the first place, the situation is still fraught with danger, and until we have a stranglehold I think we shall be wise to let the Japanese, to some extent at any rate, follow their own concept of surrender. This appears to be that Field Marshal Terauchi, as the appointed agent of the Emperor, makes himself solely responsible for the orderly surrender of all his forces. If, therefore, his authority is undermined too early, there is no knowing what will happen."

Denning knew that the delay in swiftly clamping control over Japanese headquarters, coupled with the relative weakness of British forces in SEAC's huge area of responsibility, gave the Japanese a free hand to make their own local political dispositions, distribute weapons to various nationalist groups [including the Viet Minh in Indochina], manipulate funds and funnel vast sums of money to underground groups, and permitted a not inconsiderable body of Japanese soldiers to desert and join local guerilla groups. Continued Denning:

"We have not got the interpreters, let alone forces, to assume direct control of the hundreds of thousands of Japanese involved in the surrender.

It is my view therefore that, whether we like it or not, we shall have to let the Japanese very

largely carry out the main tasks themselves, under their own officers. I regard this as very unsatisfactory from the point of view of the future, but the war having ended in the way it did [and in my view too soon], I do not think there is any other alternative. We have, I think, a very difficult time ahead." 55

On 1 September Mountbatten cabled his intentions to Terauchi, informing Terauchi that occupation forces would be arriving in Bangkok and Saigon on 3 and 11 September respectively. The complete message was as follows:

"I shall initially land forces by Air in SIAM and F.I.C. as shown below:

- (A) BANGKOK (DON MUANG) on 3/September --
1350 personnel and 190 tons of stores. These will be almost entirely Medical personnel. You will co-ordinate with the Regent of SIAM adequate measures for the safety of this Force.
- (B) SAIGON (TAN SAN NHUT) [sic] on 11/September, 1400 personnel, you will be responsible for the safety of this Force. Subsequent arrivals will be notified to you later.

2. You will provide the following to meet my Forces on their arrival:-

- (A) BANGKOK(DON MUANG) 185 load carrying vehicles.
20 Communication Vehicles. 300 Civilian Labour.
- (B) SAIGON (TAN SAN NHUT) 240 load carrying vehicles.
50 Communication Vehicles. 300 Civilian Labour.

The above includes the demand for transport for the Control Commission set out in para.17 of Annex 2 to the local agreement signed at Rangoon on 27/August 1945.

- 3. I understand that you are withdrawing Transport from RANGOON area. This will cease immediately.
- 4. I am meanwhile continuing to evacuate Allied P.O.W. by Air from SIAM.
- 5. Acknowledge receipt of this signal. " 56

On 2 September MacArthur completed the long-awaited ceremony in Tokyo Bay. With the Indochina operation approaching, a final tally listed POW camps in Baria, Nhà Bè, Long Thanh, Vientiane, Hanoi Gialâm, Sept Pagodes, Bắc Ninh, Thakhek, Mỹtho, Phnom Penh and Đà Lạt; Saigon contained 5 camps. On 2 September SEAC intercepted a radio report from an eye-witness describing conditions in Hanoi. Five thousand French officers and civilians were imprisoned in the citadel in Hanoi, and there had been scattered attacks on the defenceless French population. Outside Hanoi two Catholic priests [who had cared for 50 "half-caste" children during the war] were murdered and their bodies were thrown into the

river. There was a paradox in Hanoi in that starved bodies were piled on the Doumer Bridge while the fine shops were stocked with luxury silks and clothes and the Hotel Metropole was serving six-course meals. The Japanese were well fed.⁵⁷

On 3 September SEAC picked up a broadcast from a British POW in Saigon. He was broadcasting from Radio Saigon, which was still controlled by the Japanese. He reported that the Allied prisoners were relatively well fed and in reasonable health, thanks partly to outside help from the local French population;⁵⁸ they had also been kept fully informed of world events during the past 3½ years. The broadcast was made by an officer from a camp near the docks, and he thanked the Red Cross, YMCA and the French people for the "magnificent treatment" given to the POWs. He also gave a count of 920 POWs from Singapore in his group.

By now ALFSEA had come up with an outline plan of how they hoped to move the bulk of the occupation force to Saigon after the initial fly-in. On 30 August 12th Army received the following schedule:⁵⁹

<u>Approx. departure date</u>	<u>Method</u>	<u>No.of personnel</u>	<u>No.of vehicles</u>
16 September	Air	1280	0
20 "	Air	1280	0
24 "	Air	1280	0
24 "	Sea	10,000	1200
29 "	Sea	4000	900

This gave Gracey a sort of rule of thumb by which he could plan his tasks, although the available evidence suggests that Mountbatten at first wanted to withhold the buildup of Gracey's forces; this will be discussed later.

On 4 September a paper titled "Situation in Indo-China, as on 1st September 1945,"⁶⁰ was published. It was pertinent to SEAC Headquarters since General Gracey and the Control Commission were only nine days away from Saigon. The general summary took note of Japanese intrigue with the revolutionary groups, and stated:

"Since the announcement of the Japanese capitulation the Annamite countries from Tongking to Cochinchina have been troubled by various nationalistic revolutionary movements (Viet Minh, etc.) or Communist movements, etc., which seized power several days ago while the local governments set up by the Japanese after the 9th March 1945 resigned."

And as Gracey's subordinates emphasized later when interviewed:

"The unanimous opinion of French observers in the interior is that only the intervention of armed

Allied forces, excluding the Chinese, who are considered an additional element of disorder and agitation, can save Indo-China from very serious and bloody trouble."

Concentrating on the area of most acute interest to the Control Commission, the study continued:

"The Southern Regions, which are of the most immediate interest to SEAC, are unfortunately those on which we possess the least information... on the 27th August a revolutionary government (Communists and Viet Minh, jointly) proclaimed the Republic of Southern Viet Nam. Since then, events have taken a grave turn and the revolutionaries have proclaimed a state of seige. Great confusion reigns at Saigon. The Communists have seized cross-roads and strategic points and have cut off electricity. Newspapers have been suspended. The French population is practically interned in the area of Japanese surveyence."

The report went on to say that the Viet Minh had killed a member of an SA team dropped in on 31 August, and concluded by stating, "Only an armed force can restore order... The Japanese game in French Indochina leaps to the eyes."

The publication of this paper coincided with the receipt at SEAC of news of the huge Saigon demonstration of 2 September, and the accompanying French deaths.

Gracey did have some knowledge of conditions in Saigon. On 1 September a U.S. Dakota doing OSS work had ignored MacArthur's orders and landed at Tân Sơn Nhứt to extricate the few American prisoners of war in Saigon; it departed on 3 September. An OSS sergeant engaged in RAPWI work passed on the information that the airfield was in good condition, the Japanese "nauseatingly helpful", and there were about 50 Japanese aircraft on the field (transports, fighters and fighter-bombers).⁶¹ The Continental Palace Hotel was in good condition but crowded with French refugees. Public services appeared to be in order, and the "City [was] beflagged and bill-posted by Annamese welcoming the Mission." The Japanese appeared to be in control, although there were about 1000 "badly armed" Annamese in the streets. [The latter's presence was contrary to British orders to the Japanese to disarm the revolutionaries]. The POWs were well organized and in good condition. The report continued, "PW of all nationalities cannot speak too highly of French assistance often at great risk. Sympathies are entirely with [the] French and many [POWs] stated they wished to remain to help them."⁶² There was no visible bomb damage in Saigon, although the sergeant had not visited the docks [which had been struck on 7 February by 44 B-29

Superfortresses bombing by radar through the low cloud cover; there had been considerable collateral damage to the surrounding area, including a hospital, and a number of civilians had been killed].

It has been mentioned earlier that by now the Control Commission was officially established and working in Rangoon, and General Gracey was already acting as the Supreme Allied Commander's agent in communicating with Japanese Supreme Headquarters in Saigon. President Truman had also earlier told Prime Minister Attlee that the Japanese were being held responsible for the maintenance of public order in territories occupied by the Japanese forces, a policy which was re-affirmed at SEAC and ALFSEA. It was in this context that Gracey sent a sharply worded telegram to Terauchi when news of French deaths in Saigon reached Rangoon.

Gracey said that he had heard that a French officer had been killed in Saigon, and another severely wounded, by the Annamites, and that Annamites were molesting other Europeans. He reminded Terauchi that under the local Rangoon agreements and in accordance with the Supreme Allied Commander's orders he was personally responsible for the maintenance of law and order in French Indochina and the protection of Allied nationals. While still in Rangoon Gracey began to stamp his authority on the Japanese Headquarters:

"No further occurrences of this nature will be permitted by you. You will at once investigate the incidents which have occurred and report to me the names of the Senior Japanese Commanders in the areas concerned. You will immediately place these Commanders under arrest pending my arrival. You will replace them by Japanese Commanders who are capable of carrying out the Supreme Allied Commander's orders to the letter... You will imprison any of the local population concerned in these outrages and hand them over to me on my arrival. You will take immediate steps to suppress all political activity directed against the interests of the Allied Nations. You will rigorously suppress any subversive activity by Japanese or Japanese controlled regular or guerilla forces or police or by local authorities. You will immediately issue orders to this effect to all Japanese Forces including CLANDESTINE organisations and to all Japanese Civil and Political agencies within FRENCH INDO CHINA. You will immediately issue proclamations to this effect to all local governments and municipalities."63

And in a statement referring to the capture of Jean Cédile and his colleagues, Gracey concluded:

"I am further informed the FRENCH Officers who have been sent by the Supreme Allied Commander to assist Allied Prisoners of War and Internees have been hindered in their duties and in some cases detained by Japanese Forces. You will forthwith release these officers and you will give all possible assistance to Allied personnel in the execution of their duties. You will at once investigate all cases in which they have been hindered or detained."

Terauchi was also ordered to arrest the Japanese officers involved in what were regarded as hostile acts against Allied representatives. The Japanese did not heed Gracey's strictures to the letter, and in Cédile's case merely removed their guards to make way for Việt Minh guards.⁶⁴

Also on 4 September, a meeting was held at 1430 hours in the office of Brigadier Barrington, of Headquarters ALFSEA, Kandy; attending were representatives of SACSEA, ALFSEA and two French representatives. The question of the availability of French troops for Indochina was discussed. Barrington proposed three alternatives. One commando regiment could be moved on the French battleship Richelieu from Trincomalee on about 20 September; one commando regiment could move on 20 Indian Division ships from Madras, India, around 16 September; or one Special Air Services battalion could be moved on the Richelieu.

One of Mountbatten's representatives asked Barrington whether 350 to 500 troops could be equipped in Ceylon. After a short discussion Barrington replied that it could be done by 16 September. The French representative reminded the group that the troops would be used as commandos and would require full commando equipment. Specialist equipment was available in Dehu, and would have to be flown in. Ordinary equipment was available in Avadi^{*} and would be moved "white hot" by rail. It was agreed that vehicles would not be shipped, as the French would take over Japanese transport from 20 Division in Saigon. The French also concurred in ruling out the use of flame-throwers and PIATS^{**} at this time. The meeting ended with Barrington saying that any small shortfalls of equipment must be accepted, to which the French agreed. By 1800 the decision had been made, and both ALFSEA and SACSEA agreed that it

* Dehu and Avadi were both small towns, important for their ordnance factories. Dehu was in west central India, near Poona and Bombay, while Avadi was in east central India, near Madras.

** Projector Infantry Anti-Tank.

would be easier to equip a light commando. At this time General Headquarters, ALFSEA, was informed by telephone of the proposed make-up of the initial French forces, while the French representative departed to inform the 5th Colonial Infantry Regiment in the French Camp.

On 5 September a message was sent from ALFSEA to Army Headquarters in India (ARMINDIA), SACSEA, 12th Army and 20th Indian Division informing them of the makeup of the initial French force to be moved to Indochina. Five hundred and seventy-nine men of the 5th RIC were to proceed from Trincomalee to Indochina on the Richelieu, arriving about 1 October. A small company of the 5th Regiment would also accompany the first units of 80 Brigade to be airlifted to Saigon.

On the same day, Mountbatten addressed Terauchi on the worsening situation in Indonesia.⁶⁵ On 19 August, four days after Japan's announced surrender, Terauchi had declared [apparently unilaterally] the populous island of Java to be independent, with Sukarno as President. Mountbatten now ordered Terauchi to repeal his declaration, but it was too late. Terauchi at first denied responsibility, but on 7 September he admitted his part in this matter, which he described as "preparations for independence of the East Indies", but said it was done "according to the orders I have received from the Imperial Headquarters", and he had discontinued further efforts after the Japanese peace overtures.

At the SAC's 279th Staff Meeting of 5 September, Gracey's message to Terauchi was discussed. General Slim backed Gracey's firm line by reporting that "Field Marshal Terauchi had been given clear instructions that he was to maintain law and order."⁶⁶

On 5 September, also, the first medical team was parachuted into Saigon under Operation Mastiff, to work through senior camp officers. Supplies had been dropped into the camps since the Japanese had agreed to it on 26 August, the date of Numata's arrival in Hong Kong. Among other things, a skeleton clothing issue for 9000, including clothing for several hundred women and children, had been dropped to the Saigon area by SD B-24s. Terauchi acknowledged the arrival of this first party and said that he was discussing the POW problem with a Major Pias. On 6 September the first uniformed British troops arrived at Tan Son Nhut airfield, a small detachment (less than a platoon) of the 1st Battalion, 19th Hyderabad Regiment of India [1/19 Hybad]. They were a token escort for the 20th Indian Division advance party, which consisted of an Intelligence team, Engineers, RAF detachment and medical officers. This

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advance echelon brought radio sets with them, with which to radio back first-hand reports of local conditions to General Gracey in Rangoon. Accompanying them were the RAPWI staff who were to supervise the return of the Allied prisoners of war and internees. Royal Navy Surgeon Captain Birt arrived with them, specifically sent by Mountbatten to authenticate Terauchi's claimed infirmities.

This first operation on 6 September was an exciting start (with tragic overtones) to the occupation of Saigon. As these first heavily-laden Dakotas climbed slowly out of Bangkok for Saigon, deteriorating weather conditions did much to severely restrict the operations of the RAF transport squadrons involved in mounting the fly-in. The ferocious monsoon thunderstorms had already literally torn aircraft to pieces in midair, and 345 Wing alone had just experienced the loss due to weather of 9 aircraft in the span of a few weeks, 2 having broken up in violent air and 7 having been forced to crash-land in paddy-fields and fields throughout Burma.

En route to Saigon the cloud base was about 9000 feet, with the weather gradually deteriorating as the aircraft neared Tan Son Nhut. However, after just crossing the Grand Lake in Cambodia the Dakotas were able to descend and follow the roads leading to Saigon. Before they landed, the two leading aircraft overflew the city centre, with pilots and passengers taking a good look as they circled over Saigon. Neither aircraft was to escape unscathed after touching down at Tan Son Nhut.

As could be expected, there was a great deal of uncertainty as to how the Japanese would react to these visitors. A Royal Air Force Squadron Leader who was in the second plane described his emotions, which no doubt were representative of his colleagues. The following presents a unique personal insight into Saigon at this emotional period:

"When we went into Vietnam we had no idea how the Japanese would react; we went in without any real knowledge of whether the Japanese Command would imprison us, or impound our aircraft or cut us up into small pieces -- we were not sure. .

We had a Canadian pilot, and Lord Burleigh (I believe that was his name) was on the other plane, along with another Squadron Leader, a colleague of mine." 67

As the officer recalled, "Lord Burleigh" went with the Japanese to the Continental Hotel "to discuss with the Japanese authorities the question of our taking over all the POWs, to take them back to hospitals in Rangoon. This was our first concern, to get our prisoners out. It

was before the flights started, and we were there to arrange it."

With these last minute details arranged, the first aircraft departed. Returning in it were the first 25 British prisoners from Indochina returning to freedom. The aircraft, its crew and passengers were never seen again after departing the Bangkok refuelling stop. In a tragic postscript to the war the aircraft was caught in a thunderstorm over the Gulf of Martaban and broke up less than 40 minutes out from Mingaladon. The squadron's commander was also lost, leaving a Flight Lieutenant in temporary command at Hmawbi. The second aircraft was spared because it was immobilized at Tân Sơn Nhứt, having burst a tyre on landing.

Continued the officer:

"We arrived shortly after the other aircraft had landed. I remember being met on the runway by all the Japanese generals lined up in their uniforms -- they were all looking very smart with their Japanese swords."

The Canadian pilot got out and, "the Canadians being a very extrovert and happy-go-lucky people," saluted the ranking General [who was probably Numata, though the officer called him Yamashita], and shook his hand.

"I came after the plane crew. My reaction was that I knew I had to salute this man*, but I had only a week before seen the emaciated Prisoners of War, British POWs, lying in the hangars of Don Muang airport -- waiting -- and they were in such a shocking condition, with bones sticking out of their bodies, that this was etched into my mind, and the idea of shaking hands with a man who was responsible for this to happen was just beyond my capability. I just couldn't shake hands with him, so I didn't -- whatever the consequences might have been. He offered his hand and I just walked past him."

He saluted the other generals and walked on past them to a waiting car, chauffeured by a Japanese soldier.

This first party was then driven to the Continental Palace Hotel, or rather to the side of the square opposite the hotel, for a large crowd had gathered around the hotel.

"All the populace had seen the two Dakotas circling, and they had waited in the square to welcome us. They knew we'd come to the hotel, and they were all waiting there, French people as well as Annamites (as we called them in those days).

*This policy was soon changed, and Allied Forces were directed not to initiate salutes to Japanese Officers.

I had to get out, and I was wearing jungle green. I didn't have a revolver or anything, as it seemed pointless to me to have any kind of weapon. And I walked through this crowd, with the Japanese driver leading the way."

The atmosphere was highly charged as the group pushed its way through the large crowd and neared the hotel for their first meeting with the Japanese. Having cleared the crowd to cross the street to the entrance of the hotel, the party now saw a "large number of Japanese soldiers lined up in a row just outside the hotel." The moment must have been as traumatic for the Japanese.

"And suddenly they all came to attention with a tremendous rattle of guns -- each one was carrying a gun -- I don't know quite what they did now, but it was a very sharp action and they called out something. What it was I don't know, because this was the first time I'd experienced this. And it was such a shock to me that I thought I'd been shot -- I really did! And I was sort of expecting myself to collapse, but I didn't."

The officer's small group were led into the hotel and given "massive" rooms; "and they had roses in the room."

While the 20th Division's advance party was becoming acquainted with local conditions and radioing back reports to General Gracey in Rangoon, the Squadron Leader, who had flown his operational bombing tours in Europe and who was now a public relations officer, decided to visit the POW camps. Because of the Dakota's burst tyre he was now stuck in Saigon, and he thought he should tell the prisoners that the war was over and they soon would be back in safe hands and in hospitals for treatment. He also wanted to tell them of the latter stages of the war. So he immediately left the hotel and walked up Rue Catinat,* a main street which led from the Cathedral to the river. He asked directions to the POW camp from the first person he met; it was a fortuitous meeting, and the stranger personally took him to the camp.**

The officer was, to his surprise, allowed into the camp by the Japanese, "with no trouble at all." The prisoners, as it turned out, were fairly well informed and knew about the atomic bomb.⁶⁸ In at least one of the French camps the prisoners, after hearing of the war's end on their hidden radio, had negotiated with the Japanese colonel in command, with the result that inside the camp they were left in complete control while the Japanese continued to maintain a guard on the outside of the camp; it was a matter of "face."⁶⁹

* Later renamed Tu-Do.

** The helpful stranger was a Prince who later married the American heiress Barbara Hutton.

It was more than likely that the other camps came to similar agreements.

Since there appeared to be no Japanese problems in regard to the repatriation of Allied POWs, the big remaining question concerned the state of public order, the political situation and the disturbing number of armed revolutionaries at large, especially since more detailed reports of the recent riots were now being made available to the Control Commission and to Allied Land Forces French Indochina. The figure of 1000 armed men, recently passed by the OSS man, only included those immediately visible, the "tip of the iceberg", perhaps.

On 6 September, as the RAPWI team and the detachment of 1/19 Hybad troops were arriving, General Manaki sent a message to General Gracey in Rangoon.⁷⁰ Manaki, in his capacity as Commander of Japanese Forces in South Indochina, expressed his regrets at the rioting and the killing of Frenchmen, but assured Gracey that the situation was well in hand, calm prevailed and things were not as bad as they might seem. On 7 September, 1 more Dakota arrived, with 15 passengers on board.

Terauchi had stubbornly defied Mountbatten in one matter. When he was ordered to send Numata back to Rangoon on 4 September, he was to empower Numata to issue orders in Terauchi's name. This Terauchi absolutely refused to do, and the British had no option but to accept it. Terauchi stated that his power to command came directly from the Emperor, and, because of the essential nature of the Japanese Command, he had no authority to delegate these powers to a subordinate.

Wrote Terauchi:

"My right of command over all the forces in the Southern Region is endowed directly from the prerogative of the Supreme Command of our Emperor and I am in no position to hand it down to any junior officer." ⁷¹

Numata was thus of limited value to the Allies in Rangoon and he was returned to Saigon on 9 September, as a second and larger advance British echelon landed in Saigon.

Captain Birt wasted no time in examining the Field Marshal; his diagnosis was that Terauchi had suffered a slight stroke which had resulted in mild residual paralysis in the left leg. Birt reported that Terauchi would be capable of going to Singapore for the surrender ceremony. On 8 September Terauchi cabled his "sincere thanks" to Mountbatten for his "heartfelt kindness" in sending Surgeon Captain Birt to examine him. Terauchi's telegram gave an indication that he did not intend to go to Singapore for the surrender, and intimated that Birt had concurred in this, although Birt in fact saw no medical reason why

Terauchi could not attend the ceremony. Mountbatten, however, decided that Terauchi might be considered a martyr should he be forced to attend and excused him; General Itagaki, Seventh Area Army Commander, signed for Terauchi. Before long Terauchi was examined again, this time by a board of doctors from the 20 Indian Division medical staff. Their findings, to be discussed later, showed Terauchi to be regressing rapidly. As for the formal surrender itself, held on 12 September 1945, Mountbatten described it as follows:

"With the exception of Numata, who looked almost human, I have never seen six more villainous, deprived or brutal faces in my life. I shudder to think what it would have been like to be in their power. When they got off their chairs and shambled out, they looked like a bunch of gorillas with great baggy breeches and knuckles almost trailing on the ground. The two Admirals were dressed in khaki like the five Generals, and the only way you could tell the difference was that the Generals wore spurs." 72

Slim wrote of the paroxysm of rage and the tears of bitterness on Itagaki's face as he signed the unconditional surrender.

On 8 September Gracey sent Numata back to Saigon with the second advance group, and two days later he accused Terauchi of violating the terms of the Rangoon agreement by permitting movements of Japanese forces, for reports were being received in Rangoon that Terauchi was paying off and disbanding bodies of Korean and Formosan troops, including POW guards who would probably be wanted for trial as war criminals. Answering Gracey's reprimand, Terauchi denied reports of Viet Minh bodies moving north with the Japanese, saying that the Japanese movement was in conformity with Allied orders to clear Saigon of non-essential Japanese, and the movement was being accomplished by oxcart and Annamite labour.

On the same day, 8 September, Group Captain Grandy, * commanding 341 Wing, began the second wave of British occupation forces into Saigon, flying in aircraft "V" of 62 Squadron. This lift was carried out in 26 sorties by aircraft from all squadrons.⁷³ Included in the group were more engineers, No.3 RAPWI Control Staff and medical teams, plus 125 Cash Office and 38 Pay Master personnel, and another token handful of troops to escort the cash [one officer and 6 men of 1/19 Hybad]. They landed in Bangkok and remained overnight there. On 9 September Grandy led the aircraft into Tan Son Nhut.

The sole task of the first arrivals (6 September) was the care and repatriation of the POWs and internees. The second group was

* Now Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Grandy, Governor and Commander in Chief, British Forces, Gibraltar.

responsible for RAFPWI problems, the procurement of information on war criminals, and the protection of American property, such as it was.⁷⁴ This was the message from SACSEA to the Control Commission, but other tasks included a survey of the political climate and vital points (including the airport, power station and docks), and early reports were radioed back to Gracey in Rangoon. Numata also arrived on 9 September, with orders from Gracey to release all French parachutists still in prison, disarm the Viet Minh police, establish law and order with Japanese forces and establish a curfew in Saigon and Cholon; the riot of 2 September had prompted Gracey to issue these orders.

A day earlier, on 8 September, Mountbatten had passed on to the Chiefs of Staff Leclerc's request to fly 500 troops of the 5th RIC to Tonkin to support the French Resistance Movement "who are in a very serious situation."⁷⁵ Leclerc returned from Tokyo during this period and, to expedite matters, reduced his request to fly in 60 paratroopers in 3 Dakotas to Vientiane or Luang Prabang. While in Tokyo MacArthur had told Leclerc that he should get as many French troops in Indochina as possible, and to tell Mountbatten that he (MacArthur) agreed with Leclerc. The Chiefs replied that Leclerc should be told to ask Wedemeyer in China, which Leclerc knew would be a fruitless exercise. Leclerc did, however, strenuously object to the presence of Chinese troops in Laos; for there were no Japanese troops in that country. As it happened, the Chinese were not interested in the possibility of Japanese in Laos; they were more interested in profiteering and stayed in Laos long enough to harvest two opium crops.

During the next 48 hours hundreds of men of several different battalions moved to Hmawbi to begin a journey to what almost all of them thought would be a welcome change from Burma, to a "land flowing with milk and honey."⁷⁶ As the first major fly-in started on 11 September, the troops' expectations were at first fulfilled, but the euphoria was not to last long.



TABLE I

CONTROL COMMISSION

<u>TEAM</u>	<u>No. of Personnel</u>	<u>Function</u>
A HEAD OF MISSION	28, including Head of Mission (Gracey) and Chief of Staff (Maunsell), 4 interpreters of Japanese, 6 translators, and 16 clerks.	Command and Control
B CONTROL TEAM	23 persons, including Foreign Office, Civil Affairs, RAF, RN, etc. reps.	Control and examination of Japanese actions on surrender terms, distribution of supplies, political liaison (Foreign Office rep), aid to RAPWI, French liaison.
C INTELLIGENCE TEAM	<p>1 <u>Examination Section</u> (15 pers)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>2 <u>Security</u> (31 personnel, including 5 counter-intelligence officers)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>3 [a] G.S.I.(s) (12 pers. 6 ofcirs and 6 other ranks)</p> <p>[b] "P" Section (3 pers.)</p>	<p>Collection and examination of ciphers, maps, documents, Orders of Battle, technical data and collection of operational and logistical data.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Security of Mission, future plans for security of forces; Counter-intelligence and normal security duties.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Monitor and control Japanese signals.</p> <p>Contact, control and collection of information from clandestine forces. Provision of local interpreters, guides etc.</p>

TABLE I (continued)

<u>TEAM</u>	<u>No. of Personnel</u>	<u>Function</u>
D SIGNALS TEAM	2 communications aircraft, 40 pers, incl. aircrews and motorcycle drivers.	Maintain Communications with SEAC and other Hdqtrs as required, establish Signals Centre, Control Japanese W/T stations.
E MEDICAL TEAM	2 doctors, 2 orderlies.	Study medical and supply requirements for RAPWI and local inhabitants, Medical treatment of Commission.
F ESCORT	Pending reinforcement, 1 Company of Indian infantry and 10 orderlies. (Actually 1/1 GR troops under Lt.Col.Jarvis)	Protection of Commission
G CAMP COMMANDANT	(Est). 12	Provide two mess units, each to feed 50 British Officers and 20 Indian other ranks.

Note: This table is representative, as it reflects a somewhat smaller establishment and differs slightly from Gracey's own list (which itself was not strictly accurate as it carried the U.S. signals team on the rolls). Gracey's orders showed the Commission to be made up of a Control Team [60], Intelligence Team [25], Signal Team [50], Medical Team [4], Administrative [53-51 of whom were "Mess Units and N.C.E.], and Attached [54]. Under "Attached" were two F.S. (presumably Field Security) Sections [20], Interpreters and Translators [9], GSO II, Signal Liaison Officer and Clerk, RCM Officer (RAF), E Group Officer, EIS Officer, Naval Intelligence Officers [2], Force 136 [7, including the Honorable Hugh Astor], OSS [3], ISLD [4], and CSDIC (I) [3, including Louis Allen, authority on the Japanese in Southeast Asia and author of "End of the War in Asia," etc.].

TABLE 2SAIGON AREA CAMPS [FO 371/46338]

(Source dates from November 1944 to March 1945*)

<u>CAMP</u>	<u>POWs</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Saigon Camp A (Part of No. 1 Camp Thailand) Immigration Building, Rue Jean Eudel.	520 UK, 60 AUST/NZ, 180 USA, 500 DUTCH, 250 Misc.	<u>1510</u>
Saigon Camp B - Polyclinique Market Square formed by Rues Louis Baez, Victor Olivier, Bercesi and Vincersini.		
Warehouses No. 11 and 11 (near docks)	1100 UK, 500 AUST/NZ, 750 DUTCH	<u>2000</u>
Civil Jail 69 Rue de la Grandiere	140 Misc (known to contain French, possibly UK)	<u>140</u>
Work Camp, Saigon- Cap St. Jacques Road (67 Km from Saigon)**	400 UK, 400 DUTCH	<u>800</u>
Airfield between Saigon- Cap St. Jacques (77 Km from Saigon)***	200 UK	<u>200</u>
Nhà Bé (Synthetic Petrol Plant)	50 AUST/NZ	<u>50</u>
Tân Sơn Nhất (main Saigon airfield)	300 INDIAN	<u>300</u>
	SAIGON Area Total:	<u>5000</u>

* The Japanese coup of 9 March eliminated most of Force 136's sources.

** Thought to be the Baria airfield.

*** Thought to be the Long Thanh field, which was not quite as far from Saigon.

Footnotes: Chapter V

- 1 Great Britain, Public Record Office, WO 203/4422, SACSEA to Political Intelligence Department and Far Eastern Bureau, Foreign Office, 15 August 1945.
- 2 Ibid., Conference Secretariat Minute 5/212, 11 August 1945.
- 3 Field Marshal Sir William Slim, Defeat Into Victory (New York: McKay, 1961), p.529.
- 4 Ibid., p.530.
- 5 Great Britain, PRO, CAB 122/493, Chiefs of Staff Meeting, 13 August 1945.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 GB, PRO, FO 371/46307, 16 August 1945.
- 8 GB, PRO, Air 23/3045, Supreme Allied Commander's meeting, 16 August 1945.
- 9 GB, PRO, WO 203/2430, SACSEA Headquarters, Joint Planning Staff Amendment to JPS 181, nd. (probably 12 August 1945).
- 10 GB, PRO, WO 203/2168.
- 11 Personal interview with Brigadier M.S.K. Maunsell, Chief of Staff, Headquarters SACSEA Control Commission No.1 (Saigon Control Commission), 20 April 1977.
- 12 GB, PRO, WO 172/1777, SEAC Headquarters War Diary, 15 August 1945.
- 13 GB, PRO, WO 203/2168, JPS Conference Secretariat 5/221/2, 15 August 1945.
- 14 Papers of General Sir Douglas D. Gracey; also GB, PRO, WO 203/4566, 15 August 1945.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 GB, PRO, WO 172/1778, JPS Paper 185, 22 August, 1945.
- 17 GB, PRO, CAB 88/39, Mountbatten to British Chiefs of Staff, 21 August 1945
- 18 GB, PRO, WO 172/1778, 20 August 1945.
- 19 GB, PRO, WO 172/1778, Gairdner to Mountbatten, 21 August 1945.
- 20 GB, PRO, WO 172/1777, SEAC Headquarters War Diary, 19 August 1945.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Slim, Defeat Into Victory, pp 530-531.
- 23 Ibid., pp.531-532.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 GB, PRO, Air 25/1022, Operational Record of 232 Group [Transport].
- 26 GB, PRO, WO 172/1778, JPS Paper 185, 22 August 1945.
- 27 GB, PRO, WO 203/5608, draft SEACOS, 30 August 1945.
- 28 GB, PRO, CAB 96/9, Far Eastern Committee, "Policy Towards Siam, (Annex II)", 14 July 1945.
- 29 GB, PRO, CAB 122/493, 23 August 1945.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 GB, PRO, WO 172/1778, SEAC Headquarters War Diary, 24 August 1945.
- 32 Brigadier Maunsell, personal interview, 20 April 1977.

- 33 Papers of General Sir Douglas D. Gracey. A report of the Rangoon negotiations may also be found in PRO Air 23/3251.
- 34 GB, PRO, Air 23/3045, 28 August 1945.
- 35 GB, PRO, WO 172/1779, Mountbatten to London, 30 August 1945.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 GB, PRO, 70371/46323, SACSEA to War Office, 11 September 1945.
- 38 GB, PRO, Air 23/3045, 28 August 1945.
- 39 GB, PRO, WO 203/5560, 17 August 1945.
- 40 GB, PRO, WO 172/1775, SEAC Headquarters War Diary, 2 August 1945.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 GB, PRO, Air 20/5091, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Joint Planning Staff, 9 September 1945.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 GB, PRO, Air 20/5091, SACSEA to London, 5 September 1945.
- 45 GB, PRO, Air 26/486, Operations Record of 345 Wing [Transport].
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 GB, PRO, Air 23/2375, 2 September 1945.
- 48 Ibid., 3 September 1945.
- 49 GB, PRO, WO 203/2435, 29 August 1945.
- 50 GB, PRO, WO 203/4361, 31 August 1945.
- 51 GB, PRO, WO 203/5644, SACSEA to ALFSEA, 31 August 1945.
- 52 GB, PRO, WO 203/3367, BRITCHIN to SACSEA, 31 August 1945.
- 53 GB, PRO, WO 203/4361, Dening to Sterndale-Bennett, 31 August 1945.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 GB, PRO, Air 23/2375 [06368], Mountbatten to Terauchi, 1 September 1945.
- 57 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, 2 September 1945.
- 58 GB, PRO, WO 172/1781, 3 September 1945.
- 59 GB, PRO, WO 203/5644, ALFSEA to 12th Army, 30 August 1945.
- 60 GB, PRO, WO 203/2178.
- 61 GB, PRO, WO 203/3861, No.1 Japanese Control Commission, 7 September 1945.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 GB, PRO, WO 203/5608/5644, Gracey to Terauchi, 4 September 1945.
- 64 Jean Cédile, former Commissioner and Governor of Cochinchina: personal interview, 26 October 1945.
- 65 GB, PRO, WO 172/1781, 5 September 1945.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Personal interview, 1977. The former RAF Squadron Leader is still in Government service and wished to remain unnamed.

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- 68 Incredibly, when the RAF officer left Saigon a week later his aircraft lost an engine just after take off, crashlanded in a paddy field and burned furiously. Thanks to the foresight of the WRAF stewardess, who jettisoned the door in flight, there were no fatalities.
 - 69 Letter from M.Vallat, Secretary General of the Federation of Indochina Resistance Nets [Fédération des Réseaux de la Résistance en Indochina], 31 October 1977.
 - 70 GB, PRO, WO 203/2435, 6 September 1945.
 - 71 GB, PRO, WO 172/1782, Terauchi to Mountbatten, 7 September 1945.
 - 72 GB, PRO, WO 172/1781, Mountbatten's Diary, 12 September 1945.
 - 73 GB, PRO, Air 26/482, Operations Record of 341 Wing.
 - 74 GB, PRO, WO 203/4566, SACSEA to Control Commission, 20 September 1945.
 - 75 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, SEACOS, 8 September 1945.
 - 76 Frontier Force Regimental Magazine, February 1946, Vol.III, No.1,. p.38.

CHAPTER VI

GRACEY ARRIVES IN SAIGON

In this Division there must be NO SURRENDER
under any circumstances whatsoever. Remember
the Zulu Chief's exhortation when surrounded:

"If we go forward, we die;
If we go back, we die;
Let us go forward, my brothers."

Major General Douglas D. Gracey, OBE, MC.
Commander, 20th Indian Division.
13 April 1942.

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General Gracey's role in postwar Saigon has generated a great deal of heat, if little light, but it is necessary to define and trace his terms of reference before any intelligent assessment of his actions is possible. This proper definition of his directive is precisely what has been missing or misrepresented in nearly all accounts published to date of the British involvement in French Indochina.

The Potsdam decisions, the highest policy-making level, have already been discussed in their relation to Indochina. Since the Chinese were militarily and politically incapable of action in Indochina, the decision to assign the northern half of Indochina to China was taken for the purpose of saving Chiang Kai-Shek's "face", or political reputation. This arrangement also permitted the United States to enter behind the Chinese and work for the exclusion of France from Indochina. After the political decisions had been made, the British Chiefs of Staff in turn delegated the task to the theatre commander, Lord Mountbatten.

The British Chiefs of Staff sent Mountbatten a broad overview of British tasks following the surrender of Japan.¹ In reference to the first task ("Reoccupation of key areas of occupied territories, in order to secure effective control and to enforce surrender and disarmament of Japanese Armed Forces"), the Chiefs said:

"The dispatch of a force to Saigon to ensure control of the headquarters of the Japanese Southern armies. We are arranging to ship French forces and civil affairs personnel to follow up your forces, which should not occupy more of French Indo-China than is necessary to ensure the control of the headquarters of the Japanese Southern armies." ²

Mountbatten created two distinct organizations to deal with the problems of French Indochina, both of which were commanded by the same officer.³ The first of these was made up from South East Asia Command resources and was responsible directly to Headquarters SEAC; this was the numerically smaller Headquarters SACSEA Commission No.1 (the Control Commission). The second organization was Headquarters Allied Land Forces French Indo-China (commonly referred to as ALFFIC), a far larger organization containing British and French land and air forces, including the 20th Indian Division and attached units. To appreciate more clearly the role of the British in Vietnam, it is necessary to understand from the beginning that these two organizations had one thing in common, and one thing only: the Commander [and even that was no more than nominal, for Brigadier Hirst, as will be seen, actually ran the 20th Division in Gracey's name, Gracey being preoccupied primarily with Control Commission affairs].

The two organizations were tasked by two separate headquarters and reported to separate headquarters. The Control Commission was tasked by and reported directly to Headquarters South East Asia Command (Mountbatten). Allied Land Forces French Indo-China was tasked by and reported directly to Headquarters Allied Land Forces South East Asia (Slim), going through 12th Army for routine matters.

Gracey's directive as Head of the Headquarters SACSEA Control Commission was contained in a document dated 30 August 1945; the following statement composed most of paragraph two (Organization):*

The following directive refers to your duties in that capacity in which you will be responsible directly to me. ** Your duties as Officer Commanding Allied Land Forces will be detailed in a further directive from Commander-in-Chief ALFSEA.⁴

As Head of the Commission, Gracey was given 9 tasks, which are summarized as follows:

1. Assume control of Headquarters Japanese Southern Army and supervise the surrender.
2. Transmit Mountbatten's orders to Japanese Headquarters.
3. Obtain information regarding Japanese dispositions and supplies.
4. Control Japanese communications.
5. Study the RAPWI problem and render all possible aid.
6. Report on Indochina's lines of communication, airfields and port of Saigon.
7. Open river and sea approaches to Saigon, using Japanese resources.
8. Reduce the size of Japanese Headquarters as soon as possible.
9. Maintain liaison with the local French Government, keeping Mountbatten informed.

These, then, were General Gracey's tasks as Head of Commission. There is nothing in his terms of reference which even remotely suggested liaising with the Viet Minh or regarding anyone but the French as the legitimate government.

The lineage of Gracey's directive as Commander of Allied Land Forces French Indo-China will be discussed in descending order. President Harry S. Truman's General Order Number One stated explicitly that the Japanese were responsible for maintaining law and order in their occupied areas until Allied forces could take over. Because of the erroneous nature of later writings about the occupation of Saigon, it is necessary to begin here, for in this supreme document there is no mention of

* This directive is to be found in Appendix I.
** Mountbatten.

Communists, Việt Minh, Huks, or any other group maintaining the public order anywhere in occupied territory.

The Headquarters South East Asia Command Joint Planning Staff (JPS) issued Force Plan 1, "The Occupation of French Indo-China." Although this will be discussed in detail at a later stage, it is pertinent to examine the key points at this time. The JPS stated that "the eventual reoccupation of FIC is a matter for the French",⁵ and this statement dictated the conduct of the whole operation. The objective was to introduce a force into Southern French Indochina "in order to control Japanese Southern Army Hq, to concentrate and evacuate Allied prisoners of war and internees and to disarm Japanese forces." There would be two phases to the occupation, with Phase I coinciding with the British occupation and Phase II with the takeover by French military forces and civil affairs personnel. Under "Army Considerations," the following was directed:

"The primary task of army forces will be to secure the Saigon area, including* control of Japanese Southern Army Headquarters. Other tasks which should be undertaken as soon as sufficient forces are available include:-

- (a) disarming and concentration of all Japanese surrendered personnel.
- (b) collection and evacuation of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees.
- (c) maintenance of law and order and protection of vital installations.
- (d) apprehension of war criminals.⁶

On 23 August the Commander in Chief, Allied Land Forces South East Asia, issued ALFSEA Operational Directive No.8 to his four senior subordinate commanders^{**}; this directive discussed the broad outlines of reoccupation tasks and priorities. In carrying out the plans "to effect the military occupation of BURMA, MALAYA, FIC^{***} and NEI",⁷ the general policy would be as follows:

- (a) disarm and concentrate all Japanese forces,
- (b) protect, succour and subsequently evacuate, Allied prisoners of war and civilian internees;
- (c) establish and maintain law and order,
- (d) introduce food and other civil affairs supplies,
- (e) set up the appropriate civil administration.⁸

* Italics added.
 ** Lt.Gen.Stopford (12th Army); Lt.Gen. Dempsey (14th Army); Lt.Gen. Christison (15 Indian Corps); Lt.Gen. Roberts (34 Indian Corps).
 *** French Indo-China and Netherlands East Indies.

The general priorities for reoccupation were now, in order, Malaya, Saigon (FIC) and Burma; Siam; NEI. In keeping with Mountbatten's directive, Allied commanders were ordered to control the Japanese through their existing chain of command. There were also to be five phases of reoccupation:

- PHASE I - Present phase including Operation TIDERACE, the initial stages of Operation ZIPPER, and completion of occupation of BURMA. The establishment of an air staging base at BANGKOK and the Military Mission at SAIGON.
- PHASE II - Completion of modified Operation ZIPPER and the re-occupation of MALAYA.
- PHASE III - Completion of occupation of FIC and SIAM.
- PHASE IV - Regrouping to form BURMA Command and to re-allot responsibilities of Twelfth and Fourteenth Armies.
- PHASE V - Further regrouping to include forces for NEI.

It was emphasized that because of the overall fluid situation phases may overlap and phase timings were uncertain.

The ALFSEA directive to Gracey^{*} was prefaced with the clarifying statement that these tasks were separate from those of the Control Commission, in which capacity he would be directly responsible to SACSEA. In his role as Commander of Allied Land Forces French Indo-China, Gracey "will come directly under command Commander-in-Chief, Allied Land Forces, South East Asia."⁹ Gracey would remain under 12th Army until his arrival in Saigon, at which time he would report directly to General Slim at ALFSEA. The following tasks were given to General Gracey as Allied Land Force Commander:

- (a) Secure the SAIGON area, including Headquarters, Japanese Southern Army.
- (b) Disarm and concentrate all Japanese forces in accordance with the policy laid down in this Headquarters' letters 10028/G(0)1 dated 19 and 28 Aug 45.
- (c) Maintain law and order and ensure internal security.
- (d) Protect, succour and subsequently evacuate Allied prisoners of war and internees.
- (e) Liberate Allied territory in so far as your resources permit.

You will give such directions to the French Indo China Government as are required to effect these tasks. In these matters you will consult the senior French Land Forces Commander. 10

* Allied Land Forces South East Asia Operational Directive No.12, 28 August 1945 -- see Appendix G.

This ALFSEA directive, the basic "Masterdom"* document, was retransmitted to the 20th Indian Division.**11 The one common thread through all command levels was the maintenance of public order, which, it will be seen, was common to the Foreign Office as well. Thus by the end of August General Gracey, who was supervising the Control Commission from Rangoon, had his directives in hand.

The Foreign Office minutes reflect the concern felt in London over the delicacy of the problem of keeping the public order. It was suggested that General Gracey himself was asking that the impending civil affairs agreement with France not commit him to maintaining law and order, as he wished to concentrate on the affairs of the Japanese. Dening echoed the general unease over this potentially dangerous issue; in a telegram of "particular secrecy", Dening told the Foreign Office that he was worried about the attitude of the French civil affairs officer at SEAC headquarters.¹² Dening warned that the British should be wary of committing themselves to becoming involved in law and order. He recalled that there was a history of resistance in Indochina, long before the Japanese arrived in Southeast Asia. The French would claim that the resistance movements were Japanese-inspired and would call on British troops to quell Annamite uprisings. Having said that, Dening did recognize that the European French were in real danger from internal disorders. Said Dening prophetically:

"I think we should avoid at all costs laying ourselves open to the accusation that we are assisting the West to suppress the East. Such an accusation will rise very readily to the lips of the Americans and Chinese and would be likely to create an unfavorable impression throughout Asia."¹³

Dening concluded his letter (marked "Important" by the Foreign Office) by recognizing the difficult task which lay ahead of General Gracey:

"I do not know the answer but feel I should warn you of the situation which is likely to arise and the difficulty with which the Force Commander will be faced in Indo-China."

Dening's message reflected the worry felt throughout South East Asia Command at the prospect of becoming involved in what the British Army (with their long experience in it) called Internal Security duties. It was, to the British Army, one of the most difficult and least rewarding tasks and one which they would avoid if at all possible.

* The code name for occupation of French Indochina.

** As 20 Indian Division Operational Directive No.13, 3 September 1945.

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This question was raised when the draft Anglo-French civil affairs agreement was sent by the Foreign Office in London to South East Asia Command for comment. It was specifically met head-on by Brigadier E. Gibbons*, Chief Civil Affairs Staff Officer at Headquarters SEAC. In his reply Gibbons noted that COSSEA 314 had defined a limited British role in Indochina, and objected to paragraph 5(c) of ALFSEA Operational Directive No.12 to General Gracey; this, "which charges him with the task of maintaining law and order and of ensuring internal security, apparently without limitation of area, looks overwide."¹⁴ For the same reason he objected to the London text of the Anglo-French civil affairs agreement (Memorandum No.1), which "could well lead to serious commitments, political as well as military, and it is recommended that a less definite undertaking, which should be subject to the Allied Commander-in-Chief's primary task not being compromised, should be substituted for it."¹⁵

The Foreign Office minutes, in commenting on Denning's note of caution on how far to commit British forces to law and order, noted that the War Office had echoed Denning's question, especially in regard to Cambodia. The fact was that there were not enough troops immediately available for the job:

"From the military point of view the main difficulty is that owing to the very small number of British forces involved it will be quite impossible for the Allied Commander in Chief to ensure the maintenance of public order if so requested by French authorities."¹⁶

In fact the draft Memorandum was reworded to reflect these fears, and paragraph two stated that the French would ask the Commander, ALFFIC (Gracey) to maintain law and order in particular areas where necessary; a second redraft said almost the same thing, with the maintenance of public order being one of the three main tasks "where the competent French authorities will have so invited the appropriate Allied commander." The final redraft stated that the involvement in the maintenance of law and order in any but the British key areas was to be referred to Mountbatten for decision. It can thus be seen that the British responsibility for the maintenance of public order was never an issue; the only question was the area of involvement, and the highest political and military officials were agreed that the Commander of Allied Land Forces was charged with the keeping of public order in his key areas, which included most of Saigon.

* Gibbons had wide pre-war experience as a Civil Affairs officer in Africa.

In his examination of the London text of Memorandum No.1, Gibbons made the following remarks. The principle effect of the memorandum was to "place squarely upon French shoulders responsibility for conducting the administration of the country."¹⁷ A second result was to place General Gracey open to demands from the French to maintain public order "in such areas as the French authorities might invite him to take over." Wrote Gibbons, who as principal Civil Affairs Officer was cognizant of the dangerous situation facing the Allied Land Force Commander in Saigon:

"I think it must follow from COSSEA 314 (which restricts the British to key areas) that the Allied Commander-in-Chief must be armed with full authority, including authority for administering the civil population, in respect of those areas of French Indo-China which he finds it necessary to occupy 'to ensure control of the Headquarters of the Japanese Forces', but that his responsibilities should not extend beyond the limits of these areas. He will presumably control the 'occupied areas' through French Civil Affairs Officers who will be attached to him and responsible to him." ¹⁸

In view of the above, the areas to be occupied must be more clearly defined and qualified. Gibbons went on to warn Mountbatten of the "considerable" consequences, political and military, in taking on the maintenance of law and order in other than the "occupied areas." Gibbons wrote:

"I incline to the view that the Supreme Allied Commander should be chary of taking on this quite undefined commitment. Certainly paragraph 5(c) of the directive dated 28 August 1945 issued by Hq ALFSEA to Major General Gracey, which charges him with the task of maintaining law and order and of ensuring internal security, apparently without restriction of area, looks dangerously wide." ¹⁹

Finally, Gibbons recommended deleting the appropriate paragraph (5c) in the ALFSEA directive and replacing it with "a less definite undertaking of assistance in maintaining order, subject to this not involving interference with the proper discharge of the primary tasks." Furthermore, French forces should come under General Gracey, but if the French were to be responsible for the rest of the country an independent French Command in Indochina was "immediately necessary."

As it turned out, the force of Gibbon's argument persuaded Mountbatten further to define Gracey's responsibility for law and order, but the establishment of an independent French Command was simply not feasible at that time. Also, the War Office had told Mountbatten that

they were under "considerable pressure" from the Foreign Office and French authorities to complete the draft civil affairs agreement.

It was thus that Gracey appears to have received an amendment to paragraph 5(c), ALFSEA Operational Directive No.12, literally as he was departing Rangoon for Saigon. This was the amendment dated 12 September 1945, whose text is as follows:

Para five C ALFSEA OP Directive number twelve dated 28 Aug is being amended in view of a memorandum defining adm[inistrative] and jurisdictional questions connected with the presence of Allied Forces in FIC. Memorandum still in draft stage pending approval by War Office [,] SACSEA and French Authorities. Amendment will not be issued until paper finally approved...

Your primary task as defined by SEAC Directive to you dated 30 Aug is by controlling HQ Japanese Southern Army to enforce the surrender and disarmament of all Japanese Forces. You will report earliest possible the areas you require to occupy to ensure this control and any other area necessary to ensure release of RAPWI. This need not necessarily include all of Saigon as indicated in para Five A of ALFSEA Directive Number Twelve. Such areas defined as key areas. 20

At Mountbatten's direction, Slim provided Gracey with the final (and only) amendment to his directives* re-emphasizing that the French were to be responsible for civil administration:

In these areas you will exercise full authority over both military and civilian but working through French Civil Adm. Outside such areas Adm[inistration] will rest solely with French authorities exercising powers of state of seige. You will not have any responsibility for the maint[enance] of law and order outside key areas unless called upon by the French authorities. In such event the request will be referred to HQ SACSEA before action taken. 21

[As will be discussed later, there is some question as to whether this amendment actually reached Gracey prior to 19 September].

Dening had reinforced this view at a staff meeting on 8 September, when he again raised the question of action by British troops against forces not under Japanese command, and reiterated that this should be avoided. Mountbatten's staff also had no intention of disarming all irregular formations, only those under Japanese control. An exception was made in the case of the Việt Minh whose disarmament was ordered when their violent impetuosity began to seriously hamper the work of

* Appendix H.

disarming and concentrating the Japanese.

Foreign Office minutes of that time noted that British troops were "not to subdue unruly elements in the country apart from the Saigon area, as that will be left to the French, who say that they have adequate troops standing by in France and Madagascar awaiting transportation." It was also noted that under the surrender terms the Japanese were responsible for maintaining law and order, and that reports were being received that small parties of Japanese were joining Việt Minh attacks on the French. There was complete anarchy in areas controlled by the Việt Minh (which was recognized as a largely Communist organization); in these areas the economic situation was deteriorating rapidly, and (anticipating Gracey's proclamation) the area would have to be administered under martial law.²² The Foreign Office was also aware that the advance party in Saigon had reported great unrest and agitation and had urgently requested the dispatch of British troops.

Published discussion of the Saigon occupation is voluminous, so that it is surprising to find that no mention has been made of the most important consideration of all, and that is what may well be called the "Athens connection." Experience of events in Athens shared by many of the staff officers in the Headquarters of South East Asia Command, engendered extreme reluctance to become involved in Saigon and was ultimately responsible for the despatch of the amendment to ALFSEA Directive Number Twelve to Gracey. This restricted his role as far as was possible without making his trip to Saigon completely useless. It was also the reason why Mountbatten initially gave serious thought to withholding the rest of Gracey's division from him in the mistaken belief that if Gracey was so weakened he could never become involved. As has been mentioned, the palpable Allied weakness in the early stages produced only the reverse result by encouraging the Communist-led Việt Minh to aim higher and become more intractable. It was a lesson which Western leaders learn and relearn, akin to periodically reinventing the wheel. The influence of the Athens operation was so important to the planning of the occupation of Saigon that it would be well worth while to discuss it briefly prior to moving to Saigon with Douglas Gracey.

In 1944, with the Germans no longer a factor in Greece, Britain sent General Scobie to provide general humanitarian relief for Athens, which was invested by the EAM, a large Communist guerilla group called, in the manner of Communist insurrectionary organizations, the "National

Liberation Front." Although the need for guerillas was by then at an end, the EAM and ELAS (National Popular Liberation Army) refused to disband.

Not long after Scobie arrived (with the Greek government) the Communists, surprised by the weakness of the British occupying force, made a violent bid to overthrow the government and seize power. By this time they had (as in Vietnam) set up a provisional government, eliminated most of their rivals and were in control of all Greece except for Athens and Salonika. The only group to resist them was the organization of Colonel Zervas.

Scobie's forces consisted mainly of units being reconstituted and civil affairs personnel, all of them spread very thinly throughout Athens, so that at the onset of the Communist assault he found himself in desperate straits at the port of Piraeus and, in Athens itself, the savage fighting forced the British to abandon the RAF Headquarters in order to consolidate a perimeter around Scobie's own headquarters. Reinforcements eventually arrived and, in a series of bitter battles [in which tanks had to be employed], the Communists were pushed out of the capital. As the Communists were beaten back the Left, in their characteristic and often effective fashion, orchestrated an anti-British campaign which reached a crescendo in the United States. So powerful was it that Roosevelt feared the political consequences of support for Britain on the issue.

The British had no liking for this deadly little sideshow; to them it was an internecine squabble, Greek against Greek, and Greek politics at the time were of extreme complexity indeed. But, had the British not been there, the Communists would unquestionably have seized power in Greece.

Churchill appears to have been genuinely hurt by Roosevelt's lack of support or sympathy. In a message to Roosevelt the Prime Minister wrote:

"I hope that the British reinforcements now coming into Attica may make a more healthy situation in Athens. You will realize how very serious it would be if we withdrew, as we easily could, and the result was a frightful massacre, and an extreme Left-Wing regime under Communist inspiration installed itself, as it would, in Athens. My Cabinet colleagues here of all parties are not prepared to act in a manner so dishonorable to our record and name... Stern fighting lies ahead, and even danger to our troops in the centre of

Athens. The fact that you are supposed to be against us, in accordance with the last sentence of Stettinius' press release, as I feared has added to our difficulties and burdens." 23

Roosevelt went so far as to suggest disbanding the famous (and anti-Communist) Greek Mountain Brigade and the Sacred Squadron. With Roosevelt being more and more influenced by Stalin, Churchill again dug in by himself:

"The disarmament of the Greek Mountain Brigade, who took Rimini, and the Sacred Squadron, who have fought so well at the side of British and American troops, would seriously weaken our forces, and in any case we could not abandon them to massacre... I am sure you would not wish us to cast down our painful and thankless task at this time. We embarked upon it with your full consent. We desire nothing from Greece but to do our duty by the common cause.

In the midst of our bringing food and relief for a Government which has no armed forces, we have become involved in a furious, though not as yet very bloody struggle.

I have felt it much that you were unable to give a word of explanation for our action.... "

Roosevelt responded with a lame reply about American public opinion and the local political situation. In the words of the senior British officer²⁴ intimately involved in Greek guerilla operations [one of many officers who went from the Mediterranean to South East Asia Command], the British "got their fingers severely burned" in the Athens insurrection. To them, Gracey's occupation of Saigon, appeared analogous to Scobie's operation and they feared the possibility that he would be dragged into a civil war, with the events of Athens repeating themselves exactly in Saigon. Hence it was that successive restrictions were placed on Gracey's freedom of action until the very safety of his initial force was in jeopardy. This too was the reason why Dening, a most talented political officer, made his comment that should the British be involved in a fight against the native revolutionary government, accusations would "rise very readily to the lips of the Americans."

Although this comparison was widely made at SEAC, the view that the Athens and Saigon situations were similar was not universally shared. General Penney*, for example, disagreed with Myers about this, pointing out that the French were overthrown by the Japanese, and not by a local Vietnamese rebellion, and the Việt Minh did not appear to be significantly stronger now [24 September] than before the war. Nationalist sentiments, however, had clearly been given impetus by the Japanese, but it was

* Director of Intelligence, SEAC.

doubted whether the Việt Minh commanded widespread popular support.

Penney's intelligence summary was wired to the Cabinet:

"I have gained [the] personal impression that there may be [a] tendency to consider situation in FIC as similar to that in Greece and Venezia Giulia on re-occupation. I think this incorrect. Only real point of general similarity is that in all 3 cases our action has tended towards reestablishment of prewar situation at expense of leftist movements and minority control. In dealing with FIC and later NEI we should consider the situation in relation to our general position in the Far East and not be led astray by comparison with situations in Europe."

Gracey's original plan, submitted to ALFSEA on 9 September and approved, called for him to occupy the following areas: Saigon-Cholon-Thu Dầu Một; Mỹtho; Nha Trang-Ba Ngo; Phnom Penh; Đalat. In view of the amendment of 12 September he was directed at the last moment to further confine his key areas. He was thus limited to the Saigon area until in October the Chiefs of Staff authorized him to expand his control to Thu Dầu Một and Biền Hòa.

The mechanics of the move of the Commission and the 20th Indian Division to Saigon were contained in a document titled "Force Plan 1", published by the Headquarters SEAC Joint Planning Staff. Both "Army Considerations" and "Political Considerations" ("a matter for the French") have already been discussed, as have Phases I and II (the occupation of key areas and follow up by French forces). The document stated that political advice would be available from the Foreign Office representative to the Commission. [However, this expert advice did not become available until late September]. The plan also called for a staging base to be established in Bangkok prior to flying in the Commission, but the latter was flown in through Bangkok before the base was fully built up.

An overview of the main plan was as follows: (a) Hospital and RAPWI groups fly to Bangkok on 3/4 September; (b) 1 infantry brigade group of 7th Indian Division plus RAF to Bangkok; (c) 1 infantry brigade group of 20th Indian Division, plus Control Commission and RAF components, to Saigon through Bangkok; (d) remainder of 7 Division flown to Bangkok, vehicles by sea; (e) remainder of 20 Division to Saigon by sea; (f) 26 Division to Bangkok by sea, if required.

Navy forces available for the occupation of French Indochina were as follows: 1 cruiser, 2 destroyers, 2 HMDLS, 1 Flotilla of auxiliary minesweepers,* 4 Escorts, 1 LSH, 3 LCI (L), and the Richelieu and

* Numata, in Rangoon, was ordered to bring all ships and craft (including lighters and minesweepers) available to the Japanese on the Saigon river to a state of operational efficiency by 11 September; all river pilots, regardless of nationality, were to be assembled in Saigon for the Royal Navy Port Party's arrival on 6 September.

Triumphant of the French Navy. From the Army, the 20th Indian was provided, plus the following French forces: 1 Company of the SAS* Battalion, the 5th RIC and 1 Light Commando from the 5th RIC. Air forces available for the operation were 5 C-47 Dakota transport squadrons. The force being airlifted would be moved to Saigon between Z+6 and Z+14, with a smaller proportion being moved in sorties lasting to Z+27 (Z day being 5 September, the date of the occupation of Singapore)]. The Control Commission and an infantry brigade (80 Brigade) were to be airlifted to Saigon, the rest of the division (32 and 100 Brigades, plus supporting units) being moved by sea.²⁵ A grand total of 25,748 troops of all kinds, including RAF and French personnel, were involved, plus 2400 vehicles. The last brigade was not programmed to arrive in Saigon (by sea) until mid-October.

The Navy was tasked to sweep and open the Saigon River, organize port services, dan channels and check the marked channels, and impose the surrender terms on Japanese naval surface and air forces. There were British and American airdropped mines in the main channels, but these were supposed to be sterile by now. The sweep was to begin on Z+25 and last two days.

The Army was advised that the Japanese 38th Army, which was responsible for Indochina, had its headquarters in Hanoi (SEAC's area), and would have to be controlled through the supreme Japanese headquarters in Saigon.

The Royal Air Force was to provide one single-engine fighter squadron and one reconnaissance squadron (28 Squadron with Spitfires, and 684 Squadron with Mosquitos); 273 Squadron actually replaced 28 Squadron, which went to Bangkok in a simple switch of destinations. As the operation got under way the RAF provided the Staging Post at Saigon, technical facilities,** and ran airline servicethrough Saigon for all points East. A unique "Gremlin Task Force" was also established, of which more will be said. The RAF expected to lose one flying day out of three in September, but the weather actually turned out to be worse than that.

All clandestine organizations were ordered to maintain their cover until further notice, and were directed to provide guides, local intelligence and related duties.

* Special Air Service

** These included HF Approach Control with DF capability, VHF/DF, Beacon (ASV), limited ground radar cover, UHF airfield control world Guard channel, and HF point to point net.

Headquarters SEAC recognized a series of VPs (Vital Points) which were considered to be targets for immediate seizure by Allied Forces;* these were modified later in view of the restrictions added to the Allied Land Force Commander's tasking. It was again reemphasized that the Japanese were responsible for the maintenance of law and order in conformity with Truman's General Order Number One.

Japanese troop strength in French Indochina was listed as 71,000. Of these, 40,000 were in the south, primarily in three divisions (2nd, 22nd and 55th), 1 Independent Mixed Brigade, and Headquarters and non-divisional troops in the Saigon area. In Saigon were located the Headquarters of Southern Army (with a detachment in Dalat), part of 38 Army (2250 men), and the 2nd Division, which had recently been withdrawn from Burma for reforming (8000men). The remainder of 9000 included Navy and Air Force strength. What was left of the 4th Air Brigade (which for three years conducted offensive and defensive air operations from Burma) was now scattered through southern French Indochina; it was down to 58 Army and 9 Navy aircraft, also scattered everywhere (16 in Saigon and 9 in Bien Hoa).

Force Plan 1 directed that relations with the Japanese were to be "correct and coldly polite"; there would be no shaking hands with the Japanese, who would, if they cooperated, be granted certain privileges not including the general bearing of arms. All Japanese, regardless of rank, were to salute all Allied officers, and failure to do so constituted an offence. No Japanese officers were to be saluted, and there would be no feeding in the same room or sitting at the same table. Since the first objective was the disarmament of the Japanese, it was necessary to avoid friction until this had been accomplished. At the discretion of the senior Allied officer (with the minimum rank of Major General), the Japanese could be treated as either Surrendered Personnel or Prisoners of War. [In fact, however, this decision was taken at the highest level, and the Japanese, with certain exceptions, were treated as Surrendered Personnel, which left them in formed bodies, responsible for their own maintenance].

A source of trouble later on was the policy of using the Japanese to guard their surrendered weapons until relieved by the Allies, but with the British area of control now practically reduced to Saigon city, not much else could be done during the first few weeks. At the senior

* Saigon and Phnom Penh power plants, wharf area, foundry, ship repair and barge building works, navy yard and arsenal, machine shops, Cam Ranh Bay base, Nhà Bè oil storage depot, Tân Sơn Nhứt airfield, Saigon Radio station.

Allied commander's discretion, a small number of rifles only could be issued to Japanese forces for self-protection. Also, "no orders or warnings will be given by Allied Commanders which cannot be enforced, if necessary, by strong military action."*

Exceptions were made to the general policy of treating the Japanese as surrendered personnel in the case of members of the following groups, all of whom were subject to immediate arrest: the Kempei Tei (the "Japanese Gestapo"); the Tokumu Kikan (Japanese Intelligence Organization); Hikari Kikan (Japanese/Indian Organization); Japanese General Staff Intelligence and associated personnel; war criminals, and guards of POW and Internee camps. ²⁶ Gracey also carried with him a booklet containing "black" and "grey" lists, recording the names of 64 prominent known or suspected French and Vietnamese collaborators. The next day, on 1 September, the External Affairs Department, Government of India, to clear the air, queried the Secretary of State for India on the delicate question of cooperation with the French missions in India:

" Question of (?paramount)** urgency has (?arisen) of grant of facilities to French organisations at present on Indian Soil for movement to and from French Indo-China under military auspices. One of these organizations is entitled French Colonial mission and corresponds to Civil Affairs Service for (?omission) of re-establishment of French authority in F.I.C. Decision must turn on H.M.G.'s policy (?toward)s French in Indo-China.

2. Subject to your comments we propose to assume that it is H.M.G.'s policy to facilitate re-establishment of French influence in F.I.C. and to that end to afford reasonable facilities under control to the organisation." ²⁷

On 3 September the Secretary of State for India replied:

"Your assumption is correct. Subject to concurrence of S.A.C.S.E.A., to whom you will no doubt repeat these telegrams, all facilities may be accorded to French organisations." ²⁸

And it was only on 4 September that the 15 August warning order alerting 100 Brigade for a move to the NEI was rescinded.

At last the time came to fly the main party of the Control Commission and escort into Saigon. The RAF's 341 and 345 Wings (of 232 Group, Transport) provided the Squadrons, which a few days earlier had been

* As Gracey stated after issuing his Proclamation of 19/21 September, the Japanese were to be responsible for enforcing it outside the key areas.

** Telegram reproduced verbatim.

moved around to their final bases.* The troops to fly in (excluding the small detachment of 1/19 Hybad which had flown in a week earlier) were two companies of 1/1 Gurkha Rifles (GR) and two companies of 1/19 Hybad, plus 80 Brigade Headquarters, a tactical headquarters, and a minimal number of drivers and engineers.

A 1/1 GR newsletter had this to say:

"On the 13th [of August] we had first heard of a prospective move of 20 Div. to take over a part of Japanese occupied territory. Great speculation followed, and most of us plumped for the Dutch East Indies, though it was not many weeks before we realized how very fortunate we had been to escape going there and having a battle with the Indonesian Nationalists. We had originally expected to move before the end of August, but it was not until the 10th September that the first contingent of the Bn moved off to HMAWBI airfield near RANGOON en route to SAIGON.

Half of the Bn was to move with the Military Mission with the special and honourable duty of forming the bodyguard of General Gracey, the GOC.

The detachment was composed of an advanced Bn HQ, administrative details, two pls [platoons] each of A and B corp [companies], and one pl each of C and D. Thus all corp were represented... The remainder of the Bn was to move by sea together with the rest of 100 Bde [Brigade]."²⁹

Gracey might have been expected to take one of the other Gurkha battalions first, such as the 3/1 Gurkha Rifles, which had been in the division from the beginning, fought at Imphal and walked down through Burma. The 1st Gurkhas were relative newcomers to the 20th Division, but they were Gracey's old regiment, so he picked them to be his own escort. The fly-in began on 11 September, although most of the troops arrived on 12 September, so as to be in place when the senior officers (such as General Gracey and Brigadier Maunsell) arrived on the 13th.

The Gurkha advance party was led by Lieutenant Colonel Cyril E. Jarvis, the battalion commander. On 10 September, 151 Gurkhas, including the battalion headquarters, motored down to Hmawbi. The airfield was in a chaotic state of bustle, reflecting the fact that major decisions were still being made, literally at the last moment. It was not until this

* 62 and 194 Squadrons [in 341 Wing] at Mingaladon; 96, 117 and 215 Squadrons [in 345 Wing] at Hmawbi; 232 Group, with 9 Squadrons in 4 Wings, was operating into 16 bases (and air dropping at 8 others) from Saigon to Soerabaja and Chittagong.

date, for example, that the decision was made to substitute the 114th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, for the 2nd Indian Field Regiment [making the 114th the only British troops in French Indochina, apart from the RAF -- the rest were Indian, Gurkha and French].³⁰ The decision to limit further Gracey's area was still two days away. Wrote the 1/1 GR recorder, "The complete absence of any administrative arrangements for reception, which was to be so typical of the next few days, was here first apparent."³¹ At 0900 on 11 September the Gurkhas left for Mingaladon, where at 1245 they began the journey to Saigon in 7 sorties, arriving in Bangkok at 1600 hours for an overnight stop. The Gurkhas were not overly impressed here, either:

"At Bangkok, reception arrangements were less than inadequate; no one had heard of the hot meals so facilely promised in Rangoon."

One platoon did not arrive as "it had engine trouble and had returned spluttering to base." On 12 September the group began the final leg at 0530, arriving at Tan Son Nhut airfield at 0900, where they waited for an hour before being driven into Saigon by the Japanese. The barracks was the Annamite girls school, L'Ecole des Jeunes Filles. By evening guards were posted on Gracey's residence, the mission compound and signal exchange. Arriving with the Gurkhas were two companies of the Hybads, who immediately took over guard duties at Tan Son Nhut airfield, one of the prime VPs.³² They were deployed along the main north-south runway, and at the east end of the field, on which were located the administrative, repair and control buildings. The Headquarters of 80 Brigade were located in the Japanese Staff Quarters, across the street from Headquarters, Southern Area Army (in the southwest of Saigon). At 1200 hours on 12 September, the Control Commission closed down in Rangoon and simultaneously opened in Saigon.

The RAF, having noted that morale flights over POW camps had at the end met with intense AAA fire, described their arrival in Saigon on 12 September:

"The outward welcome accorded to the Allied Forces from both the French and Annamese alike on our entry into French Indochina was decidedly embarrassing. Our Forces obviously found themselves in a divided house." ³³

A large crowd of French civilians had gathered at Tan Son Nhut to cheer each aircraft of 62 Squadron as it taxied up to its parking spot. The RAF reconnaissance parties immediately inspected JAF installations at Tân Sơn Nhứt, and their verdict was "most disappointing." Few aircraft were discovered, and they were all unserviceable. All

serviceable aircraft had been withdrawn to Japan to defend the homeland or to Phu My airfield, twenty miles east of Saigon, at the cessation of hostilities.

Tan Son Nhut was the main engine repair and maintenance base for French Indochina, but only 2 engine test benches were found. All sorts of equipment were jumbled up, and no detailed records of bench stocks or issues were discovered. The RAF expressed surprise that any required items could be found. The arms discovered did tally with the Japanese lists, but it was emphasized that there was no way to prove that the lists were accurate:

"Judging by the aggressive attitude of the Annamese towards the French at this period, it may well have been that considerable stocks of Japanese arms had not been declared." 34

Also arriving on the 12th were the dozen or so members of the 604 Field Security Section, a specialized unit detailed to gather intelligence and track down war criminals; one of their men would be murdered before long.* Gracey then received a message from these first arrivals to say that all was prepared for his reception, and he and the senior staff landed with a smaller fly-in on 13 September, touching down at Tan Son Nhut at 1400 hours. 35 As his Dakota came to a halt in the reception area, the door was opened and his personal bodyguard of 7 Gurkha soldiers scrambled down the steps and fanned out around the aircraft. 36 Gracey then stepped out, paused for a second to take in the scene, then walked on down to the ramp, followed a step behind by his Control Commission Chief of Staff, Brigadier M.S.K. Maunsell. The entire field was strongly surrounded by Japanese troops. Across the tarmac were about 8 senior Japanese officers, including Lieutenant General Numata and the senior officers of the Army, Navy and Air Force; Terauchi was not well enough to be on hand. Off to one side was a small group of Annamites; neither Gracey nor Maunsell were prepared for their presence. Said Maunsell of them, "We didn't know who they were — they were just a little group which turned out to be the Việt Minh."

The Việt Minh started forward, talking, to intercept Gracey, but at that moment the Japanese stepped up, saluted and bowed to Gracey, who walked past the Việt Minh to the waiting Japanese generals. 37 It was shortly after this that a Japanese officer, through their "marvelous" American Nisei interpreter (who had apparently been caught in Tokyo by the Pearl Harbor raid), pointed out the Việt Minh to Gracey.

After the preliminaries were over, Gracey asked to be taken to his headquarters. The Việt Minh came forward to speak but Gracey waved them

* They set up headquarters at 12/14 Rue Colbert.

aside to enter Terauchi's car for the drive into Saigon. The road to Saigon was lined with Union Jacks and cheering throngs, with most of the French population in the streets to greet the senior Allied officers. With Gracey and Maunsell seated side by side and two armed Gurkhas in the front, they were conveyed to the Mission area in Terauchi's "wonderful" old Chrysler convertible.

Air Commodore (later Air Chief Marshal Sir Walter) Cheshire, senior RAF officer on the Commission, recorded his impressions of Saigon:³⁸

"It was attractively laid out, with broad tree-lined roads and many large houses in well-kept gardens. There was also something indefinably French about the whole place. Saigon had not been much ravaged by war and, compared with Rangoon, it presented a superficial air of prosperity."

Of the arrival at Tan Son Nhut:

"At the airfield we were welcomed, among others, by Japanese staff officers ready to carry out our orders. Waiting also was an assembly of staff cars ordered for our use. It was of interest that not one of these cars was of Japanese make, all had been requisitioned in the early days of the occupation either locally, or from as far afield as Singapore. At a later date various original owners appeared at our H.Q. to claim their cars. The car allotted to me was driven by a Japanese soldier. He was a thrusting driver and firmly believed that his passenger's seniority entitled him to priority at cross-roads. This was a perilous assumption because there were several other Japanese drivers with similar ideas about the right of way and it needed many alarming near-misses to convince my driver that seniority, which could not be determined in time, conferred no precedence.

The members of the Mission were not the first Allied representatives to reach Saigon following the Japanese surrender, as we had been preceded there by RAF Transport Command crews, some Army personnel, and a few French representatives."

Concerning the drive into Saigon, Cheshire said:

"Nevertheless, some people turned out to greet us, among them some friendly locals and a few rather subdued French. I was surprised to see one of the banners of welcome inscribed in Russian. At that stage I had scarcely heard of Ho Chi Minh, and certainly knew nothing of his political affiliations, but his influence and its orientation soon became apparent."

Cheshire described the mansion in which Gracey, he, Maunsell, Brain and other senior Commission members were housed:

"The Senior Officers of the Mission were housed in a splendid mansion, formerly the residence of the Governor of the Province of Cochin China. In the turmoil following the surrender this building had changed hands more than once and, in the process, some of its furniture had disappeared with the departing occupants.* To make up for the deficiencies so created some of us had to make do with camp beds and their utilitarian appearance made a sharp and amusing contrast with the remaining interior opulence of the residence.

The building was rat infested, and these unwelcome inhabitants made their sorties noisily at night. When the civil war flared up in earnest and marauders were about, it was difficult to determine in the dark whether the intruders were rebels or rats."

So ended the beginning of the occupation of Saigon with the troops, soon to be disappointed, expecting a pleasant sojourn in the Paris of the East. The following are a few typical recollections.

Colonel Jarvis mentally noted that most of the cheering crowds were Annamite, who outnumbered the French. He had been one of those hoping to go to the Netherlands East Indies because British liberals had for years compared British rule in India unfavourably with Dutch rule in the NEI, so that he was eager to inspect that reputed paradise. All the troops expected a largely ceremonial role only, so when Jarvis was asked what he wanted from the regimental centre in India he asked for the pipes to be sent out to add a little class to the guard mounting. The pipes were used for that purpose, and were said to be good for the morale of the colons. But what really excited spectators was the order: "For Inspection — Draw Kukris!"** However, he soon wished that he had brought the battalion mortars instead.

Major Peter Prentice, a 20 year old Captain and company commander at the time, remembers how poorly armed were the first British/Indian troops to arrive in Saigon. The infantry companies brought only small arms with them — rifles and one or two light machine guns, having left the medium machine guns and mortars behind. The word had not yet filtered down to the soldiers that troubles might await, and the ceremonial role was prominent in their planning. The Gurkhas made sure that they arrived with white belts and white gaiters to add colour to their honour guard.

* Gracey later ordered the Viet Minh to return the furniture and crockery.

** The distinctive Gurkha weapon, with a large, curved blade somewhat bigger than a Bowie knife.

The first few days were indeed all that was expected. The Gurkhas made up for their cold meals in Bangkok by benefitting from an administrative error in Saigon, for they discovered that their barracks, the Annamite girls school, had been prepared to house the Control Commission. As the Gurkhas trooped into the building, excellent food and delicacies were served to them in the mistaken belief that they were members of the Commission staff. The Gurkhas very quickly took advantage of this unexpected windfall, and the Control Commission had to do without. But the Gurkhas, accustomed to sleeping out in the open during the Burma campaigns, could not adjust to the soft beds, and the soldiers took to sleeping on the floor beside the beds.

On 12 September a total of 1091 personnel and 26 tons of stores had been flown in; on 13 September the totals were 211 personnel and 11 tons.³⁹ Thus at the end of his first day in Saigon Gracey had with him a total of 1302 men, most of whom were Control Commission Staff, RAF, RAPWI, hospital, pay corps, and engineer personnel.

On 14 September a few more sorties arrived, carrying the 917th Air Landing Ground headquarters detachment from Meiktila, plus more flying control personnel. The total airlift effort covering the period from 1 to 14 September resulted in a total of 1181 personnel* arriving in Saigon, and 9271 POWs evacuated to Bangkok on the return legs.⁴⁰ Of the total 1181 personnel ferried to Saigon, no more than a third were infantry, and taking into account duty shift schedules, rest periods, sick calls and so on, there were probably no more than a light company of soldiers -- perhaps a 100 to 120 men or so -- on duty throughout Saigon at any period.

So predominant was the idea of a peaceful role that over a fourth of the infantry troop strength -- and perhaps a third -- was immediately appropriated by senior officers to fulfil the position of batmen (valets), drivers, and so forth. As the chronicler of the 1/1 Gurkhas wrote on 14 September:

"The only other fighting Imperial troops in SAIGON were a Coy of 1/19 Hyderabad & a pl G.R.** So tight were the guard duties of the Bn that the JAPANESE quarter guard on our own compound remained unrelieved by us for several days. Extra guards

* These were personnel carried by 232 Group; as ALFSEA'S total is 121 greater, these were obviously ferried in by other units, perhaps Special Duty Squadrons.

** Who were temporarily seconded to 1/1 G.R.

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were provided for the meeting of the GOC* and the local JAPANESE Commander** and the subsequent meeting between the Mission and the JAPANESE Staff."

On 14 September, a platoon from B Company, 1/19 Hybads, took over the Saigon power plant, relieving the Japanese guard. The hotels Continental and Majestic, which housed most of the Mission staff, were still guarded by Japanese soldiers. On the morning of 14 September, his second day in Saigon, Brigadier Maunsell decided personally to reconnoiter Saigon and Cholon in order to try to get the feel of the city. He ordered Terauchi's car to be delivered, and began his tour at 1130. His driver and an additional bodyguard were both Gunners from his own artillery regiment, and unlike Gracey (who used only Gurkhas), Maunsell used British soldiers in these duties.

A Union Jack flew from the car's pennant in accordance with a decision that only officers of flag rank might do so, a decision later criticised by the US which claimed that the OSS senior officer would not have been killed had he been permitted to fly the American flag. [However, this had no bearing on his death, which will be discussed later].⁴¹

Maunsell was, in effect, taking the city's pulse, checking "for normal traffic control, the state of the shops, the markets, whether Cholon was active, and so on."⁴² He was out for an hour, and found that Saigon appeared to be fairly quiet, and half under control of the Japanese "who only acted when they felt like it." The Viet Minh claim to control the city "was a laugh" -- they had no control, and the one or two traffic policemen on duty were Frenchmen. The shops were open, and Maunsell particularly recalled the "absolutely marvellous" flower market, something he had not seen for five years. In short, Saigon seemed to be a sort of municipal illustration of Newton's law of motion -- daily life was going on regardless of what was happening at the top. At that moment there was no sign that Saigon was not a "completely and utterly quiescent city." Maunsell, who was accompanied by the Senior Commission intelligence office, reported back to Gracey that if there was underlying dissent it was extremely difficult to recognize.

That afternoon Cédile arrived at Mission headquarters for a long talk with Gracey and Maunsell. Cédile was described as "an awfully nice, charming, liberal-minded - a scholastic man rather than military." He was doing an extremely difficult job in waiting for Leclerc, who was "an explosion" in himself. Cédile knew Leclerc, and did not wish to aggravate the situation by committing Leclerc to policies which might later have

* General Officer Commanding [General Gracey].

** Field Marshal Terauchi.

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to be disavowed. He was in a position familiar to officers in every generation, of having responsibility but not authority.

Cédile at the time looked older than his years — short dark hair, round full face, jowled — "a sad man, and a very nice man." He occasionally "let his hair down" with the British, and entertained supreme contempt for most of the French in Indochina; they were considered the collaborators with the Japanese, disloyal and active resisters to Free France. It now struck Gracey and Maunsell that they might well have serious difficulties with the French as well. But during these early days the French information was basically valuable.

Scarcely had they arrived in Saigon when the British began to receive from the colons invitations to parties and dinners, but these were not accepted until very much later.

On 15 September the Commission distributed leaflets throughout Saigon and Cholon, telling the population that the British/Indian troops had certain tasks to perform and that the populace must maintain "the strictest order and discipline" during this period. Another leaflet announced that "In certain areas Europeans have been attacked, killed, and wounded, by extremist elements of the population." The peace and prosperity desired by all "can only be prejudiced by these outrages committed by irresponsibles." The message concluded:

"Be warned that such criminals will be tracked down and punished. All persons found guilty of promoting civil disorder will be severely dealt with".⁴³

The leaflets were prepared by the "Forward Base, Psychological Warfare Division, SEAC."

September 15 saw a slowdown in the air operation to Tan Son Nhut; no British troop reinforcements arrived on this day. However, one of the important (if less glamorous) units landed in Saigon, namely the advance party of No.23 Anti-Malarial Control Unit. It's members immediately began checking mosquito types and sprayed the primary areas at Tan Son Nhut and transient aircraft. From mid-September on, when its commander was released and returned to the U.K., this forgotten unit simply carried on without one, for nobody bothered to replace him. The unit's log pointed this out just "for information" only.

At this time, back in Burma, the first of the 20th Indian Division's vehicle convoys, including the guns and transport of the 114th Field Regiment, began rolling down to Rangoon.

Even at this early date the activities of the OSS detachment were so blatantly subversive to the Allied command that within 48 hours of

his arrival Gracey felt compelled to summon its chief, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Dewey, to appear before him. Dewey's actions were both conspicuous and seemingly pointless, so that the reasons for them remain a mystery. The small OSS team was in Saigon because the occupation was an Allied effort, and it had only two relatively straightforward tasks: "One, to watch over American interests, including POW property. Two, to assist* British Counter-Intelligence Staff."⁴⁴ The latter directive was concerned largely with the compilation of information on war criminals. Dewey, however, did not confine himself to his directives, but spent a great deal of his time flitting furtively in and out of obscure alleys and remote cafes in his dealings with the Communists and the Viet Minh. But, as Messmer pointed out, it is very difficult for a caucasian to flit furtively anywhere in the Far East, and Dewey's activities were recorded, step by step, by almost everyone -- the Japanese, the Vietnamese, the French and the British intelligence personnel. In the event, his machinations did no great harm to the Allies, being more of nuisance value -- he was, however a danger to himself and his group, and despite repeated warnings from the British at all levels down to that of an infantry company commander, he consistently refused either to cooperate with the Allies or, indeed, to associate himself with them in any way. Dewey deliberately maintained his villa and office outside the British area, and rejected all suggestions that he was at risk out there. The whole episode would have assumed no importance had he not been tragically and needlessly murdered at the hands of Viet Minh assassins. More will be said of this later.

Warned by Gracey on 15 September to confine himself to his assigned tasks, Dewey complained to his headquarters in Ceylon:

"At General Gracey's request I must discontinue assistance to managers [of] American interests, collection of documents, and war crimes investigation, until directive for this work and presence embankment is clarified. There is no other US authority in Saigon."⁴⁵

The Headquarters SEAC Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Browning, asked Gracey about the difficulties with the OSS, which "has two functions, both under your coordination."

In his report to the Foreign Office in London, Dening commented on the displeasure occasioned at all levels by the OSS activities. He reported that General Gracey was not satisfied with OSS actions in his area.⁴⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Peter Dewey had appeared and informed Gracey

* Italics added.

that he was charged with Consular duties, but his claim carried no conviction. Gracey had been informed by the Chiefs of Staff that the only tasks permitted OSS by SACSEA were the repatriation of POWs and internees of special interest to them, the procurement of information on war criminals, and the protection of American property.⁴⁷ If the US Government had wanted a uniformed officer to discharge consular duties, wrote Dening, then it should first have approached the Supreme Allied Commander.

"I am afraid that what lies at the root of the matter is that OSS applies to go to places to fulfil one or more stated purposes only to engage in other activities which they do not disclose, which makes a very bad impression. There is nothing very sinister in undertaking Consular functions but there is no reason why Supreme Commander should not be consulted in the first instance." ⁴⁸

Governor Cédile also remembers Dewey's entrance to Saigon. He had first met Dewey while Cédile was serving on the headquarters staff in Libya; Dewey had been assigned there because he spoke French, but there was never any friendship between the two men. Cédile's comments on Dewey typify the attitude towards the two OSS heads of mission, Patti in the north and Dewey in the south, of all who had any dealings with them, namely strong personal dislike. The British senior officer in Hanoi described Patti as "an awful man," and Dewey in Saigon was remembered as "not at all a nice man," and "a very unattractive man -- not a man many people liked," "an unpleasant man," and several opined that they were scarcely better liked by their own colleagues. It has been said that such interest as was evinced in Dewey derived from the fact that he was the nephew of New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey.

The Americans in Saigon deliberately shunned the society of both French and British, and even boycotted the Cercle Sportif, which can scarcely have helped them in their task of information gathering.

On learning one day that an American plane was about to deposit a passenger in Saigon, Cédile ordered the new arrival to be detained. He was Colonel Dewey and he freely admitted his OSS mission, saying "of course he knew we were on the same side."⁴⁹ Recalling the meeting, Cédile said, "I reproached him for not informing us of his coming and told him 'We could easily have shot you.' I told him, after all, at that time we were all a little bit trigger-happy."

Cédile then asked Dewey, "Why didn't you tell us you were coming?" Dewey replied that he had come by himself, "without any troops, without

anybody else", just to look around a bit, and he did not intend to see anyone in particular [which, in Mingant's case at least, was not entirely true]. Cédile released him, and later recalled, "Of course, all this didn't last very long. I was told several times after that he had been seen here and there, and he was killed very soon after. We never found him, and never knew quite how it was that he was killed, but presume it must have been the Việt Minh, for no French soldier would have shot an American officer."⁵⁰

Colonel (then Captain) Marcel Mingant of the French colonial forces was in Saigon during August. Having been a captive of the Japanese since March, he was in the hospital when Dewey reached Saigon. His name had apparently been given to Dewey by OSS headquarters in China, and Dewey sought him out. Mingant left the hospital temporarily to meet Dewey at the Continental Palace hotel, where they talked about the general situation for a while, after which Dewey asked if he might meet Mingant again in 8 days, as he had business in the countryside at that time. Mingant warned him against travelling in certain areas, but Dewey replied, as he did repeatedly in Saigon, that his American nationality would protect him. When Mingant returned to keep the rendezvous he learned that Dewey had been murdered.

Meanwhile, Saigon was the scene of continuing isolated murders, usually in areas far from the scattered presence of Gracey's small force. On 16 September the Commander in Chief, Allied Land Forces South East Asia, General Slim, arrived in Saigon to make a personal assessment of the situation. A guard of honour was provided for him by 1/1 GR's B Company.

Slim immediately recognized the virtual impossibility of Gracey's task, and took back with him the strongest recommendation to Mountbatten that the rest of Gracey's division should be sent to him as quickly as possible. [Gracey was not only short of troops; on this date he sent out an urgent plea to SEAC for additional typists and clerical staff, for his officers were becoming bogged down by bureaucratic congestion.] Slim further reported that, the British troops in Saigon were, in effect, confined to barracks by the unfavourable fiscal rate of exchange which placed local prices beyond their reach. One piaster exchanged officially for 1 shilling, though its true value amounted to only two pence, and pressure was applied to the French to make up the difference.⁵¹ Note circulation had increased ten-fold over the 1939 figure, as had the prices of gold and silver. By 1944 the wholesale food prices had increased to the following levels: rice, meat and fish had doubled, tobacco had

increased six-fold, cooking oil had tripled, and sugar had increased between four and five-fold.⁵² On the 16th also, 2/8 Punjab's "A" Company (80 Brigade's defence company) flew into Saigon as 1/1 Gurkha Rifles took over the task of guarding a Japanese arms dump on the Quai de l'Argonne; they were in turn relieved during the night by French troops.

On 17 September, after 4 full working days in Saigon, Gracey submitted a report to Browning which described the routine established so far. The normal workday was divided into tasks under 3 headings: scrutiny of documents submitted by the Japanese, conferences and staff meetings to implement the tasks in Gracey's directive, and internal administration of the Commission [to which was added the administration of British forces in Saigon, since 20 Division's headquarters had not yet arrived].

On 17 September, too, Gracey held his first plenary meeting with Field Marshal Count Terauchi, the Japanese Commander in Chief, though Maunsell had earlier been sent by Gracey to visit him. On that occasion Maunsell had instructed Terauchi to order the Japanese to acknowledge British orders immediately, and informed him that he would be held personally responsible for this. It was a "fairly typical set of instructions from victor to vanquished."⁵³

Terauchi lived not far from Japanese Headquarters, in the southwest of Saigon, in a residence described as a "fairly scruffy little house."⁵⁴ Terauchi was waiting at the top of the steps as Maunsell drove up. Maunsell himself recalled that his first shock came when he noticed that Terauchi did not really look like a "typical" Japanese. He was completely white-haired and "looked like any old countryman of any nation -- rosy-cheeked." Maunsell walked up the stairs with Terauchi leading the way. It was Terauchi's first meeting with the British.

In the prominent hall of the house stood a table with four chairs, and Maunsell's next shock came when he saw that on the table were six glasses and a bottle of "Dimple" Haig Scotch whisky, a brand Maunsell had not seen since 1940. A third shock arose from the discovery that Terauchi had several cases of it downstairs.

Maunsell sat down as he had been briefed to do, and said to Terauchi who dragged one leg slightly as a result of a stroke but still had most of his mental faculties: "Because of your age and your infirmity you may be seated." Terauchi replied, "I will never be seated in the face of a representative of my conqueror." Maunsell responded, "As you wish."

The Nisei interpreter then read out each paragraph of the instructions while the old man stood there, his head bowed, and said that he would ensure that these were carried out as the Supreme Allied Commander wished. He then asked, "May I say something?" To Maunsell's affirmative reply Terauchi said, "Tomorrow is the anniversary of the death of the Emperor Meiji." Maunsell, who had never heard of Meiji, later discovered that this was the emperor who decided that Japan should be Westernized. Terauchi continued, "I was brought up the son of the Japanese Ambassador to the Court of Saint James." He then burst into tears, which streamed down his face, and in a scene of dramatic pathos, struggled to finish.* "I fought for an understanding between my country and yours until the outbreak of hostilities, and no shame can be greater than mine than I am the leader of a vanquished army in the face of my conqueror, Admiral Mountbatten.**" It was Maunsell's opinion, that Terauchi was fast approaching senility, and though he did his best to carry out the instructions, he was continually undermined by his intelligence and Kempei Tei staff, who created great problems with their anti-British and anti-French activities. Maunsell had believed that the Japanese could be controlled by very stringent orders, but later found that the British had underestimated the large number of Japanese who were collaborating with the Viet Minh. It was not forgotten that Terauchi had been accused of encouraging the harsh treatment of captives and had provided the aircraft in which Chandra Bose had attempted his escape to Manchuria.

When Terauchi came face to face with Gracey, it was again emphasized to him that he was personally held responsible for Japanese activities. Terauchi finished by asking about the ceremony in which he was to hand over his sword. He asked Gracey to tell Mountbatten that he wanted to hand over his special sword, which was in Tokyo, and not his "comparatively rough and everyday sword," and expressed regret at being unable to go to Singapore to sign the instrument of surrender himself.

At this time Gracey told Mountbatten that it was essential to occupy Thu Dầu Một - Biên Hòa - Lai Thiệu area north of Saigon, in which the main body of Japanese forces would initially be concentrated. Gracey said he fully understood the "position vis a vis the French Administration." Slim approved this proposal but Gracey was not permitted to carry it out at that time.

* The scene was repeated later in Mountbatten's presence.

** Said to Mountbatten; to Maunsell on the first occasion, the words "Admiral Mountbatten" were omitted.

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As Gracey was talking to Terauchi, leaflets were being distributed throughout Saigon stating that the British Commission would leave this area as soon as the object of disarming the Japanese had been achieved.⁵⁵

On 17 September, 20 Indian Division Operational Directive No.1, "The Occupation of French Indo-China," was published.* This was the document which conveyed to the company commanders the tasks they would carry out, and it embodied the main points of the governing directives previously published. It began by stating a fact: "The political situation within FRENCH INDO-CHINA is still obscure,"⁵⁶ and then proceeded to assess that situation in the light of what was known:

"As far as our information goes at present, it appears that there is a revolutionary-cum-nationalist movement called the 'VIET MINH', which is causing trouble. This party is reliably reported to be in possession of plenty of arms. It is Anti-French and as we are going to INDO-CHINA to take over the country on behalf of the French, we may expect it to be equally Anti-British."

The troops were warned:

"It is NOT our intention to become involved in politics, in fact we must NOT do so. Our sole job in this connection is the maintenance of LAW and ORDER. But in order to carry out this task it is necessary for Comds** to keep abreast of political happenings."

Under duties connected with the maintenance of public order, two kinds of bodies were mentioned as deserving special attention: "(a) Armed bands of revolutionaries, bandits, etc.; (b) Mobs intent on rioting, looting or killing French Civil Officials, etc. These will be treated as enemies and the minimum ruthless force necessary... will be used to suppress them."

Mobs and civil disturbances were to be treated with the "normal 'Internal Security' principles." Commanders were "reminded that in dealing with hostile mobs, troops must NOT be used as police." The principles were repeated:

"Charging a hostile crowd with pick halves or rifle butts has been proved to be useless. Actual physical contact with the crowd must be avoided.

Exactly the same principles as have always been used in peace for dispersing hostile crowds will be used, i.e. Draw the attention of the crowd to the fact that if they do not disperse, the troops will open fire. If it is necessary to open fire, then only the minimum force necessary will be used trying at first to obtain one's object by shooting the ringleaders." 57

* Appendix J.
** Commanders

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A curfew was in force from 2130 to 0530 hours, which applied to the British force except for soldiers on duty. All ranks would at all times carry their personal weapons, including bayonets. "Parties leaving unit lines or barracks areas must not be less than three in number. This refers equally to officers who must always be accompanied by their personal escort who should walk some paces in rear to guard against attack from behind... Until we hear to the contrary we must guard against the possible terrorist, or fanatical nationalist, endeavouring to assassinate officers."

After dealing with general principles on the procedures to be used in relieving Japanese guards, the directive left no doubt as to what was expected of the British/Indian soldiers. All troops would at all times be "spotlessly turned out", would always walk about at a smart soldierly pace, and saluting would be perfect.

"If two or more men are walking together they must come up to the salute and down from the salute at the same time. As representatives of the British Imperial Forces we have a big responsibility and we will continuously and at all times be watched by the critical eyes of many different nationalities. Unit Quarter Guards... must be placed in a conspicuous place where the populous can see them and the more 'spit and polish' there is about the Guard area the better. When we land... ensure that the marching is faultless, that the troops swing their arms, look up and throw out their chests. They know that they are better than anyone else there -- let them show it."

The directive was signed by Brigadier Rodham as officiating Commander of 20th Indian Division, since General Gracey was in Saigon. And on this date, as on the 16th, the 1st Gurkhas took over another arms storage area from the Japanese, to be again relieved in turn by the French. This was the pattern until the British left Indochina, for the Japanese would not cooperate directly with the French. This particular supply of arms was located across the street from the Garde Civile, just west of the Botanical Gardens. So by the 17th the French were solely responsible for guarding two substantial arms storage areas, and had begun the process of rearming the ex-POWs of the colonial forces.⁵⁸

On 17 September there occurred the incident which probably did as much as anything to persuade Gracey to act against the Communist-led Committee for the South. Until then Gracey had been fully occupied with his efforts to control the 70,000 heavily armed Japanese with his few hundred soldiers, and he remained powerless to stop the growing anarchy in a city which, by Allied direction, was his personal responsibility.

Japanese intelligence staff were actively opposing him and abetting the Viet Minh, the French appeared to be about to confront him with a further problem and, to add to his existing worries, the Viet Minh now decided to call a general strike. Their decision proved to be a miscalculation of some magnitude, for up to that moment Gracey simply had not had time to notice the Viet Minh, let alone take any steps against them, [although he probably would have had to do something about them sooner or later]. By putting the city at peril they forced him to drop everything and to concentrate all his attention on them. It was the first of many serious miscalculations for which the Viet Minh leader, Trần Văn Giàu, was eventually removed from office by the Central Committee in Hanoi.

The ensuing situation was described in part by F.S.V. Donnison in the official history:

"On the 17th September the Viet Minh leaders gave wide publicity to the establishment of the Independent Republic of Viet Nam, and the claim of the Republic to administer the whole of the territories of Tongking, Annam, and Cochin China. In fact, however, the republic had at this time little or no authority and there was no effective civil administration, and no maintenance of order whatsoever. Looting and attacks upon the French were common. Vituperative and provocative broadcasts and press articles against them poured out from Hanoi, the headquarters of the Republic of Viet Nam, and also from Saigon. Nor could the Republic, whose government was Communist in character, count upon the mass of the Annamite people for these, nationalists though they might be, were by no means all supporters of Communism."⁵⁹

And commenting on Gracey's problems:

"It was in any case some time before these [Civil Affairs Staff] officers arrived to take up their duties. No financial adviser was posted to the Commission or to the headquarters of the Allied Commander in Indo-China and no political adviser became available until some ten days after the arrival of General Gracey."⁶⁰

On this day the Viet Minh called a general strike, ordering all Vietnamese to leave French employ and ordering markets to be closed to the French from the following day. SEAC radio monitoring services had intercepted an English-language broadcast from Saigon Radio which described three ways that the Viet Minh could oppose the French reoccupation. They could engage in, "(a) active resistance, (b) boycotting the French population, (c) a general strike."⁶¹ The last two measures were now in

effect. The Việt Minh attitude at this early stage was already inflexible: "They feel that any compromise now would be a defeat...." Later that night, at 2230 hours on 17 September, 15 armed Việt Minh police tried to enter the power house, but were turned away without incident by the 1/19 Hybad platoon leader, Havildar Kan Singh.

On 18 September an advance party from 3/1 Gurkha Rifles flew into Saigon as a Frenchman was murdered by 3 Annamites about two blocks east of the race course. Two of the murderers were arrested, and a mob howling down Rue Taberd, behind the Governor General's Palace, was dispersed by Dutch ex-POWs.⁶²

At noon on 18 September, the labourers in the power house stopped work for two hours, saying that they were afraid of being beaten by the Việt Minh for possessing French passes. They were then offered British passes, but were still afraid of retribution. The matter was resolved and protection guaranteed after a meeting between the manager and the leader of the workers. Shortly afterwards the news was received of the suicide of Numata's Deputy Chief of Staff, who had been cooperating with the Allies. On hearing this, the SEAC Director of Intelligence, Major General Penney, remarked, "Unfortunately, the less cooperative members have not yet committed suicide."

To complete the picture of the first five days, a hospital was established by 18 September. The medical representative on the advance party, Lieutenant Colonel Adams, RAMC (who later commanded the 42nd Indian Field Ambulance Unit) had arrived in Saigon on 6 September. He had been busy prior to the arrival of the Mission, earmarking buildings for future hospital sites. As for those being used by the Japanese for hospitals, "Orders were passed for their evacuation, cleaning, and overhaul of the water, lighting and sanitary systems."⁶³ The report continued:

"The 7 Jap hospitals in Saigon were inspected and priority for their evacuation arranged. It was decided that the 2 largest could remain holding the more serious cases, for at least a month, after which there would be only 1 large Jap hospital in Saigon. The Japs were also ordered to produce 400 beds and mattresses."

The original plan had called for all of 55 Field Ambulance and 24 CCS to be flown in during the initial stages, but "owing to the bad weather, shortage of aircraft, and the absolute necessity for getting in more fighting troops the plan was changed." The medical fly-in was temporarily held up and "the small hospital Lt Col Cockburn had with him had to provide all medical cover." As RAPWI commitments were lighter than estimated and casualties few, there were no problems. The Medical

History traced the founding of the first hospital:

"They [Lt.Col.Cockburn's staff] set up an MI Room on the air strip and the MDS and its attached units moved into L'Ecole Superieur Des Jeunes Filles in Rue MacMahon (afterwards renamed Rue General de Gaulle) on 18 Sep, and became the first British hospital in Saigon. The school became its permanent residence in Saigon." 64

With the Commission came the medical administrative organization, under Colonel G.B.Jackson of the Indian Army Medical Corps, a surgical team, a Field Hygiene Section, Anti-Malaria Unit, and the 20th Indian Division Psychiatrist (Major J.W. Miller, of the Royal Army Medical Corps).

On 18 September the airport and the port of Saigon took on an even greater importance, now that the Việt Minh were attempting to strangle the city. The senior officer, a brigadier, in charge of movements and transportation wrote:

"The local political situation is of interest as it may become a factor affecting work in the port. At the present public services appear to be in the hands of the Viet Nam party, a puppet government established by the Japanese." 65

The report stated that the party demanded independence and was "violently anti-French". With Cédile's approval, a meeting was held between the brigadier, the Royal Navy Commander and Việt Minh party officials. The Việt Minh leader said that he was willing to restore all port facilities and operate under British direction alone. A Port Sub-Committee was formed, which included two Việt Minh officials, and the plan worked. The British senior officer reported:

"If promises are kept, the civil [Vietnamese] authorities will be responsible for such matters as labour, lighting, cranes, machinery and pilots. Detailed planning has started and at the present time there seems a reasonable hope of success but the situation may well become complicated when French civilian authorities become available to take over if they desire to do."66

The narrative should, perhaps, be interrupted at this juncture by a brief comment on the development in the docks. The British were perfectly content to collaborate with the Việt Minh provided that common goals were met, and entertained no particular preference for the French, whose arrival, everyone knew, would see the start of unwanted trouble. But although these local accommodations with the Việt Minh were made,

they contravened the Allied charter which forbade official contacts with groups such as the Việt Minh — it was expressly laid down that all civil administration was to be French only. Yet decades later, when the British officers [from Chief of Staff level to infantry company commander] had retired from active service, not one officer interviewed expressed any anti-Việt Minh or pro-French sentiments. In fact, the reverse was true, for most had favoured Vietnamese independence. Even when the British/Indian troops were fighting the Viet Minh, the feeling was more of compassion, and of professionals doing a job, than of dislike. As Major C.U. Blascheck, commanding D company, 3/1 GR, said later:

"We had no antagonism towards the Viet Minh on our arrival. We knew that independence was coming for India, and thought that the Vietnamese should also have their independence -- and we were all largely sympathetic to them."

The genuine anger occurred in isolated cases of torture and mutilation of Indian soldiers or where cases of mutilation of French women and children were found.

Meanwhile, the fly-in continued intermittently as the atrocious weather conditions allowed. Crews were briefed on the following information before departing for Saigon. After leaving the aircraft at Tân Sơn Nhứt they were to walk over to the canteen adjacent to the parking strip where they would be briefed on the local situation, after which they would be transported to their transient quarters on the field. Liberty buses would take them into Saigon as needed, to return by 2130 hours before the curfew commenced; the return journey starting at 2100 hours from the Continental Palace Hotel. The aircrew briefing notes continued urgently: "Crews should take care over the local liquor." There was an excellent light beer available, "but there are a number of very pleasant aperitifs, notably amongst them being a white liquid called Anise which has a delayed action with disastrous effects on those not used to it."⁶⁷

On 18 September, in view of the deteriorating local situation, 1/1 GR relieved the Japanese guarding the Majestic and Continental Hotels (where most of the Mission staff lived). By the afternoon of the 18th, General Gracey and the Control Commission had spent five full days in Saigon. For historical interest it may be useful to describe these first days as the British recorded them at that time. The narrative will be resumed with the "controversial" Proclamation No.1 of 19/21 September.

First, the background as set down by General Gracey's own hand. On 3 October 1946 Gracey, now a Lieutenant General and busily engaged in building the Pakistan Army, responded to the official South East Asia Command (i.e. Mountbatten's) version of the occupation of Saigon.⁶⁸ It was already clear at this early stage that he took strong exception to the report, which appeared to hold him responsible for every difficult situation and praise Mountbatten for every success. This official report possibly formed the basis for Mountbatten's Section "E" report to the Combined Chiefs, which has been used by historians ever since in writing of these events. Up to now, Gracey's rebuttals have remained unknown, and these will be introduced where appropriate throughout this history.

Gracey, not a man to go to the block quietly, begins his rebuttal:

1. The chapter on F.I.C. gives a false impression of the situation and of events. There are many inaccuracies and chronology is incorrect. Before setting down detailed comments and criticisms, I therefore give an account of what in fact occurred. This, especially as regards dates, should be checked by Brigadier MAUNSELL.

2. The Story.

Shortly after V.J. day General GRACEY was summoned to KANDY, where the situation was discussed in conference with S.A.C. and General SLIM and their Staffs. Two directives were issued, one by S.E.A.C., dealing with the evacuation of prisoners of war, the control of the Japanese Southern Army H.Q., located at SAIGON, and the disarmament and concentration of Japanese forces in Southern F.I.C., and the other by A.L.F.S.E.A., dealing with the action of the troops to carry out the above. This latter specifically stated that General GRACEY was to keep law and order in F.I.C. south of the 16 degrees parallel. He was to command all the Allied troops in F.I.C. and he was given to understand that he would have the whole of his 20th Division to carry out his tasks, in addition to many other technical, medical and welfare units. The whole build up of the Force was based, in fact, on the whole of the Division being sent.

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Commenting on his pre-departure knowledge of the Saigon situation, Gracey stated:

3. It was known at the time that an Annamite government was in power, put there by the Japanese [Gracey also knew that it was communist led], that French troops were in various prisoner of war camps, and French civilians either interned or under very close surveillance in various groups in the country, the great majority being in SAIGON.
4. During the first ten days of September, the Allied Control Commission H.Q. was formed in RANGOON, during which time the Chief of Staff of F.M. Count TERAUCHI, with various naval and military staff officers, was summoned to a conference.
At this conference, the Japanese commander was ordered to maintain law and order, to ensure the safety of all French and other nationals, to stop handing over arms to the Annamite forces, and not to recognize the Annamite government, which, in accordance with general Allied policy, being a Japanese sponsored government, was not recognized by the Allies.

Gracey then traced the evidence of anarchy in Saigon:

5. It was evident at the time that the situation was very tense in F.I.C., particularly in SAIGON, and that the Annamite and communist Chinese press was inciting the Annamite troops, police and government supporters to acts of violence against all other nationalities who did not support the puppet government, particularly against the many French people and loyal Annamites.
6. A serious riot, in which several French civilians were killed by Annamite police and armed forces, took place on September 2nd, and was only stopped from assuming very serious proportions by the very courageous action of various released British and Australian prisoners of war who were unarmed, and the few R.A.P.W.I. officers who had already been flown in.* Later, Japanese officers took firmer hold. As it was, numerous acts of barbarity and much looting took place by Annamite police and

* Apparently surreptitiously, for no documentation was found for this during the research for this study. Terauchi, on 5 September, did report negotiating with a Major Pias about the condition of the POWs.

hooligans, including man-handling of French women. In the outlying districts, similar demonstrations, accompanied by unpleasant incidents, took place.

It was clear that the Annamite puppet government, vociferous on paper as regards democratic and even communistic plans for the future, was quite incapable of keeping law and order. It was also clear that there was a very large hooligan element out to make mischief, many of whom were criminals of the worst type, who had been let out of jail in March 1945, and many of whom were in possession of arms. It later became clear that this criminal element largely composed the Annamite government army.

Mountbatten, in his Section E report, states that RAPWI officers, introduced earlier, had helped to contain the riot of 2 September.

The next report of importance was the Political Report of the Saigon Control Commission,⁶⁹ the object of which was "to record the political history of SAIGON area since the Saigon Control Commission arrived in SAIGON." The report was divided into three phases: Phase 1 covered 13 to 23 September, Phase 2 from 23 September to 1 October, and Phase 3 from 1 to 8 October. The first part stated:

- 2. On arrival on 13th September, 1945 the Commission found that a Government was installed in the HOTEL DE VILLE in SAIGON; this was an ANNAMITE government calling itself the HEAD OF THE SOUTHERN REPUBLIC OF THE VIET NAM.
- 3. The head of this VIET MINH government, for that is the name of the political party concerned, is at HANOI; the government at SAIGON was a subsidiary entirely controlled by HANOI.

After tracing the inefficiency and loose control of the Viet Minh, and the mob violence and reprisals, the report continued:

- (a) an ANNAMITE government ruled in SAIGON, as a subsidiary to the main, central, government at HANOI: this government had been installed with full acquiescence and assistance from the Japanese Forces.
- (b) No proper law and order was enforced and the republic of southern VIET NAM was without legal writ.

- (c) Anti-French, and, to a lesser extent, anti European sentiments were frequently demonstrated by ANNAMITES both physically and very much more strongly and more frequently in the daily press.
- (d) Administrative services were at a standstill except for a minimum of the essential services of SAIGON and CHOLON.
- (e) Many of the more temperate ANNAMITES were too frightened to carry on with any of their normal business routine where it involved trade or contact with French nationals, having constant fear of reprisals from armed extremist elements of the ANNAMITES.

The "History of 20th Indian Division [The Post War Period, Part I - Burma]", recorded the role of the division as follows. It recorded the tasks assigned to the division commander, and commented.

"... the administration of the SAIGON/CHOLON area during the early stages of the occupation had to be undertaken in the absence of any effective local government. In fact, the maintenance of essential services and food control in the city remained a responsibility of the British forces for the greater part of their stay in F.I.C....

There was at this time no proof of TOKYO's ability to enforce the cease fire amongst its far flung armies and it was, therefore, necessary to plan the move of the Division to French Indo China as an operation of war. The planning stage produced more than the usual number of headaches for the Divisional Staff, due mainly to a rapidly changing order of battle for F.I.C., and the detailed planning required to ensure that all the numerous non div units which were scattered all over S.E.A.C. did eventually arrive at their destination."

Brigadier Taunton, Commander of 80 Indian Infantry Brigade, submitted a report to General Gracey on 14 November 1945.⁷⁰ The object of the report "is to trace accurately the build up of 80 Bde."

Wrote Taunton:

2. I take phases already shown in the Political History and show what troops were available in SAIGON: how and why they were employed and make comments on each phase. The comments are entirely my own personal opinion.

- 3. It should be remembered that the original programme aimed that the complete Bde group with its Bde HQ, three bns, Fd amb, * minimum essential ancillary services and one bn of 100 Bde should arrive in SAIGON between 13 and 22 Sep 45.
- 4. This program broke down utterly for two main reasons:-
 - (a) Bad weather.
 - (b) Maintenance of aircraft and supply of POL.
 A third reason affected the fly-in later, and that was the question of more ammunition and some 3" mortars. Events made it necessary to have both, because we had aimed at getting in bodies, with only a reasonably safe margin of small arms ammunition reserve and had not flown in 3" mortars.
- 5. In fact 80 Bde did not complete its concentration in SAIGON until 29 Sep and even then 1/1 GR were still short of one coy.

Taunton recorded that by 13 September the troops available to him were "the equivalent of a composite bn less its HQ and Adm Coy but with a very reduced and improvised scale of Jap tpt" [transport]. Commenting on the period from 14 to 17 September, Taunton wrote that there was no further fly-in until 18 September (due to bad weather). "This was unfortunate for by 16 Sep I should have had the following tps in SAIGON:- 1 Hybad, complete; Bde HQ, complete; an ADS; a large det 20 Div Sig[nal]s."

Taunton continued the sequence of events:

- 2. It was at once apparent that the most important Vital Points must be taken over as soon as possible. With no knowledge of when or what the fly-in would produce, commonsense decided that the 1/1 GR should be used in SAIGON. It would be simple for them to operate there as the Mission was in SAIGON, [and] that 1 Hybad should be used in CHOLON and/or suburbs of SAIGON.

* Field ambulance.

3. Although there were some 2000 ex-FW in SAIGON they were as yet unarmed and badly in need of training.

4. Important Vital Points were taken over as under:-

On 13 and 14 Sep- Two pls 1 Hybad. Vital Points in TAN SON NUT [sic] airfd.

NOTE:- This was vital to us for all sups and tps from BURMA until first elements 20 Div could arrive by sea ETA 10 Oct 45.

One pl - the Power House CHOLON.

This one power house worked the complete water and electric light systems in SAIGON and CHOLON. It also worked the electric light for THU DAUMOT-LAI THEU-BIEN HOA etc.

On 16 and 17 Sep - Two large dumps containing arms, amn, and some equipment were taken over from the Japs. Within 12 hrs these were handed over in toto to the French under Lt.-Col. Rivier.

Comments on period 14 to 17 Sep 45.

1. It is important to grasp a true outlook of conditions and get a fast impression of topography. This can only be done by the Comd with a Staff offr and a good IO; an adv party of Sigs and a pl for immediate protection being flown in before all others. Only an adv party of this type can assure the best possible dispersion for tps when they arrive and ensure prompt operational commitments after they arrive.

Although the Adv party sent was also essential, it was not enough to do more than send infm to the Mission and fix in broad outline accommodation. Too much time was wasted on our arrival in learning topography and recces to get comms [communications] going.

2. Tps available were being employed 100%. Those not guarding vital points were continually on recces --

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paying great attention to the dispositions of armed Annamites who were still in control of Police Stations, Post Offices, Jail, Pumping Stations, Railway, Radio SAIGON, etc. etc.

The scene is now set for discussion of the Proclamation No. 1. This was issued as an extraordinary letter sent by Leclerc to Mountbatten, which touched a raw nerve at SEAC Headquarters.

Footnotes: Chapter VI

- 1 GB, PRO, CAB 105/165; COSSEA 314, British Chiefs of Staff to Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia, 13 August 1945.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 General Sir Douglas D. Gracey, KCB, CB, KCIE, CBE, MC, was born in India in 1894; his father was in the noted ICS, the Indian Civil Service. He attended Sandhurst and in 1914 was commissioned a lieutenant in the Indian Army. In 1915 he saw action with the Royal Munster Fusiliers, and in 1916 joined the 1st Battalion, the 1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles, beginning a lifelong association with the Gurkha regiments. [Three decades later this battalion, 1/1 GR, would accompany him to Saigon, on the other side of the world]. Gracey was wounded during World War One, and received the Military Cross and bar and was mentioned in dispatches. Over the years he held a series of appointments in the Middle East (including Palestine and Persia), and India, and in 1942 was tasked with raising the 20th Indian Division. It turned out to be one of the premier units of 14th Army, being instilled with Gracey's own spirit and reflecting the special personal interest he took in the welfare of his troops.

His Gurkhas so adored him that on at least one occasion they attacked the Japanese with the cry, "The General's Gurkhas Charge!" Gracey spoke fluent Gurkhali and could converse in the various tongues of his division. On one memorable occasion he turned a tongue-lashing into a cheer when in the front he came across some soldiers who had not made an effort to dig in against Japanese artillery. After forcefully pointing out the effects of artillery on exposed infantry he immediately asked them if they knew how much he cared for the safety of his soldiers and their families at home. He never had to do this again. During the course of the war Gracey developed a hatred for the Japanese, primarily because of their inhumane treatment of captives and civilians.

He had said on more than one occasion that it was not hard to be a great commander if the acceptance of unlimited casualties was of little importance. He told his officers to be intimately familiar with the problems and situations of their men. At the lowest level, company and platoon commanders had to know everything about their soldiers: their villages, who just died, the uncles and aunts, the parents, the wives, the whole range of problems. In this way the Division would be more than just an efficient fighting formation;

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it would be a happy family, and indeed that was the title of the 20th Indian Division's own history, and that is how its former officers and men speak of it to this day: "A Happy Family." Slim, another Gurkha officers, rated the 20th Division as one of the best (if not the best) divisions in the 14th Army.

Brigadier Woodford wrote what has become a typical description of Douglas Gracey:

"What sort of man was Douglas Gracey? My answer to that question is inevitably colored by my personal regard and affection for him. Before I took command of 32 Brigade, I was his G.I. (Chief of Staff) on HQ 20 Indian Division from the beginning of our offensive in the fall of 1944 up to the crossing of the Irrawaddy. Consequently I was in daily contact with him and got to know him very well indeed.

I have never served a better commander. He was clear thinking and decisive and, in my opinion, had an exceptional understanding of the workings of minds of the Japanese Divisional Commanders against whom he was fighting.

He had raised, trained and led 20 Div. himself and made it into the fine fighting formation it was. He commanded it until it was split up when we left Saigon. He was personally known to every officer and man in the Division and I believe that his personality, his constant concern for his men and their trust in him were responsible for the exceptional standard of discipline and efficiency it always maintained. He was not a publicity seeker and I think he may have hampered his chances of more rapid promotion by his plain speaking to some of the higher-ups if the interests of his troops were likely to be overlooked. [a view shared by Brigadier Taunton of 80 Brigade]. For this we were truly thankful because no other Commander could have taken his place in our hearts.

I believe we were the only Division that was born, lived and died under the same commander. "

[Letter from Brigadier E.C.J. Woodford, DSO, CBE, Commander 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade, to the author, 9 August 1973].

Gracey was awarded the CBE for his part in the Imphal battle and the CB for the taking of Mandalay, Rangoon and the Irrawaddy crossing; he was also made a Citoyen d'Honneur of Saigon, and received the Grand Cross, Royal Order of Cambodia, Commander of the Legion of Honour, and Croix de Guerre with Palm in 1950; in retirement he did exemplary work as Chairman of the Royal Hospital and Home for Incurables in Putney, where after his death a grateful Pakistan built a Gracey Memorial Pavilion in his honour. [In part from "Who Was Who, 1961-1970"]. The first military hospital built in independent Pakistan was named after Gracey, who died in 1964.

- 4 Gracey Papers, Control Commission tasking, 30 August 1945; also in GB, PRO, Air 23/2375 and WO 203/4566.
- 5 Gracey has been widely quoted as having made this statement prior to departing Rangoon [Ellen Hammer has him in India] for Saigon. In fact, in dealing with news reporters he carefully confined himself to repeating verbatim this statement from his supreme headquarters.

- 6 GB, PRO, WO 203/5444, SEAC JPS Force Plan 1, "Occupation of French Indo-China", 31 August 1945.
- 7 Gracey Papers, ALFSEA Operational Directive No.8, 23 August 1945.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Gracey Papers, ALFSEA Operational Directive No.12, "Masterdom", 28 August 1945; also in Great Britain, Public Record Office, WO 203/2066.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Gracey was one of the few commanders of either side during the war to personally raise his own division. This he did in Southern India, forming the 20th Indian Division in Bangalore in 1942. Its sole mission was to outfight the Japanese in the jungle, and shortly after its formation Gracey took the embryo division to Ceylon for its initial taste of hard training. The division returned to India to take up defence positions on the eastern coast, after which it was committed to battle during the pivotal fight for Imphal and Kohima.

The division's order of battle reflected the "classic" makeup of an Indian division: one British, one Gurkha and one Indian battalion to a brigade. The British battalions were the 1st Battalion, Northhamptons (Brigadier Taunton's home regiment); 1st Battalion, Devons, and the 2nd Battalion, Borders. Gurkha battalions were the 3/1st, 3/8th and 4/10th Gurkha Rifles. Indian units were the 14/13th Frontier Force Rifles, 9/12th Frontier Force Regiment, 9/14th Punjab, 9th Jats (machine gun battalion), and the 4/3rd Madras Regiment. The 4/3 Madras, the defence battalion, was replaced by 4/17 Dogra in 1944. Artillery units in 20 Division were the 9th and 114th Field Regiments, Royal Artillery; 23 Mountain Regiment and 2 Indian Field Regiment, Royal Indian Artillery, and 111 Anti-Tank Regiment, R.A.

Between 12 and 18 April 1945, the three British infantry battalions were exchanged with three Indian and Gurkha battalions of the 36th Division, and 1/19 Hyderabad (to be renamed 1 Kumaon in Saigon at the end of the year), 1/1 Gurkha Rifles and 2/8 Punjab joined the Division. The 16th Light Cavalry, substituting armored cars for their Stuart tanks, joined the Division for the move to Saigon, which saw three artillery units, the vital mule transport companies and some other units deleted from the 20th Divisions order of battle.

- 12 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, Dening to Foreign Office, 9 September 1945.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 GB, PRO, WO 172/1782, Headquarters SEAC War Diary, Memo by Brigadier Gibbons to Conference Secretariat minutes, 5/266; 7 September 1945; also in WO 203/5562 and WO 203/4452.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, 10 September 1945 [F6636].
- 17 GB, PRO, WO 172/1782, Gibbons Memo, 7 September 1945.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.

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Brigadier Gibbons said that there were a number of reasons for recommending a tightening up of the directive given to General Gracey, none of which were aimed at Gracey personally. First, Mountbatten desired to remain clear of political involvement. And in a historical context, "victorious generals" tended to succumb all too easily to the temptation to become ad hoc colonial governors, and SEAC was so over-extended with problems in Burma and Malaya, to name but two areas, that there simply was no capability to devote any time or resources to affairs in French Indochina, which, said Brigadier Gibbons, came low in the order of priority of interest.

There was one more compelling reason to limit as much as possible the British role in Saigon, and this was the extreme "touchiness" of the French to any apparent encroachment of their rights there. The French and the British were philosophically diametrically opposed in their basic approach to colonial affairs in 1945, and Gibbons and others thought that the best thing to do was to limit as severely as possible any British role in French Indochina. [Brigadier Gibbons, telephone conversation 20 January 1945].

- 20 Gracey Papers; plus Great Britain, Public Record Office, WO 203/5644, ALFSEA to Saigon Control Commission, 12 September 1945.
- 21 It was this sentence which Gracey, according to Mountbatten [in line for the historic job of last British Viceroy of India] purportedly disregarded in "exceeding his instructions" by his proclamation of 19/21 September. Gracey, in fact, never left his key areas and never had any intention of doing so. The proclamation (discussed later) was a warning to groups rampaging throughout the country that the Japanese were charged with maintaining law and order. In any case, Gracey had no means by which he could personally enforce it if he wanted to, and, as seen by the example in Annex , these proclamations were the normal occurrence throughout the areas of British responsibility in South East Asia. But Vietnam to the Left Wing has had the same fascination as Jerusalem had for the Crusaders in the middle ages, and Gracey has been the target of a great deal of irrational and politically motivated histories.
- 22 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, Foreign Office Minutes, 8 September 1945.
- 23 GB, PRO PREM 3/472, Churchill to Roosevelt, 14 December 1944.
- 24 Brigadier E.C.J. Myers, Personal Interview. Brigadier Myers was later sent to Saigon to investigate the political situation. Myers had an impressive military career. A Cambridge graduate, he was a civil engineer by profession. He entered SOE service and was infiltrated to Greece, where as Head of Mission he coordinated the resistance movements. He was highly successful and personally briefed the King and Churchill on clandestine operations in Greece. His report was described by the usually taciturn War Office as "thrilling". He later took part in the airborne assault on Arnhem (as Chief of Engineers), and was also involved in the Korean War. He published a book (Greek Entanglement) on the Greek resistance.
- 25 Gracey Papers, Force Plan 1, "The Occupation of F.I.C.", 31 August 1945; also in Great Britain, Public Record Office, Air 23/3221.

26 Total Forces going to Saigon were as follows:

	<u>Personnel</u>	<u>Vehicles</u>
20 Division and attached troops	22,287	2036
Royal Navy	140	30
Royal Air Force	2,250	320
1 Company SAS Battn/ 5 RIC (French)	178	4
1 Light Commando, 5 RIC	623	10
SACSEA Control Commission	260	-
Public Relations	10	-
	<u>25,748</u>	<u>2400</u>

Sea convoys were scheduled as follows [revised schedule, as of 2 September]:

1. 23 Sept. RSS 1 Dept Rangoon 1200 vehicles 10 ships (incl. 1 POL)
 2. 26 Sept. RSF 1 " " 10,000 personnel 5 ships
 3. 28 Sept. RSS 2 " " 900 vehicles 7 ships
 4. 1 Oct. RSF 2 " " 4000 personnel 2 ships
 5. 2 Oct. RSS 1 and RSS 2 arrive Saigon with 10,000 personnel and 1200 vehicles.
 6. 7 Oct. RSS 2 and RSF 2 arrive Saigon with 4000 personnel and 900 vehicles.
- 27 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, External Affairs Department to Secretary of State for India, 1 September 1945.
- 28 Ibid., Secretary of State for India to External Affairs Department, 3 September 1945.
- 29 Gracey Papers, 1/1 Gurkha Rifles Newsletter (n.p., n.d.).
- 30 Great Brit, PRO, WO 172/7008, War Diary 20 Indian Division, 10 September 1945.
- 31 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 Gurkha Rifles, 10 September 1945.

There was a reason for this not entirely atypical state of affairs, and it is provided by Major General Pyman, Slim's Chief of Staff, who as far back as 15 August had foreseen the confusion:

"This theater quite unready for a surrender. There was no plan at all... to meet such a situation. NO PLAN... Neither SUPREMO nor Cs-in-C had given consideration to any plan to meet the new surrender conditions... FIVE DAYS AFTER FIRST WARNING OF SURRENDER AND NO APPROVED PLAN."

And that was not all: "We could not even speak to 12 ARMY at RANGOON and could just to 14 ARMY at SECUNDERABAD." Furthermore, the entire planning concept left much to be desired, for the Joint Planning Staff drew up plans on the Supreme Allied Commander's orders. But "SAC emphasised that these planners formed a part of the staff of their respective Cs-in-C. Cs-in-C did not appear to be aware of it... The main danger was an old and obvious one, namely that the planners produced papers for SAC which the Cs-in-C were not prepared to accept."

[Pyman Papers, Diary of Major General H. Pyman, Liddell Hart Center for Military Archives, King's College, University of London].

32 GB, PRO, WO 172/7765, War Diary 1/19 Hyderabad Regiment, 12 September 1945.

With the Gurkhas and Hybads arriving in Saigon, the 20th Division (back in Burma) held a conference on 12 September, where it was proposed that only 1 of the 5 Indian Infantry Workshop Companies should go to Saigon; but the senior IEME (Indian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) officer said that he must have at least 2 companies, as there would be over 2000 lorry units to maintain. There were further complications in that some artillery and infantry units were having trouble with their radio equipment because of poor maintenance, and a crash program had to be launched to correct the problem. On 14 September the transport maintenance men were given a demonstration on how to paint Union Jacks on the vehicles.

33 GB, PRO, CAB 106/113, Air Chief Marshal Park's report (ACSEA), August 1945, p.2158, para. 394.

34 Ibid., p.2159, para 399.

35 GB, PRO, WO 172/7128. War Diary. 80 Indian Infantry Brigade, 13 September 1945.

36 Brigadier M.S.K. Maunsell, personal interview, 20 April 1977.

37 Ibid. Gracey, described by all his colleagues as a very quick witted man, made an instant decision to walk straight to the Japanese, as the Allies had not recognized the Viet Minh revolutionary government.

38 Air Chief Marshal Sir Walter Cheshire, Letter to author, October 1977.

39 GB, PRO, WO 172/6798, War Diary, HQ, ALFSEA, 14 September 1945.

On 13 September wireless communications were established between Rangoon and Tharawaddy, and on 14 September the radio link was established between Saigon and 12th Army.

40 GB, PRO, Air 25/1032, Operational Records, 232 Group (RAF).

41 Gracey, in keeping with standard international practice, directed that only officers of one star rank or above ("flag rank") would be permitted to fly a flag on their cars. The flags were to denote rank, so no national flags were generally allowed. Dewey complained to Maunsell about it, but Maunsell would not back down, so he went to Gracey. Said Dewey, "It is necessary for me to fly the Stars and Stripes because of my work." Gracey reminded Dewey that his work should not take him to places where he found it necessary to seek protection under the American flag. Furthermore, Dewey was told that, in keeping with standard practice, he may paint the Stars and Stripes on his vehicles; he was also told to lash a large American flag over the radiator grill of his vehicle so that his nationality was clearly visible from the front. After Dewey was killed some members of the staff thought that the ban on flying the national flag was a contributory factor. This is hard to believe since American flags were painted on both sides of his Jeep and, if he had followed advice, a large flag was strapped across the front of the vehicle. As Maunsell later recalled, Dewey was unquestionably up to shady things, for his presence was reported "in a number of places with a number of people which called for an explanation the Control Commission never got." [Personal interview, 20 April 1977].

42 Brigadier Maunsell, personal interview, 20 April 1977.

43 GB, PRO, WO 203/5391; full text as follows:
From Forward Base Psychological Warfare Division, SEAC.

Translation French Leaflet No SF/6

To the people of Annam.

In certain areas Europeans have been attacked, killed, and wounded, by extremist elements of the population.

The Allied Forces, who have destroyed the Japanese Armed Forces on all fighting fronts, are now returning to liberated Indo-China.

Our desire is the peace and prosperity of the Annamite peoples which can only be prejudiced by these outrages committed by irresponsibles.

Be warned that such criminals will be tracked down and punished. All persons found guilty of promoting civil disorder will be severely dealt with.

15 Sep 1945.

44 GB, PRO, WO 203/4932, Browning to Gracey, 15 September 1945.

45 Ibid.

46 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, Dening to Foreign Office, 20 September 1945.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Gouverneur Jean Cédile, personal interview, 25 October 1977.

50 Ibid.

51 GB, PRO, WO 203/5467, Slim to Mountbatten, 17 September 1945.

52 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, 17 September 1945 [F6468].

53 Brigadier Maunsell, personal interview, 20 April 1977.

54 Ibid.

55 GB, PRO, WO 203/5391; full text as follows:
From Forward Base, Psychological Warfare Division, SEAC.

Translation French Leaflet No. SF/7.

To the people of Saigon.

Troops of the British Indian Army are arriving in Saigon.

The only reason for which these British Indian troops are coming is to control the Japanese forces in Indo-China, to ensure that they are peacefully disarmed and disposed of, and to repatriate Allied prisoners of war and internees.

When this is done the British troops will withdraw from Saigon.

It is not the intention of the British to interfere in the affairs of Indo-China. The population of Saigon are therefore requested to lend every assistance to these troops in order

that they may finish their task smoothly and quickly.

With so many Japanese troops in the Saigon area it will be essential that the populace and the Japanese troops maintain the strictest order and discipline while the Japanese are being disarmed. As long as the British troops are here they will assist in enforcing this.

All orders issued by the British Military Commander must therefore be scrupulously obeyed.

The safety of your families and the peace and order of your city depend upon this.

By order of the
G.O.C.
British and Indian Forces.

17 Sep 1945.

- 56 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, War Diary 20 Indian Division Operational Directive No. 1, "The Occupation of French Indo-China," 17 September 1945.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Gracey Papers, rebuttal to Headquarters SEAC report of the British occupation of Saigon, 3 October 1946; also, Brigadier Taunton's report on operations of 80 Brigade.
- 59 F.S.V. Donnison, British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943-1946 (London: HMSO, 1956).
- 60 Ibid., pp407-408.
- 61 GB, PRO, WO 172/1783, Headquarters SEAC War Diary, 17 September 1945.
- 62 GB, PRO, WO 172/7128, War Diary. 80 Indian Infantry Brigade, 18 September 1945.
- 63 Gracey Papers, "Medical History, Allied Land Forces French Indo-China, Sept 1945 - Feb 1946."
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 GB, PRO, WO 203/4020, Saigon Control Commission, Progress Report No. 1 to Headquarters SACSEA, 18 September 1945.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 GB, PRO, Air 25/1032, 232 Transport Group Records, September 1945.
- 68 Gracey Papers, rebuttal to Headquarters SEAC report of the British occupation of Saigon, 3 October 1946.

Gracey's predeparture information was further described by a former member of Force 136 who accompanied the Commission to Saigon. This was, roughly, as follows:

"Saigon was in a state of anarchy, with no group solidly in control. Several organizations were jockeying for power, with the Viet Minh being most prominent. After Gracey's arrival it was by no means certain that the Viet Minh had the support of the population, and intelligence reconnaissance sorties through Saigon confirmed this. People in outlying villages were angered by Viet Minh terror tactics which included impaling nonconformists on stakes, and so on."

[Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Astor, personal interview, 26 June 1977].

- 69 Gracey Papers, Saigon Control Commission, "Political Report, 13th September, 1945, to 9th October, 1945."
- 70 Gracey Papers, "Build-Up of 80 Indian Infantry Brigade", 14 November 1945.

CHAPTER VII

CRACKDOWN

20 APRIL 1977: Gracey would never knowingly embarrass Mountbatten or His Majesty's Government. We didn't think at that moment we were wrong... Douglas would never do that. Had I thought that he was doing that I'd have stopped him.

Brigadier M.S.K.Maunsell
Chief of Staff
HQ SACSEA Commission No.1, Saigon.

3 OCTOBER 1946: It was during this time [25 September onwards] that the Allied Commander was warned that the whole of 20th Division might not be made available for F.I.C., and was also ordered to restrict the activities of British forces to a perimeter... .

Lieutenant General Sir D.D.Gracey, C.B., C.B.E., M.C.

On 19 September, 4/17 Dogra began the move to Saigon:

"The Battalion was the last of the [80th] Bde to be flown while M.T. personnel with their vehicles and baggage parties went by sea under Captains Atma Singh and Mota Singh. The C.O. with Subedar Mohar Singh flew early, constituting the Bn advance party, and after spending the night in BANGKOK arrived on the 20th." 1

And echoing a theme common throughout the 20th Division and RAF personnel, the Dogra chronicler wrote:

"It seemed strange at first to have to depend on Jap drivers and Jap M.T. until our own arrived, but we got used to it, and the Jap's discipline was excellent. The fact that many of them had already met the Division under different conditions on the IRRAWADDY may have had something to do with it.

The lay out in SAIGON itself was that while 80 Bde would be responsible for SAIGON itself and its sister town of CHOLON, 32 and 100 Bdes on arrival would look after the approaches while French troops on arrival would garrison the countryside. The task in front of the Division was the disarming and concentration of the seventy odd thousand Japs in the British portion of F.I.C., and the general maintenance of law and order while the country settled down again and while the French authorities got into their stride. Our own task was to have two companies deployed in CHOLON as guards on warehouses, dumps etc." 2

The first of Gracey's airborne punch arrived on 19 September, the Spitfires of 273 Squadron arriving over Tan Son Nhut to peel off and make a circling approach to land, at which time the pilots registered their amazement at the situation. They had earlier provided the escort for Numata's aircraft when he had arrived in Rangoon to negotiate with Browning.

The squadron had been looking forward to the move to Saigon: "Morale is boosted once more owing to the squadron moving once again, this time into liberated territory, namely Saigon, in Indo-China, via Bangkok."³ On 11 September, 10 Spitfires left their home base at Mingaladon for Bangkok. They had a delightful stay in Bangkok:

"Pilots and airmen highly delighted with Bangkok strip, living quarters good and owing to superb cooking the food was magnificent; eggs and chicken frequently seen on the plates of everyone. Being promised with a day off in the near future, aircraft serviceability improved with pilots cleaning their planes."

On 19 September, the 273 Squadron log continued:

"The planes left Bangkok today with the pilots in high spirits, hoping Saigon lived up to its name, 'Paris of the East'. They were not disappointed, being greeted by smiling airmen on landing."

Then, echoing the familiar shock:

"Everyone a little dazed with having Japanese chauffeurs and guards, the Japanese being fully armed."

At the Supreme Allied Commanders 80th Staff Meeting of 19 September, it was stated that Headquarters SACSEA has received copies of monitored broadcasts from Saigon and Hanoi. These repeated the text of Gracey's proclamation.⁴ The "so-called Viet Nam Government" had made the broadcasts, and Mountbatten ordered Gracey to immediately seize Saigon Radio from the Việt Minh and to begin censoring all broadcasts. Dening addressed the assembled officers and spoke, for the record, of the wider political implications of the problems in French Indochina:

"The Supreme Allied Commander said that he wished to reiterate, for the sake of Press guidance, the intention of British policy in F.I.C. The object of H.M. Government, in sending British troops into F.I.C., was fourfold -- to control Field Marshal Terauchi's Headquarters, which commanded the Japanese Armies in the Southern Regions; to disarm the Japanese; to release and repatriate Allied prisoners-of-war and internees; and to maintain law and order until the arrival of French forces. He stressed that H.M. Government had no intention of using British forces in F.I.C. to crush resistance movements."

Hugh Astor had earlier spoken to Trần Văn Giàu about curbing the inflammatory rhetoric being broadcast over Saigon Radio, to no avail. When he accompanied the troops who finally dislodged the Việt Minh from the station it suddenly occurred to the British that the station was no good without the transmitter, which was some distance away, so they made a hectic dash and seized it before it could be sabotaged.⁵

Gracey now had temporarily to suspend his other activities in order to deal as a matter of urgency with the Việt Minh, who had interjected themselves between him and his task of disarming and concentrating the Japanese. It is not difficult to understand why the Việt Minh decided to force the issue within a week of the British arrival. Seventy thousand Japanese constituted an excellent diversion from Việt Minh activities, and a factor adding confusion to the local situation, especially

since many Japanese were aiding, training and even leading Viet Minh forces. Once the Japanese had been concentrated and repatriated, the Viet Minh became more exposed and would lose a lucrative source of arms. With the passage of time the French would return in greater strength, lessening the chances of a successful Viet Minh power seizure. The optimum time for the Viet Minh challenge was obviously while both British and French forces were far weaker than the Viet Minh, and while the Japanese were still present in strength. But Gracey adopted a course of action which the Viet Minh had probably discounted: he applied pressure on the Japanese to control the situation until the Anglo-French forces should become strong enough to take over, a step for which later writers of the political left have never forgiven him.

Taking a more objective view, S. Woodburn Kirby stated in Volume V of The War Against Japan:

"By the 17th attacks on French and other Europeans by Annamites had broken out on a considerable scale and Gracy decided he must intervene. He had already, early in September, sent a strongly-worded order to Terauchi reminding him to take immediate action to ensure law and order in Saigon, and to arrest and hand over to the Allied Control Commission any local inhabitants concerned in outrages, but there had been little improvement." 6

But, the Viet Minh did not confine themselves to inciting the general population; they now attempted to subvert Gracey's own soldiers. Viet Minh propaganda leaflets were left in British/Indian troop areas and quarters, and Annamites were caught in the act of propogandizing. One of the leaflets, an "Appeal to the Indian Officers and Soldiers among the British troops," said in part:

"Please do remember that over there in your fatherland, your countrymen just like us are fighting hard for freedom. Our goal being, thus, but one and the same we both must go side by side, hand in hand, love each other. We must not be divided by anybody... Let it be that in the days to come we do not shoot at each other any more.

INDIAN VIETNAMESE FRIENDSHIP FOR EVER
 CHEERS FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF INDIA
 CHEERS FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF VIETNAM." 7

Another tract noted that India and Vietnam had "partaken together in intimate relation and friendship in the pure and pacific atmosphere of Asia," and both vowed to build a second "fine and ideal paradise for two common races." It went on to daub the French and British imperialists

with the same brush and concluded:

"Indians, don't forget that you are heroic sons of Gandhi, don't forget that many of your compatriots have been massacred in building imperialism bases at India, and don't forget that the more you vanquish on the land of Viet-Nam the more you, your Vietnamese friends and all the peoples... have to suffer for ever under bondage.

Remember that, hitherto, you have sacrificed yourselves for the evil purpose of your oppressors and foes, remember that you and your Vietnamese friends, are the most hapless and unhappy upon the world and at least, remember that helping your Vietnamese friends in their fighting for independence is escaping yourselves from pains and drudgeries of slavery."⁸

This skilful attempt to turn the Indians against the British proved completely ineffective for one obvious reason; there was hardly a single Indian soldier who did not know that negotiations were well under way to grant India independence. And the fact that the Indian Army was an all-volunteer, professional army generally rendered them less susceptible to subversion anyway.

As the official history was later to record:

"On the 19th Gracey therefore took drastic action. He stopped the publication of Saigon papers, all of which had been stirring up trouble, and sent an officer deputation to the puppet President ordering him to stop requisitioning buildings, return some of those already requisitioned, furnish a list of Annamite Armed Police and other forces of the Vietminh with their present locations, and order them to remain where they were until further orders. With them he sent a copy of a proclamation which he proposed to issue on the 21st." ⁹

The above is a short but accurate description of events. The officer deputation to the Việt Minh and the Committee for the South was headed by Gracey's Chief of Staff, Brigadier Maunsell.

The official documents best describe the situation. Gracey reported the events in a telegram to Mountbatten, the subject of which was the "Internal Political Situation in F.I.C. with special reference to Annam." Gracey said that on his arrival on the 13th he had interviewed Colonel Cédile, General Leclerc's representative. Cédile traced the recent history of the area, including the abdication of Bảo Đại and the Saigon riot of 2 September. The Annamite Government's control was in name only, no legal writ was in evidence and pillaging and looting were on the increase. Wrote Gracey:

"After 6 days personal examination I decided that although the situation was not serious, the Annamite Government constituted a direct threat to law and order through its Armed Police Gendarmerie and Armed Garde Civile. In addition the Annamite Press published in Annamese, showed very strong anti-French tendencies and daily became more violent in character. A sheet published in English, was aimed at subverting British troops against the French." 10

Having given the reasons for his action, Gracey described the steps he took to clamp his own control over Saigon:

"On 19th Sept I therefore sent an Officer deputation to the puppet President to deliver the following orders:

1. I attach a copy of a proclamation which I am about to issue.
2. In order to ensure no provocation or incitement to unruly and lawless elements of all Nationals all newspapers at present published in SAIGON CHOLON in any language will be suspended immediately. I have already given the necessary orders to the Japanese forces under my command to effect this.
- 3.(A) You will immediately cease requisitioning any more buildings, land or other property.
- (B) You will evacuate at once without removing any furniture, crockery or other removable property NO.42 RUE LA GRANDIERE which you have recently occupied.' " 11

Gracey then directed the Việt Minh to furnish lists of Việt Minh police units and the names of their commanders, and these units were ordered to remain "in their present locations and barracks." Gracey characteristically added:

- "6.(B) 'You will overcome all difficulties that you may experience.
- (C) I will accept no excuses of any kind for non-compliance with these rules.' "

The proclamation itself is as follows:

"1. With the unconditional surrender to the Allied Nations by all Japanese Forces signed in the name of the Emperor of Japan at Tokyo on 2nd September, 1945 the Supreme Allied Commander of all Allied Forces in South-East Asia Command, Admiral Lord Louis MOUNTBATTEN, G.C.V.O., K.C.B., D.S.O has delegated to me, General D.D. GRACEY, C.B., C.B.E., M.C. the command of all British, French and Japanese forces and all police forces and armed bodies in French Indo-China South of 16 latitude with orders to ensure law and order in this area.

"2. Let it be known to all that it is my firm intention to ensure with strict impartiality that this period of transition from war to peace conditions is carried out peaceably with the minimum dislocation to all public and utility services, legitimate businesses and trade and with the least interference with the normal peaceful activities and vocations of the people.

"3. I call on all citizens in the name of the Supreme Allied Commander to cooperate to the fullest extent to achieve the above object and hereby warn all wrongdoers especially looters and saboteurs of public and private property and those also carrying out similar criminal activities that they will be summarily shot.

"4. The following orders will come into immediate effect.

- (A) No demonstrations or processions will be permitted.
- (B) No public meetings will take place.
- (C) No arms of any description, including sticks, staves, bamboo spears, etc., will be carried except by British and Allied troops and such other forces and police which have been specially authorised by me.
- (D) The curfew already imposed on my orders by the Japanese authorities between 2130 and 0530 repetition 0530 hours in SAIGON and CHOLON will be continued and strictly enforced."

"The Proclamation given above is being thoroughly billposted in all languages on 21 September throughout SAIGON and CHOLON under Japanese arrangements,"¹² wrote Gracey to Mountbatten.

The three principal figures responsible for the proclamation were Gracey, Brigadier Hirst (who was the division's Artillery commander and ran the 20th Division for Gracey) and Maunsell. It was, according to the senior surviving officer, Brigadier Maunsell, formulated in a period of increasing disorder and tension, as described by Gracey. Part of the proclamation was actually written by Maunsell, part by the intelligence officers on the Commission. It was evident that the Viet Minh were set to challenge the Allies for control of Saigon.

These three senior officers discussed the situation well into the night, and decided that time was running out for them and they must act immediately. Ironically, Gracey acted for precisely the same reason that the Việt Minh did, for he thought that unless he moved immediately the Allies would be outdistanced by both factions -- the Việt Minh and the Japanese, who were by then already wondering whether the British really did exercise control. Indeed a major concern of the three British senior officers was the question of what the Japanese were thinking.

Said Maunsell:

"We were terribly thin on the ground. They [the Japanese] still had their arms — we still hadn't disarmed them. They still had their ammunition — they still had access to it. We still distrusted every action the Japanese took. We talked at times as to whether there was any likelihood of a sort of land kamikaze aspect.

There we were — we'd been there for days, we appeared to be losing control, nobody appeared to be very excited by our arrival — mostly because they realized we had no teeth (no real teeth), and if one's going to be really honest, I believe that it was for two reasons: I believe one was that we felt we had got to act, and number two, we felt (which is understandable if you've just finished a war) that it was well within our terms of reference to act on that basis, because we felt it was 99 and 9/10 to do with law and order." 13

Maunsell remembered the occasion very well:

"Douglas Gracey felt very strongly about this aspect of his responsibilities, for he felt that unless the country was pacified, and quickly, none of his other tasks could be successfully accomplished. But most of all, he felt that under the terms of his original directives he'd been given tasks to do, which must be done, and this was an essential preliminary to doing any of them and within his terms of reference.

We talked about it through most of one night before retiring."

At 3 A.M. Gracey padded into Maunsell's room and awakened him. Gracey said, "I've been thinking, we haven't time." They discussed it again, and decided to act.

Maunsell stated one more reason why Gracey acted:

"Throughout all this Gracey was thinking that he must make certain that whatever action he took would support, would buttress, would underpin, would excite the unknown, quantifiably, but the existing body of support for the French that we were told on every hand was there." 14

Brigadier Maunsell was delegated by Gracey to give Tran Van Giau a copy of the proclamation which would be published on the 21st. So on 19 September Maunsell ordered Terauchi's car and, with the Union Jack fluttering from the pennant, drove up to the front of the Hôtel de Ville,

which was still occupied and guarded by the Viêt Minh and the Committee for the South. It was a short drive, for since Gracey's residence was next door, he had only to drive around the block. A rumour had spread that something important was afoot, perhaps initiated by senior French officials, for as Maunsell drove around the Hôtel de Ville he was cheered by crowds of Frenchmen.

Maunsell, proclamation in hand, ascended the steps of the city hall and entered the building for the first time, expecting to find a government in being. Instead, he paused in complete astonishment at the scene which confronted him. As far as the eye could see, there were scattered groups of totally unconcerned Vietnamese squatting around their cooking pots, which were bubbling over open flames and exuding thick smoke and pungent aromas. Screaming, half-naked urchins tumbled about the floor. Maunsell could hardly believe it. As he later said, it was not quite what he had expected from the Provisional Government of South Vietnam.¹⁵ The reception committee consisted mainly of yelling children and women cooking; the City Hall was little more than a squatter's haven. He then asked at random where the government was located, or where the head of government could be found. No one spoke English, so he picked his way around and asked in French.

Finally, someone nonchalantly grunted and pointed upstairs. Maunsell walked upstairs, followed by another officer, wondering whether he was rash to do so and apprehensive lest something unpleasant should happen. On reaching the landing he noticed a number of rooms opening from it, some with doors ajar and some with doors closed. So total was the absence of any signs of authority or organization that the scene created an impression "almost impossible to convey."

As Maunsell commented years later, "There was an air of lack of permanency, or else better arrangements would have been made for use of the ground floor besides for cooking."

But one door was, somewhat conspicuously, shut tight, and Maunsell thought that if anything was going on (or if indeed there was anybody here at all), it would be found in there. So he advanced, opened it, and discovered some extraordinary form of meeting in progress, "which to Western eyes didn't look hopeful of anything meaningful coming from it, to judge by the posturing, etc."¹⁶

One man was lying down on a sofa, some were sitting at a table, one man was looking out of the window, and half of them did not appear to be taking any interest in what was going on in the room. But one man

got up immediately -- Trần Văn Giàu. He appeared amazed at being confronted by a British officer in uniform, as he had been given no official warning of the visit.

Trần Văn Giàu had been seated at the far end of the table, and he walked around it and up to Maunsell. He appeared to be highly agitated, and he stood there, eyes blinking furiously and continuously, probably from complete surprise. Maunsell announced, "I come in the name of General Sir Douglas Gracey." He then asked Trần Văn Giàu in French if he understood. Trần Văn Giàu stood there as if in a stupor, eyes still blinking furiously, and Maunsell thought that he would have to introduce himself all over again. So he said, in his best French, "I will now repeat it, very slowly," which he did. He then handed Trần Văn Giàu the proclamation, bowed to him and the assembled company, "who had so far evinced not the slightest interest in the entire proceedings," and departed, wondering if his French had been faulty.

But Maunsell "appreciated from that moment on that to say that that group were in real control is something which I cannot believe." He was "ready to believe that they possibly had pockets of control, or that they were in touch with various elements or groups." But atrocities were being all too frequently committed, and the photographs seen by the Commission staff were terrible and chilling, "in keeping with the worst typically thought representative of the Far East." Maunsell will not say that the Committee for the South were responsible for these acts, or even agreed or disagreed with them, but he is certain that they had little knowledge or control of what was really going on. This was his feeling during all subsequent dealings with the Việt Minh, and his lasting impression of them: "Good talkers, quite attractive men from an intellectual point of view; but of those that I met, I would not have thought that executive control was ever going to be their strong suit."¹⁷

The proclamation was made public on 21 September, and contemporary photographs show Japanese soldiers putting up the posters in various parts of Saigon. The curfew part of the proclamation was meant to go into effect immediately, but the problem arose as to how to enforce it or to police it. The British had only a couple of battalions of troops, the French were of little real use, and at this moment there were no plans to use the Japanese in a fighting role. Gracey, in fact, was "trying desperately not to fall into the trap of using them, for severe criticism would follow."¹⁸

On the night of the 21st, the first full day of the proclamation's publicity, Maunsell sent two Intelligence officers, including the head of the Control Commission's Intelligence staff, with a small bodyguard, to go twice around Saigon and Cholon during the curfew and report on its observance. The reconnaissance party reported that the curfew was not being observed, especially by the Japanese. The Cholon dance halls and night "establishments" were operating full blast, and numbers of Japanese soldiers were frequenting these places. That same night a drunken Japanese soldier hit a French officer, which added to the problems. Furthermore, the French population were not paying any attention to the curfew, so the following day Gracey and Maunsell talked about it.

The Việt Minh police had also ignored the curfew. If there was to be a curfew and the British were unable to enforce it, then they would look very silly, and they might even sink to the "level of the French troops during the past four years." They then decided to make a spot check of a local Việt Minh police station, and, by using some drivers and Control Commission staff, scraped together a small platoon which entered the station. An arms and ammunition count was made, and the building was checked to see if it was being turned into a strong point.

Several members of Gracey's staff were pressing him to use the Japanese troops, but Gracey resisted it "step by step, hour by hour." Maunsell clearly remembers Gracey's hatred of the Japanese, and the archives amply bear this out. According to Maunsell, Gracey felt that rearming the Japanese would be seen as weakness on his part. There was one way by which the need for large-scale Japanese rearmament might be avoided, and that was speeding effective French control of the city. But eventually the use of the Japanese became unavoidable, for Maunsell remembered some nights when he and Gracey wondered if they would live to see the morning. Although they had both seen a lot of war, street fighting was new to them, and the nightly sounds of mortars and small arms were magnified in the city. Of this more will soon be said.

Mountbatten described his reaction as follows:

"While appreciating that the military situation in Saigon was grave, with only a small Allied force available and the river not yet open, I felt that this proclamation - addressed, as it was, to the whole of Southern F.I.C., and not merely to the key points - was contrary to the policy of His Majesty's Government; and since proclamations of this nature may well appear

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to be initiated by Government policy, I warned Major-General Gracey that he should take care to confine operations of British/Indian troops to those limited tasks which he had been set." 19

Having registered his official displeasure, Mountbatten went on:

"At the same time I approved the military measures which he proposed to take: this consisted in the first place of bringing home more strictly to Field Marshal Terauchi his personal responsibility for ensuring that the Japanese obeyed their orders; Major-General Gracey further proposed to empty Japanese troops for keeping the northern approaches to Saigon clear, moving British/Indian troops out to the approaches - and finally, he proposed to extend and consolidate his perimeter as soon as the remainder of 20 Indian Division arrived. The categorical orders to Field Marshal Terauchi had the desired effect; and in the future the Japanese were to fulfil their obligations satisfactorily." 20

Mountbatten reported that after consulting Generals Slim and Leclerc, and in view of the situation in Saigon, "I telegraphed to the Chiefs of Staff on the 24th September that I considered that Major-General Gracey, in issuing his proclamation, had acted with courage and determination in an extremely difficult situation." If "the riots he feared had developed," his small force and the French population might well have been in grave danger. Gracey was in a very dangerous situation indeed, and there is no doubt that, had he waited for the trouble to erupt before acting, he would have been more severely criticised, and casualties on both sides would have resulted. At the moment it was only a battle of words and wills. But Mountbatten touched on the fundamental problem when he wrote "I was told that French forces, with Civil officials, would be responsible for the administration of the country, Civil administration being carried out by the French even in the key areas in which my forces would be operating." 21

The Viêt Minh chose to meet Gracey's attempt to assert his authority by challenging him head-on; they immediately called for a complete strike. Gracey reported this to Mountbatten and said that he did not expect an armed resistance at this time, there were alternative sources of labour [notably the Japanese], and many workers would resume work when the threat of victimization by the Viêt Minh was removed.

Gracey had no illusions as to what Mountbatten's reaction would be. In telegraphing the Supreme Allied Commander he said:

"I would stress that although it may appear that I have interfered in the politics of the country I have done so only in the interest of the

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maintenance of law and order and after close collaboration with the senior French representatives. The alternatives would have been:

- (A) To issue orders to TERAUCHI to disarm and round up Annamese elements. In my opinion this would have inevitably ended in a considerable number of wanted Annamite persons disappearing before the round-up took place and without our knowledge and without the means to check or trace them.
- (B) To leave such action to the French. This would have precipitated bloodshed. In addition there are insufficient French troops available. 22

The Việt Minh, while calling for an intensified strike, replied to Gracey's proclamation in a letter to him. The "Executive Committee of Southern VIET-NAM Republic" said it was doing "its best to make the population accept your decisions" in order to give the country "an example of calmness and dignity" while cooperating with the British forces. The letter continued:

"Nevertheless it is our duty to draw your kind attention on the unpopularity of some of those measures which might be interpreted as an interference with our internal affairs. On the other hand the suspension of all newspapers will be a serious handicap for the Government regarding the control of public opinion. * 23

We are obliged therefore to decline all responsibility concerning any incident which might occur in the future. However in view of reaching an agreement on both sides we respectfully ask you to authorise all newspapers to be published again under the censorship of the Government of VIET-NAM, thus we shall be in a measure to control all rumours which are being spread in SAIGON." 24

Gracey considered this a "definite climb-down from previous utterances," and replied to the Việt Minh, as follows:

"I have received your letters dated 20 September, 1945 with their attached maps and papers. I commend your prompt obedience to my orders which has shown me that wise counsels have prevailed. Realising fully the imposition on the general public of complete suspension of the press I am now willing to receive applications for the renewal of publication of all papers that are owned by men of integrity and high repute. I have also received your communication dealing with Radio Saigon. I have already directed that immediate consideration should be given to the use of the broadcasting facilities of

* The "control of public opinion" by the Việt Minh press was precisely why, among other reasons, Gracey had acted against them.

SAIGON in the best interests of the country."²⁵

All of this was passed to the Cabinet by Mountbatten, who said that he had instructed Gracey to remain inside the Saigon key areas. Gracey's reference to Radio Saigon reflected a directive from Mountbatten to clamp down on the stream of subversive propaganda emanating from the Việt Minh controlled station.

Mountbatten replied to Gracey's telegram:

"I must point out that the proclamation you have issued is contrary to the policy given you by ALFSEA... in that you have announced that I have made you responsible for the whole of FRENCH INDO-CHINA South of 16 degrees North.

2. However, since you have taken this particular line and you are the man on the spot, it is my intention to support you as you will see from SEACOS 490... which I am having repeated to you.
3. You are not repetition not to employ British forces outside the SAIGON key area and must rely on the Japanese and French forces to enforce your orders. If the French call upon you to send forces outside your key area the request must be referred to His Majesty's Government through me." ²⁶

As Maunsell was delivering the proclamation to Tran Van Giau, the veteran Communist revolutionary, the Control Commission's senior intelligence officer wrote to Major General Penney, Director of Intelligence at SEAC. Penney's attention was called to the fact that the Commission was lacking expert guidance on political, financial and Civil Affairs matters.²⁷ On 19 September Gracey telegraphed directly to Mountbatten: "The deficiency from my staff of 2 CAS* Officers and one Foreign Office representative is becoming increasingly serious. Advice on political problems is essential and I would therefore be most grateful for arrival these officers urgently."²⁸ However, with anarchy visible on the horizon and murder on his doorstep, there was none of the promised expert advice available to Gracey. But unlike some senior officials, Gracey was not afraid to make decisions.

At the 100th PSO's meeting on 20 September, it was noted that "Major General Penney had received a letter from the Senior Intelligence Officer on the Saigon Control Commission which complained expert guidance was lacking on political, financial and Civil Affairs matters."²⁹ Mountbatten responded by hastening the departure to Saigon of Harry Brain,** of his Political Affairs Staff, and asked the War Office in London to

*Civil Affairs Staff

** Later Sir Norman H. Brain

speed up the assignment of 2 Civil Affairs Officers to SEAC, saying that "Their absence from the Commission is handicapping their work and is becoming increasingly serious." 30

Dening sent his own assessment to the Foreign Office:

"... a situation is arising which is even more serious than I had contemplated since objection is being taken at the very outset to the presence of British troops as supporting French Imperialism. It is not improbable that there is both Japanese and Chinese instigation behind the various movements in Indo-China.

To my mind we cannot escape our duty, which is to liquidate the Japanese Headquarters at Saigon and Japanese forces South of 16 degrees parallel, and to evacuate Allied prisoners of war and internees." 31

Dening then, apparently independently, arrived at the same conclusion as Gracey and his senior officers in Saigon when he continued:

"That objective can only be attained if law and order are maintained in areas occupied by British forces. Unless the population of the areas concerned are willing to maintain law and order themselves, steps may have to be taken to enforce it, but in that case the populations concerned will themselves be responsible for such action as may be necessary.

I fear, however, our forces are going to have a difficult time and will require all the support H.M.G.* can give them..." 32

Since this message was sent on 20 September, it most likely was written on the 19th, as Gracey was preparing to do just what Dening thought must happen if they were to get anything done. It is interesting to note that the senior Foreign Office representatives were consistently closer to Gracey's thinking in these problems than some of the military officers on the SEAC staff,** as shown by the appropriate Foreign Office minutes and correspondence between the SEAC Political Affairs staff and the Foreign Office in London.

While these exchanges were taking place, events continued to move quickly in Saigon. On 19 September, as Maunsell delivered the proclamation to Trần Văn Giàu, Brigadier Taunton issued disarmament and concentration orders to General Manaki. And a good fly-in of 22 sorties brought the remainder of 80 Brigade Headquarters staff, additional 1/19 Hyderabad and 2/8 Punjab defense company personnel, and 55 Field Ambulance.

On 20 September, 1/1 GR took over the Central Jail. This was described in part by Lieutenant Colonel Jarvis, commanding 1/1 Gurkha Rifles,

* His Majesty's Government.

** However, the most senior officers [Mountbatten excepted] also consistently backed Gracey, as will be seen.

who recalled the incident with amusement.

The young officer designated to carry out the task, probably the Assistant Provost Marshal, had held a meeting with his personnel and had expressed his anxiety over the action and his possible reception at the jail. He "earnestly" asked Jarvis, who was backing him up with a complement of 1/1 Gurkhas (and who had considerable experience in "aid to the civil power" duties), to set off and arrest a high ranking official if within 10 minutes of entering the jail the young officer had not displayed a white towel from an agreed window.

Jarvis escorted the officer and his small force to a suitable starting point from which the Gurkhas could provide covering fire should resistance be met. The Gurkhas took up their positions; the young officer swallowed and entered the jail.

Ten minutes passed. No white towel appeared at the window, and no sounds came from the building. Being "fully aware of the pitfalls of military interference with the civil powers," and the adage that "time spent on recce is seldom wasted," Jarvis decided to have a look inside the jail before arresting a high Việt Minh official. He took a couple of Gurkhas, rifles at the ready and, revolver in hand, cautiously entered the jail, making for the designated room with the signal window. As he stealthily approached the room he heard voices coming from another room. The voices sounded "social, even convivial."

The Gurkhas burst open the door and beheld an amazing, totally unexpected scene. The young officer and his group and the prison staff were clinking glasses and toasting each other's health with champagne! Seeing Jarvis's face he could only say, quite unabashed, "Sorry, old boy, the window was too high for me to reach. Come and join us for a drink." His relief was so obvious that Jarvis did join in the toasting, saying later, "After all, the war was over, and that was one more obstacle surmounted, and it seemed unfair to spoil his fun." Jarvis also thought it more important to maintain a united front than to reprimand him. And anyway they had not seen champagne for years and the comic aspect of the episode predominated.³³

Mountbatten, back in Kandy, told the Chiefs that Gracey's proclamation left him with two possible courses of action.³⁴ He could give Gracey his full support and assume responsibility for administration throughout the whole of southern French Indochina, or he could restrict the area of his responsibility to the control of the Japanese Supreme Headquarters only. The latter option represented the narrowest possible interpretation of

the Chiefs of Staff direction -- and perhaps narrower, as will be seen.

Mountbatten emphasized that the first option, which he called Course A, would require a full division to implement until such time as the French were ready to take over. He also thought that it exceeded his instructions. Course B required Leclerc to reaffirm the proclamation; which in Mountbatten's opinion would be dangerous to revoke. Leclerc was willing to do this, but only after arrival of the 9th D.I.C. Mountbatten recommended the adoption of Course B, which meant that the senior French officer would have to be instructed by the French Government to exercise civil and military control outside the key areas. Course A would also entail SACSEA controlling all French forces and Civil Affairs until Leclerc should assume that responsibility.

Mountbatten told the Chiefs that Leclerc had "expressed his warm appreciation of what GRACEY had done." Leclerc thought that French forces under SEAC control could operate outside the key areas. Mountbatten anticipated general unrest in Indochina, but continued to the crux of the problem:

"Nor do I see how I can divest myself of my responsibility for the maintenance of law and order which is a normal military responsibility of a Commander throughout his theatre. This is also very strongly the point of view of General LECLERC who maintains emphatically that the French Government must hold S.E.A.C. responsible for the functions which the French are not yet in a position to carry out." 35

While Mountbatten admonished Gracey over the proclamation, he himself posed the same questions to the Chiefs of Staff:

"In fact we cannot have it both ways. Either F.I.C. south of 16 degrees north is firmly in my theatre, or my boundary must be redrawn to exclude it, and to place the full responsibility on the French Government not only for law and order but for the safety of prisoners of war, for the disarming of the Japanese, and for the apprehension of war criminals." 36

That was precisely what Leclerc was pondering aloud. In a telegram to the French Government he asked how the British could control, disarm and concentrate the Japanese, most of whom were scattered throughout South French Indochina, if Gracey was to be restricted to Saigon only?

Again under Course B, Mountbatten seemed to think that the Chiefs were hinting that he stop the build-up in FIC, but Leclerc protested vigorously that the plan called for a division (the 20th Indian) and it

would be dangerous to renege on this now.

Leclerc discussed the situation in a telegram to the French Minister of War. He reported that Gracey's proclamation was "very important in Mountbatten's eyes in light of restricted instructions received from London. These new instructions were badly defined..."

Said Leclerc:

"I declared that General Gracey had in my opinion taken the best possible measures in the circumstances because if he had shown any weakness the situation might have become critical." 37

Mountbatten, speaking officially, requested that Leclerc suggest to the French Government that a "precise and detailed declaration" be made promising independence and dominion status to Indochina. Leclerc continued:

"The above declaration should take into account the important differences between British Imperial aims and local conditions in Indo-China. Mountbatten insisted that this declaration would have an excellent effect from two viewpoints:

- (a) It would stop all fighting for self-government, officially promised, and facilitate occupation.
- (b) It would have beneficial effect on English opinion especially and on the American attitude." 38

The last phrase was significant. Gracey's strong stand had set off vociferous left-wing complaints in the press. In Saigon itself a well known and hard core left wing American reporter was sending out what, by any reasonable standards of objectivity, amounted to hysterical reports on the local situation which all but portrayed Gracey as the very devil himself.

The proclamation thus generated a great deal of controversy, and much was said and written - both pro and con - about it. Everyone, it seemed, but Gracey had something to say about it. But Gracey did express himself on the subject of the proclamation, in his long-buried, little known rebuttal to Mountbatten's scribes at SEAC Headquarters. This document provides a unique insight into Gracey's predicament and, what is more startling, challenges the widely circulated published allegations that he was an unfeeling, bumbling blimp who disobeyed orders and decided to do what he could to resurrect the colonial system. There is a very strong possibility that Gracey had in fact never received the ALFSEA amendment which limited his responsibility for law and order to the key areas of Saigon, despite Slim's visit to Saigon, and there are indications that

some of the SEAC staff quite deliberately attempted to make a scapegoat of Gracey, perhaps out of their loyalty to Mountbatten and his concept of his place in history.

Gracey took strong exception to the SEAC staff's version of events covering the period of the proclamation. In his letter of 3 October 1946 to the SEAC Recorder, Gracey charged that the SEAC version "is NOT in chronological order, and gives the impression that the Allied commander was insubordinate and irresponsible." Gracey flatly stated:

"It is absolutely untrue to say that 'the proclamation covered the whole of F.I.C.' It is not correct to talk about key areas at this stage. This is most misleading. The question arose later!" * 39

The SEAC report apparently went further, for Gracey correctly denied threatening to use "all the weapons at my disposal." This I did much later in a pamphlet dropped over certain Annamite rebel forces, when it was absolutely necessary to do so, to prevent unnecessary bloodshed."

Continued Gracey:

"Surely, the Recorder is confusing the operations in F.I.C. with those in SOURABAYA! ** The proclamation could under no circumstances have been interpreted as coming from 'the sovereign government of a state' as the Allied commander clearly stated what his forces were in the country to do." 40

More important, Mountbatten's superior appears to have fully backed Gracey in this affair. In the same document Gracey wrote:

"It was obvious to all in SAIGON at the time - and the later acceptance by the C.O.S.*** in their COSSEA 366 of the measures taken confirm this view, coupled with what Lord ALAN BROOKE himself said to me personally - that the proclamation was essential in the form and at the time of its publication." 41

Lord Alanbrooke was Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and met Gracey during the CIGS's visit to the Far East in December 1945.

Brigadier Maunsell confirms this view. Gracey was a good soldier, and all three senior officers in the Allied Command agreed that it was well within their terms of reference to issue the proclamation. Said Maunsell:

* Italics added. Gracey appears to be referring to Telegram NGS,106 (WO 172/1784, Mountbatten to Gracey, 24 September 1945). The message would have arrived on the 25th.

** The scene of some of the worst street fighting in the Netherlands East Indies.

*** Chiefs of Staff.

"Gracey would never knowingly embarrass Mountbatten or His Majesty's Government. We didn't think at that moment that we were wrong. If I had thought that Gracey was doing anything wrong I would have stopped him. It was an absolute, plain, straightforward misunderstanding.

Douglas would never do that -- had I thought that he was doing that I'd have stopped him." 42

Another officer on Gracey's staff questioned the timing of the limitation of Gracey's area of responsibility. In backing Gracey after 32 years of silence, the officer concluded by saying that "Well, I can't prove it, and furthermore it's no good me saying it because Dickie Mountbatten will say I'm wrong... it's a long time ago."*

Finally, by Mountbatten's account, one of Slim's reasons for visiting Saigon was to assess the strength of forces required by Gracey to fulfil his tasks. But Gracey was never told that Headquarters SEAC was even remotely considering withholding his division. It was a very difficult situation in which to place Gracey, and the consequences might well have been a catastrophe, for Gracey predicated all his actions on having the entire division to back up his decisions. To anticipate for a moment, Gracey wrote:

"It was during this time [from 25 September onwards] that the Allied commander was warned that the whole of 20th Division might not be made available for F.I.C., and was also ordered to restrict the activities of British forces to a perimeter,** which was large enough to ensure the safe working of the port of SAIGON, the safety of the airfield, and the speedy concentration and disarmament of the Japanese forces in Southern F.I.C.

As it would have been impossible with the forces at his disposal to carry out these tasks, the wise decision to send the whole of 20th Division, instead of the contemplated part, was made by S.E.A.C. and A.L.F.S.E.A.

It was due to this and the speed-up in the arrival of French troops that by the middle of January it was possible to concentrate and disarm over 80% of the 70,000 Japanese troops in F.I.C. without a hitch of any sort, and to dispense with 32 Brigade to BORNEO on 25 December, and 80 Brigade to the CELEBES in the middle of January. This was a remarkable achievement." 43

While this was going on in Saigon, another small crisis erupted within Headquarters South East Asia Command itself, over a letter written by Leclerc to Mountbatten; it generated anger in some quarters and

* the officer who remains unnamed at his own request was interviewed by the author in 1977.

** Italics added.

evoked a spirited response from the SEAC staff. Although an archival copy was undated, the letter was very probably written on the 17 or 18 September, for the furious responses from various SEAC staff agencies are dated 19 September.

Leclerc, of course, received information regularly from his officers in Saigon, and as he watched helplessly from afar the growing anarchy and intimidation of the French population, he was impatient to introduce French forces to Indochina before the situation got out of hand. Having seen France humiliated there, he, like de Gaulle, desperately wanted to make sure that French troops restored French sovereignty in Indochina. And he wanted to make sure that French troops should arrive before Gracey had solved the problem for him and for France. Wrote Leclerc to Mountbatten (the letter is quoted in its entirety):

"Since my arrival a month ago you have several times repeated your feelings of friendship for France. You have displayed these sentiments on several occasions, your subordinates have acted in the same way viz-a-viz my own subordinate officers; we have all of us been very appreciative.

Also the general policy of your Government seems sympathetic to the idea of France re-establishing herself after the disaster.

I am making use of these friendly overtures to make to you a personal, respectful, and energetic protest on the subject of Indo-China.

It is evident to me, beyond all doubt, that in spite of all the public declarations, diplomatic negotiations etc., there are certain people who desire to kick us out of North Indo-China.

There is only one method of contesting such a manoeuvre: that is the rapid arrival of French troops in sufficient numbers. That is the reason why several weeks ago I bid high for the move of the 9th Division, which is armed and ready in France, as quickly as possible after the small combat group which is being transported in French warships. Yesterday I learnt from Paris that the War Office* states that they have never been given notice by your staff of the demand for transport in respect of the 9th Division; I do ask you to try to make good this delay by demanding this transport as a top priority.

You, Admiral, will make objection to me that your Government and yourself have urgent transport commitments to meet -- relief of divisions, repatriation of prisoners, etc.; but you must recognize that the situation is not at all the same as far as France is concerned. Great Britain, from the beginning of this war, has obviously met

* London

great difficulties in this theatre, but as a result of her power the final outcome has never been in doubt. Let me explain: if Burma is only put in order a month or two later this is obviously serious, but in no way does it change your position. As far as we are concerned, however, if the 9th Division, for example, arrives a month too late, the problem of the final issue of Indo-China rears its head. I ask you then, once again, to agitate as energetically as possible in this direction.

France has at her disposal a second means of gaining time and maintaining the situation: that is by parachuting a few men into regions where guerilla forces are still resisting against the revolutionaries. I refer to Laos.

You have promised me your help, yet one month after my arrival it has not been possible to do anything on these lines, whilst our adversaries do not bother to respect all the mutual agreements.

It is indeed obvious that in this case, as in the other, that pretext could and can still be found against such a weak operation. The fact which will dwell in front of French and world opinion is that sixty Frenchmen could not descend in time to succour their friends, although all the material means for so doing existed.

I do not know if this double protest on my part will be of any use whatever, but what I can definitely assert is that if I fail in the task which has been entrusted to me, to return Indo-China to France, all Frenchmen will know the reasons for it." 44

The French staff at first tried to soften the impact by translating the last phrase as "all Frenchmen will want to know the reasons for it."

There were serious charges in this letter, and the result was a spirited defense by the SEAC staff agencies involved with the French. As soon as he heard of this, Kimmins, the Assistant Chief of Staff, dashed off a note to Browning which began with, "Although a strong supporter of the French cause I do not wish to conceal my indignation at the tone of General Leclerc's letter." 45 Kimmins said that while in London he had "devoted a disproportionately high part of my time to helping the French military authorities in London to create order out of chaos." While at SEAC the staff had worked hard to satisfy all the French demands and overcome their difficulties, and every decision had had French agreement. "I am therefore at a loss to understand the discourteous insinuations made in General Leclerc's letter." There were no delays expected in the arrival of the 9th Division, and Kimmins concluded:

"Finally, I would draw your attention to the translation of General Leclerc's last sentence, which has been inaccurately done by his staff. What General Leclerc said was:

'The entire French people will know the reasons.'

In the translation the phrase has been watered down to:

'The entire French people will wish to know the reasons.' "

Kimmins then presented the facts and figures of the record. The Chief of Staff, Browning, was given a point by point refutation of Leclerc's letter. The answer began with paragraph 1, "General Commentary", as follows:

"The urgency of the need to send French formations into F.I.C. to which Gen Le Clerc [sic] draws attention in his para 4 is understood as well at S.A.C.S.E.A. as it is at F.H.Q.* Together with the other Allied Powers we have accepted the responsibility for re-establishing French sovereignty in that country. Gen Le Clerc's veiled allusions to 'certain men' who 'wish to see us thrown out of Northern F.I.C.' (para 3) can only produce ill feeling and lack of enthusiasm by the British for a task, which already entails for us endless diplomatic complications, considerable expenditure of British resources and no small danger of British forces having to fight."

Paragraphs 4 through 7 were dealt with by the Special Duty staff officers. On Leclerc's comments about Burma, the following biting reply was given to Browning.

"General Leclerc's thesis that Burma can wait but F.I.C. cannot is both impertinent and bears no relation to the logistical difficulties of the Python and Release schemes, repatriation of RAPWI and movement of occupation forces. His demand in para 5 that we 'catch up with this delay' i.e. the alleged delay in demanding shipping for the 9 D.I.C. is based on his ignorance of the fact that there has been no delay. In spite of having received no French demand for the calling forward of 9 D.I.C. in advance of the Madagascar Brigade until 5 Sep the necessary shipping can (and will) be provided so long as the telegram reaches London by 20 Sep." 46

SEAC logistics officers added that Leclerc failed to mention the "extraordinary measures which have already been taken to equip the various parties of 5 RIC in accordance with French desires, which have constantly changed." They stated that they had not even heard about the "French wishes to get in 9 DIC before the Madagascar Bde, which was originally their first priority, ahead of the Combat Cmd, and we had no clue to the priority of the Combat Cmd till 31 Aug." From a logistical viewpoint,

* French Headquarters.

the staff noted that "whatever French wishes may be, it is inviting disaster to put in 2 1/3 divs on a base organization designed for 1 div." And finally, India was objecting to the French diverting the return of Indian divisions back to India and the British did not want to see any "interference with the flow of British Army drafts or essential MINERVA* units."

The chain of events leading to Mountbatten's decision to authorize a French overflight of Thailand en route to Vientiane was described as follows, which suggested that it was "plainly untrue" for the French to say that "nothing further had been done about this idea" of dropping French parachutists north of the 16th parallel.

"During the month which General Le Clerc claims nothing was done to give effect to his suggestions for dropping French troops inside the China theatre the following action was taken to obtain clearance for the specific question proposed:

8 September - SAC 21239 sent Personnel for C.O.S. **
Rpted J.S.M. from MOUNTBATTEN. Briefly this said:-

- (a) Hayes had reported that Wedemeyer considered there was no further need for S.A.C.S.E.A. to support French resistance Movement North of 16° and that he (Wedemeyer) would definitely NOT give clearance for such ops.
- (b) Le Clerc wished to drop 60 French parachutists on VIENTIANE or LUANG PRABANG.
- (c) Le Clerc stated he had got verbal agreement from MacArthur to fly in small French parties into Northern F.I.C.
- (d) Should Le Clerc be given permission to fly these men in or must S.A.C. clear it with Generalissimo?

11 September - Answer from C.O.S. (5633) that LeClerc should clear direct with Wedemeyer.

13 September - Browning signals Mountbatten (Kanmo 262) suggesting that the matter is cleared with Wedemeyer in S.A.C.'s name.

13 September - Mountbatten signals Ismay saying Carton de Wiart (who is on his way home) is fully briefed on the matter.

14 September - Mountbatten signals Browning (S.E.A.C. 276) agreeing Kanmo 262.

15 September - As signal to Wedemeyer about to be sent (it was actually drafted) signal CFB 8089 received from Wedemeyer out of the blue, the general tone of which made it appear useless to ask his permission to carry out any operations however deserving North of 16°.

* Movement of forces and supplies from Europe to Southeast Asia.

** Chiefs of Staff.

16 September - S.A.C. returned from Singapore.

18 September - S.A.C. gave approval for French Dakotas to fly over any part of Siam (subject to A.C.S.E.A's direction) to provide succour for French civilian internees who had arrived on the Siamese side of the MEKONK (sic) from VIENTIANE (some 20 miles away). With this ruling the French appeared thoroughly satisfied." 47

According to SEAC, the 60 French parachutists were to protect about 120 French internees, including women and children, since there were no Japanese troops in the Vientiane area. On 17 September Mountbatten decided to try again to secure approval from Wedemeyer, who was rigidly opposed to the French, but on the 18th the French let it be known that the internees had been evacuated to Thailand some days earlier. Thus "It can only be assumed that the French thought that S.A.C. would look upon this operation with less favour were he to realise that its object had altered."

The Special Duty officers were next. They listed a history of changing French plans and desires, and concluded by saying:

"The first we heard of 9 D.I.C. being required early was about 5 Sept... General LeClerc's statement that he insisted on the movement as urgently as possible 'some weeks ago' is therefore an exaggeration... Our difficulty has been to obtain a firm program from the French. 9 D.I.C. was not ready before mid-Sept."

The War Office had said that shipping for French forces could be arranged provided the request was passed to them by 20 September, but as yet no request had been made. Leclerc was ignoring the fact that the 5th RIC had "been equipped up to the maximum number of men available to be ready to go in with 20 Div," the equipment coming by air and "white-hot" priority rail movement.

"In addition we have undertaken to accept the Combat Comd of 2 Armd Div without any French maintenance backing. We cannot accept more without inviting a breakdown. A base organisation designed for one div. cannot possibly maintain 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ divs."

Having amassed these examples of British endeavour and French fickleness and ingratitude, Kimmins concluded by suggesting that "Gen Le Clerc be made to appreciate the need for diplomatic finesse in this theatre," and that "Gen Le Clerc's staff be enlightened as to the World shipping situation and receive an explanation of all the factors involved in its detailed allocation within the India/SEAC Commands." If the French "fully understood the tasks to which S.A.C. and C-in-C India are irrevocably committed, whether it be politically, economically or merely in connection

with the movement of occupation forces, they would be less distrustful of our motives and more appreciative of our assistance."

And what was more, sniffed one SEAC officer, Leclerc was a brand new four-star general, having been but a division commander not long ago.

The Foreign Office was following the unfolding drama in Saigon with interest, and it is evident that the professionals in the Foreign Office were more closely allied to Gracey's thinking than were the Labour politicians in the newly elected government and Mountbatten at SEAC. For it was Gracey who was resisting, with all the limited means at his disposal, the "revolutionary outbreaks" feared by the Foreign Office. A lengthy memo by Wilson-Young of the Western Department noted:

"It is clear that we shall have to proceed with the greatest care in Indo-China. As a colonial Power it is in our interest to see that evolution towards 'progressive self-government'* is smooth and gradual and is not accompanied by revolutionary outbreaks which could but have an unsettling effect on the native populations of our own territories in South East Asia and in the meanwhile might also affect the quantity of rice available for export to famine areas." 48

Again, in line with Gracey's understanding, the minute continued:

"The responsibility of SACSEA extends under General Order No. 1 up to 16° N... We must recognize that the presence of our forces in Indo-China can in itself lead to no advantages for us while according to the policy adopted it may involve us in difficulties with the Americans, Chinese or French. If the British forces endeavor to suppress anti-French revolutionary activities we shall open ourselves to attacks from American anti-Imperialist quarters and no doubt from the Chinese, whereas a policy of complete non-intervention in domestic affairs would no doubt be interpreted by the French as a further step towards our long-term objective of pushing the French out of their colonial territories."

Wilson-Young noted that the delay in calling forward French forces (the 9th DIC) was caused by SEAC's "concern about the provision of their supplies." The Foreign Office view, as stated below, comes closer to Leclerc's later suggestion to Mountbatten:

"But in view of the delicate political situation would it not be advisable to give a higher priority to the provision and transport of supplies for the French troops even at the cost of operations elsewhere so that French troops can be allowed to proceed to Saigon without delay? The French are anxious that the first troops should be all white, with modern

* as envisaged by de Gaulle.

equipment, and these will have to proceed from Marseilles and take three or four weeks en route. Transport, however, will not be allocated until the troops have been called forward by SACSEA and I think we might suggest to the Chiefs of Staff that this be done without any further delay."49

Wilson-Young was not to know that Leclerc at the same time was suggesting the very same thing to Mountbatten at SEAC Headquarters. And he presented an official view from London which even rejected Dening's suggestion that "our position should be made clear to the world in an official pronouncement stating that our sole object is the liquidation of Japanese headquarters at Saigon and of the Japanese forces in Indo-China south of 16° N and to evacuate Allied prisoners of war and internees and that when it is accomplished our forces will be withdrawn." As Wilson-Young declared:

"The trouble with this suggestion is that it might well be interpreted as an indication of our intention to wash our hands of all internal developments in Indo-China and as indicating that we do not even accept responsibility for the maintenance of law and order. The revolutionaries would regard this as an invitation to proceed with their activities and the French, who have been pressing us in vain for months for transport to carry their troops to Indo-China - would feel that their worst suspicions of our motives were confirmed."

Again in line with Gracey, the memo continued:

"On the assumption, however, that the Supreme Commander cannot allow the position to drift might it not be advisable for him to issue some statement to the effect that, while it was no part of the task of the Force Commander in Southern Indo-China to intervene in the internal affairs of the country, he could not in the fulfilment of his task of liquidating the Japanese situation and of arranging for the release of Allied prisoners of war and internees tolerate activities on the part of any political groups which did not serve to contribute to the orderly administration of the country pending the resumption of control by the French. If approved, this suggestion might be put urgently to the Chiefs of Staff."

The suggestion was approved by the Eastern Department, and the Chiefs soon released Gracey from the restrictions imposed on him by Mountbatten. It seems that practically everyone supported Gracey except Mountbatten, perhaps for reasons of politics bearing on his own future career.

There is an old saying that troubles come in threes, and as far as SEAC Headquarters was concerned it was the absolute truth. Even before the reverberations from Leclerc's letter and Gracey's proclamation had died down in Kandy, a third crisis arose to confront the staff -- the

coup of 23 September. "Coup" is perhaps a somewhat exaggerated term to apply to the events of the 23rd, for if Gracey had disposed sufficient British/Indian units on hand perhaps little more would have been heard about it and 23 September would have slipped anonymously away like any other day.

Footnotes: Chapter VII

- 1 Gracey Papers, 4/17 Dogra Newsletter, n.p., n.d.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 GB, PRO, Air 27/1583, Log of 273 Squadron, 7 September 1945. RAF maintenance units for 273 and 684 U Squadrons were drawn from India and Burma. From Madras came half of 3209 Servicing Commando, and other key air force units were 2967 Field Squadron of the RAF Regiment (reinforced later by 2963 Squadron), half of 99 EU, plus 55647, 5803, 5804, 5820, 55651, 5847 and 5876 MSUs. From Calcutta came the Alipore main detachment of 684 Squadron and the 347 Wing Mobile Photo Section; from Rangoon came 273 Squadron, 7273 Service Echelon, 2nd Field Hygiene Section, 23 AMCU, 717 Meteorological Section and AFS units, and 908 Wing Headquarters.
- 4 GB, PRO, WO 203/5068, 19 September 1945.
- 5 Hugh Astor, personal interview, 26 June 1977.
- 6 Major General S. Woodburn Kirby, et al. The War Against Japan, Vol. V: The Surrender of Japan (London: HMSO, 1969), p.299.
- 7 Gracey Papers.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Kirby, p.299.
- 10 Great Britain, Public Record Office, WO 172/1784, Gracey to Mountbatten, 20 September 1945.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Brigadier M.S.K.Maunsell, Personal Interview, 20 April 1977.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.

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- 19 Vice-Admiral The Earl Mountbatten of Burma, Post Surrender Tasks, Section E of the Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff (London: HMSO, 1969), p.287.
It is said that the Supreme Allied Commander had reacted "violently" to this action by Gracey, although Mountbatten's response is presented far more smoothly in his report to the Combined Chiefs. There was nothing essentially wrong with this sort of proclamation, and it was the accepted thing to do in areas of Allied occupation. Evans in Bangkok and Hawthorn in the NEI had done exactly the same thing. The controversy arose over the wording of the first paragraph, which implied that Gracey was empowered to keep law and order in all of French Indochina south of 16° north latitude. That would have been true but for the amendment of 12 September, which limited his responsibility for law and order to key areas only. But as will be seen there is doubt as to whether Gracey had actually received this amendment before 25 September, at which time Evans in Bangkok and Gracey in Saigon were both restricted to key areas and told to refer questions of extra-perimeter public order to SACSEA.
 - 20 Ibid.
 - 21 Ibid., p.286.
 - 22 GB, PRO, WO 203/4273, Gracey to Mountbatten, 23 September 1945.
 - 23 Ibid.
 - 24 Ibid.
 - 25 Ibid.
 - 26 GB, PRO, WO 172/1784, Mountbatten to Gracey, Tel.NGS 106, 24 September 1945.
 - 27 GB, PRO, WO 203/5644, 20 September 1945.
 - 28 GB, PRO, WO 203/4932, Gracey to Mountbatten, 19 September 1945.
 - 29 Ibid., 20 September 1945.
 - 30 GB, PRO, WO 203/3861, Mountbatten to War Office, 20 September 1945.
 - 31 GB, PRO, WO 203/5644, Dening to Foreign Office, Tel. No. 506, 20 September 1945.
 - 32 Ibid.
 - 33 Lieutenant Colonel C.E.Jarvis, Personal Interview, 13 May 1977.
 - 34 GB, PRO, WO 172/1784, SACSEA to Cabinet, 24 September 1945.
 - 35 Ibid.
 - 36 Ibid.
 - 37 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, Leclerc to Minister of War, repeated SACSEA to Cabinet, 24 September 1945.
 - 38 Ibid.
 - 39 Gracey Papers, Correspondence with SEAC Recorder, 3 October 1946.
 - 40 Ibid.
 - 41 Ibid.
 - 42 Brigadier M.S.K.Maunsell, Personal Interview, 20 April 1977.
 - 43 Gracey Papers, Correspondence with SEAC Recorder, 3 October 1946.
 - 44 GB, PRO, WO 203/5611, Leclerc to Mountbatten, n.d.

45 Ibid., ACOS to COS, 19 September 1945.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, Foreign Office Minutes by Wilson-Young and others, 20 September 1945.

49 Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII

COUP D'ÉTAT

Indian and Gurkha troops took over the security of important positions before the coup d'état, otherwise it would NOT have succeeded, nor would it have been attempted... It is misleading to say the French engineered the coup d'état. It was done by the Allied commander on his sole responsibility, after consultation with the French adviser, Colonel CEDILLE. French forces, few in number, were naturally used to take over the government buildings.

Lieutenant General Sir Douglas D. Gracey,
3 October 1946.

Though political problems were rapidly coming to a head in Saigon, the build-up of the 20th Division and ancillary units remained slow and ponderous. For of course Gracey and his Commission and fighting troops were but the tip of the iceberg. Supporting units as well (field bakeries, veterinarian services, post office, RAF Regiment, Kinema and ENSA staff, FANYs, canteens, workshop companies, and so on) were arriving one after the other, mainly from various locations in Burma. The 20th Division veterinary staff tried to fly in on the 18th, but dangerous flying weather forced them to return to Bangkok and try again on the 19th. It was no better then, and they finally arrived on 20 September, when they set to work with the Japanese vets to inspect working animals of the Japanese Army.

The mundane administrative tasks in Saigon (billeting, feeding, etc.) were largely in the hands of 555 Line of Communication Sub-Area, whose main party embarked for Saigon from Madras on 19 September on LST 311; though one of their officers, Major I.W.Hussey, had left earlier by air on 15 September. The experiences of one small core of officers and men typified the movement problems of the day; they arrived in Calcutta for airlift on to Saigon, only to find that no tickets were available on the 18th. The same thing happened on the 19th, and the proposed journey was cancelled altogether on the 20th. They were then embarked in a ship, but the sailing was cancelled. The group finally made their own way down to Rangoon where they managed to board a ship with Headquarters 20 Division.

One of the most vitally important units was the 237th Docks Operating Company which, with other port operating units, remained behind (by French request) after 20 Division and the Control Commission had left Saigon. On 19 September a small advance party left for Saigon on the H.T.Harpyllice, with the main body remaining in Chittagong, where a few days earlier they had lost a man by drowning in an organized water polo game.

While Gracey anxiously awaited the arrival of the rest of his division, these sorely needed battalions were languishing in temporary transit camps in Burma, their commanders doing their best to keep the men occupied. The experience of 4/2 Gurkha Rifles was typical. On 19 September they had arrived in Rangoon, where they marched to their "very comfortable" transit camp. For the next 10 days "we amused the troops by doing P.T. and drill in the mornings and thereafter organizing bathing parties, cinema parties and trips into the Town, zoo, Pagoda, etc."¹ On the 18th the second 20 Division vehicle convoy had rumbled down from Tharawaddy to Rangoon prior to embarkation. On 19 September the "Masterdom"

order of battle was published, and on the next day the 2nd Indian Field Regiment began to depart to join 19 Division.

Although the build-up of his force was proceeding at what seemed to Gracey a painfully slow pace, he carried on with his methodical plan for disarming the Viêt Minh police. These operations, carried out over a period of several days, led up to the "coup" of 23 September; the combined Franco-British action on the morning of 23 September was but the culmination of these events. The seizure of the central jail on 20 September was part of the process. Another key move was the take-over of two main banks in Saigon, the Yokohama Specie Bank (located in the Hong Kong Bank building) and the Bank of Indochina nearby. The Yokohama Bank was to be closed permanently, and its seizure planned as a surprise move to preclude the Japanese from destroying any remaining documents and securities. The Bank of Indochina was to be temporarily closed "in order to evict Jap controllers and secure their books and documents which will then be handed over to the French authorities."² The banks were guarded by a small platoon of 1 Japanese officer and 20 men with a machine gun. On D minus 1 Lieutenant Colonel Forrester of the Commission would go down to Mytho with a 1/1 GR escort and return with Mr. Ferrier, former manager of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (whose premises had been taken over by the Yokohama Bank).

The first the Japanese would know of the operation would be when 80 Brigade brought Lieutenant Colonel Kamatomi (a General Affairs Staff officer) and 2 interpreters to brigade headquarters at 0630. Majors Hand and Beer were to reconnoiter the buildings "as unostentatiously as possible before D day"^{*} by "driving past or round the building the minimum essential number of times and over a protracted period and in different vehs each time." Detailed instructions were given about sealing entrances, relieving Japanese guards, entering vaults, etc. Both American and French officers were to be denied access to the banks until an inspection had been carried out.

Leclerc had made the French position quite clear. He professed himself unable to accept Mountbatten's restricting Gracey so severely, for the Supreme Allied Commander's commitment "which is under the terms of POTSDAM and TOKYO" was "to disarm all Japanese forces South of 16^o North."

Leclerc stated that "disarming Japanese troops brings trouble if they are not replaced by other troops for the purpose of maintaining order. Therefore the maintenance of order is a SACSEA responsibility

* D Day was 23 September. The code word for the operation was "Banco" !

until such time as sufficient French forces are available to relieve British troops." Leclerc had little doubt, as did Gracey in Saigon, that much of the troubles in Cochinchina and Annam were the work of "bandits and assassins taking advantage of the gap which must occur between the Japanese and Allied occupations. I have showed that the political unrest was backed unofficially by the Japanese who have never renounced their aspirations for their future programme for a Greater Asia." Leclerc had no doubt that "Any sign of weakness or lack of agreement would play the game of the Japanese and might lead to grave consequences for the future of the white races in Asia. It is essential that Great Britain continues their previous action until the arrival of the 9th Division."³

On 21 September the SEAC Deputy Director of Intelligence, Brigadier Nicholson, asked the War Office for whatever information they had on the political parties, and their aims and strengths, in Indochina and the NEI. In Saigon, Lady Mountbatten arrived on the 21st for a quick visit and look at the POW camps, and was escorted by members of 1/1 GR's 'B' Company as 1 Hybad was taking over the Commissariat de Police* in Place de Marechal Joffre in another contribution to the coming coup.

The visit of Lady Mountbatten was one of the few occasions during which female members of the Việt Minh were in evidence. As soon as her presence in Saigon became known Việt Minh women made their public appearance. Maunsell at first had no idea who they were. They were attractive and intellectual, aged between 30 and 45, and like the men were great idealists and talkers. But, like the rest of the Việt Minh, they made claims to control which were seldom supported by facts or personal observations.

On the 21st, 347 men were flown in and 1/19 Hybad was complete less 3 sorties. During the night of 21/22 September, 1/19 Hybad took over 2 more police stations and the civil jail immediately to the west of the Colonial Artillery barracks, relieving armed Viet Minh police as part of the continuing process of methodically replacing the Viet Minh occupation by the French. One of the police stations was near the river front on Tự Do, next door to the Japanese Naval Officers Quarters; the other was between the railway station and the Arroyo Chinois. A total of 45 rifles and 75 bayonets were seized and 212 armed Viet Minh were escorted away for questioning. The Hybads also took control of the Treasury, and at the same time 1/1 GR surrounded and took over the Saigon Post and Telegraph Office from the Việt Minh. As Brigadier Taunton wrote a few weeks later,

*from the Japanese.

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"The stage was now set for the coup d'etat by the French to take over the civil administration in SAIGON from Annamites."⁴

These remarks by Taunton confirm Gracey's own suggestion that he planned to remove the Việt Minh as soon as possible from the few official buildings they were guarding. As will be seen, it is not unlikely that he had already decided this even before he left Rangoon. Gracey would have preferred to wait for the arrival of greater Allied forces, preferably French, which policy would have resulted in the easing of the Việt Minh to one side. But the fact that by 20 September Mountbatten had still not called forward the 9th DIC -- Leclerc alleged this and was supported in his allegation by the Foreign Office -- left Gracey to grapple with the problem alone. It therefore became very much a question of who would strike first -- Gracey or the Việt Minh. Gracey himself wrote:

"On the arrival of the Allied Control Commission on September 13th, the situation was appreciated afresh and it was quite evident that unless the puppet government was evicted and the French government reinstated almost immediately, in fact strong measures taken, not only would the puppet government's hold on the country be consolidated and their plans for subversive action and hooliganism be made firm, but also landing by air and sea of troops and supplies would become daily more hazardous. All this would be playing into the hands of the Japanese, and would seriously delay their disarmament and concentration." 5

This is significant because it suggests that Gracey may have decided, before he left Rangoon, to pry loose the Việt Minh, slowly but firmly, from whatever grip they claimed to have on Saigon. But Douglas Gracey was not only a highly experienced officer who had known his immediate superiors for years -- decades in fact -- he was also a meticulous planner and a man of high intelligence with a well developed sense of humour and a flexible mind. It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine that he would eject the Việt Minh without seeking authority from at least Slim beforehand. As some of the archives of the period remain closed, a few assumptions based on available evidence, experience and common sense must be made. Slim visited Gracey in Saigon on 16 September, and it is impossible to believe that Gracey did not discuss with him, or at least inform him of, the operations which were planned for the coming week. One of the reasons for Slim's visit was to carry out a personal inspection of the situation, and the fact that he did not prohibit Gracey from proceeding with his plans very strongly suggests that Slim was satisfied with these.

On 20 September the radio link between Terauchi and SEAC Headquarters was broken; all traffic now passed through the Control Commission. From 15 through 21 September, the airlift squadrons of 232 Group had flown no more than 25 sorties to Saigon because of the dangerous flying weather; there had been 60 weather aborts, and 335 personnel with rations, medical and canteen stores and bitumen were flown in. Total British/Indian personnel flown to Saigon by 232 Group were now 1516. Ex-POWs and internees were backloaded from Saigon, and 194 Squadron said of these flights:

"From the emotional if not necessarily the material point of view, this month has brought the squadron its most rewarding task ever... The manifest joy of the former prisoners -- many of whom had been in captivity since the fall of Singapore -- was something to be remembered, and was reflected in that of the aircrews whose concern was their evacuation. Rarely if ever has the squadron -- one might reasonably say any squadron -- enjoyed a more wholly satisfying and rewarding duty than this." 6

The crews also spoke highly of the Gurkhas:

"The various occupying forces -- mainly Gurkhas -- flown in, were excellently disciplined, as were the Free French Forces, who were lifted to Saigon; all gave no trouble whatsoever and set a perfect example to any airborne troops."

It is not surprising that South East Asia Command resources, structured to fight a war, found it difficult at times to cope with the unexpected strains of reoccupation on so vast a scale. Perhaps in a reflection of this chaotic state of affairs the squadron's own little radio station had the call sign of "N.B.G."

Despite Gracey's advance warning to the Committee for the South, the proclamation did not deter the Viet Minh attempts to propagandize and subvert his troops. One of the more bizarre attempts to split the Indians away from the British was revealed by the following leaflet, which was addressed directly to "Indian Soldiers!" It tried to spread confusion by stating that Gracey had been killed, and may well have been meant for release to coincide with Gracey's assassination. It was distributed throughout the troops living areas and read as follows:

"Indian Soldiers!
 Gracey, Lt.General of the British army
 has been shot down at 11,43 P.M. of the
 20th of this month and 43 of yours."

The leaflet then resurrected memories of the great Indian Mutiny:

"A bloodish battle occurred between you Indian soldiers and one part of yours under the control of British soldiers."

Then, to warn of impending Viet Minh action, the tract continued:

"In the future, our Vietnam's troops will advance in a fight on Saigon and Cholon area, if you understand our sacred aim, you must show to us your white flag and we will not shoot at you.

Indian soldiers! You are our friends because your people is under British imperialism. You and your countrymen are struggling for your independence, as we are doing, why are we struggling against each other?

Indian soldiers! Stop to fight for we have the same hope to get our freedom.

VIETNAM'S TROOPS. " 7

The hand-written comments on Gracey's personal copy of the Control Commission's official report of the period 13 to 23 September provide perhaps a greater insight into the situation than does the official report itself. This document traced the situation in Saigon, describing the growing anarchy, lack of public order, and how the illegally constituted revolutionary government was terrorizing the general population through murder and brutality [which has been its trademark ever since].

The report stated that to carry out Gracey's tasks

"... it was clear that the situation of inactive mob * rule then existing could not be allowed to continue; it was of the greatest importance, not only to SAIGON and CHOLON but also to the remainder of French Indo China that administrative services should be made to function properly as soon as possible and that, therefore, law and order and proper security must first be re-established in the SAIGON-CHOLON area.

- 8. It was therefore inevitable that the French should re-establish control with, as a first step, the assumption of police responsibilities and the necessary disarmament of ANNAMITE armed elements." 8

Under the last paragraph, concerning the replacement of the Viet Minh armed police by the French, a pencilled question asked, "Can they control any better than the Annamites?" It was a moot point, as Gracey's government was committed to facilitate the resumption of French sovereignty over her territories in Indochina.

* In context, this refers to the preceding paragraphs which described Gracey's main tasks in his capacity as Commdr of Allied Land Forces as securing the Saigon area, disarming the Japanese, and maintaining law and order and ensuring internal security.

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On the first page of the report [which dealt with the recent history of events], the pencilled comments express satisfaction with the summary, saying "Good", with a heavy square drawn around the word. On the bottom of the page the following was written by hand:

"A good exposition of the case, which is an almost exact parallel with Burma. If only the French would promise progressive sovereignty to be complete at a very early date (say two or three years) AND the Annamites would be equally ready to meet them the situation might clear up." 9

But since neither condition was likely to be fulfilled due to the extreme intransigence of both sides, and Gracey knew it, all parties concerned proceeded with their own plans for future action.

To make the operation as bloodless and as easy as possible, Gracey's own troops unobtrusively disarmed the greater part of the Viet Minh police during the previous few days. It was left to the French, perhaps for reasons of amour propre as much as politics, to legitimize the operation by completing the final and largely ceremonial steps in the plan. Most of these installations in Viet Minh hands had already been taken, one by one, without resistance, by the British troops, after which many of them had been handed over to French forces. It was a brilliant operation and marked a departure from the traditional concept of the violent coup d'état, for it avoided confrontation between French and Viet Minh. It was left to the French to add the finishing touches, and that is when the problems began — but even then it remained a fairly bloodless operation, for there were only a couple of participants killed and both of them were French.

A considerable body of literature has since been published about the coup. Some versions are partially correct, and some bear very little resemblance to what happened, but no one account is wholly correct. Cédile did indeed see Gracey about the French role in the coup, but as has been written the French did not have the dominant role in the eviction of the Communist controlled Viet Minh, [for it was the Communists who directed and controlled the movement, as their later writings admit]. As the French were rearmed they began to reconstitute their units; it was by necessity a rushed process involving much improvisation. As Cédile said, "We had a body of officers, and by force of circumstances we began to form little commando groups, putting them in charge of a captain or a

commander, but they were not real units."¹⁰ *

On 21 September, 20 Indian Division Headquarters closed at Tharawaddy at 0900 hours and moved to the "R" Marshalling Camp^{**} in Rangoon as the vehicle party of the 102 Indian Company (RIASC)^{***} sailed for Saigon; the Company's personnel would follow in the "Masterdom One" convoy in 9 days. On 21 September, also, Gracey was informed that there would be a delay of 2 to 4 days in shipping 20 Division from Rangoon.

On 22 September, vehicles of the 100 Indian Company (RIASC), 20 Division Transport, began the journey to Saigon, with some vehicles going to Borneo; it was thought even at this date that part of the division was bound for Borneo. An advance party from 100 Brigade, including a tactical headquarters, arrived in Saigon under Lieutenant Colonel E.D. "Moke" Murray, Commander of 4/2 Gurkha Rifles (who was to go on to Phnom Penh as Gracey's representative in Cambodia); other members of the 100 Brigade party were Major D.H. Wenham of 14/13 Frontier Force Rifles, Major A. Arnold of 4/10 GR and Captain A.I. Akram of 14/13 FFR, representing all of 100 Brigade's battalions. On 22 September, also, the Commander of the 422 (QVO Madras) Indian Field Company was named Garrison Engineer in Saigon, with his sappers acting as escorts and part-time infantry.

On 21 September SACSEA queried Gracey on assurances from the French Mission at Kandy that trained, hand-picked French troops were on hand; a "large number of French and loyal Annamite troops" were now said to be available in French Indochina for internal security duties. At the same time Gracey wired Mountbatten that no official civil government existed and order was being kept by the Japanese with Allied troops on selected VPs; the Viet Minh were on guard over many public buildings. But "Việt Minh claims to be facto government and to have resisted Japs throughout. Both claims childish. No legal processes exist and [there is] ample evidence in fact [that they were] puppets of Japs and actively cooperated."¹¹ The Việt Minh police were carrying out arbitrary political arrests and were suspected of murdering some of the initial French parachutists. The spot check of a Việt Minh jail (referred to by Brigadier Maunsell) on 19

* Before Gracey's arrival, British, Australian and Dutch ex-POWs armed with bamboo staves did invaluable service in maintaining a semblance of order in Saigon.

** The Golf course.

*** Royal Indian Army Service Corps.

September

"revealed numerous political prisoners ITUW two French officers who parachuted FIC and two French sailors. These [were] released. Only one European French National voluntarily released by alarmed Annamite governor... French population has been very nervous with many wild rumours current. Confidence now returning. Viet Minh violently anti-French... Woefully short security personnel who have many heavy increasing tasks unusually complex situation." 12

On 21 September, also, a cryptic intelligence summary had been sent from Saigon. The telegram was from the Control Commission to SACSEA and said in part:

"Political situation and low strength own troops hitherto precluded much intelligence action. Interim period used collect info through staff meetings Japanese[,] activities other agencies. Progress satisfactory and plans in hand action when circumstances permit... No effective civil government exists." 13

On 22 September the Control Commission's Movement and Transportation Officer informed SACSEA that the railway workers were under the grip of the "Viet Nam Party", and the Japanese, (who still controlled the railways) issued orders to the Việt Minh-led civilian workers. The port would also stay in Việt Minh control until clearance (under Allied direction) of the first two convoys, at which time it would probably revert to French hands.¹⁴ Daily off-load targets for the port were 700 tons, rising soon to 900 tons, subject to the local agreements remaining firm; 200 vehicles per day were also required, and this high number was due to the fact that the vehicles used were mainly Japanese, capable of small loads and in bad repair. The Japanese were still in nominal charge until 24 September, at which time the British were to move out of their small temporary office and replace the Japanese.

Enough railway rolling stock had survived to move 1000 men per week between Saigon and Nha Trang, and Saigon and Thu Dầu Một [which is why the Việt Minh moved in on the railways]; 450 tons of goods per day could be moved between Saigon and Mỹtho, and 260 tons per day between Saigon and Nha Trang, although the goods capability was lessened if personnel were moved. The best lines were from Saigon to Mỹtho (4 hours) and Saigon to Đàlat (25 hours). There were 15 engines available, all wood-burning (and there was plenty of wood available). The roads in the area around Saigon were in good shape, which would help in concentrating the Japanese.

Gracey's proclamation was discussed at the SAC's 27th Miscellaneous Meeting on 22 September. Mountbatten told those present that General Gracey

had acted outside the scope of his "more recent instructions" in that his proclamation was addressed to all of FIC south of 16° north, but said that "the root of the difficulty lay in the contrary instructions given in different paragraphs of the original telegram" [from the Chiefs of Staff].* The first paragraph directed Mountbatten to reoccupy key areas of Japanese-held territories, to enforce the surrender and disarmament of "Japanese allied forces" and to effect the earliest possible release of Allied prisoners of war and internees. The third paragraph gave as a particular task the control of Japanese Headquarters of the Southern Armies. In view of this apparent diversion Mountbatten was going to ask the Chiefs for definite guidance.¹⁵ It seems that it took Gracey's proclamation to bring out the possible contradictory tasking in the original directive from the Chiefs of Staff.

It is evident that some blunt and spirited discussion took place at this meeting. Dening, speaking to Leclerc, said that it was his opinion that "serious trouble in FIC would cause world-wide political repercussions, and that it was therein that the true danger lay." Prophetic words, indeed. The SEAC Director of Plans wanted to halt the buildup of Gracey's forces and limit the use of troops to Terauchi's headquarters. He also made another poorly thought out suggestion that the Spitfires and Mosquitos would take care of quelling any disturbances. Slim interjected at this point and said, first, that he could not accept that the British forces were in Saigon only to control Terauchi's headquarters. Slim said that the British had three additional objectives: to disarm the Japanese, bring back the AFWI and maintain law and order, at least in the Saigon area. Second, he did not think that they could do it cheaply, for the Air Force would not be of much help in putting down "riotous outbreaks." It was at this point that Mountbatten said that he was going to repeat Gracey's telegram to the Chiefs, with two alternative courses of action to reflect the two contradictory instructions he had received, pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of each. The Chiefs should then give a definite ruling. A telegram from the War Office, dated 18 September, also appeared to limit British responsibility to Japanese headquarters.

Mountbatten's Planning Staff, on a majority vote, recommended that the British buildup should cease and British/Indian forces should withdraw from French Indochina as soon as possible.

Captain Goodenough, RN, and Group Captain Spotswood, RAF, were in favour of stopping the buildup of Gracey's forces. The third member of the Planning Staff, the Army's Brigadier Blacker, strongly disagreed, using the following argument. The Supreme Allied Commander could not avoid responsibility in French Indochina until the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed to the formation of a separate French command there. All problems concerning disarmament, guarding and evacuating the Japanese were definitely the SAC's responsibility, besides providing limited administrative support for the French. Should the British buildup cease and the French be pushed into assuming full control before they had sufficient strength, it was highly probable that they would get in trouble and demand assistance from the British. Under the SAC's control the French forces could be confined to tasks commensurate with their strength. The establishment of a separate French command must coincide with the withdrawal of British forces.

Mountbatten appeared to be downplaying the seriousness of the situation in Saigon. He thought he could control Saigon with a single brigade, and said he was hoping that it would not be necessary to send all of 20 Division to Saigon. Major General Pyman, ALFSEA Chief of Staff, pointed out to Mountbatten that 80 Brigade's vehicles were still in Burma and were due to arrive with the remainder of the division. Mountbatten thought that a possible solution would be for British forces to control Saigon and the airfield while "incidentally offering sanctuary to women and children in the event of rioting."¹⁶ The telegram he proposed to send to the Chiefs would suggest "two definite alternative courses of action, founded on the two contrary instructions he had received and the different factors of the situation." If the Supreme Allied Commander was confused, it is hardly surprising that some of his subordinates were not too clear on what British forces should do in Saigon. More surprising was that it took so long to bring the Chiefs' attention to what appeared to some officers to be contradicting directives.

The SAC's 28th Miscellaneous Meeting was attended by Mountbatten, Slim, Leclerc, Dening and other senior officers. Mountbatten drew Leclerc's attention to Gracey's telegram, which contained the text of the proclamation, and gave a summary of the political situation in Saigon. Mountbatten concluded his discussion by saying that "it was not quite clear, from instructions which had been received from London, what were his precise responsibilities in French Indo-China, and it might be that

the action which had been taken by General Gracey was too wide."¹⁷ Mountbatten repeated his intention to seek clarification from the Chiefs of Staff. Leclerc asked publicly how Gracey was supposed to disarm the Japanese in south French Indochina if he was to be restricted to Saigon only. Mountbatten replied that this was the point he would make with the Chiefs. Leclerc replied that while Mountbatten was at it he could "add in his telegram that the measures taken by General Gracey had, in fact, ensured the maintenance of law and order with small forces under extremely difficult conditions."¹⁸ Mountbatten agreed to do this.

Dening next expressed the Foreign Office view of the political question, pointing out that it was not strictly accurate to state that French Indochina south of 16 degrees north was a purely British responsibility. It was the SAC's responsibility "under the Combined Chiefs of Staff", to which Mountbatten added that this was why Brigadier General Timberman [U.S.] was at the meeting.

Dening went on to say that political movements were a French responsibility, although admittedly it was "very difficult to divorce the military and political responsibilities"; but he advised that Britain should not become involved in "political maneuvering on French sovereign territory." This was sound advice, if difficult to implement, but it appeared to run directly counter to the directive to Gracey to suppress Saigon Radio which was given at just that time.

Leclerc responded by saying that he wanted the British to keep law and order only until he was in a position to assume command and responsibility himself. Mountbatten asked Leclerc to urge the French government to proclaim publicly the autonomy of Indochina, and Leclerc replied that he had already urged de Gaulle and D'Argenlieu to do so. Leclerc then turned to Dening and asserted that it was "fallacious to argue too closely any superficial comparisons between the political situation [in Indochina] and the political difficulties in different countries; similarly, there was no common solution." Leclerc believed that "looting and brigandage" were the main problems in French Indochina and felt that the people were not overly concerned with politics. Dening diplomatically replied that he would pass on Leclerc's remarks "on the true nature of the present unrest" to the Foreign Office.

Earlier during the meeting Mountbatten had pressed Leclerc to assume responsibility for south French Indochina on 5 October [the proposed date of Leclerc's arrival in Saigon]; at that time 3250 French troops should be

ashore. Leclerc had pointed out that 1000 to 1200 of these troops would be ex-POWs from the 11th RIC and of only "mediocre value". Leclerc, who was no less anxious than Mountbatten for an early takeover, pointed out that French Indochina was "three quarters the size of France, and he could not reasonably be expected to assume such enormous responsibilities with a force of only 3250 men." He agreed with Slim that he would assume responsibility when 9 DIC arrived in Saigon, and suggested that "General Gracey would likewise be in a position to exercise full control only when a full British division had arrived in Indo-China."

Mountbatten thought that the British and French commands should be separated, with the British being confined to Saigon and the French assuming responsibility for the rest of the country. This ran counter to what Denning had just said, and Leclerc could not accept it. He thought the suggestion unworkable and wanted the French to remain under British command for the time being, although he would agree the British should restrict their activities to the Saigon area. Leclerc said he understood that the British government had accepted full responsibility for French Indochina south of the 16 parallel of latitude, and thought it "inequitable" that they should abandon this responsibility when France was not yet able to take it on. He would be quite willing to take over as soon as he had sufficient strength [the 9th DIC] "even if the situation was still difficult." Meanwhile, he would go to Saigon immediately after the rest of 5 RIC had arrived, and give all the assistance he could to General Gracey. Mountbatten said he would forward the thrust of Leclerc's argument to the Chiefs of Staff. At the end, Brigadier General Timberman interjected the thought that "any improvement in the lot of Asiatic peoples would be well received by the American public."

On 22 September SEAC informed Gracey that 2 Civil Affairs officers were en route to him from the UK, and Brain^{*} should be arriving in Saigon at any time. At the same time the SEAC Joint Planning Staff issued the second draft of Paper Number 201, "Handover of FIC to the French,"¹⁹ which by citing COSSEA 350 suggested a reduced commitment for British forces. This telegram from the Chiefs said that "In view of French willingness and ability to provide forces you should do your utmost to reduce the British forces sent there as soon as possible." French willingness was fine, but the forces were not yet in Saigon and the War

* Brain was a member of Denning's Political Affairs Staff.

Office seemed to be suggesting that it would not be necessary to wait for the French buildup before commencing the British withdrawal. A halt in the British reinforcement programme was recommended, although Dening held that the British departure should coincide with French agreement to assume sole responsibility in Indochina. SEAC was now considering sending the third brigade of 20 Division (100 Brigade, scheduled to arrive in Saigon around 14 October) directly to Borneo from Rangoon, withdrawing it from the scheduled Masterdom convoy. All of this was being discussed as the final touches were being applied to the impending coup in Saigon.

Back in Saigon, Cédile met Gracey for last-minute discussion of the imminent removal of the Việt Minh from the few buildings they still held. It is highly probable that Brigadier Taunton, whose brigade was gradually ejecting the Việt Minh from their visible toeholds on the city, attended the talks, for his Gurkhas and Hybads would cooperate with the French on the morning of the 23rd.

Although Brigadier Maunsell is emphatic that the coup was Cédile's idea entirely, it is difficult to divorce the earlier British actions from the coup. These actions, as already stated, involved the taking over of key installations from the Việt Minh and Japanese and placing most of these in French hands.

As Brigadier Maunsell recalled, the coup was the idea of Cédile and another Frenchman. The latter, reputed to be a Gaullist and the possessor of many World War One medals, had been vouched for by Cédile. It was the "profound belief of Cédile and others (who continually advanced it) that the coup would be a simple affair, as indeed it turned out to be." About 3 days earlier Cédile and his associate had, "in tremendous secrecy", said, "We'll go up to the Việt Minh outside one of the police stations [the headquarters], and we'll do that to them," making a sweeping gesture with his arm, "and it will be over. And all our friends, now silent, will throng to the French." 20

Years later, when asked of Gracey's worry that the coup might misfire, Cédile replied:

"Yes, there was the risk of an accident, of course, and he had the responsibility. But he accepted it and he agreed with me. He understood me, and as I later said to other officers in the next few days I managed to convince him. And he said, 'Well, you're a brave young man and we're going to help you, my dear boy.' He was very kind." 21

This statement verifies Brigadier Maunsell's argument that Jean Cédile had convinced Gracey that the quickest way to resolve the "sticky" situation was with a lightning takeover by French forces.* As Maunsell had said six months before the interview with Cédile:

"Now Douglas Gracey was an emotional man, but he always required facts and information, proof — but he couldn't get proof. But he became enthusiastic about it [the coup], and enthusiasm was a great part of Gracey's makeup.

If you could get him to believe in a cause, it was a small step to get him enthusiastically behind it.

The two Frenchmen converted Gracey and got him enthusiastic for this cause. After all, if the French could consolidate power quickly, the British could wind up and go home quicker. This would be the way to unite the French in a Verdun-like spirit and they would be able to properly prepare for Leclerc's arrival. And, above all, their friends among les Annamites would all come out and rally around the Tricolore. It was repeated so many times that the British came to believe it in the total absence of any other information."²²

The coup was a combined Anglo-French operation, with the preliminary steps being taken almost exclusively by the British. Queried about joint planning Cédile said.

"Yes, for the coup of 23 September there was liaison. For example, two nights before 23 September the Gurkhas occupied the Police Commissariat. The Viet Minh were in blockhouses and bunkers and it was this pressure point which we took which helped the British troops when they became involved in the clashes. They helped very much on 23 September and then they left it to us. Obviously the plan had been made because the attack was made on all sides to free Saigon...."²³

Brigadier Taunton, in his report to Gracey, described the gradual takeover of vital points during the previous few days, culminating in the Hybads taking the two Police Commissariats, Treasury and Maison Centrale from armed Annamite police, and the Gurkhas taking over the Post and Telegraph Office on 21/22 September:

"3. The stage was now set for the coup d'etat by the French to take over the civil administration in SAIGON from Annamites. During night 22/23 Sep the coup d'etat took place and in SAIGON the French had taken over their Police posts, Mairie, etc. and established gds on the five brs** leading over the Arroyo d'Avalanche. 24

* But the impression remains that Gracey, having already made up his own mind, may simply have gone through the motions of becoming convinced by the two Frenchmen.

** Bridges.

4. 23 Sep - 1 Hybad surrounded and took over the YOKOHAMA and INDO-CHINA banks."

Commenting on the period from 18 to 24 September, Taunton said:

- "1. When taking over vital points from the Japs, the policy was British take over and hand to French later.
- 2. When taking from Annamites, in the main, Japs took over first and handed over to British.
- 3. It was very apparent that the Japs had NOT adequately disarmed the Annamite Police."

On 22 September the final outline of the coup was contained in 80 Indian Infantry Brigade Operational Order Number 13. The order was prefaced as follows, under "INFM":

"1. On the night of 22/23 Sep the French Army and Administration are seizing the Police Stations, Post Office and Treasury from the VIET MINH who are at present controlling them. Z hr will be 0400 hrs SAIGON time. The following objectives will be taken by French tps under the comd of Lt-Col RIVIER:-

- (a) Z-5 mins Post Office and Telephone Exchange (35) 22055410* - One Coy.
- (b) Z-5 mins Surete (45) 22055395, one coy.
- (c) Z hr Commissariat de Arrondissement (98) 21705250 - one coy.
- (d) Z hr Commissariat Central (not marked) 20455160 - one coy.
- (e) Z hr Commissariat 1er [sic] Arrondissement (77) 22805340 - one coy (Navy).
- (f) Z hr Commissariat du Port (99) 22705250
- (g) Z hr Commissariat 6e Arrondissement) One coy. (Navy)

2. Later on 23 Sep French tps will also take over the Central Jail from 1/1 GR. All VIET MINH found at these objectives will be disarmed and interned by the French Administration until their credentials have been checked, when those considered harmless will be released.

3. Lt-Col Rivier's HQ will be located at the French Barracks in the Boulevard Norodon [sic] (10) 212547 till 0400 hrs when it will move to the Post Office.

INTENTION.

4. 80 Ind Inf Bde will co-operate with the French Forces in their plan and will take one further objective:- Garde Civile barracks (not marked) 19405380.

METHOD.

5. (a) Two pls 1 Hybad comd by a BO^{**} will take the Garde Civile barracks at 0400 hrs 23 Sep.

* Reference Saigon Street Plan, Second Edition, 1945.

** British Officer.

- (b) M. le Commandant Besson will accompany them as interpreter.
 - (c) All VIET MINH personnel will be disarmed, searched and detained under gd until such time as the French administration take them over on 23 Sep.
 - (d) As soon as the take over has been completed a report will be submitted to this HQ by jeep DR. Report will incl. casualties, prisoners, incidents, etc.
6. (a) The Jap gd at the Post Office and Telephone Exchange (35) 22055410 will be relieved by 1/1 GR (str 1 BO and two secs) at 1400 hrs 22 Sep.
- (b) Sentries will be posted outside the building with a gd room inside in order that ingress may be effected at any time.
 - (c) On arrival of the French Coy at 0400 hrs 23 Sep they will permit them to enter the buildings to take over the Post Office and Telephone Exchange and will give any assistance required.
 - (d) The French will be responsible for any VIET MINH found on the premises.
 - (e) 1/1 GR gd will be relieved by the French Coy and will be dismissed after daylight.
7. (a) The 1/1 GR gd will permit French prison officials to enter the Central jail at 0700 hrs 23 Sep and will assist them to take over from the VIET MINH warders.
- (b) The gd will be relieved by French tps on 23 Sep (time to be notified later).

ADM.

8. Tpt*

- (a) Maj R.A. HARRIS REME will detail 4 cars to be collected by French drivers at 1500 hrs 22 Sep. They will be returned by the French to this HQ by 1800 hrs 23 Sep.
- (b) The Japs are being ordered to provide 10 lorries (formerly property of the French Army) to report to this HQ at 1400 hrs 22 Sep. These will also be collected by French drivers at 1500 hrs 22 Sep.
- (c) One jeep of HQ 80 Bde will report to 1 Hybad at 2000 hrs 22 Sep for use by DR reporting completion of task.

9. Arms

- (a) Pl weapons less 2" mtrs will be carried.
- (b) Pistols Signalling will be carried by all dets.

INTERCOMM.

10. All reports to HQ 80 Ind Inf Bde Officers' Mess.

11. ACKNOWLEDGE.

* Transport.

After describing the method of issue and distribution, a postscript was added:

AFTER ORDER

Ref para 1 (c) and (e).
Gds on these buildings were taken over by 1 Hybad night 21/22 Sep. French tps will take over from 1 Hybad at time laid down in original plan. 25

The War Diary of 80 Brigade recorded the events of 23 September:

- 0345 - COUP D'ETAT during night successfully accomplished and following is present position, COMMISSARIATS 227534, 216525 and TREASURY 226532 hand over to FRENCH tps.
- 0530 - POST OFFICE handed over to FRENCH tps. YOKOHAMA BANK and BANQUE INDOCHINE surrounded and taken over by 1 HYBAD. FRENCH tps guarding bns over ARROYO DE LALANCH [sic] at 203556 - 215557-217557 - 228555 - 231550 and some firing reported. French cas 1 killed.
- 1700-1900 - four fires started by ANNAMITES at rly sta 214528, Market 216519 and warehouse 218518 other was Race Course area 197537.

The French force actually used was a mixture of 5 RIC, 11 RIC (ex-POW) and armed civilians. The 11th RIC had been reconstituted only a few days earlier. As Cédile said, the French POWs were not released on his arrival in Saigon because the Việt Minh had threatened to shoot them:

"So I had to negotiate very carefully with them and eventually we let the prisoners out almost individually and we put them into houses where there were women and children, but it was just a few days before 23 September before we rebuilt and rearmed these units." 26

This explained why the French death toll was kept to a relatively low level during the days between the 2 September riots and 23 September. Early on, around the 2 September period, Cédile described the ex-POWs as weak, with some having no shirts on their backs, and their arms consisted of bamboo staves. Fighting had been hand-to-hand, and when grateful civilians gave them "bottles of spirits" the effect on weakened bodies was immediate.

One reporter described the coup as follows:

"As clocks chimed 0300, a ragtime, grim silent army of 300 men armed to the teeth, padded silently along the deserted streets. The Coup d'Etat was beginning and Saigon was about to become French again. This was the culmination of an incredible week of turbulent rumour and

imminent uprisings. Who would strike first? Would it be the Annamese, angry, confident, truculent? Or the French? 'Three o'clock Sunday morning,' the word went round: and 300 tough men went out to take a city." 27

Each Frenchman involved wore the Cross of Lorraine on his shoulder. Christopher Buckley of the Daily Telegraph (London) quoted a British officer as saying (of the French), "They have the opportunity of a life-time for starting with a clean sheet a liberal policy for the joint running of the country."²⁸ Writing of the action, Buckley gave perhaps the most balanced report of the day:*

"The total number of casualties in the course of the night's and morning's shootings are trifling -- two French killed and four wounded, one Annamese killed,** and an unspecified number, perhaps some dozens, more or less roughly handled.

It has been established that no casualties occurred in the taking over of the town hall... The Annamese were taken by surprise and the French troops, in accordance with orders, fired at the walls and roof."

Buckley then described the unnecessarily brutal conduct of the French, citing the breakdown in French discipline:

"It hardly seemed necessary that women and striplings should be kept seated on the ground with their hands above their heads several hours after the shooting had stopped in the center of Saigon. This I saw. Such treatment was entirely contrary to the orders issued by Col. Cédile and Col. Riviere."

Buckley warned that the Annamese might well react violently to such wanton provocation by the French. In the afternoon the city was quiet except for some sniping in the northern suburbs, of which Buckley wrote:

"Japanese troops are responsible for the clearing up of this area -- not the least Gilbertian episode in a situation which, while brushing the fringe of the tragic, has strong elements of comic opera."

* The least accurate, most politically biased, and most misleading reports were undoubtedly those of Harold Isaacs, whose earlier history of China had been "heartily recommended" to Indian revolutionaries by Trotsky.

** Not a single Vietnamese was killed in the whole operation.

He had introduced his story by saying, "The solution of the problem of rule in Indo-China will depend primarily upon French ability to exercise tact and conciliation."

On the morning of the 23rd the Post, Telephone and Telegraph Office was handed to the French at 0600 by 1/1 GR; the jail was handed over at 1130. However, a mass escape was attempted when the prisoners saw the French resuming control and a number of prisoners and Vietnamese warders escaped. The mutiny was contained when the Gurkhas took back control of the jail at 1400 hours.

What should have been a simple and painless operation got out of hand for one reason: the state of mind of the French ex-POWs and civilians. After their harsh experience of imprisonment and humiliation at the hands of the Asians, the French population went wild on seeing the Tricolore flying once more over the city hall. Had the French troops maintained their discipline the French civilian population would in all probability have been held in check, but mob hysteria, like fear, is contagious. One of the British officers who arrived in Saigon within hours of the coup stated quite simply that fear underlay the French reaction in the wake of the coup.²⁹ The Japanese had permitted the Việt Minh to take over guarding the 11th RIC, and on the 23rd, the sight of the fleeing Việt Minh proved too much and the French, back on top, lost control of themselves.

Gracey's only real worry about the coup was the behaviour of the French, and he had repeatedly stressed the need for discipline above all to Cédile and Rivière, who assured him that the French troops were well-officered and tightly controlled. As Maunsell said later:

"There is no doubt that Gracey thought that it would be a pushover -- he believed Cédile and had been told it innumerable times. The information the British had about the Viet Minh was that they would not resist. The information about the French was that Cédile had tight control over them, that this was not at all a difficult task, and would be simply done -- and that once done, it would provide a substantial, useful step forward for the furtherance of the gradual takeover from the British by the French." 30

The French state of mind, as evidenced by the events described above, differed greatly from that of the British. This is well described, though on a personal level by Brigadier Maunsell, though it helps to explain why the British would do all in their power to get the French reinstalled in city hall. Although the words are Maunsell's own, the gist of the statement was echoed by every former British officer interviewed, without a single exception:

"Most of us had been fighting the Japanese since '42 and had not seen our families in 3, 3½ years. Newsmen and latter-day academics did not understand the British frame of mind in this regard.

This was a very irritating postscript to the war. We were not interested in anything past defeating the Japs. For 90%, the A-bomb was a complete surprise. Most thought that only a landing in Japan would end the war, and there was talk of it from time to time — Tiger Force was being prepared.

Suddenly, the war was over, and I went to Rangoon to meet Numata — this was the first inkling of an unwelcome postscript to the war. All talk was about the Japanese — no one had ever heard of the Viet Minh.

Mansergh [NEI], Evans [Siam], Gracey [FIC] — all talk was once they got the Japs under control in those various places, there wouldn't be any other trouble... It never entered our heads that there would be a problem caused from any other source than the Japanese..."³¹

Until the draft "Masterdom" plan was produced, neither Gracey nor Maunsell had given the matter much thought.

"Then it started to dawn on us that this was going to be something, (a), that we'd never experienced; (b), we knew absolutely nothing about at all, because we knew how you fought a war, and we knew how you fought a peace, but we didn't know how you did anything in between."

That was the view from the top. The view from the bottom was identical. Major M. Kelleher, a 3/1 Gurkha company commander, said that none of the officers wished to see their troops suffer casualties especially since the war was over.³² The British were there to keep order and ship the Japanese home — all the rest concerned only the French and Vietnamese, and the sooner the French took over the better, for the sooner the British/Indian forces could leave. This attitude was an important factor in assessing British-French cooperation throughout all the coup operations. And no one was more loath to accept needless casualties, and is still remembered for it, than Douglas Gracey.

Gracey's own description of the coup was written just twelve months after the event:

"9. By secret and very skilfully executed arrangements, a proportion of the best of the French prisoners of war were armed, and in spite of the fact that the fly-in of 80 Brigade had been much delayed by bad weather, and only half the expected number of troops had arrived, on the orders of the Allied commander the French government was installed in SAIGON, on September 23rd, and the puppet government evicted.

This revolution was noisy but there were no fatal casualties to the Annamite puppet government, or to their evicted police, though some rough handling and a few unnecessary reprisals by the French forces took place; this was natural under the circumstances, but was over-emphasized by various Press correspondents, who had the first chance, after being unmuzzled by censorship since 1939, of free and unfettered expression.

It would be as well to state here that, considering all the circumstances, the Press correspondents, having collected in large numbers in the initial stages of the occupation of F.I.C., were most fair on the whole in their reports and comments, with the exception of those few, mostly of a poor calibre, who were representatives of papers whose policy was anti-British, anti-French and in fact anti-anything which was sound policy.

10. Before the 23rd September and on that day, British troops had taken over from Japanese and Annamite troops, the essential dock area, the power house and key electrical installations, the head water-works and one or two key police stations. French troops were made responsible for the key areas in SAIGON itself, and all other vital points were guarded by Japanese troops, including the various outlying areas in which French nationals had been concentrated." 33

Gracey felt revulsion and anger at the French reaction, but, being the man he was, he accepted full responsibility. Brigadier Maunsell still remembers vividly Gracey's reaction when reports of French excesses were brought to him by indignant British officers. A few hours after the coup Gracey was in a "great rage." He asked Maunsell, "Have you heard what they've done?" Maunsell said no, he had not, and Gracey described the details of the French behaviour.

Gracey then sent for Colonel Cédile, who had been up all night with the principals in the coup. Gracey summoned them all to his office and "addressed them like pickpockets." Gracey began his severe dressing down of the shaken French leaders by saying, "Never have I been so let down in my life!" He ended by saying that the whole lot would be disarmed.

Cédile, who had been let down to a greater extent than Gracey, said how genuinely sorry he was. Gracey snapped at Cédile with "that wasn't the slightest good, and he was not to reappear again until he could give an assurance that those who should have been disarmed were disarmed, those who had committed excesses were to be punished, and what it [the punishment] was, and there was nothing more to be said!"³⁴ Cédile left, a "shaken man", looking like "an enormous, great spaniel which had been kicked in

the face. He looked like a nervous breakdown when he arrived; you can imagine what he looked like when he left!" And echoing a universally-shared opinion, Maunsell said, "When Gracey signalled Mountbatten that it was on his orders the coup began, it was typical of Gracey to take full responsibility for the plan, once having been convinced of its merits."

Gracey's report to Mountbatten was as follows:

- " 1. On my orders early 23 September FRENCH troops took over guard of police stations and Government buildings from ANNAMITE Armed Police and Garde Civile. Latter are the Armed Forces of VIET MINH Provisional Government.
2. Take over successfully though noisily accomplished though some disturbances mostly sniping still occurs at 1400 hours in Northern suburbs.
3. Japanese therefore ordered clear this area and ensure collection all arms.
4. Throughout the principle of minimum force was genuinely intended by French Leaders. Recently re-armed untrained and undisciplined French Troops indulged in many FEU DE JOIE which gave wrong impression of battle in progress.
5. Casualties up to 1400 hours. FRENCH - killed 2, possible 3, wounded 4. ANNAMITES - killed and wounded Nil.
6. Excitable French civilians indulged in unnecessary oppression of Annamites. Cedille fully agreed my firm intention treating all such acts as breaches law and order under Proclamation just issued. He is issuing stern warning to French civilians to this effect.
7. There has been no known attempt by ANNAMITE or FRENCH to harm my Forces. Disarmament of Annamese by GURKHAS of [or] Indians proceeded voluntarily. Unfortunately insufficient own troops to accomplish complete disarmament.
8. Cedille will now immediately start means to effect gradual resu[m]ption by French of overall Adm Control."³⁵

The situation immediately following the coup is best described by Gracey in his telegram of 24 September to Major General Pyman, ALFSEA Chief of Staff:

"Situation today has deteriorated due to following:

- (A) Annamite armed bands determined on Anti-French action and sabotage.
- (B) Lukewarm Jap action to intervene between Annamite and French.

- 340
- (C) Success achieved by Annamite in setting fire to Gigareira Factory.
 - (D) Necessity to curb French troops activities owing their instability with resultant loss of strength.
2. Action taken.
- (A) All own troops employed keeping order. Only serious incident involving own troops occurred as Annamites attempted to burn Power House. Attempt frustrated with casualties. Own troops killed 1 wounded 2.
 - (B) Japanese troops employed clearing areas reserved for them alone. No concerted action by my troops with Jap troops.
 - (C) On Cedilles wish am making every endeavour to have Annamite leaders found to assist control their own armed bands and to discuss cooperation with French.
 - (D) Have confined unreliable French Forces to barracks. Am only using minimum essential.
3. French casualties not fully known. Confirmed 7 civilians killed 1 French Officer and 2 other ranks killed 4 other ranks wounded.
4. Considered fly in of remainder 80 Brigade must be given priority. Am still short of $1\frac{1}{2}$ Battalions.
5. Appreciation follows early a.m. 25 September when events of night will enable me to give comprehensive picture and probable trend of future events." 36

Mountbatten passed the information to the Chiefs of Staff and discussed the substance of his recent Miscellaneous staff meetings. He drew the Chiefs' attention to the fact that "Leclerc has rejected as impracticable the solution of parallel and independent British and French commands."³⁷ Whereas Gracey had authorized the coup, and indeed had based all his assumptions on the anticipated arrival of his complete division, Mountbatten was now (on 24 September) suggesting the following to the Chiefs:

"The first essential seems to me to avoid building up our forces in FIC for the stronger we are the more the French will feel they can take provocative action against Annamites relying on presence of powerful British forces who may then be brought into conflict with indigencous population. It is mainly for this reason that I have recommended in my SEACOS 490 TOO 241201 Z the removal of southern FIC from my threatre at earliest possible date. When I suggested stopping our buildup to Leclerc he was quite horrified and said it would be surest way to invite civil strife and

bloodshed if we were weak. He claimed that since we were responsible for FIC South of 16 degrees under Tokyo surrender terms we could not evade our responsibilities and leave European population at the mercy of a native uprising. Slim agreed that we were not strong enough at present to prevent this rising outside key areas." 38

Mountbatten added that he did not press the issue with Leclerc "As I feel that it is essential for me to maintain friendly relations with my Allied Commanders-in-Chief. Furthermore, Gracey's proclamation "has in fact stabilised southern part of FIC", and Mountbatten now "strongly" recommended that it not be cancelled. Continued Mountbatten:

"If we stop our building up now the French forces although they will actually exceed British forces in FIC on 20th October, 39 may still seem to Leclerc insufficient for taking over: in which case I consider he should be ordered to do so by French Government if H.M.G. wish to avoid committing themselves indefinitely.

During intervening month I think we can maintain order by means of Japanese and thus avoid a clash between our forces and local population but there will then be only very weak forces to disarm 60,000 Japanese. The Japanese, however, seem perfectly ready to co-operate."

The final paragraph was most significant, for this appears to be the first inclination that Gracey had that he was to confine himself to key areas:

"I have re-affirmed orders to Gracey that he is not to employ British forces outside key areas unless called upon by French in which case matter is to be referred through me to H.M.G." *

While these far-reaching events were occurring, there were less weighty matters to consider. In "Defeat Into Victory" Slim has described how the British ignored MacArthur's desire that the Japanese be allowed to keep their swords. The question arose when Evans, in Bangkok, told Slim that the Japanese 18 Area Army had received a message from Tokyo, relaying a MacArthur ruling. The Japanese message said:

"In case sword in question is a private possession of Jap Officers or others we will allow the owner to keep such sword as there will be no military significance attached to it and can be recognized as a treasure. While wearing of such a sword is prohibited however." 40

* A similar directive went simultaneously to Major General Evans in Bangkok.

Evans had told the Japanese in his area that Slim's orders stood, regardless of their citing the MacArthur edict, but wanted confirmation from Slim. With tongue in cheek Evans added, "Very difficult to discriminate private from other swords."

On 24 September Terauchi asked permission to send an aircraft with two officers and an interpreter to Tokyo, where they would contact his family in Nagano Prefecture and return with his family sword.

By 24 September, 12 motor junks had been handed over to the French in order to take food to Haiphong and return with coal.

On 24 September, also, SEAC Headquarters received a message sent the day before by the Control Commission. It said that the gathering of intelligence was increasing with the build-up of Allied troops. Admiral Chudo had been taken into custody and evacuated on 23 September. He had faked an illness but the British Medical Officer was not fooled, and Chudo then tried to fake his temperature chart. The Japanese had destroyed all their naval codes and ciphers. Four reconnaissance float planes had been found in good condition at Biên Hòa. The Việt Minh boycott was continuing, and Dutch ex-POWs had volunteered to keep the hotels and other services going. The general opinion was that the greater portion of the local population were being terrorized by the Việt Minh.⁴¹

On 23 September, 20 Indian Division Operational Order Number 15 had been published in confirmation of verbal instructions of 21 September. This order dealt with the proposed establishment of headquarters in Phnom Penh and Cam Ranh Bay, to be commanded respectively by Brigadier Hirst, Royal Artillery, and Lieutenant Colonel Murray, of 4/10 GR representing 100 Brigade. It was a modest effort, involving but 31 officers and men, including signals personnel, to Phnom Penh, and 41 men to Cam Ranh Bay.

Headquarters ALFSEA now directed Gracey that in view of the attitude of the Labour Government he was to restrict the use of British troops to the absolute minimum; therefore his plan to send troops to Cam Ranh Bay was cancelled. He was advised to send French troops instead and tell Terauchi to instruct the Japanese there to obey the French. This was easier said than done, for under no circumstances would the Japanese directly cooperate with the French at that time. Gracey replied that from what he had seen of French troops during what should have been a simple operation on the 23rd he could not concur in dispatching French forces to Cam Ranh:

"Realize French troops here not seasoned but
Corps Leger who reputed trained troops have
no experience and are not trained sufficiently.

Possible that troops following may be better but they still have to be good enough to avoid strife by landing in very tricky situation." 42

On the 23rd the French had been "unnecessarily provocative and undisciplined."

Headquarters SACSEA was worried about adverse publicity about the coup and asked Gracey about the "lurid" account by the Daily Herald correspondent. Some of the press reporting was as politically slanted then as it was 30 years later. Harold Isaacs, among others, reported * that "Viet Minh sentries were shot down." He reported no French deaths, yet there were two Frenchmen killed and no Vietnamese at all. The standard of press reporting varied greatly, from extremist writing of this kind to the factual and objective accounts of the Times and the Daily Telegraph.

On 24 September the British relieved the French guards on the Artillery and Naval Headquarters, then handed them back to the French later on in the day. Presumably, this briefly freed French forces for other operations, and by late afternoon the French had also relieved the British from the task of guarding the Continental and Majestic Hotels. But as the 1/1 Gurkha Rifles War Diary noted, "Normal MISSION guard duties continued amid these kaleidoscopic changes." 43

The Việt Minh reacted instinctively, and two platoons of Jarvis's Gurkhas were sent to help the small Hybad detachment in driving off an attack on the power station. The Việt Minh managed to set fire to part of the station before being repelled with the loss of 2 dead and several wounded.

At 1600 hours Major Charles Blascheck, a veteran of some of the heaviest Burma combat, brought his D Company from 3/1 GR to reinforce temporarily 1/1 GR and was in action almost immediately. As soon as night fell the electric power failed; the station had just been taken over by the 20th Division's engineers after the Annamite workers had fled. This was "the first of a succession of irritating and nightly failures for some weeks."⁴⁴ The trouble prevented the 100 Brigade's advance party from moving out of Saigon, and they were now given responsibility (under Lieutenant Colonel Murray) for Saigon's North Sector, Saigon having been divided into two for more effective control immediately after the coup. Under North Sector were 1/1 GR, some French forces and 2 Japanese

* in No Peace for Asia.

regiments. The area was bounded in the north by the Arroyo de l'Avalanche, and in the south by Rue Verdun.

One of the 1/1 Gurkha Rifles officers expressed the generally felt bitterness towards some of the hostile press reporting. Similar reporting was later to prove one of the most important factors in ensuring Communist victory in Vietnam. The Gurkhas commented on the "fantastic" inaccuracies of the press, "always excluding the "Times" [not the New York Times]. One learns at last, the hard way, the bitter truth that there is no truth."⁴⁵

A press conference, described as "ghastly" by Maunsell, was held shortly after the coup.⁴⁶ Gracey was attacked by the American and Australian reporters, whose political sympathies were well known, and was "given hell" for rearming the Japanese following MacArthur's statement that the Japanese were disarmed. Gracey was a "wonderful target" for the Press, and was asked why he was not following MacArthur's orders. No one knew at that time that Mansergh was doing the same thing in the Netherlands East Indies. Gracey grew angry and said that the reporters did not understand the East. Maunsell, over 30 years later, laughed as he described what followed. The American replied that "The East is as unscrutable today as it was yesterday, and following this press conference is even more inscrutable." This "really set Gracey off", and about that time the Việt Minh attacked the Power Station and the lights went off. The conference continued in flickering candlelight, with sporadic bursts of gunfire and bullets whistling outside, and ended up being "really quite funny".⁴⁷

South Sector was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Purcell, commanding 3/1 Gurkha Rifles; under him were his own battalion less Blascheck's company, 1/19 Hybads, elements of 4 Dogra, some French police and a Japanese regiment.⁴⁸ Purcell's battalion had just arrived in the afternoon of the 24th, and had driven through a French-Viet Minh firefight en route from Tân Sơn Nhứt to Saigon. Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) E. "Fairy" Gopsill, a big, barrel-chested officer who had transferred to the Gurkhas from the Parachute Regiment, recalled that the battalion was driven from the airfield to Saigon by Japanese drivers. A few minutes after leaving Tân Sơn Nhứt a Gurkha NCO, standing up in the bed of the truck, leaned over and tapped Gopsill on the shoulder; Gopsill was riding in the cab with the driver. The NCO said to Gopsill in Gurkhali, "Sahib, look over there!" Ahead of them raged a fierce gun battle between French soldiers

and Việt Minh partisans. Dead and wounded men lay alongside the road, and the battalion passed a busy Việt Minh first aid post situated on the verge of the highway. The Gurkhas, rifles and sten guns at the ready, passed through without incident.

The 3/1 Gurkha Rifles were met at their barracks, a school, by their commander, Lieutenant Colonel "Percy" Purcell, who had flown in several days earlier. Purcell told them, "You're going into Cholon", and the Gurkhas were directed to establish a base area as quickly as possible. This they did and were immediately fired on by the Viet Minh; this was the start of several days of heavy street fighting for 3/1 GR. The battalion's arrival coincided with a horrific incident in which diehard Vichyists crucified a naked and shaven Frenchwoman upside down in front of the Cathedral; she was a Gaullist who had operated an escape route for downed Allied fliers, and had been betrayed by her own husband. It immediately prejudiced many of the new arrivals against the French.⁴⁹

Throughout the night of 24 September sporadic firing was heard all over Saigon, especially in the southern area bordered by the Arroyo Chinois, where the French and Việt Minh were engaged in a series of small fights. The Việt Minh succeeded in penetrating a police commissariat on Rue Fonok, near the northern tip of Khánh Hôi island, and set fire to it — the French suffered 4 casualties. "A" company of 2/8 Punjab were called out to clear the Việt Minh from an area around the cemeteries about 800 yards west of 80 Brigade headquarters, between Saigon and Cholon, and 1 Vietnamese was killed — the Hybads took the Treasury, Power Station and a police commissariat — a heavy fight broke out at the power station as 200 Việt Minh troops succeeded in setting fire to the coal dump near the main plant; the fire was quickly brought under control, but 1 of the Hybads was killed and 2 were wounded — the Việt Minh suffered 3 dead. A 1/19 Hybad section was dispatched to the northern area to reinforce the guard on Radio Saigon, and the Japanese were ordered to strengthen their guard on the important rice storage area on the Canal des Porteries following a tip that the Việt Minh planned to destroy it.

The 24th had been a good flying day, as 500 personnel of 3/1 GR had arrived, and 2 sorties had completed the buildup of 1/19 Hybad.

Of these events the Commander of 1/1 Gurkha Rifles later wrote:

"What occurred now affected me more than anything else in these operations; this was the death of a sentry of 1 Hybad, with whom we had been brigaded

ever since 6 Div. the "Paiforce" Home Guard ["Persia and Iraq Force": this potentially splendid Div. spent the whole war guarding oil wells, except for our lucky Bde.] had been formed at Secunderabad in April 1941... it struck me how tragic it was that he should have survived a whole 'real' war, and then have lost his life in a country and for a cause in which he had only the remotest interest. That was the first casualty that hit me personally; it was unexpected, and there were of course more to come which affected me more closely but not so deeply, because by that time we had changed gear back into a war-time frame of mind. I think that the sepoy himself and his companions would simply regard it as the will of God: after all they were simply volunteer/professional/mercenary soldiers (as one happens to look at it)."50

Gracey was never to waver in his belief that the coup had been absolutely necessary, and that no alternative course existed at that time. In this he was reinforced, 13 years after his death, by a former member of the Force 136 intelligence team sent to Saigon with the Control Commission. Said Hugh Astor:

"When the British arrived in Saigon the intention was to try and work with the Viet Minh."

But there was no such thing as a "Việt Minh":

"British Intelligence soon discovered that the [Việt Minh] guards on the buildings, etcetera, were a facade, and that any agreement entered into with the Viet Minh could easily be abrogated by some other equally strong a group, such as the Trotskyits and others, which often disagreed with them. It was a hopeless situation with no foreseeable chances of improvement, so the coup was decided on." 51

This implies a condition of anarchy which would eventually reach a flash point and explode. In medical terms, Gracey lanced the abscess by acting decisively at a time of his own choosing, for Việt Minh leaflets had stated quite clearly that they meant to launch an attack at some time in the future.

His official report on the coup, as distinct from his personal feelings, said the following:

"9. The promises given to General GRACEY by the leaders of the French, both civil and military, that minimum force and iron discipline would be assured during the coup d'etat proved a false assurance by their instability and indiscipline, by their emotional behaviour and unnecessary violence the French soldiers, their police and civilians, invited active counter-measures as

soon as the ANNAMITES could gather themselves together.

10. It has always been a matter of great doubt whether the ANNAMITE people would understand, let alone believe, in the re-birth of France; the excesses of the 23rd September, 1945, ensured that this difficulty would be even greater.

The fact that a new France had fought gloriously to free her own country, and had proved victorious, was not known in French Indo-China; the reason is that the number of educated ANNAMITES is a very small proportion of the population; all such information therefore would have to be disseminated to the remainder by the small educated minority; under the VIET MINH control it is safe to say that steps would be taken to ensure that what change of heart had taken place in France would be misrepresented to the ANNAMITE population, even if it reached them at all." 52

By 24 September, when the Việt Minh was gathering its forces to launch a series of attacks on the city, British forces in Saigon comprised the whole or greater part of the following: Headquarters 80 Brigade, 1/1 GR, 1/19 Hybad, 3/1 GR, Defense Company 2/8 Punjab,* Tactical Headquarters 4 Dogra, 55 Field Ambulance, and Headquarters Saigon Control Commission.⁵³

On 24/25 September the Việt Minh began their war. Writing not long after those events Trương Chinh, a prominent Communist theoretician, said:

"Peoples power had scarcely been founded in Viet Nam when the British forces... landed in Indo-China... On September 23, armed and protected by the British forces, the French colonialists launched their attack and occupied Saigon. Our people replied by force of arms, and from that moment, our heroic resistance began." 54

The struggle endured until the Spring of 1975.

On the night of 24/25 September there occurred an incident so full of horror that it coloured events in Saigon for some time. In a north central section of Saigon, the Cité Heyraud district, a screaming horde of Vietnamese appeared and entered the houses: they murdered about 150 French civilians, a great many of them being women and children. An equal number were taken away, and many were subsequently tortured, mutilated and killed. The area was guarded by Japanese troops at the time, but these stood by and allowed the mob to pass through. This incident, possibly more than any other, may have convinced Gracey that the Vietnamese population was beyond the control of any responsible organization.

* A Company, which had flown in on 16 September.

The Việt Minh and their sympathizers later blamed the Bình Xuyên gang for the slaughter, but this allegation is disputed by those who had contact with the Bình Xuyên. The Bình Xuyên was a brigand group which seldom engaged in any activity which did not return it profit. The Cité Heyraud massacre was totally different in character from all normal Bình Xuyên activity and those familiar with the group refuse to believe it could have had any part in the affair. In fact, Colonel Marcel Mingant, of French Intelligence, stated unequivocally that subsequent investigation revealed without question that the massacre was the work of the Trotskyists.⁵⁵ He also independently confirmed Astor's assertion that at that time and in that area the Việt Minh "was not an identity". The sects had not yet acquired their later influence and the Việt Minh was composed in large measure of 17 and 18 year old youths.

The momentum of violence carried over to the 25th, when a large fire was started among disused bashes about 800 yards south of 80 Brigade Headquarters. The central market was attacked and set on fire,* and 2 more French civilians were kidnapped during the riot. One Việt Minh partisan was shot near a commissariat in Cholon. Small clearing operations took place all over Saigon, with heavy action occurring along the Boulevard Gallieni, in the South Sector. Here the Việt Minh opened fire with light machine guns, rifles and pistols. "A" Company, 1/1 GR, searched the north Saigon area enclosed by Rue Legrand de la Liraye - Rue Paul Blanchy - Arroyo de l'Avalanche; they found no firearms but removed daggers from a number of Vietnamese and, more important, found 31 French women and children who were locked up in a house on the outskirts of Saigon, near the arroyo and the road to Tân Sơn Nhứt. The Việt Minh guards fled on sight of the Gurkhas, and the rescued civilians were probably survivors of the Cité Heyraud bloodbath.

The fighting along Boulevard Gallieni involved 3/1 Gurkha Rifles. They were conducting a sweep of the large area between Rue de Verdun and the Quai Belgique (in the south, on the Arroyo Chinois). Boulevard Gallieni ran northeast-southwest, about 3 blocks from and paralleling the Arroyo Chinois. The battalion found the road heavily blocked, with the entrenched Việt Minh using automatic weapons and grenade dischargers "quite freely."⁵⁶

* The flames spread through the small shops and booths, as the Viet Minh had stolen the fire engines 3 days earlier. Smith, in OSS, accused the British of burning a large section of Saigon but forgot to mention this incident.

As the 3/1 GR historian said, "A tedious battle of street fighting ensued." As soon as the Gurkhas saw what they were up against they brought out their small 2 inch mortars and grenades and quickly cleared one block after another. Continued the 3/1 writer:

"Probably our greatest impression was the magnificent system of evacuation of casualties by the ANNAMITES. Red Cross Squads were always waiting on the scene of a battle and they got their casualties away remarkably quickly.

It was impossible to assess the number of casualties we gave the ANNAMITES by nightfall, when the search was completed, but we had none ourselves, despite a vast number of 'near misses'.⁵⁷

The confusion of the 24th was illustrated by the report of 2 Vietnamese groups attacking each other, a fight which resulted in 10 casualties.

The 24th may also have been the beginning of a change of heart towards the Japanese. The 1/1 GR recorder had written about the battalion's attitude on arriving in Saigon:

"The sight of Japanese sentries and armed piquets and the sensation of being driven by Japanese chauffeurs were at first ludicrous in their unexpectedness since we had all entered Indo-China with the idea of suppressing the Japs completely and kicking them around as hard as we could. However it soon became obvious that with the small number of troops at the disposal of the Mission, it was essential to make the fullest possible use of the Japanese while maintaining our own forces as a reserve." 58

After the 24th there was little talk of suppressing the Japanese or kicking them around. On returning from helping out 1/19 Hybad at the Power Station, the 2 platoons of 1/1 GR (who were driven there by Japanese soldiers in Japanese trucks) found the road back to the barracks heavily blocked by felled trees. As it was getting dark the Gurkhas dismounted and the Japanese were told to make their way back with their trucks as best they could; the Gurkhas would return to their area on foot.

"They had not gone far however before the Japs, who had discovered a way round, rejoined and drove them back the rest of the way. This was the first of a series of incidents that showed a remarkable cooperation on their part in carrying out the terms of the treaty." 59

Although Gracey, on the 24th, had again asked ALFSEA to send him the rest of his division, as late as 26 September 100 Brigade was alerted for a move directly to Borneo.

On 23 September, as the coup was taking place, 2967 Field Squadron, RAF Regiment, sailed from Madras to Rangoon, later to embark again for Saigon. And arriving in Saigon on the 23rd was Major J.H. Clark,* of 92 Indian Field Company (Indian Engineers), who later described the critical power situation in Saigon:

"Although they had surrendered, the Japs controlled everything, acting under British orders. They gave orders to the French civilian engineers who were responsible for the power station and other smaller generating stations, and for the water supply. These French engineers merely controlled the plant through skilled Annamite foremen and mechanics, and were not themselves capable of doing any repairs, nor did they know the more intricate details of the machinery, nor the layout of the electrical and water supply systems correctly, for which up-to-date plans were not available.

When the trouble started, the whole Annamite labour forces, skilled and unskilled, ran away, and it was found that the French engineers could not cope on their own." 60

In fact,

"The operation of the main CHOLON power house at this stage was distinctly international. With a British RE Officer in charge it was kept going by a couple of French technicians, assisted by Indian sappers and Japanese Naval ratings, Japanese soldiers doing the stoking, the whole guarded by a Gurkha platoon and sniped and grenaded during the night by Annamites."61

The 20 Division historian described the situation after the coup as follows:

"The effect of the coup d'etat and the elimination of the VIET MINH Government from SAIGON was the signal for a general strike of all Annamite labour and, by intimidation, of nearly all Chinese trade with Europeans. This had been foreseen and could only be countered by the use of large Japanese labour force on the docks, airfield, power stations, for sanitary services etc; but it threw a big strain on the Divisional Engineer, Supply and Medical Services. Japanese cooperation with all services was however efficient and whole hearted and all major difficulties were gradually overcome."62

Gracey's own description of the events of the past two days is as follows:

"Annamite reactions to the coup d'etat were uncoordinated, thanks entirely to its timeliness,

* In 1950 Major Clark wrote an account of the Saigon operation in the Royal Engineers Journal.

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secrecy and the surprise gained; very strong attacks were made on the power station, and attempts were made to seize and block the road between the airfield and the town. All these were successfully beaten off, and gradually, as the remainder of 80 Brigade was flown in, the weather having improved, the vital areas of SAIGON, including the docks, were made secure and the airfield defenses improved and strengthened.

Hooligan reaction was barbaric. Several French nationals, men, women and children, mostly half-caste or loyal Annamites, were murdered most foully, including some who had spent their lives in excellent service to the Annamites. The main market, some factories and warehouses, railway stations, and workshops were burnt, often in full view of Japanese troops, who were guarding vital areas nearby. It was obvious that the Japanese Army had not been informed of the necessity for absolute obedience to S.A.C.'s orders by their commanders." 63

The next day, on the 25th, Terauchi was summoned to Gracey's office, of which more will be said later.

Of the Cité Heyraud massacre itself, Cedile later strongly hinted of possible Annamite-Japanese cooperation when he said that a company of Japanese troops had allowed the Việt Minh to pass through. Cédile verified Maunsell's account of Gracey's reaction to French behaviour. The coup was carried out by

"French civilians, with the help of a few released POWs and British troops, and they together, who had suffered under the Viet Minh, who were their enemy (a very nasty enemy), they turned against the Viet Minh, and General Gracey was very angry about this. He was angry with good reason and he ordered the POWs to be returned to barracks.

He wasn't well equipped and don't forget that the whole Japanese Army was still armed. The Japanese had only just begun to be disarmed, and he, like us, had very little information. General Gracey was saying to himself, 'well, if things start going badly, what should we do? There are hardly any planes, we're a long way from help in Singapore and Rangoon.' When he saw the fact of the French civilians and rearmed troops composed of prisoners of war, that their maneuvers were not going well, he wanted me to return all the French troops to their barracks.

I had to obey him -- he had his reasons at the time. But during the night there was this incident at the Cité Heyraud, and also one could see the Viet Minh revolutionaries, quite a lot

of them, around in the streets, shooting with their revolvers, and quite a lot of French were killed.

So I had to go and see him. This meeting was quite dramatic. I told him, 'General, I'm afraid I have the responsibility for the French civil population. I can't allow women and children to be shot and killed, so please help us by allowing us to bring back the rearmed POWs into the street.'

At first he said no, but then kindly agreed with me and said, in fact, 'All right, my dear boy,* you are right,' and very soon after that we had the French troops back in the streets." 64

The period was reminiscent of the Boxer Rebellion, with British, Indian, Japanese, French, Australian and Dutch contingents patrolling the streets of Saigon; on this occasion, however, the Americans were sympathetic to the other side. The Việt Minh repaid American moral support by immediately murdering the senior American officer.

Footnotes: Chapter VIII

- 1 Great Britain, Public Record Office, WO 172/7773, War Diary 4/2 Gurkha Rifles.
- 2 GB, PRO, War Diary 1/19 Hyderabad, O.O. No. 4, 20 September 1945.
- 3 GB, PRO, WO 203/5611, draft of telegram from Leclerc to the French Minister of War, n.d.
- 4 Gracey Papers, "Report on Operations - 80 Indian Infantry Brigade, 22 October 1945."
- 5 Gracey Papers, Correspondence with South East Asia Command Recorder, 3 October 1946.
- 6 GB, PRO, Air 27/1161, Operations Record, 194 Squadron.
- 7 Gracey Papers.
- 8 Gracey Papers, "Saigon Control Commission; Political Report, 13th September, 1945, to 9th October, 1945." n.d.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Jean Cédile, personal interview, 25 October 1977.
- 11 GB, PRO, WO 172/1784, War Diary, Headquarters South East Asia Command, Gracey to Mountbatten, 21 September 1945.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 GB, PRO, WO 203/3861, INTSUM [Intelligence Summary] No.1, 21 September 1945.
- 14 GB, PRO, WO 203/4020, "Progress Report No.2", Movement and Transportation Officer to SACSEA, 22 September 1945.

* Decades later Cédile laughed as he recalled how Gracey often addressed him as "My dear boy".

- 15 GB, PRO, WO 203/5068, SAC's 27th Miscellaneous Meeting; 22 September 1945.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 GB, PRO, WO 203/5644, SAC's 28th Miscellaneous Meeting, 22 September 1945.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 GB, PRO, WO 203/5475, 22 September 1945.
- 20 Brigadier M.S.K. Maunsell, personal interview, 20 April 1977.
- 21 Jean Cédile, personal interview, 26 October 1977.
- 22 Maunsell interview, 20 April 1977.
- 23 Cédile interview, 26 October 1977.
- 24 Gracey Papers; "Report on Ops - 80 Ind Inf Bde", by Brigadier Taunton, 22 October 1945.
- 25 GB, PRO, WO 172/7128, War Diary 80 Indian Infantry Brigade, O.O. NO.13, 22 September 1945.
- 26 Cédile interview, 26 October 1945.
- 27 GB, PRO, WO 203/5023, Emory Pierce's Story, 23 September 1945.
- 28 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, Daily Telegraph (London) cutting, 24 September 1945.
- 29 Lieutenant Colonel E. Gopsill, personal interview, 12 December 1977.
- 30 Maunsell interview, 20 April 1977.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Major M.Kelleher, personal interview, January 1978.
- 33 Gracey Papers, Correspondence with SEAC Recorder, 3 October 1946.
- 34 Maunsell interview, 20 April 1977.
- 35 GB, PRO, WO 172/1784, War Diary Headquarters SEAC, SACSEA to Cabinet Offices; SEACOS 489, 24 September 1945.
- 36 Ibid., Gracey to Pyman, 24 September 1945.
- 37 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, SACSEA to Cabinet Offices; SAC 23210, 24 September 1945.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid., SACSEA to Cabinet; SEAC (RL) 92, 24 September 1945.
- 40 Ibid., HQ ALFSEA to SACSEA, repeating Evans to Slim, 24 September 1945.
- 41 Ibid., Control Commission to SACSEA, 23 September 1945.
- 42 Ibid., Gracey to ALFSEA, 23 September 1945.
- 43 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 GR, 24 September 1945.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 Gurkha Rifles, 26 September 1945.
- 46 A left wing Australian journalist wrote his deprecating article, then left town before an arrest warrant could be served on him for stealing his hotel room-mate's clothes. It just illustrates that they were also affected with human failings. The reporting influenced the slant of histories, mostly American, which in turn spawned a generation of uninformed students, none of whom seemed to have looked past secondary source materials for their background material on this period. As late as 1972 a book on the OSS by R.Harris Smith, in a sloppily-researched chapter, had Leclerc in Saigon by 25 September.

- 47 Maunsell interview, 20 April 1977.
- 48 Gracey Papers, 3/1 Gurkha Rifles Newsletter, n.d.
- 49 Lieutenant Colonel Charles U. Blascheck, personal interview, 3/4 December 1977.
- 50 Lieutenant Colonel Cyril E. Jarvis, Commander 1/1 Gurkha Rifles, Letter to author and "Note on Events in Vietnam, 1945-1946", 1975, and personal interviews and correspondence 1977.
- 51 The Honourable Hugh Astor, personal interview, 26 June 1977.
- 52 Gracey Papers, "Saigon Control Commission; Political Report," n.d.
- 53 Gracey Papers, "History of 20th Indian Division; Part II - French Indo China."
- 54 Truong Chinh, Primer for Revolt (New York: Prager, 1963), p.17.
- 55 Colonel Marcel Mingant, personal interview, 26 October 1977.
- 56 Gracey Papers, 3/1 GR Newsletter.
- 57 Ibid. This efficient Việt Minh system of casualty evacuation was for 30 years a feature of the wars in Vietnam. It was necessary because of the Vietnamese views on death and proper burial, and without this efficient system for recovering their dead the Communists would not have been able to recruit and hold their soldiers.
- 58 Gracey Papers, 1/1 GR Newsletter.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Major J.H.Clark, "Sappers and Miners in Saigon," The Royal Engineers Journal, Vol. LXIV, No.3, September 1950.
- 61 Gracey Papers, "History of 20th Indian Division".
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Gracey Papers, Correspondence with SEAC Recorder, 3 October 1946.
- 64 Cédile, personal interview, 25 October 1977.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST AMERICAN CASUALTY

"I heard a long time after from the Viet Minh. They said, 'We did a wrong thing. Mr. Dewey had been killed, and this is no good for us.' "

Colonel Marcel Mingant
French Army.

When reports of the coup and the Việt Minh counterattacks reached SEAC Headquarters it was decided to dispatch a senior officer to survey the situation in Saigon personally. Brigadier Myers, with his unique SOE experience as Head of Mission to the Greek Resistance, was summoned by Major General Penney, SEAC's Director of Intelligence, to Mountbatten's office, where he was briefed by Mountbatten in Slim's presence. Myers was told to get to the bottom of the problems in Saigon and to find out how the British could achieve their military objectives (the disarmament of the Japanese) without becoming involved in the Franco-Vietnamese troubles, which were deemed none of Britain's business. As had been pointed out, memories of Scobie's experience in Athens were fresh at SEAC Headquarters.

Myers was ordered to report to Slim's office before he left, where Slim satisfied himself on Myers's terms of reference after reminding the latter that he was operating in Slim's territory. Myers then took off for Saigon via Bangkok in a Mosquito aircraft. The weather was atrocious en route to Saigon, with zero visibility in heavy monsoon rain. At times they were flying near treetop altitude when they got lost and eventually ran out of fuel. Due to the urgency of the mission the pilot, in making what could well have been a fatal decision, accepted an aircraft that had been officially classified as unserviceable.¹ "Nothing worked on it," recalled Myers -- even the intercom was inoperative. They were very fortunate to find a small field which Myers spotted by chance, about 30 or 40 miles out of Saigon, where they landed their Mosquito, fuel tanks dry. They crash-landed in the midst of a party of surprised Japanese, who were meeting the Allies for the first time.

On 25 September Gracey telegraphed Mountbatten that Myers had arrived, "and after discussion I consider following immediate full report on FIC is urgent."² Gracey went over his actions since 13 September:

- "2. On arrival Saigon I considered my main priority tasks as Force Comd and Mission Cmnd. were
 - (a) To establish effective control of HQ Southern Army.
 - (b) To ensure earliest possible succour and evacuation of RAPWI.
 - (c) To preserve law and order.
 - (d) To effect earliest possible disarmament Jap forces."³

Gracey said that the "self-styled Viet Nam Southern Republic" government "constituted [a] menace to law and order through its lack of control. No legal process was operative. Inactive mob rule was only proper description of situation". Furthermore, the Việt Minh government was set up "under Japanese connivance", and no administrative services

were operating in Saigon, although the "essential public services" were still functioning. Gracey also knew where the real power lay: "Main control Việt Minh party exercised from Hanoi was definitely vested in this provisional govt. for all southern areas of FIC." Gracey then stated simply why he could not recognize the Việt Minh, although a number of his senior officers have stated unequivocally that his actions were not prejudicial:

"My brief contained instr[uction]s not to get involved politically. It was therefore impossible to have any dealings with Viet Minh Govt. Reestablishment of French was therefore urgently essential to enable introduction proper adm. services."

Gracey was stating that the city had been at a standstill [and great cities cannot stand still for very long before they begin to die]. There has been ample proof of this over recent years, whether the causes are war or natural disaster. His report continued by saying that the progressive disarmament of the Việt Minh Police had begun on 16 September, but "Insufficiency of [British] tps made it impossible for me to complete disarmament in this way". Cédile and Rivier then assured Gracey of the efficiency with which the French troops would finish the job, and "Although actual take over achieved success indiscipline of French troops and provocative acts of French civilians ensured later counter action by Annamese," who regard all French as Vichy and despise them. Gracey's assessment of the situation was correct; there was a potential for trouble in Annam and Cochinchina, Laos had been infiltrated by the Việt Minh and could be a problem, but Cambodia was as yet relatively trouble-free. He then briefly traced the history of the Vietnamese resistance, mentioning the risings of 1930 and 1940. His report concluded by saying that the Việt Minh strength had greatly increased since 9 March, the Japanese did not regard themselves as defeated by France, and the French had no prestige in the eyes of the Japanese. The appearance of French troops was producing a "violent reaction by Militant Annamites in their present mood." Japanese Headquarters was unexpectedly disorganized, and Japanese disarmament carried out by the French alone would bring on serious problems. Gracey's recommendations to Mountbatten were:

- (A) Accelerate move in of all repetition all 20 Div to carry out disarmament of Japanese.
- (B) Evacuate Japanese forces prior to departure of British force.
- (C) Ensure steady arrival of good tested French tps immediately following British tps.
- (D) Ensure minimum hiatus in passage of control of law and order from British cum Japanese to French.

On 25 September Colonel C.R. Price, at the War Office, received a letter from the Foreign Office concerning "certain disquieting developments in Indo-China," where "In the view of the Foreign Office the situation is one in which we shall have to proceed with great caution."⁴ But the British objective "can only be attained if law and order are maintained," despite the War Office's insistence on watering down the law and order section of the draft Civil Affairs agreement with the French. Although Mountbatten could call upon the Japanese forces "he cannot thereby divest himself of the final responsibility for ensuring law and order throughout the territories embraced in his command...."

Price's attention was drawn to the precarious position of the British forces:

"Unfortunately, we must recognise that the mere presence of our forces in Indo-China may involve us in difficulties with the Americans, Chinese or French, depending on the policy we pursue. If the British forces endeavour to suppress anti-French activities on the part of the Vietnam party or other groups we shall open ourselves to attacks from American anti-Imperialist opinion and no doubt from the Chinese, whereas a policy of complete non-intervention in domestic affairs would no doubt be interpreted by the French as a further step towards our alleged long-term objective of pushing them out of their colonial territories."

In view of this the Chiefs of Staff were asked to speed up the transfer of French troops to Indochina. The British could not state publicly that they were in French Indochina only to secure and disarm the Japanese and to repatriate the prisoners of war and internees. No matter how tempted they may have been to do so, "the danger is that it might be interpreted as an indication of our intention to wash our hands of all internal developments in Indo-China and as indicating that we do not accept any responsibility for the maintenance of law and order." The revolutionary elements would be encouraged by such an announcement, and the French would have their "worst suspicions" confirmed.

The Foreign Office said that if Mountbatten felt compelled to make a statement on the situation, they would like him to state that while he did not wish to intervene in internal affairs he could not tolerate a breakdown in law and order, as this would impede his primary tasks.

The Chiefs of Staff agreed with this view, saying that "the announcement they propose is a fair statement of the role of British forces and that it should assist in the maintenance of order and thus the limitation of our commitment."

On the 25th, also, Mountbatten asked the Cabinet in London to treat the move of the 9th DIC to Indochina as a matter of "over-riding priority" and as close behind Massu's Combat Command of the famed 2nd Armored Division (the "Groupement Massu") as possible.⁵

Exactly when Harry Brain reached Saigon * remains uncertain, but he submitted his first political report to Dening, his superior, on 25 September.⁶ It complemented Gracey's report, and suggested that the Viet Minh leaders be brought under British protection to talks with Cédile and the French. Should the talks break down they "would then be exfiltrated from SAIGON and British protection." He thought that "such an action would not lay us open to blame politically and will demonstrate our impartiality." On 25 September a Viêt Minh broadcast from Hanoi radio protested against Gracey's actions in Saigon.

In a message to the Foreign Office Dening referred to the recent meeting in which Leclerc's comments had produced heated discussion:

"I observed that there were political movements in many parts of SEAC, Burma, Malaya and Netherlands East Indies as well as Indo-China and I felt bound to advise Supreme Commander that in so far as these movements were political they were a matter for the Governments concerned and not for this Command. General Leclerc argued that in Indo-China it was not so much a question of political movements as of pillage and banditry and he obviously wished to imply that it was our duty to suppress these in the process of maintaining law and order. He may be right to some extent but the fact that there is an independence movement is I think clearly established."⁷

The next paragraph was a dreary reminder that the Mountbatten-Wedemeyer dispute continued to the end:

"I am sending in clear further broadcasts from Hanoi radio. Admiral Mountbatten has already telegraphed to General Wedemeyer asking that he should stop broadcasts which are likely to upset law and order but nothing seems to have been done."

Dening's concern, and perhaps despair, is evident in his conclusion:

"The clouds are rolling up in the Far East and I think that there is a very serious danger of the west being regarded as aligning

* Brain was sent to Saigon to be Gracey's Foreign Office adviser until a permanent representative could arrive from the U.K. Brain, later Sir Norman H. Brain, was unsure of the exact date of his arrival, thinking that it was shortly after the coup [personal interview]. Donnison says that Brain arrived 10 days after Gracey, which would make it around 23 September. Gracey said that Brain arrived several days after the coup, but he probably arrived on the morning of the 25th.

itself against the east with incalculable consequences for the future of this Command including the set task of disarming Japanese forces in South East Asia. It is now clear in general that these forces are prepared to disarm themselves when we are ready for them to do so. Owing to lack of shipping and distance involved our forces are not in a position to maintain law and order against political unrest throughout the whole of the area of South East Asia and I would advise against attempting to undertake such a task.

It follows from this that if we are to avoid trouble full sovereignty should be resumed in French Indo-China and the Netherlands East Indies as soon as possible.

In the meantime Force Commanders in these areas are faced with an extremely difficult and delicate problem. In order to enable them to execute it with least possible harm to our assured British position in the Far East I would urge that Supreme Commander be given a very clear indication as to the limits of his responsibilities so that Force Commanders can be instructed accordingly."

On 26 September Gracey, in receipt of the pertinent messages from Mountbatten to the Cabinet, telegraphed Mountbatten saying, "Very much regret that Proclamation was not according to policy, but I much appreciate your very kind action to support me. I assure you I had no intention of deploying my forces outside SAIGON-CHOLON key area and will not do so. I fully understand your instructions...."⁸ Gracey said that he had ordered Terauchi to report to Commission Headquarters in view of Japanese laxity in keeping the peace (and especially for their behaviour during the Cite Heyraud massacre).

Gracey gave Terauchi a biting reprimand:

"I expressed my views on Japanese disregard of orders and my orders for their future conduct very strongly. This includes orders for clearance of all roads North of the town. I ordered TERAUCHI to live at his Headquarters and establish a 24 [hour?] personal LO in a room of my own Headquarters. He expressed his shame at the events making these orders necessary and immediately left to carry them out."

Gracey reported that during the past 24 hours there had been a "considerable increase" in the abduction and murder of French men and women. There was "considerable evidence" of the reluctance of the

Japanese to intervene and they had been caught "red-handed" in refusing to fire on the Việt Minh; this is why he had called in Terauchi. There was an increase in road blocks all around Saigon and Cholon to a distance of 30 kilometers [the breaking of which was one of Massu's first tasks on arrival], and bridges were being sabotaged. Mob violence had decreased in Saigon and Cholon "where rough treatment of two mobs and infliction [of] casualties estimated at 60 were killed, unknown wounded, by 80 BRIGADE produced less keenness." There was, not unnaturally, an "Increase in hostility to British Indian Gurkha troops."

Gracey stated that the strain appeared to be too much for Cédile, who "may collapse. His task is really beyond him. Should this occur, his successor must be a man of resolution and high standing. This matter is urgent." Gracey's plans now were to open the approaches to the city, if necessary by "ruthlessly enforcing" his orders, to reopen the market and encourage trading, and to urge the French to broadcast a liberal policy over Saigon radio. French troops would be used "very sparingly" during these operations, and Gracey concluded by again asking that his 20th Division be allowed to sail as their ships were loaded. He also wanted to accelerate the arrival of "GOOD WELL Commanded French troops." He had instructed Brain to forward a copy of this message to French officials "who were useless and should immediately be removed."

Gracey, as Brain later noted, minced no words with Terauchi. During the meeting on the 26th, Gracey opened by saying that he wished "to reiterate and emphasise certain of the facts on the present situation here and to give you certain definite orders."⁹ He said that "The matter of the future government of French Indo-China has always been one for the French Government," and the local uprisings were not helping them to implement their liberal policy. The [Japanese] Emperor had recognized France as one of the Allied Nations, and "The whole situation in French Indo China and its potential dangers are well known to you." Had the Japanese kept to the terms of the Rangoon agreement "the present ANNAMITE rising would not have occurred or would have been very greatly reduced and quickly stopped. Practically every case of murder of Allied nationals, arson, pillage and looting has occurred in sectors allotted to the Japanese troops in which to keep law and order." Japanese troops, including officers, had stood by and watched the perpetration of outrages, including the incident in the Dakau sector (Cité Heyraud). Japanese guards on important positions were usually understrength and had no reserves.

Gracey told Terauchi, "You will be as angry over such slip shod methods as I am." Japanese troops were often permitted to pass road blocks while the Allies were fired on or detained. In noting Numata's earlier statement to Taunton that the Japanese troops were tired, Gracey said that if this was the case then the commanding general was not doing his job properly. Furthermore, it appeared that Terauchi did not know what was going on in Saigon.

In view of all this Terauchi was ordered to keep Japanese efficiency up and to correct the ills mentioned. He was also ordered to clear Thu Dầu Một and Biên Hòa of Việt Minh, and to increase the guard over Admiral Decoux in Lạc Ninh. Said Gracey:

"With regard to the action of your forces in the above areas, objections may be raised by you that they [Japanese forces] are not adequately armed. My answer is that from what I saw of the determination of Japanese troops in action they are quite sufficiently well armed to deal with such rebels who are untrained and badly armed... As regards to other matters, I wish to point out to you that the very unpleasant side of unconditional surrender for those who have been compelled to do so is fully realised."

Mountbatten had been most considerate to Terauchi personally, and the Japanese were fully aware of the imminent Việt Minh uprising at the time of the Rangoon agreement. Gracey said he knew that a speedy return to Japan was uppermost in the minds of the Japanese, but unless they cooperated they would stay where they were for the foreseeable future. Terauchi was then ordered to move to the Japanese headquarters until further notice, "sending for your kit immediately." * Terauchi bowed and left, determined to clamp down on his forces if only to avoid the shame of undergoing another humiliation like this.

Gracey later wrote of the meeting:

"Without any specific instructions from S.E.A.C., F.M. Count Terauchi was immediately summoned and told, categorically, that his troops must obey the spirit as well as the letter of orders, and specific cases of disobedience or partial compliance with orders was given to him. His anger at this state of affairs was genuine, and after a few days, his orders having been passed, very quickly this time, to his officers and men throughout Southern F.I.C., the conduct of the Japanese forces became exemplary, and till the departure of the British troops remained so. The safety of the French

* Terauchi was actually allowed to remain living in his house; a Japanese Liaison Officer moved in his place. [Brigadier Maunsell, interview 20 April 1977].

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nationals outside SAIGON, and the security of all essential installations was therefore assured, though as there were not sufficient troops to guard every vulnerable, as opposed to vital, area, some factories and estates in the country were looted and burnt at intervals." 10

On the 26th the British and Japanese forces cleared roadblocks all over Saigon, and shots were fired by snipers scattered throughout the city. Large fires were set in several areas, especially in the north, and some of them blazed through the night. A company of 3/1 Gurkha Rifles (Blascheck's company) swept the banks of the Arroyo de l'Avalanche from East to West in the disturbed northern part of Saigon and ran into opposition in the Dakao area. They captured a minor Viet Minh headquarters and four suspects. Three Gurkhas were wounded in the skirmish around the house. A little later the Gurkhas, continuing their sweep, rescued 6 French women and children from a locked pagoda, the children saying that their parents had been murdered before their eyes that morning.¹¹ The company, hot and tired, returned to barracks by about 1300 hours. They had no sooner sat down to a well-deserved lunch when they were called out by a report that the American detachment in the north of Saigon was being beseiged by the Viêt Minh. The tired troops scrambled out of their barracks and set off for the OSS headquarters. The "scramble" order to Blascheck brought the news that Lieutenant Colonel Dewey had been ambushed and killed, making him, as it has often since been said, the first American casualty in Vietnam.* His death produced no more lasting effect than those of 50,000 other Americans in Vietnam a generation later.

The OSS account of this has been cited with great frequency, a book called OSS, by R.Harris Smith, being only the most recent occasion. The British version has seldom, if ever, been reported. Some published materials even hold the French responsible for Dewey's death, and almost everything in print blames someone other than Dewey himself, whose curious activities exposed him constantly to unnecessary danger away from the available protection.

It has been established with certainty that Dewey was ambushed at a road block. Although accounts vary, a detailed reconstruction of the assassination strongly suggests that the following is what happened.

* This is not, of course, correct, as Americans had been killed in Vietnam during the course of the war.

Dewey and a colleague were driving through the unsettled northern suburbs of Saigon, not on a main road, when he encountered a road block near the golf course, between Tân Sơn Nhứt and Gia Định. Although there was most certainly an American flag painted on the sides of the vehicle (and in front over the radiator grille for easier identification if Gracey's suggestion had been followed), and Dewey called out in French, "Je suis Americain", and was wearing an American uniform, his killers opened fire with automatic weapons and Dewey, hit in the head, died instantly. A Viet Minh mob then besieged the OSS headquarters.

The OSS book by Smith seems to have relied on immediately recognizable secondary source material for the events surrounding Dewey's death, in addition to an account by a lower-ranking member of the OSS team. A number of inaccuracies mar this account, one being that the French at that time were in American uniforms. This is incorrect, because the French were then outfitted by the British. The question of the American flag has already been discussed, and Leclerc, despite Smith's assertion, had still not arrived in Saigon. The OSS, consistent in their anti-French and anti-British sympathies at that time, accused the Allies of having "embarked on a program of massacre and brutality against the generally defenseless Annamese population...."¹² The charge closely resembled those emanating from the Politburo of the Indochina Communist Party in Hanoi, both in content and language.

According to Smith, who was apparently told this by OSS personnel, Gracey had ordered Dewey to leave Saigon, and the latter was on his way out when ambushed. This is a highly questionable account, and is not corroborated by any of the available evidence. Interviews with senior British and French officials, plus an exhaustive six month search through the archives at the Public Record Office, have failed to reveal the slightest indication that Dewey had been ordered to leave Saigon. There would have been no reason for such an order, for the OSS were more of a nuisance than a threat to the Allied command, and their movements were well known. The OSS were a cause for concern only insofar as their safety could not be assured, and Dewey's death brought home to the Americans an awareness of conditions in Saigon which no amount of British argument could accomplish.

On learning of Dewey's death Gracey sent the following message to Mountbatten:

"Very much regret to report that LT Col Dewey US Army OSS was shot dead by Annamite rebels this afternoon... All officers of or attached to Mission had been warned by me previously not to move without escort or in dangerous places. He was trusting to Americans being inviolate*... Please convey the deepest regrets of myself and all the Allies in Saigon to his father." 13

Gracey was distressed by Dewey's death, for it should never have happened. The next day, on 27 September, Gracey telegraphed SEAC Headquarters:

Complete examination circumstances Dewey death action shows following:-

- (a) Dewey killed by planned ambush whilst driving jeep.
- (b) Attack shows all signs of premeditation and planned attack direct O.S.S.
- (c) O.S.S. House flew American flag throughout. **
- (d) Annamite party approx strength armed men 20 arrived and left in MT. ***
- (e) Locals stated American flag over this building was no security owing public visits various Frenchmen observed by Annamites.
- (f) Other incidents prove that flags or other means of easy identification Allied Nationals do not afford any protection if position is met which is held by organised band determined execute planned raid or hold up. 14

Neither Dewey's killers nor his body were ever found, although the British almost had both in their hands. Behaving in a highly emotional fashion, two American news reporters placed themselves between the British assault force and Dewey's killers, permitting the latter to escape. The reporters, who exceeded their professional function and authority by interfering in the affair, were termed "highly excitable" by the Gurkha company commander involved.¹⁵ The two were Bill Downs, employed predictably by CBS (the Columbia Broadcasting System), and Jim McGlinty.

* This appeared to be a peculiar characteristic of some OSS personnel. Admiral Miles, USN, more experienced in guerilla operations in China than any of the OSS, wrote: "The Washington office of the O.S.S. appeared to have a queer, ostrich-like fixation. It was almost as if they thought their men wore invisible cloaks...." Miles, not noted for his liking of the British, was referring to China operations in this case. Miles continued, "Before we had the wit to recognize it, we had tied the hands of our friends and turned over quantities of arms to their enemy and ours." (Again referring to China; Miles, A Different Kind of War, p.491).

** This contradicts Smith's account; the flag was clearly seen by British troops who rescued the Americans.

*** Motor transport.

Downs dispatched the following story as a CBS "eye-witness account of the pitched battle at the US HQ in Saigon on Wednesday... after the attack on the HQ, where a U.S. Major requested British HQ to send Gurkha troops to go to the relief of the US Hq." The title was, not surprisingly, "British Have 'Bungled Job Badly' ".

"There was another sticky moment and it was just at this point that the firing started again. For by this time the British Gurkhas were marching to the relief of the U.S. Hq, which had already in effect been relieved. But we had sent for them. Negotiations between us and the Annamese ceased immediately. It didn't look good for us. (? McGlincy) and I said we thought we could stop the shooting... We walked down the road towards the Gurkhas waving our hats and our arms. The white flag was up. Even so the British troops let off a couple of shots at us that sent us to the ditch.

We got out again and started walking towards the Gurkhas. They held their fire, and out in front of them was a British major. He kept marching up the road. We begged him to stop shooting,* to stop his troops. He told us to shut up, that he was commanding the party. He threatened us with arrest. We told him that we would walk ahead of his troops, if only they would not fire, and that the only thing ahead of him were women and children. The major got furious and another major came up from the rear ranks and got mad at us too. We never did get a chance to tell the British leader that there were four US officers virtually in hostage** and that their lives were at stake.... " 16

Not surprisingly, the Gurkha War Diary account differs from the "news" reporter's account. After logging an account of 3/1 GR's morning sweep of the Arroyo de l'Avalanche, the fighting, capture of Viet Minh suspects, rescue of French civilians and the wounding of 3 Gurkha soldiers, the account continued:

"The Coy (Company) returned for lunch. At about 1400 hrs it was reported that an American Col had been murdered and that a USA Hq was being besieged by the mob on the RUE MACMAHON PRO LONGEE. 3/1 Coy again went out to relieve the Americans, recover the Colonel's body and disperse the mob. Reaching the USA Hq they found no siege in progress but an irresolute mob whom they dispersed with fire wounding about 10; and further up the road USA press

* Only "a couple of shots" appear to have been fired.

** apparently held there by the "women and children" referred to a couple of sentences earlier.

correspondents* negotiating with armed and uniformed ANNAMITE leaders for the return of the body. It would have been simple to capture the hostile leaders had not the press correspondents interfered, stood between our own troops and the ANNAMITES, and argued that the recovery of the Colonel's body was a matter of great political importance as some relation of his was a notorious politician in the States. Meanwhile, the ANNAMITE leaders, promising to produce the body forthwith, slipped off, jumped into a truck and disappeared: not, of course, to return." 17

The company left the OSS villa and continued the sweep; they met another Việt Minh armed mob and fire was exchanged, resulting in the deaths of 12 Annamites and the capture of five with rifles. The advance continued, but Dewey's body was not found, and the Gurkhas wrote that the news reporting of the incident "bordered on the fantastic." 18

The 1/1 Gurkha Rifles newsletter also described the incident:

"On 26 Sep Charles Blascheck was frustrated by American journalists in his quest for Colonel Dewey's body. The Colonel had been ambushed by Vitamins** and Blascheck was sent out to recover his remains. He found the body at the scene of the crime surrounded by the killers, and was about to recapture it by force, when the journalists intervened and attempted to use appeasement. As a result the body disappeared and has not been seen since. The Colonel was some relative of the Republican candidate for the Presidency of the U.S.A." 19

As will be seen, the picture emerging from the Gurkha official and unofficial diaries is one in which the two American reporters appeared to be more interested in the publicity surrounding the recovery of Dewey's body than in capturing his killers or rescuing the live Americans in the villa, and this is why the two British majors were "furious". Blascheck himself, wounded seriously in Burma, wounded again in Saigon, and to participate in another assault on the Việt Minh the next day, had this to say:

"The American correspondents wanted to 'negotiate' with the Viet Minh, saying that they 'understood' the Annamites. I replied that Dewey was dead and was not so important now -- the important thing was that several live Americans were still in the villa, but the idiotic correspondents kept saying that they were friends of the Viet Minh and that Dewey was important." 20

* Downs and McGlincy.

** Gurkha slang for Viet Minh.

Blascheck said he knew perfectly well that Dewey had important political connections in the US and did not need the press to tell him that. He had received a report that the Americans were in trouble and had taken out his full company of Gurkhas. His instructions were to get the Americans out to a safe place, whereas the press were concerned only with Dewey's body. He arrived to find a confused scene at the US Headquarters, made more so by the two correspondent who kept getting in the way and who finally were dressed down by Blascheck in no uncertain terms.

Blascheck clearly remembered seeing some Việt Minh in the house which he believed to be the OSS Headquarters. While he was sizing up the situation he saw a body thrown from a window. Although Blascheck could not see the face, the body was in a US uniform. It was thrown into a large monsoon storm drainage ditch, and as it was still the rainy season the drains were filled with fast moving water and presumably the body was washed away, down to the river or to be lodged somewhere under the city in the drainage system. It may or may not have been Dewey, but no one will ever know because of the interference by the reporters.

Major General Pyman, Slim's Chief of Staff, further rebutted the OSS claim that Gracey's ban on junior officers flying flags contributed to Dewey's death. He reported that only the General Officer Commanding (Gracey), Brigadiers and the senior Royal Navy and Royal Air Force officers were authorized to fly national flags on their staff cars. He also provided some key information which for some reason the OSS omitted in their report. First, all cars, including OSS vehicles, were issued paper flags; these were to be stuck to the windscreens of all vehicles. Second, the OSS in Saigon had agreed not to fly flags on cars, but said that they would paint the Stars and Stripes on the bonnets and doors.²¹ Thus had they carried out their intention the US flag would have been clearly visible to Dewey's killers. The OSS report was thus deliberately misleading or, like much of their work in Southeast Asia, badly done.

Since the OSS appeared to be less than open in their report of the circumstances surrounding Dewey's death, Mountbatten had to fill in many blanks in this report which reached the hands of Brigadier General Timberman, the senior US officer at SEAC Headquarters. The OSS had failed to mention that Dewey had been called in by Gracey and warned about his subversive dealings with known Việt Minh, and that Gracey had forcefully warned Dewey against travelling without an escort (which was available to him at any time he required it). It was repeated that

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Gracey did not authorize Dewey the privilege of flying a flag at the car's pennant solely because of his junior rank, which was standard international practice, but had urged him to fasten it across the radiator so that it could be seen from the front (from a roadblock). It was emphasized that in any case a small fluttering flag would probably not be distinguishable until too late. Mountbatten, who was on less than friendly terms with Gracey at the time, told Timberman that he was satisfied that Gracey had done all he could to prevent the incident.²²

On 26 September, the day Dewey was killed, a disturbing report was received at SEAC Headquarters regarding OSS activity in Indochina. Force 136 agents had now confirmed the extent of the evidently coordinated American efforts to subvert the French and British. The report described the anti-Allied efforts and the spreading of anti-French propaganda by the OSS "through all channels". Force 136 was so alarmed at the long-term implications of the American operations that they recommended that a series of outposts be established by the British along the entire 16th parallel. They had a more immediate cause for concern in that they reported that the Americans were refusing to permit Force 136 to evacuate French women and children to safety in Vientiane. The Force 136 telegram ended by independently confirming Sainteny's later assertions; the Americans were taking advantage of Viet Minh attacks "to discredit French and declaring that French administration will not repetition not be permitted in Chinese zone."²³

The mentality of the OSS is illustrated by a particularly revolting incident in which a French officer was murdered in cold blood with the apparent approval of an OSS officer. On 6 October Mountbatten was so disgusted by the report that he complained to Wedemeyer about it. The incident occurred as a small party had crossed the Mekong from Nakon Phanom into Laos, in the US area north of the 16th parallel. A British Force 136 officer* and a French officer named Klotz were in Laos, accompanying an OSS lieutenant [whose name is available in the appropriate archives] and a band of Viet Minh. The Viet Minh turned on the Frenchman, but the Force 136 officer, arms outstretched, immediately positioned himself between the Viet Minh assassins and the French officer in a desperate effort to save his life. But 2 or 3 of the Viet Minh party slipped around

* This officer now lives in London, and was attempting to introduce Klotz to the Viet Minh in order to insure his safety.

the officer and shot the hapless Frenchman from the side. The American officer had watched all this, for when the attack was made he stood aside with the words, "I guess I am now a neutral." [In fact he was not a neutral but an active ally of the Communist dominated Viet Minh].

Many years later, Cédile spoke of Dewey's activities:

"Well, you know there are always people who think they can do things better than others, who think they have a great talent for reconciliation and who want to put things into order -- people who are a bit more liberal than those who are in command and who have to be more careful and who have to be much more restrained... But he was a dilettante, I think. He could say whatever he wanted, he had nothing to risk [politically], nothing to lose; no one could accuse him of anything."

While speaking in context, Cédile recalled an incident in which a French liaison officer [Verdier] was cut off by the Việt Minh at Tân Sơn Nhứt. Due to faulty local communications the British at Tân Sơn Nhứt contacted their headquarters in Singapore, Singapore radioed Saigon, and Cédile got the message and sent a rescue force for the officer. Cédile then continued:

"I remember feeling very annoyed. Well, Dewey was involved in his little adventure. I heard that an American mission* came to find out what happened, and after I left Saigon I even heard a body was found and identified as Dewey's by the teeth, but I don't know.** " 24

Colonel Mingant, French Army, added a postscript to the tragic affair. He remembered that Dewey, perhaps for the purpose of cover, was known as "Mister" Dewey in Saigon. Mingant had warned Dewey that the Vietnamese were not under a strong central control, but Dewey told him not to worry for he had nothing to fear. Mingant and the French had known the Việt Minh long before Dewey arrived, and said that if Dewey had wanted to meet any of them he had only to ask and the French would have brought the Việt Minh to Dewey. Mingant said that Dewey may well have had some influence with the Việt Minh, but it was unfortunate that he did not use it to promote a settlement, but rather backed the Việt Minh blindly.

* led by Dewey's brother.

** Dewey's body was never found.

Mingant was later told by the Việt Minh that they had killed Dewey:

"I heard a long time after from the Viet Minh. They said, 'We did a wrong thing. Mr. Dewey had been killed, and this is no good for us.' "25

Mingant, then a captain, said that Dewey was "a little shot, just like me. I don't think he was mistaken for a French officer, but you know the Việt Minh at that time had no chief exactly, not yet." Dewey had told Mingant that he had plenty of questions to ask him, but was killed before they met again.

Not much was heard from the OSS after that, except for a couple of other incidents which occurred at about the same time. On one occasion a platoon of Gurkhas was fired on when approaching the Việt Minh headquarters in Saigon, from bows and arrows among other weapons. One of the Gurkhas received an arrow in the arm and the snipers were chased down and captured. The Việt Minh building was flying several flags, including the British, American and French flags. Captain (later Major) Peter Prentice took them down and piled them into his jeep, and as he drove away an OSS jeep came up and an altercation ensued. It seems that the Americans were incensed at having their flag removed from flying over the Communist building. Prentice said, "Well, all right, if you want it flying from there I'll take it back and put it up again."26 That was indeed what the OSS wanted and the Stars and Stripes remained the only Allied flag to fly over the Việt Minh headquarters. Prentice never knew exactly what the OSS were doing except to remember that "one had the feeling that they were dashing about with big radio sets."

The other notable incident occurred when OSS Captain Coolidge was wounded in another Việt Minh ambush the day before Dewey's death. He was cared for in the British hospital, and according to the Medical History, Allied Land Forces, French Indo China:

"... the Americans flew a special Skymaster hospital plane complete with Lt.Col. Surgical specialist, Major Medical specialist and Capt pathologist to remove a wounded American officer from our care, and also an appendicitis case from Hôpital Grall. This dramatic incident was accompanied by much clicking of cameras, and one had the impression that our Allies were convinced they had saved two of their colleagues from a terrible fate." 27

It would, indeed, be difficult to disagree with Smith's sentiments expressed in his book on this period when he wrote that it was "a confused

team of seven OSS men"²⁸ who went to Saigon, though he was wrong in stating that it was the "first and only Allied force to reach Saigon during the week of 2 September." Dewey's death was indeed tragic, but it would have been even more tragic had he not been previously warned of the possible consequences of his actions.

Footnotes: Chapter IX

- 1 Brigadier E.C.J. Myers, Personal Interview, 6 November 1977.
- 2 Great Britain, Public Record Office, WO 203/4273, Gracey to Mountbatten, 25 September 1945.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 GB, PRO, FO 371/46304, 25 September 1945 [F 7161].
- 5 GB, PRO, WO 172/1784, SEACOS 491, 25 September 1945.
- 6 Ibid., FO/2, Brain to Dening, 25 September 1945.
- 7 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308, No.530, 25 September 1945 [F 7445].
- 8 GB, PRO, WO 203/4349, COS 30, Gracey to Mountbatten, 26 September 1945.
- 9 GB, PRO, WO 203/5023, Report of Meeting, 26 September 1945.
- 10 Gracey papers, Correspondence with SEAC Recorder, 3 October 1946.
- 11 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 Gurkha Rifles, 26 September 1945.
- 12 R.Harris Smith, OSS (University of California Press, Berkeley: 1972)p.341.
- 13 GB, PRO, WO 172/1785, Headquarters SEAC War Diary, 26 September 1945.
- 14 GB, PRO WO 203/4273, COS 32, 27 September 1945.

Noyes Thomas, War Correspondent of The Times of India, wrote the following:

"Another sensational development... has been a calculated and prolonged attack by Annamites on United States Office of Strategical [sic] Services headquarters and the cold-blooded murder of Col. Dewey, head of the American section of the Allied Control Commission...

It was at lunch time yesterday [26 September] that United States personnel was first deliberately attacked. Colonel Dewey was being driven by another American near the airfield when his jeep, which was bearing the United States flag, was stopped by a band of armed Annamites. After being told to leave the vehicle the Colonel was asked what his nationality was. He replied, "United States of America!" He was fired on with a machine gun at pointblank range. The driver of the jeep managed to escape under fire.

Next, the Annamites converged on the nearby headquarters of the United States Office of Strategical Services and opened fire. Twelve Americans inside

replied with rifles, revolvers and light machine guns. There was a fierce gun battle, which lasted for two hours, before Gurkhas succeeded in breaking through."

[The Times of India, 27 September 1945]

- 15 Lieutenant Colonel Charles U. Blascheck, MC, personal interview, 3/4 December 1977.
- 16 GB, PRO, FO 371/46398, 28 September 1945 [F 7765].
- 17 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 GR, 26 September 1945.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Gracey Papers, 1/1 Gurkha Rifles Newsletter, n.d.
- 20 Charles Blascheck, interview, 3/4 December 1977.
- 21 GB, PRO, WO 203/5644, Pyman to SACSEA, 29 September 1945.
- 22 GB, PRO, WO 203/5023, Mountbatten to Timberman, 30 September 1945.
- 23 GB, PRO, WO 203/5644, Force 136 to SACSEA, [I.5304], 26 September 1945.
- 24 Jean Cédile, personal interview, 26 October 1977.
- 25 Colonel Marcel Mingant, personal interview, 26 October 1977.
- 26 Major Peter Prentice, personal interview, 19 August 1977.
- 27 Gracey Papers, Medical History, Allied Land Forces, French Indo China, Sept 1945-Feb 1946, n.d.
- 28 Smith, OSS, p.337.

CHAPTER X

PRELUDE TO WAR

I reported that if we continued to support the re-establishment of the French Government in F.I.C., we couldn't avoid becoming involved in war with the indigenous population... The Annamites had been promised independence when Japan had won the war. They had no intention of reverting back to the 1940 status quo.

Brigadier E.C.W.Myers
Head of Security Intelligence
Headquarters SEAC.



26 September, a tragic day for the OSS, ended happily for about 20 people, thanks to the monsoon downpour:

"The rain contributed one final touch of comic opera this afternoon. The guards outside one of the gaols deserted their posts and belted for cover. About a score of Annamese prisoners made a dash for it, too, into the rain. No one pursued them. It was not thought worth while." 1

In reporting that rioters were now showing "less keenness" as a result of 80 Brigade's response to the rioting, Gracey outlined his future course of action for Mountbatten. Gracey's plan, as telegraphed to SACSEA, was composed of 5 parts:

- keep clear the northern approaches to Saigon, using Japanese troops with orders to use ruthless force if necessary;
- do the same within Saigon, using British/Indian troops and avoiding the use of French troops if possible;
- immediately reopen the markets and encourage an increase in trading in the city;
- reopen Saigon radio and urge the French to broadcast a liberal policy, which they had prepared;
- and clear the southern approaches to Saigon when troops became available.²

He also sent Mountbatten a list of "useless" French colonial officials who should be immediately removed. Finally he asked for the rest of his division and for good, well-commanded French troops.

On the 27th, with an increase in fighting likely, Numata requested a meeting with Maunsell; Brain sat in on this meeting between the 2 respective Chiefs of Staff. The Cité Heyraud massacre was evidently much on Numata's mind, for he made an emotional statement in which he said that "in 40 years of service he had acquired a reputation for absolute honesty if not wisdom," and begged General Gracey to trust him to carry out faithfully the orders given him.³

But, said Brain,

"On the other hand I have do doubt that Japanese policy here will continue to leave a legacy of friction and that there is a definite but unobtrusive output being given to the Annamites. The lack of coordination between the departments of the Japanese headquarters and the ignorance of staff officers even of what is going on in their own departments, of which we have had startling demonstrations, is such that it is perfectly possible that these activities are

being organized without Numata's knowledge. Every effort is being made to obtain concrete evidence but this political activity can only be put to a stop by the speedy disarming of the Japanese forces. At present the Japanese can only be relied on to cooperate in the maintenance of law and order as against the Annamites in places where they are under British observation." 4

On 27 September SEAC warned the Foreign Office Political Warfare Department, Calcutta, of impending trouble in Saigon. Further involvement by Gracey was anticipated as "restoration of French police [sic] almost certainly necessary and gradually French will take over control [of] other public services, if necessary supported by force. Absence of guidance from [the] Foreign Office [is] regretted greatly." 5

A 12th Army report to SEAC Headquarters described the French police as "trigger-happy", and "drastic action [is] called for since French population [is] near panic. Continental Palace Hotel besieged." 6 French civilians, afraid for their lives, had fled the troubled areas of Saigon to seek refuge in the hotel, where men, women and children clogged the corridors as stray bullets whistled across the square outside. The Vietnamese staff had departed, and Dutch ex-POWs, who had volunteered to keep the hotel going, were serving hot soup and stew to the refugees. The telegraphed report ended by saying that "As no light except few candles [the] scene with crashing rain outside was ghostly and rather dramatic."

Under these conditions Gracey had ordered trucks loaded with Indian, Gurkha and Japanese soldiers to patrol the city and to disperse mobs, eliminate snipers and dismantle road blocks where found. In the northern sector, under Murray, the French were on the right (east), Gurkhas in the middle and Japanese on the left. There were more problems in the southern sector, where Purcell, of 3/1 GR, was in command and where the vital power station was located.

Japanese were seen leading many of the mobs, and one incident came to light in which a Frenchman was besieged in his shop by a hundred armed Việt Minh. He managed to reach a nearby Japanese military post, but the Japanese told him that "this was [the] Japanese Army from whom he could expect no help." He did, however, make a miraculous escape under a hail of bullets. It was impossible to walk a block at night without being stopped at every corner, usually by an armed French policeman," at which time one shouts 'Anglais' as loud and as quickly as possible." 7

Gracey had reported that his single brigade was getting worn out with skirmishing and guard duties; his troops, he said, had fought continuously for 3 years and were tired. He again appealed for the rest of his division, if only to make the Japanese obey him.

On 27 September a number of Việt Minh were killed by the Japanese while attempting a water crossing to the north of Saigon in the Dakao area. Just west of that area, the overworked Blascheck again took out his company, this time to relieve two platoons of 1/1 GR. The platoons had been sent to reinforce the French post on the bridge Eyriand des Vergnes, but came under heavy fire from well-concealed Việt Minh positions on the far bank. One of the Gurkhas was killed and one Gurkha officer, Jemadar Churamani, was hit and badly wounded. It was not possible to assault the Việt Minh frontally, for the attack would have had to be made over open ground. There were no reserve troops available, so the Gurkhas spent the night in the area, "disturbed only by constant and unfounded alarms from the French."⁸ At 0630 on the 27th, Blascheck's company from 3/1 GR crossed the bridge on Rue Paul Blanchy, turned left and attacked the Việt Minh from the rear, which cleared the area between the Canal de Ceinture and R. Nhiều Lộc. Six Việt Minh were killed, 24 wounded, and nearby houses harbouring Việt Minh were burned. Blascheck's company then withdrew through the French and 1/1 GR platoons and returned to barracks, followed by the 1/1 Gurkhas an hour later. During the action a Gurkha soldier, Rifleman Tekbahadur Ghale, won the Military Medal for possibly saving the wounded Jemadar's life by carrying him to safety under heavy fire.

On the 27th, too, a company of 1/1 GR swept an area in northwest Saigon, and a strong force of 100 Việt Minh again attacked the power house, but were driven off after losing 2 killed and 5 wounded. Another party of 10 Viet Minh were caught crossing the Arroyo Chinois in a boat; the boat was sunk by 3/1 GR and no survivors were seen. The Cholon Ammonia Factory was also attacked, and the Việt Minh suffered 7 more casualties as 1 Indian soldier was killed and 1 wounded. The radio station in the north was also hit by the Việt Minh, but a detachment of 3/1 GR repulsed the attack during which 2 Việt Minh were killed and 4 wounded.

The 3/1 Gurkha Rifles recorder captured the atmosphere of the days following the Việt Minh rising.

"Next day [27 September] two coys carried out a sweep of the Arroyo Chinois against fairly light opposition as most of the Annamite forces in the area were engaged attacking a coy of the Hyderabad Regiment. The casualties during the day were 9 I.O.Rs wounded, Annamites 25 killed and 30 wounded. During the whole of this period, bazaars, factories and godowns were burnt nightly. French women, children and irregular troops were murdered and altogether the French Community lived indoors in terror for their lives. The Bn was roughly disposed to keep open B. de GALLIENI, the streets up to the ARROYO CHINOIS, and to protect vital points such as the Fire Station, leaving a small mobile force which was used exhaustively, dashing from the scene of one place of lawlessness to another." 9

"B" Company, 3/1 GR, crossed over to Khanh Hoi island and established itself in the abbatoir. Khanh Hoi had been Viet Minh territory.

"For the next several nights, "B" Coy was sniped every night as was the Power House. The same day the Bn HQ platoon had a battle along the road to the Wireless Station clearing five road blocks and killing and capturing ANNAMITES as they progressed; they sustained no casualties. Practically every day, sometimes three times a day, our small mobile columns were called out to rescue captured French*, search houses, clear road blocks and even to cordon fires. Moving around the city was never easy owing to road blocks and sniping and the ever present danger of the crazy shooting French.

The Bn HQ platoon was next to receive attention and a strong attack was put in to try to dislodge them from the Wireless Station. This attack which was fanatical and supported by numerous grenades was beaten off causing the enemy 3 dead and 4 wounded...

Up to the end of the month, raids, searches etc. continued and we took many prisoners and captured arms, ammunition, and documents of considerable value." 10

A total of 55 guards were mounted over vital artesian wells by 4/17 Dogra, whose A and B Companies had flown in on the 26th in 23 aircraft. "A" Company was based in North Sector, near the Cathedral, and two of its platoons went into action almost immediately.

The fighting was getting worse, and Indian civilians living in Saigon were now being attacked by the Viet Minh because of the actions

* who, according to Charles Blascheck, were frequently locked up in pagodas.

of the Indian troops; six Indian civilians were killed in a short period, and the 80 Brigade historian now noted that "The men have accepted the necessity of fighting the Annamites. At first their attitude was merely disinterested, but since casualties have been incurred and they have seen and heard of atrocities committed by the Annamites against the French women and children, feelings against the Annamites has risen. They now consider the Annamites as 'Dushman'." Furthermore, "The Annamites have distributed propaganda in the form of leaflets among the men. The general trend of these leaflets is to compare the situation in FIC and the Annamite struggle for independence with that in India. These leaflets have had NO effect on morale. Few VCO's or IORs have even bothered to read them..."¹¹ Like all other units, 80 Brigade had told its troops that they were not to get involved in politics; "the sole job of All Ranks is the maintenance of law and order." Troublemakers were to be manhandled and knocked out rather than shot, but when casualties were incurred from machine guns and grenades the picture began to change.

As Brain noted in his report of 27 September, the Japanese participation was extremely important to the Viêt Minh during this period. When Indian troops were fired on from a house in the middle of Saigon they attacked and found 6 Japanese with a radio set, with which they had apparently been in contact with Viêt Minh headquarters.

On 27 September Brain, as political adviser to Gracey, sent a fairly comprehensive report to SEAC. Since his arrival, when he "was welcomed with anticipatory sighs of relief",¹² he had "been consulted at every point on matters of policy, and signals and reports to S.A.C.S.E.A. have taken full account of my views." He spoke well of Numata, but General Manaki* gave the "impression of being dull-witted and rather bewildered with the situation in which he finds himself." Brain thought that Manaki "probably intends to carry out his instructions but is incapable of doing so expeditiously and efficiently." Wrote Brain:

"Unfortunately the road which is paved with such good intentions leads to a hell made up of known inefficiency and strongly suspected sabotage. Preliminary examinations of the organisation of the headquarters of the Southern Army have shown it to be disjointed, ill-

* Saigon garrison commander and Commander, 2nd Division.

coordinated and badly administered. At a conference at which six Japanese staff officers were present reference was made by us to the 'Planning Board' which was shown in the outline of their organisation... It may sound incredible but is true that only one of the officers present knew of the existence of this department and he was only able to identify it after being given a list of the officers comprising it." 13

Brain was so struck with the Japanese organization, or lack of it, that he expanded on the subject:

"It will be no news to you that the Japanese tend to work in watertight compartments and that the right hand frequently does not know what the left hand is doing, but here the hand does not appear to know what the fingers are doing. In every case it was found that an officer knew little of his department beyond the officers immediately subordinate to him and a G.S.O.1. had to send for a G.2. in order to know the number of G.3's under his own command."

Having said that, Brian said that this disorganization, bad as it was, did not account for all the problems with the Japanese. He wrote that

"There is no doubt that there is some kind of Japanese organisation whose object it is to make things as difficult as possible for the restoration of law and order and for the peaceful turnover of the country to Allied control. There continues to be evidence of the handing over or sale of arms to the Annamite revolutionaries; complicity of Japanese civilians or soldiers in plain clothes in acts of armed violence; failure of Japanese troops to intervene in cases of beating, killing, and abduction of French men and women and of attacks on Allied personnel, in areas where the Japanese have been given the responsibility for the maintenance of law and order; and so on. The system of watertight compartments would of course facilitate the working of such an independent organisation.

The Japanese have admitted that the Annamite revolutionaries may be receiving illicit assistance from Japanese troops who have deserted and have not yet been rounded up, but one cannot help feeling that such an explanation could give excellent cover for what was in fact a planned activity."

Terauchi appeared to have really been in ignorance of the situation regarding his forces. During the recent meeting with Gracey, Terauchi "took immediate action to have (Gracey's orders) transmitted in translation to all officers down to platoon commanders (an exceptional action which he himself suggested), that in areas for which they were responsible Japanese forces were to take firm military action to deal with any armed Annamites encountered and to give assistance when called upon by Allied personnel."

While Terauchi's action had improved Japanese overt cooperation, "It cannot be relied on of course to have any effect whatever on the undercover activities mentioned above and we can expect the surreptitious supply of arms and encouragement to the Annamites to go on wherever this can be done without observation by Allied forces." Only the presence of a greater number of Allied troops would stop this.

Brain also discussed the three courses open to the British regarding Japanese disarmament. The Japanese could be concentrated, leaving most of the country to the Việt Minh; the British could replace the Japanese as the latter are concentrated; the French could be left to deal with the Japanese. The first and third courses were impractical for the French would oppose one and the Việt Minh the other. As Brain noted, "The points that with the limited forces available to us we were able to take over ourselves were secured without difficulty and without a shot being fired." Furthermore, the Japanese would not stand for course three, either. Their attitude to the French was one of "veiled contempt", for "they have had to deal with no serious resistance from the French, and they know of them only as a defeated nation; they have no knowledge of the exploits of the French in Europe." To make matters worse, the French population had low morale and tended to panic. There was no choice but the second, to replace the Japanese as they were disarmed, "however much we may wish to avoid the political implications of handing Indo-China back to French rule."

Brain drew particular attention to the state of the French population:

"As I have said their morale is low. They combine an almost hysterical fear of the Annamites (which to my mind denotes a guilty conscience) with an intense hatred and desire for revenge. These people will constitute one of the greatest obstacles to the institution by the French of a liberal policy and its acceptance by the Annamites. If at all possible I think that these people should be evacuated from Indo-China at the earliest possible moment." 14

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Brain said that Cedile, the "Governor General designate of Cochin China", was a "well meaning and liberal man who appeared to be "unfitted" for his task:

"He commands neither the respect of the French population nor the trust of the Annamites. The former complain of his tenderheartedness towards the rebels. The latter see in him the representative of those who have exploited and ill-treated them and as the one responsible for the excesses of the French prisoners of war whom he re-armed. It was felt by all of us who saw him when the situation was at its worst two days ago that he was on the verge of a complete breakdown. What is wanted is a strong man with a reputation for fairness who will represent the new France and who will not refuse to give the Annamites a hearing."

There appeared to Brain to be a hint of disagreement between Rivier, commander of French troops, and Cédile. Cédile had mentioned to Brain that although Rivier was in France during the war "he never saw a shot fired." Rivier was reputed to be a "good administrative officer but quite lacking in personality and leadership." Brigadier Myers confirmed this assessment in his own independent report, to be discussed later.

On 27 September, Gracey's first heavy fighting reinforcements began to embark at Rangoon; these included "B" Squadron, of the 16 Indian Light Cavalry, who went aboard the S. S. "Moreton Bay". Also embarking on the Moreton Bay was most of Brigadier Jim Woodford's 32 Brigade, consisting of 3/8 Gurkha Rifles and 2/8 Punjab; (4/2 GR followed in the Circassia). On the 28th the ship left her moorings in Rangoon to anchor at the mouth of the Rangoon River, from where on the 29th she began the journey to Saigon.

On 28 September the fighting flared up again as Gracey gave priority to the security of Tân Sơn Nhứt. Patrols from 1/1 GR continually swept the road to the airfield without incident, but a 3/1 GR company on reconnaissance in the north met an entrenched force of Viet Minh at the bridge at Ấp Đồng Ni, east of Gò Vấp. The Việt Minh were heavily armed with rifles and machine guns, and the battle was joined. The Gurkhas by now had suffered their first casualties, and this company was from one of the most battle-hardened battalions, having walked through Burma from Imphal. When the smoke and din had subsided 7 Việt Minh corpses lay on the ground; they broke and scrambled away, suffering possibly 53 more killed in the flight as the Gurkhas grimly pursued them. Three Gurkhas were wounded in the action which saw about 60 Việt Minh killed. The Gurkhas were beginning to make a name for themselves in Vietnam, and the memories of these days were to last for decades.

A Gurkha convoy from Lai Thiêu, a town on the river about 10 miles north of Saigon, did not fare so well. Again a platoon of 3/1 Gurkha Rifles was involved, and they suffered their worst casualties of their whole stay in Indochina. Eighteen Gurkhas, plus a detachment of Japanese and a handful of Dutch soldiers, had accompanied a convoy of 13 vehicles which had been dispatched to evacuate a Japanese ammunition dump in Lai Thiêu. The Gurkhas earned their pay on this day, for they were ambushed six times on the return journey, when the trucks were filled with ammunition and unmaneuverable. When the convoy finally reached the British perimeter 5 trucks had been lost; 6 Gurkhas had been killed (including 2 missing, believed killed), and 3 wounded. The loss of the Gurkhas was deeply felt by the battalion: "This was a sad blow as we lost some first class NCOs in this ambush."¹⁵ The Japanese had opted out of the fight: "There is little doubt that the JAPANESE know all about this ambush and they fired not a shot to defend the convoy." Of the Dutch, 1 officer had been killed and 3 soldiers wounded.

But the action was not confined to the Gurkhas, for 4 Dogra had been thrown into the fight as soon as they arrived. As the Dogra recorder wrote of the Việt Minh general uprising of the 25th:

"Almost the first shots were fired at the C.O. who had four rounds put into his car at five yards range before beating a hasty and unceremonious retreat... "A" Coy, under Subedar Dhian Singh, the first to arrive, was given two hours grace and was then sent off to stiffen up one of the sectors. They went into action on the 28th, when the two forward platoons contacted about 200 well armed Annamites in a strong bunker position. Being finally held, Subedar Dhian Singh took under command two nearby French platoons and finally drove the Annamites out for a minimum cost of 35 (Viet Minh) killed. "A" Coy had 3 O.Rs* wounded." 16

This action had taken place at Thanh Nyan area, in the botanical gardens, and the Việt Minh, armed with rifles, machine guns and grenades, were driven into houses about six blocks north; these were turned into strong points and contact was broken off at 1230. Later in the day 4 of the 5 trucks lost in the ambushed convoy made their way into Saigon.

Mountbatten now summoned Gracey, Cédile and Brain to Singapore, where in a meeting attended by Mr. J.J. Lawson,** a former miner who was

* Other Ranks (enlisted men).

** An officer in Burma wrote of Lawson: "The Secretary of State had just been here and was a nice little miner, but he just hadn't got a clue as to what was really going on!"

now the Secretary of State for War, the Indochina situation was discussed. Again, Mountbatten's report of this conference (to the Chiefs of Staff) was a bland recapitulation of the meeting with the three officers but, as will be seen, Gracey directly confronted the Supreme Allied Commander on the withholding of the rest of the 20th Division.¹⁷

At this meeting (SAC's 31st Miscellaneous Meeting, 28 September) Mountbatten asked Gracey to explain his proclamation; Gracey replied without hesitation that he had interpreted his instructions to mean that he was confined to using British forces in key areas around Saigon, but this did not absolve him from his responsibility for ensuring law and order throughout French Indochina south of the 16th parallel, in the whole of which area he was forced to rely on the Japanese for security duties. Gracey said that merely to direct the Japanese to maintain order was not sufficient. It was essential that the Vietnamese behind the disorders should themselves know that he had instructed the Japanese to maintain public security and that those who persisted in provoking disturbances would be punished. A proclamation was thought to be the best way of publicising his message to the people. Had he not taken this step a good many French lives would have been lost. In his action he was strongly backed by Slim who, as will be seen, was becoming less enchanted with Mountbatten's style of command. Since Slim, Browning, Leclerc and practically everyone else present approved of Gracey's action, Mountbatten accepted the explanation.*

Gracey further reported that the Japanese were involved in most of the disorders and he was compiling a list of the names of the responsible Japanese commanders for later trial. He was of the opinion that these Japanese should be shot, and Mountbatten agreed. Mountbatten permitted Gracey to continue his efforts to bring the French and Viêt Minh together for discussions, but stipulated that he "could only be the vehicle through which such contact was established. He (Gracey) must not in any way enter into discussions or negotiations with the Viet Minh."¹⁸

Mountbatten then expounded his own view of the situation. He said that His Majesty's Government was determined not to repeat the Greek experience, and the British forces must not incur casualties by becoming involved in local affairs. Law and order should be a French problem (but

* A source close to Gracey said that when Gracey returned from Singapore he reported that Mountbatten had decided to relieve him of his command; however, Slim had intervened by telling the SAC that "if he (Gracey) goes, I go! "

due to political delays there were insufficient French troops for this task). Cédile said that there were many French civilians throughout Indochina now dependent on the Japanese for their lives. Mountbatten then asked if they could all be brought into Saigon, but Gracey responded by saying that Saigon was already overcrowded, it would be difficult to find transportation and each move would entail a military operation.

Mountbatten told the Chiefs that he had "persuaded" Cedile to meet the Việt Minh and Gracey was trying to get them all together. That was not exactly how Gracey remembered it. He wrote that he had not needed Mountbatten to remind him to try to effect a reconciliation between the French and the Việt Minh:

"From 25th September onwards, efforts had been made by Colonel CEDILLE, after full agreement with the Allied commander, to get in touch with the members of the late Annamite government, and these were eventually successful. Again, there was no question of waiting for orders from S.E.A.C. to do this." 19

Mountbatten said that Gracey agreed with following Course B,

"but has pointed out that it will not be possible to limit his resources to the Brigade which is now in, since SAIGON covers such an enormous area that he considers that the full 20th Indian Division which is due to complete its build up in SAIGON by mid October, will be required." 20

That is not how Cedile remembered it. There were several generals (including Slim) at the meeting, besides Mountbatten. Cedile said that Gracey went to Singapore to ask for reinforcements:

"Well, whatever you may say that's what we went to ask for, especially air support, because we didn't have very much of that. I don't know why but they didn't give us much air support... I remember when I asked for reinforcements and they weren't forthcoming. I saw that Gracey was not very pleased, and Mountbatten said 'no reinforcements.' And General Gracey said to him -- he used these very words -- he said, 'Saigon is much bigger and much more important than Liverpool, and how would you expect to defend a town the size of Liverpool with just a few battalions of Gurkhas and Dogras?' I always remember that incident when he compared Liverpool to Saigon." 21

Cedile appreciated Gracey's courage, for "Gracey always said what he thought." Said Cedile:

"All I could do was to rely on General Gracey, because we did need help. We had to face the enemy and at that time I wrote myself -- I telegraphed in code -- to General Leclerc. I

asked Leclerc politely to try and get Mountbatten to send us some troops, some reinforcements, because we did need them badly. I know that Leclerc did it. In fact he did everything he could to insure these reinforcements for us, and some came -- there weren't very many. I am certain that General Leclerc had intervened in supporting Gracey to get some troops for us while waiting for the French to arrive." 22

It was evident that Gracey had received solid support from all the senior officers present, with the possible exception of Mountbatten, who wrote:

"Slim has investigated this matter personally and is strongly of the opinion that not less than one Division is required merely to comply with course (B), that is, merely to safeguard the SAIGON area including dock area and airfield, which are essential for the safety of the maintenance of our own forces."

Mountbatten now professed fear that unless there was a strong British force in Saigon "I am of the opinion that it will become increasingly difficult to control the Japanese" (which is what Gracey had been saying for two weeks). The Japanese had already violated Allied instructions by arming the Việt Minh. "On GRACEY making strong representation to TERAUCHI, he has promised to do his best to prevent this, but I feel is himself embarrassed at our lack of force." Gracey had restated his position of holding the Japanese responsible for the safety of Allied nationals outside his key areas until the French were strong enough to take over; "Only then will these Japanese Forces be marched to the concentration area near SAIGON for disarmament by British Forces." Furthermore,

"GRACEY has explained that the reason why he extended his proclamation to cover zones outside SAIGON was to ensure that the Annamites know that he had ordered the Japanese forces to safeguard Allied Nationals. Otherwise there was a great danger of a massacre, which he and CEDILLE consider that this action has now averted." 23

Mountbatten concluded by saying that Gracey's entire division would be needed for both courses A and B:

"I have instructed SLIM not to hold up the move of the rest of 20th Indian Div. I must point out that the need to get the 9th French Colonial Infantry Div into INDO CHINA at the earliest moment has become more important than ever."

Cedile had a final comment on the issue of Gracey's badly-needed reinforcements:

"When we went to Singapore he (Browning) supported Gracey -- Slim, also. There was much discussion because Gracey had a lot of support among the generals on Lord Mountbatten's staff, and he was obviously friendly enough to write to them, and so we got our reinforcements. We then achieved our mission.

No Frenchmen could say that he was not fully supported by the British." 24

On 28 September, in London, the War Office responded to a request by Prime Minister Attlee for a note on Indochina by saying that the disarming and control of Japanese forces and the maintenance of law and order were of concern only as they affected the primary tasks of controlling the Japanese headquarters and repatriating APWI. "The British Commander of the Occupation Force for French Indo-China was given orders in this light...." 25

On 29 September, 4 Dogra's C and D companies arrived and were immediately assigned to guarding Tân Sơn Nhứt airfield, RAF Headquarters and the radio station. The Dogra guards on the artesian wells were relieved by 422 Field Company. Tân Sơn Nhứt was now continuously guarded by 2 platoons of 4 Dogra, about 180 RAF personnel and 250 Japanese troops. On 29 September, too, Headquarters 20 Indian Division closed at Rangoon at 1000 hours and embarked aboard the Ranchi, which was part of the first sea convoy to Saigon (RSS 1); they joined 32 Brigade Group, 16 Cavalry, 114 Regiment (Royal Artillery) and ancillary units in the convoy of 10 vessels, which also carried POL, stores and 1200 vehicles.

In Saigon the Việt Minh attempted to burn a wooden bridge but were driven off by the Japanese. Reports from Lai Thiêu in the north caused concern, for the situation there was said to be worsening. Information was also received at Commission Headquarters that 30,000 Viet Minh troops were concentrating in the areas of Biên Hòa, Mỹtho and Vĩnh Long. A "generally reliable" source stated that these forces were to attack Saigon from the Botanical Gardens. The report was forwarded to SEAC Headquarters where it caused more concern than in Saigon, for 1/1 Gurkha Rifles only noted the information and added that the "generally reliable source" was "too reminiscent of the days of 'well informed circles' to be believed in the Bn." 26 The rest of the battalion, 450 men under Major R. Clark, embarked on the Rajula at Rangoon.

On 30 September the convoy finally left Rangoon, four days behind schedule. In Saigon, a detailed plan for the defense of the city was in preparation; it was otherwise an uneventful day, although 9 Annamites were arrested in Cholon and some arms and ammunition were recovered. The RAF's 908 Wing in Saigon became Headquarters, Royal Air Force, French Indo China.

On 30 September, in London, the Joint Planning Staff (Chiefs of Staff Committee) prepared a report for the Chiefs titled "French Indo-China -- Measures for Responsibility for Internal Security by SACSEA."²⁷ As instructed, the JPS examined the correspondence between SACSEA, the Foreign Office and the War Office, together with the proposals from the French (through SEAC) to abolish the boundary at the 16th parallel. After tracing the recent history of Indochina since 9 March 1945, the report stated:

"Unless a firm stand is taken, there may be continued riots, interference with communications and public services and activity by guerilla armed bands. There also may be a threat from native troops who served with the French until March (of which native troops 15,000 have retained their arms), and from the armed gendarmerie and civil guard recruits who are under the nominal control of Viet Nam... On the arrival of British forces in Saigon it was clear that the Viet Nam Government had control in name only, that law and order had ceased to exist and that pillaging and looting was on the increase. The press was also very strongly anti-French and becoming more violent."

The JPS agreed that Mountbatten's Course B was the correct one to follow, and that Leclerc had been right to refuse to assume responsibility until the arrival of the 9th DIC. They also agreed that it would be unwise to revoke Gracey's proclamation, since that would further incite revolutionary activity. The report continued:

"We are, therefore, perforce left in a situation in which we must remain legally responsible for law and order throughout South Indo-China until the French take over... For planning purposes we cannot count on any acceleration by these means and must therefore be prepared to accept that we may have to retain responsibility in South Indo-China until the end of the year."

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The Joint Planning Staff agreed with Gracey in recommending that the build-up of his division should continue "In the light of the situation which has developed." As for "Policy for Employment of British Forces", the JPS said that "we must clearly gain and retain complete control of the Saigon area since this is required by our military object." The rest of the country must be left to the French due to the small size of the British forces available. But "Saigon is the most important centre of population in the country and control of this area may be sufficient to allow small forces to establish law and order throughout the rest of the country."

The Joint Planning Staff then made a far-reaching recommendation which freed Gracey from a large measure of his restriction and authorized him to maneuver outside Saigon:

"We should, however, be prepared to assist these (small French) forces to the limit of our ability provided that, in the judgement of the local commander, this can be done without prejudicing the local security of Saigon."

The JPS then recommended that "the following interim policy should be given to S.A.C.S.E.A.:

- (a) His primary responsibility is control of the Saigon area.
- (b) He is authorised to assist the French in the interior of the country as far as he can without prejudice to (a).

Their report concluded with the recommendation that the theatre boundary remain unchanged until the French could assume responsibility for all Indochina.

In Saigon itself, repeated attacks by the Việt Minh on the power station underscored the importance to Saigon of that installation; the city depended for its water on the artesian wells, and it could not be drawn from these without electric power to drive the pumps. But although the power house was successfully defended, its condition gave cause for concern. The Vietnamese labourers had, before they departed, sabotaged the fuel elevator to the furnaces, the electric motors which drove the water injectors for the boilers, and more. A labour force of 200 Japanese soldiers was employed, working in shifts, carrying coal in sacks from barges in the canal to the furnaces.* The resourceful Electrical and Mechanical

* The fuel used was a mixture of coal and maize.

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Engineer, an Australian, rewound some of the injector motors himself, and some Japanese marine engineers finished the job for him.²⁸ But having control of the power station, such as it was, had its tactical advantages:

"There was always a curfew at night, and no street lights. If a unit got attacked at night, it could ask for the street lights in its area to be put on, which was a nasty surprise for the attackers who were caught in the open." 29

Brigadier Myers was moving about under these precarious conditions, conducting his own investigation into the explosive political situation, and as he was leaving Saigon it was announced that General Gracey had managed to bring the French and the Việt Minh together for face to face discussions. Myers, an officer with an unusual depth of experience in clandestine operations, had no doubt as to what the major problem was. Wrote Myers:

"My mission, given to me personally by Mountbatten, in Slim's presence, was a fact-finding one, basically to find out how we could achieve our military task in F.I.C., viz. accepting the surrender of the Japanese, without becoming involved in an internal war between the Annamites and the French, which was none of our business." 30

Myers then briefly described Scobie's experience in Athens, and continued:

"To sum up, I reported that if we continued to support the re-establishment of the French Government in FIC, we couldn't avoid becoming involved in war with the indigenous population. The French were largely discredited. The Annamites had been promised independence when Japan had won the war. They had no intention of reverting back to the 1940 status quo.

During my about 5 or 6 day stay in Saigon I spoke to several senior and educated Annamites. Few had a good word for pre-World War II French colonial government in F.I.C. Virtually all pleaded with me to impress upon Mountbatten the necessity for an up-dated and liberal outlook by the French, if bloodshed was to be avoided and F.I.C. was not to be driven towards Communism."

On the evidence available to him Myers wrote that the Vietnamese nationalists were generally not Communist, and he shared Gracey's view that the problem was in large measure due to French intransigence.³¹

The French, said Myers, could not go on ignoring the changes wrought by the Japanese occupation. The Vietnamese said that they did not wish to involve the British, but in their view there was no way to avoid this. The French insisted on "returning to square one," and the Communists would take advantage of this. Regarding the Vietnamese, "The last thing they wanted was to become 'second-class' French colonial citizens once again,"³² and the Communists would know how to turn the nationalistic outburst to their advantage after liberation. Wrote Myers:

"The French... couldn't understand what had hit them, any more than we did. Moreover, they blamed nearly all their troubles on the Communists and, initially, this only deepened the Annamite anti-French feelings and increased the troubles for the French -- and ourselves." 33

Myers, like Brain, had no use for the colons generally and also thought that a new class of Frenchmen should come out from the metropole.

Myers, who later went to Burma on a similar investigation into Aun Sang and his Burma National Army, interviewed Chinese and Frenchmen also, and personally shared Roosevelt's view of colonial France. But as the British Government was committed to the unequivocal return of French sovereignty to Indochina, and especially after having been ordered by Mountbatten to avoid entering into discussions with the Việt Minh, Gracey was left with no room in which to maneuver. And now that the Chiefs of Staff were about to free him from the confines of Saigon, war appeared unavoidable.

Footnotes: Chapter X

- 1 Daily Telegraph (London), 26 September 1945.
- 2 GB,PRO, Air 2375, Gracey to Mountbatten, 26 September 1945.
- 3 GB,PRO, WO 203/5023 and WO 172/1785, Brain to Dening, 28 September 1945. Brigadier Maunsell was also impressed by Numata. Said Maunsell:

"He (Numata) was a charming old man; he was a terribly nice old man. He was the kind of man that when I used to have him up to tell him that once again the Japanese had failed to do everything they said, he used to suck in his breath and hiss, and put his head down and say, 'I know I'm a stupid old man,' and I used to say, 'Yes, you are a very stupid old man and you'll be removed from your position if we could find anybody who was less stupid and more efficient.' And he would say, 'I will do my best!'"

(Brigadier M.S.K.Maunsell, personal interview, 20 April 1977).

- 4 Ibid.
- 5 GB, PRO, WO 172/1785, Hq. SEAC War Diary, 27 September 1945.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 Gurkha Rifles, 27 September 1945.
- 9 Gracey Papers, 3/1 Gurkha Rifles Newsletter.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 GB, PRO, WO 172/7128, War Diary 80 Indian Infantry Brigade, September-October 1945.
- 12 GB, PRO, FO 371/46309 (No.1/FO), Brain to Denning, 27 September 1945.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid. This was a continuing argument among the French also.
- 15 Gracey Papers, 3/1 GR Newsletter, n.d.
- 16 Gracey Papers, 4/17 Dogra Newsletter, n.d., and GB, PRO, WO 172/7757, War Diary 4/17 Dogra.
- 17 As this meeting was taking place, the first of Gracey's fighting reinforcements began their journey to Saigon; on 28 September the Moreton Bay slipped her moorings in Rangoon and set sail for Saigon, to be followed by the rest of the first convoy on the 29th and 30th.
- 18 GB, PRO, WO 203/5068, 28 September 1945.
- 19 Gracey Papers, Correspondence with SEAC Recorder, 3 October 1946.
- 20 GB, PRO, WO 203/4349 (SEAC 421), 28 September 1945, repeated as SEACOS 494, 29 September 1945.
- 21 Jean Cedile, personal interview, 26 October 1977.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 GB, PRO, WO 203/4349, SEACOS 494, 29 September 1945.
It was difficult to see how Gracey could have guaranteed the safety of Allied civilians in the key areas only while disclaiming responsibility for them in outlying areas. Apart from humanitarian grounds, all of French Indochina south of the 16th parallel was Mountbatten's responsibility, yet all the senior officers but Mountbatten appeared to have strongly supported Gracey. It was said that both Slim and Leclerc intervened forcefully to prevent Gracey's dismissal.
- 24 Cedile, interview, 26 October 1977.
- 25 GB, PRO, PREM 8/63, 28 September 1945.
- 26 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 GR.
- 27 GB, PRO, FO 371/46308 (JP(45) 258 (Final)), 30 September 1945.
- 28 Major J.H. Clark, "Sappers and Miners in Saigon", The Royal Engineers Journal, Vol. LXIV, No.3, September 1950, p.281.
The E and M officer, identified only as Bill L., was described by Clark as a "brilliant E. and M. officer." Wrote Clark:
"He was also quite fearless. The first day the trouble started, he was driving with the Gurkha

Battalion Commander [probably Lt.Col.Jarvis] just outside Saigon, not knowing that anything was in the wind, when suddenly a burst of L.M.G. (light machine gun) fire riddled the back of his car. His companion was about to return the fire with his Tommy-gun, when Bill told him not to move on any account. He got out of the car unarmed, started back up the road to the man with the L.M.G., and told him in the broadest and most lucid Australian some home truths about the nature of his birth, and of his chances of reincarnation in a future life. He then strolled back to the car, turned it round, and drove back the way he had come, leaving the Annamite still puzzling over what had happened. The Battalion Commander later removed two bullets from the seat he was sitting in."

As for the power station, it had six boilers, but "Bill considered himself lucky if he could get three working at once. Sometimes he could only keep half a boiler going, as the boilers were fired in two separate halves." The firebreaks had to be renewed by a Madras Sappers and Miners Company (whose advance party had been flown in), as they were in a serious state of deterioration. At this time the power station needed to generate sufficient power only to continuously operate the electric pumps in the artesian wells and to pump the water into Saigon's reservoirs. If the water supply should fail "the consequences would be disastrous." The Japanese and French had water piped into their houses, but the Vietnamese and Chinese, the vast majority of the population, drew their water from fountains and taps in the streets and market places. There were no shallow wells because the water near the surface was foul and brackish. The Saigon reservoirs were supplied by water from 10 artesian wells which were about 200 feet deep. (Clark, "Sappers and Miners in Saigon", pp.281-282).

- 29 Ibid., p.282.
- 30 Brigadier E.C.W.Myers, letters to author, 19 January 1976 and 24 March 1977.
- 31 Myers, personal interview, 6 November 1977.
- 32 Myers, letters to author, 1976, 1977.
- 33 Ibid.

CHAPTER XI

TRUCE

The result of the action we have been compelled to take has been that we have become unpopular with the Annamites and Indonesians because we are regarded as re-imposing on them French and Dutch rule which they had already shaken off, and with our Allies because our efforts to restore law and order, which to them means French and Dutch rule, are so restricted. The real and underlying danger is that the situation may develop so that it can be represented as a West versus East set-up. I need not point out how extremely dangerous this may be.

Slim, to Alanbrooke
6 October 1945.

As September 1945 drew to a close the military situation was visibly worsening, which obliged consideration to be given to the possibility of employing the Spitfires in some role other than reconnaissance and shows of force. Some of the road blocks were too well fortified to be attacked by small patrols. Although the last 9 days of September had seen an increase in the RAF's airlift sortie rate,* by 30 September a total of 3369 personnel had been flown into Saigon, a large proportion of whom were not combat troops.

Air reconnaissance revealed an increasing number of road blocks and movements of organized bodies. This led to the conclusion that the Spitfires might have to be called in if British casualties were to be avoided, though Gracey believed that the decision about their use would have to be made by Mountbatten himself. He also sought authority from Mountbatten to fly Terauchi's Assistant Chief of Staff to Hanoi to consult the Việt Minh about the worsening political situation in the South and to provide Gracey with information about conditions in the north. Gracey was most anxious to know more of the political situation in Hanoi (and in November he dispatched a permanent representative there).

From 23 to 28 September inclusive, British casualties amounted to 6 killed, 26 wounded; the French had lost 8 killed, 3 wounded, while French civilian casualties, at this time, were known to be 25 killed and 100 missing.*** The Việt Minh losses were officially listed as 204 killed and more than 200 wounded. Gracey told Mountbatten that in Pakse, Laos, the Việt Minh had attacked the French, using Japanese machine guns and mortars, while the Japanese, "sat by" and "smiled and did nothing."¹

As a result of information received from Saigon, Mountbatten cabled the British Military Attache in Washington that on 30 September Lieutenant Colonel Dewey's body had still not been recovered, and was unlikely to be recovered in the future. He regretted, as did Gracey, being unable to comply with the wishes of Dewey's father, but promised that the Allies

* 132 sorties had ferried 1853 personnel to Saigon.

** Mountbatten would not agree to this.

*** Civilian casualties were probably higher, as these figures included only the known casualty rate in Saigon.

would continue looking.*

The RAF element in the Control Commission was fully extended in controlling Japanese air resources, the troop and supply airlift, and a host of similar duties, and the shortage of aircraft throughout the South East Asia area was acute. The Press, with its customary insensitivity, now demanded that Mountbatten supply a plane for its own exclusive use, merely to provide a special airlift of their dispatches and materials to Rangoon on a regular basis. Air Commodore Cheshire, in recommending that ACSEA (Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park) disapprove the request, noted that the reporters "are unable or unwilling to understand"² the severe operational shortages.

On 30 September a message from the Control Commission requested SACSEA to instruct Special Duty operations in Calcutta to cease leaflet drops over Indochina, because its own requests, sent directly to Calcutta, had elicited no response. The leaflets, which probably originated in French headquarters, were reported by the Control Commission to be unhelpful. SEAC Headquarters was also asked to send a senior officer to Saigon to control the important radio station there and to supervise its handover, by stages, to the French. The Control Commission was fortunate to number among its members Hugh Astor, whose family owned the renowned (London) Times** and who was himself experienced in journalistic work, but he was still only a junior lieutenant colonel, and "It requires men with more executive power than Astor, who is excellent within (the) proper scope of his task."³

On 30 September Gracey asked Mountbatten directly:

"Am I now empowered to use Spitfire aircraft to attack hostile targets? Am already employing Spitfire TAC/recce sorties. I wish to employ in attacking role against hostile concentrations, road blocks, etc. Grateful earliest reply as I am still not clear." 4

On 1 October Mountbatten responded to Gracey's query:

"As from daylight 3rd October you are empowered to use Spitfire aircraft to attack hostile targets if for over-riding operational reasons you require to clear road blocks or bunkers to ensure the safe movement of your troops for any vital task. In particular you may use Spitfires to keep open your lines of communication between your airfield and your key area in Saigon." 5

* Many leads were followed up and graves were exhumed both in Saigon and in the surrounding countryside, but to no avail. According to Lieutenant Colonel (then Major) Gopsill, officers down to the level of company commanders were personally alerted in this regard.
** A local paper was published in Saigon for British forces; it was the Times of Saigon.

But Mountbatten told Gracey to refrain from using the fighters on road blocks which did not interfere with his operations, or on "concentrations of Annamites from which large casualties might result." Furthermore, in the manner of operations on the Northwest Frontier of India, leaflets must be dropped on the intended target at least 2 hours prior to any Spitfire attack; Gracey then was directed "to report at once each case of using aircraft offensively together with reasons which made this imperative and telegraph the text of the leaflet that was dropped beforehand." But this was not northwest India, and the 2 hour restriction was rescinded a few days later.

Mountbatten explained that these restrictions were necessary in order "to counter the anti-British propaganda which is certain to be put out after each attack by the Vietnam controlled Radio Station in Hanoi which General Wedemeyer, in spite of my repeated requests, appears unable to control."

The Supreme Allied Commander had now received the instructions from the Chiefs of Staff concerning the relaxation of restrictions on Gracey, and added:

"In order to reduce the likelihood of disorder you may make a public announcement on the lines that whilst you have no wish to intervene in the internal affairs of INDO-CHINA, any activities or agitation cannot be tolerated which may be detrimental to the internal security and orderly administration of your tasks of controlling Japanese surrender and relief and evacuation of RAPWI." 6

It was no more than Gracey had said two weeks earlier.

On 1 October a composite force called "Dinforce" was assigned to clear a portion of Gia Định. Dinforce was composed of 3 infantry companies and a small tactical headquarters, the infantry being provided by 1/1 GR, 3/1 GR and 4/17 Dogra.⁷ No opposition was met during the sweep, but French police accompanying Dinforce made 24 arrests, which included a Viet Minh "Red Cross Team". Another 3/1 GR infantry company (Blascheck's company again) operating independently east of Gia Dinh, along Route 22, came under sniper fire. The 3/1 Gurkhas counterattacked and 28 Viet Minh were killed. The Viet Minh renewed the attack within a short time and again they suffered heavy casualties. The 3/1 GR casualties amounted to one Gurkha soldier slightly wounded and "Major Blascheck very slightly wounded." The 1/1 GR newsletter described the action:

"Blascheck's coy was providing 'stops' on the open flank of the operation and was attacked just before the withdrawal was due to start; it was however able to pull out after inflicting heavy casualties on the Vitamins. Charles was helping to evacuate one of his wounded in a civilian car he had found when he was hit in the middle of the chest - but the bullet only penetrated a few millimeters. His men, who had previously believed that bullets couldn't hit him, now realized that they bounced off him."⁸

On 1 October Lieutenant Colonel Lecomte, of the French Mission, asked the Special Duty senior officers to arm the French guerillas in Indochina with surrendered Japanese weapons. Lecomte argued that these guerilla groups were as yet the only signs of French sovereignty, and in any case the arms were needed to protect themselves and the local population against the (Việt Minh) revolutionaries who were being armed by the Japanese.⁹

Despite objections from Browning and Denning, Mountbatten agreed to the French request to arm their guerillas south of the sixteenth parallel provided "we are not told that they are going to cross the intercommand boundary." Browning and Kimmins thought that this was a risky move since these groups were not operating under British control and were in the vicinity of the intercommand boundary, where they would probably oppose the Việt Minh who were being backed by the Americans.

By 1 October, 422 Indian Field Company had relieved the infantry of guarding 11 tube wells in Saigon and Cholon. On 2 October, 2 grenades were thrown at the Arras tube well at 0100 hours; the sentry returned fire by Sten gun, but no casualties were observed. Although the truce, (described soon) was in effect by 1800 hours, at 2030 another sentry came under fire, and a sapper had been missing from the Nancy tube well in Saigon since 0900 hours.

The situation on 1 October was described in the Saigon Control Commission's "Political Report", which concluded:

"This phase (the second phase, 23 September to 1 October), was one of rioting and bloodshed; the actions of the mob were typical of those of all savages; murder, outrages, interference and molestation and murder with outrage of French women, atrocities on women and children, were all present. It was obvious that without intervention by the British there could be no hope of any ending this phase without the use of maximum force and its inevitable blood-

bath. The VIET MINH leaders were therefore contacted and on the 1st October, 1945, the first meeting between ANNAMITE leaders and General GRACEY took place." 10

The report covering the third phase (1 October to 8 October) began as follows:

The object of this meeting was twofold:-

- (a) To make the Annamites understand the senselessness of further bloodshed and to stress the immediate necessity of a truce.
- (b) To arrange further meetings but, then, between the French representatives and the Annamite leaders, with a British representative present. 11

At 1630 the first meeting between the British and Viet Minh was opened by Harry Brain, Gracey's political adviser. Brain stated that he was present in two capacities, representing both the British Foreign Office and General Gracey, who had been sent to Saigon by the Supreme Allied Commander to disarm and remove the Japanese.¹² As Foreign Office representative, Brain stated that it was "not the intention of His Majesty's Government that British Forces should be used for any political purposes whatsoever." The fact that British troops were presently fighting the Vietnamese did not mean that their object was the reinstatement of the French Administration by force. Said Brain:

"Politically H.M. Government are neutral but they together with other members of the United Nations have decided that they will not recognize any change of sovereignty of any territory which has taken place by force during the war."

At the same time, however, one of the aims of the UN was the "full and steady development of Colonial peoples all over the world and an increasing measure of self-government to them."

As General Gracey's representative Brain said:

"I am here to tell you that the present situation (in) this area caused him the greatest distress and concern. Here we have people at each others throats who have been the common victims of Japanese aggression while the real culprit - the Japanese themselves - stand by and smile."

Brain then addressed the spirit of Gracey's proclamation:

"For the proper disposal of the Japanese General Gracey must and will have law and order. But quite apart from the Japanese

he is also grieved that such a spirit of animosity and distrust which he feels is mainly due to misunderstanding should persist between the French and Annamites here."

Brain then announced that he was the bearer of a letter from General Gracey, and at Gracey's request he would now read the letter. The letter, in full, was as follows:

"I feel confident that the present state of disorder in this area involving as it does the death of Annamites, Frenchmen, British and Americans and the disruption of the peaceful life of the community is as much deplored by the leaders of the Annamite Nationalist movement as it is by myself. (I) Would impress on you that the present wave of lawlessness with its shootings and burnings of property causing distress to thousands of your fellow countrymen and casualties to many of those who came here with friendly feelings towards you is doing incalculable harm to your cause and losing you the sympathy of civilised people.

I believe that if it were possible for you to meet the representatives of the New France, the France which fought in and played a glorious part in the final overthrow of her oppressors and whose policy towards you is not a policy of vengeance and aggression, many of your difficulties, fears and doubts could be set at rest and an atmosphere created in which normal life could go on and prosperity be re-established. Therefore with the full approval of the new French authorities (I) ask you to agree to meet the French leaders at a place and time to be fixed at this meeting and under my personal guarantee of your protection by British guards in order that all difficulties may be thrashed out." 13

Brain concluded by saying that General Gracey was in the building, and it was his desire to see and talk to those present about the situation if they were willing to hear what he had to say. But Brain emphasized the true purpose of the meeting:

"But I would like to make it quite clear that the main purpose of arranging this meeting is ultimately to bring you and the leader of the New French Adm(inistration) together so that you can hear each others' views at first hand. We expect you to do your utmost as we shall do ours as mediators to bring about an agreement with the French in a spirit of reasonableness and to avoid useless recrimination and accusation.

If you are ready to see General Gracey I will now inform him."

Gracey then entered the room and (in view of Mountbatten's order to avoid political discussions with the Việt Minh) began by saying, "This is no discussion of policy." He said that the local situation was entirely a matter for the French and Vietnamese, and "my task here is to get the Japanese forces of all kinds disarmed and shipped as quickly as possible out of the country." But apart from the needless suffering of the civil population, "the disarming and extradition of the Japanese forces is being delayed by the necessity of employing British and Japanese forces to stop attacks on Allied Nationals and to keep the life of (the) Saigon-Cholon area going." Gracey said his whole division, "with tanks, guns and the finest infantry in the world" would arrive shortly, and "the sooner the Annamites return to normal peaceful conditions and behave themselves the sooner can my task be completed of disarming the Japanese and getting them away out of French Indo-China." Continued Gracey:

"But there is no intention of British forces leaving the Saigon-Cholon area for some time and they will be here as guarantors that impartiality is shown in dealing with crime and disorders." 14

But, said Gracey, in order to carry out his main tasks it was essential that certain steps be taken by the Việt Minh:

"Are you in a position of authority to ensure these steps are taken and your orders carried out? Have you come here with ability to control both the moderates and extremists among your parties? Are you in a position of sufficient authority to ensure that orders to your armed bands are obeyed?

Here are the steps you should take immediately as regards law and order and to ensure that I can carry out my task.

- (a) Return all Allied Nationals in Annamite hands at once. Return Colonel Dewey's body at once for Christian burial.
- (b) Stop molesting Allied Nationals everywhere and allow no future molestation.
- (c) Order all armed bands to cease activities at once.
- (d) Order all villagers and townspeople to return to their homes at once.
- (e) Remove all road blocks and allow all traffic to pass freely.
- (f) Remove all blocks on waterways.

- (g) Return all stolen parts of machinery including railway engines.
- (h) Give full information as regards the sabotage of the water supply. "

The Việt Minh then replied to Gracey's statement. They said that they had welcomed the British troops as they thought that they had come to liberate the Vietnamese from both the Japanese and the French. Most of the French were Vichyist and their past behaviour had "infuriated" the Vietnamese. The only way that "confidence could be regained" was by restoring the Việt Minh to power. The Việt Minh would be prepared to meet the French "provided that the British acted as arbitrators and would protect their nationals against French aggression."

Gracey responded by saying that it was his duty to restore law and order and to arrange a meeting between the French and Vietnamese. Neither he nor his officers or men would "meddle or interfere" in local politics. The Việt Minh would "lose the sympathy of the whole world" if they refused to meet the French for face to face talks, and it was "essential that law and order is completely restored as a first essential." Gracey said that he would not permit the Japanese to take part in present or future discussions, and reminded the Việt Minh leaders that he "well knew that their forces had been aided and armed by the Japanese and that they still had a number of Japanese deserters and others assisting them." Gracey ended by assuring the Việt Minh that he would nominate a representative to attend their meeting with the French, "and that in my capacity as Commander Allied Forces I would deal severely with all acts of provocation irrespective of the nationality of the offender." *

Gracey, on leaving, assured the Việt Minh once more that they would not again get an opportunity to discuss the situation. Staff talks continued after Gracey's departure from the room, and the following agreements were reached. The Việt Minh agreed to a cease fire to take effect from 1800 hours on 2 October. Posters to that effect would be put up in Saigon and Cholon after 1200 hours on 2 October, and the Allies would guarantee the safety of the billposters. Finally, a meeting was scheduled for 1100 hours on 3 October between the Viet Minh and the French, and Brain would represent Gracey at the discussions.

The French senior representatives, Cedile and Repiton (Preneuf, Leclerc's Chief of Staff), were then informed of the results. But,

* This statement must be emphasized again in view of the amount of hostile material published about Gracey. In his capacity as Allied Land Forces Commander he was charged with the maintenance of public order in his area of control.

wrote Gracey, "From their attitude [I] cannot be optimistic." He told Mountbatten that "I cannot stress too highly the importance of Leclerc's arrival here earliest possible, both for law and order as well as politically. Whether these Annamite representatives are really able to control their unruly bands only time can tell." Brain was assigned to specifically check and see if Gracey's demands were being carried out.

On 2 October another sizeable contingent of British fighting reinforcements, including 4/2 Gurkha Rifles and 2967 Field Squadron, RAF Regiment, embarked on the Circassia, to set sail two days later. By now the first sea convoy had entered the Straits of Malacca, to rendezvous near Singapore in order to arrive together in Saigon. Boat drills were rigorously practiced due to the danger of stray mines.*

On 2 October, also, Mountbatten wrote to the Chiefs of Staff, acknowledging the new instructions contained in COSSEA 366 [which authorized Gracey to move out of Saigon]. He reported that Leclerc was "horrified" at the delayed departure of the 9th DIC, and had "expressed his protest in the most emphatic terms."¹⁵ Leclerc had declared that he would now not be able to take over in Indochina until the end of the year. The Chiefs' offer of cargo ships to help in moving the Madagascar Brigade would not alleviate the situation since Mountbatten could not find the personnel ships. Furthermore, "Leclerc considers this brigade which only contains a proportion of white troops quite unsuitable in the present conditions of F.I.C." Delays in transferring the 9th DIC to Saigon would increase the danger of further involvement by British/Indian troops. Mountbatten pointed out that "the lift available within SEAC is already below that required for planned movements so that in the event of serious disturbances in F.I.C. and the failure of the French forces to arrive the greatest difficulty would be experienced in sending additional British support to F.I.C."

Mountbatten then emphasized the major role played by the Japanese in Indochina:

"The only way in which I can avoid involving British/Indian forces is to continue using the Japanese for maintaining law and order and this means that I cannot begin to disarm them for another 3 months. By that time

* In fact, the Richelieu struck a mine en route to Saigon and, as the British were withdrawing three months later, the troopship Highland Brigade struck a mine en route to Makassar.

prisoners of war and internees will all have been removed and since it will be obvious that we could physically have disarmed the Japanese long before the end of December we shall have less and less good excuse for retaining British/Indian forces there. In fact we shall find it hard to counter the accusations that our forces are remaining in the country solely in order to hold the VIET MINH Independence Movement in check." 16

Mountbatten went on to say that he had received a message from the Viceroy of India (Wavell), which stated that "Indian opinion is most sensitive about (the) use of Indian troops to suppress disturbances in other Eastern countries." Protests had already been made against the use of Indian troops in French Indochina and Java.

Mountbatten concluded by re-emphasizing the need to move the 9th DIC rapidly to Saigon, and added:

"Meanwhile my task is not being made easier by persistent attacks against (the) British being broadcast by Hanoi radio which is presumably under China Theatre's control. I have protested about these broadcasts but so far without result."

The propaganda to which Mountbatten objected said that it was "the British who are now directing the massacre of our countrymen. This is no longer a conflict but war which has been started by (the) British Delegation."

In Saigon, the spread of the news of the impending truce was accompanied by a brief decrease in violent incidents. At Tân Sơn Nhứt, 273 Squadron had done no flying for several days due to a shortage of aviation fuel, and on the 2nd they opened their mess bar with a "terrific party." The truce gave 1/1 Gurkhas "time to make proper arrangements for the celebration of our first post-war Dushera...* the festival was observed lavishly and General Gracey himself attended the Kalratri nautch."¹⁷ Despite the truce, sporadic sniping was heard in late evening.

Christopher Buckley continued to provide his penetrating insights into the situation in Saigon:

"The initiative now rests with the Annamese leaders. Who are these men who speak or

* A Hindu festival involving the beheading of a goat by a kukri, drinking and nautch dancing. The company's weapons are neatly stacked in a square, heavy and automatic weapons usually in the centre, and the goat's carcass is dragged around the square of weapons, encircling them in blood.

claim to speak for the 20,000,000 and more Annamese population of Indo-China? They are a motley collection, united only by a somewhat genuine desire for national self-government and a common distaste for French rule." 18

Buckley, who sought to report the happenings accurately rather than sustain some political ideology or other, went to the heart of the problem:

"The question that presents itself is: To what extent can this little group of semi-westernised intellectuals hope to allay or control the turmoil that they have raised? It is one thing to get your gunmen on to the streets in execution of vague promises of liberty for all. It is another to get them in hand again, particularly in the more remote parts of the country. The rising that began a week ago was carefully planned, it was not a spontaneous outburst. It received a good deal of stimulus and some material aid from the Japanese forces in the country. Its adherents have been buoyed up by propaganda claims. The developments of this week will decide whether this affair is to be more or less speedily liquidated or to drag on in futile costly guerilla fighting for months to come. In case of the latter it is now clear that the British commitment does not extend to supplying troops for the suppression of the Annamese irregulars. Our mission here is a localised one. It will remain so."

Gracey's meeting with the Việt Minh leaders produced the desired effect, and at 1100 hours on 3 October the French and Việt Minh met for discussions. Gracey opened the meeting with a short introductory address and then departed, leaving Brain to remain as his observer at the talks. The meeting lasted for two hours, and at first the atmosphere was stiff and formal. However, as the talks progressed the air was gradually cleared and the conversation became more cordial. Gracey's report stated that "Tea and biscuits and cigarettes helped and at one point both sides were laughing together. At (the) end of (the) meeting both sides shook hands warmly."¹⁹ It was emphasized that the return of all hostages and of Colonel Dewey's body, together with an exchange of prisoners, was a prerequisite to satisfactory discussions. The Việt Minh "strongly deplored (the) taking of hostages by extreme element not under their orders and undertook to do their utmost in (the) next two days to find and return those who still live and also Colonel Dewey's body."

Gracey felt that the "irreproachable attitude" of Cédile and Repiton were in large measure responsible for the apparent success of the talks. [But as will be seen the weakness of the Việt Minh and their lack of control were responsible for a breakdown before long]. The next Franco-Việt Minh meeting was set for 1100 hours on 6 October, when both sides were to produce written statements. But after the meeting the leading Việt Minh negotiator, Dr. Thach, asked Brain for a private interview on the same day; after this private talk Brain told Gracey that he was not optimistic of the future, mainly because the wild men with the guns were in a dominant position over the Viet Minh political negotiators.

Brain's meeting with Dr. Thach lasted 2 hours; they spoke in French and there were no other persons present. Thach repeated his statement that the Allies had been welcomed "as liberators to free the Annamites of the French yoke." Brain replied that if this was so the Việt Minh were "greatly mistaken!" Dr. Thach must remember that the French were Allies of Great Britain and had fought beside Britain; they were also Britain's closest neighbours in Europe. Said Brain, who emphasized that he was giving his personal views and not speaking as a representative of His Majesty's Government, "As liberating forces our task was to free Southern Indochina from the Japanese who had usurped power from the French and not to interfere in the internal politics of the country."

Dr. Thach responded that the Việt Minh Government had thought that the British would support them as the "de facto government with democratic principles which had shown itself capable of administration and which represented the aspiration of 99 per cent of the Annamites." Brain replied that in British, and perhaps American eyes, the facts appeared very differently. "In the first place they had been enabled to establish themselves in power solely as a result of the Japanese aggression against their country."* Japan and Britain were enemies and "we could not recognize a change of sovereignty which had taken place through the action of our enemies at the expense of our allies. Furthermore Annam was bound to France by treaties signed by the Emperor. The Emperor had abdicated but the treaties he had signed were signed in

* Thus turning on the Communists their own favourite description of their opponents [puppets], a term which Gracey continually used in describing the Việt Minh in Saigon at this time.

the name of Annam." Only negotiations with France could bring about "alterations and abrogations" of existing treaties. The Viet Minh would lose sympathy, and perhaps the fight, should they attempt to secure their goals by force.

As far as Thach's claim that the Viet Minh was "a democratic and effective administrative," Brain said:

"I pointed out that it had not been the result of a popular election and that its inability to control its followers was demonstrated to the world by the abduction of women and young children, the commission of outrages, and the murder of Col. Dewey, followed by an attack on a house flying the American flag."

Dr. Thach was "greatly depressed" by the thrust of Brain's argument, "but he recognized the force of it from the practical point of view." He then asked Brain what he would do if their positions were reversed. Brain replied that he would persuade the party to drop its demand for immediate and unconditional independence, which would result in deadlock, but "try to secure some promise of eventual self government, if possible with a fixed date." Thach said that had the Việt Minh been negotiating with the British and not the French, they would probably have been promised immediate independence. Brain disagreed, saying that in British areas it was necessary to include a transition period under British tutelage prior to the granting of independence. He pointed to Burma as an example, and in Burma the independent government had fought against the Japanese, but they had recognized the need for a transition period "before they could hope to be able to cope with the difficulties that face a state in modern times." It would be better for Vietnam to look to the French temporarily, "whose language they spoke and with whom, as he [Thach] admitted, they had close cultural ties."

Thach "admitted sadly the wisdom of this advice," but said that the Party would immediately reject a transition period lasting more than a few months." If he [Thach] and his colleagues accepted such a proposal they would be the first to be killed by their supporters."

Brain wrote that "The interview took place in an atmosphere of frankness and friendliness," and he told Thach that his sincere advice was given if in the long run the Việt Minh "really had the interests of the Annamite people at heart."

During this brief period of reduced military activity Jarvis's
1/1 Gurkhas were able to concentrate on their ceremonial drills:

"We had a really good holiday, our only outside assignment being a search of the harbour area in which B.Coy took part under command of the 3rd Bn. We continued to provide the guards on the Military Mission, of course. Throughout the period of Vitamin activity, whatever our other commitments, we always put on a daily Ceremonial Changing of the GOC's Guards. The Guard fell in and was inspected in the Cathedral Square and marched to the GOC's house (led by a piper 3 days a week) where it mounted. The effect on the population, especially the beleaguered French, was probably reassuring and encouraging. There was usually a large crowd of spectators (in fact, we had to change the time on Sundays when the attention of the congregation was apt to be distracted) and the command "for inspection - draw kukris" was always received with delight." 20

On 3 October personnel of the RAF Regiment relieved 4 Dogra of the defense of Tân Sơn Nhất airfield. Two days earlier the first Royal Navy vessels had docked at Saigon; these were three mine sweepers which had escorted a frigate and 2 LCIs, the first RN ships to visit Saigon in nearly 4 years. The Richelieu now lay at anchor off Cap St. Jacques, where she and a cruiser were bringing more French troops to Indochina. There was some excitement in the 1/1 Gurkha Rifles Mess when at 2100 hours the lights failed and a "half-naked Annamite" was caught "crawling along the floor trying to get a flame for his candle. His intentions were almost certainly peaceful (he proved to be a servant of RAPWI's) but he spent the rest of the night in the Quarter Guard." 21

On 3 October Lieutenant Colonel Purcell, commanding 3/GR, was replaced as South Sector commander by Lieutenant Colonel Trotter of 1/19 Hyderabad. The 3/1 Gurkhas were now preparing to challenge the Viet Minh for control of Khanh Hoi island. Although the truce was in force, C Company of 4/17 Dogra was fired on at night by 3 Viet Minh, 2 of whom were captured.

While this was going on, there was trouble in Dalat, where on 3 October the Viet Minh occupied the public buildings. [The Japanese reacted on 6 October, and a bloody battle accompanied the ouster of the Viet Minh: the Japanese lost 11 killed, 17 wounded and 2 missing, while Viet Minh casualties were 80 killed and 160 wounded].

October 4 was fairly quiet in Saigon. A number of demonstrations took place and some shots were fired as British troops looked on. The Circassia had now begun her journey from Burma to Saigon, carrying more fighting reinforcements for Gracey in the form of 4/2 Gurkha Rifles, 2967 Field Squadron, RAF Regiment, and important ancillary units like Field Service and Workshop companies.

On 4 October, 1000 Vietnamese formed up and marched past a 3/1 Gurkha Rifles company position; when they were abreast of the 3/1 GR Quarter Guard they presented arms to the onlooking Gurkhas. "Fairy" Gopsill, who remembered the incident well, thought that they may have been Cao daists. When the massed Vietnamese approached his positions Gopsill turned to the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Purcell, and asked, "What the hell do I do about this?" Purcell replied, "Well, there is nothing you can do," but no incidents occurred during the march. Fighting broke out later that evening, however, and Mike Kelleher and his A Company, 3/1 GR, were surrounded by Việt Minh. Gopsill's Company was ordered by Purcell to relieve Kelleher, and late at night set off in vehicles. They soon came across a road block and had to dismount, Gopsill ordering the drivers to follow in the vehicles as the blocks were cleared. The first three road blocks were not covered, although Gopsill knew that they soon would be.

Suddenly, a "shower of grenades and Bren guns opened up". Gopsill shouted "Grenade!" and dived to his right, "right into an open Annamite lavatory— a bloody great pit which was full of it!" Continued Gopsill:

"I scrambled out, you can imagine in what condition, and we then fought our way through the road block, killed quite a number of the enemy, and my Senior Gurkha Officer — a marvelous chap — said in so many words: 'Sahib, for Christ's sake please get to the back!' I said that we must push on and he said: 'No, we're not worried about your bravery. You stink!' I never realized it so I gave my rifle to a soldier, dived into the canal and swam to Mike. No further worry."

On 5 October Leclerc finally arrived in Saigon where he was met at his Dakota by Gracey and other senior officers including Brigadier Taunton. A platoon from D Company, 4/17 Dogra, and a platoon of Frenchmen formed a guard of honour for Leclerc. Shortly after, a light commando of the 5th RIC was brought to Saigon in a

French cruiser, which had left the Richelieu anchored off Cap St. Jacques.

A French proclamation was issued to coincide with Leclerc's arrival, and leaflets bearing the message were scattered all over Saigon by airplane. Leclerc stated that he was preceding Admiral D'Argenlieu and carried the greetings of General de Gaulle and the French people. France, like Indochina, had known the sufferings of war, and the sudden collapse of Japan had not given France time to fight in this theatre, but by taking part in crushing Germany she had taken part in Indochina's liberation. Japan had taken advantage of the delay in the return of the Allies to start disturbances and engage in propaganda. As soon as Leclerc assumed command he would put a stop to this work of the enemy. The French Government had decided on a plan to bring prosperity to Indochina, and "Together we will feed those of you who are hungry, clothe your wives and children, build on your ruins, work for the well-being and the prosperity of your families whose great traditions are the best guarantees of peace and prosperity; this can only be achieved if order reigns... Until further notice the Army of Great Britain, our Ally, holds military authority."²²

The Political Warfare division at Headquarters SEAC advised the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department that "the following line in regard to output to French Indo China" was being taken by SEAC.²³ Radio broadcasts to French Indo China will be transmitted as far as possible by the French and given a "specifically French identification." British comment on news from French Indochina would be restricted to emphasizing the reasons for the presence of British troops, namely the controlling of Japanese Headquarters in Saigon (which controlled Japanese troops in the whole theatre), the ~~disarming~~ and disposal of Japanese troops in French Indochina, the repatriation of Allied POWs and internees, and the maintenance of the peace in order that the first three tasks may be carried out. In a fundamental reversal of policy the PW Division now wrote that "we will stress (d) in particular (the maintenance of law and order in order to carry out the other tasks), and play down the non-intervention line."

The French would be given assistance in their propaganda efforts and would be encouraged to emphasize de Gaulle's promise of eventual self-government for Indochina. The British would scrutinize the scripts since most of the French broadcasting was to be done by SEAC transmitters.

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Certainly a great deal of work was required of the propaganda and political warfare staffs, for a few days earlier Mountbatten had sent MacArthur a list of Japanese violations* of the Rangoon agreement: messages had been going out in codes not handed over by Numata in Rangoon --- Terauchi had been communicating with Tokyo on the subject of disarmament and repatriation -- the Japanese had not contacted the Australians -- Terauchi had earlier refused to invest Numata in Rangoon with executive powers and had declared the independence of Indonesia several days after the original surrender offer by Japan -- he was discharging Koreans and Formosans from the Japanese armed forces, and the condition of Allied POWs in Sumatra and Java were still shocking -- Terauchi had attempted to renege on his promise to send Numata to Rangoon in early September and had in fact failed to send a representative to Bangkok on 5 September -- he had attempted to continue broadcasting and was operating aerial flights without giving adequate notice to the Allies -- Terauchi was also disposing of property to locals, withdrawing transport from key areas, failing to prohibit the destruction of property and installations and was losing control of Japanese-armed local forces by failing to maintain their discipline. The priority of repatriation of Japanese was now French Indochina first, then Siam and the Netherlands East Indies.

On 5 September, Dening wrote a long letter to Sterndale-Bennett in the Foreign Office. He was worried about satisfactorily settling the state of war between Siam and Britain, since the Siamese felt that "they can count on the Americans to back them against us and the French." Dening thought that "At the bottom of it all is apparently Seni, who, having been treated for three and a half years in Washington as the brave representative of the Resistance Movement, is suffering from totally unwarranted exaltation."²⁴ A Siamese delegation led by a member of the royal family was in Kandy, and were being difficult, but after 6 days they appeared to be starting to "wilt" under neglect. Wrote Dening, "I have asked people to refrain from entertaining them, and Force 136 not to advance them any further funds without reference to me. Presently I will cut off their motor car too if I consider it advisable."

Turning to Indochina, Dening said that Gracey had protested against the return of Brain to Kandy; but Meiklereid was to be Gracey's adviser and "I must have Brain back." The "basic evil" in Indochina was the Vichy French, who were despised by everyone including the Gaullists, who

* As of 20 September.

unfortunately were "too few and far between, and not so remarkable at that." Said Dening:

"I do not gain the impression that the independence movement of Indo-China is an insoluble problem. But there is little doubt that the Japanese are still fostering it covertly, and the badness -- I can find no other word -- of the Chinese and the Americans north of 16° is likely to make life difficult for some time to come."

Dening wrote that the draft of the manifesto which Leclerc proposed to issue was irreproachable, and he concluded by writing:

"These independence movements in Asia must be treated with sympathy and understanding. Otherwise they will become really serious. As I have indicated, they are half-baked and treated in the proper way they should not be very terrifying. But treated the wrong way they may well, in the end, spell the end of Europe in Asia. I think we should be leaders in handling the situation in the right way. After all, it is our forces who are liberating these areas and it is the British taxpayer who is paying. Let us, therefore, stand no nonsense from the Dutch or the French. In the end, they may well have cause to be grateful to us -- though gratitude is not a very marked feature of international relations."

Throughout the history of this period the figure of "Bill" Slim grows ever larger, his brilliant military mind, combined with a keen understanding of human nature and rare political insight, being mainly responsible for British success in the East. Slim, in response to a request by the CIGS,* Lord Alanbrooke, wrote him a letter in which he summarized the situation in Southeast Asia. Slim reported that "We have got one (problem) now in French Indo-China, and in the Netherlands East Indies. I call it one problem because in essence the situation that faces us in each is in broad essentials the same."²⁵ Slim had a firm idea of the immediate problems facing his land forces, and this accounted in some measure for the vital support he gave to his commanders on the spot like Douglas Gracey who, according to General Kimmins** (SACSEA Assistant Chief of Staff), were "pitchforked" into their respective turbulent areas. Slim's letter presents an excellent, comprehensive overview of the political situations, both in FIC and the NEI, and is reproduced in its entirety as follows:

* Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

** Personal Interview 26 January 1978.

The main factors are:

- (i) A large colony which was captured by the Japanese after a very poor effort at defense by the responsible European power, with resulting collapse of European prestige, especially French and Dutch. In F.I.C. a Colonial administration of a very poor type which cooperated with the Japanese.
- (ii) A pre-war national independence movement which, carefully fostered by the Japanese, has increased in militant strength immeasurably in the war years and which now in, both F.I.C. and N.E.I. can with reason claim to be the only de facto government.
- (iii) Considerable well-armed and partially trained nationalist forces at the disposal of Nationalist Governments.
- (iv) A lack of realisation on the part of most French and Dutch officials and of all French and Dutch resident civil population of the changed world attitude towards Colonial nationalism and an ignorance of the great local changes in F.I.C. and N.E.I.
- (v) Large undefeated Japanese forces throughout the territories not yet disarmed or concentrated. The forces are well disciplined and so far have generally obeyed our orders.
- (vi) Thousands of French and Dutch released prisoners and civilians who are in some danger of massacre and whose only protection is in many places the Japanese forces.
- (vii) In F.I.C. a Chinese occupation North of 16° which is, with American encouragement, violently hostile to France.
- (viii) No French or Dutch forces of any real value or strength as yet available and the prospect of any arriving, especially in N.E.I., very slow.
- (ix) The great areas involved, the immense distances reinforcements etc., must travel, and the shortage of shipping.

The Dutch prisoners were remaining in FIC because the Dutch government was as yet unable to accept them in the Netherlands East Indies, but the majority of French POWs were domiciled in Indochina. Slim stated that it had not been possible to disarm the Japanese because they were needed "for the protection of Europeans, to keep open communications and to maintain a modicum of order outside the small areas we occupy. Our forces are small." Referring to Gracey's difficult situation in Saigon, Slim wrote:

"In F.I.C. British forces have been compelled, in order to prevent the massacre of French civilians,

to maintain essential services and to secure themselves, to use force against armed Annamites. Several hundreds have been killed, more wounded and British, Indian, Dutch, French and Americans have been killed and wounded. There is now an uneasy truce which will not, I think, last long."

According to Slim it was unfortunate that "the only troops with which we can make any attempt to maintain order outside the very small areas we can occupy ourselves, are the Japanese. Thus even in Saigon - Cholon, the greater part of the internal security duties are carried out by the Japanese." Slim pointed out the disadvantages of this policy, which were the following: in the first place the Allies could not disarm the Japanese, either now or in the immediate future, even if they were willing [as Slim thought they were] to disarm themselves -- the Japanese did not want to go on keeping public order -- the actual control they could exercise was, in any event, limited to a few vital points and communications -- there was, in their areas of responsibility, "little security for life or property and, of course, no law. We earn the opprobrium of the local inhabitants and to some extent of our Allies for employing the Japanese at all."

Slim then drew attention to a problem which appeared to be generally overlooked, and which was "real and more likely the longer the present situation continues." This worrisome point was that "through some provocative action by irresponsible French or Dutch elements there may be a large scale native rising against Europeans." If that were to happen the small British garrison would be hard pressed "even to maintain themselves," and would not be able to prevent the massacre of French or Dutch civilians; there would also be great difficulty in finding reinforcements or shipping to help the garrison should this nightmare occur.

Slim then told Alanbrooke that SEAC had been receiving directions from various sources which "seems to me to have been somewhat involved and at times contradictory." The British were originally to have disarmed the Japanese and repatriated Allied POWs and internees without in any way "getting involved." At the same time the British were to work "in the closest possible accord with Dutch and French authorities", who were to be responsible for "general internal security." Said Slim:

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"These tasks were to be achieved by using the British forces to hold only key areas and Allied forces to control the areas outside. The difficulty of this is that up to the present [6 October] the British forces have not been large enough to hold even the key areas and there have been practically no Allied forces to hold outside them. The Japanese forces have therefore had to be used to supplement the British even in key areas and wholly outside. If French or Dutch are used to extend these areas I think there is very little doubt that, unless the political situation improves immensely, there will be clashes. When these clashes occur, even if British troops do not have to go to the assistance of their Allies, as has already happened, the Dutch or French forces will be operating under the command of the local British Force Commander, under my higher command, and the SAC's Supreme Command. As long as we retain this command we cannot divorce ourselves from the responsibility for their actions."

Concerning Internal Security in Java, Slim thought it likely that the British would soon be charged with that problem in the Netherlands East Indies. He made it quite clear to Alanbrooke

"that this means either that we co-operate with the only existing government, the Indonesia Republic, or we overthrow it and replace it.* In fact we cannot take over security of anything except the smallest areas or put back the Dutch outside those areas without armed conflict with the Nationalist movement. The same applies in Indo-China until the arrival of effective and considerable French forces, at least the 9 D.I.C.

The result of the action we have been compelled to take has been that we have become unpopular with Annamites and Indonesians because we are regarded as re-imposing on them French and Dutch rule which** they had already shaken off, and with our Allies because our efforts to restore law and order, which to them means French and Dutch rule, are so restricted. The real and underlying danger is that the situation may develop so that it can be represented as a West versus East set-up. I need not point out how extremely dangerous this may be."

To Slim, the only answer to these problems lay in an early handover to the French and Dutch governments. But this could not occur until

* Italics added.

** written by mistake as "with" in the original letter.

"reasonable" French and Dutch forces had arrived "unless we are prepared to contemplate large scale massacres." At the moment, "it appears that for a variety of reasons their [adequate French and Dutch forces] arrival is being more and more delayed. I consider this most dangerous."

If the British were to keep the situation under control between the present time and the arrival of adequate French and Dutch forces, "every means should be used to impress on the, I fear, somewhat unrealistic Governments of France and Holland, the need for conciliation and for the honest offer of a reasonable measure of Self-Government." This to Slim was as important as the early arrival of (in the case of FIC) French forces, and Slim was also of the opinion that "the more diehard officers and [colonial] officials could be transferred to some other sphere of activity."

Slim's recommendations were that British forces remain confined to key areas while securing, with Japanese forces, the safety of European civilians outside these areas,* and that (depending on the speed of arrival of French and Dutch forces), FIC and NEI be removed from SEAC and made the responsibility of their own governments. The removal of Japanese forces from FIC and NEI should have priority over Malaya and Burma. Slim concluded by saying, "Forgive me for writing at such length, but I am sure you agree that the present rather confused situation is fraught with great danger."

The Control Commission reported from Saigon that their work had been somewhat curtailed due to the necessity of having to move under escort since the "outbreaks of rioting, sabotage, looting, and murder which occurred on 2 Sept 45."²⁶ For this reason "it has been difficult to obtain authoritative reports on the situation within the remainder of FIC south of 16° parallel." The scrutiny of documents submitted by Japanese Headquarters had continued, but "the accuracy of these documents is increasingly open to doubt." It had been impossible to examine Japanese Headquarters "and at the same time expect it to carry out the orders issued regarding the maintenance of law and order." But with a "change in the internal situation an advance is now being made and the examination of the headquarters will be completed within the next week."

The Kempei Tai, although listed as war criminals, were remaining free for the present. Gracey wrote that:

* This was Gracey's view exactly.

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"until overall disarmament can take place I do not wish to upset the present working of the Kempei Tai, except in one instance given below. The Military Police section is affording considerable assistance to me as Commander Allied Land Forces in the maintenance of law and order, and to intern them now would impede the execution of my tasks; I have, therefore, decided that immediately guard disarmament and concentration of Japanese forces takes place I will then close down on all Kempei Tai and war criminals. Until then all Japanese civilians among whom is included the civilian element of the Kempei Tai have been ordered to wear a particular armband; failure to do this will involve arrest. I am expecting that this will enable me to put one or two of the really wanted men inside straight away on a purely disciplinary matter: i.e. without the possibility of disorganisation throughout the whole Kempei Tai organisation."

The Mission had through force of circumstances become involved in tasks not originally assigned to it; this was due to the late arrival of the Headquarters, 20th Indian Division, and included the necessary political liaison between the French and the Viet Minh, the initiation of proclamations in cooperation with the French government, law and order outside areas actually occupied by 20 Indian Division troops, and the control of all Intelligence organisations and coordination of all reports for all areas outside the Saigon-Cholon area. The heavy workload was caused by a number of factors beyond the control of the Mission. Perhaps the major contributory factor to the problem was MacArthur's ban on the Allies setting foot in Japanese held territory before the formal surrender in Tokyo on 2 September; the real damage was done during that two week hiatus following the cessation of hostilities, in which time the Communists had complete freedom of action. But Gracey was, even now, looking ahead to the possibility of reducing the Mission staff in certain areas; by 1 November the Director of Survey, certain Intelligence personnel and a few other smaller agencies should have completed their work. From November to December the RAF, RN and Economic Advisory Staffs should also be reduced. From 1 December onwards Gracey thought that "the need for a Mission as such will be so reduced that a change in organisation will be necessary." Headquarters 20 Indian Division, suitably augmented, would be adequate to fulfill remaining tasks.

On 6 October, 20 Indian Division Instruction Number 2 was issued.²⁷ On arrival, 32 Brigade was ordered to "clear their area of armed Annamites and to maintain law and order within their area"; key points within the Brigade's area were the airfield [with approaches] at Tân Sơn Nhứt and the road and rail bridge at Ấp Đông Nhi — 80 Brigade were to clear roads and maintain order in Saigon and Cholon. Within the 80 Brigade area, two companies of the RIASC were to be stationed on the New Race Course and responsible for its protection, while 114 Field Regiment (RA) were to be based in the Artillery Barracks [when vacated by the Dutch]. The 114th Field Regiment were also to be responsible for the POW and Internee camps, while the IEME Headquarters were to make a strong point of their present location in Cholon. On arrival, 100 Brigade was to move north to the Thu Dầu Một - Biên Hòa - Lai Thiệu area to disarm the Japanese and guard the various arms dumps located therein. French forces were ordered to relieve the Japanese on the east bank of the Saigon River and clear the area within the loop of the river to An Khánh Xã, in addition to certain areas north of the Arroyo de l'Avalanche and in Saigon itself. The Japanese were, for the present, ordered to maintain "strong fully armed" battalions in Lai Thiệu and Thủ Đức, and to keep the roads open and clear from 32 Brigade's northern boundary to Thu Dầu Một and Biên Hòa. The armored cars of 16 Cavalry were to patrol the whole area, to include 100 Brigade's area in the north, but no British troops were to proceed outside this area without Gracey's permission, and they would not fight unless attacked. The object of the patrols was "to show the flag, to keep the roads open and to carry out reces." Until the arrival of 100 Brigade, the Commander of 1/1 GR (Colonel Jarvis) was to start controlling the Japanese troops in their concentration areas.

The intelligence summary accompanying 20 Division Instruction 2 reiterated the reasons for the weakness of the Viet Minh; it stated:

The Viet Minh is in fact an impossible grouping of rival elements separated by insoluble antagonism. Their disagreements on theory are further aggravated by the personal ambitions and the spirit of rivalry amongst the leaders. They vie with each other in violent speeches for fear of being left behind in the race for supremacy.

This was a fairly accurate appraisal of the situation in Saigon, and the report continued:

But above all every Viet Minh revolutionary is tainted with the hereditary vices so often denounced -- venality and corruption. We have had the example of the 2nd Div where three times in as many weeks the leader absconded with all the funds.

While the Viet Minh hands were not considered to be formidable opponents, the risk of ambushes and snipings were nevertheless great.

Since disturbing reports were being received from Dalat (where a large bank was located), the Japanese were ordered to reinforce their garrison there; General Manaki was told that "The present Japanese force of 400 is not considered sufficient with which to carry out your task of maintaining law and order and disarming the Annamites." Manaki, commanding the Saigon garrison, was ordered to send an additional 600 troops to Dalat. They were to be well armed with light and heavy machine guns, mortars and grenade dischargers. The Japanese were not to begin disarming the Viet Minh until strong enough to do so, at which time the Japanese commander was to regain control of the power station, water works, and another power station 12 miles from Dalat. Manaki was authorized to send troops from Saigon and replace them with troops from Phnom Penh.

On 6 October a further meeting took place between the French and the Viet Minh. The French were represented by Colonels Cédile, Repiton Preneuf, and Major Paul Mus; the Viet team was composed of Phan Văn Bách, Dr. Phạm Ngọc Thạch and Hoàng Quốc Việt. Harry Brain was present at the conference as Gracey's observer.

Cédile opened with "a few words about the arrival of General Leclerc, describing his background and character and his good intentions towards the native peoples of Indochina, and making it clear at the same time that he was determined to ensure law and order."²⁸

Dr. Thạch responded with a fairly lengthy statement, prepared by himself and M. Bach in which he traced the course of events in South Vietnam before and after the British arrival and the resumption of French administration. The Viet Minh declined responsibility for the ensuing disturbances which, they claimed, "expressed the anger of the people." Dr. Thạch turned the Allied charges around and declared that "large numbers of Annamite men, women and children had been the victims of atrocities by the other side and that since Sept 23rd the houses of Viet Nam citizens had been systematically pillaged and women molested by Frenchmen and Indians." The Viet Minh were ready to help in the search for kidnapped French civilians "and restore them to the French

against a similar number of Annamites." The Việt Minh further denied all knowledge of hostages taken by Annamites "and declared with regret that attempts to discover Col. Dewey's body had failed." Dr. Thạch concluded his statement by making four demands, which, if complied with, "would guarantee a cessation of the disorders* and safety for all French people." These demands were the restoration of the Việt Minh Government and return of essential services to Việt Minh control, the rearming of Việt Minh police and the return of police stations to them, disarmament of French forces, and the liberation of all Annamites, including Hoàng Đôn Văn (a member of the Viet Minh government).

Cédile was, not unnaturally, unhappy with this statement and asked if the Việt Minh "had nothing further to say about the hostages", but the latter replied that their "careful enquiries had failed to produce any evidence of any abductions whatever. They suggested that the persons in question had been killed in the fighting." Cédile pointed out that Annamites had been seen leading the hostages away, and their corpses had not been found. "Did they (the Việt Minh) seriously expect people to believe that over 100 French people including women and children, could be led through the streets without a single person having seen or heard of them?"

Dr. Thạch reiterated that no evidence of hostages had been discovered, at which point Mr. Brain intervened to suggest that the Việt Minh should make a fresh effort, for "the negative answer they had just given would prove to the world that their claims to be an efficient administration were not worth much." Dr. Thạch then said that further efforts would be made. Brain returned to Thạch's original statement by demanding full details of all charges against British Indian forces, "Without full documentation such charges were meaningless and would be ignored."

Repiton-Preneuf then raised the key issue by saying that the French delegation present were not empowered to negotiate the question of sovereignty, so the Việt Minh were leaving little scope for discussion. "It was a legal question which was a matter for the French Government." But the French had nevertheless made "very liberal and practical offers; to install Annamites in positions of authority in the civil administration, police, etc. These were concrete steps which could be dealt with immediately. Had the Annamite leaders nothing to propose of that nature?"

* A curious and apparently contradictory undertaking in view of the fact that the Việt Minh had just disclaimed responsibility for the disorders.

Dr. Thach then raised the other key issue: the Việt Minh would not consider anything except "the restoration of sovereignty to the Việt Nam Government." Here was the insoluble problem: the Việt Minh wanted full sovereignty and the French delegates could not negotiate it.

Repiton-Preneuf was not put off by the inflexibility of the Việt Minh and continued to urge some sort of compromise. Thach responded that the arrival of French troops (the 5th RIC aboard French warships) had come as a surprise and warned "that if they disembarked it would be considered a hostile act for the results of which the Việt Nam Government refused to accept any responsibility."

Cédile interjected by pointing out that "these forces had left ports for Indochina before any question of conversations had arisen. Their movements had not been kept secret, and their purpose was not to fight the Annamites but to maintain law and order in Indochina and assist in disarming the Japanese." M. Bach, like the French, then said that his delegation could not negotiate political questions, which would have to be referred to the Central Viet Nam Government in Hanoi.

Cédile seized this statement to illustrate the French position, saying that "their purpose in talking to Viet Nam leaders was to settle the local problem." The French at this point suggested a further meeting, but the Việt Minh representatives hesitated, saying that "they were already meeting with disapproval imposing restraints on the people in return for getting no visible concessions, so they were not sure they could guarantee the maintenance of the truce. (In fact they were proved right, for they were unable to control some of their elements and the truce was eventually broken). The French-Việt Minh meeting was finally scheduled for 1100 hours on 8 October.

Gracey reported the results of this meeting to Mountbatten and Slim,²⁹ saying that the "fact that conversations have not yet broken down had gained us further time." Substantial British reinforcements were expected on the following day, and Gracey ended by saying:

"Attitude of both REPITON and CEDILLE again irreproachable in spite of unhelpful attitude of VIET MINH leaders who appeared to be riding to orders from the extremists and therefore even less ready to help and more stubborn.

Only new feature (of) today's discussion was additional stress laid by VIET MINH leaders on responsibility of BRITISH for present situation by assisting French to take over."

On 6 October Leclerc received his orders appointing him acting Commander-in-Chief, French Forces in the Far East, directly responsible to Mountbatten as Supreme Allied Commander.³⁰ However, the British force commander [Gracey] would continue to be in command of all forces, including French forces, until the departure of British forces and the assumption of control by the French.

To this already complex situation was added, on 7 October, yet another difficulty, and its source was General Auchinleck [Commander in Chief, India]. Auchinleck was understandably concerned with developments in Southeast Asia for he was under intense pressure from Indian politicians over the use of Indian troops for reoccupation duties. He therefore opposed the speed up of the 9th DIC, arguing that this would "result in retention in India for an extra six weeks at least of anything up to 18,000 British troops due for PYTHON."³¹ Delay would also occur in returning Indian troops from the Mediterranean and in the arrival of British drafts from the UK. Auchinleck stated flatly that "I am not prepared to accept this delay in PYTHON programme", particularly as the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Lawson, had just promised British troops that he would do all he could to get them home. Furthermore, "Indian troops used (must?) for political reasons be withdrawn from FIG."

At 0830 on 7 October, Brigadier E.C.J. "Jim" Woodford's 32 Brigade, together with supporting units, arrived off Cap St. Jacques. At 1400 hours the Moreton Bay threaded her way up the twisting Saigon River to Saigon, where she berthed at 1830 hours, near the Ranchi [which carried the Headquarters, 20 Indian Division, the Provost Company and others]. While some of the units waited until the morning of the 8th to disembark, the Provost Company and 9/14 Punjab immediately left the ship and marched to their respective lines [the 9/14 Punjab going to the Annamite Barracks].³²

At 1000 hours on 8 October Main Headquarters 20 Indian Division opened in Saigon; rear Headquarters 20 Division remained in Rangoon, while the tactical headquarters in Saigon was closed down. Headquarters 20 Division simultaneously assumed the additional function of Headquarters Allied Land Forces French Indo China [officially abbreviated ALFFIC].

* Return of British troops to the UK.

On 8 October also, Lieutenant Colonel Rivier [Commander of French forces in Saigon] received ALFFIC Operational Instruction Number 1,*³³ which directed him to "take over the protection of the Northern Sector of Saigon from exclusive the Saigon river to inclusive the railway bridge immediately north of the Rue Verdun." French forces were prohibited from crossing the Arroyode l'Avalanche, although charged with protecting the bridges across it, and the only exception to Rivier's restriction was that he might cross the Arroyo only if necessary for the "immediate protection" of the bridges. The Japanese were to remain responsible for protecting the road to Tan Son Nhut between the airfield and the Arroyo de l'Avalanche, and Japanese troops relieved by the French were ordered to move into Gia Dinh. The French takeover was ordered to be complete by 1200 hours on 9 October, and Lieutenant Colonel Jarvis ** was to relinquish command of Northern Sector to the French effective 1000 hours on 10 October. Neither Gracey nor Leclerc wasted any time in implementing the resumption of control by the French. Colonel Jarvis would, however, retain command of British troops within the sector and of Japanese troops protecting the Tan Son Nhut road and in Gia Dinh.

The 20th Indian Division's History³⁴ said of these early days of October:

"The VIET MINE continually broke the truce by carrying out parades and marches in SAIGON and CHOLON, often within sight of our troops who nevertheless refrained from taking any action, and the usual grenade throwing and sniping incidents were still occurring. Attempts were also made to suborn Indian troops with propaganda leaflets, playing up the similarity of India's and VIETNAM's struggle for independence. SAIGON was being gradually reduced to a state of seige, the VIET MINE blocking all roads and entrances, and preventing the conveyance of food into the city."

The political report of the Saigon Control Commission, covering the period from 1 to 8 October, described the apparent impasse:

- * Signed by Brigadier J.A.E.Hirst, who ran the Division for Gracey throughout the entire British occupation; Gracey was largely occupied by Control Commission matters.
- ** The copy of "ALFFIC Op Instr No.1" in the PRO is incorrect as it lists Lieutenant Colonel Murray's name here; Gracey's personal copy had Murray's name lined out and Jarvis's written in, and Jarvis was indeed commander of Northern Sector [for 24 hours].

"The demands of the Annamites are simple but inflexible, they appear to leave no room for discussion or compromise. They comprise the transfer of sovereignty to the VIET NAM government, the disarmament of French forces, the re-armament of Annamite forces and the release of all Annamite prisoners.

Even if it were conceivable that such conditions should be accepted by the French they could not be permitted by General GRACEY. He must continue to be responsible for law and order in the places where his troops are, and the inability of the Annamite leaders to restrain their people from looting, abduction and outrage does not give him confidence in their ability to maintain law and order. *

The attitude of the French is that they are not empowered to make decisions affecting French sovereignty, but they are willing to bring Annamites at once into close collaboration in the administration of the SAIGON area. They guarantee that their policy towards the Annamites will be extremely liberal and that there will be no reprisals.

The Annamite leaders, however, remain adamant in their demand for immediate and unconditional independence. In these circumstances there is clearly a danger that the conversations will break down." 35

The report then discussed the role of the British troops in Saigon:

"In that event it must be remembered that the British attitude, throughout, has been one of self-defence. British troops have only fought when they have been attacked. They have refrained from using anything but light arms to defend themselves. Naval guns, aircraft, artillery and tanks have remained idle. The truce is, in fact, a more or less complete cessation of actual attacks by Annamites and will be broken only when they themselves recommence attacks.** In the meantime they continue to urge their people, by leaflets and posters, to continue strikes, maintain the encirclement of SAIGON and consider all who work for the French as traitors.

* In Gracey's writings, this was a major factor in his decision to evict the Việt Minh by the coup of 23 September.

** This was exactly how the truce was broken.

It is necessary to realise these facts in order that the responsibility for any fresh outbreak of disorder may be placed firmly where it belongs. Such a fresh outbreak will be suppressed by force and this time there will be no guarantee that the heavy armament which we have refrained from using before will not be used, if necessary to the full.

Since the above was written a third meeting has taken place between the French and Annamites. This meeting produced nothing new."

The report reiterated that the Viet[^] Minh could not produce Dewey's body or any of the dozens of kidnapped French civilians, and both sides agreed that "there was no useful purpose to be served in continuing the conversations, but it was decided to refer the question to a meeting, if possible, between French representatives and the Viet Nam Central Government at Hanoi." The document concluded, resignedly:

"It is still fervently hoped — but it is a forlorn hope — that sense will prevail. Then, in a peaceful atmosphere, the Japanese will be disarmed and the Annamites will be able to bring their case to a French government which will, we trust, examine it with a sympathy and fairness worthy of the cause for which they and we have fought for five years."

On 9 October Gracey sent Lieutenant Colonel Murray [who had been commanding 4/10 GR in Burma] to Phnom Penh. Murray assumed the acting rank of Brigadier, and, as Commander Allied Land Forces in Cambodia, represented Gracey. Murray was directed to take command of all Japanese forces in the area, and was specifically charged with maintaining law and order in the Phnom Penh area, safeguarding all Allied nationals, ensuring the stability of the Cambodian Government in accordance with Leclerc's directive, and disarming all Annamites (including the Viet[^] Minh police).³⁶

Accompanying Murray to Cambodia were one platoon of 1/1 GR (to act as his personal escort) and a signals detachment; two French companies were to follow during the next two days. Murray would command the Japanese through Lieutenant General Sakuma, commander of 55 Division. Murray established his headquarters at the Hotel Resident Superieur, and on 10 October held a meeting with Lieutenant General Hatori, commander of the 5th Air Division, and Major Hara of the Kempei Tei [who on 13 October was sent to Saigon under arrest].

Also on 9 October, a meeting was arranged between the British and the Việt Minh. Gracey was planning to move into Gia Định and Gò Vấp and so informed the Việt Minh at this time. The meeting, which appears to have been fairly short, was opened by Gracey's representative, Brigadier Hirst, who addressed the Việt Minh as follows:

"I will reiterate the objects for which British Forces have come to this country, viz:-

- (1) To disarm the Japanese forces in this country.
- (2) To get the Japanese forces sent back from this country to Japan as soon as possible.
- (3) To maintain law and order in this country whilst we are completing these tasks.

All this is set out in Proclamation No.1 issued by General Gracey.

The British troops are impartial, and after 6 years of war, fought to relieve you of Japanese domination, are anxious only to complete their tasks and then return to their own country.

The British have no interest in the politics of this country as between you and the French. Proclamation No.1 by General Gracey sets out the conditions which are essential to enable the British to complete their tasks:-

- (1) In order to maintain law and order, and so that people may go peacefully about their work, you are not to carry arms.
- (2) You are not to hinder or impede the free movement of Allied Troops, so that we can get on with disarming the Japanese.
- (3) You are to allow the population to resume their normal work, so that the essential services may operate, and are not to interfere with the normal trade of the country. "

Having wasted no time in setting down the British conditions, Hirst continued:

"As you know, a truce between the Allied Forces and your forces has been in operation during the political discussions between the French and your government. These have now proved unsuccessful and the question has been referred to Higher Authority.

I wish to know your attitude now as regards this truce.

- (1) Are you prepared to comply with the requirements of Proclamation No.1?
- (2) Are you prepared to cease carrying arms?
- (3) Are you prepared to stop shooting Allied soldiers?

- (4) Are you prepared to allow Allied Forces to move where and when they like without interference?
- (5) Are you prepared to allow the public services and the normal trade to restart?

If you are prepared to do this now, I desire only to make peace and arrange details of terms. If you are not prepared to give these guarantees, I wish to make it quite plain that I shall from now on use such force as I consider necessary to implement the terms of the proclamation."

Hirst went on to state in stark terms the consequences of forcibly opposing the Allied troops in the performance of their duties:

"I have sufficient force at my disposal and I shall make use of all the weapons which I have -- armed cars, guns, mortars, aircraft, and so on. I am determined to carry out the terms of this proclamation, and those people of whatever nationality who oppose my forces, must take the consequences.

The British Forces here are the finest trained troops in the world today -- what chance have your half-trained levies against them? You are fools if you think your troops can oppose them successfully. The only result will be a lot of needless and useless bloodshed -- the outcome of the struggle will not be in doubt.

I appeal to you, therefore, to be sensible about this. It is my last offer and your last chance of settling this matter.

I am prepared to give you 24 hours (until midnight on 10/11 Oct) in which to pass your orders to your commanders and leaders to carry out the proclamation -- to lay down their arms and not to oppose the movement of my troops.

From that hour onwards I shall start to move my troops as I desire. If your troops offer no opposition, I only require a peaceful laying down of your arms.

If your troops resist, they will be dealt with by all the weapons at my disposal.

This is my last word, I now await your answer."

Hirst then reassured the Việt Minh representatives that only British troops would be employed in disarming the Japanese. The Việt Minh expressed satisfaction at this information and said that "it would have a big effect on their followers." They went even

further by saying that "not only would they give the British all assistance possible but would even arrange civic receptions for our troops." Hirst again warned them that they had until midnight, 10/11 October, to transmit their orders to their military leaders, after which he would move his troops at his pleasure —"and he expected them to be received peacefully." The Việt Minh were then told that British troops would initially occupy Gia Định and Gò Vấp, the northern suburbs of Saigon [to the east of Tân Sơn Nhất].

Maunsell reported the results of this meeting in a message to 12th Army, adding that during the conference "News [was] then received that action against airfield by Annamites was in progress. Annamite leader considerably taken aback. They expressed their regret and left at once to issue necessary orders to stop action."³⁷ He, Hirst and Brain met with Repiton Preneuf following the hasty Viet Minh departure, and the Frenchman agreed that no French troops should be used in the operation planned for 11 October north of the Arroyo de l'Avalanche [this operation affected only the key area]. Two French companies were, however, still scheduled to fly to Cambodia within 48 hours.

While Hirst was warning the Việt Minh representatives to stop their disruptive activities, Gracey, Leclerc and Cédile were in Rangoon for another meeting with Mountbatten. Leclerc had apparently held a secret meeting with the Việt Minh, and he now reported the results of the meeting to Mountbatten. The Việt Minh representatives had given Leclerc exactly the same information as they had given Cédile during the more publicized meetings, namely that they had lost control of their followers and could not produce any hostages or Dewey's body. Leclerc then added the puzzling news that a radio message from Hanoi to the Việt Minh in Saigon had been intercepted, ordering the Viet Minh to prolong negotiations with the French as long as possible. "He [Leclerc] was at a loss to understand what reasons could have prompted such an order, in view of the fact that the prolongation of negotiations was more in the interests of the French than of the Annamites."³⁸ Gracey affirmed that he had been told the same thing by the Việt Minh, and that he had asked to see the man who controlled the guns. Gracey also told Mountbatten that he had issued a solemn warning to the Việt Minh not to impede the British task of disarming the Japanese.

Douglas Gracey was one of a select few divisional commanders described as "powerful" by General Kimmins* (who attended this meeting), and he now spoke plainly to Mountbatten. Gracey said that "he had prepared plans, which he intended putting into action on 11th October, to move his troops into certain areas commanding Saigon and Cholon and between Saigon and the airfield. He considered this essential in order to ensure his communications against the action of the Annamites, and he would use force if necessary."³⁹ Gracey then made it quite clear that "He was not prepared to accept indefinite casualties to his soldiers from sniping in the vicinity of Saigon."

Mountbatten said that "although it was essential to continue further negotiations with the Annamite leaders they were unlikely to produce concrete results if the leaders had no control over their irregulars." But he again emphasized that the British were in a "preventative" role, and stipulated that his Political Warfare and Public Relations departments be informed prior to any action taking place. Gracey responded by saying that he fully understood these limitations, and in fact had already prepared a statement on the current political situation.

Cedile told Mountbatten that the Việt Minh had now added "a fourth condition to any agreement with the French -- namely, the re-establishment of Việt Minh control in the civil administration of Saigon, in fact a return to the situation which had prevailed during the later period of Japanese occupation."

General Gracey then outlined the present position:

"... Saigon was run by French police, with the assistance of British-Indian troops in certain of the main utility services, and of Japanese troops in the provision of labour. The Annamite citizens did not take their usual part in the administration of the city, because of their complete intimidation by the Viet Minh."

Gracey said that "the establishment of Allied control in the area immediately around Saigon" would solve many of the present problems and would induce the Annamites to return to their normal labours.

* personal interview 26 January 1978.

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Gracey and Cédille differed in their assessments of Saigon's food problem. Cédille reported that Saigon had only a four day supply of food left, and although there was an abundance of food a few miles from the city, the Annamites would not bring their produce into Saigon without armed protection. Gracey did not think that the problem -- as serious as it was -- was quite so bad. He had set up a committee [under the Commander of the Royal Army Service Corps] which "had the position in hand and under review." While British troops, for political reasons, would not be used to clear and protect the food markets in the environs of Saigon, and French troops would not be available for this purpose for several days yet, Gracey had ordered the Japanese "to give all possible assistance in this matter."

A potentially serious problem was posed by the French navy which appeared to be conducting its own operations independently of any Allied command. The matter was raised by Mountbatten, who had only just learned of it. Admiral D'Argenlieu had announced that the French ships in Eastern waters, including the Richelieu and Triomphant, were about to come under his operational control, so that Mountbatten had been obliged to inform him by telegraph that "this would not be in agreement with the arrangements made between H.M. Government and the French Government. Lieutenant General Leclerc agreed that this was indeed the case, and suggested that there must be some mistake."

Leclerc further added the disturbing information that

"there had been some misunderstanding concerning the size and the command of landing parties from the French warships at Saigon; for instance 'Richelieu' had refused to land 250 men at his request. Colonel Cedille mentioned examples of cases when unauthorised landing parties had carried out individual operations to the embarrassment of other Allied forces at Saigon." 40

Mountbatten made it clear that the French Navy was to respond to the wishes of Gracey and Leclerc, and directed Admiral Power to so inform the French naval units. In the meanwhile, Admiral Graziani [French Naval Commander designate, Saigon] was invited to Ceylon "so that his position should be cleared up."

Mountbatten then asked Gracey to obtain all Japanese papers of significance, including orders of battle, for his dispatches. Gracey replied that the Japanese Headquarters was so disorganized and inefficient that "he doubted whether they would have sufficient knowledge of the

strength and movements of their formations to produce many useful papers on the subject." Gracey suggested that Mountbatten might have better luck in going directly to Japanese army and divisional headquarters for this information, and the SAC so directed his staff. The meeting ended after Mountbatten repeated his order that none of his commanders were to grant interviews to the press. This reflected instructions from the Chiefs of Staff "following gross misquotations in the press of an interview given by Lieutenant General Christison."

In Saigon, although the shooting had abated somewhat, the propaganda war was still raging. The Việt Minh, possibly with one eye on the Americans, invoked the spirit of Lafayette in exhorting the French soldiers to lay down their arms. In a "Message sent by our combatants to French soldiers", the Việt Minh concluded by saying, "French soldiers, workers and peasants of France, arise, La Fayette is watching you, let the blood of your ancestors speak and take up again the glorious trail which they once laid down for you."⁴¹

On 10 October Lieutenant Colonel Jarvis "took over command of Northern Sector Saigon for the last 24 hrs of its life."⁴² It was disbanded the following day because of the arrival on 10 October of more 20 Division reinforcements. These two weeks were a period of intense shipping activity in Saigon.⁴³ Between 8 and 11 October substantial British/Indian reinforcements arrived, but on 10 October occurred the incident which marked the turning point in the history of the British occupation, for the extremist elements of the Viet Minh broke the truce by attacking a British engineer reconnaissance party near Tân Sơn Nhứt, and the British force commenced hostilities in earnest. Gracey had been deadly serious when he warned the Việt Minh of the possible consequences of their hostile actions, and they were now to discover that he was a man of his word.

Footnotes: Chapter XI

- 1 Great Britain, Public Record Office, WO 203/5023, Gracey to Mountbatten, 23 September 1945.
- 2 GB, PRO, WO 203/4431, Control Commission (RAF) to ACSEA, 25 September 1945.
- 3 GB, PRO, WO 203/5644, Gracey to Mountbatten, 30 September 1945.

- 4 Ibid., Gracey to Browning, 30 September 1945. The confused scene was described years later by Air Commodore (later Air Chief Marshal Sir Walter) Cheshire: "When Air Command Headquarters at Kandy detailed me for this appointment they were extremely vague about the duties and responsibilities involved, and this lack of positive instructions was further emphasised when the Staff invited me to write my own directive."
- 5 GB, PRO, WO 203/4273, SEACOS 497, 1 October 1945.
- 6 GB, PRO, WO 172/1786, War Diary Hq. SEAC, COSSEA 366, 1 October 1945.
- 7 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 GR, 1 October 1945.
- 8 Gracey Papers, 1/1 GR Newsletter.

Blascheck had to cross a bridge to reach his troops, but did not want to abandon the Citroen car he had picked up along the way. Under heavy fire he dashed to the car, but forgot to turn the ignition on in the heat of the moment. A bullet smashed through the radiator, traveled through the dashboard and lodged in his chest; it was a long bullet, from a French Hotchkiss machine gun, and it was half in and half out, moving in and out with his heartbeat. "Fairy" Gopsill dashed up and, like an old friend that he was, told Blascheck that he was wounded just above the heart and might die! An Indian Army doctor later said that he could remove the bullet, but Blascheck might bleed to death. Blascheck now carries a neat, round scar to remind him of that incident.

- 9 GB, PRO, WO 203/5644, Lecomte to S.D. Branch, 1 October 1945.
- 10 Gracey Papers, "Saigon Control Commission, Political Report, 13th September, 1945, to 9th October, 1945."
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 GB, PRO, WO 172/1786, Saigon COS 40, 1 October 1945.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid., and Gracey Papers.
- 15 GB, PRO, FO 371/46309, SEACOS 500 [F 7789], 2 October 1945.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Gracey Papers, 1/1 Gurkha Rifles Newsletter.
- 18 GB, PRO, WO 203/5476, Daily Telegraph [quoted in SEAC Daily Digest], 3 October 1945.
- 19 GB, PRO, FO 371/46309, SACSEA to Cabinet Offices (SEAC [RL]119), 3 October 1945.
- 20 Gracey Papers, 1/1 GR Newsletter.
- 21 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 Gurkha Rifles, 3 October 1945.
- 22 GB, PRO, WO 172/1786, War Diary Headquarters SEAC, 5 October 1945.
- 23 GB, PRO, WO 203/5476, SAC 24314, 5 October 1945.
- 24 GB, PRO, FO 371/46353, F 9305, 5 October 1945.

- 25 GB, PRO, FO 371/46309, Slim to Alanbrooke, 6 October 1945.
- 26 Gracey Papers, Saigon Control Commission Report No.2, 6 October 1945.
- 27 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, 20 Indian Division Instruction No.2, 6 October 1945.
- 28 GB, PRO, FO 371/46309, "Record of a meeting between French and Annamite leaders on 6th Oct[ober] 1945."
- 29 GB, PRO; WO 203/4273, Sqn 167 COS46, 6 October 1945.
- 30 GB, PRO, WO 172/1786, SAC (45) 171, 6 October 1945.
- 31 Ibid., 53/COS. C-in-C India to Cabinet Offices, 7 October 1945.
- 32 The troops had enjoyed the ocean cruise and were in no hurry to disembark:

We had a first class trip over on the S.S. MORETON BAY of 14,500 tons. Just 32 Bde HQ, ourselves [9/14 Punjab], 3/8 Gurkhas, a Sqn of the 16th Cav and part of a Bty of 114 Field Regt R.A. The sea was calm throughout and the ship comfortable and well run with a first class canteen which was much appreciated by the men. In fact we were all quite sorry when on 6th Oct we arrived at CAP ST.JACQUES at the entrance to the SAIGON RIVER. We anchored there for some hours and then steamed up the river passing the French battleship RICHELIEU on the way, and arriving in SAIGON itself just as dusk was falling. We stayed on board for the night.

Next morning at 0800 hrs we disembarked and the Bn. except for a small baggage party fell in on the quay. Then with our Dhol and Surnai, only one of each unfortunately, playing nobly we marched through the town amid the applause of the populace to our first resting place, the Annamite Barracks on the edge of the town.

The scene was repeated at 1000 hours when 3/8 Gurkha Rifles disembarked and marched all the way to Tan Son Nhut airfield; 2/8 Punjab left the Ranchi to route march to their base area on Rue Miche, their historian noting that "Our march through the town was like something out of a news reel of the liberation of France. The population showed, to say the least, a marked enthusiasm for us."

Gracey Papers, 9/14 Punjab Regiment Newsletter for October/November 1945, and 2/8 Punjab Newsletter, n.d.

- 33 Gracey Papers, and WO 172/7008, War Diary 20th Indian Division.
- 34 Gracey Papers.
- 35 Ibid., "Saigon Control Commission, Political Report, 13th September, 1945, to 9th October, 1945."
- 36 Ibid., ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.2, 9 October 1945.
- 37 GB, PRO, WO 203/4349, Sqn 181, COS47, 9 October 1945.
- 38 GB, PRO, WO 172/1787, SAC's 33rd (Misc) Meeting, 9 October 1945.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.

- 41 GB, PRO, WO 172/1787, War Diary Headquarters SEAC, 9 October 1945.
- 42 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 GR, 10 October 1945.
- 43 On 8 October the Ranchi, Rajula and Moreton Bay had departed, to make room for the Samrich, Samjoy and Beureoch, which carried motor transport, stores and 3860 badly needed tons of POL. On 10 October the Circassia, Harpalyce and Samgaudia docked in Saigon with the advance party from 100 Brigade, 4/2 Gurkha Rifles, 2967 Field Squadron [RAF Regiment], 20 Division CIEME and other supporting units, and motor transport (including 16th Cavalry vehicles). These reinforcements were in addition to the 7150 troops and 507 vehicles which had arrived by sea between 6 and 9 October.

The Gurkhas from 4/2 GR did not disembark from the Circassia until 11 October.

CHAPTER XII

WAR

It is an unpleasant type of war, the enemy wear no uniform and one seldom sees them carrying arms, but there is always the odd sniper and the apparently harmless bystander who throws a grenade and ducks for cover. It looks as though the French have a tricky time ahead of them.

9/14 Punjab writer.

The 10 October entry in the War Diary of 20 Indian Division contains the following cryptic entry: "Annamites broke truce by ambush Engineer Recce Party, killing RE Adjutant [,] 1 VCO and 2 IORs of his escort and wounding remainder. ALFFIC Op Instr No.3 issued."¹ Mountbatten, in his official report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, stated that during his meeting with Gracey and Leclerc news was received that the Việt Minh had broken the truce. Wrote Mountbatten:

"... as it seemed clear that the Viet Minh spokesmen were incapable of ensuring that agreements into which they had entered would be honoured, I ordered that strong action should be taken by the British/Indian forces to secure further key-points,* and to widen and consolidate the perimeter of these areas. At the same time I insisted that further attempts to negotiate must continue." 2

The unofficial 9/14 and 2/8 Punjab Newsletters gave a more detailed account of the incident which sparked off an enlargement of the British military role, and "As far as the Bn was concerned the shooting season for Annamites had opened".³ The engineers had been escorted by 2/8 Punjab infantrymen and had ridden in trucks driven by 9/14 drivers. The 2/8 Punjab chronicle is as follows:

A sec(tion)** from B Coy under Sub(edar) Ladhu Ram accompanied an engineer officer on a recce. They were returning when they were held up by a large crowd of armed Annamites. The Sub gave the order for the sec to take up positions and the sec promptly leaped out of their truck and took up posn in a drain alongside the road. After a while when things had quietened down the R.E. officer gave the order for the men to get back into the trucks and carry on back to Saigon. They were no sooner in the trucks however when the Annamites opened up on them and in the first fusillade the offr and the VCO were both killed.

Nk (Naik) Tunda Ram took over comd and got his sec back into the ditch from where they continued to hold out from 1700 hrs until they were relieved the next morning. During the night Nk Tunda Ram was killed as were two more of his men. Out of the remainder of the sec not one man remained unwounded and when they were relieved the next morning they were found to have only 10 rds of

* Gracey later questioned Mountbatten's frequent use of the pronoun "I", noting that most of the actions supposedly ordered by Mountbatten had already been carried out by himself (Gracey).

** About 8 Punjabis.

S.A.A.* left between them. There were 35
dead Annamites around their position. 4

The 9/14 Punjab Newsletter added further details of the
Việt Minh ambush, which occurred near the golf course as the
engineers were inspecting water lines:

It was during these days of truce at the
beginning of October that a Sapper Officer
went out along one of the roads leading
north from Saigon on some form of reconnaissance.
He had an escort of a section from 2/8 Punjab
and, as they had no transport, one of our 15
cwt trucks driven by Naik Punnu Khan was detailed
to take them; the Sapper travelled in a car.
The reconnaissance completed they turned for
home and, when some three miles from the town,
they were fired on by some Annamites the Sapper
Officer was wounded and his car wrecked. He
transferred to the front seat of the truck and
they went on. Shortly afterwards they ran into
another ambush, the Sapper was again wounded,
some of the escort killed and the truck damaged.
While dismounting from the truck the Sapper was
hit and killed and Punnu Khan got a bullet in
the elbow. It was now just getting dusk, they
were some way from home and some six men, several
of them wounded, were surrounded by a party of
Annamites numbering anything up to a hundred.
Things did not look too good but events were to
show that a handful of Punjabis, even when wounded,
are worth an army of Annamites. Punnu Khan and
the Gujar section Commander of the 2/8th lost no
time in getting a small defensive position going
with their single Bren gun as the main weapon
for defence. Throughout the night they beat off
a succession of attacks with heavy casualties
to the enemy, the Gujar N.C.O. was killed and more
men were wounded but they hung on. At dawn Punnu
Khan, who knew a few words of English, called out
to the Annamites and said that unless they fall
in on the road he would knock hell out of them
as he had a hundred men just coming up. To
some extent this bluff was successful and Punnu
Khan, taking the remainder to hang on at all
costs, slipped out through the enemy to get
help from the 3/8 G.R. a mile or so up the road.
He was fired on as he went but got through and
came back with a Coy of Gurkhas. The rest
of his party although fired on were safe and the
Annamites, seeing a whole Coy after them, with-
drew. The estimate of Annamite casualties is hard

* 10 rounds of small arms ammunition.

to make but it is possible that Punnu and his handful had accounted for anything up to forty. For this very gallant action Naik Punnu Khan and a sepoy of the 2/8 Punjab both received the M.M. Punnu himself was invalided back to India. As far as the Bn was concerned the shooting season for Annamites had opened. 5

The "20th Indian Division's History" reported that the attacking Việt Minh force, which had been held off for 24 hours by less than a dozen wounded Punjabis and Gujars, had numbered 500.⁶ It was reminiscent of the Zulu attack on Rorke's Drift in an earlier colourful era of empire building. [The 20th Division History also reported a simultaneous attack on the 3/8 Gurkhas at Tân Sơn Nhứt airfield]. The beleaguered section was finally rescued by a combined Gurkha-Japanese force (1 platoon each).* The 20th Division historian wrote of the incident:

Events of the 10th October... established beyond any doubt that the Viet Minh political leaders were in fact unable to control their armed forces... The futility of negotiating with the Viet Minh had been demonstrated and our troops were ordered to take offensive action against Viet Minh forces where necessary. 7

The ambush of the engineer reconnaissance party and the attack on the Gurkhas at Tân Sơn Nhứt (which was repulsed by Gurkha mortars at a cost of 6 Việt Minh known killed) were not the only incidents of the day; 3/1 GR reported a fire at 2300 hrs behind the soda factory on Khánh Hối island, bridges were attacked and Gurkhas fired on, incendiary grenades were thrown at warehouses, and road blocks sprang up on main streets in their area. These reports suggest that the ambush of the engineer party was not an isolated incident but part of a deliberate series of actions designed to invite retaliation.

Also, on 10 October, 908 Wing, RAF Station Saigon, became Air Headquarters, RAF FIC. The RAF at Tan Son Nhut received a warning from 20 Division that another Việt Minh attack was expected and RAF troops, few in number at this time, immediately undertook preparations to defend the vital airfield. A local Japanese armoury was found and Japanese and French weapons, in addition to the RAF's own guns, were distributed. Japanese machine guns were mounted on the balcony of the control tower, with fields of fire down the runways and taxiways.

* The 3/8 G.R.War Diary erroneously lists the ambush as occurring on 11th October. The attack began at 1500 hours and at 0600 on 11 October Punnu Khan reached the 3/8 Headquarters.

The Headquarters and Flying Control building was converted to a minifortress, and all the Spitfires and C-47s were taxied up to the building. The aircrews were ordered to sleep in their cockpits and while awake to watch the tower for flare signals.

Newly arrived RAF Regiment troops, who had flown in at 24 hours notice, were immediately deployed to the north to augment the small Japanese and Indian detachments there; some were placed in the Headquarters building with a platoon of Dogras.

That evening a violent tropical storm burst over Saigon and continued to 2300 hours. Whether the heavy rains or defensive preparations deterred the Viet Minh is unknown, but no attack occurred and the defensive arrangements were continued on the following day. (The assault, a ferocious one, did occur two days later).

On 11 October Gracey reported the details of the 10 October attack to Mountbatten in the following message:

1. In neighbourhood (of) airfield and Cholon Annamite armed bands last night broke truce. They attacked my troops and also burnt out cigarette factory. RE recce party proceeding to examine water well was ambushed near golf course. 8

Gracey then listed the casualties: 1 British officer, one subedar and 2 Indian soldiers killed, and 7 wounded. He pointed out that this "definite aggression" was in spite of recent assurances given by Viet Minh leaders, and he was "now proceeding to take necessary strong action against armed resistance. (I) have consulted Leclerc and we are in complete agreement."⁹ Wrote Gracey:

- "Our agreed policy as follows.
- A. Strong action against armed men or bands who in any way resist disarmament or commit hostile acts or sabotage or in any way infringe proclamation order.
 - B. Disarmament and search for Annamite arms as advance to key areas near Saigon and Cholon progresses.
 - C. No necessary provocative use of force during disarmament.*
 - D. Strict orders to prevent looting by own troops.
 - E. To cause as little disturbances as possible to all law abiding persons. 10

* This phrase, written in the compressed style peculiar to telegrams, meant that force would be used only when operationally essential -- not provocatively.

Gracey then stated that he was now proceeding with his plan to occupy progressively the key areas of Biên Hòa, Lái Thiêu and Thủ Dầu Một. Responsibility for casualties must now rest with the Việt Minh, and Gracey thought that it should be made known that he had personally warned the Việt Minh leaders on 8 October, and Hirst, on 9 October, had told them of the consequences of their breaking the truce. Said Gracey, "I further stressed that this would entail the use of all weapons of war at our disposal."¹¹ Gracey asked Slim for authority to form military tribunals to try Việt Minh murderers of his troops; failing that he wanted to classify them as war criminals. Slim would not concur in either action, since the formation of a British Military Administration would be necessary for the institution of military tribunals, and this was politically out of the question. It was one of the rare instances in which Slim did not back Gracey.

While Mountbatten agreed with Slim's line of argument in not conceding Gracey's request to establish martial law, he said that he had a great deal of sympathy with what the British/Indian troops were going through in Saigon and he appreciated the difficulties of the situation:

"If Gracey considers it of any help, he may tell them I have reported to H.M. Government that the troops in South East Asia Command are accomplishing with willingness, courage and efficiency all that British policy has demanded of them, and are behaving with exemplary forbearance in extremely difficult circumstances."

Mountbatten thought that it would help if the troops knew that the people at home were being told of their problems. But, continued the Supreme Allied Commander:

"Our position is difficult enough already, without establishing martial law for our own purposes within somebody else's country. The only solution I can see is that the French courts should have their personnel increased if necessary by flying in reinforcements from France, and that they should adopt a speedier procedure to bring these cases to trial, so that those proved guilty may have the sentence carried out sufficiently quickly to act as a deterrent to others." 12

In SEACOS 510, 11 October 1945, Mountbatten informed the Chiefs of Staff that he had authorised Gracey to issue the following announcement at his discretion:

"The SAC directs me that he has been instructed to tolerate no activity which might be inconvenient to the orderly administration of the tasks with which he has entrusted me. These tasks are to control [the] Japanese surrender and subsequent disarmament of Japanese forces in Indochina and [the] relief and evacuation of Allied POWs and internees.

While these objective[s] are being accomplished the inhabitants, whatever their race or creed, must be enabled to carry on their lawful activities without interference and without fear of violence and this right will be guaranteed by armed forces under his order.

The terms of this notice are in accordance with the policy of His Majesty's Government."¹³

Brigadier Woodford's 32 Brigade was charged with conducting the investment of Gia Định, the first move of the expanding British involvement in Vietnam. On 10 October, "ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.3" had been issued to Woodford, which directed him to secure

- (a) Gia Dinh from inclusive the bridge over the river Can Bong to Thanh My Tay -- cross roads Binh Hoa Xa -- road junction 1000 yds west of Gia Dinh.
- (b) The road/rail bridge at Ap Dong Nhi - Go Vap - road running South and South East to Saigon.
- (c) The Thanh My Tay area up to the Canal De Thanh Du.
- (d) The remainder of your area as laid down in 20 Ind Div Instruction No.2 dated 6 Oct 45. ¹⁴

Woodford was told to "use such force as is necessary to overcome any opposition" and to "apprehend and disarm any armed Annamites you encounter," but "You will NOT carry out a detailed search for arms unless opposition is encountered, in which case you will search for and seize all arms found in the area of opposition." D Day was set for 0800 hours on 11 October.

The intelligence provided to Woodford was somewhat sketchy. It was difficult to estimate the numbers of Việt Minh in the Gia Định area, but intelligence personnel were reasonably sure that Gia Dinh and Go Vap were Việt Minh assembly points. Although a figure of 3000 armed Việt

Minh was put forward, Woodford was told that it was unlikely that he would encounter many of them. Since at the 9 October conference the Việt Minh had stated their intention to accept the British entry into Gia Định and their violent opposition to the French, the latter were omitted from the operation.

Three Japanese units were to come under Woodford's command for the Gia Định operation (Yoshida, Sato and Yamagishi butais). One troop each from 16 Cavalry and 114 Field Regiment (Royal Artillery), plus air support within the established guidelines, were available to Woodford. Personnel from 604 Field Security were to follow his forces into Gia Định where they would conduct their specialized intelligence and interrogation activities, and arrested Annamites would be placed in the temporary custody of 20 Division Provost Company for transfer to the French.

At 0630 on 11 October the operation began; 9/14 Punjab, under Lieutenant Colonel J.B.Hobbs, moved to a bridge on the southern extremity of Gia Định, north of Dakao. At 0800 one squadron of 16 Cavalry came under command of 9/14 Punjab. At 0930 Gia Định was occupied without incident and posts established at a bridge and road junction, both at the eastern edge of the town. By noon Battalion headquarters were established in Gia Định and Japanese forces relieved of security duties. By 1315 an armoured car troop, with a company of infantry, had made a reconnaissance of a major road running through Gia Định from southeast to northwest, stopping at a major intersection between Binh Hòa and Gò Vấp, where they reported the presence of half a dozen armed Viet Minh. It was at this point that the first serious incident occurred, an incident which again proved (if further proof was necessary by this time) that the Việt Minh extremists were out of control, since Việt Minh negotiators had earlier agreed peacefully to accept the British occupation of Gia Định. The 9/14 Punjab Regiment War Diary summarized the action:

"No.9 Pl[atoon] dismounted to cover those who were called on to surrender. Annamites moved towards our tps with hands raised when fire was opened by about 30 Annamites at short range from west of X [cross] rds.

Immediately the surrendering Annamites took cover in fox holes already prepared. As a result of this No. 14597 Hav[ildar] Ahmed Khan was killed.

Considerable prophylactic fire put down by our tps as a result of which 4 Annamites were killed and many were wounded. Three of the original surrendering Annamites were extracted from fox holes with their arms and were handed over to F.S.S.* " 15

The 9/14 Punjab Newsletter, in describing the incident as "not much of an engagement", recorded the death of Havildar Khan in a manner common to the entire division: "... he was a most gallant NCO who had been all through the Burma campaign and it is sad that he should meet his death through treachery after peace was declared." 16

The reconnaissance to the edge of Gò Vấp was made because Gò Vấp was the battalion's objective on the following day. The 16th Cavalry War Diary added the final details to the ambush at the road block when writing that the company commander ordered a section of infantry to bring in the surrendering Việt Minh. But as the Punjabis advanced a heavy volume of fire suddenly erupted from the scrub immediately behind the trenches and the Havildar commanding the section was killed with a shot through the throat. The rest of the section immediately took cover while the armoured car troop opened up on the Việt Minh with 37mm and Besa machine guns. Four Việt Minh were killed immediately, and 5 prisoners taken. The rest of the Việt Minh were pinned down by Besa bursts, at which time the troops withdrew. The withdrawal itself was a tricky operation involving the maneuvering and turning of armoured cars and vehicles in the narrow road. So ended the first day of the occupation of Gia Định and Gò Vấp which was to be resumed on the following day.

After a relatively quiet night at 9/14 Battalion Headquarters, the Gò Vấp operation continued on 12 October, when at 0600 two French liaison officers reported to the battalion; one squadron of armoured cars from 16 Cavalry rumbled up at 0945, and at 1000 the occupation of Gò Vấp resumed when nearly five infantry companies, supported by the armoured cars, searched about 200 houses on either side of the main road into the town. No contact was made with the Việt Minh, although a few harmless shots were fired by snipers at a cross roads. At noon the sweep was widened and sporadic action occurred, which resulted in some Vietnamese being killed and 1 Indian soldier wounded;

* Field Security Section

the house from which his assailants fired was destroyed by armoured car 37mm fire. At 1230 the Punjabis captured a Việt Minh officer in uniform,¹⁷ who was handed over to the Field Security Section detachment accompanying the battalion. A final Việt Minh attempt at defending Gò Vấp was broken up by armoured car fire and the occupation of the town was complete; the second objective was to patrol the road and tram lines northwest of Gò Vấp and join up with 3/8 GR; and in the course of these operations 20 French civilians, captives of the Việt Minh, were released and two road blocks removed. A detachment of armoured cars then drove west to contact 3/8 Gurkhas. With the successful conclusion of the operations, the 16 Cavalry armoured cars returned to their base near Tân Sơn Nhứt. The Punjabis withdrew to their lines after leaving two pickets at key areas, and handed over the responsibility for Gò Vấp to 4/2 GR.¹⁸ The latter noted, during these operations, "... we came to the conclusion now and never altered that opinion that the Annamite will never stay to make a proper fight of it," although two days later (on 14 October), the 4/2 recorder wrote that the battalion "were unlucky enough to lose two men and two vehicles" in establishing two bridgeheads "against slight opposition."

Việt Minh activity was noticeably increasing. The Spitfire pilots returning from their daily reconnaissance flights reported about 150 Viet Minh, in military formation, between Gia Định and Học Mớn, and it was reported that 500 Annamites were assembled in Thủ Dầu Một.¹⁹ More disturbing was the report of 6 field guns in Việt Minh hands, and the road from Cholon to Đức Hòa was completely trenched across. Trees were felled across a number of other roads, and in Thủ Đức the Viet Minh had held mass meetings and requisitioned all cars to transport their troops for an attack on Allied forces.

Saigon's North Sector* was formally abolished on 11 October, when Jim Woodford's 32 Brigade assumed responsibility for that area of Saigon. Cyril Jarvis and his 1st Gurkhas then prepared to rejoin the arriving 100 Brigade for their movement north out of Saigon as the British planned on expanding their key areas.

The French 5th RIC and Marines played a part in the 9/14 Punjab operation of 11 October, as they secured the Thành Mỹ Tây area to the Saigon river.²⁰ They were supported by "C" Troop, 114 Regiment (RA),

* Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jarvis during the last day of its existence.

who the following day laid down 28 rounds of high explosive ordnance in clearing out machine gun nests.

On 11 October Hirst ordered the Japanese to reinforce the garrison in Phnom Penh by 140 men, who were to be armed with 20 light machine guns and personal weapons. They were to be drawn from 3 Japanese battalion's attached to Woodford's 32 Brigade (Yoshida, Sato and Yamagishi Butais). The Japanese were now beginning to cooperate to the extent that the same orders drew attention to a Japanese soldier who, as driver for the RE Commander, was commended for "his devotion to duty on 10 October 1945 when a British Officer and a small force of British Troops were subjected to an unprovoked attack by a large band of Annamites... You will ensure that Lance-Corporal Niko Inouye's superior officers are acquainted with this fact."²¹

At about this time a letter addressed to "The General Commander of English Army at Gia-Dinh" (presumably Brigadier Woodford) was received at 9/14 Punjab Headquarters²² and passed on to Woodford and General Gracey in Saigon. The letterhead bore the title, "Eastern Defending Committee; Head Office: Biên Hòa," and was datelined "Eastern Zone, 11th October: 1945." It was as follows, with various British comments in the margins:

Sir,

I have the honour to call your attention on the following points:

- 10) We, Vietnamese people, have no aim to attack, nor to disturb English Army in its mission to disarm Japanese Army. We are always ready to give some help to English Army in the above mentioned mission. [A pencilled British comment by this paragraph stated, "Not borne out by what has happened"].
- 20) Our only purpose is to forbid French people or soldiers to get out of the region of Saigon and Cholon. So we beg you not to mixe [sic] in your army any French soldiers, who, after your returning back to your bases, would occupy by force our towns and villages, as they did some days ago in Saigon.

I hope that you will guarantee to US on this notable point.
- 30) Will you kindly give me the fixed time and zone into which your army will go and disarm the Japanese army, so that I can notify MY MEN, in order to prevent any trouble that should be caused by misunderstanding.

40) As for me, I am totally responsible
on everything happening between your
Army and Mine.*

Awaiting your prompt decision,
I am; Sir,

Respectfully Yours

THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF VIETNAMESE ARMY
IN THE EASTERN ZONE.

[Signed]

Hoàng-Cao-Nhã

In this vein, a reply was sent back to the Commander in Chief, Vietnamese Army in the Eastern Zone, Eastern Defending Committee, Bien Hoa, by Lieutenant Colonel Ritchie, 20 Division's Chief of Staff, who said that General Gracey was willing to receive a Việt Minh representative "to hear any statement or explanation or suggestion on the subject of law and order which you may wish to express; the representative will be sent as your personal representative."²³

Continued Ritchie:

2. You will remember both now and in the future that General D.D. Gracey speaks as the Commander of the Allied Land Forces in FRENCH INDO CHINA South of 16 Parallel; I would draw your attention to the word "Allied"; the Allied Nations include the French nation.
3. You will reply suggesting the place, date and time for the meeting; also the composition of your party, the route by which it will enter the Allied lines and the means by which it will be recognised. The party will be given safe conduct through the Allied lines.

It is not known whether the Việt Minh responded to Gracey's invitation to parley; it is likely that they lost interest when they obviously were unable to split the British and French forces over reoccupation policy.

Incidents were now simultaneously flaring up throughout the British area of responsibility. Writing, in part, of the period from 4 October to 30 October, the 3/1 Gurkha Rifles historian said:

"Every day up till the 12th we had one or more occurrences. It became almost a daily task clearing the numerous roadblocks on the RA GAN GIOC. Despite all our hard work,

* British comments by the last paragraph said, "He should come in and speak to the General" -- "Yes, and call off the blockade."

plundering on a much reduced scale and arson continued. The ANNAMITES were now using incendiary grenades, fired from discharger cups, and petrol bombs thrown at close range. Two important factories went up in flames. Nightly we continued to bump slight opposition with patrols and sniping continued fairly frequently. The 11th was a bad night and considerable damage was done by incendiary grenades fired from the NORTH bank of the ARROYO CHINOIS where the Japs were on guard! A wood and oil dump was set ablaze and the men fighting the fire were heavily engaged with l.m.gs & rifle fire which was not very accurate fortunately. 24

As the 3/1 writer had previously noted of Khanh Hói Island, "The area is a vast one for a battalion to protect, especially as it is populated by the real 'bad hats' in [the] Saigon area." It was becoming more important now as a great deal of the surrendered Japanese Army munitions and small arms were being moved from outlying areas to Khanh Hói for storage.

In a remarkably blunt report, the SEAC Assistant Director of Intelligence summed up the problems in South Indochina. He prefaced his report with the statement that the document expressed his personal opinion, and should be treated as such. He commented that General Gracey was not permitted any contact with the Viêt Minh, and the small number of French with him were not enough to take over administrative control. It was also hard to explain to the Vietnamese how large numbers of Vichy French were back in positions held during the war. Wrote the senior officer, "Throughout the handling of the situation, the French appear to lack every vestige of imagination."²⁵ For example, a pamphlet to be airdropped had the old theme of "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité," and called upon the Annamites to lay down their arms, saying that the French would be

more considerate and more generous than they had ever been before. Such a pamphlet, under the existing conditions, would have but provoked the Annamites to further rage. It promised the Annamites nothing new. Up to date the French seem incapable of appreciating the frame of mind of the Annamites and to adjust their actions accordingly.

It is not an exaggeration to say that until the arrival of Colonel Repiton Preneuf, General Leclerc's acting Chief of Staff, there was not a single Frenchman with both imagination, ability and powers of leadership who had returned in a position of authority to F.I.C."

He went on to say that there was conclusive evidence that Japanese intelligence organisations were behind the Viet Minh and the revolt "to the hilt." As far back as April 1945 Annamite officers were established in the same building as Minoda's* headquarters, and high Kempei Tei officers were often seen with Caodists and other groups. The Brazzaville declaration was not enough, and the Japanese had publicised it to the Vietnamese as noncommittal and worthless. Like most of the British participants, including Gracey, he had no doubt as to the root cause of the troubles:

"Provided the French are prepared to deal with the Annamites as human beings and not as chattels for exploitation as in the past, there is every reason to believe that the leading Annamites will not only listen to them, but will help them...."

On the 12th, the night fighting in Saigon was intense, with delayed action mines continually exploding, large fires ringing the city, and the crackle of small arms fire and banging of artillery could be heard throughout the night. On 12 and 13 October Gracey was encouraged by the arrival of two strong battalions, the 9/12 Frontier Force Rifles (FFR) and the 9th Jats (the Machine Gun Battalion), who arrived by air from Hwawbi, Burma.²⁶ As the Jats were deplaning at Tân Sơn Nhứt on the 13th, the busy 3/1 Gurkhas again reported heavy activity in Khanh Hôi Island:

"... on 13th Oct we carried out Op "CHINA", which was a complete 'sweep' of the island. Under comd for this operation was one coy 1/1 G.R., 1 Coy DOGRA and NAVAL units. Prisoners were taken, 13 in all and a certain number of arms and ammunition recovered, but there was no trace of the l.m.gs. The island was very deserted during this search and the whole atmosphere spoke of a breach in security."²⁷

The Gurkhas spent the night on Khanh Hôi, during which time several attacks on their positions were beaten back. The first attack came on a platoon on the west end, just after midnight, and was supported by two light machine guns; one Gurkha was wounded and sniping continued until first light. At 0045 the docks were charged, banzai

* The Japanese military governor of F.I.C.

fashion, but again the attackers were repulsed. Several attempts were then made to set fire to buildings on the river front, and it took a grenade attack by the Gurkhas to silence snipers in the area. An attempt by Vietnamese to cross over to Saigon from the east bank was abandoned when the Royal Navy illuminated the area with searchlights.

The 13th was an exceptionally busy day for 16 Cavalry. A squadron came under 3/8 GR command as the Gurkhas prepared to establish themselves in new positions. They were under sporadic sniper fire throughout, and the leading troop of armored cars and infantry dealt with resistance as it occurred. By 1100 hours the battalion tactical headquarters was established at a crossroads about two miles north of Tân Sơn Nhứt, on the main road northwest from Gò Vấp. Brigadier Woodford then drove up to report that the 4/2 Gurkhas on a crossroads two miles due north of the 3/8 tactical headquarters were under "considerable enemy fire" and unable to advance to their objective (a bridge a few hundred yards away to the north). The operation was carried out, but the move "was sniped and shot at the whole way." On moving to a new objective a couple of miles to the southwest the 16 Cavalry troop was opposed by light machine gun and rifle fire from Việt Minh concealed in the thick undergrowth; the ambush party was dispersed by return fire from the armored cars. Another 4/2 objective, again a bridge, was well defended by Việt Minh troops with two, and possibly three machine guns and the 4/2 GR commander wanted to send for another company of his infantry. But with daylight fading the 16 Cavalry commander suggested moving in with the squadron headquarters detachment, plus two platoons of infantry, and after 45 minutes the bridge was seized. When the remaining two Gurkha platoons arrived the squadron returned to harbor.

In the Cholon area, there was great excitement in the ranks of 4/17 Dogra, for not only did General Gracey visit the unit but a section attached to 3/1 GR captured a man believed to be the Kempei Tei chief, "the local Japanese Himmler"! The excitement (shared at 20 Division Headquarters) was dampened when the man turned out to be a Vietnamese.

To the north, in the early morning darkness of the 13th, a Việt Minh force had approached Tân Sơn Nhứt from the southwest and fired on 16 Cavalry positions 600 yds from the airfield; in a heavy exchange of fire bullets struck the 273 Squadron crew quarters, 1307 (RAFR) Wing

Headquarters and the 6th Air Formation Signals Officers Mess. The Việt Minh forces fanned out and assaulted Tân Sơn Nhất from three directions. The situation looked desperate for about twenty minutes, during which time the Việt Minh stormed Tân Sơn Nhất in a major effort to destroy the aircraft and transmitters there. The attackers were slowly driven back by the 16th Cavalry and Japanese infantry. They did, however, reach the doors of the radio station and got to within 300 yards of the control tower before being stopped; the fight for the field then turned into a grim struggle as the loss of the airfield would have cut Saigon off from the rest of the world. The RAF Regiment defense force, positioned east and southeast of the field, did not participate in this fire fight, but took part, with the Japanese, in the sweep which followed, which drove the Viet Minh back a distance of two miles.

At 1030 the participating units were briefed, and Wing Commander Allen (commanding 1307 Wing) wanted a show of strength while searching for arms; about 500 men were involved. The operation, mounted to the southwest (from which direction the attack occurred), began at 1100 hours, with Allen directing the action from a nearby crossroads. On the left flank were positioned 2963 Squadron,²⁸ with 2967 Squadron in the centre and Major Matsuzato's Japanese infantry company on the right. In the centre, 2967 Squadron was fired on from a house almost immediately, but heavy Bren and rifle fire drove the Việt Minh out; in their hasty exit they left a shotgun and some equipment behind. Further Việt Minh fire came from a cemetery in front, but again the Việt Minh fled to heavy undergrowth. After a third ambush two suspects were flushed out and captured.

The RAF Regiment flights soon lost contact with each other in the heavy growth and proceeded independently. One flight came across a temple containing a haversack with clips of Japanese and French ammunition, plus Sten magazines. A Bren gun group, chasing some Viet Minh, also discovered a temple containing Việt Minh arm bands.

The last RAFR troops returned to base at 1430, but the Japanese stayed out until 1600.²⁹

Back in Saigon, the 9th FFR had a few pleasant days following their arrival, but as their historian wrote:

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"This was the proverbial lull before the storm; every day some unit has an 'incident' with the rebel Annamites, but we had escaped so far. Grenades were thrown at some of our transport and the Jawans replied with vengeance. Unfortunately one man was killed and several wounded by grenades a few days later and then the gloves were off. Wire cages were put round some of the trucks and strong escorts became the order of the day.

Patrols out into the country provided excellent training for everyone and the odd clash with the Annamites took us back to our first days on the Chindwin. Two Annamite flags — put up in the Bazar at night — were captured by Jock Lawrie and the defence platoon. Periodical raids on houses of suspects revealed grenades and rifles." 30

Mountbatten, who a few weeks earlier had considered withholding Gracey's full division from him, was now gravely concerned over the rapidly deteriorating situation in Saigon and concluded his report to London by emphasizing the need to speed the arrival of French reinforcements:

"Both SLIM and I would be failing in our duty if we did not draw your attention to the serious consequences to British/Indian forces of any postponement in the original date of [the] arrival of 9 D.I.C. In fact we both consider it more urgent than ever for 9 D.I.C. to be accelerated." 31

On 13 October Brigadier Hirst sent a stiff letter to Lieutenant General Manaki, Commander of the Japanese 2nd Division (responsible for the Saigon area). Hirst related that during the British operations in Go Vap they had discovered some 30 Japanese soldiers in various houses in the town. While saying that "Their attitude to the British soldiers was correct",³² he implied a collaboration between those Japanese troops and the Việt Minh and demanded "to know what they were doing there and to which unit they belong." Continued Hirst:

"What orders had been given to them and by whom? If they were there for the maintenance of law and order, it did not appear that they had been taking any active steps to deal with Armed Annamites in the neighbourhood.

During the French operations at THANH MY TAY I am practically certain that opposition was encountered from formed bodies of Japanese.

These parties were dressed in proper uniform, which appeared to be Japanese, and were operating in conjunction with the Annamites, and were equipped and armed like proper soldiers.

I know for certain that there were certain Japanese troops taking part with the Annamites.

Who are these troops?

What action do you propose to take to eliminate them? They are traitors to your Army and your Emperor."

Hirst then turned to the letter received by Lieutenant Colonel Hobbs, 9/14 Punjab, from the Viet Minh Army in the Eastern Zone:

"General GRACEY wishes General MANAKI to explain why such an office should be allowed to exist in BIEN HOA, when this village is supposed to have been cleared.

General GRACEY has grave doubts as to General MANAKI's sincerity when such things as this come to light."

It is not known what response Manaki [described by Brigadier Taunton of 80 Brigade as "dull-witted"] made, but Hirst's charges added weight to the argument that the Japanese were actively assisting the Viet Minh.

A number of other incidents had occurred on the morning of 13 October. Before dawn about 15 to 20 Viet Minh attacked the 16 Cavalry* perimeter with rifles and grenades but were driven off and lost two men killed and two captured. The 3/1 Gurkhas captured 6 looters in the docks, and one of their patrols came under fire from a block on Rue Lanessan and had to clear it with 3-inch mortar fire. The French were continuing their mopping-up operations in the Thanh My Tay area, where pockets of Viet Minh were holding out. The French had lost 6 killed, but Viet Minh casualties were "believed heavy" [Indeed, casualties were always proportionately higher when the French engaged the Vietnamese, reflecting the bitterness on both sides]. The French captured two Japanese Air Force officers during this operation, and summarily executed them both.

The 9/14 Punjab's Number 3 Company searched a number of buildings between Battalion Headquarters southwest to Gia Dinh and by sheer luck discovered a local Viet Minh headquarters and post containing 4 wounded Vietnamese. The four suspects, together with a number of seized documents, were handed over to the Field Security Service

* The 16 Cavalry historian exclaimed that "Our cookhouse was shot up!"

detachment. Heavy fighting was also reported near the power house in Saigon.³³

At Commission headquarters, Mr. Meiklereid [Brain's successor as Foreign Office adviser to Gracey], now wrote his first summary of the situation in Saigon. In a letter to Denning, Meiklereid wrote that the population as a whole were in

"a very nervous state, and though they have actually suffered little from privation their morale is low and they are unlikely to be very effective in carrying on either the administration or their normal activities without a complete change of atmosphere." 34

Meiklereid pointed out that the local French population had had little knowledge of events in the world, apart from the Japanese occupation. Leclerc's arrival had

"given them considerable temporary moral support, and the line he took at his first meeting with the French population demanding a united front is likely to prevent a VICHY/de GAULLIST split. The applause for General de GAULLE appears to have been unanimous, despite the presence of a number of strong 'ex' Petainists."

He reported the breakdown in negotiations between the French and the Việt Minh ("As was to be expected"), but implied that the fault lay with the Việt Minh for demanding immediate and full autonomy. He also reiterated the very clear warnings personally given to Việt Minh leaders by both Gracey and Hirst, but the Việt Minh had inferred that "we were acting as a screen for the building up of the French Forces." With the 10 October ambush of the British section near Tân Sơn Nhứt "General GRACEY was left with no other course but to implement his threat." Meiklereid continued:

"The French are obviously delighted at the turn of events as General LECLERC's attitude on his return from RANGOON showed that he by no means agreed with Colonel REPITON on the non-participation of the French troops. He considers that it would have a very bad effect on French morale and prestige."

At this time Meiklereid independently echoed Slim's fear that

"There is little doubt that we shall now be accused of backing French Imperialism, but I frankly consider that no other course was possible if the Allied troops were to carry out their task, and enable us to hand over

to the French as soon as possible and let them tackle their own problem -- it is no small one!

As for the immediate future, Meiklereid said that:

"It is, as yet, too early to estimate the strength of the Annamite opposition, but it may be not inconsiderable -- at least at first, as they must realise that it is now or never for them. Once the French have taken over, they can be expected to be ruthless in putting down the 'revolt'. It is evident that the leaders of the COCHIN CHINA VIET MINH COMMITTEE have little or no hold on their followers, and the situation is likely to develop into a form of guerilla warfare with arms supplied by the Japanese."

Meiklereid then interrupted his assessment of the political situation to report a curious meeting with Leclerc, who had called on him the previous day:

"He [Leclerc] began by expressing the opinion that unless BRITAIN and FRANCE avoided the mistake made after the last war, i.e., non-cooperation, a further war would inevitably result. He added that our interests were obviously common ones in the EAST and if we allowed the French to be thrown out of Indo China it would have considerable repercussions on our own Colonial possessions in the FAR EAST. So far the conversation had followed the lines of our previous interview in KANDY.

The General then referred to his reputation of frankness and stated that he had been informed that I was particularly anti-French and had been specially selected for this post on that account. In view of the attitude I have always adopted, both previously in Indo China and later in French West Africa, I was somewhat amused at this accusation, which I strongly refuted.*

I am afraid, however, that I failed to convince the General as he went on to state that the attitude so far adopted by General GRACEY had been admirable and he sincerely hoped that it would not be affected by political intrigues -- obviously myself!

I can only imagine that some of my 'friends' who fear what I may have to say about them have tried to get in first."

* Meiklereid's wife was French.

Meiklereid returned to the political situation by reporting the opinion of a Frenchman who had been interned by the Japanese in Singapore and restricted by the Vichy authorities, a man "whose views I found both sound and reliable during my previous sojourn in French Indo China." The Frenchman

"stated that in his opinion the present situation was due mainly to:-

- a) the delay in the arrival of the Allied Forces* and the opportunity thus given to the Japanese to arm the Annamites.
- b) the failure to apprehend the VIET MINH leaders in Saigon.
- c) the excesses of the French in the coup d'etat of September 23rd.

As regards (c) apart from the inevitable result in loss of life the unfortunate, but perhaps understandable, excesses on the part of the French only recently liberated, combined with their slovenly appearance due to their lack of proper uniform had created the worst possible impression on the Annamites."

Meiklereid went on to state that the Frenchman opined that for the future the Annamite leaders must be arrested and the Japanese deserters in the Việt Minh ranks be "rounded up" as soon as possible.

"This having been completed the status quo should be reinstated for a period of some months before the declaration made by General de Gaulle regarding the status of Indo China is implemented.

Apart from the question of prestige the lapse of time would enable the moderate Annamites who have been intimidated by the extremists to come to the fore.

As regards General de Gaulle's declaration regarding the future status of Indo China he considered it would have been very well received by the French in Indo China at the time it was made had they been aware of it as up to that time the native population had if anything helped them against the Japanese. Unfortunately owing to the lack of wireless facilities it received little publicity at the time and

* Caused largely by MacArthur's ban on Allied landings in Japanese-held territory until he had received the Japanese surrender in Tokyo.

when it did become generally known feeling had already begun to run high while the assumption of power by the Annamites and their general attitude was not conducive to its acceptance."

This was an astute assessment. Like de Gaulle, the Frenchman recognized the inevitability of Vietnamese independence, but felt that it should come as a result of a French gesture rather than by threats of force. While Meiklereid recognized the bias in the argument, he considered that "it probably fairly accurately represents the outlook of the saner members of the French civil population."

General Gracey agreed with Meiklereid's text,

"except to say that the Annamites are doing everything in their power to separate British and French forces, and thus to pave the way for a public declaration that British impartiality is a myth, and that the British never had any other intention than backing French imperialism. The intransigent attitude of the Annamite leaders has in fact forced us to full military cooperation with the French, which, in General Gracey's opinion, is all to the good, as the situation before the Annamites broke the truce was dangerous in the extreme as regards cooperation and a continuance of cordial relations with the French."

Shortly after he wrote this report, Meiklereid received a copy of the Việt Minh reply to Hirst's questions of 9 October; "It completely bears out General Gracey's point that their main object is to 'separate British-French forces'."

Gracey's opinion was expressed in a message to Mountbatten in which he described his recent correspondence with the "self-styled C in C VIETNAM army of [the] Eastern Zone." In reporting Meiklereid's receipt of a letter on 13 October from the Committee for the South, and the continuing rigidity of the Việt Minh position, Gracey wrote:

"I consider that VIET MINH Central Policy if such a thing exists is to attempt by every means of conciliation with British to split British and French. I have no doubt that they will accuse British through radio and all other means of coming to F.I.C. with statement that they had no interest in politics but in fact providing shield for reinstatement of French. In fact it has now become inevitable for the proper execution of my tasks that I should

act hand in hand with LECLERC policy as to key areas only. By doing so I inevitably provide very considerable assistance to political aims of French in this area." 35

The increasing military activity at this time was described by the "20th Division's History", which recorded:

"On the 13th 32 Bde fanned out and advanced NORTH of GOVAP to the line of the River CHO and secured all bridges intact. A coy of 3/8 GR fought a pitched battle on the approaches to one of these bridges throughout the night 13/14 October. These bridges held by 3/8 GR and 4/2 GR came in for a great deal of VIET MINH attention during the following weeks, and sniping and grenade throwing was a regular feature...

The night of 13/14 October was marked by large scale VIET MINH attacks in the SAIGON/CHOLON area. Determined efforts were made to dislodge the 3/1 GR guarding the entrances to the docks. The attacks were made in characteristic Jap fashion with much screaming and shouting.³⁶ A Jap BN HQ on the outskirts of CHOLON was attacked and surrounded during the night, and reinforcements were dispatched at dawn to assist them in driving off the attackers. All these attacks were repulsed with heavy losses, and as a result the SAIGON/CHOLON area remained comparatively quiet up till 22nd October." 37

Having been beaten back in frontal assaults the Việt Minh now intensified their attempts to strangle Saigon, and RAF reconnaissance

"indicated that the VIET MINH were determined to cut off the city from the outside world, and that extensive demolitions and roadblocks were visible on all roads leading out of the city.

Large concentrations of Annamites seen in the area N.E. of SAIGON (THU DAU MOT - THU DUC- BIEN HOA area) confirmed reports of a large VIET MINH build up in this area."

The situation continued to grow more ugly day by day, and any hopes of reaching a peaceful settlement had vanished by this time.* The French were determined to regain their position (and prestige) by force of arms, the Việt Minh had despaired of gaining immediate

* On 1 October Gracey had written that unless some form of autonomy was promised the Vietnamese by the French the fighting was inevitable.

independence, the British were intent on securing their key areas, and the Japanese, who had surrendered two months earlier, must have wondered what it would take to be allowed to lay down their arms again and go home.

The Việt Minh attack on the Japanese Headquarters in Phú Lâm, described briefly in the 20th Division History, was a particularly bloody battle. During the night-long fight the Japanese killed about 100 attackers while taking 200 prisoners and several weapons. Japanese casualties amounted to one dead and two wounded. The Việt Minh had transported 15 truckloads of Vietnamese from Mytho to participate in the assault, and the number of attackers was estimated to be between 500 and 1000 men. The Việt Minh troops were led by an unidentified young man of 24 years of age, a Vietnamese of French citizenship who had been an enlisted man [other rank] in the 11th RIC.

The meagre firepower of the attacking force included 70 muskets and 3 submachine guns, and subsequent interrogation revealed that the attack had been launched in an effort to secure weapons.

Among the Allies the suspicion grew that the Japanese were inflating their reports, and this action was described in part by the Intelligence Summary of 22 October:

"... an attack was put in against a Jap HQ at PHU LAM. Interrogation reports suggest that the Jap claim to have killed 100 out of 1000 was greatly exaggerated, but they certainly rounded up 329 men, women and children as PW." 38

Despite this sarcastic summary, the important part played by the Japanese troops at this stage cannot be emphasized too strongly. They were doing the lion's share of the dirty work in clearing road blocks, patrolling, and investigating and rounding up wanted Vietnamese.* After a slow start the Japanese were now taking a more active role in anti-Viet Minh operations, but their distaste for this activity remained undiminished. They were in a totally unenviable position.

* And stolen cows. On 14 October the Japanese were ordered to round up 70 stolen cows, believed to be 5 kilometers from Phú Lâm, and return them to the Race Course. This incident of "cow-napping" would be humorous except for the fact that the Việt Minh siege of Saigon was having an effect and the beef was badly needed.

On 14 October, 32 Brigade continued to run into strong opposition as they consolidated their positions and gradually moved the Việt Minh out of their suburban stronghold in the north. Primary objectives of Woodford's Gurkhas and Punjabis were the river bridges north of Saigon. The Gurkhas had to charge one bridge and use armored cars to secure another. More than five Japanese were seen with Việt Minh forces in the course of stiff fighting which left 24 Việt Minh and one Gurkha dead. Despite this, the north bank was still in Việt Minh hands and early in the battle the Gurkhas of 4/2 GR were forced to abandon a truck and a jeep which were captured by the Việt Minh. Major Cobb and Captain Spark were fired on at close range, and when Brigadier Woodford came up to take a look the Việt Minh, no respectors of rank, fired on him too. 1 Gurkha later died of his wounds and 10 Việt Minh were killed; others probably died in the jungle or fell into the river.

Northwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt the 3/8 Gurkhas cleared Việt Minh from a bridge with a bayonet charge, and 4/2 GR ran into "strong opposition" in clearing two bridges to the east of 3/8 GR.

In 80 Brigade's area, Taunton's troops were subjected to sniping, arson, and road blocks, and two mortar bombs damaged a cable in the power station. In three days over 125 Việt Minh had been killed, if Japanese casualty estimates were correct, while two Indians and one Japanese were killed. Nearly 350 suspected Việt Minh were arrested.

Most of Indochina was now tense with unrest as the two sides in the Saigon area rested from the fighting of the previous day. Pro-French individuals were being arrested and shot in southern Laos, while the coastal areas north and east of Saigon were nests of Việt Minh activity. A low grade intelligence report was now received in Saigon that 1000 Japanese troops from Cambodia had joined a force of 10,000 Viet Minh soldiers in Tây Ninh, the Cao Đài capital northwest of Saigon.

Back in London, the Joint Planning Staff, as instructed, gave their opinion of Slim's letter to Alanbrooke on the worsening situation inherited by the British in the French and Dutch possessions of Indochina and the Netherlands East Indies. In the manner of headquarters staffs everywhere, their response of the 14th reflected their long distance from the scene of these immensely difficult problems. As to Slim's recommendation that the removal of the Japanese from Indochina and the NEI should have priority over their evacuation from Burma and Malaya,

the best the JPS could do was to say that "With regard to priorities for evacuation of the Japanese, this is a matter for the Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia, in consultation with General MacArthur."³⁹

On the following day Mountbatten was informed by the Chiefs of Staff that action was being taken to accelerate the transfer of the 9th DIC to Saigon. He immediately wrote to Gracey, asking him to "Please inform Leclerc and tell him how glad I am that our repeated attacks have borne fruit at last."⁴⁰

A message from Gracey to Slim clarified the immediate background to the violence. The "Suggestions, assurances and statements made by Hirst to the Annamite leaders on October 9 were all bounden only repeat only in the event of the continuation of the truce. In view truce is broken and remains broken... all Hirst's statements of 9 October are therefore inoperative."

General Leclerc flew to Phnom Penh on the 15th and arrested the Cambodian Prime Minister. It was said that Lieutenant Colonel Huard, commanding the 5th RIC (in Phnom Penh as acting High Commissioner for Cambodia) was supposed to have done this, but did not feel confident enough to do so. Gracey's representative in Phnom Penh, acting Brigadier Murray, had recommended the arrest because of the Prime Minister's pro-Japanese conduct. Leclerc made the arrest by a simple nod of the head -- not a word was said, and both he and the arrested minister flew back to Saigon in the afternoon.

To avoid the unpleasantness the King of Cambodia had embarked on a pilgrimage before Leclerc arrived and returned the day after the Prime Minister's arrest. After the return of Leclerc and his captive to Saigon Huard rounded up the remaining known extremists in Phnom Penh and the situation returned to normal. As reported by ALFFIC Headquarters to ALFSEA, "Altogether a very satisfactory coup d'etat by the French with strong flavour of Ruritania."⁴¹

Gracey's personal account of affairs in Cambodia was given in his rebuttal to the version produced by Mountbatten's staff. In his response on 3 October 1946 to the SEAC Recorder, Gracey wrote:

"As regards Cambodia, the situation was that shortly after the Japanese removed the Vichy government in March 1945, an anti-French prime minister, who had been sentenced to death for treason, was put into power by the Japanese, and gradually the loyalist element in CAMBODIA was ousted from power, against

the King's wishes. He, however, was powerless to interfere with Japanese machinations.

The establishment of the Annamite regime in COCHIN-CHINA, ANNAM and TONKING had its repercussions in CAMBODIA -- not only did Annamite [Viet Minh] influence increase, but also the loyalty of the forces of law and order was gradually being undermined.

Shortly before the arrival of the Allied Mission in SAIGON, R.A.P.W.I. teams, and small detachments of French and British special intelligence Forces arrived in CAMBODIA, and reported the fact that to ensure the compliance with the terms of the surrender by the Japanese troops in CAMBODIA, a British commander and staff were required in PHNOM-PENH, the capital, and if law and order were to be kept, some French or British troops, or both, were most desirable...

Shortly after Colonel MURRAY arrived, he reported that in his opinion, the speedy arrest of the Prime Minister was essential if CAMBODIA was not to be embroiled in serious civil disturbances, or worse. It was essential to the Allied forces that there should be no trouble in CAMBODIA, as it was providing the fresh food supplies for SAIGON and CHOLON, which were not obtainable in COCHIN-CHINA owing to the Annamite food blockade.

Opportunely, General LeCLERC arrived at this time, and at the request of the Allied commander, himself flew to PHNOM-PENH, arrested the Prime Minister, and flew back with him the same day to SAIGON. This very carefully arranged and neatly executed coup d'etat caused the trouble to subside immediately. Loyal and well tried ministers were appointed by the King, whose complicity in the coup d'etat was never in question, as the day was chosen during a week when he was away on a pilgrimage.

Confidence was restored, the Japanese officers in CAMBODIA, completely surprised, started to cooperate at once -- later, they openly expressed admiration at the speed, secrecy and thoroughness with which we had spiked their guns! ... There was very little trouble in CAMBODIA thanks to the above strong action."

But there was no flavour of Ruritania in the Saigon area as there now occurred a number of small, sharp fights between the British/Indian troops and the Viêt Minh, with 3/8 GR, 4/2 GR, 9/14 Punjab and 4 Dogra

(plus some Japanese units) all reporting actions. One armored car became bogged down in Hành Thành Tây village, north of Tân Sơn Nhứt and northwest of Gò Vấp, and was guarded all night by a platoon from Yoshida Butai until it could be extricated in the morning.⁴² The 3/8 Gurkhas killed twelve Việt Minh while conducting sweeps and seizing a bridge, and armored cars supporting them killed six more; 25 Việt Minh prisoners were taken.

In the United States, the British Military Attache wrote to Mountbatten from Washington, stating that the father of the assassinated Lieutenant Colonel Dewey had offered to increase the reward for the return of his son's body from the current 5000 piasters. However, he agreed to withdraw the offer when he realized the potentially dangerous consequences of the act, for it offered an incentive for the murder of officers in the future.⁴³

Gracey's Headquarters now issued ALFFIC Operation Instruction No. 5,⁴⁴ which divided the Saigon/Cholon area and suburbs into four sectors, known as 32 Brigade, French, 80 Brigade and Royal Artillery Sectors. In the 80 Brigade sector, 4/17 Dogra was experiencing the frustrations associated with guerilla warfare; their unit war diary stated that many sweeps were fruitless as weapons "are obviously hidden with great care, probably under floors and other such places, and unless the search is 100% thorough it is useless. With the troops available only very small areas can be tackled."

During the 16 October daily conference between Hirst and the Japanese, the latter handed over a report on the Phú Lâm operations during the night of 13/14 October. They also requested written confirmation of Gracey's orders (transmitted by Hirst to General Manaki) to arrest certain Vietnamese leaders. The conference minutes noted that

"The Japanese referred to more complaints of illegal action, e.g. looting, removal of vehicles etc by French nationals against the property of Japanese civilians. The Japanese also stated that, in view of the above, it was becoming increasingly difficult to restrain junior officers, NCOs and men from taking retaliatory action, e.g. by deserting from the Japanese forces and joining the Annamites to fight the French. The Japanese added, however, that stern measures were being taken to prevent this." ⁴⁵

An entry in the 9/14 Punjab Newsletter is indicative of the steadily rising tempo of the hostilities during this period:

"... we have been busy searching and patrolling, bringing in arms and suspects and generally ensuring the safety of our portion of the SAIGON perimeter. We have had casualties, Sepoy TOR MOHD of D Coy killed and some ten men wounded, though not seriously, but the rebels have suffered far more heavily than we. Among our wounded is MAJOR APPS who was sniped at close range in GOVAP. He had a miraculous escape as a bullet drilled his right cheek bone, passed behind his nose and came out through the left cheek bone without doing any material damage. He has been in hospital for a fortnight but should be out in a couple of days with his beauty unimpaired. His fourth wound in this war.

It is an unpleasant type of war, the enemy wear no uniform and one seldom sees them carrying arms, but there is always the odd sniper and the apparently harmless bystander who throws a grenade and ducks for cover. It looks as though the French have a tricky time ahead of them." 46

On the night of 15/16 October the Viet Minh assaulted a 3/8 Gurkha position at a bridge in which 400 desperate attackers, some armed with bows and arrows, were beaten back. The Viet Minh used a form of tear gas in the attack, and analysis of the arrowheads revealed sublethal traces of strychnine. One Gurkha was killed, and in this and other attacks 16 more Viet Minh were shot dead.

As a result of this raid the Japanese were asked if there were any stocks of poison gas in Indochina. The Japanese replied that there were none in the south but the possibility existed that there might be some in Tonkin. However, the Chinese had invested the north, and the Viet Minh were well armed and organized there, so there would be little chance of investigating the report or securing the gas, if any. Additionally, reports continued to flow into Saigon of organized Viet Minh reinforcements from the north. Giáp himself has stated:

"After the triumph of the [August] revolution, liberation troops emerged in every locality and in the first days of the revolution, when the French colonialists coming at the heels of the British troops started war in South Vietnam, many units of the Vietnam Liberation

Army got ready to go south. These were not merely platoons of some dozens as before but thousands of young patriots from every locality who, responding to the appeal of the revolution, resolutely went south to fight the aggressors. Throughout the country, every day witnessed moving, encouraging scenes of these youths piling into long trains which took them to the southern part of their fatherland to fight together with their compatriots for national independence." 47

The main enemy were the reactionary French colonialists, "formerly the most zealous lackeys of the Japanese." 48

The 3/8 Gurkha Rifles War Diary records the escalating violence as its companies and platoons were constantly engaged by the Viet Minh. On 16 October their day began at 0800 when a Gurkha section on patrol killed a Viet Minh attempting to assassinate the section leader. In the evening D Company were attacked by a large force of Vietnamese, and one Gurkha was killed; the Việt Minh left 16 dead when they were beaten back.

The completion of the buildup of 20 Indian Division occurred on the 17th, for Gracey's third brigade (100 Brigade, commanded by the larger than life figure of Brigadier C.H.B. Rodham*) arrived in Saigon. 49 As they disembarked a further series of sharp fights occurred throughout the area. Ten armed Vietnamese were arrested during the course of a search of Gò Vấp, and a line party was shot at and grenaded not far away. In 80 Brigade's area 3/1 Gurkhas, acting on a report that eleven Japanese anti-tank guns were in the sector, conducted a search and uncovered four dismantled guns. A boatload of ten armed Vietnamese was sunk while attempting to cross a canal, and only two men were seen to escape.

Allied intelligence indicated that the main Viet Minh strength lay in the Thủ Đức - Biên Hòa - Thủ Dầu Một area north and northeast of Saigon; it was here that General Gracey decided to position the newly arrived 100 Brigade.

Although major Việt Minh assaults on and within Saigon had abated, widespread guerilla activity by small groups continued to harass the Allies and take its toll, and reports persisted of Việt Minh forces moving south from Tonkin.

* "Roddy" Rodham, who died in Pakistan in 1973, is remembered with awe and affection by his colleagues. A huge man, he could not fit in the small front seat of a Jeep and was chauffeured while sitting in a specially constructed rear seat; a larger windshield was also installed in his jeep. (Major Peter Prentice, Personal Interview, 19 August 1977)

The Japanese were ordered by Brigadier Hirst to provide eight Japanese interpreters for the use of 100 Brigade, as Anglo-Japanese military cooperation was increasing dramatically. They were also ordered to produce their key to the vault of the bank at Dalat; the other key was said to be in Việt Minh hands. More will be said of the transfer of millions of piasters from the Japanese to the Việt Minh, but at this moment the sole key in Japanese hands was deemed so important that a special aircraft was made available to bring it to Saigon.

As a result of recent French actions the British now discussed the question of the unauthorized burning by French troops of a village south of Rue Verdun. General Leclerc said that he would make sure that Colonel Rivier's forces would not repeat the act.

Gracey's policy of making sure that his troops were highly visible to the population was paying dividends, and on the 18th 16 Cavalry and 1/19 Hyderabad troops did a flag march through Cholon. It was "A great success. Considerable cheering by the Chinese population." 50

However, at the same time to the north the Việt Minh fired on 4/2 GR troops on the road between Gò Vấp and Battalion Headquarters; using machine guns and rifles, they ambushed the Gurkhas from the same place where grenades had been hurled by unseen attackers the previous day. At this time "B" Company, in their words, "plastered" the area with two-inch mortar and small arms fire and burnt surrounding houses; "Much blood found but no bodies," 51 and 14 suspects were arrested.

In 80 Brigade's area a 4/17 Dogra writer said:

"Shooting match between French and Annamites in Rue de Nancy reported to us by an excited French soldier during the morning. Fighting patrol sent out to investigate found the incident finished. It is very difficult to assess the value or accuracy of these French reports." 52

Another boat load of armed Viet Minh was now sunk attempting to cross the Arroyo Chinois near the western tip of Khanh Hôi, and RAF pilots reported that nearly all roads out of Saigon were blocked, either by trenching, felled trees or earth works (as in the case of the Gia Định - Thu Dầu Một road). A "low grade" intelligence report said that Vietnamese were seen placing "native poison" in water wells between Thu Dầu Một and Laithieu.

ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.6 was issued to Air Commodore Cheshire. He was told that during the next three days, before Japanese reinforcements could arrive, there was "considerable danger" that the Viêt Minh might attack the small Japanese garrison and the French civilian population in Đàlat. Two Japanese battalions, each short one company, were en route to Đàlat, but for three days [18,19,20 October] the RAF was ordered to carry out strong shows of force over the Đàlat area. The Spitfire squadron commander was given the authority to use his discretion in deciding to use the leaflets available to him and to commence offensive action against armed Viêt Minh bands seen attacking "the French civilian concentration areas, Japanese forces or vulnerable points in Đàlat such as boosting stations, water supply installations, railway station, etc. If he decides upon any offensive action he will use minimum force to achieve his object."⁵³

There was "great excitement" at 273 Squadron when it was announced that they were to do an "actual strike" at Đàlat, and the strike team was formed by drawing names out of a hat, after which the selected pilots were briefed. "Then there was great disappointment, the show was cancelled."⁵⁴ Finally, two Spitfires, carrying 90 gallon fuel drop tanks, took off for Đàlat at 1330 on the 17th:

"... they had a good look round the town and did a few dummy attacks on a concentration of Annamites. They both [S/Ldr Sylvester and F/Lt Lilburn] said when they got back, that the country that they flew over was very bad. They dropped special leaflets on the Annamites which as afterwards confirmed, did a lot to clear up a sticky situation."

The Japanese reported that a liaison officer (recently returned from a visit to Đàlat) reported that "the situation there would be completely in hand if 300 reinforcements were received." The Japanese also stated that "negotiations for the key of the bank vault, now in Annamite hands, were in progress. The key in Japanese hands would be returned as soon as possible." They were also sending an officer of regimental commander's rank to Nha Trang to assume command of the 1100 Japanese troops in that area (600 of whom were railway operating troops).

On the night of 18/19 October five grenades were thrown into the 9/14 Punjab perimeter, but no casualties were incurred, and desultory

sniping continued throughout the night. Mortar fire dispersed concentrations of Việt Minh, and a few rounds of artillery from 114 Regiment's guns kept the Việt Minh north of Tân Sơn Nhứt dispersed at night. A mortar concentration was laid down on the western edge of Gò Vấp, after which ten Việt Minh were captured and a great deal of blood discovered. In the southern part of Cholon an armored car became stuck when the road subsided due to sabotage. On the 19th a platoon from 4/10 GR (Murray's battalion) flew to Phnom Penh to relieve the original platoon from 1/1 GR.

Gracey now asked Browning for permission to send a permanent British representative to the Chinese headquarters in Hanoi. This was brought on by the exasperating discussions at Tourane [Đà Nẵng] following the seizure there of eight Japanese aircraft* under British control. As Gracey said in his telegram,

"During discussions at TOURANE to facilitate release [of] our aircraft it became evident Chinese consider exact position 16 degrees parallel as considerably South of position as demarcated by this Commission." 55

The negotiations were complicated by the fact that the Chinese were annoyed that Terauchi still retained command of Japanese troops in Tourane, and Gracey foresaw similar problems at other areas along the common border. His means of communicating with Hanoi were limited indeed: he could only go through SACSEA and General Carton de Wiart in Chungking.

The Chinese themselves thought that Gracey should send a representative to Hanoi. Chinese military officials in Tourane representing the local commander, General Tsung, suggested that a British Liaison Mission in Hanoi

"would considerably assist parochial discussions on the following points:- (A) Exact position 16 degrees parallel (B) Arrangements for release, control, administration of movement by air, land or sea North and South of 16 degrees parallel." 56

Because of the Chinese attitude towards the French, Gracey felt it would be better at this time to omit any French representation on the proposed Liaison Mission. In addition to normal liaison duties, Gracey thought that the mission would provide him with valuable intelligence of the political situation in the north. Meiklereid suggested that

* carrying food.

the dispatch of a British mission to Hanoi would result in an immediate request by the Chinese for a similar mission in Saigon. As it was, a British mission did go to Hanoi in November; it was headed by a remarkable officer, of whom more will be subsequently said.

The 3/8 Gurkhas were busy on the 19th. A patrol from B Company searched a grid square about 1½ miles north of Tân Sơn Nhứt; the area searched was roughly a square mile, and they rounded up 25 suspects found sleeping in the jungle.* Southwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt C Company, guarding the main crossroads leading from Cholon northwest, captured a Vietnamese "'snooping' around our position." A mile to the west a C Company patrol engaged six Việt Minh, killing two. The house sheltering the six was destroyed by fire after it was discovered to be harboring a Việt Minh telephone exchange.

On the following day a 3/8 position on a bridge five miles northwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt was attacked, and a Gurkha was slightly wounded by a premature explosion from his own three inch mortar. One of the attackers was killed.

The hapless General Manaki now received another stern letter from Brigadier Hirst, who stated that he had received a report that a large Việt Minh force had arrived in the Thu Dầu Môt area. Continued Hirst:

"Furthermore, I have been informed that your forces at THU DAU MOT have received these Annamites in a most improper manner and have even shown them friendliness.

I view this report with grave concern and demand that you immediately despatch an officer of suitable rank to THU DAU MOT to investigate the situation and that you furnish me with a full report in writing on the conduct of your forces in that area as soon as possible." 57

It was evident that the only way the British would deny the Thu Dầu Môt - Thủ Đức - Biên Hòa assembly areas to the Việt Minh would be by occupying them, and this they would soon do.

The publication of Operation "Moussac" on 20 October marked the first time that the legendary figure of Jacques Massu enters the history of Indochina. The newly arrived Lieutenant Colonel Massu, the Roi des Nases, Commander of Groupement Massu [Regiment de Marche de la 2^o DB]**, was to be in charge of the operation.⁵⁸ It was the first

* An informer later reported them to have been involved in attacks on British forces the day before.

** Deuxième Division Blindée, or Second Armored Division.

French thrust out of Saigon and the first step in the French effort to reconquer Indochina.

The operation was planned for 24 October, and would be a French - British - Japanese affair, for the Royal Navy, RAF, a British Army Liaison officer and the Japanese Army were involved in supporting the French. Details of the operation, as published on 20 October, were as follows. The Royal Navy would transport 270 French troops by water to its objective at Mytho, while the French would provide a ferry near Vinh Long, where the RN would also provide a tug. The RAF would attempt to provide photo reconnaissance of the operational area and would reconnoiter the roads and ferries. On 21 October the French were to take over 31 trucks from the British at Tân Sơn Nhứt, and three ambulances on the following day. The French would thus have three days in which to bring the vehicles to peak mechanical condition. Brigadier Taunton was assigned to provide a Major from 80 Brigade to act as liaison to transmit orders to the Japanese, for the latter would not accept orders from the French.

The French were authorized air support* "in case of grave emergency", and the British Royal Engineer report on the Saigon-Mytho road was delivered to Leclerc; the Japanese were also asked to report on the bridges in the area and, if possible, to guard them. There were three known road blocks en route, and the Japanese were ordered to seize them on 21 October.

Rodham now issued "100 Brigade Operational Instruction No.52".** This order outlined the details of the British move into Thủ Đức, Thủ Dầu Một and Biên Hòa, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Reports from "low grade" French sources stated that three trains carrying three to four thousand Việt Minh from Tonkin had arrived in Thủ Đức during the last few days. Allied intelligence estimated Việt Minh forces as follows: 2000 Vietnamese and 200 Japanese in Nhà Bè (just downstream from Saigon) under Nguyễn Văn Khánh; 2500 Vietnamese and 150 Japanese at Thủ Thua (southeast of Saigon) under Nguyễn Văn Bá; 2000 Vietnamese and 150 Japanese at Cangioc (south of Saigon); 2000 Vietnamese and 100 Japanese in Cha Bá Hòm (southwest of Saigon); 500 Japanese (with 2 artillery pieces) dressed as Vietnamese, in a

* Massu said that he never asked for, nor received, air support [personal interview, Paris, 1977].

** Dated 20 October.

plantation just north of Thủ Đức; 3000 Koreans in Thủ Đức (via Tây Ninh), with 3 guns. These forces were in addition to the Việt Minh cadres operating in the Saigon/Cholon area.

In a separate operation two RAF Regiment men went to Đà Lạt as escorts for two officers who received the bank's keys from the manager. The Japanese had said that the trip was hazardous and that they would bring the keys to Saigon, but the manager refused to hand over the keys to them.

The Japanese were brought into the picture when "Order No.1" was issued by Brigadier Rodham to General Manaki. Manaki was informed that 100 Brigade would be occupying Thủ Đức, Biên Hòa and Thủ Dầu Một on 23, 24 and 25 October respectively. Wrote Rodham, "Having occupied these areas I will then assume responsibility for the maintenance of law and order in the area."⁵⁹ Manaki was ordered to facilitate the move of 100 Brigade by taking a number of actions, as follows: (1) The Japanese were to continue disarming all Vietnamese (including police) and search for weapons in the Thủ Đức - Thủ Dầu Một - Biên Hòa area; (2) keep the Route Coloniale open between those towns [dug-in Việt Minh at road blocks would be dealt with by Rodham's tanks and armored cars]; (3) the Japanese were to "thoroughly clear" a three mile radius of those three towns. Steps were taken to minimize the possibility of the Việt Minh fomenting trouble between British and Japanese troops by firing on Rodham's troops as they approached the Japanese. Japanese troops in Thủ Đức, Biên Hòa and Thủ Dầu Một would then come under the command of Major Mullaly (4/10 GR), Lieutenant Colonel Pickard (14/13 FFR) and Lieutenant Colonel Jarvis (1/1 GR) respectively.

The Việt Minh were now generally switching to a guerilla role, abandoning for the most part direct assaults on Gracey's forces. However, the sniping and grenading of the Allied troops continued. Word now arrived that on 10 October a Japanese patrol from Phanrang to Đà Lạt was attacked by the Việt Minh and only one man survived to reach safety. The Japanese further reported that the Việt Minh were training soldiers in the Xuân Lộc area, about 55 kilometers east of Biên Hòa. The Japanese were also investigating a report that an entire Japanese unit had defected to the Việt Minh in Thủ Dầu Một.

During their daily conference with Brigadier Hirst, during which they received their orders, the Japanese stated that regimental

commanders summoned from Biên Hòa to Saigon (for discussion on the impending Allied operation) were delayed due to a clash with the Việt Minh. They had also somehow managed to retrieve the Việt Minh's key to the Đàlat Bank and had returned it to the French manager. The Japanese, in view of their increasing military involvement against the Việt Minh, now asked permission, "in cases of immediate necessity, [to] despatch forces up to coy strength to remove road blocks etc., without first requesting permission from the local Allied Comds."⁶⁰

They were informed that

"in the case of small obstacles easily removed by a few men, prior sanction need not be requested, but that, in the case of large blocks, the Japanese Comd would always refer the matter to the Allied sector Comd before initiating action."

On 22 October 9/14 Punjab lost a soldier killed at a crossroads east of Gò Vấp, just south of the main road and rail bridge over the river; another soldier was wounded. The 3/8 Gurkhas, acting on an informer's tip, arrested 31 Vietnamese near the village of Tân Sơn Nhì, about four miles southwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt airfield. Artillery fire was called in to silence sniping and medium machine gun fire on a 4/2 GR position on a bridge two miles north of Gò Vấp. The population was also now treated to the hitherto unlikely spectacle of Japanese infantry units, carrying out the occupations of Chợ Ballom [sic] and Bin Diên [sic]*, being supported in their minor clashes with the Việt Minh by 16 Cavalry armored cars.

A grade "A" report from French sources identified the overall Viet Minh commander of the Biên Hòa district as Hoàng Minh Châu, recently arrived from Hanoi. It was also reported to Allied intelligence that "1000 Tonkinese troops" had arrived in the Xuân Lộc area on 15 October, armed with rifles and one light machine gun per eight men. They were said to be commanded by a dozen Japanese officers including Lieutenant Sakamoto, the ex-Kempei Tai chief at Cap St. Jacques. More ominous was the report that the Japanese had handed over 200 tons of ammunition to the Việt Minh from dumps in Biên Hòa, Mỹ Tho, Bình Long, and Tân An.⁶¹

Although the fighting was receiving the most attention, there were other pressing problems to consider. On 22 October, the Control Commission's chief Civil Affairs Officer, Lieutenant Colonel T.M. Kirkwood, wrote to the senior SEAC CA officer, Brigadier Gibbons.

* The accompanying map coordinates place these areas about 20 miles southwest of Saigon.

Kirkwood commented on the inadequacy of a War Establishment strength of two CA officers, and despite the fact that the War Office and the SEAC Headquarters attitude was that "we should let the French do it all", it was not that simple. Because of unrest "The writ of the French Administration in Saigon and throughout Indo-China does not go very far." In almost all matters concerning the Japanese and Vietnamese the French were dependent on the British. There were complex problems of finance, property, justice, trade, civilian supplies and shipping which must be worked "after the fighting troops of 20 Division are withdrawn."

Kirkwood compared the situation to the Balkans in 1944 at the time of the British intervention and Syria in 1943/44, when Beirut and Damascus saw considerable rioting. In late September a basic Civil Food Control Organization was hastily set up to avoid famine, and Kirkwood wrote that if Headquarters (Gibbons) had any doubts as to the gravity of the situation he was invited to visit Saigon to discuss it on the spot. The situation was being aggravated by the fact that the Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese appeared to be ignoring French orders.

In Kandy, Mountbatten dined with the French naval commander, Admiral Graziani, on the 22nd; Graziani carried a letter from D'Argenlieu to Mountbatten. Mountbatten stated that D'Argenlieu should have been equally as delighted "that the continued pressure which I have applied to the Chiefs of Staff has succeeded in advancing the date of the arrival of the 9th DIC from the end of December to November." He quashed rumours that he was displeased with D'Argenlieu's impending arrival in Kandy and added:

"My own hope is that General Gracey and his Division will be able to prove of real service to you within the limitations which, as you know, my Government have placed upon their activities."* 62

A team of Japanese communications officers now visited the 20 Division Signals branch, for 100 Brigade lines were now being maintained by the Japanese. By 15 October the temperamental radio link with Phnom Penh was working satisfactorily and a link had also been established with 7 Division in Bangkok.

* Someone on the Control Commission staff had placed two large exclamation points, in blue pencil, aside the last statement. [Actually, the Chiefs of Staff had overruled Mountbatten in freeing Gracey from the unrealistic limitations imposed upon him by SACSEA].

"ALFFIC Intelligence Summary No.1", dated 23 October, traced the recent political history of the Saigon area. It noted that the Viet Minh had agreed to the truce on 2 October "Following engagements in which Allied Troops and Japanese inflicted severe casualties on the Annamite insurgents, in particular in N W SAIGON, and a successful sweep through GIA DINH which demonstrated our ability to move troops out of SAIGON when we wished..."⁶³ On 10, 11 and 12 October Japanese soldiers had been seen on the Viet Minh side during 32 Brigade's operations in Gia Định and Gò Vấp. Regarding the Thủ Đức - Biên Hòa - Thủ Dầu Một area:

"In the absence of reports other than Japanese and from local sources, no very clear picture of events in this area has been obtained. The Japanese view is that only small Annamite forces have been located in these places (except that they complain of continual attempts to rob their ammunition depots in the BIEN HOA area). The local source view is that large forces are collecting in the area between THU DUC and DIAN on the railway, with the intention of opposing our further advance. Tac/R* reports have on several occasions noted demonstrations of approx 1000 in THU DAU MOT."

The Control Commission intelligence officers had worked out their unique method of evaluating reports:

"The principle adopted in considering these low grade reports is (a) where Japanese and local sources disagree, to disregard the Japs and accept that a proportion of the figure suggested by the local source (usually 10%) is actually in the area as stated; (b) where Japanese and local source reports agree, to accept a rather higher percentage figure for the area."

The intelligence staff also pointed out that the main support for the Việt Minh came from the Tonkinese coolies on the plantations, "so that any trained bodies of these already in the area may be the occasion" for reports of trainloads of Tonkinese arriving from the north. These rumours "would, of course, greatly encourage the wavering Annamites of Cochin-China, who have never been as active as those from the NORTH."

* RAF tactical reconnaissance.

The fortifications in Baria and Cap St. Jacques were still held by the Japanese, whose attempt to barter 107 rifles for food appeared to have been thwarted by Manaki's order to maintain surrender discipline. Nha Trông was another key trouble spot, but again orders from Saigon had improved the Japanese attitude as a handful of French marines landed to cover the off-loading of food for the beleaguered civilian population. The Japanese reported that public opinion in the Mytho-Cântho area was "excitable", but the Japanese were acting vigorously in this region, guarding important bridges and removing road blocks. Việt Minh strength in this area appeared to be "surprisingly low."

In conclusion, the Intelligence Summary stated that the consensus of reports was that the main Việt Minh strength was in the Thủ Đức - Biên Hòa - Thu Dầu Một area. It remained to be confirmed that the Việt Minh here were being reinforced from Hanoi:

"It appears likely however that better disciplined troops will be met here than elsewhere, and an attempt at defence (as opposed to the normal guerilla tactics) may be encountered. The value of Viet Minh forces in other areas may be considered to be that of large bands of brigands."

Since Gracey intended to concentrate the bulk of the surrendered Japanese forces in the region between Thủ Đức - Biên Hòa - Thu Dầu Một, he would first have to occupy these towns and clear the area of Việt Minh. That task fell to Rodham's newly-arrived 100 Brigade.

Footnotes: Chapter XII

- 1 Great Britain, Public Record Office, WO 172/7008, War Diary 20 Indian Division, 10 October 1945.
- 2 Vice Admiral the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, Post Surrender Tasks, Section E of the Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff (London: HMSO, 1969), p.282.

Major General Harold Pyman, Slim's Chief of Staff at ALFSEA, was in Saigon on 8 and 9 October. His personal diary records the following comments:

The attitude of the FRENCH is that they are not empowered to make decisions affecting FRENCH sovereignty, but they are willing at once to bring ANNAMITES into close collaboration in the administration of the SAIGON area. They

guarantee (but nobody will believe a FRENCH guarantee) that their policy towards the ANNAMITES will be extremely liberal, and that there will be no reprisals. The FRENCH delegates at the meetings have been most patient and have shown great willingness to meet the ANNAMITES more than halfway in order to prevent the negotiations from breaking down.

General GRACEY is not prepared to allow the ANNAMITES demands to be met, because he considers that another reign of terror would immediately ensue. He has made it clear to the ANNAMITES that so far he has only used minimum force and BRITISH troops have only been used defensively; but if they are called upon again to restore law and order they will use all the forces at their disposal. Therefore a large number of ANNAMITE lines will be lost... We can only hope that the FRENCH Government will be fair to the ANNAMITES."

Pyman wrote that although it would be a "great tragedy" if the Viet Minh decided to fight, a "major rebellion" would probably break out if the talks failed. But if so, "We and the FRENCH -- for what they are worth -- are in a strong position to meet them."

Before his departure from Saigon on 9 October, Pyman promised Maunsell to speed up the arrival of tank crews and to clear up questions concerning the use of the RAF.

[Pyman Papers, Liddell Hart Center for Military Studies, King's College, University of London].

- 3 Gracey Papers, 2/8 Punjab Newsletter.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Gracey Papers, 9/14 Punjab Newsletter.
- 6 Gracey Papers, 20th Indian Division's History.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 GB, PRO, WO 172/1787, Sqm 189 COS 50 (Saigon Control Commission to SACSEA), 11 October 1945.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 GB, PRO, WO 172/1787, War Diary Headquarters SEAC, 11 October 1945.
- 12 GB, PRO, WO 203/4454, SAC 25800 (SACSEA to ALFSEA, info Gracey), 19 October 1945.
- 13 GB, PRO, CAB 105/162; also WO 203/4744, SEACOS 510, 11 October 1945.
- 14 Gracey Papers, ALFFIC Op.Instr.No.2, 10 October 1945.

- 15 GB, PRO, WO 172/7749, War Diary 9/14 Punjab, 11 October 1945.
- 16 Gracey Papers, 9/14 Punjab Newsletter.
- 17 GB, PRO, WO 172/7747, War Diary 9/14 Punjab; the captured Viet Minh official was reputed to be the secretary to the local commander-in-chief.
- 18 Gracey Papers, 4/2 GR Newsletter.
- 19 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, INTSUM No.23 to 1500 hours, 11 October 1945.
- 20 Gracey Papers, ALFFIC Op Inst No.4, 11 October 1945.
- 21 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, 8th Orders by Brigadier Hirst, 11 October 1945.
- 22 Although Lieutenant Colonel Hobbs, commanding 9/14 Punjab, passed the letter on up through channels to Gracey [who replied on 14 October], Hobbs sent an immediate reply to the Vietnamese commander, as follows:

In reply to your letter dated 11th October 1945 the questions you raise are being dealt with by the Commander of the Allied Forces in INDO CHINA, from whom you will receive details of the conditions he requires you to accept.

I am not authorized to give any answer on questions of policy, but you must clearly understand that any person found carrying arms will be arrested and disarmed. Any person resisting the movement of British troops will be shot.

As by now you are probably aware some of your men fired on my troops at 1-30 hours today on the outskirts of GOVAP. This action which was entirely unprovoked resulted in the death of one of my men. I am glad to say that your force was dispersed with casualties.

In the fourth paragraph of your letter you say that you are responsible for the actions of your men. I can assure you that any further hostile action on your part will be met with the full force at my disposal, which I may tell you is most formidable.

I will hold you entirely responsible for any incident which may occur in the future.

[Gracey Papers].

- 23 Gracey Papers, Ritchie to Viet Minh Commander, 14 October 1945.
- 24 Gracey Papers, 3/1 Gurkha Rifles Newsletter.

On the 12th, also, advance elements of 684 Squadron arrived. The enormity of the tasks laid out for the squadron is evident when considering the vast areas involved and the poor flying weather prevalent at the time of year. The photo reconnaissance Mosquitos were to map large areas in

Malaya, Sumatra, Java and Borneo besides having to cover all of the British section of French Indochina. Some of the Mosquitos even flew to Hanoi and back to map that city and key areas in the Red River delta.

The first Mosquito left Rangoon for Saigon on 12 October; it was flown by Squadron Leader W.M.Murray, a New Zealander, who temporarily took command of the squadron. The ground personnel embarking from Calcutta [the squadron had been based at Alipore] on 25 September had an inauspicious start, as they had been directed to the wrong ship and had to disembark at Rangoon and try it again. This first leg of the trip to Rangoon, must have been truly unpleasant as the squadron renamed the vessel the "Altmark" after the notorious prison ship of the German pocket battleship "Graf Spee".

The ground crews finally reached Saigon on 11 October, where they were in place to receive Murray on the 12th and the first flight of six Mosquitos on the 15th. By the end of October the squadron was in place, with detachments at China Bay (four aircraft) and the Cocos Islands (seven aircraft). A few photo reconnaissance Spitfires from 681 Squadron Detachment later augmented 684 Squadron at Tan Son Nhut.

25 GB, PRO, WO 203/5562, "FIC, Political and Internal Situation," 12 October 1945.

26 The 9th Battalion's Magazine described their arrival:

The Battalion arrived in Saigon without incident and soon settled down in what we thought was a "Land flowing with milk and honey." -- alas, a grim reminder met our eyes next morning -- four graves outside our staging camp.

The Battalion was split up next day, companies moving out to guard bridges, factories and other vital points. Battalion Headquarters was moved to the Fort [de Cai Mai, to relieve the Dogras] -- 'just like the Frontier, don't you know', and very soon the Union Jack flew over Cholon for the first time. The Battalion band -- only formed a few days before and consisting of two dhols, two surmais and a couple of buglers, led the Battalion through the streets.

Major General D.D.Gracey, CB, CBE, MC, soon came out to see us and presented medal ribbons to many of the officers, VCOs, and men.

27 Gracey Papers, 3/1 GR Newsletter.

28 The adventures of 2963 Squadron, RAF Regiment which would have stretched credulity to breaking point had they been enacted in a stage farce may be worth mentioning. In October 1944 (a month after it was formed) it departed Calcutta for a train and ferry journey to Burma. The units 6 officers and 137 men arrived in Chittagong on 27 October, and entrained for Dohazari. Their train immediately collided with a goods train and the engine was derailed. After a delay they arrived in Dohazari to discover that they were supposed to have remained in Chittagong, to which they returned the following day. On 30 October their brand new 3-ton truck was in a head-on collision while the unit was en route in heavy rain to a temporary camp in Ramu, and on 5 November returned to Chittagong, only to discover that no lodging was available, so they pushed on to Double Moorings.

At Double Moorings they found that no water was available due to contamination, but the Army came to their rescue with water. They finally found their water bowser, but it was unserviceable and the Army again rescued them. By now most of the officers had been in and out of hospitals for various ailments, mostly due to bad water.

On 10 November they left Double Moorings for Comilla, and the water bowser plus two 3-ton trucks broke down en route and were left on the road. On 11 November they arrived in Comilla but missed the turn to the airfield and wound up unexpectedly in another camp. By now they had had enough and defied orders to move on again, staying the night at the camp. Two more men went into hospital. On 13 November they departed Agartala (reached the day before) for the Syhlet transit camp (having prudently sent the troublesome bowser on ahead), only to find that no room was available at their destination — no one had warned the camp of their arrival and the men had to sleep in and under their trucks (except Corporal Jones, who fell off his motorcycle on a "rough road").

On 15 November the unit left for Shillong, and the log triumphantly stated that "all vehicles negotiate difficult bends and gradients", that is, all except the 3-ton Ford which crashed into a wall and broke its front axle and was left at the roadside. Arriving at Shillong that day, two more men went into the hospital, followed by three more on the 16th. On 18 November the 2963rd move on to Nowgong, but two trucks (or lorries) would not start and were left behind. The men again slept in their vehicles and the bowser broke down once more. On 19 November they arrived in Dimapur to find tents available (but no water) and one more truck gave up. The

next day, en route to Imphal, two more vehicles broke down, and it was a much-depleted unit which was welcomed by the 221 Group Commander [at this time 30 men, a quarter of the strength, were scattered in various hospitals along the way]. By now, even the break-down vehicle had broken down. Then just as things were looking up in Imphal, the entire unit received cholera shots.

However, comedy turned to tragedy when the unit arrived in Saigon, as on 2 October the commander, Squadron Leader Ward, was shot in the back and seriously wounded while riding in a Jeep near Tan Son Nhut.

29 GB, PRO, Air 29/1118, Log of 1307 Wing, RAF, 13 October 1945.

Major Matsuzato's report was as follows:

Report No.1 concerning the wiping out of Tan Son Nhu village.

To Wing Commander Allen October 13th.

1. Our troop returned at 16 hours safe and sound without any casualties, completing its duty.
2. The situation and the cause of fighting as follows
 - (a) Most of the armed Annamites have already gone away only a small number were left. These were no resistance at all and no damage as well. (b) After thorough searching we took the following arms as war prizes.
 1. 4 rifle bullets
 2. 1 hand grenade (without safety plug, so putting it into the well, made it unserviceable)
 3. About 30 bamboo spears and arrows (breaking into pieces, making them useless).

Signed. Major Matsuzato
Commanding Officer.

The "war prizes" were handed in to Wing Headquarters.
The RAF log of the events of the past few days is as follows:

It was a situation of some irony when Wing Commander Allen met the Jap Major Commanding and discussed the disposition of the Jap Forces...

A peculiar feature is also that the Japanese, whom we were fighting less than two months previously, are now aiding their victors against another enemy. Wing Commander Allen, O.C. 1307 Wing who has campaigned against the Japs from Onbank to Rangoon, now finds some of these very men under his command, and what is more proving very reliable in their defense duties at the airfield. An ironic situation from the point

of view of the Japs assisting us is that they risk being killed by their own weapons in the hands of the Annamites or even in the hands of Japanese fighting with the rebels; also, of course, the fighting in which they are involved has its root cause in the action the Japs took when they put the Annamites in power in March of this year.

At the end of October the RAF historian wrote, "There seems no immediate hope of a settlement in the dispute here, and with the dangers of infiltration ever present the need is for constant vigilance."

[GB, PRO, Air 29/1118, Log of 1307 Wing, RAF, October 1945].

- 30 Frontier Force Regimental Magazine, Vol. III, No.1, February 1946.
- 31 GB, PRO, WO 203/4273, SEACOS 513, 12 October 1945.
- 32 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, Hirst to Manaki, 13 October 1945.
- 33 GB, PRO, WO 172/9016, War Diary 63rd Indian Infantry Workshop Company, 13 October 1945.
- 34 GB, PRO, WO 203/5563, Meiklereid to Dening, 13 October 1945.
- 35 GB, PRO, WO 203/4273, Sqn 204 COS54, 14 October 1945.
- 36 The 3/1 GR Newsletter account complemented the official War Diary, and is as follows:

On the 14th, a pl of 'B' Coy was fairly heavily attacked by ANNAMITES with l.m.g.s, grenades and rifles. Despite the tenacity of this attack we only had one man wounded. In the dark it was impossible to assess the casualties to the enemy but they must have been considerable. During this attack 'D' Coy main position was also attacked, as was 'A' Coy in 'A' Area marked on the map. In this latter attack the quarter guard was hit by an incendiary grenade but three well aimed 3" mtr bombs broke up the attack which followed. 'C' Coy on the docks also received attention this same night when a party of -0 [the first digit is illegible] ANNAMITES, supported by l.m.gs and rifles from the houses charged the main entrance. This attack, typical Jap fashion, with all the screaming etc. was met with a hail of l.m.gs, fire and grenades at close range, it dispersed. M9AIs were fired into the l.m.g. positions in the houses and in an hour all was quiet. We only traced four ANNAMITES casualties, but they must have had at least fifteen in this action alone; 22 gun shot and other wound casualties were found in the ANNAMITE Hospital CHOLON subsequently and many fresh graves were found on the island. There is no doubt that the 14th was a well planned and co-ordinated attack in all sectors. It was a miserable failure and probably decided the ANNAMITES against any further [-] force. Incidents occurred daily for the rest of the month. An attempt was made to cross the River SAIGON from the EAST and

many attempts were made to cross the Canal de Derivation from the SOUTH, all attempts were defeated, boats were sunk and few survivors got away. Searchlights played their part on the River SAIGON. Perhaps the most amusing incident at this time was when a young Rfn [Rifleman] called 'Halt', three times, to a swimming ANNAMITE before shooting him; he didn't know that ANNAMITES cannot 'tread water' !

- 37 Gracey Papers, "20th Division's History".
- 38 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, ALFFIC Intelligence Summary, No. 2737/GSI, 22 October 1945.
- 39 GB, PRO, FO 371/46309 (F8661), 14 October 1945.
- 40 GB, PRO, WO 203/4454, NGS 271, 19 October 1945.
- 41 Gracey Papers.
- 42 By now the casualties were as follows:
- Vietnamese killed by British — 307
 - Vietnamese killed by Japanese — 255 (including 80 in Dalat), plus 180 wounded.
 - British casualties — 1 British Officer and 7 Indian/Gurkha other ranks killed, 29 wounded, 2 missing.
 - French casualties — 24 killed, 7 wounded, 2 missing.
 - Japanese casualties — 12 killed, 9 wounded, 2 missing (their figures).
- 43 The OSS were still involved in their malicious anti-French (and now, Anti-British), pro-Communist activities, and at this time the full story on the murder of the French officer Klotz, in Laos, became known. An OSS officer (who shall be named Major "B" and whose name is available in the archives) and party had parachuted into French Indochina from Kunming in late September and crossed into Northeastern Thailand, where they carried out anti-British and anti-French activities. Astonishingly even for the OSS, Major "B" announced that he was going to use the Nakon Phanom airstrip for his own purposes (although he had not bothered to ask the Thai authorities). This was ironic in that it was usually Wedemeyer's China Command who complained that Allied agents operated in their area without express permission, and Siam fell within SEAC. The US general at SEAC, Timberman, sent a stiff note to China Command and "B" and party were promptly ejected from whence they came, but not before they had managed to cause some mischief. According to Force 136, "B" later reported that Klotz's Viet Minh murderers had arrived on scene at OSS request and later "escaped". Mackenzie, head of Force 136, wrote to Dening about this despicable action and was not surprised at the Viet Minh escape, which happened "as we foresaw".
- 44 Gracey Papers, "ALFFIC Op. Inst. No.5", 16 October 1945.
- 45 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, Minutes of 16 October Conference.
- 46 Gracey Papers, 9/14 Punjab Newsletter.
- 47 Võ Nguyễn Giáp. The Military Art of People's War (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p.76.

- 48 Truong Chinh, Primer for Revolt, the August Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1963), p.17.
- 49 Arriving on 17 October were 4486 troops and 370 vehicles of 100 Brigade (14/13 FFR, 4/10 GR, 23 Mountain Regiment).
- 50 GB, PRO, WO 172/7353, War Diary 16 Cavalry, 18 October 1945.
- 51 GB, PRO, WO 172/7773, War Diary, 4/2 GR, 18 October 1945.
- 52 GB, PRO, WO 172/7757, War Diary 4/17 Dogra, 18 October 1945.
- 53 Gracey Papers, "ALFFIC Op.Instr.No.6", 18 October 1945.
- 54 GB, PRO, Air 27/1583, Log of 273 Squadron, 17 October 1945.
- 55 GB, PRO, WO 203/4932, 221 Sqn COS61, 19 October 1945.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, Hirst to Manako, 20 October 1945.
- 58 Massu had reached Saigon on 19 October after a circintous air journey from Ceylon, via Hyderabad, Calcutta, Rangoon and Bangkok. He had arrived in Colombo on the aircraft carrier Béaru. For his own account of the raising of the Groupement de Marche de la 2^o DB, and its subsequent operations in Indochina, see Massu's book Sept Ans Avec Leclerc [Paris: Plon, 1974].
- 59 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, Order No.1, 21 October 1945.
- 60 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, 21 October 1945.
- 61 Ibid., INTSUM No.34, 22 October 1945.
- 62 Gracey Papers, Mountbatten to D'Argenlieu, 23 October 1945.
- 63 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, ALFFIC Intelligence Summary No.1, 23 October 1945.

CHAPTER XIII

EXPANSION

I am absolutely convinced that the healing of our sick and weary world is going to be more complicated by the fact that a free, third rate and irresponsible Press are at large in the world today. They have consistently misquoted our statements and in fact done everything to embarrass the situation rather than help it. If you can only do something to persuade the people at home that 50% of our problems now have been due (and will be in the future) to the world Press, you will have done a most important thing.

Lieutenant General Browning to
Major General Penney
25 October 1945.

With the arrival of 100 Brigade, Gracey could now implement his plan to secure and pacify the Thu Đức - Thu Dầu Mốt - Biên Hoà triangle, in which the bulk of the Japanese were to be concentrated prior to their transfer to Cap St. Jacques for embarkation to Japan. As early as 19 October, 1/1 GR were alerted for their move to Thu Dầu Mốt. Although the 100 Brigade Operation Instruction No.52 (which dealt with the moves to the north) was dated 20 October, the ALFFIC Operation No. 7, the parent instruction, was dated 21 October, rather than the reverse. Certainly, Gracey wasted no time in pushing his third brigade out, for among other things Biên Hoà was developing into a major Việt Minh centre.

ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.7, signed by Brigadier Hirst, informed Rodham of his tasks and the makeup of the additional forces which were to come under his command. Rodham was ordered to "(a) Establish forces at Biên Hoà and Thu Dầu Mốt;* (b) Control the area and keep open the L of C** to SAIGON NORTH and EAST of 32 Brigade's present boundary, (c) Concentrate and disarm the Japanese forces."¹

Brigadier Rodham issued "Op Order No.2" on 21st October 1945. Woodford's 32 Brigade was to establish bridgeheads and secure cross roads leading out of Saigon, and the Japanese had been ordered to disarm the Việt Minh throughout the area. Also, "The day before the arrival of the Bde at THU DUC - BIEN HOA and THU DAU MOT, the Japanese have been ordered thoroughly to comb the area within three miles radius of each place for armed Annamites and hidden arms."²

In order to preclude the possibility of the Việt Minh firing on Rodham's troops from behind Japanese positions, and thereby forcing a British - Japanese fight, the Japanese were told to keep clear of the roads during the brigade's actual movement. A recognition signal was also devised for the use of Japanese troops guarding vital arms dumps, bridges and vital points.

The operation itself was to be carried out in three phases. Phase I was the securing of Thu Đức, Phase II of Biên Hoà, and Phase III of Thu Dầu Mốt. Spitfire reconnaissance had reported all "Route Coloniale" roads in good condition, but the road north of Saigon (to Thu Đức) was blocked at intervals with trees and trestles.

* Thu Đức was omitted, but inserted in 100 Brigade's "Op Instz No.52".

** Line of Communication.

The following additional troops were to come under Rodham's command from 0800 hours on the day before D day*: 16 Cavalry less one armoured car squadron, 31 Battery from 23 Mountain Regiment, 9 Jat Machine Gun Battalion less two companies, 64 Indian Workshop Company, one section of 20 Division Recovery Company, and 481 Field Company.** Supporting units were 42 Field Ambulance, 9 IMSU, and 45 Indian Composite Platoon.³

The whole force was divided into four groups, Groups A,B,C and D.*** Besides the additional troops mentioned, Rodham had his own infantry battalions: 1/1 and 4/10 GR, and 14/13 FFR. On 23 October the whole force (minus Group D, the smallest group, which was to move later) would depart, and Group C would remain at Thủ Đức. On D+1 Groups A and B were to move to Biên Hòa under Lieutenant Colonel J.N. Chaudhuri, the Indian commander of 16 Cavalry; Group A (minus 16 Cavalry and the 4/10 GR company) were to remain in Biên Hòa. On D+2, 16 Cavalry and the 4/10 GR company were to join Group B for the move to Thủ Dầu Một, still under Chaudhuri's overall command, and Group B would remain at Thủ Dầu Một under Cyril Jarvis. On D+3 16 Cavalry and the 4/10 GR company were to return to Saigon. It was a well-planned and well-executed operation, as the force moved counterclockwise in a triangle, dropping off groups along the way.

* D Day was 23 October 1945.

** A slight discrepancy concerning one support unit exists between "ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.7" and "100 Ind.Inf.Bde Op Order No.2"; Gracey's own copy of the ALFFIC Operation Instruction also differs slightly from the copy in the Public Record Office.

***	<u>Group A</u> (Mechanized)	<u>Group B</u> (Mechanized)	<u>Group C</u> (Marching)	<u>Group D</u> 64 Indian Workshop Coy Units' heavy baggage.
	Comd: LtCol Chaudhuri,	Comd: LtCol	Bde Hq, Sig Sec,	
	16 Cav.	Jarvis, 1/1 GR	LAD.	
	16 Cav(-1 Sqdn)	1/1 GR (-1 Coy)	1 Coy 2/8 Punjab	
	1 Coy 4/10 GR	1 Coy 9 Jats	Hq. 9 Jat	
	+14/13 FFR	31 Mtn Bty(-1 Sec)	42 Ind Fd Amb *	
	+1 Coy 9 Jat	Det 42 Ind Fd Amb	9 MSU *	
	+Det 42 Ind Fd Amb	Det 481 Ind Fd Coy	481 Ind Fd Coy*	
	+Det 481 Ind Fd Coy.	(All units remain Thu Dau Mot)	1 Wireless Sec,	
			64 Ind Wksp Coy	
	+ To remain at Bien Hoa		1 Sec 20 Recovery Coy	
			4/10 GR (- 1 Coy)	
			45 Ind Comp Pl	
			* (less dets)	
			(All units remain Thu Duc)	

At 0730 hours on 23 October, the operation began as the first battalion, the 4/10 Gurkha Rifles, moved out, marching out of Saigon carrying full pack and equipment. Five hours later the battalion entered Thủ Đức, weary but unhindered. At 1300 an Officers' conference was held, and an immediate reconnaissance was made of the battalion's perimeter. The men were more than satisfied with their quarters arrangements "as we are billeted in the big Convent here at THU DUC and there is plenty of room both inside for sleeping and outside for recreation."⁴ According to 1/1 GR, the first day's operation had gone very well, with "no hindrance except for the Military Police in SAIGON who were alleged to be directing traffic."

On 23 October, as 4/10 GR was tramping up to Thu Duc, 9/12 FFR "was ordered to hand over in Saigon to French troops and move to Cap St. Jacques at the mouth of the Saigon river, a welcome change to a pleasanter milieu. The men were able to enjoy some welcome sea bathing."⁵ The relief was genuine, for the 9/12 FFR historian had earlier written that "Life in French Indo-China, as in other Japanese-occupied territories surrendered after the Second World War, was by no means ordered and peaceful. The aftermath of war had left unrest and the ugly head of communism was raised, causing trouble, sabotage and outbreaks of violence."

The regimental history continued:

"The Battalion's role in the Cap St. Jacques-Baria area was to take custody of Japanese surrendered troops who were being concentrated there. Sixty thousand were due to arrive shortly, and these included some sixty generals and admirals besides Field-Marshal Terauchi, the Japanese Supreme Commander in South-East Asia. He was an old and sick man and was removed for treatment to Singapore, where he died soon afterwards." ⁶

In 32 Brigade's sector Việt Minh snipers wounded a 4/2 Gurkha, who later died, and the Gurkhas searched houses to the west of battalion headquarters to Gò Vấp; four suspects were arrested, three with Japanese ammunition and equipment and one in a green uniform who carried papers showing him to be a "Tonkinese soldier from Hanoi."

The force moved out of Thủ Đức early on 24 October, arriving in Biên Hòa at 0845. There was no sign of the 4-8000 Tonkinese Viet Minh troops reported in a previous low grade estimate, but "reliable reports state that all armed Annamites, approx 2000, evacuated the

town on 22.10.45."⁷ The unit commanders were met by Colonel Miyake, the senior Japanese officer in the area, and the town was immediately "searched and found to be clear". The 14/13 FFR and ancillary units set up camp in the jail area, and at 1100 hours the Union Jack was "hoisted with ceremony" over the main gate entrance to the Bien Hoa jail. In the afternoon a French major arrived as Liaison Officer to Lieutenant Colonel Pickard, commanding 14/13 FFR. At 1600 hours Chaudhuri, Pickard and Miyake met to discuss Japanese troop dispositions prior to the move to Thu Dầu Mốt on the following day. For 1/1 GR, the afternoon was spent relaxing and bathing in the river, although their staging area was formerly the Việt Minh headquarters, and quantities of Việt Minh documents were discovered there.

On 25 October, as the remaining group prepared to depart for Thu Dầu Mốt, the 14/13 FFR took up a new headquarters at the old French Administration Building. Jarvis's group reached Thu Dầu Mốt at 1100 hours on 25 October, "after a peaceful journey along a road lined with Japanese troops."⁸ On the day before, in Thu Đức, 4/10 GR had seized all weapons at the local Bow and Arrow Factory and were already searching selected areas. The Việt Minh had previously told the Mother Superior of the local convent that they would attack when she rang the church bell. The Gurkhas set up an ambush and rang the bell, but the Việt Minh never showed up. The following day, however, an interpreter assigned to 100 Brigade Headquarters was threatened by armed Viet Minh, but a search by the Gurkhas produced no results.

As the last group entered Thu Dầu Mốt, six Spitfires took off from Tân Sơn Nhứt

"to do a show of force over BIEN HOA and THU DAU MOT. This was a general beat up of the place to keep the Annamites quiet while the Army went in. Bad visibility prevented a really good show." 9

The "20th Indian Division's History" described the actions of the past few days:

"The THU DUC - THU DAU MOT - BIEN HOA area N.E. of SAIGON had been selected as the main concentration area for Japanese forces in SOUTH F.I.C. but before the disarming and concentrating of the Japanese could commence it was necessary to secure this area.

100 Bde were earmarked for this task and on the morning of 23 October the Bde organised as a mobile column moved out of SAIGON with 4/10 GR in the van and secured the town of THU DUC without opposition. On the following day the 14/13 FFR went on to occupy BIEN HOA and secured intact the vital bridges over the DONGNAI River SOUTH of the town. On the 25th the 1/1 GR occupied THU DAU MOT. Both the latter operations also encountered no opposition. The absence of opposition in this operation came as a complete surprise, as the area had been the concentration area and training ground of a large proportion of the VIET MINH forces in COCHIN CHINA. TONKINESE troops of the VIET MINH Army had been arriving by train in this area from the NORTH.* Reports differed widely as to their numbers but they were stated to be well armed and disciplined and were intended to provide a hard core for the VIET MINH forces in COCHIN CHINA.

Reports received indicated that the VIET MINH had moved out of the three towns less than 24 hours before the arrival of our troops. Although 100 Bde occupied their area without a fight, they were engaged for the duration of their stay in constant operations against the VIET MINH guerilla elements which were left behind when the main body withdrew. The dense nature of the country rendered the task of combing out these guerilla parties extremely difficult and to sweep the whole area thoroughly would have required many more troops than could be spared at this time." 10

While the major operation of 23-25 October was the investment of the Thu Duc - Bien Hoa - Thu Dau Mot area, the other two brigades remained busy as the daily incidents of sniping and arson continued. On 23 October, as the 4/10 Gurkhas marched into Thu Duc in Phase I, a 3/8 GR patrol was fired on from a crossroads, and one Gurkha was killed. Half an hour later, at 1230, Major J.B. Clements brought up B Company to attack the Viet Minh ambush party but the latter had moved. However, the company was fired on from a position a few hundred yards from the ambush site and the Gurkhas moved in with 3-inch mortars bracketing the new sniper location. At 1315 the village in which the Viet Minh attackers had hidden was set on fire

* Verifying the accounts of Giáp and Trương Chinh.

and an ammunition dump was destroyed. Two Gurkhas were wounded, and at 1330 the company returned to base, having engaged the Việt Minh in a thirty minute fire fight. Việt Minh casualties amounted to thirty killed and six wounded, and this figure was considered to be a low estimate. A Japanese grenade dump was found and destroyed, and one Japanese was seen with the Việt Minh.¹¹

On the night of 23/24 October the same company was "jittered" [harassed] by a "large number" of Việt Minh at a bridge near the scene of the recent action. A B Company position on a bridge fired on the Việt Minh jitter party and casualties were believed to have been inflicted, as blood was found near the position. On the following evening, at the same position where the earlier sharp fire fight had occurred, B Company again stood to all night long with a large number of Việt Minh circling the position while shouting and beating drums.

The French now reported that the Việt Minh had attacked forces at Nha Trang, and the battleship Richelieu had been sent to back up the cruiser Triomphant there; both had permission to use their guns if necessary. A small group of Vietnamese were said to be marching east out of Biên Hòa, and the Japanese report of 500 Việt Minh arrivals from Tonkin was accepted as fairly accurate. The Japanese estimated that 200 more Việt Minh were now northwest of Xuân Lộc and 300 in Trang Bóm; they also stated that a small party of Japanese had been paralyzed after drinking water from a poisoned well at Hóc Môn.

ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.8, issued on 24 October, acknowledged that "Hostile activities of the Annamites have, to a large extent, receded from our expanding perimeter within and on the edge of which they have now confined themselves to minor guerilla tactics."¹² The 20th Division was now to "commence systematic patrolling beyond the present perimeter... the object of these patrols is to show the flag, reconnoitre and open up the roads, rid the area of malcontents and reassure the peaceful inhabitants, so that they will recommence their normal trading." The patrols were not to fight unless attacked and would clear undefended road blocks; they were also forbidden to search for arms unless a special operation was "laid on as the result of information from informers or the observations of patrols." Night ambushes were permissible "after due reconnaissance by day."

The Japanese again protested the French attitude towards them. The minutes of the 24 October conference held by Hirst state that

"The Japanese complained of the lack of appreciation by certain elements of the local French population, and, more especially, the local press, of the work performed by the Japanese forces working side by side with the Allied forces in the suppression of disorder." 13

The Japanese also reported heavy fighting east of Xuân Lộc, and they were now out of contact with their troops east of Biên Hoà, as the lines had been cut. They also said that Japanese-Vietnamese relations had deteriorated at Bãriã, near Cap St. Jacques, because 500 tons of salt had been shipped from there to Phnom Penh. In retaliation, the Việt Minh were said to have "raided a Japanese arms depot and stolen some 800 cannon shells."

A 20 Division memo of 24 October stated that "A dump of 600 Tear Gas bombs was located at GOVAP. These are now believed to be in Annamite hands."¹⁴ The memo further confirmed that the poison on the Việt Minh arrows was probably strychnine, but in sublethal quantities.

On 25 October, as far as can be ascertained, came the only evidence of direct Russian involvement in South Vietnam. The Japanese reported that in their sweep and disarmament of the Việt Minh which immediately preceded the arrival of the 1st Gurkhas in Thu Dầu Một, their forces had found a Russian among the Việt Minh. The minutes of the 25 October British-Japanese conference said of the Russian:

"Being a subject of an Allied nation, he had been placed in protective custody. He was, however, reported to be the leader of the local VIET MINH party and is said to have come from CHINA originally."

The Japanese were ordered to hand the Russian over to 100 Brigade. The 1/1 GR War Diary reported the incident as follows:

"At 1600 hrs a RUSSIAN claiming to be a French subject and a rubber planter was brought in by the Japanese: an exotic red bearded figure by Kipling out of Conrad, he freely admitted having worked for the VIET NAM for two days before his detention. The papers he carried showed him to be a scientist of some learning. He was sent to Bde for detailed interrogation." 15

The diarist also reported that the former governor's house had been used as a Việt Minh headquarters and the jail as a bow and arrow and pike factory. The 1st Gurkhas said of the Japanese, "Their intelligence information was to prove invariably accurate: it was always clearly illustrated by quite excellent maps."*

The 1/1 GR barracks in Thu Dầu Một was the former Vietnamese militia barracks built by the French. It was better than any barracks the British troops had in India, recalled Lieutenant Colonel Jarvis, the 1/1 GR commander. Lieutenant Colonel R. Clark, who succeeded Jarvis as 1/1 GR C.O., remembered it as a "Beau Geste" sort of barracks, left spotlessly clean by the Japanese who had just moved out. As the 1/1 GR Newsletter later wrote, there was a drawback:

"The barracks at THU DAU MOT were probably the best that the Bn has ever occupied. They consisted of two large barrack blocks with a fine parade ground, and separate quarters for officers. The only drawback was that it meant, literally, death to go outside unescorted. We lost one follower and two IORs of the Field Ambulance who did so." 16

In Thu Dầu Một the Japanese remained largely responsible for the maintenance of public order, as the Gurkhas "provided a mobile column to take action against irreconcilables who sniped and ambushed us and the Jap sentries, impartially, and made raids on warehouses and installations." 17

Lieutenant Colonel Clark described the Thu Dầu Một operations, including the remarkable fact that the town was initially deserted of Vietnamese inhabitants:

"The Bn Gp consisted of our own Bn plus one Tp 23 Mountain Regt (artillery), one Tp 16 Cavalry (Armoured Cars) and one Sec Indian Engineers.

To this was added a group of five or six 'Colons' who were supposed to be with us as interpreters but they hardly mixed with us at all and eventually moved off to take over the old French Governor's Residency.**

* This was probably because Lieutenant Colonel Cyril Jarvis, commanding the 1/1 Gurkhas, developed a closer relationship with the local Japanese commander, Major Takahashi, than perhaps the other battalion commanders. Many years later, Jarvis returned Takahashi's sword to him, to discover that Takahashi had died! However, Jarvis received a photograph from the family, which showed Takahashi's widow holding the sword and surrounded by the immediate family.

** Lieutenant Colonel Jarvis had earlier written: "A French officer was attached to us in Thu Dầu Một, and went down very badly, because of his attitude to the Gurkhas, which was far too 'colonial'."

The Vietnamese population of Thu Dau Mot was very noticeable by their complete absence and it was not until after Christmas before we found them in a jungle clearing some three miles out of the town where they had constructed a new village of bamboo and grass huts. In fact this seemed fairly typical as we failed in all efforts to contact the local people. They simply took to the jungle when troops appeared.

There were one or two contacts with the Viet Minh but this was mainly casual sniping, in particular at a detached company base about 3 miles south of Thu Dau Mot. This necessitated a Bn sweep when we cleared a number of houses on the perimeter of the village." 18

Lieutenant Colonel Clark provided an insight into previous Japanese-Viet Minh cooperation in the area:

"On the score of Jap support for the Viet Minh it may be of interest that when the 'Colons' took over the old French Residency in Thu Dau Mot they discovered that the evening before our arrival in the town the Japanese commander had given a banquet for the Viet Minh! They found the full list of guests and the menu. Unfortunately there was no list of Japanese officers against whom we could take action but I did warn the Jap commander of the area that I would have a Military Police investigation if I had any further cause to suspect collaboration. The interpreter used the term 'Kempei Tei' and you should have seen the Admiral's face. He was obviously really scared that our RMP* would use Kempei Tei methods!" 19

Fires now blazed all over Saigon and Cholon as Viet Minh arsonists attempted, among other things, to burn down the Power Station. Japanese firefighters came under heavy sniping, and 4/2 GR killed three snipers north of Tân Sơn Nhứt.

The French under Massu had startling success in their first operation, the recapture of Mỹtho. One of Massu's officers had reconnoitered the area in a Japanese Zero, and although his mechanized column had rough going due to the numerous road cuts and blown bridges (destroyed by a Vietnamese graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique),²⁰ the commando group under the unique naval parachutist Ponchardier,

* Royal Military Police.

supported by the sloops Gazelle and Annamite, seized the town in a lightening waterborne assault.

Reports that sizable bodies of well-armed Việt Minh were slipping back into Gò Vấp seemed confirmed when the Việt Minh mounted a strong attack on 9/14 Punjab at 2230 hours on the night of the 25th. This attack on a 9/14 post just east of the golf course near Tân Sơn Nhứt was supported by five light machine guns and a Japanese grenade discharger. Major Apps brought up a platoon to reinforce the post and the ensuing fight lasted for four hours. When the Việt Minh withdrew the 9/14 troops burnt the houses which covered the Việt Minh approach and counted twenty dead Việt Minh; 9/14 casualties were seven "slightly wounded". A "drastic search and patrolling of [the] area [was] carried out", and two suspects were arrested and handed over to the Field Security Section. On the previous day 9/14 patrols had rescued a French family and discovered two houses containing signals equipment and small arms ammunition. The houses in the vicinity were fired as the 9/14 Punjabis were reacting vigorously to Việt Minh attacks.

On 25 October an Indian sapper guarding the Concasseurs tube (artesian) well in Cholon was shot dead by a burst of Sten gun fire from a nearby house. Naik Ajmer Singh, of the 92nd Indian Field Company (Indian Engineers), had been guarding one of five wells operated by the Bombay Sappers and Miners Company. In describing the incident, and tragi-comic aftermath, Major J.H.Clark, R.E., wrote as follows:

"It had become a matter of custom when fired on or ambushed to take the only retaliatory measure that was found to have any effect. This was to burn to the ground the hut or house from which the shots came, and any others roundabout. It seems harsh on the innocents among the guilty, but in actual fact there were very few innocents. They all supported the terrorists, and were never anything but hostile to us." 21

The wells were continually being sniped at night. It was irritating for the sappers, because they had strict orders never to fire unless they had a target, and of course they never did." The Naik's death triggered a reaction:

"The O.C. of the company got angry, and obtained permission from Brigade to destroy all the houses near the wells. The same morning the Sikh platoon burnt down eight houses near that well. They had considerable

difficulty in doing so, because they were made of very tough teak and there was absolutely no wind to fan the flames. Even when saturated in petrol they did not burn very effectively. The O.C. then indicated to the Subahdar where he could start on another lot in the afternoon near another well, at the corner of a huge Chinese-Annamite slum, but separated from it by roads on all sides which would act as firebreaks. At 1500 hours that afternoon an urgent telephone call brought the O.C. to the scene. It was obvious what had happened two miles away. A black pall of smoke hung over the rooftops. The difference between the morning's and the afternoon's burning was that these huts were made of dry thatch and that a strong wind had sprung up.

The Subahdar had only fired one hut, and now the whole hutted slum was an inferno half a mile long by a quarter of a mile wide. The inhabitants were panic stricken, and crowded the roads and blocked them with their goods and chattels pulled out of their houses. The first hut had burnt out in a matter of seconds, but the wind had blown the flaming thatch on to [a] nearby hut, which had gone up in flames also, and distributed burning thatch as much as a hundred yards further away on to other houses. And so it grew and spread literally like wild-fire. It was an appalling situation; with the high wind spreading the fire further afield every moment, the whole of Cholon was threatened, because there was no firebreak wide enough to stop the fire, and no time to make one.* The only bright spot was that the mobs of shrieking humanity were too panic-stricken to start any shooting. The feelings of the O.C. may well be imagined. It was certain that the whole of Cholon was going to burn down, that tens of thousands of people would be homeless, if not killed or injured, and he was responsible. Futile attempts were made to stop the fire with all the water-tank trucks, pumping sets, men and buckets that could be obtained, whilst the unhappy O.C. turned over in his mind what he was going to say at his court martial.

However, quite suddenly the wind dropped and actually blew gently from the opposite direction, and some light rain fell. The fire went no

*News of this fire most probably caused Mountbatten to criticise Gracey's policy in a letter to be discussed later in this chapter.

further. The houses burnt themselves slowly down to the ground, and as the smoke cleared the full extent of the devastation could be seen. Several thousand homeless Annamites and Chinese drifted out to clear ground outside Cholon, and started to encamp there in the open. The Sikh Naik had certainly been given a worthy funeral pyre. An anxious O.C. sat down and wrote his report, and had a worrying time waiting to hear the outcome of it. But his luck was in; for the Chinese had been making trouble for some time, and when their complaint about the fire went to the authorities, accusing the allied forces of committing all sorts of other offences against them, they received a reply to the effect that they were doing nothing but obstructing the allies from carrying out their tasks. They cheated the troops, ran evil places of entertainment, spread disease, sheltered terrorists, and profited from both sides whatever happened. If they didn't cooperate in future, there would be another Fire of Cholon. The incident was closed, and there was practically no more trouble from sniping in that area for some time, although it all started again later when the French were taking over." 22

Shortly thereafter a 3/8 GR company on a sweep seven kilometers northwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt airfield encountered some opposition, after which 59 Tonkinese were brought in. At night, another 3/8 company was again "jittered" by 80 to 100 Việt Minh armed with a few rifles. The Việt Minh fired from such a distance that their shooting was ineffective, and the Gurkhas replied with mortar fire, at which time screams were heard and the firing ceased. The Việt Minh kept up the shouting and banging of drums throughout the night.

By the 26th the balance of 20 Indian Division (3000 men) had arrived, completing the buildup of Gracey's own forces to a final strength of 22,190 men. French forces at this time totalled 4575, which included 2150 personnel of the Combat Command, 2nd Armored Division (Groupement Massu). By the end of November French strength was to reach 26,375, the greater number being due to the expected arrival of the 9th D.I.C.²³

Towards the end of October, in Bien Hoa, a British-Japanese meeting was held "to ensure compliance with AIF BIEN HOA ORDER NO.1 dated 25th Oct 45." The latter was issued by Lieutenant Colonel Pickard, commanding 14/13 FFR, and laid down the general tasks assigned to the Japanese; these included the passing of information on the Việt Minh to Pickard and the establishment of a curfew. On the

27th Captain A.I. Akram, 14/13 FFR, conferred with Major Kosaka, Chief of Staff of the 29th Infantry Regiment.

"Major Kosaka was informed that at 1430 hrs on 26 Oct 45 a VIETMINH car had escaped from X DONG 3875 and a JAP picquet on the road near X DONG had made no attempt to stop and search the car and its occupants. It was pointed out that this indifference on the part of the Japanese picquet was a case of disobedience of orders issued by the S.A.C.S.E.A., and Major KOSAKA was warned that severe disciplinary action would be taken in future against JAP soldiers concerned in all such cases." 24

This incident, small and unimportant in itself, is illustrative of the Japanese tendency towards complicity in areas away from Saigon. Although ordered to arrest Việt Minh on sight, the Japanese in places such as Biên Hòa allowed the Việt Minh openly to march out of town by the score. There were also dozens, if not hundreds, of local arms dumps which were never reported to the Allies, for the 20th Division troops were constantly discovering small ammunition storage areas in the course of their sweeps.

Kosaka had been preceded by Mr. Trần Lâm, a representative of the large Chinese community in Biên Hòa. Colonel Pickard and Captain Akram discussed the state of sanitation in Biên Hòa with Mr. Lâm. Pickard "stressed the importance of immediate measures for improving it." It was a mundane topic for discussion, but representative of the sort of problem faced by the various local British commanders. The sewage system consisted of bullock carts collecting refuse from all parts of town, and since the drivers were Vietnamese who had left (although a Chinese was in charge) the system had come to a halt. Pickard pointed out that "There was a large number of diseased paupers and loafers at large in the town, who not only lived day and night in the market place and adjacent streets but were constantly dropping their excreta in the streets without any check whatsoever." Since ALF Biên Hòa was near the bazaar, the local air was becoming quite unbearable at Pickard's headquarters. The Chinese community was persuaded to start up the sewage system again.

In other incidents, the Japanese carried out a surprise raid on a reported local Việt Minh headquarters a few miles southwest of Cholon, killing ten Việt Minh and capturing five. The Sato Butai was ordered to Biên Hòa to become part of Gateforce for the impending drive to Xuân Lộc. During the French operations around Mỹ Tho, the sloop

Annamite reported stopping two barges in midstream. The barges were believed to have been manned by Japanese, and were loaded with Japanese mines (some of which were ready for laying). The occupants abandoned their barges, which were later sunk by gunfire. A 4/17 Dogra operation to clear the southwest corner of Saigon brought in 94 suspects, including a probable Japanese deserter, and some weapons. A further snap raid brought in nine more suspects and two rifles, two shotguns and some grenades.

In Thu Dầu Mốt the 1st Gurkhas reported that "The Japanese brought in an assorted collection of captured ANNAMITE weapons: swords, poisoned arrows, catapults, long bows, cross bows, stabbing knives, throwing knives, spears, shot guns, rifles and grenades. During the night ANNAMITES cross the river and planted two flags near the quay side."²⁵ On the 28th the first ration convoy, escorted by a 4/10 GR company, arrived in Thu Dầu Mốt, and "Subversive pamphlets in ENGLISH, CHINESE, JAPANESE and ANNAMITE were found in the town: their distributor was captured by the JAPANESE." As the convoy was en route north, 4/2 GR fought a pitched battle over a bridge about 2½ miles north of Tân Sơn Nhứt; the Việt Minh withdrew, and the 4/2 report stated that "The patrol reported seeing Jap troops but it is thought that these may have been Tonkinese troops whose equipment is similar."

Earlier in the day, 20 Division had informed 100 Brigade that Sato Butai was to arrive in Biên Hòa on the following day. This Japanese battalion, 500 strong, was to come under command of 100 Brigade in order to carry out the following tasks. Rodham was ordered to seize the Xuân Lộc area and break up any Việt Minh force found there, establish a strong base at Xuân Lộc and patrol "vigorously" towards Baria, east on the Nha Trang road and north towards Đà Lạt, and to operate offensively at all times while maintaining control of communications in the Xuân Lộc area.²⁶ Rodham was to nominate a British officer to command the force and to assign armored car and artillery support from his resources as he saw fit. The British officer and supporting units were to be withdrawn after having established a block and issuing orders for further Japanese operations in the Xuân Lộc area.

Major L.D.Gates of the 14/13 Frontier Force Rifles was selected by Rodham to command the force, which was to be called Gateforce. Gates was issued "100 Ind Inf Bde Op Instr No.55", dated 27 October 1945.

He was informed that Việt Minh headquarters, together with 2000 troops, had been reported to have fled to the Xuân Lộc area, and while his brigade had met no resistance so far, Rodham stated that

"I appreciate that a strong show of force moving immediately into the area of their Hq. will disperse any conc[entration] they may have made or are planning to make. I further appreciate that NO opposition other than occasional sniping will be met if the advancing force is strong. Small rd blocks will be encountered but I consider that they will NOT be held against a show of force." 27

Gate's infantry would consist of Sato Butai, supported by a squadron of 16 Cavalry armored cars, a company of 14/13 FFR infantry and a 42 Indian Field Ambulance detachment.

Gates was ordered to establish his patrol base at Xuân Lộc on 29 October, patrol aggressively from 30 October to 1 November, then return to Biên Hòa on 2 November with the whole force. He would have two Japanese interpreters with him, and while the British/Indian units were to take a seven day food supply, the Japanese were responsible for their own maintenance. The armored cars were to carry sufficient fuel for 500 miles, and the whole order was drafted by Rodham himself, who cautioned Gates not to use half measures if met with opposition.

Gates received his personal instructions in an order titled "In Confirmation Verbal Orders. Gate Force Op Order No.1". The background information was essentially the same as that provided by 100 Brigade Instruction No.55, with a slightly more detailed breakdown of the forces available to him. In addition to the units mentioned, Gates would have a platoon of 9 Jat machine gunners, a section of 3 inch mortars from 14/13 FFR and a Royal Engineer detachment.

The operation itself was to be carried out in four phases. These were, from Phase I* to Phase IV respectively, the establishment of a

* For Phase I the order of march was as follows:

<u>Mobile Troops</u>	<u>Main Body</u>	<u>Rear Guard</u>
C Sqn 16 Cav less 1 troop	1 Platoon C Coy 14/13 FFR Tac Hq.	1 platoon Sato Butai 1 troop 16 Cav.
2 Coys Sato Butai Det R.E.	1 Platoon 9 Jap. MMG 1 Sec 3" Mortars, 14/13 FFR C Coy 14/13 FFR less 1 plat. Sato Butai less 2 Coys & 1 plat. Det 42 Fd. Amb. B Ech. Det LAD 16 Cav.	

patrol base in Xuan Loc on 29 October, patrolling the Đà Lạt road on 30 October, patrolling the Bà Rịa road on 1 November, and the return to Biên Hòa on 2 November.

The patrol base itself would be formed by one troop of 16 Cavalry armored cars, one platoon of C Company (14/13 FFR), one section of 9 Jat medium machine guns, one company of Sato Butai, 42 Field Ambulance detachment and the engineers. For Phases II and III the order of march was 16 Cavalry, 14/13 FFR, Tactical Headquarters plus ambulance jeeps, 9 Jat, Mortars, Sato Butai, recovery vehicle and 16 Cavalry.

Gates was ordered to use "maximum force" against enemy opposition, and all armed Vietnamese were to be disarmed. Further, "Any opposition from a village will be answered by complete destruction of the village." These were draconian instructions, indeed, but the message to the Việt Minh and the population was brutally direct: there would be no safe haven for Việt Minh engaged in warfare, and villages should not shelter Việt Minh units.

By 2100 (9 P.M.) on 28 October Sato Butai had still not arrived in Biên Hòa, and the Gateforce starting time was moved back to 0900 on 29 October. By 0800 hours on the 29th it transpired that Sato Butai had been issued incorrect orders by the Japanese staff and had turned up in Trang Bóm, about 15 miles east of Biên Hòa. So at 0925 Gateforce departed Biên Hòa and picked up Sato Butai on the way. Shortly after, Gracey and Hirst arrived in Biên Hòa from Saigon to look over the area and discuss the battalion's operational role with Pickard.

While Gracey was in Biên Hòa, rumblings of discontent became audible at the highest levels of command in South East Asia. At the request of General Slim, Major General Harold Pyman, ALFSEA Chief of Staff, wrote an extremely blunt letter to General Miles Dempsey, the Commander of 14th Army. The reason for the letter, and for its timing, was Dempsey's visit to Delhi to confer with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Alanbrooke. So long as the war was being fought, Slim and the senior Army commanders had concealed their very considerable discontent and loyally supported the Supreme Allied Commander, presenting a facade of unruffled harmony to the world. But with the massive postwar problems to be confronted,

compounded by a home government more intent on securing votes than supporting the senior commanders in the troubled areas, officers like Slim could contain themselves no longer. Wrote Pyman:

"As you know, the situation here is continuously complicated by the dynamic energy of SAC.* He loves to dabble in matters which are not his concern and, when called to order, justifies his interference on the ground of the political aspect. He insists upon centralising all political matters entirely at his own HQ. Partly because of his tremendous charm of manner, it is extremely difficult to establish a cast iron case where he has really been naughty.

It would be wrong to say that the machinery of command is really efficient. These interferences are taking place constantly and have always been a source of worry to the C-in-C [Slim].

As I once said to you before, SAC tries more and more to run these HQ's as a Combined Operations Headquarters. He seems to find it particularly tempting to deal with military matters, but that I think is largely because the RAF have now practically nothing to do, and he knows better than to upset the Royal Navy.**

The Joint Planning Committee "in particular has been a source of irritation to the C-in-C." The Joint Planners had a dual allegiance to SAC and the Commanders in Chief, but the latter were prevented from doing their own staff planning. It was "contrary to the normal method of planning", and Browning had been approached several times, but neither he nor Slim could change Mountbatten's ideas. Continued Pyman:

"This system has become particularly obnoxious of late because the Joint Planning Committee have tended to deal more and more with executive plans, and less with more distant projects." 28

Slim's disenchantment extended to Mountbatten's reorganization of SEAC in Singapore.*** So if Gracey was less than happy with Mountbatten, he was not alone.

With Gracey on the way back to Saigon, Gateforce arrived in Trang Bôm by 1300 hours, and local patrols discovered no Việt Minh activity. However, Gates reported that the day before a body of 300 Viet Minh had left Trang Bôm, armed with 140 rifles, 30 light machine guns, pistols

* Supreme Allied Commander (Mountbatten).

** Mountbatten was a Captain (Colonel equivalent), and acting Vice-Admiral while SACSEA.

*** None of this is intended to detract from Mountbatten's historic and valuable contributions to winning the war as SACSEA. His place in history is assured, and the author remains one of his great admirers. This merely shows that he was mortal.

and spears. In view of this information, which turned out to be accurate, Gates encamped west of Xuân Lộc, as darkness approached, and at 2000 hours (8 P.M.) radioed Biên Hòa for a company to come out and establish a base in Trang Bôm. In the meanwhile, Sato Butai had moved ahead to reconnoiter and attempt to make contact with the Việt Minh.

At 0600 hours on 30 October, A Company left Biên Hòa for Trang Bôm while a section of artillery from 23 Mountain Regiment remained on alert to move out and support Gateforce if needed. At 1330 hours Gates radioed Pickard, informing him that Gateforce had been fired on by the Việt Minh at first light, and his force had attacked at 0700 hours. The Việt Minh withdrew to the northeast, pursued by a company of Sato Butai. There were no British casualties, and the Japanese suffered three wounded. Unconfirmed Việt Minh casualties in this initial skirmish were 3 wounded, and 27 prisoners were released from Việt Minh captivity.*²⁹ Gateforce finally entered Xuân Lộc and the armored cars immediately began patrolling the town.

The "20th Indian Division's History" provided more details of the day's operations:

"On the morning of 30 October the column arrived at XUAN LOC and found the town held by a large force of VIET MINH troops who had withdrawn from the BIEN HOA area shortly before it was occupied by our troops. With the support of the sqdn of 16 Cavalry a full scale attack was launched and determined opposition encountered. The town was cleared after heavy casualties had been inflicted on the VIET MINH. 27 French hostages were released and over 60 prisoners taken, amongst whom were some TONKINESE recently arrived from the NORTH." 30

The initial casualty estimates radioed to Biên Hòa were drastically revised when the battle was over, for a major encounter had taken place, with the Japanese bearing the brunt of the combat. Somewhere between 100 (100 Brigade report) and 130 (16 Cavalry report) Việt Minh had been killed, most by Sato Butai in two engagements, the rest by the British force in one attack and in support of Sato Butai. The 14/13 FFR now had a man killed. Several road blocks were removed, and a quantity of arms recovered as many of the Việt Minh discarded their arms on retreating.

* These were French and mixed French-Vietnamese who were to have been executed by the Việt Minh.

Unarmed Việt Minh searched the battle area at night for wounded, but were driven off by Japanese looking for arms. A Việt Minh prisoner stated that the "Xuân Lộc force was [the] largest in F.I.C."³¹

While the Biên Hòa area remained a major trouble spot for 100 Brigade, the Việt Minh were busy everywhere. In the Thu Dầu Một area roads and bridges were constantly being damaged and the Việt Minh were seen openly digging trenches on the opposite bank of the river.³²

Back in Saigon's northern suburbs, 3/8 GR continued their series of engagements with determined guerillas in their sector. A D Company patrol proceeding along a road about two miles southwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt was attacked by small arms fire and grenades. One Gurkha was killed and another wounded, and the patrol retaliated in the now-classic method of destroying the attackers' cover — part of the village was burnt, and Việt Minh casualties were unknown. An A Company patrol found and destroyed three local Việt Minh headquarters four to seven miles west northwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt, meeting continual slight opposition. Việt Minh casualties were again unknown, but blood was discovered in the area where they had been.

At the end of the month the Japanese were authorized to draw down their garrisons in Qui Nhơn, Tuy Hòa and Thạch Bàn, and to bring those troops plus the European populations to Nha Trang. Hirst then provided the Japanese with a piece of intelligence reminiscent of numbers of alleged sightings later to be made by Americans during the Sixties in South Vietnam:

"An European, medium height, well built, sunburnt, generally carrying a machine carbine, has been seen on horseback among the Annamites holding the two block houses between the beach at TIWAN and the BARIA road (approx 6802). His name is believed to be TELLIER, formerly interpreter with the Japanese.

You will arrest this man at the first opportunity and bring him to this HQ for interrogation." 33

In Thu Dầu Một, the airfield was inspected and found to be serviceable, and soon after some Dakotas and Spitfires landed uneventfully there. Although frontal assaults had now largely ceased in the Saigon area, the Việt Minh were stepping up their activities elsewhere. Phnom Penh reported that the frontier post of Le Rolland had been captured and the post at Snoul attacked. Japanese

guards on two bridges southwest of Cholon were also overwhelmed, and the Viet Minh had attempted to operate the shore batteries at Rach Cat against the French, but had been unable to do so. They did, however, make off with some sea mines from the Rach Cat fort.

Earlier, at the 29 October British-Japanese conference, Brigadier Hirst angrily castigated the Japanese over the serious loss of a large quantity of ammunition from the Phú Thọ Rubber Plantation. The loss amounted to several truck loads of ammunition, and Hirst charged that this "can only be due to gross neglect of duty on the part of the commanding officer and the troops responsible for its protection, if not to actual cooperation with the Annamites."³⁴ Hirst demanded a full investigation, and was dissatisfied with what he considered was an inadequate punishment awarded to the officers commanding the guard. The Japanese were also asked to explain why the Allies had not previously been informed of the existence of a dump of this size. They could only answer lamely that it was an Air Force depot and as such not under Colonel Suzuki, Chief of Ordnance at Headquarters Southern Army. However, when asked which officer was ultimately responsible to General Manaki for all ordnance in Indochina, the Japanese admitted it was Suzuki. The specter of Japanese-Viet Minh collusion was very great in this and a number of other notable instances. At the same meeting the Japanese were ordered to discontinue the use of the term "Butai" preceded by the commander's name when referring to battalions. Henceforth they were to "use the proper designation of the Bn e.g. 1 Bn 16 Regt." [However, the British units working with the Japanese continued to use the Butai designation as a matter of course].

The Japanese also made known their anxiety about their small garrison at Phan Thiết, for the Viet Minh were being driven to that area. They were informed that Gateforce would soon be patrolling the road to Phan Thiết and the Royal Navy would supply landing craft should reinforcements be necessary.

There was no respite in the Saigon key area as a 9/12 FFR patrol was fired on southwest of Cholon: there were no casualties and four Viet Minh were captured and handed over to the Sûreté. In the evening a French armored column passed through Cholon, firing medium machine guns indiscriminately to both sides. Two local civilians were killed and several wounded. The 9th FFR War Diary stated that "In future Bn will escort all French convoy[s] through the Bn area."*

* A Gurkha officer interviewed stated that he and a colleague had to throw themselves flat on the street to save their lives while walking on Rue Catinat (Tu Do) when the French did the same thing there at about this time.

Casualty figures were now released by Allied Headquarters, as follows (as of 29 October):

	<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>	<u>Missing</u>
British/Indian	18	51	3
French	17	34	2
Japanese	19	13	2
Dutch	1	3	-
American	1	-	-

An estimated 391 Việt Minh had been killed by British forces ("not for publication"), and 441 arrested. There were as yet no reliable figures for Vietnamese killed by French and Japanese forces, but certainly the total number of killed was far higher, especially in view of Gateforce's actions in the Xuân Lộc area shortly thereafter.

On the 31st, an emergency message from Gateforce advised Pickard that a potentially serious situation was in the making, for part of Gateforce was still in Trang Bôm and the Việt Minh were now attempting to destroy a key bridge between Trang Bôm and Xuân Lộc, having set fire to it. One company of 14/13 FFR, plus engineers and guns from 23 Mountain Regiment, prepared to depart to reinforce Gateforce, and a 4/10 GR company arrived in Biên Hòa from Thủ Đức to replace the 14/13 company. However, Gates radioed back that the bridge could be repaired with his own resources and the relief column remained in Biên Hòa. However, one platoon plus a detachment of 481 Field Company departed to assist in repairing and strengthening damaged bridges along Gateforce's route.

At this time Gates, no longer in danger of being cut off from Trang Bôm and Biên Hòa, launched a three-pronged attack on Việt Minh forces in a plantation area near Xuân Lộc. A sharp, bloody fight ensued until the Việt Minh retreated, leaving 62 bodies on the field; 28 Việt Minh were captured. Thus in two days the heart had been shot out of the Việt Minh main force unit in that area, as they had suffered between 162 and 192 killed and dozens wounded and captured. To make things worse, the Japanese had surprised yet another Việt Minh party, numbering about 50, during a physical training session and shot down almost the whole group; only a few escaped.

Even as Gateforce was in action, Mountbatten, perhaps fearful of adverse publicity, wrote a letter to Gracey which stung Gracey into a detailed reply. Mountbatten's letter was as follows, opening with

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"My dear Douglas":

"Isn't it great news that the 9th D.I.C. will be out by the end of December? I propose to come and visit you about the end of this month in order to arrange the final turnover from British to French Command, and possibly to take part in the official hand-over ceremony.

I should like your advice as to whether you think it would be a good thing for me to accept Terauchi's sword on the occasion of my visit, in which case I propose that this should be done at your Headquarters in the presence, only, of senior allied officers and not more than two photographers. I do not wish to drag an invalid man of sixty-seven through a humiliating ceremony, and leave it to you to arrange matters so that this may be avoided.

On the other hand it must be remembered that until Terauchi has handed over his sword the surrender cannot be regarded as complete.

If he has two swords it is proposed that I take one for the King and the other for myself. As you know no Japanese officers whatsoever are being allowed to return to Japan with their swords from any overseas commission.

The fact that I intend to give one of the swords to the King must be kept completely secret."

The niceties over, Mountbatten (who did not take Gracey's advice about Terauchi's surrender) now criticized Gracey for his conduct of operations in Vietnam:

"About the pamphlets you have been dropping from the air, I must say that it would be most indiscreet for a British Commander to put on record that 'tanks, ships, aircraft and guns' are massed against virtually unarmed people, and that 'useless misery' might ensue. Any leaflet, worded in such a way, must be signed by the French Authorities for we must not further embarrass H.M. Government or the French Government by making it appear that we are strongly threatening the Independence Movement." 35

The letter was signed "Dickie Mountbatten", but had a handwritten postscript:

"I was most distressed to see you had been burning down houses, in congested areas too! Cannot you give such unsavoury jobs (if they really are military necessities) to the French in future"

Gracey's response, in full, was as follows:

"Very many thanks for your letter dated 31st October, 1945; I too was very glad to hear that the arrival of the 9th D.I.C. had been advanced. We shall, of course, be delighted to see you whenever you can come to SAIGON.

With regard to Terauchi's sword: I have just heard from TOKYO that two swords are on their way here; I would suggest that the ceremony for the surrender of the sword to you by TERAUCHI should take place at SINGAPORE and not at SAIGON. I am convinced that this is the right answer for the following reasons:-

- (a) As you know, TERAUCHI's sword can almost be called the outward and visible sign of authority he holds from the Emperor; whilst he is in SAIGON it is essential for the proper execution of his orders by his own forces that nothing is done to undermine this authority. At SINGAPORE he will be in his own small H.Q. in a country in which Japanese forces have already been disarmed; in SAIGON he is in a country where only partial disarmament has been possible, and where Japanese forces are still operationally employed in the maintenance of law and order.
- (b) I consider that the act of surrender, which as you say completes the overall act of surrender, is more properly executed within the British Empire than on French soil; it would, therefore, appear more logical that this particular ceremony should take place at SINGAPORE, the site of the S.E.A.C. official surrender ceremony, than at SAIGON; a place of no significance to the average person.

I will, of course, keep the fact that you intend to give one of the swords to the King a complete secret.

I was pleased to see that CARTON DE WIART had had a considerable success with the Generalissimo on behalf of the French; from the little connection we or the

French authorities here have had with representatives of the Chinese authorities in north French Indo-China, it would appear that the greatest difficulty is not between ourselves (or the French) and the Chinese, but between the Chinese and the other Chinese, or in this case, the Chinese in HANOI (or HUE) and the other Chinese in CHUNKING! There appears to be a singular lack of unanimity on the question of who ultimately commands who and why!

Finally I would like to give some explanation about the two 'operational' points upon which you take me to task; the first was the wording of one of the leaflets,³⁶ and the second was the destruction of some houses, burnt down in CHOLON. In all fairness to you and to my Division I feel that an explanation is necessary.

Although on numerous occasions both in SAIGON and elsewhere it has been stated that H.M.G. have no political interest in F.I.C., the Annamites have felt, and in fact have vociferously so expressed themselves, that 20 Ind. Div. is being used as cover to allow French troops to be brought into the country; and, therefore, that in fact we are anything but impartial. Further to this, they have always loudly proclaimed that wherever they found French troops or police, they would resist and employ every form of active opposition that they or their armed forces could produce: in spite of their attitude during our temporary truce, it was soon evident that they were going to find it impossible to differentiate between our troops and those of the French, both of whom have been engaged in the maintenance of law and order and essential services in next door areas; since the truce was broken it has been proved that the Annamites have no intention of trying to differentiate between my troops and those of the French. It is self-evident, therefore, that the Annamites are actively hostile to British forces; and if hostile and actively so, it follows that in the execution of my own military tasks, such as the clearance of key areas for the ultimate disarmament of the Japanese forces, I am forced to take offensive action; not only in order to carry out my tasks but also to prevent my own troops from sustaining needless casualties at the hands of Annamite insurgents and rebels: also to maintain a proper standard of British prestige in the

eyes of the French and Chinese, two very susceptible communities, with active uncensored press.

The extent of the active opposition which has been encountered so far is best indicated by a casualty statement for the period from 20th September to []* th November:-

(a) CASUALTIES TO BRITISH TROOPS.

	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>VCOs</u>	<u>IORs</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Killed	1	2	16	19
Wounded	1	2	65	68
Missing believed killed	-	-	4	4
				<hr/> 91 <hr/>

(b) CASUALTIES TO JAPANESE TROOPS.

	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>NCOs</u>	<u>JORs</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Killed	7	11	36	54
Wounded	8	20	51	79
				<hr/> 133 <hr/>

The large majority of the casualties enumerated above have been caused by unprovoked attacks on my troops, NOT in affrays started by them.

I am at all times obviously responsible for the security and safety of my own forces. In spite of the issue of warnings verbally and in writing to disturbers and likely disturbers of the peace, the Independence Movement has by its attitude strongly threatened my forces in the expectation of their duty, infinitely more than I have threatened them.

The particular passage from the pamphlet that you quote was dropped with the full knowledge and agreement of the French authorities, at a time (approximately 1st October) when we knew that few Annamites were really active extremists: we knew that there were many on the edge of the political movement who disliked the thought of months of guerilla warfare, loss of money, loss of home, and in fact all the misery of war; we knew also that the extremist elements were doing their utmost to collect all such into their ranks. The pamphlet was, therefore, written and dropped from aircraft in order to persuade the vacillating elements of the population

* This date is blank in Gracey's letter, but may have been 8th or 9th, as the letter was dated the 9th; it could be that the original was too weak to reproduce properly in Gracey's copy.

why peace could be the only sensible policy to adopt. In that pamphlet, I did not say that tanks, ships, aircraft and guns were massed against virtually unarmed people; I said that the Annamite extremists and irresponsible elements who were trying to continue the useless fight against the might of tanks etc. were misleading the remainder of their people; nor is it really accurate to refer to the Annamites as really unarmed; they were and are well equipped with rifles, L.M.G.s, medium machine guns (in small quantities), grenades and grenade dischargers. I had this particular pamphlet dropped in order to save further bloodshed and as a warning not as a threat.

I had been given a task to do in the preservation of law and order within key areas; I had told the Annamite leaders and they agreed that I was bound to do it; they were inclined to belittle to their own followers the effects of disobeying my orders; I, therefore, had to warn them of the inevitable results of pitting themselves against me and of putting me in such a position that in order to carry out my tasks they forced me to take action against their own people.

There was one problem I had to consider before insisting on the French authorities signing the pamphlet; at the time of issue of the pamphlet to which you refer, the French authorities had no means of implementing any warnings they might issue other than by the use of British troops; surely such signature would have put H.M.G. in an invidious position, as we should have laid ourselves open to the charge of openly promising to aid and abet French domination?

In order to safeguard the movement of my troops on their lawful occasions, and to reduce their casualties from sniping and grenade throwing to a minimum, it has been essential for me to clear certain areas, which have shown themselves continually to harbour armed extremists. Searching such houses has been done on numerous occasions and has on only very few occasions produced anything; such searches have always been followed by fresh sniping, fresh grenade throwing and further casualties. On the other hand, burning such houses or as they really are, basha huts, has inevitably

produced a series of resounding detonations giving ample proof of the presence of ammunition. Within key areas I do not think I would be wise to pass responsibility for such acts to the French; in these areas inhabitants well know that I am responsible for law and order; the very presence of my troops proves that conclusively. The actual effect of obtaining French assistance would result in the complete destruction of not 20 but 2,000 houses, and probably without warning to the occupants! In the area for which I am responsible I do not honestly feel I can risk such a travesty of justice: You may doubt the veracity of this statement, but I can assure you that French measures in such cases know no such thing as minimum force.

I have written at great length, for which I apologise: I have only done so because I felt from your letter that something must have been lacking from my reports as I had obviously failed to explain the background against which I had had to issue such pamphlets and demolish houses." 37

October closed with a number of sharp engagements throughout the three brigade areas. In 32 Brigade's area, 3/8 Gurkha Rifles was again in action against a company-sized body of Việt Minh. Two groups of Gurkhas, two platoons each, set out to reconnoitre two suspected Việt Minh positions just west of Tân Sơn Nhi village, about two miles west southwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt. One group went down a road, the other along a canal bank. They met, and had not encountered any Việt Minh; but on returning separately to base they came under constant sniper fire. D Company engaged the snipers with 3" mortars and small arms fire and casualties were believed to have been inflicted on the Việt Minh. Half an hour later, at 1100, the company was again engaged by a determined enemy, and now the Gurkhas could see their mortar bombs falling in the midst of the Việt Minh group, in which "2 Japanese were seen to be taking an active part." Exact Việt Minh casualties were not known, but two bodies were seen. one in the ricefield and one near the road.

In Cholon, in 80 Brigade's area, the Việt Minh floated burning rafts downstream in an attempt to set key bridges on fire, but without success. Four Indian soldiers were also wounded in Cholon during a machine gun and grenade attack on their post. Because of the prevailing insecurity there, Cholon was now placed out of bounds for off-duty troops.

Down in Khanh Hói, the 3/1 Gurkhas had arrested numerous looters in the docks and warehouse areas, and on Rue de Nancy, in 4/17 Dogra's area, an IEME driver was shot and wounded. In fact, the military action now assumed a fairly constant pattern, with few all-out battles but continual small-scale patrol engagements, yet the casualty rate continued to rise. Indicative of the high level of activity was a 20 Division order to cease all practice firing in order to conserve dwindling ammunition stocks.

Paddy field and jungle bore silent witness to this opening act of the bigger drama of years to come, as small groups of men fought one another in the half-light. But for Gateforce there were, in this the first of the postwar counter-insurgency wars, few spectacular battles. It was more a matter of men falling silently and unrecorded into the thick undergrowth or beneath the languid brown surface of the swamps and canals. November appeared to offer little prospect of any change.

Footnotes: Chapter XIII

- 1 Gracey Papers, "ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.7," 21 October 1945.
- 2 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, "100 IND INF BDE OP ORDER NO.2", 21 October 1945.
- 3 Rodham's orders, contained in Instruction No. 52, have been cited by virtually every anti-British writer on the period to illustrate the brutality of the British counter-insurgency operations. The order invariably quoted verbatim is: "Always use the maximum force available to ensure wiping out any hostiles we may meet. If one uses too much no harm is done." There is, however, more to it than that, for Rodham continued, "If one uses too small a force and it has to be extricated we will suffer casualties and encourage the enemy." Taken out of context the quoted orders appear brutal, but their purpose in Instruction No. 52 was solely to emphasize strongly that "the full precautions of war must be taken throughout the ops." As Rodham went on to say, the reason was simple -- the brigade was at war and they were taking casualties. They had no defined front, and were vulnerable from the flanks and the rear, just as on the North West Frontier in India, where some in the division had served. In the oft-cited phrase, the operative word is "hostiles".
- 4 GB, PRO, WO 172/7793, War Diary 4/10 Gurkha Rifles, 23 October 1945.
- 5 W.E.H.Condon, The History of the Frontier Force Regiment (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1963), p.511.
- 6 Ibid.

7 GB, PRO, WO 172/7743, War Diary 14/13 Frontier Force Rifles, 24 October 1945.

8 The 1/1 GR Newsletter discussed these events:

100 Bde was the last Bde of 20 Div to arrive in Indo-China. It came on 17 Oct and on 19 we received the warning order for our future operations. We were to leave the fleshpots to 80 and 32 Bdes and move out to show the flag in the country to the North of Saigon, and proceed with the disarming of the Japs who were concentrated in that region. 100 Bde group, commanded by Brig Rodham, consisted of 16 Cav, a Mountain Regt IA, MG Bn 9 Jats, 42 Fd Amb and a dett of Engineers, with the original Inf Bns of the Bde, 14/13 FF Rifles, 4/10 GR and ourselves. We left the following in Saigon to continue to carry out duties as General Gracey's bodyguard: C. Coy, the General's old coy. commanded by John Rennie, who seemed best fitted to withstand the rigours of social life, the "Bn HQ defense pl": and the A.T. Pl (still unhorsed).

These rigours were real enough, as one of the youngest of the bodyguard troops, who deserted his post under unusual circumstances, can testify. He was a sentry one night on one of the main gates of General Gracey's house; when he was approached by an amorous French woman who threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. Fearful of what might happen next, he forgot his duty and fled for safety to the guard room.

We all moved in MT and reached THU DUC on 23rd. Here Bde HQ remained with the 4/10 GR. On the 24th we arrived at BIEN HOA, where we shed the 14/13th, and went to THU DAU MOT on the 25th. We were escorted by the 16 Cav: while we settled into the barracks, they did a 'chukka' round the town in the course of which, much to his indignation, the 2 i/c was hit in the back of the neck by a hostile grenade: it failed to explode.

Cyril Jarvis, who commanded the 1st Gurkhas at the time, related the humorous incident to the author in 1977. The 16 Cavalry second in command was a British officer who was disgruntled anyway because he had not been selected for promotion. His chagrin was increased when it was discovered that the grenade which bounced off his neck and sputtered on the ground looked like it was wrapped in an old sock. This was the final insult: "It wasn't even a proper grenade!"

9 GB, PRO, Air 27/1583, Log of 273 Squadron, 25 October 1945.

10 Gracey Papers, "20th Indian Division's History", n.d.

- 11 GB, PRO, WO 172/7786, War Diary 3/8 Gurkha Rifles, 23 October 1945.
12 Gracey Papers, "ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.8", 24 October 1945.
13 GR, PRO, WO 172/7008, Minutes of 24 October 1945, Conference (Nineteenth Orders).
14 Gracey Papers, Memo, 24 October 1945.
15 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 GR, 25 October 1945.

Lieutenant Colonel Jarvis remembered the incident well. Since he knew some rudimentary Russian he attempted to get the prisoner to talk, to no avail. The Russian was wearing a regular Viet Minh uniform, with gold stars on the lapels of his jacket. He was handed over to the Sûreté and never heard of again. [Cyril Jarvis, personal interview, 13 May 1977].

Jean Cédile also remembered the Russian, but said that he had no direct knowledge of his fate:

I had no knowledge of military operations. My job was to prepare the events of 23 September, and as I said to General Gracey, to reequip the PWs, but anything else [military] I knew nothing about. My work with the British consisted mainly of arranging the affair of the 23rd of September.

[Jean Cédile, personal interview, 26 October 1977].

- 16 Gracey Papers, 1/1 GR Newsletter.
17 Ibid.
18 Lieutenant Colonel R.W.Clark, former Commander 1/1 GR, letter to author, n.d. [1977].
19 Ibid.
20 Jacques Massu, Sept Ans Avec Leclerc (Paris: Plon, 1974) p.245. The Vietnamese, Nguyen Ngoc Bich, was later betrayed to the French by the Viet Minh.
21 J.H.Clark, "Sappers and Miners in Saigon", The Royal Engineers Journal, Vol. LXIV, No.3 (Chatham, Kent: 1950), pp 284-285.

All of this, however, was but more fuel for those writers who saw in these events only the Allied sins, and on 25 October Browning had written a prophetic letter to Penney:

I am absolutely convinced that the healing of our sick and weary world is going to be more complicated by the fact that a free, third rate and irresponsible Press are at large in the world today. They have consistently misquoted our statements and in fact done everything to embarrass the situation rather than help it. If you can only do something to persuade the people at home that 50% of our problems now have been due (and will be in the future) to the world Press, you will have done a most important thing.

[Papers of Major General W.R.C.Penney, Letter from Lieutenant General Browning, 25 October 1945. Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, University of London King's College].

- 22 Ibid. This may have been what R.Harris Smith was referring to in his book, OSS, when he wrote that "the British had deliberately burned down great sections of the native quarter of Saigon." He probably meant Cholon, since nothing comparable happened in Saigon. [University of California Press, Berkeley, 1972, p.346]. With that curious selectivity which permeated the writings on this area in the Sixties and early Seventies, Smith fails to mention the Viet Minh fire campaign of September (to increase its effectiveness they had carefully managed to remove Saigon's fire trucks beforehand), and the fact that arson and incendiarism constituted a major part of their strategy. A great deal of South Vietnam's produce — warehouses, houses, rubber dumps, etc. — were daily put to the torch by the Viet Minh as a matter of policy.
- 23 Meanwhile, in London, a political report was received at the Foreign Office on 26 October; it was the report sent earlier by Dening to Mountbatten, in which Brain traced the recent history in the south. In the report, now about two weeks old, Brain recapped the reason for the 23 September coup, noting that pure hooligans and bandits had been flourishing "under the banner of the fight for independence." Wrote Brain:

Because these activities went on under the authority of the so-called VIET NAM government the latter could not be dealt with as an administration capable of maintaining order. It was for this reason that Gen GRACEY arranged for the civil administration to be taken over by the French using rearmed French prisoners of war. This was done on 22 and 23 Sept in the form of a coup d'état.

It has not been possible to date to find any evidence that Brain or Dening ever disapproved of the coup, and Brain was even-handed in his report which stated that

the French administration was not a great deal better than that which it superceded for there began a repetition by way of reprisal against the Annamites of just those acts of which they had been accused, illegal arrests, beatings and unnecessary ill-treatment of prisoners, and an overbearing and insulting attitude to the Annamite population. This naturally confirmed up to the hilt the worst fears of the Annamites that they were back to the old days of violent suppression by the French and goes far to explain the wave of terrorism which then broke out.

Brain again pinpointed a major cause of the problems in the south:

Before and after the French take-over an important and very dangerous factor in the situation was the hysterical attitude of the French population. The wildest rumours circulated — and were believed — that hordes of Annamites were gathering to attack the city, that hundreds of civilians were being

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massacred - even that it was the Ghurkhas who had set fire to the market place. The excesses committed by the French were partly the outcome of this mixture of panic and the desire for revenge, and one of the things which has emerged very clearly is the necessity of removing the French civilians and prisoners of war as soon as possible, if normal life is to continue and French and Annamites are to live in harmony.

Brain's scathing report went straight to the heart of the matter:

All the French people I have met have assured me that the great majority of the Annamites want nothing more than to live in peace and carry on their work under French rule, and that the VIET MINH are a set of pirates and bandits who owe their power purely to the fact that they were armed and backed by the Japanese. I think that this is a dangerous belief. It is a comforting one and represents what they would like to believe. But they are shutting their eyes to the fact that Annamite independence movements have existed for some 80 years and have broken out in violent forms more than once, only to be driven underground by the use of the harshest measures of suppression. They are also ignoring the fact that many of the arms now being used against them and us are French arms seized by the Annamites themselves. There is not the slightest doubt that the Japanese backed the Annamites, but the flames were there before the fuel was added. The fact that resistance did not immediately collapse when the first heavy casualties began to be inflicted by our forces is alone sufficient proof of this.

The unanimous opinion we have been given in the past by the French that the Annamite movement was of little account and that 'deux coups de fusil' would see the end of resistance has proved so utterly wrong that it is difficult to place any reliance on the views of the French regarding the political importance of the demand for independence. They do not realise that in the eyes of the natives the French are no longer the superior beings that their domination and their force of arms made them appear in the past. The Annamites have seen the French dictated to, humiliated, and finally disarmed and kicked out of authority by an Oriental race, and, perhaps equally important, they have tasted power and known for a short time the pride of being a de facto government.

Brain emphasized that the Viet Minh leaders he had met "were no mere puppets of the Japanese, but educated and intelligent men with a strong determination to be free from, as they put it, the French yoke." He went on to say that he

Also gained the impression that they were not entirely in control of the forces which threatened us, and this impression was confirmed by a private interview which I had on 3rd October with Dr. PHAM NGOC THACH, who is the member of the local administration responsible for foreign affairs and at the same time a representative of the central VIET-NAM government in Hanoi."

- 24 GB, PRO, WO 172/7743, War Diary 14/13 Frontier Force Rifles, 27 October 1945.
- 25 GB, PRO, WO 172/7769, War Diary 1/1 Gurkha Rifles, 27 October 1945.
- 26 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, Message 271635, October 1945.
- 27 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, "100 Ind Inf Bde Op Instr No.55", 27 October 1945.
- 28 Papers of Major General Harold Pyman, 29 October 1945. [Liddell Hart Center for Military Archives, University of London King's College].
- 29 GB, PRO, WO 172/7743, War Diary 14/13 Frontier Force Rifles, 30 October 1945.
- 30 Gracey Papers, "20th Indian Division's History", n.d.
- 31 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, "Sitrep to 1530 hrs", 31 October 1945.
- 32 The 1/1 GR War Diary for 30 and 31 October is as follows:

30 Oct. Three trenches were found dug along the track leading through the village to the NORTH of the FRENCH BARRACKS. As the track is never used by traffic it is difficult to see why such energy was expended. (ANNAMITE tactics rarely descended to such depths but they were to keep on doing pretty silly things and their continuous avoidance of all principles of war or even common sense made the work of the Battalion less uncomfortable.) The ditches were filled in by the local inhabitants, CHINESE; their senility and feebleness had prevented them making any attempts to stop their road being spoiled. In the afternoon the FRENCH LAFO Col. TURCK, attached to the Battalion in a capacity which no one was ever quite able to fathom, was fired on in the Market place and also had a grenade thrown at him while on some useless errand. The culprits were not found.

31 Oct. B and D Coys, Pioneer Platoon, Mortar Platoon and 4 Secs. MMGs (9 JAT) searched the area

bounded by 175767 - 169747 - 162747 -
156771 - 169770, found grenades and spears
in houses and captured seven ANNAMITES.
0200 hrs 70 - 80 patients plus seven
ANNAMITE sisters disappeared (presumably
of their own free will) from the hospital
in THUDAUMOT in pony carts. Japanese
sentries were near: Col LE TURCK'S opinion
that they had been forcibly abducted by
the VIET NAM was obviously without
rational foundation unless they were all
deaf and dumb. The search for the elusive
sisters started by Col Le TURCK was to
last for days (they were finally found near
BENCAT by the Japanese and packed off to
SAIGON).

[GB, PRO, WO 172/7769].

- 33 GB, PRO, WO 172/7708, Twenty-Fifth Orders, 30 October 1945.
34 Ibid., Twenty-fourth Orders, 29 October 1945.
35 Gracey Papers, Letter from Mountbatten to Gracey, 31 October 1945.
36 The leaflet in question is reproduced below [Gracey Papers]:

ANNAMITES	ANNAMITES	ANNMITES.
READ THIS	READ THIS	READ THIS.

You know that your representatives are at present conferring
with the representatives of the new France.

You know too that a truce has been ordered by the Commander
of the Allied Forces.

This Cease Fire has been accepted by your representatives.

Do not be misled by the extremist and irresponsible elements
who are trying to continue this useless fight against the terrible
might of tanks, aircraft, guns, ships, soldiers, sailors and airmen.
After six years of War the United Nations of the World wish for
peace. They have no sympathy for those who attempt to attain their
ends at the expense of Bloodshed.

Return to your Peacetime duties.

Refrain from murdering, pillaging, thieving and other acts which
are illegal.

The New and Free France wishes to recognise your point of view.
Do you want a life of destruction, of misery, of famine and of
unhappiness for yourselves and for your families? Do you want to
suffer the terrible destruction of modern arms against your houses
and your villages?

Return to your Peacetime duties.

Let wisdom prevail. Stop this senseless bloodshed. Pay no heed
to those fools who encourage you to continue this pointless fight.

Return to your Peacetime duties.

Let those who do not listen to this warning and wise advice be warned that they will certainly bring misery and misfortune to their families and their friends.

RETURN TO YOUR PEACETIME DUTIES!

37 Gracey Papers, Letter from Gracey to Mountbatten, 9 November 1945.

CHAPTER XIV

CONSOLIDATION

We used rocket launchers to blow the doors down, and before I could say 'knife' the Gurkhas were across and in with the Kukris and butchered everyone in it.

Lieutenant Colonel E. Gopsill, DSO, OBE, MC.
3/1 Gurkha Rifles
Personal Interview 12 December 1977.

November saw Gracey's forces fully committed to the immediate problem of pacifying the areas in which the Japanese were to be concentrated and disarmed. As the British achieved success in the battle against the Việt Minh, and as substantial French forces began to arrive in Indochina, the emphasis gradually shifted to the formidable task of preparing the Japanese Armed Forces for repatriation to Japan. The arrival of Mountbatten at the end of the month, when he formally received Terauchi's personal surrender, signalled the fact that the major British objective had now become the concentration of the Japanese. However, several more weeks were to elapse before British (and Japanese) units ceased fighting.

Although the counter-insurgency role was new to Gracey's troops, and although his individual battalions were greatly stretched in regard to the area for which they were responsible, the 20 Division units had notable success in the campaign against Việt Minh forces. There were a number of reasons for this. First, and probably most important, the Division was well led -- there were competent commanders from Gracey down through brigade, battalion and company levels. Below that, the records of individual actions show that platoons and sections were also generally well led. The Division was also experienced in combat, having been committed to battle against the Japanese from the Imphal-Kohima days to the end of the war. The British were helped by the mutual antagonisms in the Việt Minh organization, and the Tonkinese troops who came south to stiffen the local Việt Minh cadres were, to an extent, themselves strangers.

It should also be mentioned that some of Gracey's professional soldiers did have experience in the task of pacification by their service on the North West Frontier in India. Brigadier Rodham in particular (on whose markedly broad shoulders fell the responsibility for clearing the main concentration areas) was experienced in operations against some of His Majesty's rebellious subjects, having earlier participated in the Mahsud campaign and operations in the North West Frontier in addition to the war in Burma.

There were a number of recognizable features in the general pacification strategy. Disarming and concentrating the Japanese was part of Gracey's goal. By securing the important key area he hoped to encourage the local population to return to their customary pursuits and restore the normal tempo of life and commerce to Saigon and the surrounding countryside.

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British strategy at this stage appears to have been conceived largely by Rodham, for it was his brigade which remained to clear the Việt Minh on the departure of 32 and 80 Brigade (which earlier had borne the brunt of the immediate street fighting in Saigon before Rodham's brigade arrived in Vietnam). By skilful employment of his limited resources, Rodham's tactics combined the use of mobile columns assigned to specific objectives, surprise sweeps, static posts and road-clearing operations which kept open his vital lines of communication and made his troops highly visible to the local population — Rodham put a great deal of emphasis on his soldiers keeping a "high profile" in their areas of responsibility. British responsibilities were further defined by the creation of Inner and Outer Zones, of which more will be said.

As November opened, one of Rodham's special columns (Gateforce) was proceeding down the Pham Thiết road to Giá Ray in its task of dispersing the Việt Minh main force and driving them further away from the key areas. Giá Ray* was found to be deserted, and the entire area of Gateforce's operations was now believed to be cleared of Việt Minh main units — these were now retreating east before the British/Japanese advance. Despite reports of large boulders being poised on overhanging cliffs, Gateforce returned uneventfully to base in Biên Hòa a day later, leaving Sato Butai in Xuân Lộc as a garrison to keep the Việt Minh as far from the key areas as possible.

The more routine, less spectacular and more frequent sweeps had varying success. Sometimes they were mounted in response to hard intelligence, but more often they were designed to keep the Việt Minh off balance, and occasionally the British were lucky and damaged the Việt Minh by catching high ranking members by surprise or by discovering arms caches. Although the emphasis was on the Gateforce operations in the east, Jarvis's 1st Gurkhas kept up the pressure in Thu Dầu Mọt when two companies searched houses from early morning until noon. As sometimes happened, this sweep bumped into a Việt Minh force. Earlier, 28 suspects had been detained and six houses were found to contain shotguns, rifles, grenades, javelins and ammunition. The six houses were destroyed, and during the operation the Việt Minh opened fire from the far bank of the river. Return rifle and machine gun fire from the Gurkhas failed to silence the snipers and artillery and

* Gateforce had surprised a Viet Minh demolition squad in the act of blowing up a bridge near Giá Ray, with gelignite and fuzes in place.

mortar concentrations finally destroyed the houses sheltering the snipers, killing thirteen Việt Minh.

Perhaps encouraged by the success of Gateforce in smashing the strong Việt Minh concentration in the Xuân Lộc area, Rodham, from his Thu Đức headquarters, issued "100 Brigade Operation Instruction 56". In the background information Rodham stated that 20 Division's influence was now being extended beyond the Saigon perimeter, and 32 Brigade sweeps had been pushing up the Saigon River's west bank, encountering small armed bands and snipers en route. The evidence now showed that the Việt Minh had withdrawn to concentration areas around Bến Cát (northwest of Thu Dầu Mót). Further evidence indicated that Việt Minh were moving down from Lộc Ninh to Bến Cát. There was a Japanese garrison of 300 artillerymen in Bến Cát. Rodham thought that a British advance to Bến Cát would meet opposition and road blocks, but after a show of force during the "first brush this opposition will melt away and become confined to snipers and saboteurs. There are certainly a number of diehards in the area."

The order to form another special mobile column was addressed to R.W.Clark, who was then a Major and second in command of 1/1 GR, and a number of additional units were to come under his command at 1200 hours on 5 November. His force was to be known as "Clarkol",* and his general tasks were as follows:

- (a) To break up any ANNAMITE FORCE found in the BEN CAT area.
- (b) To est[ablish] a firm base in BEN CAT area.
- (c) To operate strong offensive patrols on general axis rds radiating from BEN CAT.
- (d) To kill or capture all armed ANNAMITES.
- (e) To assist and give necessary protection to SAIGON CONTROL COMMISSION FINANCIAL ADVISER in the inspection of JAPANESE Printing Press at LAIKHE 0700 [map coordinates] with a view to its removal, and in the collection of bank notes from the Press.
- (f) To report by wireless the feasibility of removal of the Printing Press to SAIGON. 1

* 1 sqn 16 Cav armored cars, less 1 troop
 1 Coy 1/1 GR
 1 Sec 3" mortars, 1/1 GR
 1 Sec MMGs, 9 Jat
 Det 42 Ind Fd Amb
 Det 481 Ind Fd Coy
 Yamagichi Butai (400/500 troops).

Clark was further assigned specific tasks, such as which roads in particular to patrol, and all "Recces in force" were to be back in the firm base by 1530 hours each day. Rodham cautioned, "During whole op you must watch your L of C from THU DAU MOT to BEN CAT paying particular attention to br[idge]s." This was no doubt a result of Gateforce's experience in being temporarily cut off from Trang Bom. Jarvis was ordered to "hold in readiness on wheels" a relief force consisting of a company of Gurkhas and a battery (less one section) of 23 Mountain Regiment.

An amendment was later issued to Clark's orders; the change had been necessary because "The operation of CLARKOL is now part of a bigger operation to encircle and destroy all [armed] ANNAMITES within the BENCAT area." On the night of 7/8 November Massu's French force was to advance to and occupy Tây Ninh, with French armor arriving on the 8th in order to establish a firm base there. On the following day French patrols were to move east from Tây Ninh in the hope of driving the Việt Minh towards Bến Cát, while Japanese forces were to move south from Lộc Ninh and establish a block at Chơn Thành. In view of the enlarged plan the composition of Clarkol was now altered, with more firepower being added to it. One troop of British artillery from 114 Regiment was to be brought into Thu Dầu Môt and attached to Clarkol, and the machine gun complement was increased from one section to one platoon of 9 Jat. The tasking remained unchanged.

Clarkol's departure from Thu Dầu Môt on 8 November coincided with the French drive east from Tây Ninh. Clark's force was to sweep the Bến Cát area in the north, and by 1015 he was established in Bến Cát; a smaller mobile column was detached from Clarkol and drove to Long Thành, but met no opposition. The operation was described in part by a 1/1 Gurkha writer:

"Mob[ile] col[umn]s searched THU DAU MOT town and its environs thoroughly and then went further afield to visit the whole area. There were frequent brushes with Vitamins and we suffered some casualties. The most notable effort was that of "Clark Col" which was commanded by Bobby Clark... This force combed the country 40 miles North of THU DAU MOT, visited BEN CAT, AP BUNG CAU, and CHAUK LOO and returned with 106 prisoners, having left the YAMAGISHI* BUTAI to garrison BEN CAT.

* The spelling of this name in various documents appears to be divided between Yamagichi and Yamagishi. "Yamagichi" is used throughout this text.

BUNG was [the] scene of several actions by the mobcol; in one of these the Pioneer pl comd. Jemadar Bakhatbahadur scored a most successful snap shot on the forehead of an Annamite sniper who was stalking Bn. Hq. from the rear."2

Lieutenant Colonel Clark later wrote of the Clarkol operations:

"It was about this time that I was ordered out with Clarkforce to investigate the extent of Viet Minh activity towards the Cambodian border... My modus operandi was for the 1/1 GR Coy to ride on the armoured cars and, as soon as we hit trouble, to put in the Japs. This avoided casualties to our own men and, since the Japs supported the Viet Minh, the latter seldom continued the operation.

The first evening we arrived at a large village and billeted for the night. The village was completely deserted and all evening patrols reported 'No contact' for 2 miles.

After a quiet night the usual dawn patrols went out and presented a very different picture on return.

Of the six roads radiating from the village all roads were blocked by felled rubber trees for a distance of $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles except the one up which we had come and which we would have to use to return to Thu Dau Mot. No sight was to be seen of any Vietnamese.

There obviously must have been a large number of Viet Minh active during the night but, since no contact could be made and it would have taken a day to clear the road blocks there was little more we could do. After fairly wide patrolling without contact the force returned to Thu Dau Mot without achieving anything other than to show the Viet Minh strength.

I remain convinced that Takahashi's* Bn had throughout been giving active support to the Viet Minh but we couldn't prove anything and all orders to him were carried out with scrupulous correctness. He even shot a senior NCO through the thigh with his pistol, in my presence, because I complained that some task had not been completed." 3

* Major Takahashi commanded the Japanese battalion in Thu Dau Mot.

Clark further commented on the initial French operations in the 1/1 GR area -- a common description by British officers:

"The first French operational forces now began to arrive but we saw little of them as they only passed through our area to operate further North and towards the Cambodian border.

They really were a band of pretty unruly cut-throats and it was subsequently no surprise to me that they were not accepted in the country by the Vietnamese.

Their method of 'pacifying' a village, without any provocation or indication that the place might be hostile, was to drive through in American 3 ton trucks .300 machine-guns on the cab, all guns firing on alternate sides of the street at first floor level 'in case someone might be about to snipe at the column.' They seldom hit anyone but if that is the way friends arrive it is little wonder the Vietnamese threw them out." 4

Despite British suspicions concerning Japanese-Viet Minh collusion, Yamagichi Butai clashed with Việt Minh troops in the B^ên C^át area on the 9th, and suffered five wounded. On the following day Clarkol fought a six hour battle with Việt Minh units armed with rifles and light machine guns. Five Việt Minh were killed, six wounded and twenty captured. Two days later Clarkol split into two smaller columns; one swept northwest from B^ên C^át, the second reconnoitered the road east to beyond Thành Tây. The two mobile columns returned to B^ên C^át after a few hours, at which time Clarkol returned to base at Thu Dầu M^ôt. Several more armed Việt Minh had been captured, and Clark's troops just missed rescuing a number of prisoners said to be held by the Việt Minh. A further report had led them to a house where again they just missed their quarry, but this time the number "52" was chalked on a wall, perhaps indicating the number of prisoners held; notices were also found which cautioned the Việt Minh against talking to the prisoners. Clarkol returned to Thu Dầu M^ôt without Yamagichi Butai, which remained to garrison B^ên C^át.

In Thu Dầu M^ôt itself, suspicions of Japanese-Viet Minh collusion* were strengthened when Việt Minh arsonists walked past Japanese guarding 1000 tons of rubber and set fire to the dump; incendiarism had become

* In a few days Brigadier Hirst was to ask the Japanese for an explanation of incidents which had occurred between 25 September and 7 October. During this time the Cholon post office and telephone and telegraph exchanges were destroyed while guarded by Japanese troops.

part of Việt Minh strategy and Gracey's troops were hard pressed to cope with fires throughout the key areas. Another instance of questionable Japanese sincerity occurred in Thủ Đức, not far from Rodham's own headquarters, when a Japanese captain and twenty men were detailed to arrest the secretary of the local Việt Minh organization. The raid was in response to Japanese information, and in a somewhat suspicious report the captain stated that "they succeeded in seizing his [the Việt Minh's Secretary's] wife and servants, but saw the Secretary himself -- escaping across the field at the back of the house."⁵ It appeared that over a dozen Japanese soldiers were unable to run down (or wound) a single Vietnamese of questionable athletic ability.

Three days prior to Major Clark's reconnaissance in force, Rodham had sent a smaller mobile group into Lai Thiêu. This column was named Sawcol, after Major Sawhny of 16 Cavalry. Sawcol departed Thủ Đức with the objective of showing the flag in what were reported to be strong Việt Minh concentration areas in and around Lai Thiêu. Sawcol was composed of a 16 Cavalry squadron less one troop, one company of 4/10 Gurkha infantry and one artillery section from the mountain battery detachment.

The column departed at 0800 and went straight to the Bata Shoe factory to check reported damage there. The factory was found to be deserted, but had been making boots for the Việt Minh. A local rubber dump was also deserted, and the Japanese (who were supposed to be guarding key areas of the town) were conspicuous by their absence.

The local Japanese commander, Colonel Hamagachi, was summoned by Sawhny and told that he [Hamagachi] was personally responsible for the area and no further Việt Minh activities (including the erection of road blocks) were to be permitted. The 16 Cavalry report stated:

"The present negative attitude by the Japanese Commander would NOT be tolerated, and that a far greater activity on the part of Jap troops to suppress Viet Minh activities would be expected of him. This shook Col. Hamagachi and had a very salutary effect on him." 6

The shoe factory had been "thoroughly looted" by the Việt Minh, but a French boy (one of Sawcol's objectives) was located and the column returned to their Thủ Đức base on the following afternoon.

But while these specially designed and tasked mobile columns were relatively successful in achieving their limited objectives, in terms of men and material they were expensive to mount, for the remaining British troops could do little more than conduct minimal

sweeping operations and respond to emergencies. As a result, for a few days at a time the Việt Minh were able to take advantage of the lessening of British pressure. These were the times when incendiaryism and road and bridge sabotage increased, and 16 Cavalry reports described armored car crossings of numerous rickety bridges with "a certain amount of anxiety and amusement" — supporting structures had usually been removed or other damage done to the bridges.

Rodham's third battalion also conducted limited armed reconnaissance as 14/13 FFR plus 16 Cavalry armored cars and Jat machine guns swept the road and river from Biên Hòa to Bình Long and Bến Cát, where Việt Minh concentrations were reported.

But although the emphasis was on military operations against the Việt Minh, the first modest step towards disarming the Japanese was taken on 2 November, when the first of the many localised surrender ceremonies took place. On this occasion the Saigon-Cholon Kempei Tei section handed over their sidearms and swords, saluted the Union Jack and were interned. All the Japanese consular officials were now in "honourable confinement", including the group flown in from Phnom Penh on the same day.

Following the Saigon Kempei Tei surrender General Numata, in a paper titled "Reorganisation of Japanese Forces in FIC", was ordered to provide an Army Headquarters in Saigon which would command all Japanese Army and Air Force units in South Indochina. The Army commander was to be Lieutenant General Nishioyada, as Field Marshal Terauchi, declining steadily, now spent a great deal of time convalescing at Cap St. Jacques. The Japanese 2nd Division, on being replaced in Saigon by the 5th Air Division, was to be relieved of all wider commitments and move to Lai Thieu to come under Brigadier Rodham to use as he deemed necessary. The Japanese Army Headquarters, Saigon, was to assume control of Japanese forces in South Indochina upon the departure to Singapore of Field Marshal Terauchi and Headquarters Japanese Southern Army.

At the daily staff meeting the Japanese were now informed that they could reduce the size of their operational forces under Brigadier Taunton of 80 Brigade. At the moment, 2000 troops from the Japanese 2nd Division were operating under Taunton; these were to be reduced to 1000 men, to be organized as follows: 600 for guard duties, 200 for fighting reserve and 200 for administrative duties. The 1000

Japanese now released were to prepare to move "in due course" to the Japanese concentration area between Biên Hoà and Thu Dầu Môt. As units of the 2nd Division were released they would, in principle, be replaced by units of the 5th Air Division* who would eventually take over all the static guard posts in the Saigon-Cholon area. Second Division troops near the Cambodian border had still not received "clear orders regarding offensive action to be taken against all armed Annamites," and the Japanese were ordered to rectify this situation immediately. Hirst also drew attention to the fact that the Japanese in outlying areas appeared to be selling arms and ammunition to the Việt Minh, and Major Takahashi in Thu Dầu Môt had announced that there were over 3500 Japanese troops in the Thu Dầu Môt area who did not fall under his control; these included naval troops, hospital corpsmen, weather forecasters, marine troops and so forth.

On the following day, 100 Brigade "Jap Surrender Instr No.1" was issued to provide guidance on forthcoming Japanese surrenders.⁷ Under "Phases of Ops Leading up to Disarmament", Rodham wrote that

"Broadly speaking our operations are divided into three phases:

- PHASE I (a) Thorough combing out of area for elimination of hostiles and collection of rebels arms.
- (b) The recce and marking down of all JAP arms, amn, explosive and store dumps preparatory to their evacuation to SAIGON or destruction.
- (c) The clearance of roadblocks so that these dumps can be collected by M.T.
- PHASE II The collection or destruction of all JAP arms, amn, explosive and store dump.
- PHASE III The disarmament of the JAPS."

However, Rodham recognized that "We have not yet completed PHASE I and this may yet take us a considerable time. Owing to extreme shortage of tpt the Div. Comd [Gracey] wishes us to start on PHASE II in respect of dumps near firm bases." Ordnance collected from the Japanese was to be backloaded on empty ration transports. Rodham saw no point in backloading ammunition and grenades and asked permission to throw the former into the nearest river and blow up the latter. These instructions, however, referred to arms in dumps, as the Japanese were not to be disarmed at present. As for the Japanese themselves, the decision had now been made that

* from Cambodia.

On disarmament of the Japanese, surrendered personnel as opposed to War Criminals and PW will be divided into two categories:

Category 'A' Those individuals and units which have scrupulously carried out orders and co-operated properly since BRITISH troops came here.

Category 'B' The rest — non co-operators, the half-hearted indisciplined units, officers who have not carried out their orders to the best of their ability or have been half-hearted in carrying them out.

Category "B" individuals were to be returned last to Japan, and in the meanwhile given "all the menial and disagreeable jobs." This information, however, would not be passed to the Japanese until they were disarmed.

At this time Gracey was surprised by news of the unexpected appearance in Cholon of two Chinese officers from the 60th Division [which was in the area just north of the sixteenth parallel]. They had motored down and spent the night of the 4th in a Cholon hotel and sought an interview with Gracey on the following day. They carried a letter dated 25 October from the "Commanding Force of the 60th Army, Hue". Colonel Sy Wang, Major K.H. Hwan and a sergeant were sent to Saigon to get food for the Chinese Army and certain necessities for the Chinese cooperative store for officers and men. The letter was signed by Major General P.M. Wan, Chief of the 60th Army. Gracey pointed out to the Chinese that negotiations between Mountbatten and Chiang Kai-Shek (concerning the exchange of missions in Indochina) were reaching an advanced stage, and that the local British commander's task concerned the Japanese rather than civil commitments and supply. He then sent them to D'Argenlieu with their request.*

Gracey did not need any problems with the Chinese in the north, as he was coping with problems caused by the Chinese in Cholon. Gracey had been forced to turn his attention to the propaganda war being waged against him,** time he could ill afford to lose as he was occupied with a number of other more pressing problems from the pacification operations to disarming the Japanese. In a telegram to the Department

* In Biên Hoa, the French reported seeing two Chinese colonels and a Chinese staff officer in the market.

** Which continues in some of the current histories on this period.

of Public Relations in India he focused on the "sudden wholesale allegations* by [an] element of [the] Chinese Community and Chinese Press in [the] Cholon district of Saigon against [the] conduct and discipline of British Indian troops recently used as an excuse to strike, and non cooperation movement by Chinese."⁸ In Gracey's view there was little doubt that the real cause was to be found in the fact that many of the Chinese leaders, who formerly had collaborated with the Japanese, were now working with the Viêt Minh to hinder the Allies. In fact, the President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce had been arrested, and in his pocket was a letter of agreement of cooperation with the Viêt Minh. Wrote Gracey, "His arrest and reason for it has had [a] salutary effect amongst those Chinese elements terrorising their compatriots to acts against us." Virtually none of the "wholesale charges" stood up to investigation by a British/Chinese Bureau set up after a meeting between Chinese leaders and Gracey. They did agree on such matters as curfews, methods of searches, and so on, and mutual cooperation increased.

As it happened, investigations did substantiate some of the Chinese charges, but these acts had been committed not by Gracey's troops but by Pondicherry Indians sponsored by French police. The Chinese were also pressing Gracey to lift his ban on British/Indian troops dallying in Cholon -- they wanted the business back.

There was another potential problem which worried Gracey, and that was the possibility that Leclerc would gain control of British forces. With talk of his division leaving Vietnam, Gracey wrote to General Slim, ALFSEA Commander. Gracey commented that the Commander in Chief had no doubt seen the recent critical letter from the Supreme Allied Commander to Gracey, a copy of which he attached to this letter, and wrote:

2. I do hope that when the command of French forces passes to LECLERC I shall not be placed under his command for any purpose, even within the limitations imposed on my activities by H.M.G. I get on extremely well with LECLERC but if I am put under his command at any time, it will be more difficult than it is now to resist his more extravagant demands, especially as regards transport.

3. It is most necessary that I should continue to run the whole Japanese side of things as long as we are here. The Japanese will take anything from us, but will do nothing for the

* Of looting by Gurkhas [all Indian troops were called Gurkhas].

French. However, we shall very shortly be able to disarm most of the Japanese, and I hope that LECLERC's operations, which his troops have carried out with great skill and speed (and with much unnecessary brutality) will soon allow us to concentrate all except the more northerly Japanese detachments,

4. The French troops are leaving a pretty good trail of destruction behind them, which will result in such resentment that it will become progressively more difficult for them to implement their new policy, and, I am convinced, will result in guerilla warfare, increased sabotage and arson as soon as we leave the country.

5. LECLERC may even find he wants to rearm some of the Japanese again -- and if this is necessary, the result, in my opinion, will be that such Japs will desert in large numbers with their arms.

6. LECLERC is bound to ask before he leaves to be presented with every and any form of equipment that 20 Div can spare. This request may well embrace weapons of all kinds, clothing, equipment, bridging and technical equipment, such as directors etc., precision instruments, canteen stores if available etc. etc. I should be grateful for an early rating on my policy in this matter.

Gracey added a P.S.:

TAILPIECE. Ref. para 3 above. The following has just been submitted by the Japanese: Quote:- We respectfully submit a request that all orders to our forces should be passed by a British and not a French Officer, as we find it increasingly difficult to carry out the orders resulting from their schemeless plans. Unquote: The last is, alas, so true about the implementation of their plans. 9

While Gracey was exercised with the task of speeding up the concentration of the Japanese, and the likelihood that problems with the French would grow in relation to the size of their forces, the major activity during this period was the continuing difficult, grinding pursuit of the Viêt Minh, both in the urban centers and in the countryside. Conditions were not yet to the point where the Japanese could be completely disarmed and concentrated.

In Saigon and Cholon, 1/19 Hybad, now renamed the 1st Kumaon (Russell's) Regiment, carried out a series of raids on suspected Viêt Minh houses, and four suspects were handed over to the Sûreté. Two

women were arrested distributing Viet Minh propaganda to Indian troops, and in the Cholon bazaar a grenade killed a 9/12 FFR soldier and wounded another.

In 32 Brigade's Sector, 4/2 GR searched a hospital and school in Gò Vấp and were sniped by Việt Minh who escaped into heavy brush behind the shops. The school was empty, but a large number of Vietnamese men and women wearing red cross armbands were in the hospital. Forty-one men were arrested, and an informer later stated that these men were responsible for much of the sniping in Gò Vấp. On the 3rd a great deal of firing was heard in 4/2 GR's area, believed to be Việt Minh reprisals on Chinese informers involved in the previous day's operations. The 4/2 Gurkhas further validated Rodham's emphasis on protecting his lines of communication, at times to the exclusion of other necessary military operations, when they reported that a ration truck had been fired on by Việt Minh who lay in ambush on both sides of the road about two miles north northeast of Tân Sơn Nhứt. The Việt Minh had a light machine gun and threw seven or eight grenades, but caused no casualties. The Gurkhas immediately replied with 2 inch mortars and charged the ambushers who fled, leaving two dead while carrying away one wounded man. At the same time a sniper fired four shots at a sentry at battalion headquarters, but missed each time.

With garrisons positioned in outlying districts, the security of vehicle convoys now became a matter of urgency. Likely ambush sites (and there was no shortage of these) were reconnoitered and the undergrowth was cut back as far as possible from the roads. As Lieutenant Colonel Clark, 1/1 GR, wrote:

"The Viet Minh also took to harassing the twice weekly ration convoy from Bien Hoa despite the armoured car escort and Jap guards at VPs and so the Japs were ordered to clear the jungle for 50 yards either side of the whole route. This they did, without batting an eyelid, within 3 days! I later had to order them to clear a further 50 yards as the Viet Minh took to catapulting grenades at the convoy by springing bamboo 'ballistas' and the Japs did complain at this order saying that we had already removed all their tools.

My only reaction was to ask my Adjutant, Capt Bob McMaster, how many officers swords were in the surrendered weapons dump, intending to smash off the tip and reissue them as machetes. The Japanese reaction was immediate and before McMaster could answer the interpreter agreed that they would do the job. They did so within a week.

As far as I can remember this was about the only protest the Japs ever made about orders given to them at our daily conference as, because of the small British presence, they were left pretty much to themselves... Most of the Japanese force consisted of Navy personnel and they were fully employed on digging out aerial bombs from underground tunnels, most of which had collapsed." 10

In early November, during the Diwali Hindu festival, grenades were again thrown at a 9/12 FFR truck in the Cholon bazaar, wounding three soldiers, but "at least" ten Viêt Minh were believed killed by return grenade and Sten gun fire. Three more Sikhs were wounded while buying chickens from a village, and mortar fire was put down on the village. The 9/12th War Diary states that there was now not a day passing without grenades, sniper fire or both being inflicted on the 9/12th in their Cholon area. The same held true for all battalions, and the casualty figures crept up correspondingly.

The "20th Division's History" continued:

"The position in SAIGON/CHOLON had by this time been stabilized and 80 Bde, with the assistance of Field Security and French Sûreté personnel were engaged in sweeping the built up areas and carrying out security checks on large sections of the population.

This was especially necessary in the CHOLON area which is densely populated and where VIET MINH incendiarys, grenade throwers and snipers were able to mingle with the native population. Our troops continued to suffer casualties in this area from grenades and sniping attacks...

The main feature of the first fortnight of November was a wave of grenade throwing incidents in the CHOLON area. At this time the whole of 80 Bde (less the 3/1 GR on KANH [sic] HOI island) and 9/12 FFR were disposed in the CHOLON area.

In addition, there was a proportion of Div troops, including IEME workshops and 100 and 102 Div Tpt Companies. Like most EASTERN cities CHOLON consisted of numerous bye-ways and side alleys which afforded easy getaways for grenade throwers. Our casualties would have been heavier had it not been for the unreliability of the home made grenade." 11

Unfortunately, a more reliable grenade was thrown at a 1st Kumaon truck near a canal bridge in Cholon, killing a VCO and wounding four others who were returning from battalion headquarters. The area was cordoned off and 136 Vietnamese were held for questioning. In the north, a Japanese soldier was wounded when the Việt Minh attacked a Japanese post southeast of Thu Dầu Một.

Rodham now directed that a network of dozens of check posts be established throughout 100 Brigade's area. The sentries at these posts were to search all vehicles (other than British or Japanese) for arms. The searching was to be done "politely and cheerfully and people themselves will NOT be searched."¹²

In Thu Dầu Một, the Japanese retaliated against the recent Việt Minh attack on their post by sweeping Thu Dầu Một, bringing in a total of 61 suspects. On the 6th they turned their attention to Bien Hoa, which they swept completely, but the town was apparently clear and a Chinese liaison officer reported that the community felt "comparatively safe from VIETMINH." On the previous day the Japanese, now more aggressive, had reported finding what appeared to them to be a Viet Minh military academy, and some of the suspects brought in were believed to be former students of the academy.

Three more Việt Minh were killed in 32 Brigade's area as a Japanese patrol linked up with 4/2 GR, and 3/8 GR reported that an unserviceable Japanese aircraft had been set on fire at Tân Sơn Nhứt, after which 32 Brigade asked the RAF to institute "some identification system" for the "large number of Annamite coolies" employed by them. The Japanese near the airfield arrested eight more suspects, one of whom was carrying 150 rounds of ammunition. The Gurkhas burned down two houses a mile north of Go Vap, and ammunition was heard to explode in the flames. In late afternoon the 4/2 Gurkhas fired mortars into a suspected Việt Minh concentration area just north of Gò Vấp, and a Chinese informant reported that seventeen Việt Minh had been killed, and twenty-two wounded, by the mortar fire.

When Jean Cédile visited Rodham's 100 Brigade area, he was fortunate enough to escape a grenade thrown at him while en route to Thu Dầu Một. The "20th Division's History" noted the increased activity during early November:

"The situation in the SAIGON/CHOLON area had remained comparatively quiet during the last few days of October, but fighting flared up in CHOLON on the night of 31 October/1 November with an unsuccessful attack on one of our picquets on a bridge.

In the GIA DINH area on the night of 2/3 November a strong attack was made on one of our posts. During this attack the VIET MINH again used tear gas bombs without success.

On the afternoon of 3 November a company of the 4/17 DOGRA became heavily engaged with a large body of VIET MINH in a built up area NORTH of CHOLON. The defences here included well constructed bunker positions. The company was forced to remain out overnight and during the night jitter parties were active in the familiar Jap fashion.

The following morning the company was joined by 16 Cavalry armoured cars and another company of the 4/17th, and between them they accomplished the task of clearing the area." 13

Soon after Cédile's escape near Thu Dầu Một, the hapless French Lieutenant Colonel Turck had another grenade thrown at him in the town, but the 1st Gurkhas caught two of the attackers while the Japanese ran down another. In 4/2 GR's area, a Gurkha company was fired on while conducting a sweep towards BẾN CÁT, just east of Gò Vấp. The Gurkhas counterattacked ferociously and killed twenty-two Việt Minh; eight boats were also sunk trying to escape across the river and some arms and documents were seized in the village.¹⁴ A further 179 men and 78 women were arrested as suspects and most of the village was burnt down. The Gurkhas did not incur any casualties, and it was being driven home with a vengeance that war, especially a guerilla war, was no game.

Rodham now issued "100 Ind Inf Bde Op Instr No. 58", which began by saying, "This Bde's area of responsibility has been extended." He reiterated his main tasks of establishing "complete law and order", clearing lines of communication and ridding the area of hostile elements so that the Japanese could be disarmed and their arms dumps emptied. An additional area had now been allotted to 100 Brigade; this new area stretched all the way east to Xuân Lộc, south to the east bank of the river through Saigon, and northwest to BẾN CÁT* (north of Thu Dầu Một) and Tân Uyên. The original Biên Hòa - Thủ Đức - Thu Dầu Một area now became known as the "Inner Zone", and the further areas as the "Outer Zone." From now on all Japanese troops were to come under

* There are two places named BẾN CÁT, one, a larger town north of Thu Dầu Một, the other a village near Gò Vấp.

the local Japanese Sub-Area Commander. Thus all Japanese troops in the Biên Hòa Outer Zone, regardless of unit affiliation, were to come under Colonel Miyake, while all British troops in the Biên Hòa Inner Zone were to be placed under Lieutenant Colonel Pickard, 14/13 FFR Commander (who would also exercise overall command of Japanese troops in his Sub-Area through Colonel Miyake). Similarly, Lieutenant Colonel Jarvis in Thu Dầu Một would control Japanese troops in the Inner and Outer Zones through Major Takahashi, and Major Mullaly of 4/10 GR would work through Colonel Sakai in Thủ Đức. The necessary orders had already been issued by General Manaki.

The Japanese were generally responsible for security in the Outer Zone, as British troops were restricted to operations in the Inner Zone unless used for specific tasks (such as the Gateforce and Clarkol operations). But even the Japanese were not present in sufficient strength to guard all vital points in the Outer Zone, and 20 Division Headquarters was asked for a list of the more important VPs, with emphasis placed on the Biên Hòa - Xuân Lộc and Thu Dầu Một - Bến Cát roads.

Rodham thought that the Japanese could be used for the following tasks:

- (i) Eliminating small bands of rebels for which a combined force is NOT necessary.
- (ii) Arresting any rebel leaders or armed ANNAMITES they can trace in their area.
- (iii) Searching for arms in any village reported to contain VIET MINH Agents or rebels.
- (iv) Furnishing Sub Area Comds with all information they can get hold of regarding rebel or VIET MINH activities in or near their areas.
- (v) Give warning of the approach or infiltration of any rebels or VIET MINH agents towards the INNER ZONE. 15

For the present, Japanese naval units would not come under the Japanese Army, but the naval area commander, Captain Kakita, would move his headquarters to Thủ Đức, to be near Rodham's 100 Brigade Headquarters. Kakita was to appoint local naval commanders to work for Jarvis and Pickard in Thu Dầu Một and Biên Hòa.

British troops increased the pressure on the Việt Minh during these first few days of November, and Brigadier Woodford, of 32 Brigade, now executed plans for a massive sweep in his sector, plans which involved all of his battalions. This was a big operation which

concentrated on about a square mile area bordered by the road running northwest from the golf course, west of Gò Vấp and northeast of Tân Sơn Nhứt. Two companies of 2/8 Punjab were detailed to search the area while 4/2 GR and 3/8 GR blocked all exits from the area. All males between 18 and 40 were detained, so that 2000 men were held for questioning by the Sûreté; another 120 were arrested by Gurkhas at the exit blocks.

One result of this intensive sweep by 32 Brigade was that their area became quieter than it had been for weeks. However, women were daily smuggling grenades hidden in loaves of rice bread to Gò Vấp, and "some buildings in Go Vap which have been burned down have had arms and ammunition so securely buried under the earthen floors that ANNAMITES have later returned and retrieved these arms from the ruins."¹⁶

Allied Intelligence officers were scoring some notable successes, an example of which was the arrest of Phan Phước Tân, alias Sáu, on the night of 7/8 November by a 14/13 FFR search party. Tân was reputed to be the local Việt Minh Commissar of Police and a "known VIET MINH Chief." Arrested with Tân in the Biên Hòa area were a Việt Minh agent and a Frenchwoman thought to have been kidnapped; it was later discovered that she was with the men voluntarily. The Japanese also brought in two Việt Minh officials.

In Cholon, a suspicious priest reported an "alarming increase" in new graves in a cemetery, and 80 Brigade units investigated the possibility that arms and ammunition were being hidden in the graveyard.*

In Saigon, the Control Commission issued a summary of operations for inclusion in SACSEA Report No.4. In it Gracey reported that the arrival of more French troops** had facilitated his task of expanding the perimeter to Thu Dầu Một and Biên Hòa, and certain areas were now being taken over by the French. Large concentrations of Việt Minh troops were reported outside the occupied area and operations were planned to "break up these concentrations and drive the remnants away from the concentration area...*** Many smaller operations involving close cooperation between British and Japanese forces have also been carried out with great success."¹⁷

* Significant quantities of arms were indeed recovered from graves throughout the area.

** 1800 French troops had arrived during the preceding two days.

*** With mobile columns such as Gateforce, Sawcol and Clarkol.

The report continued:

"Experience has shown, however, that any important operation to be carried out by the Japanese should be under the direct command of a British Officer. The British Officer is then in a position to see that the operation is carried out quickly and efficiently - the Japanese usually being only too anxious to demonstrate their soldierly qualities in the presence of British troops. If left to themselves, however, the Japanese do not always conduct their operations with the degrees of thoroughness and despatch required."

French forces had now extended southwards into the Mekong delta, occupying Mỹtho,¹⁸ Càntho', Gò Cồng, Vĩnh Long, and other towns. They felt well enough established to assume complete control and the Japanese forces were being withdrawn accordingly. However, it was still necessary to attach a British liaison officer to ensure Franco-Japanese cooperation.¹⁹

Gracey now had a fairly firm plan for the proposed drawdown of Japanese forces and their subsequent concentration. He was hoping that by 20 November the Japanese, "less a certain number employed in operational roles and the staffs and guards of some Japanese Stores and Depots", should have moved to their concentration areas.

Gracey had heard news of the proposed departure of his division from Indochina*, and he forwarded to Leclerc a summary of the instructions received from ALFSEA concerning the withdrawal of 20 Division.²⁰ Gracey asked Leclerc for an estimate as to when the French would be prepared to accept responsibility for the Japanese forces, and hoped that the majority of the Japanese in the concentration areas could be disarmed by late November. Gracey also advised Leclerc that it was unlikely that any Jeeps or wireless equipment could be given to the French, and some of the 3 ton and 30 cwt vehicles would have to be taken by 20 Division.

In Leclerc's reply to Gracey's letter of the 9th, he acknowledged the conference he had had with Gracey earlier in the day.** Leclerc

* Ever the solid commander, Gracey telegraphed Major General Pyman, ALFSEA Chief of Staff, requesting all available information "including type of terrain, climate, etc., in areas to be occupied later by 20 Div so that I can start organizing suitable Brigade Gps. Matter also affects order of priority of location of French tps in relief of mine in Saigon-Cholon." [Gracey to Pyman, 7 November 1945] .

** 12 November 1945.

agreed that "It is of the greatest interest in view of the return to law and order that the Japanese should be embarked as a matter of first priority as was promised by SACSEA telegram 452 of 17 Aug. addressed SCAP."²¹ Leclerc further stated that in his view it was "indispensable" that after their disarmament the Japanese should be transferred from their present concentration area in 100 Brigade's territory to some place where it would be "much more difficult to remain in contact with the civil population and desert, e.g., BARIA CAP ST JACQUES."

Leclerc wrote that he accepted the fact that the British were responsible for disarming the Japanese. "We have always respected this principle as even during the operations it is a British L.O.* who eventually transmits orders to the Japanese." For Leclerc and Massu, the sting from this procedure was difficult to conceal. Leclerc confirmed that it would not be possible for him to take over the task of disarming the Japanese until the 9th DIC and Corps support troops arrived, and until his over transportation situation improved.

Gracey agreed in part with Leclerc's arguments, but disagreed on the requirement for the corps troops to be in place before 20 Division could depart; at the present shipping rate this could severely delay the departure of 20 Division. Although Leclerc wanted the British to disarm the Japanese garrisons in south Annam, Nha Trong, Đà Lạt, Phan Rang and Phan Thiết, Gracey thought that the French could do this by January as the total Japanese strength in those garrisons was only 3500. Gracey did recommend that the vehicle and troop ships arrive together, as the "Time gap between the arrival of personnel and vehicle ships is most paralyzing, to the speed of French operations." He also recommended that the repatriation of the Japanese begin immediately.

Back in London, Brigadier Calthorpe, War Office, asked Sterndale-Bennett if there were "any political considerations which might delay the withdrawal of our forces from Indo-China once the 9th Colonial Division has arrived."²² Wrote Calthorpe:

"You will appreciate that any additional commitments in the Far East will have a direct bearing on the plans we are making for the reinforcement of our forces in Netherlands East Indies and the extension of S.E.A.C.'s control in those areas which he has still to re-occupy."

* Liaison Officer.

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This was a powerful argument against keeping Graceys forces any longer than absolutely necessary in Vietnam (if indeed any arguments were needed at all), and as there appeared to be no political objections, the original plan [of removing 20 Division when the 9th DIC arrived] was broadly adhered to.

In Kandy, a first draft of the Joint Planning Staff (JPS) Paper 215 was published on the 9th; it was titled "Turnover of Command in FIC and NEI".²³ The SEAC JPS laid down four conditions under which British forces could be withdrawn. First, Japanese troops must be disarmed and isolated from any possible Việt Minh contact, and French troops must be in sufficient strength to insure the isolation of the Japanese and the containment of the Việt Minh. Second, a civil administration should have been reestablished. Third, the French and Chinese in the north should be negotiating, and, finally, Terauchi's headquarters must have been moved to Malaya.

The JPS also stated that "in no circumstances should British Forces be placed under French command or operational control in INDO-CHINA." British forces remaining in Indochina after the resumption of French control should come directly under ALFSEA. As with bringing the 20th Division to Vietnam in the first place, there still existed a shortage of shipping. The shipping bringing the 9th DIC to Saigon could not be used to take the British out since it was committed to other tasks, and shipping to carry out Gracey's brigades would not be available until December and January.

The Planning Staff concluded that their four conditions would be met by early January 1946, so that the British troops could commence their withdrawal by mid-December. This proved to be an accurate assessment, but although the JPS thought that "We should, therefore, be clear of INDO-CHINA by mid-January, 1946.", two battalions stayed on for a couple of extra months. In order to get the 9th DIC operational as soon as possible it was recommended that all of 20 Division's vehicles be turned over to the French.

The French were gradually becoming more prominent in south Indochina, and on the 10th Woodford and the newly arrived French commander in Gia Dinh held a conference in which they agreed on the relief of certain 9/14 Punjab posts in Gia Dinh. At noon Woodford received a message from Division Headquarters, officially informing him that he and his brigade would be going to British Borneo in mid-December. Even as he was digesting this information the 4/2 Gurkhas caught seventeen Việt Minh in the act of digging up containers of oil

which, according to an informer, was to be used to burn down the Catholic Church in Gò Vấp. Woodford's next visitor was General Valluy, Commander of 9 DIC, who wanted to see for himself the trouble spot in which his units were to operate. On the night before Valluy's visit to 32 Brigade's area the Việt Minh had succeeded in penetrating the Tân Sơn Nhứt defenses and destroyed 400 drums of fuel.

An Anglo-French parade was held on Armistice Day, and was reviewed by D'Argenlieu, Gracey, Leclerc and other local dignitaries. The route of march was, as usual, past the Cathedral, under which stood the reviewing officers, and down Rue Catinat (Tứ-Do). After the parade Gracey presented decorations to men of the 1/19 Hybads for their valor during the Burma campaigns, most being honoured for actions during the battle of Myitson or in the desperate Japanese escape attempts across the Pegu Yomas.* After the presentations Gracey spoke to the troops (mainly Jats, Kumaonis and Ahirs) in Urdu, praising their performance in Burma. He said that he was glad to decorate them himself, and "He expressed his regret that instead of earning their well deserved rewards they were still engaged in a certain amount of fighting, in order to enable the city to function normally."²⁴

Despite the significance of Armistice Day there was no lessening of the level of military activity in the key areas. The 4/2 Gurkhas, for example, fought with twelve Việt Minh who ran from a house and fired on the Gurkhas during a sweep about three miles southwest of Lái Thiêu. The Gurkhas killed two before entering the house and arresting ten suspects inside. In a unique incident the Việt Minh attacked a hospital in Cholon but were driven off by local Chinese, including the "inmates", who killed two of the attackers.

The Lái Thiêu area was becoming a trouble spot, for on the following day an armored car column was ambushed on the southern edge of Lái Thiêu. However, gunfire from the cars blasted the attackers from their positions. This column had now been ambushed three times during the fairly short convoy run to Thủ Đức, but for the price of a single 16 Cavalry trooper wounded in the thigh, the Việt Minh lost ten killed; six were taken prisoner and the last ambush party finally fled, abandoning their arms in the process. Later in the day Gracey called on the 16th Cavalry troops and gave them a talk on the "Situation in French Indo-China."

* For this see Louis Allen's Sittang, The Last Battle.

The situation in Cholon remained as difficult as ever. A grenade was thrown at a Jeep, and while one soldier was slightly wounded, several civilians were killed. Eleven more Indian soldiers in a truck were wounded by a grenade thrown from the upper storey of a house in Tân Phú, and a sweep was immediately mounted to flush out the terrorist grenade thrower. In the west, two French supply columns from Saigon to Massu's force in Tây Ninh were heavily attacked en route, and near Xuân Lộc twenty Mọi tribesmen led by a Việt Minh guerilla* attacked a Japanese post, killing one Japanese soldier and wounding another. Road blocks and trenches were still making travel on the roads from Saigon a difficult matter.

The increasing level of violence was reflected in the higher casualties now being suffered by Gracey's forces. "D" Company, 14/13 FFR, conducted what seemed to be a routine sweep of the village Tan Tu (about four miles north of Biên Hòa). When the soldiers mounted their vehicles to depart the village, three grenades were suddenly hurled into the bed of one of the trucks. Twelve of the 14/13 FFR troops were wounded by the explosions, three of whom died the following day. The rest of the column immediately jumped out of the trucks and again swept the village, killing six Việt Minh, capturing one and arresting four suspects.

The Việt Minh were now beginning to use a tactic which they would employ with success during their coming war with the French -- they ambushed a convoy in the Biên Hòa area, and when a relief force arrived they ambushed that as well. In this instance, however, six more Viet Minh were killed and a number captured while twelve Indian soldiers were wounded. There were reports now of large Việt Minh forces armed with tanks and guns in the Ban Mê Thuột area in the central highlands, and the Việt Minh leader Trần Văn Giàu was said to be in Battambang, Cambodia, with a force armed with 800 rifles and 100 machine guns.

In the usually troublesome Gò Vấp area the 4/2 Gurkhas and the Việt Minh simultaneously distributed their respective propaganda leaflets, yet, amazingly, failed to encounter one another. The 3/1 Gurkhas in Khánh Hội did meet the Việt Minh when three Việt Minh approached a Gurkha platoon area near the docks. The Gurkhas shot dead two of them and one escaped after suffering a kukri wound. But casualties

* The significance of this lowland Việt Minh's influence on the Mọi was not lost on Allied Intelligence.

were not confined to the soldiers of the opposing sides, for on the morning of the 13th a 1st Kumaon patrol came across a shocking sight in Cholon -- a Vietnamese woman was found tied to a tree and stabbed to death. She was the wife of an Indian merchant, and a note in Vietnamese, attached to her body, warned all traitors that the Viet Minh had a similar fate in store for them.

Division Headquarters now received information that the bodies of Lieutenant Colonel Dewey and a missing Gurkha soldier were buried in the cemetery for the poor in Thu Dầu Một. The 1/1 Gurkhas investigated the report, but without success. In Biên Hòa, 14/13 FFR had better luck when they seized the Việt Minh Secretary General for the surrounding six provinces.

These numerous, if unspectacular, small unit actions continued slowly but inexorably to push the casualty rate up. In Bung, a few miles southeast of Thu Dầu Một, a 1/1 GR mobile column was engaged by an entrenched Việt Minh force, and mortar and artillery fire killed at least seventeen Việt Minh soldiers. Three more Việt Minh were killed by 3/8 Gurkhas about five miles northwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt following a petrol bomb and grenade attack on the Gurkhas.

Tân Sơn Nhứt airfield was temporarily isolated from Control Commission Headquarters in Saigon when a Việt Minh squad cut the telephone lines at 2145 hours on the 13th. The cut was skillfully made between two guard posts just thirty yards apart and only two hundred yards from the Officers Mess on the main Saigon road.

An example of the types and amounts of Japanese arms and ammunition collected from their scattered depots was the convoy load arriving in Saigon at this time for storage and disposal -- this included 18,000 grenades, 1158 rifles and 40 light machine guns. At the same time the 4/2 GR War Diary reported collecting 50,000 mortar rounds, 111 rocket launchers and other arms and ordnance too numerous to list (including rifles, machine guns, etc.) -- such was the large amount of Japanese arms stored in CochinChina. The problem was that many of these dumps were not discovered by, or were inaccessible to, Gracey's forces, and much undoubtedly ended up in Việt Minh hands and was shipped north.

The recent history of political and military activities was summed up in "ALFFIC Intelligence Summary No.2".²⁵ Part 1 dealt with events between 22 October and 14 November. It was stated by Gracey's Intelligence officers that the increasingly effective Việt Minh siege

of Saigon was in large measure broken by 100 Brigade's operations to the north and by the French drive to Mỹ Tho and Cần Thơ. The Việt Minh main force units had been driven eastwards after the Xuân Lộc battle and were now concentrated around Phan Thiết. However, in all previously occupied areas groups of Việt Minh were active and their operations ranged from the throwing of grenades at passing vehicles to "well organized attacks on isolated posts and picquets." Gracey's battalions had kept the offensive and carried out numerous sweeps in their areas, "but the ability of these guerillas to hide themselves amongst the large native populations in these areas renders the task of combing them out extremely difficult."

Posts on the Cho River bridges north of Gò Vấp were constantly sniped by day and night. In early November the situation in Saigon deteriorated when strong attacks were made on posts in Gia Định and Gò Vấp. Việt Minh troops in bunker positions were engaged in Cholon, but vigorous action by 20th Division troops, including an increase in sweeps and security checks, gradually lessened the frequency of serious incidents.

In and around Nha Trang the Japanese had fought several engagements with the Việt Minh, who were finally cleared from the area around the town when French marines arrived on the cruiser Triomphant. However, the report continued, "The whole EAST COAST is a VIET MINH playground in which VIET MINH bands have complete freedom of movement including the use of the railway which the small isolated Japanese garrisons are powerless to prevent." The most serious opposition was expected when operations were to begin in the Đà Lạt and Ban Mê Thuột areas. An ominous statement reported that it was now "worth noting that the hill tribes of this area, the MOIS, have become reconciled to ANNAMITE control." The Vietnamese, plainsmen, previously had little contact with the Moïis, who were often under the influence of individual Frenchmen. But the Việt Minh had gained "considerable influence over the Moïis, "in some cases organising parties of them within VIETMINH bands. This new familiarity permits the ANNAMITES to take refuge in jungle areas, where pursuit will be difficult."

While the Tây Ninh - Lộc Ninh - Saigon triangle had largely been cleared by joint British-French action (Massu's drive on Tây Ninh and Clarkol to Bến Cát and north), the Viet Minh continued to pose a problem in the Mỹ Tho-Cần Thơ and Plain des Jones areas. Although Việt

Minh main force units had retreated east and north, guerilla activity was expected to continue in the British key areas.

The interrogation of Nguyễn Văn Hai, former secretary to the senior Việt Minh commander in Cochinchina, revealed that the Việt Minh main force (totalling 5000) had retreated to Phan Thiết the day before the arrival of Gateforce in Xuân Lộc. What the British and Japanese fought were Việt Minh suicide units totalling 444 men. The main force had retreated because the Xuân Lộc area was considered unsuitable for defense. In the suicide units, 100 had been killed and many wounded, although in the initial skirmishing the Japanese troops had intentionally fired high and inflicted no casualties.*

The "sitrep to 1530 hrs 14 Nov" reported that "a local stated that as all VIET MINH leaders [in] GOVAP area [were] now captured [the] VIET MINH are having three weeks rest to reorganise... night 13/14 Nov 3 fires started in GO VAP area... comment, evidently speedy reorganisation." The Việt Minh had also just introduced a new tactic in the 32 Brigade area. The 3/8 Gurkhas had discovered the new Việt Minh technique by which the latter hoped to disable Allied motor transport (and troops). The Việt Minh had dug a large pit in the road and covered it with bamboo supports; earth was put down over the bamboo and the tarmac replaced. While it could be detected fairly easily in daylight it was almost impossible to spot at night. While there is no record of Allied vehicles tumbling into these traps they served as a deterrent to unrestricted night driving.

Daily intelligence summaries reported ten more Việt Minh killed, and twenty suspects arrested, by Japanese troops in operations north of two bridges a few miles north of Tân Sơn Nhứt and Gò Vấp. The Japanese lost two dead, and several individual Việt Minh agents and soldiers with documents and weapons were arrested in the course of routine security checks in all areas. But not all Japanese units were able to maintain their wartime efficiency, and 221 members of the 2nd Japanese Division Hygiene Regiment were jailed pending investigation into recent cases of indiscipline and a search for suspected Kempei Tei in their ranks.

In mid-November Gracey sent Mountbatten a letter received from Terauchi, in which the Field Marshal passed on significant information about his forces he had just received from Tokyo. This information

* There was no explanation in the accompanying intelligence summary as to why the Japanese did this.

most probably came from MacArthur's staff through Japanese channels:

1. All those [Japanese] guilty of desertion committed on or before 2 September 1945 were pardoned by the General Amnesty by virtue of the Imperial Ordinance 597 granted on 17 October 1945. Consequently no disciplinary action can be taken for deserters of this category.
2. It is the policy of the Japanese Command to punish the crime of joining in or cooperating with the Việt Minh party committed during desertion. 26

The internment of Japanese civilians now began. The total of 5500 were to be interned at a rate of 600 a week, and a week later 555 Sub-Area was informed by Control Commission Headquarters that, except for prison guards, Formosans and Koreans in Japanese service were to be treated as civilians.

Within the last week or so the emphasis in the British area of South Vietnam had, it seemed, suddenly swung from fighting the Việt Minh to concentrating and disarming the Japanese. On 16 November "100 Inf Bde Jap Surrender Instruction No.3" was issued, which began by saying that orders had been received that the concentration and disarmament of the Japanese must be speeded up. This was Phase III of the British operations in the area, and Rodham began pages one and two of the instruction by emphasizing, "WE HAVE GOT TO GET A MOVE ON".

Phase I had been "the elimination of hostiles from the area." But from now on the Japanese would not be used for offensive operations except for Yamagichi and Sato Butais in Bến Cát and Xuân Lộc respectively, who would remain armed for the present. Phase II was the collection of all Japanese arms, ammunition and stores. This was now almost complete. Due to the British-directed reorganization the new Japanese Army Headquarters was being formed in Saigon, and on 20 November Lieutenant General Manaki was scheduled to move to Laithieu, in the 100 Brigade area. But 2nd Division and Army troops were immediately to commence moving to the concentration areas under 100 Brigade's authority, and these moves were being carried out by the Japanese under their own arrangements. The final Japanese total in 100 Brigade's area would be 35,000, comprising 12000 from 2nd Division, 17000 Army and 6000 Navy troops. By 26 November all medium and light machine guns, mortars, grenades and grenade dischargers were to be removed from the Japanese (with the exception of Yamagichi and Sato Butais). Twenty-five percent of Japanese guards were to be armed with rifles (50 rounds) or pistols (12 rounds), the rest with lathis and staves, like "chokidars"

(Indian watchmen). A reserve force would have a greater ammunition supply.

But the immediate task of relieving the Japanese of their money was to be accomplished in two steps. First, the cash balances and valuables held in unit accounts or by units were to be gathered, followed by the collection of cash and valuables in possession of officers and men.* A certain sum of money would then be handed back to the Japanese for their maintenance. But so short were the Allies of specialist support troops (such as paymasters) that the Japanese were tasked to "depiaster" themselves through the agency of "Withdrawals Officers", one to 300 men or less.

The Japanese were to be warned that they must scrupulously obey this order, for they would no longer be able to use piasters and would be summarily punished for so doing after surrendering their money. Furthermore, the amount withdrawn was to be credited in the soldiers paybooks for payment in yen upon returning to Japan. The Japanese Withdrawals Officer would be supervised by an Allied officer, to whom the total of collected money would be handed after the parade. Gracey reiterated that severe punishment was in store for any Japanese individual or holder of a unit account who attempted to circumvent this order.

It was at French insistence that Gracey made arrangements for the Japanese to surrender all currency negotiable in south Indochina. This surrender of currency was to commence on Sunday, 25 November, and continue as fresh drafts of Japanese troops moved into the concentration areas.²⁷

This matter of currency, to be discussed later, was potentially a problem of enormous importance, the full magnitude of which had only now become apparent to the Allies (especially the French). Hundreds of millions of piasters appeared to be held by the Japanese, which led the French to fear the disaster of inflation and the danger that this enormous amount of money might fall into Việt Minh hands.

Gracey also laid down some guidelines for the formal surrender ceremonies, which were to be kept as simple as possible while still bringing home to the Japanese the fact that they had lost the war. Humiliating the Japanese was to be avoided, and "The essential point is that every man realises that he personally surrenders and pays an act of respect to the nation to which he surrenders, symbolised by the Union Jack."²⁸ Prior to the surrender parade the Japanese unit was

* From 22 November to 31 December this sum totalled 3,790,000 piasters for 68,500 Japanese troops.

to hand in all arms except sidearms. The parade itself was to be conducted by an Indian VCO (Viceroy's Commissioned Officer), who was to be seated at a table in front of a flagstaff on which the Union Jack would be flying.* A number of Allied guards were to be posted around the parade ground, and the Japanese unit was to march in and form up facing the flag. Officers were to step out individually in front and salute the flag, bow to the VCO, salute the flag again and fall back to the unit. They were to retain their swords for the present. Warrant officers were to perform the same ritual, but would hand over their swords. At the command of the senior Japanese officer the troops were to bow to the flag, ground their arms and bow again to the flag, after which they marched off.

Of the dozens of surrender parades which took place throughout the British key areas, one notable ceremony occurred at Tân Sơn Nhứt on 17 November when Matsuzato Butai formally surrendered and was disarmed to 25% of its strength. This battalion had played a major part in defeating the desperate Việt Minh assault on Tân Sơn Nhứt a few weeks earlier, and to these Japanese troops the population of Saigon owed a debt of gratitude for keeping open their link to the rest of the world. At 1400 hours the Japanese battalion marched on to the field and lined up facing the RAF ensign, officers in front. Awaiting them were the troops of the RAF Regiment, dressed in green battledress with white webbing. On Matsuzato's command the Japanese bowed to the ensign; Matsuzato then paid his compliments to Group Captain Sturgiss, and ordered his men to lay down their arms.

Wrote the RAF recorder:

"The sight of those long rows of rifles lying harmlessly on the ground with bayonets gleaming in the sun will be long remembered by those who witnessed the parade. The Japs formed up again outside the roped area of the parade ground and the [RAF] Regiment Flights moved off... They marched past the long line of Japanese, and in the precision of their marching, their smart and soldierlike bearing, they were the epitome of the victorious troops."

The Chinese in the north appeared to be less than fully exercised with the task of concentrating and disarming the Japanese. The French reported that thirteen Chinese divisions were said to be in Tonkin,

* In some cases the table was covered by a Union Jack.

five of which were in transit to Formosa and Manchuria. At least 20,000 of these Chinese soldiers had left the army by permission of their commanders in order to settle as civilians in Tonkin. Except for the Red River delta, no attempt had been made to disarm the Japanese, increasing numbers of whom were deserting to the Viet Minh.

In Kandy, Mountbatten suggested to Browning that Terauchi should be moved to Singapore the day after the handover of responsibility for south Indochina to the French. Mountbatten was perturbed at reports that Terauchi had hoarded a two-year supply of stores and some gold bullion; the Supreme Commander had thought that Terauchi was eating normal army rations. Although the Field Marshal was no longer in effective control of Japanese forces he was, as Mountbatten acknowledged, the chief cover for the British presence in Vietnam and thus could not be moved prior to the British departure.* Mountbatten had also decided to spare Terauchi a trial for war crimes, saying, "I doubt the wisdom of trying a cripple of 67 unless it is known that he gave orders which render him guilty."²⁹

Browning agreed that Terauchi should remain in Saigon, but there were senior officers, including Major General Pyman, who were not yet absolutely sure that Terauchi would issue the necessary orders to surrendered Japanese in the event of trouble. In any case, it was decided that the Field Marshal should have a deputy Supreme Commander, and General Itagaki (who had substituted for Terauchi in the surrender ceremony in Singapore) was nominated for that position. Mountbatten concurred "despite General Itagaki's militaristic outlook! The Japanese themselves had just decided on the ship to bring Terauchi to Singapore. The vessel Taian Maru was being prepared for his journey, the destroyer Kana Kazi, first proposed, now being deemed unsuitable.

On the 19th a special meeting was held between the British and Japanese senior staffs in Saigon. The British participants were Brigadiers Hirst and Maunsell, and Air Commodore Cheshire; Japanese members present were Lieutenant General Numata, Commander Kusumi and Lieutenant Colonel Tomura (around whom, as Maunsell had earlier said, "everything revolved").

The Japanese were at the meeting to answer the charge of fomenting unrest in Java, where the fighting between British and Indonesian nationalist forces was particularly savage. Of the local situation, Numata said that he was disturbed at the idea that the Japanese were

* Since Terauchi was the chief cover he "should not blow the gaff by leaving long before we do." [SAC's personal minute, 16 November 1945].

to be concentrated at Cap St. Jacques (which British reconnaissance had shown to be the best place to concentrate the Japanese and sever the links between the Japanese and Việt Minh). Numata protested,

"It is a surprising fact that some of your forces are still harbouring the idea that the Japanese forces are assisting or cooperating with the Annamites, and I regret very much indeed that the present order to concentrate the Japanese Forces in Cap St. Jacques would seem to have been issued on this assumption. I certainly hope that you will review our hearty cooperation with the Allied Forces since their arrival here and wipe out such an idea entirely." 30

Numata then pointed out some of the problems associated with collecting all the Japanese at Cap St. Jacques -- the shortage of water, malignant malaria, shortage of building materials and food, lack of transportation facilities and so on. It was causing concern to the Japanese, for the area was damp and swampy. If it was indeed necessary to gather the Japanese there, Numata requested that the number be limited to 20,000. These 20,000 Japanese would live in town, but if new barracks could be built the number could be raised to 40,000. The greatest problem was water. The present supply system could provide a maximum capacity of 1000 tons per day, but large scale repairs to the system were necessary in order to achieve this capacity.

Hirst replied firmly that the British knew all about this and the area would not have been selected had it not been capable of taking all the Japanese. Maunsell then interjected to comment on the "hearty cooperation" of the Japanese, which, he said, was not substantiated by events of the weekend when British casualties had been inflicted by Japanese deserters working with the Annamites. They had been clearly recognizable by their uniforms and superior military training and marksmanship. Furthermore, recent interrogation of Kempei Tei personnel had generated grave doubts on Japanese assertions that no officers had deserted from Headquarters Japanese Southern Regions, and in fact a list of such officers was now being drawn up. Despite this, however, good and efficient work by Japanese officers and men would be recorded.

Maunsell closed by saying that he would not allow Numata to continue this statement which was a waste of time and undesirable -- Brigadier Hirst was in charge of arrangements and needed no advice from Numata, and Japanese headquarters would be told in the future not to reproduce such statements.

In Kandy, the SEAC staff thought that it was now time to bring Japanese Headquarters Southern Regions to an end for, in their view, the work required by the Japanese headquarters in fulfilment of the surrender terms had been completed. Furthermore, Terauchi was no longer in effective control, for by this time power had been almost completely decentralized to subordinate commanders. Breaking up the Japanese headquarters, and the "Japanese war machine in South East Asia", would "bring home to the rank and file full realisation of their defeat." This assertion by the SEAC staff had a somewhat hollow ring, for they had waited until the survival of Gracey's forces had been assured — with Japanese help — before "bringing home to the Japanese the full realisation of their defeat."

Now that their freedom to operate as formed units of the Imperial Forces was drawing to a close, the Japanese were proving more effective, possibly because they wished to win the respect of the British victors before finally departing from Vietnam. If this was indeed part of their motivation during the final weeks, then they achieved their objective. Or perhaps it was that they knew that the seeds that they had planted in Vietnam, as elsewhere, had already germinated and could no longer be prevented from reaching full growth.

Thus, at B^ên C^át, Yamagichi Butai began aggressive sweeping operations and dislodged the Vi^êt Minh from the area, killing and capturing dozens. They now reported B^ên C^át cleared of Vi^êt Minh to a radius of five kilometers. Japanese patrols in Budop brought in thirty-three Vi^êt Minh suspects and a number of weapons. There were, as in all armies, some problems with second echelon, (non-frontline) troops, and two patrols from a Japanese motor company claimed to have been "captured" by the Vi^êt Minh four miles east of Saigon. The Japanese officer and eighteen men were released after handing over their weapons (a sword and eighteen rifles). This report was received with great skepticism at Control Commission Headquarters. On the other hand as these troops (described as "third rate" by the Japanese Command) were cooperating with the Vi^êt Minh, an infantry patrol lost an officer killed and five men wounded in a fight with the Vi^êt Minh about five miles east of Gia Đ^ình.

Brigadier Rodham now issued "100 Ind Inf Bde Japanese Surrender Instruction No.5, Full Disarmament", which he again prefaced with "WE HAVE GOT TO GET A MOVE ON". Sub-Area Commanders were immediately to begin disarming the Japanese in their areas, with one vital exception.

Commanders responsible for the "ALL RED ROUTE" [100 Brigade's Lines of Communication] were to maintain their Japanese guards for the present time. This route encompassed the road from Saigon to Thu Duc, and the main routes connecting the key areas with Lái Thiêu, Thu Dầu Một, Bến Cát, Biên Hòa and Xuân Lộc. All Japanese guards on other roads were to be dispensed with forthwith, and the risk of having bridges blown would have to be accepted. Since some of these roads served Japanese supply dumps,* it appears that these were being abandoned in order to concentrate the Japanese as quickly as possible.

To counter the spate of daily grenade-throwing incidents the "scorched earth policy" (of clearing the All Red Route for forty yards on either side) was to be speeded up. As Rodham stated, the "JAPS have any amount of labour with which to carry this out and it is a very suitable job for unarmed men."³¹ There were exceptions to this policy, which did not apply where the road met houses or villages, rubber plantations, crops, or places where a single hedge bordered the road.

Ten percent of the Japanese were to retain their arms for self-defense, for "In all fairness, we cannot allow these tps to march long distances completely unarmed at the mercy of any ANNAMITE 'Grenade-Thrower'." As for the surrender parades, local British commanders were told to practice their own ceremony the day before the event occurred, with the surrendering Japanese commander in attendance; both would then know exactly what to do on the following day. As the days passed and more parades were held, Japanese commanders of units to be disarmed were to witness the parade on the day prior to their own unit's formed surrender. They were not to watch it more than one day in advance in order "to prevent Japs 'brooding' over [the] fact of having to give up their arms and perhaps causing a number to desert and make a nuisance of themselves in the countryside." The British/Indian guards were to be "Ceremonial Guards", and would not be in firing position; however, they would carry full ammunition and have their weapons loaded.

Even as plans were being made to disarm the Japanese their casualty rate was slowly rising. Japanese patrols clashed with the Việt Minh on three occasions in the always-disputed area about six miles east of Saigon (across the river), and lost one officer and three men killed; 7 Japanese were wounded. Another Japanese guard on a bridge

* not arms dumps.

was killed and two others wounded, and a Japanese patrol was said to have been surrendered when cut off by a downed bridge east of the Saigon River.

Over in Nha Trang, the French landed on the night of the 19th, under cover of the Richelieu's guns. In 32 Brigade's area the 4/2 Gurkhas raided a house about 800 yards south of the golf course near Tân Sơn Nhứt; the house was said to harbor the head of the local Việt Minh. He was not in, but a pistol and incriminating documents were seized and six suspects arrested. An ambush was then laid on the house and six more suspects were picked up. In 80 Brigade's area, 4/17 Dogra caught eleven Việt Minh in the act of digging up the road. In Tân Tích the Japanese raided a suspected Việt Minh area and killed ten defenders; many more escaped by jumping into the river, and quantities of arms and ammunition were seized.

Back at SEAC Headquarters in Kandy, the Joint Planning Staff issued the third and most comprehensive draft of JPS 215, "Turnover of Command in FIC". The French were now reported to have 9196 troops in Indochina*; by 10 December a total of 19,819 French troops would be in the south, 15,000 of them being the main body of the 9th Colonial Infantry Division. There still remained a few Allied Prisoners of War and Internees in the south who were awaiting repatriation, including 35 British, 42 Dutch and 150 Swiss.

The Joint Planning Staff recognized that SEAC would have to maintain the French forces for some time to come. The Staff now suggested that Mountbatten should consider relinquishing responsibility for south Indochina upon the departure of the last British troops, for "in the event of a deterioration in the political situation, resulting in widespread disorder and bloodshed, world opinion would attribute the blame to SEAC and British/Indian forces might again have to be employed to restore the situation." On the other hand, other areas in SEAC's sphere of responsibility needed Indochina's rice, and since SEAC must maintain the French for the foreseeable future, it may be desirable to keep some measure of control over them. Also, the Japanese, though disarmed, may yet cause the French some trouble. Finally, "The indefinite retention of even a reserve of operational control in FIC would materially assist the future problem of theatre defence strategy in the Far East."

* 9 DIC, 4457; Combat Command 2 Armoured Division 2165; 5 RIC 1159; Two Marine companies 354, Administrative and Support Troops 1061.

It was suggested that after consultation with the French the question of the degree of control to be exercised in Indochina by Mountbatten should be referred to the British Chiefs of Staff.

Browning now informed Gracey that he could tell the Japanese that they were to be given first priority for repatriation from Southeast Asia to Japan. In SEAC's eyes this should cut down the number of Japanese desertions to the Việt Minh, and Terauchi was to broadcast this to the Japanese in Vietnam (but not to Japanese in other areas). As for the future of the Control Commission, the SEAC staff had Gracey's letter on the subject under advisement. Gracey's proposals were that the Commission as now organized could be disbanded upon the transfer of Terauchi to Singapore. There would be no need for a special agency to control Terauchi's headquarters in Singapore, but since references were still to be made to Headquarters, Southern Regions, some portion of the Commission should remain in Saigon. The Headquarters itself could be controlled directly by the ALFFIC Commander, reinforced by the transfer to him of the remainder of the Control Commission staff.

While this was going on a Spitfire was hit in the propeller by small arms fire from the ground -- the first and only instance of a Spitfire being hit while airborne. Since the Spitfire pilots were operating under such strict rules of engagement regarding air support for French troops, the question inevitably arose of simply giving the aircraft to the French and letting them provide their own air support. In response to an enquiry from his staff Mountbatten approached the ACSEA, Sir Keith Park, on this possibility. Park would not hear of it. First, he advised the Supreme Commander that the ACSEA had no authority to hand over Spitfires to the French without Air Ministry approval. Furthermore, even if the RAF did nothing more than service the aircraft for French pilots, the British would be vulnerable to adverse criticism. Finally, Park pencilled in a note on Mountbatten's query: "NO. Why should RAF personnel support [the] French in settling an internal civil disturbance not within tasks of SEAC?"

In Vietnam, the continuing fighting and unrest made it impractical for Gracey to concentrate the Japanese as rapidly as he wished, for his battalions were still preoccupied with the Việt Minh. At about this time a Gurkha was attacked at his post about one and a half miles southwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt by six Việt Minh who stabbed him with a spear. He managed to fire a Sten gun burst at his assailants before collapsing. His fellow 3/8 Gurkhas followed a trail of blood to a house and into a

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paddy field. They destroyed the house, then rounded up all the males in the area and made them stand on one leg for forty-five minutes before they were released.

In the Biên Hòa area, B Company, 14/13 FFR, plus a section of mortars, JAT machine guns and 16 Cavalry armored cars swept an area northeast of the town. They met a road block and grenade attack, but suffered no casualties in killing two Việt Minh. A wounded prisoner reported the presence of 500 armed Việt Minh a few miles away. The column was sniped at on the return journey, and two more Việt Minh were killed. A little further on came another grenade ambush and 1 more Việt Minh was killed. More sniping resulted in four more dead Việt Minh (this group having been entrenched in foxholes). The 14/13 troops finally returned to base after breaking through this spate of ambushes; they had killed nine Việt Minh at no cost to themselves. But this had been their lucky day. Incredibly enough, of the dozens of grenades hurled at them, none had exploded -- their pins had not been pulled.

The gods were also smiling on another 14/13 FFR driver this day. He was driving a truck into a nearby village to get fresh vegetables when a Việt Minh guerilla threw a grenade at the truck. The grenade struck the driver in the side of the face and fell into the truck, but failed to explode. The Việt Minh grenadier and six others were captured by the truck's escort.

Many of the grenades raining down on the 14/13 FFR soldiers were being hurled from positions near Japanese posts, and Colonel Miyake -- who appears to have been a reluctant ally of the British -- was called to explain why the Viet Minh were operating with such impunity. From the Thu Dầu Một base, two companies of 1/1 Gurkhas, supported by machine guns, artillery and armored cars, combed the area around Ấp Bung Cầu (north of Thu Dầu Một). Strong resistance, including machine gun fire, was met in two villages which were seized and searched. The houses in which weapons were found were burnt down, and at the end of the 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ operation a concentration of artillery was laid down on an area suspected of being a Việt Minh night concentration area. Not far away some 16 Cavalry troopers discovered fourteen badly wounded Việt Minh, believed to be casualties from earlier actions against Clarkol. The 16 Cavalry report estimated that fifty casualties had been inflicted on the Việt Minh.

South of Saigon, villagers reported the presence of 300 armed Việt Minh and five Japanese deserters in a village about ten miles south of Cholon. This force was engaged by artillery, after which they had reportedly split, one group heading for another village about five miles southwest of Long Kiến, which turned out to be the site of a stiff fight between 3/1 Gurkhas and strong, dug-in Viet Minh troops.

The Long Kiến operation was laid on because of intelligence that the Viet Minh were holding a number of French hostages in that village. Thus on 18 November a force of two platoons under Major E.W. MacDonald left the 3/1 GR base at Khánh Hội for Long Kiến. MacDonald was supported by a water-borne party of forty Gurkhas who approached Long Kiến from the southeast.

MacDonald's force had gone just a few hundred yards when they were engaged by a party of about thirty Việt Minh armed with rifles, and a thirty minute firefight occurred before the Vietnamese were dispersed. Only a mile further on the party encountered another Việt Minh position, a post defending a bridge over a river. The bridge was in a village, the north of which was ringed with well sited Japanese-style bunkers and occupied by about fifty Việt Minh armed with machine guns and rifles. This proved a formidable task for two Gurkha platoons and Long Kiến was not, in the event, taken until four days later.

One of MacDonald's platoons attacked the defenses "in a good old fashioned charge"³² and broke through, dispersing the defenders. That particular village, on the elbow bend of the Khánh Hội - Long Kiến road, was cleared, but a destroyed bridge and more entrenched Việt Minh along the road forced the platoon to turn back. The whole force retired northwards to the south bank of the Canal de Derivation, the battalion's south perimeter, fired on all the way back by light machine guns and rifles. Local reports stated that a force of 200 Việt Minh and twenty Japanese were in that area and the day's actions resulted in the death of between twenty and thirty Việt Minh and the capture of four. One Gurkha was wounded, and Lieutenant Colonel Purcell, the battalion commander, had to bring out reinforcements with mortars to see the force safely back to battalion lines -- Purcell had his hat shot off in the process.

While MacDonald had slow going along the road, the water-borne party under Major E. Gopsill travelled a circuitous route down a number of connecting streams and canals, swinging an arc to the east and south and approaching Long Kiến from the east southeast. As they approached

Long Kiên heavy firing from scattered Việt Minh positions forced the landing craft to a halt, then a short withdrawal, at which time (1500 hours) it was discovered, to their horror, that the tide had come in and the landing craft could not pass under the nearest bridges to withdraw to safety. The two platoons of Gurkhas and Japanese sailors were now stationary targets for the Việt Minh, who soon discovered their predicament. Whether by design or by accident, the Japanese Navy had neglected to tell the British about the tides.

Tactical reconnaissance flights had earlier reported downed bridges and defended positions along the Long Kiên road, and Gopsill himself had reconnoitered the approach to Long Kiên, so the fierce opposition should have come as no surprise; thus the wisdom of assigning a total force of eighty Gurkhas in two groups to such a heavily defended area appears questionable.

Gopsill well remembered his hazardous predicament. In 1977, speaking of the Long Kiên operation, he recalled that the Việt Minh fire was so intense that he thought that a thousand Việt Minh may have opposed his two platoons.

He contacted Lieutenant Colonel Purcell, the 3/1 Commander, by radio and said, "It's very difficult. I can push on if you like, but I think we'll be cut off."³³ "Percy" Purcell radioed back orders for Gopsillforce to hold in place and withdraw as soon as possible. Said Gopsill:

"Well, I couldn't come out because the river had risen and I couldn't get under the bridges. We were stuck there. I said this to the men and they said, 'Never mind, Sahib, we'll be O.K.' We were there for six hours. I got on the road bridge and dropped a plumb line to the approximate height of the boat, and reckoned when it swung we could get out. Eventually it swung free and we came out.

I've never forgotten it. I said to my senior Gurkha officer, 'Load your chaps, I'll wait here,' and he said, 'Oh, no, Sahib, you get out and you can lie in midstream and give me covering fire.' He was a wily old bugger -- we were both laughing, and he got the M.C.* for that.

Well, I got to midstream and we commenced fire while he got into the boat and we went downstream together."

* Military Cross.

During the withdrawal the Việt Minh attacked the group with machine guns, grenades and an anti-tank gun. The retreat was in the nature of a blitz as "Gopsill Force" ran the gauntlet back to Saigon, firing its way through Việt Minh positions on both banks. By now both craft had been hit numerous times, and the anti-tank gun had blasted holes in both boats near the water line. Miraculously, no Gurkhas were killed in the operation, although two were wounded, along with a Japanese sailor. The boats had been so heavily shot up that Gopsill and his Gurkhas had to stuff the holes with their clothes to keep them afloat long enough to reach safety. As Gopsill said of the anti-tank gunfire:

"... they had [the gun] firing just below the waterline at us; we could see and hear it hitting. God knows what would have happened had they aimed above the waterline because we were crowded on the boats.

As we got out of the boats one sank, and the other sank during the night." 34

The first phase of the Long Kiến operation ended with the 3/1 Gurkhas being heavily engaged but unable to reach their objective. The next attempt was to be made on 22 November. As it was, thirty to forty-five Việt Minh had been killed and a number of others wounded and put out of action for a cost of three wounded Gurkhas, one wounded Japanese and a lot of sweat and excitement. Two Japanese had been seen with the Việt Minh, who appeared to be exceptionally well trained and aggressive here, and it was thought that the Japanese were responsible for the more accurate sniping aimed especially at the British officers. The "20th Division History" reported that the Vietnamese defenders at Long Kiến were members of the Bình Xuyên gang, reinforced with some Japanese deserters. 35

On the 22nd the Gurkhas made a second attempt to oust the strong Việt Minh force from the area of Long Kiến and to seize the village and rescue French hostages, if any were still left there. This time the British collected a large enough force to do the job. Two full companies, rather than the two platoons used earlier, were tasked to lead the operation, and these were supported by a troop of guns from the 114th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery. The two companies (A and C Companies) were relieved of their commitments in Khánh Hôi on the evening of the 21st by companies from the 4/17 Dogra and 9/12 FFR.

Gopsill's company led the operation. The first objective was an old French fort about a mile south of the Canal de Derivation; the fort was to be seized at 0500 hours. On the way, not long after leaving the Khanh Hoi base area, Gopsill's company was attacked by a Viet Minh ambush party armed with grenades. Two of the grenade throwers were captured and the Gurkhas continued their advance along the Long Kien road. Stiffer opposition was met soon after this first engagement, this time by dug-in Viet Minh defenders on the banks of a stream, or nullah. The defenders were driven off and the gunners laid a few rounds into the midst of a group of about thirty Viet Minh retreating through the paddy fields. The next objective was the fort and the village of Ben Ho, which proved to be an important local Viet Minh headquarters and refuge for Japanese deserters. The assault on the "Beau Gest" fort and village was preceded by a short artillery bombardment, during which a Japanese deserter was killed. Another Japanese deserter was killed by a burst of Sten fire when the two sides closed. The clearing of the fort, involving one of the few true kukri charges (if not the only known one) of the campaign, is best described by the officer who led the assault. Lieutenant Colonel Gopsill stated that Viet Minh defenders in the fort opened fire as the Gurkha company approached. Said Gopsill, "We used rocket launchers to blow the doors down, and before I could say 'knife' the Gurkhas were across and in with the kukris and butchered everyone in it."³⁶ The immediate area was cleared and local patrols carried out, after which the rest of the force (including Major Mike Kelleher's A Company) passed through on the way to Long Kien. A large quantity of arms and a variety of ammunition, plus Japanese and Viet Minh documents, were captured by Gopsill's force.

It was now just after noon, and the heat was described as "unbelievable."³⁷ Kelleher's force reached Long Kien at about 1400 hours, but this time there was little opposition and the only Viet Minh visible were three wounded who were captured in the local hospital. However, driving out the Viet Minh was only half the objective; the French hostages were searched for after Long Kien was occupied, but to no avail. Information from local sources indicated that two of the French civilians had been executed during the previous night, but the three remaining hostages had escaped. Since it seemed that the Viet Minh now held no French hostages, and since it appeared that it would serve no useful purpose to leave the company overnight in Long Kien,

especially with known strong Việt Minh forces in the vicinity, the decision was made to withdraw. The withdrawal was accomplished in "good N.W.F.P." style", with rearguards covering the exit by the main force. Two rearguard actions were fought as the company, returning to base, was engaged by fire from light machine guns and rifles. Quick use of artillery and mortars quickly silenced the Việt Minh pursuers.

The 3/1 GR force finally returned to Khánh Hội about 1930 hours in the evening. No hostages were found, but somewhere around fifty Việt Minh had been killed and their forces dispersed and pushed out of the immediate area. It was estimated that about thirty Japanese were operating with the Việt Minh during the course of the operation and, as the Gurkhas later wrote, "the accurate sniping and encircling tactics indicated that they were well to the fore."³⁸ Leclerc was well satisfied with this operation, which enabled the French to occupy the area not long afterwards.

Two days earlier, British and French delegations had met to discuss the program for the relief of British and Japanese forces by the French. On the British side were Brigadiers Hirst, Taunton and Hendriks (Commanding 555 Sub Area), and eight other officers including Lieutenant Colonel Hobbs of 9/14 Punjab (who was acting Commander of 32 Brigade in Brigadier Woodford's absence); Brigadier Rodham of 100 Brigade was probably too preoccupied with clearing out Viet Minh and concentrating Japanese to attend, and he would be the last to be relieved upon the British departure. Representing the French were the recently-arrived Brigadier General Valluy (commanding the 9th DIC) and Lieutenant Colonel Repiton (Leclerc's Chief of Staff).³⁹

The two sides went down the list, one place at a time, discussing areas on the map. The French said that they could relieve the Japanese Naval detachment at Nhà Bè, on the river just south of Saigon, by the first week of December; they hoped to relieve Japanese Naval forces on the Saigon River's perennially troubled east bank by mid-December. They further arranged to relieve British and Japanese forces in south and west Cholon by 28 November; this was Taunton's 80 Brigade area. Tân Sơn Nhứt airfield, Gò Vấp and Gia Định, (all trouble spots and in Woodford's 32 Brigade area) could be transferred to French forces in mid-December. The transfer of the Japanese concentration areas (Biển Hòa - Thu Dầu Một - Thủ Đức) was to be discussed at a later date, as would handovers by British detachments in east Cholon, Cap St. Jacques and Bà Rịa.

Mountbatten asked Gracey for his views on the SEAC staff's plans for closing down Japanese Southern Army headquarters. It was now

* North West Frontier Province.

proposed that Terauchi should move to Singapore as soon as possible after 1 December, the actual date to be fixed in conjunction with Gracey's handover of command to the French. Terauchi was to travel to Malaya in a Japanese ship, which would not be at the expense of British movements. Among other groups, an Intelligence [Reconnaissance] Checking Party was to be formed to verify Japanese information and study airfields, communications and port facilities in the south.* Mountbatten and Gracey were in general agreement on the main issues, even if they differed on the size of the residual mission and other relatively less important matters.

As the British were thinking about drawing down, the French were meeting increasing resistance wherever they operated. In Nha Trang, the Việt Minh fiercely resisted French efforts to move inland from the town. The six French and 95 Việt Minh dead were indicative of the savagery of the fighting whenever French and Vietnamese met in battle. The Richelieu brought her guns to bear on the station west of Nha Trang, where she shelled a trainload of Viet Minh arrivals from Tonkin. The Japanese commander in Nha Trang admitted that a "large number"⁴⁰ of his troops had deserted to the Việt Minh, which may have accounted for the stiffening of Việt Minh defenses in the area. Elsewhere, the usual daily incidents of grenading and sniping continued, and Việt Minh casualties rose steadily.

D'Argenlieu held his first formal press conference as the 3/1 Gurkhas were returning to Long Kiên.⁴¹ In reply to written questions he stated that the Việt Minh leaders were not regarded as war criminals, but individuals accused of criminal activities who would be dealt with by the courts. The press were suitably impressed with the Admiral's sincerity as he said that talks with the Việt Minh could go on. By now the French government had received assurances of Anglo-American support of France's sovereignty over Indochina.

Meiklereid's dispatches described life in Saigon during this period.⁴¹ With the arrival of Admiral D'Argenlieu, Jean Cédile had reverted to the status of Governor of Cochinchina. Criticism was being voiced of French conduct of trials for captured Việt Minh** and

* Members of this team were to be the last British casualties in Vietnam.

** As Meiklereid remarked, judges were human and were sometimes "touched by the hysteria of the moment." As observers in Washington during the Watergate years may recall, this "hysteria of the moment" was not confined to judges in Saigon in 1945.

certain correspondents, as was their wont, were exacerbating the issue for reasons of their own. Two reporters in particular (one a well-known American left wing figure) produced daily outpourings of vitriolic denunciation of what they termed "neocolonialism" and the "brutality" of the Anglo-French occupation.

The French community was growing nervous over rumours that the British would leave before the Japanese had been fully repatriated, but in general Saigon was quiet and the population was settling down once more to normal work. Japanese consular officials were being treated as ordinary civilian internees since they had earlier taken over administrative functions in the colony.

The Việt Minh were still described as uncontrollable armed bands and criminal elements, with pillaging occurring in their operational areas. Leclerc's tactics and the behaviour of his troops had encouraged the French population to demand revenge and reprisals.

Meiklereid has described the arrival of yet another group of Chinese emissaries comprising Colonel Yeung She War and a secretary. They carried a letter from Lieutenant General Su Wen of 1st Area Army Headquarters in Hanoi and purported to represent the Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau on a mission of "consolation", to tell the Chinese community, "so long cut off from their native land", what was happening in China. The two Chinese officials were received by Meiklereid in M. Clarac's* presence; Meiklereid referred them to the French, who remained suspicious of their motives.

Shortly thereafter a third Chinese mission arrived, this one headed by Mr. Chang-Yong, who carried a letter from "Full General Lu Han, Commander in Chief, 1st War Commission Chinese Army at Hanoi". Chang-Yong was described as Commissioner of Food to Indo-China and Representative of the Chinese Ministry of Food. He wanted to buy 30,000 tons of rice to ship to Haiphong. The French agreed to let the Chinese have 5000 tons in November and another 5000 tons in December, on one condition: the Chinese must leave Laos, for there they were undermining the King (on whom the French relied, in part, to reestablish their influence).

The British stayed clear of these peculiar French-Chinese problems. Although life was slowly returning to normal, the general strike imposed by the Việt Minh continued. Essential services, such as water and

* D'Argenlieu's Political Adviser.

electricity, were being operated by the armed forces (largely British and Japanese engineers). The French came in for some harsh words in this regard.*

The French population, as yet unaccustomed to queueing, were inclined to do their buying on the black market rather than take their turns at the food distribution points. The French administration was gradually reimposing its authority. The Police, CID, Public Health, Information, Finance, Economic Affairs, Justice, Political Affairs, Post and Telegraph, Education and other major departments resumed their functions, in some cases in spite of a lack of staff and office space. There were still few Vietnamese civil servants, for many who had earlier left their posts had not yet returned.

Governor Cédile was reluctant to employ Vichy officials, but found himself forced to do so since most of the French in Indochina were tainted by collaboration with the Japanese. As rationale for this, Cédile stipulated that all appointments were provisional pending future enquiries.

The judicial service was now being reorganized, but restricted its activity to penal cases for the time being since the Viet Minh had removed all case histories, books, dossiers and archives, and what little remained was in disorder. A Court Martial Decree had been issued on 2 October which was specifically designed for all crimes and offences against national defence, security and public order since 9 March 1945.⁴²

Correctional Tribunes dealt with common law offences, petty thefts, assaults and frauds. Les Jurisdictions d'Instruction consisted of five courts which, for the most part, quickly and summarily examined cases involving more serious crimes and political offences before they were referred to Courts-Martial; one body also dealt with police court cases. The principal difficulty at that time lay in identification of suspects (due, as mentioned, to the fact that most records had been lost or destroyed).

In this regard, the British Chiefs of Staff approved Mountbatten's instructions to Gracey in Indochina and Christison in the Netherlands East Indies. These instructions were, essentially, that the local French courts should try cases in FIC, the Dutch were to set up military

* See note 43.

courts until the civil courts could be reestablished, and British officers should not sit on these courts.

What part, if any, the Việt Minh played in manipulating French passions during this period of heightened tension in South Vietnam must remain a matter of speculation. In late November there was a violent reaction by the French civilian community to the murder and mutilation of two French children. The demand for reprisals, of which little had been heard for some time, now arose again. Stories of outrageous French behavior were supplied by Vietnamese propagandists to left wing foreign correspondents, who, to the mounting anger of French officials in Indochina, seized on them eagerly and despatched them to the world press.

The British reported an increase in the number of Frenchmen who wanted to emigrate to Australia. As Meiklereid had found in Dakar, "good" Frenchmen seemed unwilling to go out to the colonies, and the shortage of qualified civil servants seemed likely to continue. The local French community did little to overcome the difficult situation:

"The commercial community is apathetic. Most of them expect things to return to normal by some heaven-sent process without doing a hand's turn to bring it about. I fear that the general impression among the British when they leave is not likely to be complimentary to the French."⁴³

On 23 November the first steps were taken to relieve the British of their commitments in Vietnam. Gracey issued orders dealing with the relief of his forces in Cholon by the French. The 9/12 Frontier Force Regiment were to be relieved of their commitments in Cholon by French troops, at which time* the battalion was to be detached from 80 Brigade's operational control and come directly under Division command. All Japanese guards in Cholon and Saigon were to be relieved on the day before 9/12 FFR handed over to the French. One 9/12 FFR company was to relieve "C" Company, 1/1 GR (which had remained in Saigon to mount guard over the Control Commission when the rest of the 1st Gurkhas went up to Thu Dầu Môt). The 9/12 FFR was to move to Cap St. Jacques in order to prepare to receive the bulk of the surrendered Japanese personnel. The 9/12th advance party was scheduled to arrive at Cap St. Jacques on the 27th, followed by the remainder of the battalion (less one company) on the day after. Just north of Saigon, 9/14 Punjab handed over all responsibility for the difficult Gia Định area to the French 9th DIC.

* 25 November 1945.

The French takeover had an ominous beginning, as their assumption of control was marked by an explosion and fire in their Cholon barracks. It seemed as if everyone in the French Army smoked cigarettes, and it appears that a match or lighted cigarette end accidentally fell into some petrol, which set off some nearby ammunition and added to the pyrotechnics of the evening, during all of which the Viet Minh started two other fires. To add to French problems, the news from Laos reflected the difficulty faced by the still weak French in vital areas there. Two captured French soldiers were beheaded by the Viet Minh in Vientiane, and their severed heads were publicly exhibited.

The French were expecting a difficult time in the Nha Trang area, and radio and propaganda from Hue broadcast encouragement to Viet Minh forces opposing the French in that sector.* The French were now carrying out reconnaissance patrols of entrenched Viet Minh positions just half a mile west of Nha Trang. The Hue broadcasts continually spoke of "trainloads of reinforcements" arriving to help the local Viet Minh. To facilitate Franco-Japanese cooperation in the coming battles to eliminate the Viet Minh around Nha Trang, Lieutenant Colonel Gopsill of 3/1 Gurkha Rifles (fresh from the Long Kiên operations) was flown in by the RAF to act as the liaison between the French and Japanese. Gopsill stayed there for about six weeks, and was in the thick of the fighting in the Nha Trang area.⁴⁴

There was, of course, another side to the Anglo-French pacification operations, and this was the vital intelligence-gathering function performed by a number of agencies which were, for the most part, little known. Their war diaries are either not available or do not adequately record their operations. Many small, specialized sections were cloaked under innocuous titles or buried within more mundane organisations such as Supply Offices, and so forth. These covert operations came to light on rare occasions, such as the assassination of an agent or soldier performing those unique duties. A measure of the effectiveness of these small, special units may be gathered by the following excerpt from the "20th Division's History":

* Incredibly, the bad feeling between SEAC and China theatre continued after the war, and from Kandy Browning was obliged to ask Carton de Wiart, in Chungking, to protest to Wedemeyer about the stream of anti-British propaganda emanating from Hanoi Radio, propaganda which included charges that the RAF was making use of explosive toys and pencils.

"During the latter part of November, there was little change in the situation in the SAIGON/CHOLON area. Both in 80 Bde and 32 Bde areas security checks were carried out on a very thorough basis. This entailed segregation of large areas and checking the identities of 400 to 500 people a day.

High praise is due to the Field Security personnel who operated in some of the very worst areas of SAIGON/CHOLON -- the price placed on their heads by the VIET MINH being a testimony to their efficiency." 45

Indeed, on 20 November, at 1430 hours, two Việt Minh assassins murdered Sergeant I.J.Watt of the Field Security Section. A former civil policeman, Sergeant Watt was killed in Cholon by grenades and automatic fire. He was declared Killed In Action, and the area on Rue de Caymai was immediately swept by the Kumaon Regiment; eight suspects were arrested near the house which Watt had been searching.

Việt Minh terrorism continued without respite. The 4/2 GR Commander escaped injury when a grenade was thrown at him, and two grenades were thrown at the Civil Purchaser's escort in the Biên Hòa market place -- two 14/13 FFR soldiers and perhaps thirty civilians (five of whom later died) were wounded, and fourteen suspects were immediately seized. In Bến Cát, in the north, the Japanese halted a Việt Minh staff car during the course of a sweep and captured a woman in the uniform of a Việt Minh captain. Thirty Việt Minh attacked a 9/14 Punjab post on a bridge at night, but were driven back, and 3/8 GR found seven more vehicle traps in their area. Having lost heavily in strong assaults on Allied troops, the Việt Minh had switched to small unit tactics and simple terrorism in the form of grenade throwing and sniping by individuals.

Rodham's brigade appeared to have heeded his exhortations to "get a move on", and despite the Việt Minh guerilla war the 14/13 FFR disarmed five Japanese units* totalling 1380 men, on the 23rd. This was, at least, a significant start to the disarmament of the Japanese forces, and on the following day Rodham issued "100 Ind Inf Bde Jap Surrender Instruction No.8, Collection of Money and Valuables From Japs."⁴⁶ The problems generated by Japanese manipulation of currency in Indochina will be more fully discussed later, but Rodham's strictures on this subject deserve attention at this time.

* No.4. Field Hospital, Sea Transport Corps, No.7 Railway Regiment, Southern Army Communications Survey Detachment, and part of Headquarters Southern Army.

Even now, when the Financial Adviser to the Control Commission had not yet fully come to grips with the problem, there was growing unease over the extent of Japanese tampering with the local economy. Rodham stated that "There is evidence that the JAPANESE have secreted vast sums of French Indo-China currency in cash. The amount may be in the region of 800,000,000 piasters." He went on to say that if indeed the Japanese had such sums under their control they would quite likely seek to undermine the currencies of nearby British territories and build up commercial undertakings "under bogus names." It must be made economically impossible for Japan ever again to become a military power, and by stripping the Japanese of their cash the Division would be doing its part in this worthwhile enterprise. Terauchi had been notified in writing about this policy, and after the Japanese had been "depiastered" they were to be handed back 2,000,000 piasters for subsistence.

Rodham had about 80 Japanese units with 35,000 troops to disarm and depiaster in his Inner and Outer Zones. As he recognized, "The amount of work to be got through in this connection is colossal...." The Control Commission's Financial Adviser, Lieutenant Colonel Sweeny, was to be in Biên Hòa on 26 November to lecture the 100 Brigade personnel directly involved in the operation. Available officers were drafted in for this purpose from the infantry battalions, Sappers and Miners Companies and Field Ambulance Units, and officers were directed to start looking for educated VCOs, NCOs and soldiers to help in the task. Rodham appreciated the extra burden this important detail imposed on his soldiers as he wrote, "I well know that units have NO clerical staff available to assist as they are already fully occupied with disarmament statistics, [and] record[ing] of collection of stores of every description from many Jap dumps." They were also fully occupied with the guerilla war.

Gracey hoped to have completed the disarmament of all the Japanese by the end of November, with the exception of outlying garrisons and troops in transit. Under the circumstances, it was an ambitious goal, but at the time all his commanders were exercised with this problem, and he hoped that the disarmed Japanese could be moved to Cap St. Jacques concentration areas beginning in early December. To this end, 32 Brigade now disarmed five more Japanese units* totalling

* 5th Air Division units in Tân Sơn Nhứt, Gò Vấp, Lái Thiêu and Phú Thọ, and a smaller number of the 4th Infantry Regiment.

over 1000 troops.

On 25 November, a day on which Numata was personally reprimanded by Gracey for disobeying curfew orders, the French invalidated all 500 piaster notes as legal tender. This caused an uproar throughout Vietnam as not only the hoarders (mainly Chinese) were affected, but thousands of British troops were now "out of pocket" as well.⁴⁷

The notes had actually been declared invalid on the 18th, with an announcement that they must be paid in by the 25th. Of the grand total of 500 piaster notes, those issued prior to 9 March 1945 (the date of the Japanese coup) would have 70% of their value credited to blocked accounts. The really bad news was that all 500 piaster notes issued after 9 March were declared invalid. This was done to deflate the economy and counter the effects of Japanese action in issuing about 940,000,000 piasters in notes between 9 March and 23 September 1945; the grand total of 500 piaster notes issued before March had been no more than 300,000,000 piasters.⁴⁸ This move reduced note issue by a third, and rendered valueless a large proportion of notes held by the Japanese and, presumably, the Viêt Minh.

The British Army's Financial Adviser to the Control Commission discovered extensive Japanese financial manipulations, showing that the Japanese had drawn 615,000,000 piasters in excess of normal commitments in 1945, of which 369,000,000 were drawn during the two weeks immediately preceding the Japanese surrender. Most of this appeared to have gone to support subversive activities, and considerable pressure was now being placed on the Japanese to trace these funds.* To look ahead for a moment, of 63,402,275 piasters in cash actually recovered from the Japanese forces, a third of it (22,391,000) was in 500 piaster notes. The full extent of Japanese currency manipulation is revealed by the fact that, between early 1943 and 9 March 1945, the Bank of Indochina (on Japanese instructions) printed 1,200,000,000 piasters. More will be said of this later.

However, as the overall operation to disarm, depiaster and concentrate the Japanese slowly gathered momentum, British troops still were obliged to react to Viêt Minh attempts to conduct a lower level of warfare based on terror and guerilla tactics. Typical of this was the incident on the 25th in which two 3/1 Gurkhas went to investigate a noise

* This suggests that Sainteny was correct when he asserted that the Japanese meant to leave behind a "time bomb" in Indochina.

in the northern tip of Khánh Hối. They were attacked in what appeared to be an ambush, but one Gurkha escaped. The other was less fortunate, and two Gurkha sections were immediately "scrambled" to search for him, but they came under heavy fire from Việt Minh soldiers lying in wait and were unable to continue the search. The Gurkha was found the next day -- he had been clubbed to death. Two Việt Minh bodies were also found, casualties of the firefight with the search party. A little later in the day a 4/2 Gurkha was caught in heavy growth near his platoon position north of Gò Vấp and killed. A 4/2 GR search party came across his killers as they were burying his body, and one Việt Minh soldier was wounded and captured when the Gurkhas opened fire. Within the next five days, C and B Companies, 3/8 GR, reported a man "missing, believed killed" from each company.

Although four Gurkhas had lately been surprised and assassinated by Việt Minh "snatch squads", the Việt Minh themselves suffered fourteen more killed and five captured when Yamagichi Butai swept through a village near Bến Cát. These Japanese frontline infantry units, as opposed to the support troops, were giving a good account of themselves right up to the moment when they had to disarm. It was a unique situation in the history of warfare.

Japanese reports indicated that 700 well armed Việt Minh troops, supported by 3000 coolies, were constructing positions at Dran, along the Đà Lạt-Phanrang road/rail line. These were said to be elaborate positions consisting of caves, trenches and wire, with which the French would eventually have to deal. The French were beginning to meet this sort of stiffer resistance in the outlying areas, and a French convoy was ambushed near Tây Ninh -- two jeeps were lost, two men were killed and four wounded, including a Lieutenant Colonel. Another French patrol of the 71st Engineers was ambushed near Benluc, a few miles southwest of Saigon, and one more Frenchman was killed and three wounded. Although the French had swept the Cantho area earlier, Việt Minh activity was now on the increase there. The French attack on the strong Việt Minh positions west of Nha Trang was held in abeyance pending the arrival of reinforcements, and more of these arrived in Saigon on the 25th as the 1st Battalion, 27th Colonial Infantry Regiment and additional elements of the 9th DIC disembarked.⁴⁹

These French reinforcements presented a ticklish problem for

General Auchinleck,* who was understandably acutely aware of Indian sensitivities in this matter. After prolonged discussion the Viceroy of India had now agreed that ships carrying French forces for Indochina (and flying British and American flags) could use the harbour at Cochin under the following conditions.⁵⁰ No more than two or three ships could be in the harbour at any time, and they were not to spend more than two or three days in Cochin. No French troops were to be allowed to land and, as far as possible, all evidence of the presence of French troops was to be concealed. No reference to French troops on board was to be made in orders or telegrams unless these messages were classified "Top Secret". The French were to be informed that if news of the presence of French troops in an Indian port leaked out, and the threatened labour strikes materialized, the harbour would be closed to French ships in the future. Such was the delicacy of this matter, and it may have affected the rate of French trooping to Indochina.

Negotiations between the British and Chinese on the exchange of missions in Indochina had now been successfully concluded, (perhaps due in part to the north's desperate need for southern rice), and Gracey had decided on the composition of the liaison team he was about to send to Hanoi. The officer selected by Gracey to represent him at Lu Han's headquarters was Lieutenant Colonel A.G. Trevor-Wilson, an SIS officer who in London had shared an office with Kim Philby. Trevor-Wilson, an officer uniquely suited for this delicate task, was to lead a mission of four men**to Hanoi on the 25th. He was advised by Gracey that his tasks were "solely military and in no way concerned with politics or economics except in the rare cases in which they definitely affect your military tasks."⁵¹ However, as Donnison has pointed out in referring to commanders in Gracey's position, Trevor-Wilson found it impossible to remain uninvolved as he soon was sucked into the whirlwind being formed in Hanoi.

In the south, although the emphasis was on Japanese disarmament, the fading of November saw Gracey's battalions busy coping with the Viet Minh. On the 27th a 9/14 Punjab patrol in 52 Brigade's area was

* Commander in Chief, India.

** A Major (GSO II), Warrant Officer and a Sergeant (Wireless Telegraphists), and an Orderly.

fired on, and in the ensuing battle five Việt Minh were killed and four captured, with no Punjabi losses. In the Bến Cát area Yamagichi Butai met stiffer resistance and ran into three ambushes; three Japanese were wounded and one Việt Minh killed.

A unique situation developed down in Cap St. Jacques when the 9/12 FFR advance party arrived and immediately held a meeting with the local Việt Minh chief, G.Wong. The British were willing to leave the Việt Minh alone provided the latter did not interfere with the main task of concentrating the Japanese in the area. But unfortunately all the good will in the world could not get around the main sticking point, and that was the problem of the returning French. Wrote the Việt Minh leader for "The Annamite Government of Cap" to the "English Allies at Cap":⁵²

Sirs,

As a result of our interview this morning the Annamite Government of CAP accept your request in so far as it concerns the Electric works, Water works, and the normal functioning of the market, under the following conditions:

1. The control and supervision of these works is the concern of the Annamite Government. No stranger may enter these works without our permission.
2. The Allies must be responsible for all violation of the rights of the Annamite people by the French.
3. The Allies must assure us on the following two points:
 - (a) The non-presence of French in the territory of the town of CAP.
 - (b) Ban the French from touching our public buildings.

If ever incidents occur as a result of the infringement of these conditions, the Allies must be responsible.

We await your written acceptance before starting the works.

Finally, we maintain good friendship towards the Allies, and we are ready to help them in the disarmament of the Japanese.

The Consul of the Annamite Government of CAP.

[signed] G. WONG
DANG CHEF

But even as this letter was being delivered in the south the Việt Minh struck again in the north, where a Force 136 officer (probably a Frenchman) was assassinated by a Việt Minh squad. He had been in an

Arab house in the village of Bưu Long, about two miles northwest of Biên Hòa, when the Việt Minh burst in, killing him and wounding the two Arabs present -- another victim of that subterranean, secret war of agents. Just a day earlier another Force 136 officer, a Frenchman, had been wounded in Biên Hòa.

The 4/2 Gurkhas in particular had been taking a toll of Việt Minh in their area (Saigon's northern suburbs), and on the 27th they again clashed with the Việt Minh when a 4/2 mobile column was ambushed. The Việt Minh, who appeared to be notably active in this area, lost ten killed in the exchange of fire; the 4/2 Gurkhas emerged unscathed and went on to link up with the 1st Gurkhas in Thu Dầu Môt. A 9/14 Punjab patrol was fired on in the same area where a day earlier they had killed five Việt Minh. The Punjabis burnt down a few of the nearby houses and four rifles were captured, including two which were fished out of the paddy field where they were thrown on the approach of the patrol.

Three Japanese were now captured by the Việt Minh in the Ấp Bung Cầu area north of Thu Dầu Môt, and another was taken by Việt Minh squads near Đình Thành. The 100 Brigade situation report commented that these kidnappings were becoming more prevalent as greater numbers of Japanese were being disarmed. While the 4/10 Gurkhas disarmed 920 more Japanese in Thu Đức, a 4/10 mortar section dropped in two rounds near a pagoda (a known Việt Minh meeting place) and broke up a gathering of Việt Minh who were uttering "wild cries" and beating drums.

A knife attack on some officers at the RAF Mess at Tân Sơn Nhứt -- apparently made by a single assailant -- triggered a sweep by a flight of RAF Regiment troops from 2967 Squadron. One hundred males in the local area were rounded up and herded to a crossroads near the Mess. There, in an unusual scene, Wing Commander Allen addressed them, through an interpreter, by the lights of drawn up jeeps. The 1307 Wing historian recorded that "It had a profound effect upon them, and they all filed past the Wing Commander when he permitted them to leave, making the usual obeisances. A strange sight indeed at 2330 hours, but these are strange conditions obtaining here and call for action which is not always according to the book."⁵³

But although the Việt Minh appeared to be well organized in propagating a steady level of violence, and in the south had a free hand outside the British key areas, Allied emphasis was on the formal Japanese surrender ceremonies and disarmament as November drew to a

close. Mountbatten's intended visit on 30 November to Saigon, where he was to receive Terauchi's personal surrender, sharpened this emphasis as Gracey's staff made preparations for the big event.

There were now few big targets for Gracey's battalions to hit -- fewer large groups for columns such as Gateforce to meet and destroy. But the level of violence, though locally lethal, was generally tolerable. The once-paralysing Viet Minh blockade of Saigon had been broken and life was slowly getting back to normal. The French were taking greater responsibility for affairs in South Vietnam, and the Gurkhas, Punjabis and Dogras were speculating on their next postings. On the 28th a large part of 32 Brigade's sector, north of Saigon, was handed over to the French as the 14th Army Commander, General Sir Miles Dempsey, landed at Tân Sơn Nhứt on the eve of Mountbatten's arrival. The end of the beginning of the modern Vietnam wars was in sight.

Footnotes: Chapter XIV

- 1 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, Operation Instruction 56, 1 November 1945.
- 2 Gracey Papers, 1/1 GR Newsletter, n.d.
- 3 Lieutenant Colonel R.W.Clark, letter to author, 1977.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 GB, PRO, WO 172/7793, War Diary 4/10 Gurkha Rifles, 2 November 1945.
- 6 GB, PRO, WO 172/7353, War Diary 16 Light Cavalry, 5 November 1945.
- 7 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, "Jap Surrender Instr No.1", 3 November 1945.
- 8 GB, PRO, WO203/5024, Gracey to Department of Public Relations, India, 4 November 1945.
- 9 Gracey Papers, Letter from Gracey to Slim, 5 November 1945. This tailpiece may have reflected a meeting between Brigadier Woodford, Commanding 32 Brigade, and the senior Japanese officer in his area. The Japanese had requested the meeting shortly after a sizable number of French troops had arrived in Saigon. When he entered Woodford's office the Japanese officer said that he was speaking for all Japanese when he asked that they be excluded from having to operate with the French. In Japanese eyes, the French were a defeated nation and the Japanese did not wish to be humiliated by having to work with or for them. Woodford clearly recalled the phrase used by the Japanese commander when referring to the French: "We do not like their schemeless plans." In other words, the French were not decisive and often changed their plans. [Brigadier E.C.J.Woodford, personal interview, 23 September 1973.]

- 10 Lieutenant Colonel Clark, Letter, 1977.
- 11 Gracey Papers, "20th Division's History", n.p., n.d.
- 12 Rodham's directives were as follows:

Searching must be done politely and cheerfully and the people themselves will NOT be searched. All civilian vehicles will be searched whether they are flying a CHINESE flag or NOT. In many cases Tongas, Bullock Carts etc. will only be carrying passengers and all that will be necessary is to stop them, have a glance inside, or perhaps make the passengers get out for a moment or so that one can see that they are not sitting on anything.

All vehicles must be searched but we must do it in such a manner that we will NOT antagonise friendliness.

The institution of these CHECK POSTS is at first annoying for the population. It has been found, however, from other anti-terrorist campaigns that provided such searches are politely carried out, in the long run, they help a great deal in restoring public confidence.

Even if we do NOT succeed in finding many arms, these CHECK POSTS will impress on the population that we really do intend to catch offenders. This will give those who are inclined to be friendly confidence that we really mean to enforce law and order.

[GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, 100 Ind Inf Bde Op Instr No.5, 5 November 1945.]

- 13 Gracey Papers, "20th Indian Division's History".
- 14 Some civilians may well have become casualties in this operation, for the entire village of B^hen Cat, numbering about 800, began evacuating the village to the north bank of the river on the approach of the Gurkhas. Casualties were "unknown" when eight of the boats were sunk. From the 100 Brigade situation reports the Gurkhas, sniped at all the way, pushed the snipers back into B^hen Cat, and it seems likely that the Vi^het Minh either ordered or persuaded the population to desert the village.
- [GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, I 1222, 7 November 1945.]
- 15 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, 7 November 1945.
- 16 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, War Diary 20 Indian Division, "INTSUM No.50", 7 November 1945.
- 17 Gracey Papers, 7 November 1945.
- 18 A 3/1 Gurkha officer interviewed by the author stated that while he was on a mission to M^htho local French agents had passed him information of clandestine midnight flights in and out of the M^htho-C^hantho' area by US C-47 aircraft. These aircraft were said to be ferrying arms in and out of the area, between Cochinchina and Tonkin, and the OSS was suspected of directing the operations.

- 19 For example, "Op Directive No.2", signed by Gracey, directed Major M.Sadiq Khan, 9/14 Punjab, to act as Liaison Officer to Lieutenant Colonel Massu for Operation "Stica", the drive to Tay Ninh. He was to pass French orders to the Japanese, who would not deal directly with the French. Of the operation itself, the 9/14 Punjab historian wrote:

As French columns go it was apparently a success but the method of conducting the operation was somewhat novel to our way of thinking. Apparently the column moved at a uniform speed of some 45 m.p.h. and if any casualties occurred a detachment of French nurses were left behind without protection, to look after them and catch up as best they could. Luckily they all did catch up but, knowing the Annamite, it makes one shudder to think of it.

[Gracey Papers, 9/14 Punjab Newsletter.]

- 20 The Summary of Instructions stated that 20 Division was to [Gracey Papers, 9/14 Punjab Newsletter.]uth West Pacific Area, the first brigade group going out to British Borneo in mid-December. Division Headquarters and the second brigade group were destined for Dutch Borneo and the Celebes in mid-January, and the third brigade group was to go to Ambon and Dutch New Guinea as soon as the French were able to complete the relief of Gracey's forces. Actually, the last brigade, 100 Brigade, returned to India.

[Gracey Papers, Appendix "A", ALFFIC No. 3362/G, 9 November 1945.]

- 21 Gracey Papers, Leclerc letter to Gracey, 12 November 1945.
 22 GB, PRO, FO 371/46309, F 10117, 10 November 1945.
 23 GB, PRO, WO 203/2019, "Turnover of Command in FIC and NET", 9 November 1945.
 24 GB, PRO, WO 172/7826, War Diary, 1st Battalion, Kumaon Regiment, 11 November 1945.
 25 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, War Diary 20 Indian Division.
 26 GB, PRO, WO 203/5024, Gracey to Mountbatten, 15 November 1945.
 27 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, Appendix A to "100 Ind Inf Bde Jap Surrender Instruction No.8", 24 November 1945. Gracey letter dated 17 November 1945.
 28 GB, PRO, WO 172/7008, War Diary 20 Indian Division, No. 3365/GS, 17 November 1945.
 29 GB, PRO, WO 203/4941, Mountbatten to Browning, 17 November 1945.
 30 GB, PRO, WO 172/4431, Minutes of Meeting, 19 November 1945.
 31 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, 19 November 1945.
 32 Gracey Papers, 3/1 Gurkha Rifles Newsletter.
 33 Lieutenant Colonel E.Gopsill, personal interview, 12 December 1977.
 34 Ibid.

- 35 Gracey Papers, "20th Indian Division's History", p.14.
 36 Lieutenant Colonel Gopsill, interview, 12 December 1977.
 37 Gracey Papers, 3/1 GR Newsletter.
 38 Ibid.
 39 GB, PRO, 172/7008, War Diary 20 Indian Division, Minutes of 20 November Conference, 21 November 1945.
 40 Ibid., INTSUM No.65, 22 November 1945.
 41 GB, PRO, FO 371/53957.
 42 GB, PRO, FO 371/46310, Meiklereid to Foreign Office, 26 October 1945.
 43 GB, PRO, FO 371/53957, SITREP, Meiklereid to Denning, 30 November 1945.

While Anglo-French relations were generally good, there were occasions when good will was strained. The primary foci of British complaints were the apparent lack of fire discipline of the French troops and the French attitude towards, and treatment of, the Vietnamese. British/Indian troops and buildings came under French fire on a number of occasions, often for no readily discernible reason. Typical of this was the incident of 19 November when the 63rd Indian Infantry Workshop Headquarters received a number of machine gun bursts from the newly-arrived French in Cholon. Dozens of rounds just missed the barracks as a French armored car travelled the street firing on both sides. The IEME commander happened to be inspecting the 63rd at the time and himself came close to being shot by the French barrage. Understandably incensed, he filed a complaint against the French. [But while he was unhappy with French indiscipline, he ordered his four Indian Field Company Commanders to tighten up discipline in their own units].

At least one Gurkha, and possibly more, was shot dead by the French, and a sentry at the 2/8 Punjab mess narrowly missed being shot when the French fired on him with machine guns at 0300 on 26 November. He had replied to the French patrol's challenge with "Friend Anglais!", at which time the French opened fire. It happened that these French soldiers had only arrived in Indochina on the previous evening and had been told to fire on anyone not replying to them in French. Fortunately, the sentry's companion recognized the patrol as French and managed to restrain his colleague from returning fire with his own light machine gun, thereby possibly saving needless Allied casualties.

A 20 Division Intelligence Summary-listed complaints from 80 Brigade about the police. While acknowledging the French problems, the report stated:

On frequent occasions they have failed entirely to fulfil commitments, the most glaring example being a case where the French Police undertook on four successive days to relieve a British guard and on each day failed to turn up.

[GB, PRO, WO 172/7128, 20 Division Intelligence Summary, Appendix E, 22 November 1945.]

The same summary also had this to say:

The IORs have begun to distrust both the French troops and civil authorities. The shoddy turnout of French troops, their bad discipline and their habit of lounging about on street corners have caused the average sepoy to feel contempt for them. The French police too have not impressed the IORs as a result of their indiscriminate shooting at night at mere shadows, bad behavior while cooperating with units on raids on suspect areas, and ruthless and brutal treatment on occasions of civilians detained for interrogation.

The engineers also had their problems. On 19 November, major repairs on the power house boilers were necessary, including rebricking the furnaces. The 422nd Indian Field Company reported that "Cooperation from the French [was] most disheartening." When sapper engineers were withdrawn from the pumphouse on the 21st, the French sent no replacements, despite repeated requests to do so.

Nor were the leaders spared. On 29 October Gracey, who had already criticised Cédile and Rivier, had harsh words for two other officials. Cédile's deputy, Lieutenant Colonel Anthonioz, was described as "small minded, lacking in imagination and pigheaded", and Colonel Martin (head of the French mission to the Control Commission), came under Gracey's withering pen. Martin, wrote Gracey, "does little but waste the time of our overworked staff with minor details and cannot even speak English." However, Leclerc's Chief of Staff, Repiton-Preneuf, was complimented by Gracey.

44 Gopsill returned to Saigon in time to rejoin his unit as it embarked for Macassar in late January. Years later, a group of South Vietnamese Army officers toured Britain. Their itinerary included the School of Infantry at Warminster, where Gopsill was an Instructor. One of the Vietnamese officers approached Gopsill and asked if he had ever been in Nha Trang in late 1945. When Gopsill replied that he had, the officer said, "I commanded the Viet Minh force opposing you. It was our aim to kill the big British major."

45 Gracey Papers, "20th Indian Division's History."

46 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Brigade, 24 November 1945.

47 Not everyone suffered from the impending recall of the 500 piaster notes. A British officer's commandeered car suffered a flat tire during this period, and since there was no key to the trunk (boot), the lock was shot off. The lid flew up, revealing an amazing sight. The officer — who, because of this incident, requested anonymity when interviewed by the author — found the trunk stuffed with boxes of what appeared to be "monopoly mony", but which were, in fact, 500 piaster notes. He and the officers with him decided to remain silent about their discovery. They tried an experiment with the freshly-printed notes, which were determined to have belonged to a Việt Minh paymaster (who himself had stolen them or had received them

from the Japanese). They took a single note and bought a bottle of whisky — when they received change, with no questions asked, they decided that the notes were genuine.

At about this time news was received of the plan to recall the 500 piaster notes. The entire battalion was immediately formed up on the following morning, and in keeping with their long-standing policy of dividing spoils, the money — which equalled the staggering sum of £27,000 sterling, was divided among the men and a portion put into the battalion fund. The men had one day in which to spend all they could. Through some deft manipulation a large portion of the money stayed in the unit fund, and until its disbandment there were no more mess bills for members, and the troops always had the best of recreational equipment, sporting gear, etc.

The Division Finance Officer, who had his suspicions, visited the unit and asked about the money — there would be no questions asked if the money was turned in. That story has remained relatively unknown for all these years, and there are a few more like this yet to be told.

- 48 GB, PRO, FO 371/53957, F1058, 30 November 1945.
- 49 Substantial French forces were en route to Saigon at this time. Thousands of troops were aboard ships flying the U.S., British and French flags. As of 29 November the Orontes (British) and Pasteur (French) were already in Saigon. The Stanford, Kingspoint, Winchester, Pachang, Taos, Lake Charles (all U.S.) and Eridan (British flag, French crew) had just passed Singapore. The Georgetown and Amherst (U.S.) were out of radio contact but had passed Colombo. The Boissevain and Johande Witt (Dutch) were to sail from Marseilles on 29 November and 4 December respectively. The Felix Roussel (French), Monarch of Bermuda, Cameronia, Arundel Castle (British) had been cancelled. Trooping for the remainder of 9 DIC had not been fully confirmed as yet.
- 50 GB, PRO, WO 172/1793, War Diary Headquarters SEAC, Rear SACSEA to SACSEA (MOKAN 1234), 26 November 1945.
- 51 Papers of Lieutenant Colonel A.G. Trevor-Wilson, 24 November 1945. Trevor-Wilson's orders were as follows:

ASSIGNMENT.

You are Senior Military Representative of a Military Mission whose tasks are outlined below and which tasks are solely military and in no way concerned with politics or economics except in the rare cases in which they definitely effect your military tasks.

CHARTER.

Your duties as leader of the Military Mission at HANOI are as follows:-

- 207
- (a) You will act as my Military Representative with your H.Q. at HANOI, and as such you will present to Commanding General LUHAN all problems which have arisen or which may arise in order that you may reach the most expeditious settlement.
 - (b) You will confer with the Chinese authorities on the exact demarkation of the 16th parallel, with a view to the solution of such occupational problems as have arisen or may arise in territory on either side of it.
 - (c) You will ensure that early information is exchanged between General LUHAN and myself on the subject of the premeditated arrival in either area of Missions, representatives etc; this will also include the flight across the 16^o parallel of such aircraft as may be necessary for one purpose or another, where such aircraft intend to land within French Indo China.
 - (d) You will ensure that no inconvenience or inefficiency is caused by the unheralded arrival of official or semi-official representatives in either HANOI or SAIGON.
 - (e) You will ensure the easy exchange of information between my H.Q. and that of General LUHAN on all problems of mutual interest and importance.
 - (f) You will transmit to the correct authorities in HANOI such information as I may desire;
 - (g) You will endeavour to ensure the expeditious turn round of such ships as may be sailed from SAIGON to ports in northern F.I.C. with a view to an exchange of coal for rice. You will keep me informed of any delays or difficulties which may occur and you will take such immediate steps as may be necessary to make adequate preparations for the proper safeguarding of such commodities, either arriving from SAIGON or due for shipment to SAIGON.
 - (h) You will examine the possibility of accrediting British and other War Correspondents to the Chinese at HANOI.

COMMUNICATION.

You will communicate reports on your task as they are necessary by wireless using such means as you have in your possession and by the despatch of Mail Bags, informing me by W/T. of their E.T.A. It will be essential for you to return to SAIGON on or about the 10th December, 1945, in order to make a full report.

D.D. Gracey,
Major General,
Commander,
H.Q. SACSEA Commission No.1,
Saigon.

24th November, 1945.

In addition, Trevor-Wilson was assigned ten covert tasks:

TO: Lt.Colonel A.G. TREVOR-WILSON
Major E. Esling.

You are in possession of your Charter signed by General GRACEY, in addition to your Charter you have a list of items which are of obvious interest to General GRACEY, but some of which cannot appear in an official Charter; apart from those of which you are well aware and which are contained in your list, the following summarizes those points which are of particular interest to General GRACEY and which do not appear in the official Charter:-

1. Release of British aircraft held at TOURANE.
2. Extent of disarmament of Japanese forces carried out by Chinese.
3. Extent of move northward of Chinese forces out of F.I.C.
4. Work done by Chinese forces towards documentation and collection of evidence of War Criminals, with special reference to those War Criminals likely to be indicted by the British Empire.
5. Future programme and policy for Chinese forces in northern F.I.C., with especial stress laid on their plans for hand over to the French Authorities.
6. Number of French Officers under arrest in Annamite gaols.
7. The strength of Annamite forces and all details.
8. Indian Independence Movement Organization and extent of its membership or that of kindred societies.
9. Evidence of Japanese "stay behind" movement.
10. Broadcasts by Hanoi Radio.

DIMSEY
Brigadier,
Chief of Staff,

- 52 GB, PRO, WO 172/1793, War Diary Headquarters SEAC, 27 November 1945.
- 53 GB, PRO, Air 29/1118, 1307 Wing War Diary, November 1945.

CHAPTER XV

DRAWDOWN

The camaraderie which exists between Officers of the Indian Army and their Gurkha and Indian soldiers must be explained to them. Our men, of whatever colour, are our friends and not considered 'black' men. They expect and deserve to be treated in every way as first class soldiers, and their treatment should be, and is, exactly the same as that of white troops.

There is no more fruitful source of friction between Indian Army Officers and their men on the one side, and French troops on the other, than when our Indian and Gurkha troops are regarded and treated as 'black' by French officers and men. I mention this point particularly as cases have occurred in which it is obvious that our Indian Army traditions have not been understood.

General Gracey to General Leclerc
Saigon, 12 December 1945.

As November drew to a close a 3/1 Gurkha writer summed it up fairly well: "... November closed fairly quietly after a similar beginning, but a stormy middle period."¹ The arrival of the French in British key areas was viewed with mixed feelings. Wrote a 9/14 Punjab:

"Our area in GIADINH, except for our own barracks, has now been taken over by the 9th French Div. There is a word for discipline in the French Dictionary but apparently it is obsolete; however their senior officers are charming and affable and say that we are 'Très Sympathetique'. We have made some good friends among them but do wish that they would stop calling all Indian Troops 'Les GOORKHAS'; we have explained that 'Les POONJABS' are the ones that really count and hope to educate them in time." 2

The Punjab historian went on to echo the universal British/ Indian complaint of the fresh French troops:

"Since their arrival in GIADINH our nights, previously quiet and peaceful, have resounded to the noise of musketry on all sides. We started off 'standing to' and thinking that the whole Annamite army was attacking us but now realize that it is merely 'Trigger happiness' on the part of our Allies; the French maxim seems to be 'when in doubt discharge your weapon as rapidly as possible and in any direction!' Luckily they usually shoot into the air and anyhow we have a wall round us. 'Vive la France' or at least those who survive the nightly fusillades from their comrades." 3

The apparently complete lack of French fire discipline culminated in a 3/1 GR sentry being shot dead on the docks, and the 3/1 platoon which went to retrieve his body was also fired on.* The 3/1 Gurkha base area again came under fire on the following day, despite the intervention of the commander of D Company, 3/1 GR, who had asked the French to stop it.⁴

* These unfortunate incidents occurred not infrequently. One Gurkha officer interviewed in 1977 stated that a French officer refused to acknowledge the challenge by one of his Gurkha sentries; the Gurkha shot the Frenchman dead, and his body was immediately buried. No report was ever filed of this incident.

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Gracey now had a direct link to Hanoi, as Trevor-Wilson had announced on 28 November that the Saigon-Hanoi communications link was open. On the same day, at 1700 hours, the main body of 9 FFR had arrived at Cap St. Jacques by river and found the town almost deserted and most of the nicer bungalows looted. The Japanese helped the battalion to unload and move into their new home (the Grand Hotel) on the sea front. The Mayor's house became the officers' mess.

In Thủ Đức, 4/10 GR now began their "Japanese Financial Disarmament", and four Gurkha officers collected over 8½ million piasters and gold bullion worth about two million pounds sterling,⁵ plus a "considerable quantity" of opium which was also handed in by the Japanese. On the following day they collected about three million piasters in addition to jewelry, watches, cameras, and so on. The magnitude of this vitally important "depiastering" operation may be appreciated when it is realized that these enormous amounts of money, gold and opium were collected by a single battalion in two days. Furthermore, thousands of Japanese troops outside the British key areas had to travel to the key areas to be disarmed and to turn over their valuables. There was just no way to check on the amount of arms, ammunition and money which were quite probably turned over to the Việt Minh as these Japanese units made their way to the British area around Saigon.

The 14th Army Commander, Lieutenant General Dempsey, arrived in Saigon a day before Mountbatten, reaching Tân Sơn Nhứt on 28 November, and was greeted at the airport by Gracey and Leclerc. He chaired a meeting at 20 Division Headquarters and did his best to answer the unanswerable concerning the future of the division and of the role, if any, of British officers in the Indian Army after independence.

Even as Dempsey was talking the Gurkhas were out hunting for Việt Minh. The 4/2 Gurkhas plus 16 Cavalry were in two columns, working two main roads between Tân Sơn Nhứt and Thủ Dầu Một. Approaching the Saigon River near Thủ Dầu Một they surprised a Việt Minh ambush party digging up the road at an elbow bend about three miles south of the town. The Việt Minh fled on seeing the Gurkhas, and the two columns met and swept the area. The Việt Minh were again encountered near the river, and ten were killed; the rest threw their weapons into the river and tried to escape to the north bank, only to find the 1/1 Gurkhas waiting for them there. Several more Việt Minh were killed by the 1/1 Gurkhas, and 4/2 GR then returned to base without incident. No British/Indian casualties were incurred during the operations.

On 29 November the Supremo himself arrived in Saigon. He had earlier visited Tavoy, on the Tennasserim coast, and at 1630 landed at Tân Sơn Nhứt. In their discussions Gracey stated that Terauchi's health was deteriorating rapidly and there was some doubt as to whether the Japanese Field Marshal "could stand the strain of a move to Singapore."⁶ Mountbatten agreed that Terauchi should at least remain the titular head of Japanese forces to keep unbroken the chain of command from the Emperor on down. Terauchi was to remain in Saigon until Gracey departed, at which time the decision would be made as to whether he would be moved to Singapore, stay in Saigon or be returned to Japan. Mountbatten reiterated that he was aware that "Terauchi was a major war criminal but that in his present state of health he doubted that he would ever be brought to trial, and that he would inform the Chiefs of Staff accordingly".

Although extra security precautions had kept the nearby 80 Brigade area quiet, trouble continued in the outlying areas. In 32 Brigade's area two Japanese were wounded when a convoy of three supply trucks was ambushed about seven miles northwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt; two more Japanese were wounded near Thu Dầu Một, and in the Mytho area the French killed 22 Việt Minh, captured 16 and destroyed an arms and grenade factory.

At last, on 30 November, the moment came for Mountbatten to receive the personal surrender of his Japanese counterpart. The scene was the rear of Gracey's residence, where a red carpet was laid at the foot of the stairs leading down from the palace. Representatives from the various Indian, Gurkha and British units were represented and lined up on the stairs, forming a cordon through which Mountbatten was to descend. Waiting in the courtyard, off the carpet, were the old Field Marshal and his aide, who was holding the box containing the two swords. After a suitable delay Mountbatten, in white, descended the stairs and faced Terauchi; the time was 1000. The Supreme Allied Commander then stated:

"I am now going to accept the swords of Field Marshal Count Terauchi as a symbol of the final act of surrender of the Supreme Commander of the Japanese Expeditionary Forces of the Southern Regions to me as Supreme Allied Commander of the South East Asia Command."⁷

Terauchi then saluted and handed over the box. It was all over in a few minutes; for some reason Dempsey did not stay for the ceremony, as he departed Saigon at 0900. According to Gracey's papers, two

British Army doctors also attended the ceremony — they stood by with a syringe of morphine at the ready:

"For a long time F M Terauchi had been due to surrender his sword to the Supremo but this had been postponed on account of the former's ill health. Before the Supremo's visit to FIC in Nov we were asked to examine Terauchi to see if he was fit to attend a ceremony. A medical board of Col Jackson, Lt Col Passmore, and Major Miller, examined him at HQ Jap Southern Army. They found him hemi-plegic, and suffering from marked arteriosclerosis with cerebral degeneration. They advised that Terauchi should not be put to the strain of a public ceremony but could participate in a small private one — and this took place with Major Brook and Major Miller standing by with a syringe of morphia just in case...." 8

By 1030 Mountbatten was holding a meeting at Gracey's residence attended by the two senior French officials, D'Argenlieu and Leclerc (plus their Chiefs of Staff), Gracey, Kimmins, Hirst, Scott-Bell (Royal Navy), Micklereid, Clarac (D'Argenlieu's Political Adviser) and J. Rayner (Psychological Warfare).

Coming straight to the point, Mountbatten said that it looked as if the first brigade of 20 Division would leave at the end of December, followed a month later by General Gracey, Division Headquarters and the second brigade. He then asked the French if these proposals were acceptable, to which Leclerc replied that the departure of the first brigade posed no problem, but the movement of Gracey and the second brigade "should not be fixed firmly, as it depended on the arrival of the 9th D.I.C."

Although Gracey and Leclerc had enormous respect for each other, Gracey now interjected to state that in his opinion the second brigade could depart as planned, as it was not necessary to await the arrival of 9 DIC's equipment.⁹ D'Argenlieu then said that "General Leclerc had only meant that he must have sufficient equipment to ensure that he would be able to employ the division as such."

Mountbatten suggested that Gracey and Leclerc could settle the matter in the light of events at the time, and if a serious holdup of 9 DIC's equipment occurred the question might have to be reconsidered. However, the driving factors in this case were the intricate interlocking theatre movements, one piece being the departure of the second brigade

and their subsequent relief of the Australians in the Celebes. Mountbatten said that the third brigade would also probably be used to relieve Australians, and that any undue delays would have to be negotiated with the Prime Minister of Australia. Could General Leclerc give any indication as to when the third brigade [100 Brigade] could be withdrawn?

Leclerc replied "that he could not possibly take the responsibility for guarding all the disarmed Japanese in French Indo-China until all the French forces which he was expecting had arrived from Europe." This, however, depended mainly on the shipment of equipment from Britain. However, it appeared that the third brigade could depart when 3 DIC had received its equipment. Leclerc added that he had received a telegram from the French military attache in London saying that the British had accepted responsibility for moving the French brigade from Madagascar.

Mountbatten "said that when in Delhi the Viceroy had informed him that Indian agitators were making much capital out of the employment of Indian troops in French Indo-China and the Netherlands East Indies." The minutes of the meeting went on to record:

"In these circumstances he [Mountbatten] regretted that at the request of the Government of India the original intention to place British/Indian troops under French command after the departure of General Gracey, could not now be carried out. He regretted this decision, but the matter was out of his hands."

It is doubtful if all this handwashing was really necessary for a straightforward soldier like Leclerc, but after Mountbatten made his regrets both D'Argenlieu and Leclerc assured him that they understood.

Mountbatten then returned to this theme of avoiding potentially unfavourable publicity. He told the French that he would have no objection to Leclerc immediately taking over direct command of French forces, acting under D'Argenlieu instead of Gracey. Mountbatten said that Government approval would have to be sought for this, and "he did not wish to press it, but he put it forward from a desire to help the French as much as possible." It would also "ease the political criticisms being levelled in India and other parts of the world."

The French again said that they understood, but Leclerc, in saying that he appreciated the offer, thought that "certain difficulties"

might make it impossible to separate the commands at this time. In his opinion the proper time for that was the departure of General Gracey and the arrival of the remainder of 9 DIC.

After again turning down D'Argenlieu's request to transfer the disputed Cambodian area from General Evans in Bangkok to Gracey, Mountbatten turned to the subject of aircraft for the French. Leclerc had asked for a squadron of Spitfires, and Mountbatten wondered whether the French would accept Japanese fighters pending consideration of the request. Leclerc replied that he did not want to address the proposal unless there was no hope of obtaining the Spitfires.

Mountbatten again indicated his aversion to adverse criticism, explaining that "as an Allied Commander he had to follow the general principle of the United Nations in regard to the use of Force against native populations." The Allied forces under Gracey had to conform to these principles and he "did not want to lay down definite guidelines which would restrict the French unduly." He left it to Gracey and Leclerc to sort out the separation of British and French commands in Vietnam. D'Argenlieu agreed.

Mountbatten had to tread lightly over this issue, for the next item of discussion concerned the export of food from Cochinchina. Mountbatten needed the rice surpluses from Indochina to alleviate the serious food shortages throughout the rest of his command. D'Argenlieu replied that his own situation was not too good either, but he would do what he could to help "if his situation improved."

Saigon Radio was discussed next, and the British proposed that the French should take it over immediately, subject to certain reservations. D'Argenlieu raised the question of SACSEA directives after Gracey's departure, for he felt that "one of the principal points of sovereignty was control of the radio...." Mountbatten again replied that these directives "were not entirely his own product, but that they were based on directives received from the Foreign Office in London, and that he understood that they were issued under the auspices of the United Nations." The Supreme Allied Command had now twice invoked the United Nations in giving the impression that he was so far down the chain of command as to be virtually powerless in this matter, at which point D'Argenlieu quietly asked if it might be confirmed that these directives were indeed issued under the authority of the United Nations; Mountbatten replied that he

would have to check on this. D'Argenlieu then asked if Mountbatten had listened to Hanoi Radio, and suggested that the Chinese "might also be reminded of their obligations to the United Nations". But Mountbatten had been attempting for some time to get the Americans to intervene with the Chinese to control the vituperative and inflammatory Communist propaganda emanating from Hanoi, but without success.

Mountbatten explained for Singapore on the following day. Terauchi, whose request to say a few words during his surrender ceremony had been curtly denied, was waiting at the airfield to speak to Mountbatten. The Supreme Allied Commander had granted Terauchi's request to deliver a note, provided it was brief (less than 1½ minutes).

The old Field Marshal, now a pathetic figure despite his status as a major war criminal, expressed his "heartfelt gratitude and deep emotion" at the consideration shown to him by Mountbatten during the surrender ceremony the previous day. On behalf of the officers and men of the Southern Army he thanked the Allied Commander for granting a special holiday on the occasion of the Meiji Festival on 3 November, and assured Mountbatten that Southern Army "will continue faithfully to carry out their duties in connection with the surrender." Terauchi said that he looked forward "with pleasure" at receiving Mountbatten's personal guidance, and concluded by saying ". . . may I congratulate Your Excellency on your notable victory and express to you my warm appreciation for your having granted me a personal interview."¹⁰

Mountbatten responded by saying that General Gracey had reported that Terauchi was carrying out his orders, and added, "I may say privately, and this will interest the Field Marshal, that I am sending one of the swords to the King."¹¹ Terauchi again burst into tears during this meeting, and he remains an enigma, for an RAF witness wrote that the Field Marshal and his senior officers appeared to be in good spirits on Mountbatten's departure.*

Mountbatten, on his departure from Saigon, noted in his diary that Leclerc had declared, "Your General Gracey has saved French Indo China!" The Supreme Allied Commander also wrote that Gracey was

* When on his arrival in Singapore in March, 1946, Terauchi asked for a meeting with SACSEA, Mountbatten said that "he did not feel much disposed to meet Field Marshal Terauchi again after the lachrymose efforts which had followed his last meeting."

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"doing a first-class job", a significant reversal of opinion as he had been on the point of dismissing Gracey just a few weeks earlier (before the Chiefs of Staff had overruled his wish to restrict Gracey to the immediate vicinity of Saigon).

Even as Mountbatten was leaving Saigon, 14/13 FFR was in action against the Việt Minh in the Biên Hòa area. A mobile column went in pursuit of Việt Minh reported to be about three miles southeast of Biên Hòa; another platoon travelled by river to land downstream in support of the mobile column. As the river-borne platoon made the turn south on the loop of the river it came under heavy fire from Việt Minh on the bank. There were no 14/13 FFR casualties, but five Việt Minh were killed.

A few days later Mountbatten was joined in Singapore by the two senior Allied officers in Vietnam, as Generals Gracey and Leclerc arrived to attend the Supreme Allied Commander's 300th Meeting, which was held in Government House on 6 December at 1730 hours. This was an occasion of unusual importance because the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, was present.* What his thoughts were at this time tempt speculation, for he had already received Major General Pyman's letter informing him about the dissatisfaction with Mountbatten's leadership shared by a number of the most senior officers, and there is little doubt he had already discussed this matter with some of them.** Also present were Browning, Park (RAF), Dempsey (who was succeeding Slim as ALFSEA Commander in Chief), Evans (ALFSIAM), Denning, Meiklereid (Gracey's Political Adviser) and other key staff officers. After discussing the subject of disputed territory between Siam and Cambodia the rest of the meeting (eight items on the agenda) was devoted to Indochina.

The Supreme Allied Commander asked Leclerc to "give a brief summary of the situation as he saw it in French Indo-China". Leclerc began by saying that by comparison with what was happening in Java

* It was during this time that Alanbrooke assured Gracey that the proclamation of 19/21 September, to which Mountbatten had violently objected, was correct in its form and timing.

** These discussions may have been influential in the decision of the Chiefs of Staff to disapprove Mountbatten's strong suggestion that a Supreme Commander, and associated command and staff structure, be retained after his departure and the disbandment of SEAC. The services, especially the Army and Navy, strongly opposed the retention of a Supreme Commander.

things were not too bad in Indochina. But he stressed that the reason the French had achieved success so far was because they had not over-extended themselves -- they had done only what was possible. He also said that the part of Indochina under control was small when compared to the remainder. In order to finish the task he needed the 3rd DIC and the Expeditionary Corps units -- especially their equipment.¹²

In response to a question by Alanbrooke, Major General Denning, the PAO*, stated that eleven ships with French troops had arrived in Saigon or were at sea between Singapore and Saigon; two more ships were expected in mid-December, which should complete the buildup of 9 DIC (less a certain number of vehicle parties). The British had already supplied the French with 600 vehicles in Indochina, and would hand over another 1300 on the departure of 20 Indian Division. Denning added that the first ship carrying troops of the 3rd DIC (the Arundel Castle) was due to sail from Marseilles on 18 December. Two other big liners were scheduled to sail on 3 January and one more on 10 January. The remainder of 3 DIC's trooping had not been fixed yet, but the four ships mentioned would carry between eight and nine thousand troops; the passage took four weeks. In response to another question by Alanbrooke, Denning replied that 1900 vehicles in India were earmarked for 3 DIC, of which 400 were to be shipped in December.

Mountbatten then informed Leclerc of a report which had recently appeared in the Chicago Sun** newspaper, stating that the crews of eight American ships (each of which had carried 2000 French troops to Saigon) were "resentful of this task". These crews "had declared that they would have preferred to have been employed repatriating American troops from Europe", an unsurprising statement given the political preferences of their union leaders.

Leclerc made no comment on this information and, in a reply to Mountbatten's question, voiced his agreement with the proposed British drawdown in Indochina, saying that he wished to

"emphasise most particularly the great need for landing craft. This arose because the roads in French Indo-China were in very bad shape, and were often cut by the rebels, whereas, particularly in the south, there were many rivers and

* Political Affairs Officer.

** A newspaper known to be strongly isolationist and, for some reason, virulently anti-British.

canals which could be used for troop movements and supplies. North of Saigon all the key towns were on the coast and could only be reached by sea. The lack of landing craft had caused casualties in previous operations; for an example at Nha Trang a landing on the beaches was not possible because there was no landing craft. Instead the landing had to take place in the harbour itself. They had to be landed in an unarmoured native junk and ten men were killed or wounded by a light machine-gun." 13

Leclerc was then invited to send the French aircraft carrier Bearn to Singapore to fetch what landing craft were available, but, since the Bearn was equipped with 12-ton cranes, only the smaller craft could be transferred in this manner. It was also agreed that harbour defence motor launches would be handed over to the French, and Sir Keith Park added that the Air Ministry in London had authorized the transfer of twelve Mark VIII Spitfires to the French.

Mountbatten closed the meeting by announcing the appointment of Brigadier Maunsell as Head of the Inter-Service Mission which was to be established on Gracey's departure and the disbandment of the Control Commission, and Leclerc said that "he agreed that this was a most suitable appointment."¹⁴

Prior to his departure for Singapore to attend this conference, Meiklereid had submitted a political report in which he addressed the French administrative reorganisation in Indochina. Five Commissioners of the Republic had been appointed, to serve under the High Commissioner, Admiral D'Argenlieu.¹⁵

Up to this moment the Port of Saigon had been efficiently managed by the British Military and Naval authorities, but the time had now come for the French to take it over. Their troops were arriving in increasing numbers and the tonnage of merchant shipping was expected to increase as normal commercial life was revived. But the French, wrote Meiklereid, had "so far shown little inclination to tackle this responsibility -- and it is no small problem -- maintaining that they do not possess the necessary ways and means."

Meiklereid finally went to D'Argenlieu himself to discuss the matter, and as a result of this intervention a meeting was held between the appropriate British and French authorities. Although the French remained reluctant partners, it was decided that a French Liaison Officer

would immediately be attached to the British docks operating staff and a French Port Authority would be formed.

Another pressing problem was the shortage of food in Indochina. Since 1943 there had been a steady decline in rice production, which was likely to be aggravated when the 1945/46 crop was in.* The political situation, in Meiklereid's view, had directly affected the situation. The position in the north, in Tonkin, was so bad that the French had set aside the first 200,000 tons of the new crop for the north. There were only 71,000 tons in the Saigon/Cholon area, as follows: the Japanese military authorities held 50,000 tons (half of which was unfit for human consumption), and French civil authorities had 21,000 tons. However, the requirement for the next three months was for 81,500 tons.

Although the rubber plantations were generally intact, machinery was badly damaged. Planters were now beginning to return to their plantations, where they were reorganizing their labour forces under the protection of armed guards.

Meiklereid went on to discuss the tangled financial situation in Indochina, where on 18 November the first deflationary measure had been introduced. [This was the announcement that all 500 piaster notes -- the highest issued -- would be cancelled, and required to be paid in by 25 November]. Wrote Gracey's Political Adviser:

"... the measure is aimed at persons who have amassed large fortunes from financial dealings with the Japanese and from black market activities. The measure is expected to reduce the note issue by one third. A large proportion of these notes is still in the hands of the Japanese and a considerable number are also held by the VIET MINH." 16

The Chinese merchants "who are not prone to the utilisation of bank facilities" were hit hard. While the French were now mounting "a considerable press campaign" to explain the necessity of such severe action, they were now wondering if "they may have been a trifle hasty in introducing these measures which may adversely affect the political situation." The British Army Financial Adviser had uncovered evidence of "extensive Japanese financial manipulations", and there was "little doubt that a considerable portion of these funds**has gone to ground for subsequent use in subversive activities."

* The shortage was reflected in the amount of rice exported, as follows: 1943: 922,000 tons; 1944: 500,000 tons; 1945(to the end of August): 61,000 tons.

** Perhaps hundreds of millions of piasters.

The level of activity in the British area in Vietnam gave no evidence of any decline. The nature of guerilla warfare resulted in the scattered British battalions fighting sharp, localised and unrelated actions in their respective areas. In the always troublesome Gò Vấp area, in Woodford's 32 Brigade area, 9/14 Punjab's No. 3 Company twice came under Việt Minh fire while carrying out a sweep to the northwest. Twenty-five suspects were arrested, including a man identified as a former major in the French Army who was now Chief of Staff of the Annamite Southern Army. A few days later the 9/14 Punjabs took up blocking positions as the French swept the area south of Gò Vấp; four Việt Minh were killed during the operation. The Punjabis reported that a French truck was attacked in Gò Vấp, and return fire killed nine Việt Minh soldiers. Shortly thereafter the Japanese guard on the Gò Vấp train depot came under fire -- these last few Việt Minh attacks had been carried out in daylight and were supported by light machine guns. Two French Jeeps had been shot up near the golf course, and four Frenchmen were wounded and one Jeep burned. A 4/2 GR patrol reacting to this ambush intercepted the Việt Minh party and killed four. A Jat patrol searching a village four miles north of Tân Sơn Nhứt discovered the body of a Frenchman in a Vietnamese house, and six suspects were arrested.

Four more Việt Minh were killed in Gò Vấp when two platoons of 9/14 Punjab were subjected to grenade and small arms fire. The Punjabis engaged the Việt Minh with 2 inch mortars, and when the Việt Minh retreated they were met by the French, who killed four. Other Việt Minh were killed by ones and twos in a number of isolated incidents throughout the area.

In a small but significant incident a Vietnamese woman passing 32 Brigade Headquarters had her shopping basket searched by a 2/8 Punjab sentry. Ten hand grenades were found in her basket, and she stated that the Việt Minh were paying anyone the sum of twenty piasters per grenade smuggled through Allied lines, and five hundred piasters was the payment for throwing a grenade at Allied troops.¹⁷ At these prices a number of civilians were undoubtedly killed in the act of hurling grenades at Gracey's forces. The Field Security Section in Gia Định later informed 32 Brigade that the arrested woman had given the security forces information on where she had received her grenades, and a 9/14 Punjab platoon arrested two suspects in a house in Gia Định.

On 9 December Brigadier Woodford held a conference at 32 Brigade Headquarters to discuss the brigade's last major operation in Vietnam: the assault on Hân Phú² island. Attending were the commanders of 9/14 Punjab, 4/2 GR, and representatives from the Royal Navy and 114 Field Regiment (Royal Artillery). According to the "20th Division's History", Hân Phú² had developed into a major base for Việt Minh guerillas driven out from the Saigon area. The objective of the operation was to clear Hân Phú², and the detailed plans were worked out at this time.* Even as the conferees were working out the details the Royal Artillery reported that they had destroyed by artillery fire a number of junks in the Hân Phú² area northeast of Gò Vấp.

The plan was published on the following day. The operation was 32 Brigade's biggest undertaking since October, when it spearheaded the expanding British role with the investment of Gò Vấp and Gia Định. Briefly, the plan called for 4/2 Gurkha Rifles to assault and sweep Hân Phú², while 9/14 Punjab was to take up blocking positions to cover possible Việt Minh escape routes, to include the shooting of Việt Minh retreating across the river. The 9/14 Punjabs were also to be prepared to cross the river in rubber boats or "country craft" if called on by the 4/2 Gurkhas.

The Royal Navy was tasked to provide five craft in which to transport the Gurkha battalion to Hân Phú²; the departure point and time was to be the RN barracks in Saigon, at 0630 hours. One of the boats was designated a casualty evacuation craft, and each boat was to be armed with four Bren guns and eight soldiers from 9/14 Punjab. One battery of artillery from 114 Field Regiment was to support the operation from their gun emplacement area on the golf course near Tân Sơn Nhứt. The area to be bracketed was about one kilometer due north of Bến Cát and between two and three kilometers northeast of Gò Vấp, in the pocket formed by the bifurcation of the river. The Hân Phú² area encompassed about one square kilometer. The French post on the bridge east of Bến Cát was responsible for protecting the 59 Field Ambulance detachment and the naval craft while at anchor.

* The assault was scheduled for 12/13 December, and amended to 15/16 December.

Unfortunately, the Việt Minh scored first, for on the eve of the operation three 9/14 Punjab soldiers were killed, and one wounded, by Việt Minh snipers in Gò Vấp as the Punjab company was moving into position to support the Hân Phú² assault.

On 15 December the 4/2 Gurkhas embarked as briefed, at the Royal Navy area in Saigon, and at 0830 the 4/2 GR mission commander radioed that his landing had been unopposed. Brigadier Woodford observed the landing from the opposite bank of the river, and it appeared that the Việt Minh had not expected a waterborne approach. The Gurkhas turned south, and a few minutes later the company on the right flank came upon a force of fifty Việt Minh, who were immediately dispersed. By this time 9/14 Punjab was in place, providing stops at likely exit points.

As a 4/2 GR writer described it:

"The size of our force was limited to two Rifle Coys and Tac HQ by the extent of our other commitments. This force embarked in 5 landing craft at the Docks before dawn, then as dawn was breaking we moved up the river and landed without opposition (but in great danger from our own guns) on the northeast corner of the peninsula [the area between the Cho and Saigon Rivers]; we then spread out Westwards and turned SOUTH in the hopes of driving the rebels into the arms of 9/14 Punjab who were lining the SOUTH and WEST banks of the river CHO. Actually most of the rebels had already cleared out, apparently in much hurry, but we estimated that there were about 100 left to oppose us and for an hour B Coy mostly, had quite a little battle losing one man killed and 4 wounded in the process and killing about 30 of the rebels before the rest slid off into the jungle and were never seen again. During the course of the drive a vast amount of booty was collected and destroyed, the rebel HQ was found and gutted and over 400 assorted able bodied males were rounded up and sent to the Surete in SAIGON. On the evening of the 15 Dec we harboured the night on the S.E. corner of the Island and the following morning following a bombardment by our guns one coy of 9/14 Punjab crossed on to the peninsula and assisted us in finishing off a thorough house search of the area. Finally about 1300 hrs we called it a day [and] reembarked on our landing craft and returned the way we had come." 18

The 32 Brigade War Diary listed the results of 4/2 GR's efforts as of noon on the 16th: 32 Việt Minh killed,* 459 captured, and equipment collected included three medium machine guns, rifles, pistols, radio transmitters, generator, telephone exchange, and more. The 9/4 Punjab view of the Han Phú operation was as follows:

"This party was a complete success from all our points of view. Firstly, the area was cleaned up and secondly the unpleasant task of wading through the paddy was done by 4/2nd GR...."

On the return, 4/2 GR engaged in a potentially disastrous three way firefight with the Việt Minh and the French. A French armoured column of the 2nd Armoured Division, returning from the north, was fired on by Việt Minh troops at a bridge near Hành Thông Tây, about three miles straight north of Tân Sơn Nhứt. The French troops, unaware that British troops were in the area, mistook the returning Gurkhas for Việt Minh and opened up on them. A confused battle followed in which the Gurkhas fired on the Việt Minh, who were shooting at the French while the French shot up the Gurkhas. One French soldier was killed and three Gurkhas slightly wounded in the face by flying brick splinters.

But even as 32 Brigade battalions were operating in the Han Phú area, ALFFIC Operation Instruction No. 9** was published. These orders addressed the relief of 32 Brigade by the French. On 18 and 19 December this brigade was to become the first British brigade to relinquish responsibility in Vietnam. Upon relief the 32 Brigade units were to be concentrated as follows: 9/14 Punjab in Gia Dinh, 4/2 GR at a main road junction about a mile north of Tan Son Nhut and northwest of Go Vap, 3/8 GR about three quarters of a mile north of Tan Son Nhut, and 2/8 Punjab's B Company at Tân Sơn Nhứt. Rodham's 100 Brigade remained in place, the Royal Artillery was to be responsible for the area due north of Cholon and west of Saigon (which included the artillery barracks and the race course), and Taunton's 80 Brigade held the area from Tân Sơn Nhì (about three kilometers southwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt) to the eastern tip of Khánh Hôi island. This area included most of Cholon and was bordered in the north by the main road which became known as Lê Văn Duyệt. The French assumed complete responsibility for Saigon.

* These were bodies recovered; others probably remained undiscovered in the jungly swamps.

** Dated 15 December 1945.

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The French took over Gò Vấp from 9/14 Punjab on the 18th, according to plan; or, as a 9/14 Punjab writer put it, "... on [the] 18th the French took over complete control, or as near control as they could get." On the following day 4/2 GR and 3/8 GR were relieved by French troops, and on the 20th the last of the Japanese. Gò Vấp garrison -- 42 men -- surrendered to 9/14 Punjab. Woodford's battalions were now in their final concentration areas and on the same day 32 Brigade was declared non-operational to permit all units to prepare for their impending move to British North Borneo.¹⁹

With 32 Brigade preparing for their departure and 80 Brigade fairly quiet, 100 Brigade was bearing the brunt of the Việt Minh guerilla activity. The "20th Division's History" stated:

"During December there was no improvement in the situation in 100 Brigade area. The Japanese, who had been responsible for law and order over a large part of the area were being rapidly disarmed and this encouraged VIETMINH elements driven from their haunts in other areas to seek refuge here. Incidents ranging from the throwing of grenades at passing vehicles to organised attacks on our own and Japanese posts and picquets were a daily occurrence and our troops had their hands full in maintaining law and order in the vicinity of their garrisons and keeping the roads clear for convoys. At this time the VIETMINH were concentrating on a policy of the destruction of rubber dumps, public buildings and other French property. The few armed Japanese that remained provided guards for these dumps and installations and there were many small battles fought between them and VIETMINH incendiaryists." 20

The fighting between the Japanese and the Việt Minh had indeed increased in intensity. In mid-December the Japanese summarily executed two Việt Minh captured while attempting to poison the Japanese unit at a crossroads about eight miles northwest of Tân Sơn Nhứt. Seven more Japanese were poisoned in Tân Bá, about three miles west northwest of Biên Hòa; all recovered, but two "went mad". * In other instances of Japanese-Việt Minh clashes, a routine Japanese patrol came upon a Việt Minh party a few miles northwest of Thu Dầu Môt, and

* These were but two of many documented attempts by the Việt Minh to poison Japanese food or drink. However, British Intelligence suspected that in a few cases the Japanese used this as an excuse to "lose" their weapons to the Việt Minh.

in the ensuing fight two Việt Minh were killed; another patrol south of Saigon killed three Việt Minh and captured seven. A delayed report from Lộc Ninh stated that the Japanese outpost at Dak Kia had been attacked by a strong Việt Minh force. After a one hour battle the Việt Minh retreated, leaving behind ten killed — many more were believed to have been wounded. Japanese casualties were one dead and four wounded, and a Japanese sentry on a supply dump in Bến Cát was killed by a sniper. A later report on the Dak Kia battle revised the known Việt Minh death toll to fourteen, although the local inhabitants stated that thirty Việt Minh died of wounds; some of the dead Việt Minh were said to have been Tonkinese. This attack had been made by regular uniformed Việt Minh troops.

In Lai Thiêu the Việt Minh attempted to burn a bridge by rushing the Japanese guards; driving a truck, they burst through the sentries and set fire to the truck on the bridge, after which the Việt Minh team escaped by jumping into the river while the guards were busily extinguishing the blaze. In an unrelated incident, ten Japanese, including a captain, were killed and thirty-two injured in Biên Hoa when a barracks housing 177 Japanese en route to Cap St. Jacques collapsed.

There was trouble every day in Gò Vấp, where the Việt Minh were making things difficult for the French. Two Japanese soldiers were killed there on the 13th as the French and Japanese were continually engaged by guerillas. Another Japanese was killed when one of their convoys was attacked in 1/1 GR's area.

In 80 Brigade's area another interpreter was kidnapped by a Việt Minh squad. The interpreter, Dost Mahommed, was reported by the 1st Kumaons as having been captured while buying food in a village located on the north bank where the Saigon River forms a loop — opposite the eastern tip of Khanh Hôi island. Three suspects were caught in a raid by 1 Kumaon, and the trio confessed that Dost Mahommed was dead. On the following day the Kumaons laid an ambush near the spot where Dost Mahommed had been captured, and two more suspects were captured and handed over to the French police. These Việt Minh prisoners reported that the interpreter had killed four of his abductors and wounded another with his revolver and a grenade before he died from bullet wounds.

In the south, where 9/12 FFR was coexisting with the Việt Minh, two armed Việt Minh were arrested inside the 9/12th battalion area and sent under escort to Saigon for interrogation by the Field Security Section, at which time the local Việt Minh were "warned not to make trouble in CAP ST JACQUES."²¹ On the following day the local Việt Minh Chief met the battalion commander and apologised for the incident, and arrangements were made with the Việt Minh to permit the battalion Medical Officer to give medical aid to the local inhabitants twice a week (Mondays and Saturdays). The Japanese in Cap St. Jacques were ordered to guard the water points, and the Vietnamese were requested to repair the water works and restore electricity. The Việt Minh replied that they were willing to cooperate with the British so long as no French returned to the area.

A meeting was held on 6 December between the 9/12 FFR Adjutant, representatives of the Japanese Army and local Vietnamese (presumably the Việt Minh, who controlled the area) to decide on a suitable concentration area for Japanese troops (60,000 of whom were expected in Cap St. Jacques by mid-January). On the following day the 9/12 FFR officers again met Việt Minh officials to discuss the evacuation of certain areas on the arrival of the Japanese Army units. Because the British and Việt Minh were conferring regularly here there was little combat activity, and the 9/12th was reverting to peacetime training -- something that most of the other battalions were not able to do. The battalion conducted demonstrations of street fighting, but on the 14th a British gunner from 231 Battery, 114 Field Regiment, was killed and another wounded by Việt Minh as the battery was en route to Baria. While the Royal Artillery gunners were attempting to repair the bridge they were attacked with rifles and light machine guns, and a 14/13 FFR mobile column rushed down from Biên Hòa and with artillery support dispersed the Việt Minh from their ambush positions.

Most of the fighting, however, was occurring in Rodham's 100 Brigade zones. The greater number of such incidents indicated that the Việt Minh were increasing the level of their activity, and this was confirmed in Rodham's Operation Instruction No. 60,* which began by stating that "Hostile activity on the 'All Red Route' is on the increase."²² But Rodham himself maintained the offensive and kept

* Dated 8 December 1945.

the Việt Minh off balance by his adroit use of the relatively few troops at his disposal, given the area of his responsibility. As he wrote, "The problem to be considered by Comds* is how best to dispose the comparatively few troops, in relation to the length of the road to be protected, they have available." Most ambushes occurred on non-convoy days.

Rodham further stipulated that "Particular parts of the road require of course particular treatment." He instituted roving mobile patrols which dismounted at random to search likely trouble spots and ambush sites, and he was careful enough to insist that they be strong enough so as not to be ambushed themselves and require relief. They were to search for likely grenade ambush sites and "Small Arms fire" sites up to two hundred yards from the road. As the roadside scorched earth policy developed the emphasis was to swing from the "Grenade Thrower Ambush" to the "Small Arms Fire Ambush".

Rodham specifically drew the attention of his commanders to previous experience: "The old North West Frontier rule 'of never doing the same thing twice the same way' applies equally to these mobile piquets and will bewilder the enemy." After suggesting courses of action regarding protection of convoys, Rodham wrote:

"I realise that Bn Comds will NOT have sufficient troops on convoy days for any other ops or officers available for deplaning parades etc. but this must be accepted. It will also be the devil of a sweat for officers and men but it is worth it. Unless we start now taking strenuous action like this I am convinced that there will be a danger of the convoy being badly shot up and the troops suffering unnecessary casualties.

Even if it turns out that we have over-insured no harm will have been done." 23

Rodham's stringent precautions were paying dividends, for an intercepted Việt Minh message to their headquarters stated that "the clearance of hedges and undergrowth from the road to a depth of 25 meters on either side was making their guerilla warfare most difficult and that they were considering moving off further Westwards." Rodham was now using every available Japanese on these road-clearing operations, and authorized the issue of "extra cutting implements" to the Japanese for this.

* Commanders.

Rodham's strict insistence on clearing undergrowth on either side of widely-travelled routes undoubtedly saved some Gurkha lives when a 4/10 GR company en route from Thủ Đức to Biên Hòa was ambushed halfway through their journey. At 0730 on the 3rd the company was attacked and the Gurkhas immediately dismounted to engage the enemy, whose strength was estimated at fifty armed with rifles and two light machine guns. Although the ambush achieved surprise, and one Gurkha was wounded by fire, all the Việt Minh grenades fell short due to the distance [40 yards] between their scrub cover and their targets on the road. The Việt Minh fled on the approach of the Gurkhas, and a Japanese search party later found three dead Việt Minh at the site.

But the Việt Minh were not without their successes. In Thu Dầu Môt a column of 1/1 Gurkhas and Jat machine gunners departed for Tân Thành, about four miles to the east northeast. They were to inspect a Japanese hospital there and to collect medical supplies. The mobile column had barely cleared the outskirts of Thu Dầu Môt when it was ambushed by the Việt Minh. This attack occurred just ninety minutes after the 4/10 company (mentioned above) was ambushed. Two Jat soldiers were immediately killed by grenades and machine gun fire.

One of the most successful Việt Minh operations occurred four days later when a British/Indian column of 36 vehicles was ambushed. This column was transporting printing press machinery from Bến Cát to Thu Dầu Môt. The Allied force was not weak, being composed of 1/1 Gurkhas with a mortar section and a Jat medium machine section. The column was attacked by a Việt Minh force armed with light machine guns, rifles and grenades, and in a skillfully executed ambush the Gurkhas and Jats suffered thirteen casualties. Two Gurkhas soldiers were killed and one Gurkha officer and four soldiers wounded, while the Jats lost one soldier killed, one VCO and three soldiers wounded; in addition, a transport driver was killed. Việt Minh casualties, if any, were not known. The column finally proceeded as two 14/13 FFR companies raced over from Biên Hòa and swept the area.

Brigadier Rodham now laid down further guidelines concerning the Japanese, and advised his commanders not to discuss these plans with the Japanese "in case false hopes are raised".²⁴ The British were hoping to have their first commitment (Navy and 2nd Division troops) ready by 15 December for shipment to Japan. Rodham told

Gracey that over 9000 Japanese troops could start the march to Cap St. Jacques at 48 hours notice -- after they had been relieved of their money. The Japanese headquarters staff were ordered to work out the details, and most of the Japanese would pass through Biên Hòa en route to the final concentration area at Cap St. Jacques.

Rodham also decided that his troops should become more visible in order to encourage a return to normality among the local Vietnamese.

Wrote Rodham:

"100 Ind Inf Bde and att[ached] tps will est[ablish] permanent posts throughout the present INNER ZONE with a view to restoring confidence amongst peaceful ANNAMITES and thereby assist restoration of law and order and the disarmament and evac[uation] of the JAPANESE forces." 25

The Inner Zone remained divided into the three sub area of Thủ Đức (4/10 GR), Biên Hòa (14/13 FFR) and Thu Dầu Một (1/1 GR). Since the decision had been made in November to make Cap St. Jacques the final Japanese concentration area instead of the Thủ Đức - Biên Hòa - Thu Dầu Một triangle, Rodham's Inner Zone became a holding pool through which the Japanese would pass en route to Cap St. Jacques after having been disarmed and depiastered by Rodham's forces. Two Dogra companies with their mortar sections came under 4/10 GR command on the 27th in order to more fully implement this policy. The main tasks of the Sub Area Commanders remained the "Maint[enance] of law and order, the extermination of all hostile elements and arrest of all custodians of arms" and the protection of a variety of vital points. The new policy was described in "20th Indian Division's History":

"Up to this time 100 Brigade had maintained their garrisons in the three main towns -- 1/1 GR in THU DAU MOT, 14/13 FFR in BIEN HOA and Brigade HQ and 4/10 GR in THU DUC and used the Japanese for guards and picquets outside these towns. In an attempt to restore confidence amongst the more peaceful elements of the population it was decided to establish small garrisons of Indian troops in a few important villages and points in the area. For this purpose two companies of the 4/17 DOGRAS were placed under command of 100 Brigade -- 80 Brigade's commitments in SAIGON/CHOLON having been considerably reduced by the handover to the French. The occupation of the selected places was carried out on 27 December against NO opposition although the VIETMINH were not slow to react to our occupation of

areas in which they had previously had comparative freedom of movement. Our newly established posts and garrisons were subjected to the now familiar sniping and grenade attacks — the 1/1 GR coy at BUNG (6 kms SE of THU DAU MOT) and the 4/17 Dogra coy at LAITHEIU (8 kms NW of THU DUC) coming in for most of the attention. On the 3 and 4 Jan 1/1 GR from THU DAU MOT swept the area around BUNG and the town itself but the flooded country side and numerous demolitions hampered progress and our tps were unable to close with the parties of VIET MINH guerillas who offered occasional opposition." 26

Further examples of such "occasional opposition" included the Viet Minh ambush of a convoy of three vehicles in the southern outskirts of Thu Dau Mot. A Gurkha rifleman was killed in the ambush, and the ensuing sweep by 1/1 GR brought in 29 suspects. A Japanese detachment moving by the Saigon river from Thu Dau Mot to Phu Thuan, to the northwest, was also ambushed by Viet Minh lying in wait along the river banks. A sharp, twenty minute firefight began, and when the action was over ten Viet Minh and one Japanese soldier had been killed; one Japanese was wounded and four were missing. Near Bien Hoa a mobile column was ambushed en route to Vinh Cuu, and another Indian soldier was killed; however, six Viet Minh in trenches were captured. In Cambodia, five Japanese deserters were killed at Prek Kak, probably by the French, and in the Saigon area, the 9/14 Punjabs reported that a member of the "VIET MINH Secret Service" had been arrested in Go Vap and turned over to the Field Security Section.

The small Field Security Section staff was reduced when an FSS sergeant attached to 100 Brigade Headquarters was severely wounded in Thu Duc; he and his French interpreter had left the British lines without an escort. This was contrary to standing orders, but was a fact of life in the nether world of covert operations, and he was shot and his interpreter kidnapped and believed murdered. Two sections of the 4/10 GR defence platoon were sent out to search for the interpreter (and the British truck which was also captured). The Gurkhas were fired on almost immediately and remained in a running fight for one or two miles. They reported that the Viet Minh "Fire also included heavier stuff than S/A [small arms] either 2" Mortar or Grenade Discharger". One Gurkha was wounded and three Viet Minh were killed. That night a 4/10 Gurkha was wounded outside the perimeter, and on the following day the Gurkhas

searched the half-dozen areas from which they had been fired on, including a Pottery (about three miles south of Thủ Đức). They burnt thirteen houses to clear the road to fifteen yards on either side, and on approaching the Pottery were informed by a local that a Việt Minh meeting was in progress inside. The building was immediately attacked, but the Việt Minh had fled, leaving behind documents which were handed in to Brigade Headquarters. The Gurkhas then burnt down the Pottery.

The Gurkhas retraced their steps on the following day and came upon a small village about two miles south of Thủ Đức. After completing their search of the village they had moved no more than fifty yards down the track before they were fired on from the village. The Gurkhas returned and burned five empty huts, but they continued to be fired on by snipers in the surrounding area. Before withdrawing the Gurkhas captured three home made guns, smooth bore launchers with which the Việt Minh had fired on them from a distance of twenty yards.

In the Biên Hòa Inner Zone, two companies of 14/13 FFR sweeping the area north of Tân Phong village (about two miles north of Biên Hòa) engaged fifteen encamped Việt Minh, killing four; two Việt Minh were wounded and captured. Eleven suspects were arrested during the ensuing sweep, and the jungle camp was burnt after some arms and ammunition were recovered. One Indian soldier was later wounded by sniper fire, and one of the captured Việt Minh stated that their main body had left the Tân Phong camp in the morning for Tân Tích, a few miles to the north.

But although the Việt Minh guerilla activity showed no signs of abating, Gracey's forces were suffering attrition from the effects of the war's end. A representative comment was made by a 9/14 Punjab writer:

"We are still suffering acutely from a shortage of men. Although we have lost all our SIKHS no JATS have yet arrived to replace them. The same applies to the DOGRA Coy now that the AHIRS and GUJARS have gone. Men who went off on 28 days leave in JUNE have not yet returned. As a result we are working on three weak Coys., A and B being combined as one... we hope that it will not be long now before the Jat Coy is a full strength going concern... Repat[riation] is beginning to hit us...."27

Against this background of sustained violence and constant contacts with Việt Minh guerillas, Gracey wrote a letter to Leclerc, a letter which inferred a barely controlled exasperation with French demands on the overstretched British resources, their apparent lack of appreciation of the current situation, and above all their attitude toward non-whites in 20 Division. Gracey began by referring to his recent conversation with Leclerc and wrote, "I think it would be of great value to publish the following figures to all French units."

Gracey then proceeded to list the numbers and types of vehicles already turned over to the French, and the amount of vehicle maintenance he was providing to French forces. Furthermore, "French troops should know what it entails in the way of transport to concentrate the Japanese in the CAP ST JACQUES area."²⁸ The numbers of Japanese involved were as follows: 6000 from Saigon-Cholon, 26,000 from Thu Dầu Một-Biên Hòa, 11,000 from Phnom Penh and 7000 from outlying districts such as Lộc Ninh, Bù Đốp, Tây Ninh, Nha Trang, etc. Also, more than 7000 tons of stores and 7000 sick would have to be transported by road and river.

Despite their genuine mutual respect for each other, Gracey's letter was sharp and to the point:

"They should also be told of the tremendous task it has been to concentrate all the Japanese dumps and depots into safe places from the hundreds of small depots into which the Japanese had, before the surrender, dispersed them in accordance with their scheme of defence, and to avoid undue damage from air raids which were becoming increasingly heavy towards the end of the war. This has already involved moving some twenty thousand tons of petrol, raw materials, equipment, stores and rations by road and river, a considerable quantity of which has gone to the French forces.

They should learn of the road and bridge repairs, and the railway repairs being carried out by British and Japanese engineers, all requiring transport, and all greatly assisting the free movement of French forces.

It might be of value for them to realize that, had not the Japanese in most cases carried out my orders faithfully, there would have been a disaster of the first magnitude in Southern French Indo China with a massacre of thousands of French people, and the destruction of a vast amount of French property.

They should know I think, that I, and you, depend on the Japanese maintaining their discipline in order to ensure that they continue to carry out their orders faithfully, and that anything done to undermine their discipline will, in fact, react against your plans for the resettlement of French Indo China.

They should be told of the British efforts to hasten your equipment and to provide everything possible to assist the French e.g. most of our vehicles are being left behind when we go; aircraft have been transferred; landing craft, medical supplies, rations, canteen stores etc are being provided."

Having placed the situation in perspective for the newly-arrived French forces, Gracey saved his sharpest point for last:

"The camaraderie which exists between Officers of the Indian Army and their Gurkha and Indian soldiers must be explained to them. Our men, of whatever colour, are our friends and not considered "black" men. They expect and deserve to be treated in every way as first class soldiers, and their treatment should be, and is, exactly the same as that of white troops.

There is no more fruitful source of friction between Indian Army Officers and their men on the one side, and French troops on the other, than when our Indian and Gurkha troops are regarded and treated as "black" by French officers and men. I mention this point particularly as cases have occurred in which it is obvious that our Indian Army - traditions have not been understood."

Gracey said that, on his part, he had "fully explained to all my Officers and men the magnitude of the task you have before you, and the steps you are taking to get your young soldiers into trim for their formidable task." He concluded by congratulating Leclerc on the "remarkable improvement shown in the last week."

Although the Army remained continually engaged against the Việt Minh guerillas, the RAF had not as yet been employed in a combat role. After weeks of flying tactical reconnaissance sorties, punctuated by an occasional leaflet drop, the Spitfire pilots were eager to become involved in attacking the Việt Minh forces; however, constraints on their use made this almost impossible. But at last, on 11 December, came the day for which the pilots of 273 Squadron had been waiting -- the chance to expend ordnance on the enemy. In this the single instance of offensive use of Spitfires in Indochina, the log of 273 Squadron reads as follows:

11 Dec/0720-0940/ At last the great day has arrived and permission has been given to strafe the Annamites and give close support to French troops who are threatened by 1000 Annamites in area MZ8086 northeast of BAN ME THUOT. The lucky pilots on this strike were S/Ld.W.J.Hibbert, F/Lt. D.Colebrook and F/Lt. S. Shi Sho. Conditions were not ideal as 10/10 cloud at 400 feet was encountered over the target area but this did not stop warning leaflets being dropped and strafing runs being carried out on these positions. No movement was seen, but strikes were seen on buildings at 818870, and one building was left burning at the road junction 795855, and one armoured car was seen amongst the buildings there. The French forces reported guns at position 810863; no guns were seen, but the area was thoroughly strafed. All the pilots were overjoyed when these three aircraft returned, and all hope we will get more work of this nature in the near future. * 29

This was the single action of the lone Spitfire squadron in Indochina, and in this, their only attack, no bombs were dropped and no Vietnamese were even seen. Warning leaflets were dropped and most of the strafing was directed at empty ground as map coordinates only were attacked,**and no free armed reconnaissance was conducted. Furthermore, the whole squadron was disbanded and the pilots left Indochina soon after.

On 13 December Gracey reported to SACSEA the series of events leading up to his approval of the use of the Spitfires. On the 7th Colonel Rivier had reported that 200 or 300 well-armed Việt Minh were strongly dug in at crossroads of the Pleiku and Ninh Hòa roads. The Japanese guard at the nearby airfield was forced to withdraw towards Ban Mê Thuôt as the Việt Minh were expecting the arrival of 1000

* This entry is reproduced in its entirety because of the false picture painted of the use of the RAF in Indochina, typical of which is Ellen Hammer's statement, "In London, British liberals recoiled from reports of Royal Air Force attacks on Vietnamese in support of French troops." [Ellen Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, p.119.]

** As a Spitfire had limited endurance at the best of times, and because Ban Mê Thuôt is in the highlands some distance north of Saigon, and since the atrocious weather probably made it difficult to find the target, the Spitfires would have had just a few minutes over the target area. This, then, was the grand sum of "Royal Air Force attacks on Vietnamese".

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Tonkinese reinforcements from Ninh Hòa. A number of incidents indicated an attack was imminent. The Việt Minh reinforcements arrived on the 8th, and proceeded to occupy the northern part of the airfield. The French detachment now lost seven killed and seventeen wounded (20% of their total strength). On the following day Colonel Rivier urgently requested reinforcements. On the 10th the Việt Minh began their attacks at 0530, using mortars. Rivier had been unable to give information about Việt Minh positions as the guerillas were very mobile and controlled the outskirts of Ban Me Thuot. The small French detachment was reduced to a fight for survival, and the French Command lacked any means of reinforcing them (none of their four Catalinas was in flying condition). At this point Gracey was approached, and he agreed to permit a patrol of three Spitfires to intervene if the situation at Ban Mé Thuôt became critical.

The Việt Minh attacked unceasingly on the 10th, and on the 11th they increased the pressure and the French position became precarious. The Spitfires were then sent in and made three passes over the target area, responding to signal panels laid out by the French. The Việt Minh attacks ceased as soon as the Spitfires began their strafing runs.

The Commander of RAF Station Saigon also submitted a report to Air Commodore Cheshire at Commission Headquarters. He reported that the patrol had been ordered to drop warning leaflets, attack three specific target areas and avoid attacking "large Annamite concentrations."³⁰ The patrol saw the French, but no one else, and French troops placed their signal panels on a football pitch north of the town. These signals agreed with the briefed targets and strafing passes were made on two road junctions and a "gun area" (but no guns were seen). The "French then began to put out ground signals which were not on the list handed to the RAF. No action was taken by a/c."* That the Spitfires were able to do what they did remains something of a miracle given the weather conditions (10/10 cover at 400 feet in a mountainous terrain).

Headquarters ALFSEA now approved Gracey's proposal to hand over to the French the complete equipment of one troop of 114 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery. As the day of his departure drew closer, Gracey wrote to ALFSEA about the future of his division, a unique formation which, as Brigadier Woodford wrote, was perhaps one of a kind in that it was born, lived, and eventually died under but one commander. Gracey knew that his division, like proud battleships no longer needed, would

* aircraft.

eventually be broken up; it was his wish only that it not be split up and fade away by pieces — it should remain a complete division until it disbanded. Wrote Gracey:

"I am most anxious to ensure that when 32 and 80 Brigade Groups have reached BORNEO and MAKASSAR, 20 Indian Division should not cease to exist as such. In order to carry this out I most strongly recommend that the interior economy, disciplinary matters, general administration and training of these two Brigades be carried out under my orders, and that 32 Brigade Group in BORNEO should be put under my operational command as well, after my arrival in MALAYA; 80 Brigade Group merely being under operational command of AFNEI. If some such arrangement is not made I am very much afraid that the magnificent esprit de corps of the Division will be seriously impaired.

It is the wish of all Officers and Other Ranks in the formation to keep the Division as such until it is finally disbanded." 31

Major General Pyman, Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, ALFSEA, replied to Gracey on the 24th:

1. The Commander-in-Chief is also most anxious that the identity of 20 Indian Division should not be lost when it leaves French Indo China for redeployment. He realises the difficulties resultant upon wide dispersion and the different nature of the tasks of each brigade.
2. To ensure continuation of the present magnificent esprit de corps of 20 Ind Div the Commander-in-Chief has ruled that all brigades of the division after redeployment will still remain under the command of Major General D.D. GRACEY, CB, MC, for all purposes except that:-
 - (a) 80 Bde Gp on arrival at MAKASSAR will be under command of 15 Corps for operations and maintenance
 - (b) 32 Bde Gp on arrival in BORNEO will be under the direct command of HQ ALFSEA for operations and maintenance.
3. After Main HQ 20 Ind Div have arrived in MALAYA the Commander-in-Chief intends discussing the future command of 32 Bde Gp with Major General GRACEY.*

* As it turned out, Gracey's wishes were not fulfilled for a number of reasons. The division headquarters did not go to Malaya, but returned directly to India, and the primitive state of communications, added to the distances involved, would have made contact with his scattered brigade groups very difficult at best.

The political situation as of 15 December was described by Meiklereid in his report to Denning. After referring to Mountbatten's recent visit to Saigon, and the meeting in Singapore with Alanbrooke (attended by Gracey and Leclerc), he touched on the problems being created by the "very arrogant" behaviour and indiscipline of the newly-arrived French troops, who were being increasingly criticized by the press for the manner in which they had conducted their clearing operations. Leclerc was taking all possible steps to improve the situation and had instituted weekly press meetings to explain the military operations to Allied press correspondents.

Friction existed between the new French arrivals and the colonial French population, and the Vietnamese in Saigon had adopted a policy of noncooperation with the administration. The news of the impending departure of British troops was being received "in some quarters with considerable perturbation, as it is felt that with the French troops disseminated throughout the territory the danger of acts of violence on the part of the Annamites is likely to increase." Older residents were pessimistic and desired to "cut their losses and get out", but strict censorship had been imposed to keep news of this sort from reaching France, where recruiting for the Administrative Service and commercial interests would be adversely affected.

In Meiklereid's opinion the paddy situation was not as bad as had been anticipated, and the Việt Minh had actually been advancing cash* for the gathering of the crop in certain areas. They had taken over the mills in Sóc Trang and Cánhổ and, contrary to good Marxist doctrine, were making a profit from the sale of their goods. In Laos, the situation was "still confused", and Prince Souphanouvong (the "Red Prince") had gone to Hanoi.

After describing the difficulties faced by the French due to the Chinese in Tonkin, Meiklereid wrote:

"The French have obviously had to give in all along the line, having only gained from the Chinese the implied right of legislating in that territory, though apparently still subject to the agreement of the Chinese. On the other hand I am reliably informed that the FRANCO/CHINESE negotiations in CHUNGKING regarding the eventual withdrawal of Chinese troops from Northern INDO-CHINA are progressing

* As a result of the massive monetary assistance afforded by the Japanese, there was no lack of cash in Việt Minh coffers.

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favourably. The French have now realised that the "pacification" of Southern INDO-CHINA is going to take longer than was first anticipated, and they are not likely to be able to tackle the even more serious problem of Northern INDO-CHINA for some time to come. In view of the large French community and French interests in the territory, whose safety is solely dependent on Chinese maintenance of law and order, they will continue to have to rely on Chinese troops until they are able to take over themselves." 32

On the 28th a more comprehensive report from the astute Lieutenant Colonel Trevor-Wilson, Gracey's representative in Hanoi, was received at Commission Headquarters in Saigon. His assessment of the political situation is of more than passing interest as he was quite likely the only disinterested observer in Hanoi. After describing the differences between the Việt Minh and the elements comprising the Đông Minh Hội, Trevor-Wilson wrote:

"The actual VIET MINH Government is greatly criticised both in the native press and by means of street demonstrations and distribution of pamphlets. Since the VIET MINH took over power in August, 1945, i.e. four months ago, there has been ample proof of its inability to administer the country. The administration was completely disorganized by the sudden removal of the Mandarin system, the Mandarins having been replaced by improvised committees. The public treasury has been completely emptied as a result of demagogic measures such as the cancellation of direct taxation. No remedy has been found to off set the great floods of 1945 as a result of which large parts of TONKIN are still under water; nothing has been done to keep the dykes in repair. Railways, roads and bridges are in a very bad state. Coal mines produce very small output. No measures have been taken to prevent outbreaks of cholera and above all to remedy the almost certain famine conditions which will ravage the country within a few months. Government has been carried on by terrorist tactics, e.g. arbitrary arrest, suppression of free press, etc.

Five Government ministers are communists, two of them extremist... " 33

Although a military team of seven Russians (headed by a full colonel) was due in Hanoi in the near future, Trevor-Wilson wrote

that "There is no evidence, however, that the Việt Minh is in contact with Moscow." Trevor-Wilson thought that a shift of power to the Đông Minh Hội was possible "In view of the fact that the Việt Minh Government is so much discredited in the eyes of the mass of the native population..." — however, "It is possible that the two sides will form a coalition before the withdrawal of the Chinese Forces."

In the south, the guerilla war continued. A bloody clash occurred on the 30th when at 0600 a Viet Minh force attacked a tire factory at Bình Phước, about two kilometers east of Hán Phú island. The dozen Japanese guards repulsed the Việt Minh, who lost fifteen or sixteen killed; the Japanese suffered three wounded. A French patrol was ambushed in Bến Cát, north of Thu Dầu Một, and the French casualties were three killed and five wounded; another Frenchman was killed in Gia Định as fifty suspects were detained in the course of mopping up operations.

But as December came to a close and Christmas drew near, 32 Brigade prepared to depart. During this time the 4/2 Gurkhas threw a party. As Lieutenant Colonel Kitson, Commander of 4/2 GR, earlier had written of their successful cocktail party and dance, it was "marred only by the fact that a couple of Frenchmen were murdered almost within sight of our house only an hour before the party started and some of us had to go and clear up the mess."³⁴

32 Brigade now made its last march in Saigon. As a 9/14 Punjab writer reported:

"On 22nd Dec '45 a farewell parade for 32 Bde was held in the BOULEVARD NORODOM in SAIGON at the special request of the French. A composite Bn. [Battalion] formed of one Coy from each Bn. in the Bde and a Bn. of French Troops took part, supported by a sqn of the 16th Cav and some Stuart tanks of the [French] R.I.C.M., reputedly the crack Regt of the French Colonial Army. The parade was Commanded by Brig. WOODFORD of 32 Bde while the Bn was Commanded by Lt. Col. Hobbs. A Platoon each of JATS, PMS and PATHANS made up the 9/14 Coy which was Commanded by Major Harwood Barnes. The parade was a great success and after an inspection by General Le CLERC and Brig. RODHAM of 100 Bde, who was Commanding 20 Div in the absence on leave of Gen GRACEY, we marched past. The pipe band of 4/17 Dogras played for us and the British force

marched past led by our old and valued friends 92 Fd. Coy REIE. This was followed by a march past of the French with their own band playing. On the whole a fitting finish to a happy sojourn in FIC. We have left many friends there and sadly also we leave five graves in GIADINH, of men killed in action, two others missing from operations we have not recovered but local information leaves us in little doubt that they were murdered and thrown into the river."35

Although the 9/14th writer was unhappy that the Christmas season "was rather spoiled by our move to SARAWAK", they did host a cocktail party on Christmas morning;

"it was attended by all the VCOs with Gen. VALLUY the Commander of 9eme DIC and some of his staff as our guests of honour. General VALLUY had been a good friend of the Bn. and showed his appreciation by presenting Col. HOBBS with the badge of the 9eme DIC, a charming gesture as it was his own personal badge which he unpinned from his shirt. He was presented to all the VCOs and through an interpreter told them of his appreciation of their work and cooperation. The rest of the day was mainly spent in packing and in farewells of varying tenderness by officers to their friends."

On Christmas day the 3/8 Gurkha Rifles embarked on the MV Highland Brigade, which set sail for Labuan on the following day. The British withdrawal from Vietnam had begun. At Cap St. Jacques several 9/12 Frontier Force Regiment officers and VCOs took to the water in landing craft to wave goodbye to their friends in 32 Brigade as the Highland Brigade sailed slowly past them on the Saigon River and out to sea. These two battalions, who had gone through so much together, would not meet again due to the breakup of 20 Indian Division -- they ended up being on opposing sides as 9/12 FFR went to Pakistan (as yet not in existence) and 8th GR to India.

These few days over Christmas were relatively quiet ones, even in Rodham's area. The 4/10 Gurkhas escaped injury when a convoy was attacked in a unique fashion two miles north of Thủ Đức -- an 81 mm mortar bomb, which had been suspended by wires in the foliage above the road, was dropped on the last truck of a convoy, but it did not explode.

As the 100 Brigade War Diary described it:

"24 Dec Annamite forces demonstrated modern air sp [support] to ground tps (1945). 81mm Jap Mor[tar] bomb suspended by stout string

over bough of tree. Seasoned bomb aimer squatted [at] base of projector. Bomb hurtled down to own tps convoy but failed to explode. One dejected Annamite captured. Own tps amused.

On the 26th, as the Highland Brigade slipped her moorings in Saigon, 4/2 Gurkha Rifles and associated detachments embarked on the SS Aronda. As they were boarding Brigadier Woodford and some of his headquarters staff departed Saigon for Labuan on the destroyer HMS Nith. On the following day, as the Aronda left Saigon for Jessolton, 9/14 Punjab embarked on the Lake Charles Victory. Theirs was not a luxury cruise:

"On the 28th* we reluctantly said goodbye to our comfortable quarters at GIADINH and set out for the docks. Adm Coy went with the baggage and the rest of the Bn. marched, with the Dhol and Surnai playing nobly, through the streets of SAIGON and aboard the S.S.LAKE CHARLES VICTORY. Our first and we hope our last experience of an American Victory ship. Luckily we were not crowded on board but even then it was most uncomfortable. No portholes at all in any of the troop decks or cabins, very little deck space and of what little there was none was covered which was [a] considerable disadvantage as it rained continuously."

To add to their problems the sea was rough and most of those on board, including the American contract crew, were seasick. Finally, halfway through the voyage the ship's company heard by radio that their contract had expired on 1 January, and "The result was that they lost what little interest they had had in the proceedings and our disembarkation was a difficult affair." Even some of their baggage was looted by the crew.

So an entire brigade was now gone. There are two postscripts to their departure. Brigadier Woodford later wrote of his brigade's work in Vietnam:

"In hindsight, I would rate the intelligence we received before embarkation at Rangoon as scanty. We knew that our mission was to receive the surrender of the Jap forces in French Indo-China, consisting of about 77,000 men and including the H.Q. of Field Marshal Terauchi. As you know, 80 Bde had flown in ahead of the rest of the Div. and we heard from them a certain amount of scattered shooting had been going on before we disembarked. It was not until my Bde H.Q. was established ashore that it was clear that we had more to handle than casual banditry.

* A minor discrepancy, as the 32 Brigade War Diary has them boarding on the 27th. The 9/14 War Diary agrees with this Newsletter.

First impressions on reaching Saigon were mixed. Of course the change from living constantly in the open was welcome and the amenities of a city were appreciated. When it came to the fighting, we found that less fierce but more frustrating than the war proper. The hit and run tactics of the Viet Minh never gave us a definite objective and seemed to involve more sweat for less result.

I doubt if anyone fully appreciated the potential seriousness of the problems likely to develop in the country. At that time the power and determination of the Communists was not so evident as it later became and after being under Japanese occupation for so long, a bit of disorder was not surprising.

The only French troops I met were those of the 9th Colonial Infantry Division. We got on quite well with them, but were not impressed with their discipline and behavior. They were inclined to help themselves to the market produce brought into the city via the check points on the roads and they seemed to treat the local people with less consideration than we had insisted on. I never saw them in action...

When we had settled in and were chasing the VM, I had three battalions of Japanese infantry fighting under my command against the VM. They did their stuff very well and kept up their morale and discipline to a remarkable degree." 36

A 4/2 GR writer added:

"We had been in French Indo China for just under 3 months; as an experience it was interesting but it was a poor type of war since throughout it was so difficult to understand why we were there. That they remained unquestionably and intensely keen and loyal throughout this difficult period is fitting tribute to their incredibly high morale, to the stock from which they are sprung and to the 'esprit de corps' of the 2nd Gurkhas." 37

As occupation troops they had been much the same as any others. There had been romances between them and the local women, commanders had worried over the venereal disease rate, black marketeering had been inevitable and there was some financial manipulation on a personal scale. All these things would later affect the American troops in Vietnam, but Gracey's soldiers had eschewed the use of drugs, which were then as readily available as they would be a generation later.

With 32 Brigade en route to Borneo and 80 Brigade gradually disengaging in Cholon, 100 Brigade was left to deal with the complex problems of maintaining internal security, neutralizing the Việt Minh, disarming, depiastering and concentrating the Japanese and sorting out the numerous and varied Japanese supply dumps throughout their area. On the 26th there had been an as yet unexplained air attack by the French on the railway station and sidings at Biên Hòa. Although the Việt Minh largely controlled the railways and had used them to transport a sizeable number of Tonkinese troops to Cochinchina, the station and rolling stock in Biên Hòa were in Allied hands.

Five valuable engines were destroyed by the attack, and some rolling stock and the barracks of the Japanese guards were damaged. The Spitfires making the raid had just been handed over to the French, and French and RAF roundels and fin flashes were very similar. The Japanese reported the attack, and as the 14/13 FFR War Diary reported, "Incident unexplained." ³⁸ December did not end quietly. Four French scout cars were ambushed while en route to Lái Thiêu. Return fire killed thirteen Việt Minh and several houses in the immediate area were burned. A 4/10 GR patrol "bumped" a Việt Minh force of unknown strength just southwest of Thủ Đức. One Gurkha and eight Việt Minh were killed.* The patrol, two sections of 4/10 Gurkhas searching for snipers who had fired on the radio station, met "considerable resistance", and one Gurkha was wounded when shot by a pistol at a range of six feet.**

As mentioned earlier, the 1/1 GR company at Bung came under continuous attack by the Việt Minh. The company reported that "90% of rebels in the area are TONKINESE, who by force of arms have instituted a reign of terror."

A 3/1 GR writer pretty well summed up the situation in the Saigon area:

"Throughout the month the FRENCH kept taking over more and more commitments and we had one or two incidents. Looting in the area of the Docks continued to be defeated by most excellent marksmanship and a display of a corpse or two on the scene of the crimes. Flag marches and night patrols continued regularly and enabled us to enjoy a very pleasant Christmas on the nearest lines to 'Peace Time' for many years. 1945 ended with little more incident -- the FRENCH troops 'shooting in' the NEW YEAR magnificently." ³⁹

But while the Saigon area was quieting down as the new year approached, there was little relaxing in 100 Brigade's Inner Zone.

* 100 Brigade report.

** 4/10 GR report. The Gurkha apparently later died of wounds (100 Brigade Report

Footnotes: Chapter XV

- 1 Gracey Papers, 3/1 GR Newsletter.
- 2 Gracey Papers, 9/14 Punjab Newsletter.
- 3 Ibid. When one of the first Gurkha battalions arrived in Saigon in September their first night was disturbed when a shot was fired into their compound and ricocheted around the walls. The company scrambled out of bed and stood to. Several minutes later another shot went ringing around the compound. A patrol was hastily assembled and dashed out in the street to flush out the sniper. After several more tense minutes a third shot rang out and the Gurkhas spotted the window from which the shot came. They entered the building, crept upstairs and in true street fighting fashion kicked the door down which led to the sniper. The heavily armed Gurkhas burst upon a very frightened Frenchman sitting in his bath water. It seemed that every few minutes he raised up, pointed his revolver out of the bathroom window and fired blindly -- presumably to impress the Viet Minh. Unfortunately, his shots kept hitting the Gurkha barracks.
- 4 All British sources -- the British officers interviewed and the War Diaries and Newsletters of nearly every battalion in 20 Division -- criticized the French for their indiscipline and 'trigger-happiness'. But it must be understood that a large proportion of the newly-arrived French troops were not professional soldiers yet -- they were ex-maquis, the antithesis of the well-drilled, tightly-disciplined soldier. By VE day the French had wearied of the war and, as in the Civil Service, volunteers for Indochina were not forthcoming in large numbers. In Europe, even dynamic and charismatic leaders like Massu had difficulty in persuading their battalions to step forward and engage in what at that time they all believed would be battles against the Japanese somewhere in the Pacific. As Massu said, they were tired of war. Certainly, for some like him it had been a long road from Chad to Germany. [General Jacques Massu, Personal Interview, 25 October 1977].
- 5 GB, PRO, WO 172/7793, War Diary 4/10 Gurkha Rifles, 28 November 1945. Also backloaded were 9500 kilograms of opium worth £2,000,000.
- 6 GB, PRO, WO 172/1793, HQ SEAC War Diary, SAC's 39th Miscellaneous Meeting, 29 November 1945.
- 7 GB, PRO, WO 172/1793, HQ SEAC War Diary, 30 November 1945.
- 8 Gracey Papers, "Medical History, Allied Land Forces French Indo China, Sept 1945-Feb 1946".
- 9 GB, PRO, WO 172/1793, HQ SEAC War Diary, SAC's 39th (Misc) Meeting.
- 10 Ibid., HQ SEAC War Diary, 30 November 1945.
- 11 As in his earlier letter to Gracey, Mountbatten was for some reason treating the sword's eventual destination as an important secret, although it is not clear if by now Terauchi cared where his swords ended up. It has been privately said that Terauchi may have had the last word in this matter, as one source (in Vietnam at that time) thought that the swords in the box handed to Mountbatten were not Terauchi's.

- 12 GB, PRO, WO 172/1793, HQ SEAC War Diary, SAC's 300th Meeting, 6 December 1945.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Shortly after his return to Kandy from Saigon, Mountbatten had written to Brigadier Maunsell, confirming his offer to Maunsell of the position of Head of the "Interservice SEAC Mission" to be formed on Gracey's departure and the disbandment of the Control Commission. Maunsell had been recommended for the task by General Gracey. [Gracey Papers, Letter from Mountbatten to Maunsell, 3 December 1945].
- 15 Meiklereid's report of 30 November described the French reorganization:
- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| M. Sainteny | Delegate of the High Commissioner for the Northern Zone and Commissioner for the North of Annam and the Tonkin. |
| Colonel Imfeld | Commissioner for the Republic of Laos. |
| M. Cedile | (Formerly using the military rank of Colonel), Commissioner of the Republic for Cochinchina. |
| General Alessandri | Acting Commissioner of the Republic for Cambodia. (Shortly to be replaced by a Civil Administrator). |
| M. Vallat | Commissioner of the Republic for South Annam. |
- [GB, PRO, WO 172/5563, "Report on French Indo-China as on November 26th 1945."]
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, 7 December 1945.
- At this time the Việt Minh announced that on 20 November at 1130 hours General Gracey had been assassinated by Indian soldiers in Saigon: "... thus an enemy who was dangerous and blood thirsty has been annihilated." Why this propaganda came to light on 7 December is not clear -- it was repeated in posters stuck to trees in 14/13 FFR's area on 12 December.
- [GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Brigade, INTSUM No.8 1500 hours, 7 December 1945].
- 18 Gracey Papers, 4/2 GR Newsletter.
- According to the "20th Division's History", Hân Phú was "the last remaining VIETMINH stronghold in the SAIGON/CHOLON area", and "The elimination of this hotbed of VIETMINH activity had an immediate effect on the situation in the suburbs NORTH of SAIGON which rapidly improved from that date."
- 19 Woodford was appointed "Commander of the Land Force which will relieve the AUSTRALIAN forces in BRITISH BORNEO", and his tasking was as follows:
- You will ensure the internal security of the country.
 - You will exercise military administration proceeding with the rehabilitation of the country until such time as the civil authorities are in a position to resume control.
 - You will control, guard and when the time comes organise the evacuation of the Japanese who have been disarmed and concentrated at KUCHING and JESSELTON.

To save shipping and to assist the French, Woodford was directed to take a minimum number of vehicles, heavy equipment and supplies -- he was to make up his deficiencies by taking over equipment from the 9th Australian Division in British Borneo. Brigade Headquarters and 3/8 GR were to be located in Labuan, 9/14 Punjab in Kuching and 4/2 GR in Jesselton.

[Gracey Papers, "Allied Land Forces South East Asia, Operational Directive No:17", 16 December 1945].

- 20 Gracey Papers, "20th Indian Division's History".
- 21 GB, PRO, WO 172/7738, War Diary 9/12 FFR, 2 December 1945.
- 22 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Brigade, 8 December 1945.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, "100 Bde Surrender Instr No.10", 29 November 1945.
- 25 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, "100 Ind Inf Bde OO No.3", 22 December 1945.

Gracey had now identified the three main Japanese concentration areas as Thu Dầu Một and Thủ Đức, Phnom Penh and Cap St.Jacques. The initial target dates for Japanese repatriation were as follows: up to 5000 by 10 December, 10,000 more by 15 December, 10,000 by 25 December, and 20,000 by 1 January 1946. It was thus hoped that 45,000 Japanese could be repatriated by 1 January.

- 26 Gracey Papers, "20th Indian Division's History".
- 27 Gracey Papers, 9/14 Punjab Newsletter. If this was a widespread complaint, then Mountbatten's later assertions that he could have simultaneously secured the key areas of Tonkin may be questioned in that his forces were diminishing while his commitments were increasing.
- 28 Gracey Papers, "Personal and Confidential" Letter from Gracey to Leclerc, 2110/G, 12 December 1945.
- 29 GB, PRO, Air 27/1583, 273 Squadron Log, 11 December 1945.
- 30 GB, PRO, WO 203/4273, ALFFIC to Hq SACSEA, 13 December 1945.
- 31 Gracey Papers, Gracey to ALFSEA, 3362/GS, 14 December 1945.
- 32 GB, PRO, WO 203/5563, "Situation Report on Conditions in F.I.C. as at 15th December 1945."
- 33 GB, PRO, WO 203/5563, 28 December 1945.

Mr. P.J. Honey later commented on Trevor-Wilson's report from Hanoi:

This latter quote made me think back, and I questioned two old Vietnamese friends about the time, one of whom lived in Hanoi and the other in Saigon. It was very much as Trevor reported, though I hadn't noticed this before, and these two friends confirmed it. In the North, where the people had had direct experience of the Việt Minh in power, the man in the street knew them as communists, as oppressors, as incompetents in administration, and he hated them. In the south they were less well known, identified in the minds of the people with the struggle for independence from colonial rule, and, for all their violence and coercion, they were regarded as noble, worth supporting, and idealists. [P.J. Honey, letter to author, November 1978].

34 Gracey Papers, "20th Indian Division's History".

35 Gracey Papers, 9/14 Punjab Newsletter.

36 Brigadier E.C.J. Woodford, Letter to author, 1972.

37 Gracey Papers, 4/2 GR Newsletter.

38 GB, PRO, WO 172/7743, War Diary 14/13 FFR, 26 December 1945.

At this time the 14/13th Commander held a discussion with the 2nd (Japanese) Division Chief of Staff, Major Kosaka. They ranged over a variety of subjects, including Japanese discipline, incidents near Japanese posts, the checking of Staff Tables, working party commitments, the Japanese New Year holiday, and Korean "Comfort Girls".

39 Gracey Papers, 3/1 GR Newsletter.

CHAPTER XVI

CITOYEN D'HONNEUR

However distasteful it may be to you, you should stress, if asked by the Press, that this is a mark of personal esteem for you on giving up your association with the French and should not be construed as a national gesture.

Dempsey to Gracey
January, 1946.

On New Year's Eve Rodham issued "Op Instr No.63", which closed the year on a sombre note. In it he directed his battalions to mount a series of preemptive strikes against the Việt Minh since "Information from very many different sources indicates that the rebels are planning some sort of co-ordinated offensive to take place between now and 10 JAN '46. The VIỆT MINH leader is reported to have said that this will be 'the last grand offensive before the British leave'." Rodham's instructions continued:

"The sudden increase in rebel activity in the last three days, during which period there have been 12 incidents in this Bde's area alone, certainly does indicate that there is some foundation for these reports.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the VIET MINH bands in this area are now reported to have been placed under the control of one man.

From reports received by Div HQ and also by this HQ the four main rebel concentration areas are:

- (a) Between THU DAU MOT and BEN CAT 0999.
- (b) WEST and SOUTH WEST of BUNG 2074.
- (c) In the BEN GO area 4067.
- (d) NORTH EAST of BIEN HOA." 1

One squadron of armoured cars was to be placed under command of 100 Brigade from 1 to 5 January; as Rodham wrote, "The first essential is to strike at the rebel concentration areas and discourage them before they start."

The 1/1 Gurkhas were ordered to "destroy all hostiles in the BUNG area on 2 JAN." Supporting the Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Clark, were armoured cars, a section of artillery, medium machine guns and mortars. The Commander of 14/13 FFR was ordered to destroy all hostiles in the BÊN GỔ area in operations set for 4 January; BÊN GỔ was on the river, five or six miles south of Biền Hoà. One company from 4/10 GR would travel to Biền Hoà and cover for 14/13 FFR while they swept BÊN GỔ. The exact location of the third Viet Minh concentration north-east of Biền Hoà had not been pinpointed, and should the fighting patrols fail to make contact with the Việt Minh in BÊN GỔ they were told to be prepared to switch their operations to the northeast of Bien Hoa, provided firm intelligence of that area was received. Regarding the fourth area, around BÊN CAT, the French were planning an operation to clear out the Việt Minh up there.

Rodham emphasized that "The above operations deal with specific enemy concentrations only." Commanders were told to strike as hard as they could during the next ten days at any reported enemy concentration within reach, as Rodham's information indicated that the locals were wearying of military operations and the Việt Minh were becoming discouraged; "If we can give him one or two good knocks now we will have every chance of discouraging him from worrying us in the future." Commanders were advised to regard "all locals anywhere near where a shot has been fired as enemies", for "The difficulty is to catch him, as immediately he has had his shot or thrown his grenade he pretends to be friendly." Commanders were also encouraged to bring in suspects from troublesome areas, for "Locals do NOT like a trip to the Surete in SAIGON and this will encourage them in future to give us information before the enemy start any of their nonsense, for fear of being made to take another trip to the Surete." In view of the increased Viet Minh activity, company and postcommanders in outlying areas "must have NO compunction in clearing an adequate field of fire round their posts. Obstacles, wire, poonjis etc. must be placed far enough out to prevent the enemy getting within grenade throwing range."

With the increasingly rapid drawdown of Japanese fighting units the number of incidents increased to close to an intolerable level as the Việt Minh quickly moved to fill the gaps left by the withdrawal of Japanese forces. In the last three days of 1945 the French had killed 93 Việt Minh and captured 32 for the cost of one Frenchman wounded.²

In accordance with Rodham's directives to maintain the offensive, a 1/1 Gurkha patrol, escorted by two scout cars, brought in the New Year by reconnoitering a bridge about four miles southwest of Thu Dầu Một. As they approached the bridge they came under machine gun fire from a strong bunker position south of the bridge and received sniping from both flanks. The Gurkhas returned fire, but a road block prevented the scout cars from advancing. The patrol then returned to base, during which trip they had two grenades thrown at them. A mortar concentration was subsequently laid on the bunker area, with unknown results. At Bung, just a kilometer due east of the same bridge, a 1/1 GR company was heavily grenaded and fired on for an hour, and a Japanese post about two miles northwest of Thu Dầu Một was attacked unsuccessfully. At the same time, eleven houses on the wharf in

Thu Dầu Một were set alight by Việt Minh incendiarys -- most of the houses were Chinese-owned.

On the following day the 1/1 Gurkhas, with armoured cars and Jat machine gunners, returned to the bridge west of Bung. The bridge was repaired while the armoured cars waited, and in the meanwhile one Gurkha company proceeded about two miles further south, to a road junction; another platoon, with Jats, went to another crossroads nearby, where all were grenaded heavily -- two Gurkhas were wounded and one Việt Minh killed. To the south, Rodham's own escort, travelling with the ration convoy, was ambushed and shot up between Thủ Đức and Lai Thiêu; the Gurkhas returned fire with light machine guns and mortars, but as soon as they dismounted the Việt Minh melted away into the jungle.

Throughout the night the 1/1 Gurkhas received heavy sniping and replied with harassing fire; dead Việt Minh were later found where the Gurkhas had laid their return fire. Near Bung, a Japanese patrol ran into a Việt Minh party and a sixty minute firefight followed, during which one Japanese NCO and five Việt Minh were killed.

At this time a remarkably successful patrol was undertaken by a small party of ten 14/13 FFR soldiers led by Havildar Bagh Bahar. The patrol, called "Sherforce", had been attached to a strong fighting column which on New Year's Day had left the main base at Biên Hòa to sweep Vĩnh Cửu. Sherforce slipped away as the main column departed Vĩnh Cửu for the return to Biên Hòa. The Havildar's orders were to observe Việt Minh activity in the Bến Gỗ area (about seven or eight miles southeast of Bien Hoa); they were to return early on the 3rd.

The eleven men, entirely on their own in Việt Minh territory, moved through very thick jungle and undergrowth, skirting road blocks and trenches discovered on the back trails and roads. They came upon twenty Việt Minh accompanied by two Japanese in uniform, all armed with rifles or submachine guns. Continuing south they laid in wait on a road and ambushed and captured one man. The patrol then split into two groups. Five hours later one group returned to the starting point, having moved about from midnight to 0500 in the morning. They reported "constant movement on the roads of armed bands often including women and much noise in the houses."³ The other small force reported much the same thing -- the roads at night swarming with armed bands and a great deal of activity in houses and, in this case, a Cao Đài temple.

On one occasion barking dogs nearby gave them away, but the patrol avoided villages and came to a bridge over which was passing a Việt Minh patrol. The Việt Minh were joined by another party, at which time Havildar Bagh Bahar's squad moved on, crossing a nullah - this was now at the northern loop of the Song Cai, just east of Biên Hòa. At this point they heard a group approaching from the west, and took up ambush positions. The party approached to within five yards of the Havildar's squad when they realized that they were being observed, at which time they shouted "Japani!" The patrol were not taken in and opened fire, killing at least fifteen Việt Minh -- this included their prisoner who tried to escape in the confusion. The rest of the Việt Minh force, including some women, ran to a nearby village, from which they fired a few shots, and the 14/13th patrol went on to Biên Hòa, reporting to the Battalion at 0715.

This well-executed patrol revealed the extent to which the Việt Minh owned the countryside at night -- armed bands literally everywhere and roaming at will. But during Sherforce's final night out in the bush the parent battalion, the 14/13 FFR, had come under heavy attack by a strong Việt Minh force of at least battalion size. The first assault had hit the northeast sector of the Biên Hòa perimeter, which was held by D Company under Major T.B. Hunter, MC, plus Jat machine guns. The attack was opened by a heavy machine gun firing explosive bullets, and this was the signal for simultaneous assaults on C Company, 14/13 FFR, under Major J.L. Stewart (on the river bridges) and a post under Jemedar Karim Dad of D Company (across the river and west of the bridge). The main attack was on the Battalion's perimeter, where the Việt Minh had infiltrated forward by crawling along the ground using all available cover and aided by heavy supporting fire. The attack was finally beaten off by concentrated machine gun fire, assisted by heavy mortar concentrations on the Việt Minh rear. The two other attacks, on C Company and Post RP3, were also beaten off, as were two attacks on Japanese positions at the jail and railway station. It was four hours before the Việt Minh withdrew -- and an hour later Havildar Bagh Bahar's squad entered the lines.

Although the Việt Minh were unsuccessful in breaking through the 14/13th perimeter they had displayed sound planning in mounting five simultaneous attacks in the area. At 0645 14/13 FFR patrols

swept the area around their perimeter and found nineteen bodies of Việt Minh soldiers -- mainly Tonkinese, and including one woman -- though it is highly probable that the total number of killed was greater. Also recovered were a number of rifles, grenades, bayonets, Bren magazines and nine Japanese helmets. At 1045 Brigadier Hirst, acting Division Commander, drove up and congratulated the 14/13th Commander on his battalion's performance during the night. Known Việt Minh killed (during the big attack and by the Havildar's ambush) on this morning came to 34, but the figure was subsequently found to be much higher -- it turned out that the 14/13th and the Jats had almost annihilated the Việt Minh attackers. On 5 January the Japanese captured a Tonkinese in the act of throwing a grenade at the Biên Hòa "lunatic asylum". He revealed that he had been a member of the force of 700 (including 183 Tonkinese) who had assaulted the Biên Hòa perimeter on the 3rd. Of this force, no less than 80 had been killed and 200 wounded. Their severe losses were due to the fact that only ten percent of the attackers possessed firearms. Although supported by four machine guns and two mortars, most of the attackers were armed with knives and swords -- good planning, but bad judgement! The real killing was done when the Việt Minh were caught in a crossfire by the Jat machine guns. There were no 14/13 FFR or Jat casualties.

The 100 Brigade "Sitrep to 0900 hrs 6 Jan" reported that 14/13 FFR officers considered the figure of 80 Việt Minh killed to be "substantially correct". Two remaining hours of darkness had permitted the Viet Minh to remove all but 34 bodies. The 100 Brigade report stated that "the attack recklessly carried out came straight in on the cross fire of two Sec[tion]s MMGs* and the whole area was spattered with blood." A remnant of this force had been ambushed by Havildar Bagh Bahar's patrol and fifteen more were killed. Whatever the military wisdom of the operation the courage of the Việt Minh soldiers was beyond question.

The next few days saw 14/13 FFR actively sweeping their area following the disastrous Việt Minh attack of the 3rd, the bloodiest day yet for the Việt Minh.

The minutes of an interservice meeting held on 3 January provide an indication of the enormous amounts of ordnance stocked in Cochinchina; 820 tons of ammunition were loaded on a Japanese craft awaiting disposal

* Medium Machine Guns.

at sea, and 3000 more tons of general ammunition were awaiting disposal in Saigon. A great deal of ordnance had been handed over to the French for custody. Phu Tho airfield contained nearly three hundred huge 2000 kilogram bombs whose size made removal extremely difficult, so it was decided to render them harmless and leave them in place. The RAF reported the presence of a number of dumps in the Phnom Penh area, including 600 tons of bombs and ammunition in the city itself; there was no available shipping to move this ordnance, which was being guarded by the French. The Royal Navy wanted to dump much of it "in the PHNOM PENH backwaters", which were "not used for navigation, are muddy and reasonably deep." They thought that it would be "almost impossible" to salvage any heavy ammunition so disposed. Curiously, French ships had refused to accept for disposal any of the 300 tons of ammunition in Saigon. At all times "The possibility of improper disposal must be considered."

The medical representative at the meeting reported that opium was still being received, although most of the medical stores were now concentrated in Saigon.

It is highly probable that the Allies recovered but a portion of the huge arsenal of arms, ammunition, bombs, grenades, and other ordnance stockpiled by the Japanese in Indochina.*

At this time Colonel de Guillebon (Chief of Staff French Forces in the Far East) wrote to Brigadier Hirst. The letter followed a discussion held earlier that afternoon between de Guillebon, Brigadier Taunton (Commander of 80 Brigade) and Lieutenant Colonel Ritchie (Chief of Staff, 20 Indian Division). After the meeting, and a subsequent discussion with General Vallery, de Guillebon wrote that

"...I beg to inform you that we agree to the withdrawal of 80 Brigade on or about 15th January 1946.

I take this opportunity to inform you that, in view of operations towards the North and East and in connection with the installation of the Madagascar Brigade, General LECLERC has made

* There was no way of adequately accounting for Japanese equipment, as shown by a report dated 16 December 1945. For example, in one report the Japanese claimed to have turned in 27,177 rifles, 1134 machine guns, 276,000 grenades, 610 wireless sets and 60,535,000 rounds of small arms ammunition. The British reported receiving 3707 rifles, 148 machine guns, 65,000 grenades, 14 wireless sets and 7,046,000 rounds of ammunition.

plans, which he will forward to General GRACEY, for the taking over of part or the whole of 100th Brigade area by the French.

The departure of 80 Brigade should not interfere with General LECLERC's plans." 4

Brigadier Taunton's 80 Brigade units were given definite news of their standdown when 20 Division Headquarters published "Suggested Programme of Relief of 80 Bde Gds"*.⁵ The brigade was to be relieved of all commitments by 2/8 Punjab, 9 Jat and the French at 1600 hours on 11 January. Thus the Kumaons, 23 Mountain Regiment, 3/1 GR and the Dogras were to be relieved of their various guard commitments on vital points such as the Central Jail, Yokahama Specie Bank, Japanese Transmitter, Phu Tho airfield, artesian wells, power house, Gracey's residence and more (including a most important key point -- the brewery, which the French would take over).

An advance warning order alerted 80 Brigade to be prepared to embark on 15 January, so the two Dogra companies helping Rodham's 100 Brigade were ordered to return to Saigon (from Lai Thieu) on the 12th. The French were specifically asked to take over four areas: Khanh Hoi (presently held by a battalion -- 3/1 GR), the important Cholon power house, a smaller power house in Cholon (just south of the race course), and the brewery, all guarded by 70 men each. Nine other areas would be taken over by the Jats and 2/8 Punjab.

Things appeared to be going well enough for the French to talk about the relief of 100 Brigade. In a letter to General Gracey, written for General Leclerc by Major F.A. Weil, Liaison Officer, the French announced that they should have one mechanized cavalry squadron each in Bien Hoa and Thu Dầu Môt by 15 January, which would permit a "progressive evacuation" of those places by 100 Brigade units.⁶ By the 20th they hoped to have been able to relieve 100 Brigade everywhere except in Thủ Đức itself. Gracey penned a short statement to the letter which called for the relief of the Japanese battalions in Xuân Lộc and Bến Cát before 100 Brigade could draw down.

Rodham's methods were now bearing fruit, for when 4/10 GR swept Bình Phú, west of Thủ Đức, some locals pointed out the houses of pro-Việt Minh inhabitants. The houses were "suitably dealt with" by the Gurkhas, and two Việt Minh flags and a number of documents were captured. In Khánh Hối, the 3/1 Gurkhas engaged four boats carrying a party of Vietnamese attempting to land on the eastern tip of the island at night. One boat escaped, but the remaining three were captured and their twelve occupants killed in the water.

* Guards.

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Early in January it was announced that Mountbatten had been promoted from Captain to Rear Admiral; he was now a substantive flag officer, not just acting as one. When the distinguished actor John Gielgud* brought "Hamlet" to the British troops in Saigon he insisted on using the same costumes as in the London production. He also performed in Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit", and referred to his "audience", rather than the "troops", which is one reason why he is held in such high esteem.

The War Office was doing its utmost to speed up the movement of the 3rd DIC to Vietnam. Between the end of December and mid-January there were five ships** available for French trooping, each capable of carrying from 3000 to 3500 soldiers. Nevertheless, even when their trooping runs to Saigon had been completed there would still be 8667 French soldiers left in France, and it was hoped to move them in February. The departure of 100 Brigade to some extent depended on the arrival of the 3rd Division.

Gracey was now requested to issue the following statement simultaneously with a similar one by Admiral D'Argenlieu:

"As a result of a joint plan agreed between the High Commissioner for France for Indo-China, and the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia, the French authority will henceforth assume the task of maintaining law and order in Southern French Indo China except for certain defined zones in which Japanese armed forces will be interned pending their repatriation. The British and Indian troops in Southern French Indo China have begun to withdraw from the country. For the present, however, it is necessary for some to remain in the zones of Japanese concentration to guard the disarmed Japanese."***

One third of Gracey's division left the parent body on 4 January when a terse message from ALFSEA to ALFFIC announced that at noon of the 5th, 32 Indian Infantry Brigade "ceases to be under command 20 IND DIV and comes under command HQ ALFSEA for all purposes."

* Later Sir John Gielgud.

** Cameronia, Andes, Pasteur, Monarch of Bermuda, Nea Hellas.

*** See Mountbatten's Section E of the Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff for the relevant information, pronouncements, etc., on this period.

The command of British North Borneo simultaneously passed from the 3rd Australian Division to Woodford and 32 Brigade.

In Vietnam, the tempo of French military activity quickened perceptibly. They killed fifty Việt Minh in operations just two kilometers north of Thu Dầu Một; Colonel Massu's column was slicing through the area southeast of Saigon, and 31 more Việt Minh were killed around Ban Mê Thuột. Heavy engagements occurred in several other places, notably in Tây Ninh, Cần Thơ and Mỹ Tho.

In the Trà Vinh area of the delta the French had the unusual experience of being petitioned by one group of rebels for protection against another group of rebels. Officers on the warship Gazelle were asked to help 3000 Vietnamese being attacked by the Việt Minh. Ironically, the boat carrying the petitioners was flying a Việt Minh flag. This was probably a Hoa Hảo group seeking assistance against Việt Minh attacks.

The French lost no time in integrating their new air support capability into their repacification operations. Rodham's 100 Brigade "Operation Instruction No 65" reported scheduled French Spitfire ground attack sorties as early as 7 January 1946.* This particular order dealt with comprehensive French operations throughout the Inner Zone, with French Spitfires tasked to bomb and strafe a number of areas including An Hoa and up to the west bank of the Saigon River, and the hook of land formed by the Saigon River around An Lộc Đông (one kilometer north of Hán Phú and about four kilometers north of Gò Vấp).**

Rodham's forces were to act as stops, but they were covering a large area -- a line running from south of Lái Thiêu to a bridge just west of Thu Dầu Một. French columns and naval craft were driving in to this area, including Lieutenant Colonel Sizaire's force coming down Route Coloniale 13 from Bến Cát towards Thu Dầu Một. The Japanese were not given advance warning of the operations.

A French intelligence report, rated C3, was now handed to Gracey; it stated that force of 1000 Tonkinese had crossed the Đồng Nai River in the Tân Tích area northeast of Biên Hòa en route to Phan Thiết (a known Việt Minh concentration area). A dawn French sweep through the western outskirts of Thủ Đức resulted in two Việt Minh killed and 25 suspects detained. The French, apparently acting on solid intelligence,

* The French had four Spitfires in Nha Trang by 4 January.
** The RAF had practically ceased all tactical operations by now, and even the daily Spitfire tactical reconnaissance sorties had been discontinued on 8 January 1946.

had picked up two known Việt Minh agents, the Việt Minh secretary for Thủ Đức, two members of the force which had attacked Biên Hòa on 3 January and a man who was known to have murdered several Frenchmen prior to the Việt Minh "uprising".⁷

In French operations northwest of Thu Dầu Một, covering the 6 to 8 January period, three French columns had converged on Thành Phố. They accounted for 150 Việt Minh killed and 40 captured. A French detachment of the 2nd RACM was ambushed south of Saigon and lost seven killed and five wounded. In the past week the Việt Minh had suffered serious losses, and the outlook for them in the Inner Zone was grim as the French were rapidly gaining strength and becoming more familiar with the new type of warfare in Indochina. As a 20th Indian Division historian wrote:

"The situation in French Indo China was at this time changing rapidly. The greater part of the two French divisions had arrived in the country and their mobile columns were fanning out from SAIGON in all directions occupying all the main towns and clearing up the areas in between. VIETMINH influence and power in SOUTH FIC was on the wane and many of their leaders and followers had wearied of the struggle and surrendered to the French. The die hard elements were attempting to make their way to the EAST Coast of ANNAM where large concentrations of VIETMINH still existed and which was completely under their control -- except for the area around the part of NHA TRANG where a French force had gone ashore in mid November and with the assistance of the Japanese garrison were holding a 'bridgehead' surrounded by a large concentration of VIETMINH forces. In SOUTH COCHINCHINA the French were moving steadily SOUTHWARDS occupying one town after another. The road from SAIGON to PHNOM PENH had been cleared. The town of BAN ME THUOT 160 miles NE of SAIGON in the heart of the interior had been occupied and the DARLAC Plateau on which it stood cleared of VIETMINH. With the exception of the EAST Coast the disintegration of the VIETMINH armed forces in SOUTH FIC was now complete. The remnants of these forces joined together and formed guerilla bands in many parts of the country and their presence was likely an ever present threat to law and order." 8

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In British operations, a 4/10 Gurkha patrol flushed and killed a Việt Minh about two kilometers south of Lái Thiêu; near his body was a briefcase containing Việt Minh news bulletins and four maps showing British and Việt Minh positions. The Gurkha company then swept the area back to their own lines and east of the Lái Thiêu road, turning north to Lái Thiêu. Half a kilometer south of Lái Thiêu they "bumped" a large Việt Minh party in bunkers. A fight ensued in which six Việt Minh were killed and one Gurkha wounded by a pistol shot. A variety of bayonets, knives, three pistols, 200 rounds of ammunition, shotgun shells, tools for making grenades, and some grenades (which "appeared to be in a very dangerous condition") were found; the grenades were destroyed on the spot. At the same time, two grenades were thrown at a 4/10 Gurkha PW escort moving through the Lái Thiêu bazaar. Two more Việt Minh were killed, and with these sweeps on the 10 January the 4/10th Gurkhas brought in 127 prisoners and suspects.

The Việt Minh still remained active around Biên Hòa, despite the costly defeats they had recently suffered in the area, and "jitter parties" continued to probe the 14/13 FFR lines, firing submachine guns, rifles and throwing grenades as they did so. In the north, 1/1 GR joined the French in a big sweep on the 10th. The 1/1 Gurkhas, supported by armoured cars, acted as stops for these operations south and southwest of Thu Dầu Mốt. The French were in the west and patrolled the Saigon River, 4/10 GR was in the east flank and 1/1 GR in the middle. It was a relatively quiet day for the Gurkhas, although heavy firing emanated from the French area.

On 8 January Gracey wrote to Leclerc about the relief of 100 Brigade. Gracey said that he was in "entire agreement" with Leclerc's "proposals to relieve troops of 100 Brigade in the BIEN HOA - THU DAU MOT area progressively during this month and thus to enable me to withdraw some of that Bde to the SAIGON CHOLON area." But, wrote Gracey:

"I would however remind you that there are still two Japanese armed units acting operationally under the orders of 100 Bde:

- (a) The 'SATO BUTAI' of 500 men at XUAN LOC
- (b) The 'YAMAGISHI BUTAI' of 500 men at BEN CAT

and I consider that the early relief of these is a matter of first priority, so that they can be concentrated, disarmed and sent to CAP ST. JACQUES.

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Although they have carried out their tasks satisfactorily up to date I think it would be unwise to rely on their operational efficiency for too long in the future, now that practically all the other Japanese units have been disarmed." 9

Gracey then suggested that "the first troops which you may have available should be used for the relief of these Japanese, and that after that has been completed the relief of 100 Bde (except THU DUC) should continue." It was acknowledged that this proposal may delay the relief of 100 Brigade for a short time past 20 January.

Gracey also brought up the problem of the relief of Japanese guards on vital points. Over 100 VPs of all kinds were (as of 8 January) still being guarded by 3224 Japanese soldiers, of whom 2490 were armed.* Gracey wanted to keep the Japanese guards on his Lines of Communication, for "The rebels are always attempting to destroy bridges on this road and guards on these VPs are essential until my troops are withdrawn."¹⁰ He drew Leclerc's attention to the fact that a number of pro-French Vietnamese and priests who were now under the protection of Yamagishi and Sato Butais would have to be withdrawn to safety if the Japanese units there were not replaced by French troops. Furthermore, the guards on the scattered rubber dumps would be "very isolated" when the main Japanese force withdrew, and even with a fairly strong guard force "it is not possible to prevent the odd hostile crawling in by night and setting fire to outlying Warehouses."

In Biền Hoa, the Japanese units were evidently less than enthusiastic about their role as Anglo-French allies, and Colonel Miyake, the Japanese commander, was called in to talk to the 14/13th Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Gates. The reason for this discussion was Gates' dissatisfaction with the state of discipline of Miyake's soldiers. A recent inspection of Japanese posts on the important All Red Route, by Major Wenham and a Japanese Liaison Officer, revealed "discipline slack and men untidy". Some posts were deserted, and the commanders of others were absent. Local purchase orders were being disobeyed, and post garrisons were sharing houses with Vietnamese, "a procedure to which the Comd. strongly objected."

* Japanese guard commitments were as follows: 540 troops on main Japanese dumps and equipment, 516 on civil installations, 549 on Lines of Communication, 1257 area guards (including Ben Cat and Xuan Loc), and 362 for use by the British.

Gates had cause for further complaint regarding "co-operation of Japanese forces with the Annamites." Sato Butai, in Xuan Loc, had captured four important Việt Minh prisoners. However:

"No report was given until an explanation was asked for by the Comd himself. By this time the prisoners had been released and a doubtful story was forwarded from Sato Butai that they had escaped." 11

Miyake was then ordered to go out and inspect Japanese posts on the All Red Route and to censure Major Sato. But Gates was not yet finished. In the big night attack on 3 January, during which the Japanese on Biên Hòa railway station were attacked, two of the Japanese light machine guns had broken down:

"Colonel Miyake was informed that these guns should NOT break down. In addition the Japanese garrison at the station only fired when they thought they were being attacked."

Gates told Miyake that poor Japanese units would be the last to be sent home to Japan. The French had also complained of bridges being cut near Japanese posts, and General Gracey was to be informed that Colonel Miyake was not cooperating fully and the discipline of the Japanese Army in this area was poor. In order to strengthen Miyake's authority the British now handed his sword back to him.

At this time Gracey received a message from Dempsey, who said that he had just seen Gracey's recent signal to Pyman, which inferred a slowing down in the British withdrawal from Vietnam. Dempsey wrote that

"On the departure of MAIN HQ 20 DIV, 80 INF BDE and DIV TPS this month I am most anxious that only the following BRITISH TPS should remain in FIC. HQ BRITISH TPS in FIC consisting of REAR 20 DIV with CRA* in COMD. The MISSION 555 SUB ARFA. 100 IND INF BDE. Your Signals [to] PYMAN lead me to suppose that you are behind schedule in concentrating JAPANESE. I know of NO other reason which would make you wish to retain additional battalions. Please signal me urgently on this matter treating the reduction as planned of our tps in FIC as of utmost importance." 12

Gracey replied immediately, suggesting that Dempsey's staff had not adequately done their homework and that his plans were following exactly the programme ALFSEA had agreed to during the earlier conference in Saigon. Gracey asked Dempsey to send a senior staff officer to Saigon as soon as possible in order to "explain and smooth out all

* Brigadier Hirst, Commanding Royal Artillery and acting Commander, 20 Indian Division.

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misunderstandings."¹³ Since Mountbatten wanted to return to Saigon, Gracey suggested that the visit could fit in with the departure of Gracey's Headquarters.

Messages such as this one by Dempsey appeared to intimate that Gracey was deliberately seeking to prolong his extremely complex and thankless duties in Vietnam, duties which were unpalatable and unrewarding as his troops -- for political reasons -- were not yet permitted to receive the decorations which the French wanted to bestow on them. Wrote Gracey:

"Delay in decision re award to my officers and men of French decorations producing feeling of slight resentment at our apparent apathy in reaching decision -- fully realize difficulties but naturally D'ARGENLIEU and LECLERC wish to present some such decorations personally prior to departure [of] 20 Div. "

He also expressed his disappointment at the decision to send Headquarters 20 Division and division troops to Malaya:

"Splitting of div to this extent gives rise to rumours of dissolution [of] 20 Div. I wish at once to lay such unsettling stories -- your policy for future employment 20 Div with my task in MALAYA [with] possibility of taking over comd again of 32 and 80 Bdes and future task of 100 Bde would enable me to quieten fears which I hope are quite unfounded."

It was ironic that Dempsey's staff had prepared his prodding note to Gracey at literally the very moment when a sizable part of Gracey's force was leaving Saigon, for on 10 January the 114th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery [the only British troops in Vietnam excepting the RAF and RN -- the rest were Indian] departed for Malaya. The 114th personnel sailed on the Esperance Bay, followed by the unit transport in an LST. They were followed to Malaya just two days later by the 16th Light Cavalry (minus C Squadron) and their armoured cars. So, except for 23 Mountain Regiment, Gracey now had no heavy firepower left to him, and the loss of 16 Cavalry meant that Rodham was now effectively stripped of his ability to mount fast preemptive mobile sweeps through suspected Việt Minh areas. On the 11th, Taunton's advance party from 80 Brigade flew to Makassar as 80 Brigade itself was relieved of all commitments by the French and stood down. Responsibility

for the shrinking British sector in the Saigon area itself was assumed by Brigadier Hendriks and 555 Sub Area, with forces composed of 2/8 Punjab and MG Jat (less one company).

A week later Gracey received a response to his query about decorations for his soldiers; the philosophy was contained in a note from SACSEA to Browning. Mountbatten was against an Anglo-French parade at which French medals were to be given to the British. This "may well give the Hearst press* and the many pro-Annamite and pro-Indonesian journalists the chance to say that the French were publicly rewarding British soldiers for having put them back into FIC by force." It was hard to see how the handing out of a few medals to brave private soldiers, which could have been done quietly, would alter world opinion, while senior officers like Mountbatten himself were regularly accepting foreign decorations.

On 11 January, the 20 Division Chief of Staff received a letter from Major Weil, French Liaison Officer, concerning the impending relief of British/Indian forces. On behalf of Leclerc, Weil wrote:

"We have made arrangements for THUDAUMOT and BIEN HOA to be relieved on 20th January 1946.

If possible we intend to relieve XUAN LOC at about the same time. We may not have enough troops at our disposal for XUAN LOC before the 23rd.

As regards BEN CAT we agree to the withdrawal of the Japanese as from the 20th January." 14

Gracey accepted the premise that the French would not be able to relieve all Japanese troops prior to the departure of 100 Brigade, but he was standing firm on his insistence that the two remaining active Japanese infantry battalions (Sato and Yamagishi Butais) be relieved concurrently with the standing down of 100 Brigade.¹⁵

Since it appeared that 20 Division would be going to Malaya, Gracey wrote to Malaya Command requesting details of the division's future tasks and its proposed location. Malaya Command replied that 20 Division would be lodged in 2nd Division's area, with Gracey's

* Mountbatten's criticism of the American press was well founded. The Chicago Tribune had, for example, called British retaliatory action against an Indonesian village, whose inhabitants had cruelly murdered British/Indian soldiers in a plane which had crash-landed, as "another Lidice". American soldiers would later suffer similar treatment from their own press reporting the Vietnam War.

Headquarters at Kluang and three battalions dispersed in the area. His tasking would be to control and move Japanese from Johore State to the Riouw Archipelago, and local operational duties as decided by 2nd Division. It was impossible to be more specific as the final order of battle of 20 Division to Malaya had not yet been decided.¹⁶

Gracey now informed Dempsey of the proposed French relief of 100 Brigade. The French planned to relieve 1/1 GR and 14/13 FFR (in Thu Dau Mot and Bien Hoa respectively) by 20 January, with the possibility of this schedule being slightly delayed. After these two battalions had been relieved ("and NOT before") he could release two battalions of Division troops namely the Reconnaissance Battalion (2/8 Punjab) and the Machine Gun Battalion (MG Jat), by 25 January.¹⁷ After that British troops in Indochina would be located as follows: one battalion at Thu Duc (4/10 GR), which would continue to supervise the movement of Japanese from the outer areas to Cap St. Jacques — Rodham's 100 Brigade Headquarters, one infantry battalion (4/10 GR), one squadron of 16 Cavalry, plus a Field Company and Field Ambulance unit were then to move down to Saigon. Rodham's task would be to command British troops in Indochina for a short time, until the Inter-Service Mission took over. In Saigon itself, 2/8 Punjab was charged with guarding the Mission and Jail. Local administration in Saigon was to be provided by 555 Sub Area, and one battalion (9/12 FFR) was in Cap St. Jacques. Brigadier Hirst was to depart with Main Headquarters 20 Indian Division at a time to be decided by Dempsey, but not earlier than 25 January.

The future of 20 Division was still uncertain, although there were only two weeks left before Gracey was to leave Saigon, and a little over three weeks before 20 Division Headquarters was due to depart. On the 12th Dempsey wrote to Gracey about "the future of your Division". Said Dempsey:

"My object is to concentrate 20 Div in Malaya with yourself in command. It will then no doubt return to India like the other divisions. In the meantime 100 Inf Bde will have to remain in FIC until the situation permits it being brought to Malaya. 32 Inf Bde is temporarily in Borneo and you will take it under command directly your headquarters are set up in Malaya. 80 Inf Bde will have to visit Makassar for a period which cannot yet be determined and whilst it is there it will operate directly under 15 Corps. I still cannot say for certain that it will be unnecessary for you to take a small headquarters to Makassar but I sincerely hope that you will NOT have to go." 18

The relief of 100 Brigade (less 4/10 GR) was to coincide with a French sweep from Thu Dâu Môt to Thủ Đức. The sweep was scheduled for 20 and 21 January, and on the 21st the 1/1 Gurkhas were to leave Thu Dâu Môt for Saigon. An Anglo-French conference of 12 January worked out this plan, which also called for Yamagishi Butai to be withdrawn from Bèn Cát on 17 January, followed by all Japanese troops outside the British Sector moving to Thủ Đức on the 22nd. On 23 January it would be the turn of 14/13 FFR, together with all posts on the Thủ Đức - Biên Hòa Line of Communication, to be drawn into Saigon, followed on the 26th by the relief of Sato Butai in Xuân Lộc. News of the relief of the Japanese battalions was to be kept from them until the last moment.

These were fairly extensive sweeping operations which were being planned by the French, and which included 100 Brigade participation. All participating French units were to come under the command of General Valluy of 9 DIC. These substantial French units included Valluy's own 9th Division, a light commando, a Marine battalion, a company of the river flotilla, two battalions of the warships Tourville and Savorgnan de Brazza, one or two destroyers, one light cruiser, and assorted other barges and craft. Rodham's brigade was to operate primarily along the river and lay down barrages to keep the Việt Minh from falling back on Thủ Đức.

As far as the British in Vietnam were concerned, the situation was fluid at best. Plans were changing rapidly and the future of 20 Indian Division was uncertain. On the 13th, as the 20 Division Order of Battle for Malaya was published, Rodham issued "Operation Instr No. 66"; under the first subheading ("Change in Policy") Rodham wrote that "The move of British Tps ex [from] F.I.C. has been speeded up," and "This entails a redistribution of 20 Div Tps in F.I.C."¹⁹ Furthermore, "The majority if not all of the Jap guards on rubber dumps, installations, VPs, bridges etc. in THU DAU MOT and BIEN HOA Sub-Areas are being abandoned and NOT taken over by the French," but Japanese guards in the new Thủ Đức Sub-Area were to remain for the present.

Rodham described the overall relief plan in an Operational Order to his units; in his Order he announced that the relief of 100 Brigade would be carried out in two phases. Phase I was the relief of Thu Dau Mot sub area" in conjunction with a combined BRITISH/FRENCH sweep through the whole of 100 Bde area between the SAIGON R and the DONG NAI R." Phase II was the relief of the Biên Hòa sub area and the move of Brigade Headquarters to Saigon.

Rodham received his own formal orders from Gracey in "ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.11". Rodham was informed that the relief of his brigade (less 4/10 GR) by the French should be completed by 23 January, and "On the move of HQ 20 Ind Div to MALAYA you will assume command of all British troops remaining in FIC."²⁰ However, he would remain directly under command of 20 Division and his designation as Commander, 100 Brigade, was to remain. It was now close enough to the event to tell Rodham that "At a date to be notified the operational control of French troops in FIC will pass to the French Government. HQ ALFFIC will close same time." The Commander of 555 Sub Area (responsible for administration in Saigon) was to come under Rodham. The 1/1 Gurkhas were to be replaced in 100 Brigade by 9/12 FFR. Rodham's two tasks were as follows:

- (a) You will ensure the internal security of the British Sectors of SAIGON and THU DUC and the area of CAP ST.JACQUES-BARIA.
- (b) You will control the disarmament and concentration at CAP ST. JACQUES, of the Japanese Forces in FIC, SOUTH of Latitude 16 degrees NORTH.

ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.11 was superceded three days later by Operation Instruction No.12, which gave the exact date on which command of French forces was to pass to the French; this was to be 28 January, the date of Gracey's departure from Vietnam. There were to be three phases for the withdrawal of 20 Division.**

Brigadier J.A.E.Hirst was now to command all British troops in Vietnam from Gracey's departure until 7 February, at which time command would pass to Brigadier M.S.K. Maunsell, who would be directly under ALFSEA. Maunsell was to have under him a force which was not quite equivalent to a brigade in strength.***

* Dated 14 January 1945.

<u>PHASE I</u>	<u>PHASE II</u>	<u>PHASE III</u>
to be completed approx. 28 Jan.	to be completed approx. 6 Feb.	to be completed approx. 10 Feb.
Main Hq 20 Indian Division 1/1 GR	HQ 100 Ind Inf Bde 14/13 FFR	Rear Hq 20 Ind.Div. Hq 555 Sub Area
Proportion Division troops	Proportion Div. and non-div troops	NG Jat 4/10 GR Proportion Div.and non-div. troops.

*** 2/8 Punjab, 9/12 FFR, plus medical and dental units, engineers, War Crimes investigators, Docks Operating Companies, Provost, Paymaster, Canteen, Welfare and Graves Registration Units. 21

So determined were the British to disengage that it was announced that all Japanese guards were to be withdrawn by 23 January "whether or NOT the FRENCH take over the gds". 22

The French were heavily involved everywhere. In mid-January twenty Việt Minh were killed in Gia Định, which until recently had been secured by 9/14 Punjab.

The extent of the Việt Minh hold on the countryside was noted in a 4/10 GR report which stated that in a number of villages only children and old men and women could be found. Cecil Gracey had arrived in Saigon for a short visit prior to her husband's departure, and on the 15th, a 4/10 company escorted General and Mrs. Gracey to Thủ Đức, where the Battalion gave a concert at 2100 hours. The Graceys remained overnight in Thủ Đức and returned to Saigon the following day.

With 1/1 GR and 14/13 FFR due to be relieved soon and pulled back into Saigon, Lieutenant Colonel H.S. Mullaby (Commanding the 4/10 Gurkhas) was issued 100 Brigade Operation Instruction 68 on the 19th; in this Order was a map trace outlying his new, smaller area which was to be called "Thu Duc British Sector", as opposed to "Sub-Area" -- this name change was made to avoid confusion with the French areas, and in any case the 1/1 GR and 14/13 FFR sub areas were being abolished. Mullaby's new area of responsibility was centered at a spot roughly between Lái Thiêu and Thủ Đức, and had the Saigon River as the western boundary; the road to Biên Hòa, running about two miles east of Thủ Đức to a crossroads about midway between Thủ Đức and Biên Hòa on Route Coloniale 1, was the eastern boundary. From the crossroads (the northeast point) the Sector curved gradually southwest, passing just east and south of Lái Thiêu to the river. The Thủ Đức British Sector was the one area which was to retain Japanese guards when the Japanese were being withdrawn and disarmed everywhere else. However, Japanese Navy personnel in the Sector were under the French. In this Order Rodham announced that Sato Butai would be going from Xuân Lộc directly to Cap St. Jacques, bypassing Thủ Đức British Sector. The French, as they passed through Xuân Lộc, were to hand Sato a written order from Brigadier Rodham to this effect. As planned earlier, Yamagishi Butai was to come through the Thủ Đức British Sector for disarming, then proceed to Saigon to raise the Japanese 2nd Division labour pool to 6000. General Manaki was to remain in Thủ Đức for the time being.

The time was approaching when 80 Brigade would leave Vietnam. As a 4/17 Dogra* writer described it:

"It was originally intended to fly out an advance party of officers, while the C.O. was to go out, stay a couple of days in MAKASSAR and come back to answer questions about the places. Various factors, the chief one being the non-arrival of the DAKOTA, altered this and the advance party finally flew off on the 11th Jan with Major Colquhoun, who had been unearthed from PENOM PENH, in charge and with Major Weber as the Bn representative. The Bn was complete again in the Annamite Barracks, long since renamed Dogra Lines, having by then handed over our SAIGON commitments.

On the 14th 80 Bde ceremonially handed over to the French. The ceremonial consisted of a combined British and French parade, the whole under command of Brigadier Taunton, while the C.O., with Captain Evans as Adjutant commanded the British Battalion of six companies, one each from each of the Battalions, the others being the Fd Coy, the defence coy from the 2/8 Punjab, and the M.G. Coy of the Jats. The parade itself was a simple one, being a general salute to Generals Gracey and Leclerc, an inspection and a march past, our pipes and drums playing the General Salute and for 80 Bde's march past." 23

The first of the two RAF tactical squadrons left Vietnam at about this time, as the first two Mosquitos were flown from Saigon to Bangkok on the 12th. A large proportion of 684 Squadron's supplies were flown out by the "Gremlin Task Force" (of which more will be said), and the main party of the squadron left Tan Son Nhut for Bangkok by road convoy on the 20th:

"It was not known what difficulties would be encountered on the road as no convoy had come through to SAIGON for a long time, but despite bad roads, even worse bridges and second rate vehicles and the risk of attack by rebel Annamites, the convoy was a great success and made the journey of over 600 miles in 7 days." 24

* In an appendix to the Dogra Newsletter, the Dogras listed the tally in their "Vermin Book", as follows: killed -- 503 Japanese, 1 INA, 54 Annamites; Captured -- 8 Japanese, 95 INA, 105 Annamites. Dogra losses were 27 killed and 65 wounded. These figures included the Burma campaigns. No Viet Minh had been killed in the last eight weeks.

In the Saigon/Cholon area itself the British zone shrank to an area encompassing the Colonial Artillery barracks and the race course,²⁵ so that there were now three main British areas of responsibility in Vietnam : Thu Đức British Sector, the Saigon/Cholon area and Cap St. Jacques.

Major Weil replied to Lieutenant Colonel Ritchie, 20 Division Chief of Staff, concerning the relief of the Japanese. The French, in their reply of 19 January, appeared to be sensitive to British prodding. On behalf of Leclerc, Weil wrote:

"It is not possible to reply in a precise manner to the questions asked by the British Command relative to Japanese Guard Stations, which will be removed or not in actual fact by the French Troops.

This problem can only be dealt with after reconnaissance of the place, and above all, after mopping up of this region.

We are proposing, therefore, to wait until the 25th January, to decide with precision, after obtaining the advice of Colonel Gilles,* who is directing the mopping up operation and commanding the Section, the stations of which we shall assume charge, and those for which we shall request the provisional maintenance of a Japanese guard.

However, [the guards on a number of named depots] can be immediately transferred to Cap St Jacques, as has already been proposed by Brigadier Rodham. The depots are destined to supply the Concentration Camps -- their guard does therefore not concern us,** and we can only see advantages in their rapid evacuation to LE CAP." 26

A report by Meiklereid described how a number of French soldiers were complaining that they had been brought to Indochina under false pretenses. They claimed that they had been told that their purpose was to fight the Japanese, but instead they found themselves fighting Annamite maquis. Although a better class of French soldier was now arriving, indiscipline was still evident and the crime rate had soared to the point where the courts were swamped.

Gracey wrote to Dempsey about the final departure plans. He mentioned that Leclerc had been given a promise that the last British brigade would leave Vietnam only on the arrival of the whole French

* Gilles, who had one eye, was a remarkable paratroop officer who was in the thick of the Indochina fighting from start to finish. Promoted to Brigadier General later, he commanded the initial airborne assault on Biên Biên Phủ in 1953.

** A handwritten note was added by a British staff officer who implied that since the French would soon be responsible for feeding the Japanese they might reconsider the question of guarding these stocks.

Expeditionary Force. Gracey said that in view of this "he [Leclerc] will stick his toes in probably. I think I can come to a compromise with him whereby I leave approximately two battalions and some service troops here to carry out the spirit if not the letter of the agreement."²⁷ Dempsey agreed that the promise should be kept and backed Gracey's plan, to which Leclerc did agree.

By the end of January nearly 54,000 Japanese had been disarmed and concentrated. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in a reply to Tom Driberg, stated that British casualties from the breach of truce in mid-October to 13 January amounted to 40 killed, 110 wounded and 5 missing. Annamite casualties came to 2756, of whom 1565 had been killed by French forces; 641 had been killed by the British and 550 by the Japanese.

Brigadier Taunton, Commanding 80 Brigade, left Saigon by air on the 18th; he flew to Singapore to confer with the Commander of the 7th Australian Division (whom he was relieving) and went on to rejoin his Headquarters in Makassar. A day later a firm date was given for the pullback of 100 Brigade from Thủ Đức to Saigon — this was to occur on 22 January, the date on which the main body of 80 Brigade was due to sail for Makassar. Rodham's Headquarters was to take over the offices vacated by 80 Brigade.

The now-famous Dogra pipes and drums played before the citizens of Saigon for the last time on the 21st, as the Battalion marched from the Annamite Barracks to the docks. Also boarding the Orduna were 80 Brigade Headquarters, 604 Field Security and the brigade's supporting units (welfare, medical, dental, engineer units, etc.). On the 22nd the Orduna, bound for Makassar via Singapore, sailed slowly and majestically down the Saigon River — until it got about ten miles downriver from Saigon, when the ship got stuck on a mudbank. On the following morning, the Orduna was piped off the mudbank by the Dogra band, and passing Cap St. Jacques a party of 9/12 FFR came alongside in a French LCI to wave farewell to the Brigade.

Lieutenant Colonel Clark had brought his 1/1 Gurkhas into Saigon on the 21st, having conducted a number of sweeping operations on the way down from Thủ Dầu Một through Thủ Đức. There was not much to say about these operations except that there were no battle casualties, little contact and only a few suspects arrested; the only injured were from B and C companies who had two or three men slightly hurt

by a "panic stricken water buffalo." The 1/1 Gurkhas marched into the Annamite Barracks as 4/17 Dogra marched out.

Gracey, a man who did not lack a sense of direction, now wrote to Dempsey, saying that the 20 Division Engineers were "dithering over [the] handover of stores [the the French]." ²⁸ This dithering was due to "lack of direction from ALFSEA", so Gracey had told his engineers to go ahead and hand them over immediately [Gracey himself was due to leave Saigon in five days]. At the same time he informed ALFSEA of the proposed order of battle of British forces remaining under Maunsell. On the 24th, the following day, ALFSEA issued orders for the departure of 20 Divisions Main Headquarters, which was to leave on the Sefton no later than 28 January. Even at this late date there was no firm destination given for 20 Division, but it was now believed to be India.

Amazingly, the Japanese were still inflicting casualties on the Việt Minh, for on the 19th a patrol from Thủ Đức had surprised a Việt Minh party attempting to block the Thủ Đức- Biên Hòa road. The Việt Minh were dispersed and suffered at least one killed. By the 22nd, the eve of the departure of 14/13 FFR from Biên Hòa, there was still no word of the impending arrival of the French. As the 14/13 War Diary noted, there was "considerable apprehension amongst the French Administrative officers owing to the non arrival of relieving French troops." On the 23rd, as scheduled, the 14/13 FFR departed Biên Hòa for Saigon.

Three days prior to Gracey's departure from Vietnam he was informed by Mountbatten that the British Chiefs of Staff had now decided that the French could assume the task of guarding Japanese surrendered personnel in the southern half of Indochina. There was thus no official reason for any British troops to remain in Vietnam. Gracey was told to press the French to take over this responsibility as soon as possible and no later than the end of February. The Japanese were then to receive their orders directly from the French. Wrote Mountbatten:

"My only remaining direct responsibility regarding the surrendered Japanese in French Indo-China will then be:-

- (a) The provision of such additional maintenance requirements as the French may initially be unable to provide.

(b) The provision of shipping for the repatriation of the Japanese to JAPAN." 29

But the shipping available to SACSEA was "limited", and "on my representation the British Chiefs of Staff are taking up the question of the provision of additional shipping with General MACARTHUR."

Gracey was pressing Leclerc to take over more responsibility, but on some points the French stood firm. Leclerc would not agree to the withdrawal of key British/Indian transportation units or the docks operating troops until his own such specialists arrived -- these units were needed for the efficient unloading of 3 DIC, which was vital to Leclerc's plans.

As the British role was reduced, and the Việt Minh now appeared to leave the British alone, the fighting between the Việt Minh and French was getting worse and casualties were heavy. The French were informed that at noon on 30 January all Japanese guards outside the British sector were to be withdrawn. On the 26th Gracey's Headquarters published the final plan for the withdrawal of 20 Division.³⁰ Headquarters ALFFIC and main Headquarters 20 Indian Division were to close at 0001 hours on 28 January, at which time command of all British troops in French Indochina passed to Rear Headquarters 20 Division. Rear Headquarters was scheduled to close at 0001 on 7 February, at which time command of British forces passed to Brigadier Maunsell and the Inter-Service Mission.

A draft of Mountbatten's four page directive³¹ to Maunsell was sent to London on 28 January. Maunsell's two infantry battalions were not to be used for fighting except under two circumstances: against mutinous Japanese or if British lives were in danger. Since the equipage of the French 3rd DIC was a British responsibility, Maunsell was directed to report twice monthly on the progress of equipage. The "SACSEA Inter-Service Mission" was to be officially formed on 28 January, the date of Gracey's departure from Saigon.

Gracey's force was reduced some more when on the 26th part of 1/1 GR* embarked on the Sefton. Dempsey had recently denied Gracey's request to fly straight home to India from Saigon, saying that there were reasons "which make it desirable that you come to Singapore on 28 Jan as originally planned. You will stay a night or two here then go direct from Singapore to India."³²

* The 1/1 Gurkhas and 3/1 Gurkhas had killed 162 and 82 Viet Minh respectively, against five 1/1 GR and eight 3/1 GR killed or missing. [E.V.R. Bellers, The First King George V's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Malun Regiment), V.2, 1920-1947].

On the 28th, the day of his departure, Gracey issued his final report titled "Notes on Overall Situation in F.I.C.". He stated that D'Argenlieu would command all French forces from 28 January, the three services being commanded by Leclerc (Army), Auboyneau (Navy) and Andrea [sic] (Air Force). Except for "odd bands of desperate characters" there was no organized resistance left in the south and southwest of Saigon. Japanese armed detachments remained in Đà Lạt (three battalions) and Nha Trang (one and a half battalions) to safeguard the French, and these would soon be relieved by the French, so that except for a few rifles for local protection all Japanese forces in southern Indochina would have then been disarmed. Although there were now three concentration areas for the Japanese,* all should be concentrated in Cap St. Jacques by late February.

Most important, to Gracey, was the fact that it was now "Apparent that French policy is now being more clearly linked with French military action. General tendency to show by practical measures that policy will be sincerely carried out." This was helped by " (a) Disgust of majority [of] local Annamites of VIET-MINH army brutality and terrorism, (b) Better discipline of troops and (c) Better tactics used by French troops and (d) Steady establishment of French Administration and police."

Under "How We Can Assist French" Gracey wrote, "Start, even a trickle, repatriation of Japanese." The propaganda and psychological warfare aspects should be emphasized, and "Brutalities committed by VIET-MINH forces against their own people should be mentioned whenever they occur." These measures "will greatly assist S.E.A.C. in my opinion, as the easier we make the French task in Northern F.I.C., the quicker will we be able to leave the French entirely to it."

Gracey reported that the Japanese were "dreading" being taken over by the French; they expected the French to treat them very harshly and withhold their rations. Gracey had reassured the Japanese on these points. He closed his report by saying that he expected little or no trouble, but thought that Leclerc would put off as long as possible the assumption of control of the Japanese.³³

Before he left Saigon, Gracey was accorded a singular honour by the French. In a ceremony in the City Hall he was presented a scroll and made a Citoyen D'Honneur of Saigon -- the equivalent to being given the freedom of the city. This was the first time in the

* Japanese Navy in Thu Dầu Môt, Japanese working parties and technicians in Saigon, everyone else at Cap St. Jacques.

eighty or so years since the municipal government of Saigon had been formed that any man had been so honoured.

In a response to Gracey's inquiry, Mountbatten (reflecting the Foreign Office view) said that he had no objection to Gracey receiving the title "Citoyen D'Honneur" from the people of Saigon, but for obvious political reasons his directive must not be prejudiced in any way. In a message to Gracey, Browning wrote that "However distasteful it may be to you, you should stress, if asked by the Press, that this is a mark of personal esteem for you on giving up your association with the French and should not be construed as a national gesture."³⁴

Meiklereid, who held Gracey in high regard, had returned from Singapore on the 27th and impressed upon the French that it was necessary "for political reasons" to confine the ceremony to a personal tribute to General Gracey -- nothing must transpire which "might in any way embarrass the General on the eve of his departure from Indo-China." The French agreed, and the Prefet's speech had to be rewritten at the last minute. Meiklereid spoke of the "great success achieved by General Gracey in carrying out the mission with which he was entrusted."³⁵ Meiklereid told the Foreign Office that the French population "consider that they owe their personal safety to him [Gracey] and his troops."*

Large crowds greeted Gracey, who was popular and highly regarded by everyone except politically-motivated historians, as he entered the City Hall accompanied by Mrs. Gracey. He was greeted by Jean Cédile and the Mayor, who spoke:

"No-one will ever forget the feeling of exuberance which greeted the arrival of the first Dakotas bringing the advance elements of the Allied Commission. This arrival brought to the citizens of Saigon the end of a nightmare that had lasted for four years, the liberation of their city within a few months of their Mother Country, and the renewal of relations of the world of free men, amongst whom those of Free England are the most dear to the hearts of Frenchmen...."

Gracey replied in French and, characteristically, accepted the honour on behalf of the British, Indian and Gurkha troops he had the honour to command in French Indochina. He concluded by saying that "I am pleased to take the opportunity of this occasion to thank all

* However, the Socialists in power in London refused to authorize decorations for Gracey's troops, who were killed and wounded during an unpopular mission on which the Labour Government had sent them -- they had not been in Indochina by choice.

those who helped the British, Indian, and Allied POWs both before and after the unconditional surrender of the Japanese. Never shall we forget what you did for them, especially those of you who at the risk of your own lives gave shelter to our escaped comrades in danger."³⁶ Not long after, Numata conveyed Terauchi's appreciation of the "fair and courteous manner" in which Gracey had conducted affairs in Indochina.

Douglas Gracey was the dominant figure of this episode — this whole story revolves around him, and when he left, to shouts of "Vive Gracey", the British involvement in Vietnam, for all practical purposes, came to an end.

Main Headquarters, 20 Indian Division, left Vietnam for India on the Sefton on 28 January.* Hirst, with Rear Headquarters, now commanded British troops in Vietnam.

As Gracey left, Rodham asked Hirst a number of questions concerning the relief of 100 Brigade by the French. Yamagishi and Sato Butais were still armed and in place, and a number of Japanese were still guarding vital points in Rodham's area. He particularly wanted confirmation that 4/10 GR in Thủ Đức would be relieved by the French on 5 February. Hirst passed these questions on to the French, who replied that they wished to keep the Japanese guards for the time being — to early February, at least.

On the following day, in Singapore, Gracey attended Mountbatten's 311th Meeting, during which Indochina was the topic of discussion. Mountbatten "expressed his very high appreciation of the way in which Major General Gracey had carried out a very difficult task as Head of the Control Commission in French Indochina. He wished to add his tribute to the gratitude which had already been expressed by Admiral d'Argenlieu and Lieutenant General Le Clerc." The Chiefs of Staff had agreed to SACSEA's proposal that French Indochina south of the 16th parallel should be withdrawn from SEAC on Gracey's departure (with the temporary exclusion of the Cap St. Jacques area).

Mountbatten thought that the US Chiefs of Staff would raise objections to his relinquishing command in Indochina to the French. Since at least six weeks had elapsed since Mountbatten had made these suggestions, it was possible that the US Chiefs did indeed object. Mr. Brain thought that "the only explanation which occurred to him was that

* Also departing on the 28th were 3/1 Gurkha Rifles and the 1st Battalion (Russell's) Kumaon Regiment (formerly 1/19 Hyderabad) — these 80 Brigade battalions marched on foot from Khanh Hoi and Cholon, respectively, to embark on the Dutch ship Tegelberg for Makassar, where Brigadier Taunton became Force Commander, Outer Islands.

the Americans did not wish to associate themselves with the idea of handing over the Annamites to the control of the French."

The British presence in Vietnam was still needed, apart from anything else, for the administration of the French 3rd Colonial Infantry Division. As the French had not officially made known their views on the necessity for the Inter-Service Mission, Mountbatten set forth his own ideas. He would not accept the idea of the British quietly folding their tents and slipping away from Saigon now that the area was secure. He directed Maunsell to tell the French, as tactfully as possible, that if they dismissed the Mission the Supreme Allied Commander would withdraw their vital logistics support. Furthermore, as the British had "cleared F.I.C. for them by force of arms... our Mission was not to be a 'hole and corner' affair or 'here on sufferance' ".

It was generally accepted that Anglo-French relations were at their best at this point, and would probably not be as good again. Although the French were anxious to reassert themselves as completely as possible they were having difficulties in recruiting and keeping Vietnamese labour. They could not have kept vital installations like the docks and the power plant operating without British help, and were in the uncomfortable position of wanting the British to leave but not being able to afford to see them go.

On the last day in January what little role the RAF had left in Vietnam ended with the disbandment of 273 Squadron (Spitfire). As early as 7 December they had been sharing their ground support equipment, generators, etc., with the French, whose own Spitfires had begun to arrive from France in mid-December. The French were now masters of their own destiny, at least in southern Indochina.

Footnotes: Chapter XVI

- 1 GB, PRO, WO 172/7135, War Diary 100 Indian Infantry Brigade, "100 Ind Inf Bde Op Instr No.63", 31 December 1945.
- 2 GB, PRO, WO 172/9956, War Diary 100 Brigade, "Sitrep to 0900 hrs 25 Jan."
- 3 GB, PRO, WO 172/10272, War Diary 14/13 Frontier Force Rifles, Report No. G/4, 3 January 1946.
- 4 Gracey Papers, Letter from de Guillebon to Hirst. No. 1105/L, 3 January 1946.

- 5 Gracey Papers, No. 168/13/G, 4 January 1946.
- 6 Gracey Papers, No. 1116/L, 5 January 1946.
- 7 GB, PRO, WO 172/9956, War Diary 100 Brigade, "Sitrep to 0900 hrs 10 Jan."
- 8 Gracey Papers, "20th Indian Division's History".
- 9 Gracey Papers, No. 3362/IV/GS, 9 January 1946.
- 10 Gracey Papers, "Relief of Jap Gds by French Tps", 8 January 1946.
- 11 GB, PRO, WO 172/10272, War Diary 14/13 FFR, Conference Minutes, 7 January 1946.
- 12 Gracey Papers, Cipher No.2316, ALFSEA to ALFFIC, 10 January 1946.
- 13 Gracey Papers, Gracey to Dempsey, 10 January 1946.
- 14 Gracey Papers, No. 1157/L, 11 January 1946.
- 15 Gracey Papers, No. 3362/IV/GS, "Relief of 100 Brigade", 11 January 1946.
- 16 Gracey Papers, No 0 3578, ALFFIC to Malaya Command, 11 January 1946; also, Malaya Command to ALFFIC, 0 2226, 12 January 1946.
- 17 Gracey Papers, ALFFIC to ALFSEA, 11 January 1946.
- 18 Gracey Papers, 2339b/99, Dempsey to Gracey, 12 January 1946.
- 19 GB, PRO, WO172/9956, War Diary 100 Brigade, "100 Ind Inf Bde Operation Instr No.66", 13 January 1946.
- 20 Gracey Papers, "ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.11", 14 January 1946.
- 21 Gracey Papers, "ALFFIC Operation Instruction No.12", 17 January 1946.
- 22 Gracey Papers, 18 January 1946.

In Saigon, the final copy of the Times of Saigon* was published on 15 January, yet another indication of how rapidly the British involvement in Vietnam was drawing to a close. In the final "Au Revoir" issue the paper reported that the ENSA performance of "Without a Prince", at the Garrison Theatre, had been cancelled due to sickness in the company. It also reported the rescue by French forces of seventeen French nuns, one Vietnamese nun and one French girl. The raid was in the Cho Moi area of the Mekong, and French troops in landing craft from the corvette Gazelle met Viet Minh resistance during the operation. Publication ceased four months to the day since the first edition was printed. From a modest beginning it had grown to being a prime source of news for not only British forces but French troops and civilians ("long starved of straight-forward news"). Wrote the editor. "Like all lusty babies we grew", and "The result was that we were printing 500 copies daily for a veritable league of nations." His last paragraph was as follows:

In the days ahead, each and every one of us will have a part to play. At this moment in London, the first steps are being taken to produce a world organisation which will end war for ever. France and Britain, Allies in the darkest days, are side by side in this great and Christian move towards the light, the pure light of peace. Hand-in-hand let us go forward together. Meanwhile, au revoir.

* The Times of Saigon was edited and published by Bernard Drew; there was also a "Sunday Times of Saigon".

- 23 Gracey Papers, 4/17 Dogra Newsletter.
- 24 GB, PRO, Air 27/2213, 684 Squadron Log, January 1946.
- 25 The British Sector encompassed the area bounded by the following streets (with their modern names): from the railway station along Lê Văn Duyệt, Đường Phạm Hồng Thái and Quốc Lộ Số 1 (all three being the continuation of Lê Văn Duyệt to the northwest) to the village of Ba Queo (just south of the western tip of Tân Sơn Nhứt — from there along the road southwest (which became Le Dai Hanh as it passed west of the race course, turning around the race course to run northeast on Trần Quốc Toàn to a six-way road junction or circus (Công Trường Công Hòa), then south along Petrus Ky or Đại Lộ Công Hòa for two blocks past the railway tracks to Trần Hưng Đạo back to the beginning around Lê Văn Duyệt; the area included the Artillery barracks and Japanese Headquarters.
- 26 Gracey Papers, No. 1197/6, 19 January 1946.
- 27 Gracey Papers, Gracey to Dempsey, 22 January 1946.
- 28 Gracey Papers, ALFFIC to ALFSEA, 23 January 1946.
- 29 GB, PRO, WO 203/4349, NGS 691, 25 January 1946.
- 30 Gracey Papers, O 2382, 26 January 1946.
- 31 GB, PRO, FO 371/53961, F 4307, 28 January 1946.
- 32 Gracey Papers, Cipher 2555, 23 January 1946.
- 33 GB, PRO, WO 203/5026, 28 January 1946.
- 34 GB, PRO, WO 172/1799, HQ SEAC War Diary, 19-27 January 1946.
- 35 GB, PRO, FO 371/53959, Meiklereid to Foreign Office, 1 February 1946.
- 36 Gracey had presented Japanese swords to dozens of French men and women who had helped Allied prisoners and evaders over the years. Three days before he left he held a ceremony, with 100 Brigade troops as a Guard of Honour, during which he presented Madame Betaille with a check from a grateful British government. Her husband had been executed by the Japanese for running an escape route which had saved a number of Allied lives (mainly American).

CHAPTER XVII

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Bn marched from the lines to the naval jetty [—] drums and surnais were played. Men shouted their religious cries. Japs lined themselves up on the road and bowed to the marching column.

9/12 FFR War Diary
30 March 1946.

With General Gracey gone, command of British troops in Vietnam had passed to Brigadier Hirst. The British wanted to send "Check Recce Parties" to Indochina to survey installations and gather intelligence, but Leclerc had asked SACSEA to hold up the movement of these reconnaissance parties until approval had been received from Paris. Browning asked Maunsell to get Leclerc's approval for their arrival with the stipulation that they would be confined to the British perimeter until approval was received from Paris — to delay them would mean the loss of valuable shipping space. Had it been a week earlier there would have been no reason to ask the French — the Check Recce Parties would have gone in anyway, but the French were now in command again.

On 2 February a schedule was published which outlined the program of relief of British and Japanese Army troops by French and Japanese Naval units.* For the British, the main points were the relief on 5 February of 4/10 GR (Thủ Đức), one company 2/8 Punjab (Tân Sơn Nhất) and one company MG Jat (Phủ Thọ Petrol Depot) — these units were to be relieved by the French Army, but all this depended on the arrival of French troops on the Cameronia, which was due in on the 4th.¹ Japanese troops on the Phủ Thọ Petrol Depot were to remain in place.

As for the rest of the Japanese Army, all detachments on guard duties in the Thủ Dầu Một - Biên Hòa - Thủ Đức area were to be withdrawn by noon on 4 February for movement to Cap St. Jacques, where they were to be disarmed on the 5th. These Army units were to be replaced by Japanese Naval units under French Army command which would receive their arms from the Army units they replaced. Of the two Japanese infantry battalions, Yamagishi Butai (down to company strength in Bến Cát) was to be relieved by the Japanese Navy on the 7th, while the stronger Sato Butai would remain in Xuân Lộc until the 15th. Both Japanese battalions were to make their own way to Cap St. Jacques for disarming and depiastering by 9/12 FFR (which had technically replaced the departed 1/1 GR as the Division Reconnaissance Battalion). All Japanese in Cambodia were now ordered to proceed to Cap St. Jacques immediately.

The situation at Cap St. Jacques was curious in that this was the one place where the British and Việt Minh were still getting along fairly well. Regular meetings were held between 9/12 FFR and the local

* The last of 16 Cavalry — C Squadron — departed Saigon on 2 February 1946.

Việt Minh leaders, and in a response to the latter the British had arranged to transport more salt to the area. However, as the 9/12th historian wrote, "... a growing complication was the arrival of the French to take over more and more area under their control."²

Mountbatten returned to Saigon a few days after Gracey's departure. On 2 February he held a meeting at Tân Sơn Nhứt, which was attended by Maunsell, Meiklereid and four other officers. Maunsell reported that the local situation reflected a change of policy coming from Paris. The French attitude was "now that GRACEY is gone, let us make it F.I.C. and not Anglo-F.I.C."³ Mountbatten "said that his fear had always been that there would be incidents for which he would have been blamed."

Maunsell drew Mountbatten's attention to the Press, which was eagerly looking for French atrocities against the Vietnamese. He thought that the sooner the British got out, the better.

To SACSEA's query, Maunsell reported that the "French advance by road was moving very quickly to the 16th parallel, which would be reached in two or three months, but he felt that an overall clearance of F.I.C. would take up to three years." Again in reply to Mountbatten, Maunsell stated that French troops could not get to Hanoi before 1 March. As for Terauchi, Maunsell thought that the old Field Marshal's attitude was, "They think I am an old man who is finished, but I will show them that I can move [to Singapore]." The French wanted to take over responsibility for the Japanese on 20 or 25 February, "which will make the retention of all British forces, apart from the Mission, unnecessary."

Mountbatten asked if the French still wanted the Mission, to which Maunsell replied that "they had not shown their hands yet on this, but that it would be necessary for the administration of the French 3rd Division." It was at this point that the Supreme Commander stated that the Mission would not be a "'hole and corner' affair". Maunsell then said that there had been "a tremendous send-off for Major General Gracey", and added that "General Gracey had even been complimented by the Annamites [Việt Minh]."

A number of miscellaneous points were covered, including the trial landing of a Dakota at Siem Piep so that the SACSEA could visit Angkor. It was laid down that "our general policy should be that the French were running the place, but that it was being fed through the shipping resources of South East Asia."⁴

For the Mission, there were only small arms left in Vietnam on the 5th, since the last British guns had gone when the 23rd Mountain Regiment (Indian Artillery) sailed on the Dunera for Singapore. They were to have moved to Makassar, but there was no room for them there. Not long after, the Dunera passed the Cameronia, inbound with more French reinforcements — their arrival meant that the third and last British brigade could depart. The Cameronia docked in Saigon on the 6th, with 3391 French troops on board, and two days later Rodham's hard-working 100 Brigade Headquarters embarked.* Their last week had been taken up with handing over paperwork to Maunsell's Mission. On the following day Rear Headquarters 20 Indian Division and Headquarters 100 Brigade sailed for India and disbandment, but not oblivion — for they had left as a legacy a foundation of security on which the French must now build.

At the moment the Cameronia was leaving Saigon, the RAF Ensign was being lowered at Tân Sơn Nhứt, where at 1000 hours, to "God Save the King", the flag was lowered — followed immediately by the "Marseillaise" and the raising of the Tricolore.

The final entry in the log of RAF Station Saigon records the end of an episode and the beginning of another:

"And so passed control of Tan Son Nhut airfield from the RAF to the FAF after five months of occupation. These have been months of changing fortunes. We have had many administrative worries but it has been a happy Station. On the 6th of September 1945, we took over the airfield from the Japs; on 9th February we handed it over to the French and on 15th February the Air Headquarters disbanded. We have seen many changes since the September days. At first the only aircraft on the strips were Japanese and these were used by us for all sorts of jobs. But in these five months, we have seen Saigon develop into an important air terminal used by the RAF, USAAF, FAF and RAAF; we have seen the coming and going of 684 Mosquito Squadron and 273 Spitfire Squadron.

And in these early days, the nights were filled with the sounds of firing and many were the times we 'stood by'.

* In January 6292 British/Indian troops left Vietnam, followed by 5638 in February. The rear party of 1/1 GR also embarked on the Cameronia. Mountbatten's original plan had been to put 100 Brigade under French command, but had changed his mind on the strenuous objections of General Auchinleck and the Viceroy of India. 5

Now, though each night still brings
its crops of shootings, peace reigns
— more or less.

In this, our last month in Saigon,
the Airfield looks pleasant and clean.
Gone are the large expanses of water,
the muddy side tracks. Circumferenced
by noble trees, this busy field presents
a most attractive appearance both from
the air and from the ground.

In the shuttered houses of Saigon
town French families are saying
farewell to our men and in the canteen
at nights the last sing-songs reverberate
through the thatched roofs. And so
another chapter in the annals of the
Royal Air Force is closed...." 6

This was a touching last entry in the log, written by an officer who was evidently proud of the part played by his unit in the overall operation — and well he might have been, for the efficient operation of Tân Sơn Nhứt during the weeks that Saigon was under a state of seige by the Việt Minh kept the city alive and in touch with the world. The airlift and the river-borne food convoys from Cambodia had prevented the city from collapsing during the weeks of hard fighting in late 1945.

In February the Foreign Office received a report on Japanese financial manipulations in Indochina — the Japanese had done the same throughout their areas of occupation. The report was compiled by Lieutenant Colonel Sweeny, Gracey's Financial Adviser on the Control Commission. It was an arduous and seemingly impossible task, but Sweeny did a tremendous job of investigative work in clarifying the extent of Japanese financial manipulations. The Foreign Office commented that "Lt.Col. Sweeny appears to have done an admirable piece of detective work" in fitting the story together despite lost or falsified records and uncooperative witnesses.

In his summation Meiklereid told the Foreign Office that a "considerable sum, estimated at 200 million piasters in south F.I.C. and 75 million piasters in North F.I.C. has gone to ground."⁷ The Japanese "Economic Co-Operation Association" had met regularly in the former British Consular Residence in Saigon, and in fact had been sitting when the building was bombed in February 1945 — the members had been killed.

Regarding south Indochina, two of a list of thirteen areas of expenditure were "likely to prove dangerous" — these concerned items 5

(work on fortifications and supplies) and 13 (normal maintenance). Some firms had been passing "large sums" on to third parties before closing up business following the Japanese defeat. Up to 200,000,000 piasters had "gone to ground" under items 5 and 13 alone:

"The money in the whole of FIC that may be available for undesirable use should not exceed 275,000,000 piasters... It seems likely that a large number of the 500 piaster notes declared illegal recently have found their way from South FIC to Hanoi and may strengthen the forces opposing French reoccupation of North FIC." 8

Sweeny traced Japanese expenditures in Indochina from 1941 to 1945*. The revised figures for the rise in fiduciary issue in French Indochina were as follows. In August, 1939, notes in issue totalled 186,206,000 piasters. In November, 1941, after the Japanese entry to Indochina, notes in issue amounted to 338,865,000 piasters. On 9 March 1945, the day of the Japanese coup, the total jumped to 1,548,287,000, and by 31 August 1945, when printing stopped, it had soared to an astronomical 2,349,543,000. It was thought that the French in Hanoi had smashed the plates of the printing presses on the date of the Japanese surrender. General Numata claimed that the greatly increased expenses during 1945 were due to the decision to turn Indochina into a strongly fortified zone and the supply base for Southeast Asia in a fight to the last. During the last three quarters prior to the surrender the Japanese had withdrawn nearly a billion piasters, 256,147,000 on the 14th of August, a large sum of which had gone to Hanoi.

What the Japanese failed to tell Sweeny was that on 23 August 1945 they had advanced six months of pay to all ranks, amounting to some 16,000,000 piasters, yet on 17 November Terauchi had requested the release of 41,000,000 piasters to cover the pay of his troops from 15 October to 31 December 1945. As Sweeny mentioned, "The sum would have covered fourteen months pay and they had already been paid up to February 14, 1946!" Among other things, the six months advance caused a steep rise in black market prices during September.

It was towards the end of November before the British were in a position to get a grip on Japanese assets, which after impoundment

* 1941: 57,210,188 piasters; 1942: 85,607,019; 1943: 119,227,320; 1944: 359,836,910; 1945: 935,667,000.

at that time came to just 58,930,573 piasters. As the Control Commission tightened their hold on Japanese accounts, Japanese expenditure dropped. In September these had totalled 17,000,000, in October 15,000,000, and in November 13,000,000. The British had full control by December, at which time Japanese expenditures plummeted to 4,500,000 piasters; it was forecast to be 3,500,000 in January and 3,00,000 per month thereafter. Japanese firms in Indochina represented the following industries: construction materials, textiles, timber, metals, chemicals, transportation, buying agents, shipping, rice, steel, oil, food, ships chandlers, canned and dried food stuffs, ironwork, refrigeration and cold storage, buyers of hides and meats, wood shipbuilding, gunny sacks, and more. Over 100,000,000 piasters had been paid to these firms after the Japanese Headquarters knew that Tokyo was asking for peace terms. Nearly all of this had passed to third parties and disappeared.

There is more to Sweeny's report, but it seems clear that Hồ Chí Minh and the Việt Minh may not have established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as destitutes, despite their failure to seize the Bank of Indochina in Hanoi. As well as these not insignificant sums of money they inherited a large quantity of Japanese arms and ordnance so that there can be little doubt that they were left in a moderately sound position by the Japanese -- certainly they were more fortunate than most revolutionaries.

In Cochinchina, French marines came to Cap St. Jacques on the 10th, and presumably British - Việt Minh conferences ceased at this time. The Japanese High Command enforced a standard of discipline among their troops to the end. Senior Japanese officers constantly visited their forces, both in the concentration areas and in the field where they were still armed.* On 28 January, the date of Gracey's departure from Vietnam, Numata had a talk with Dempsey in Singapore. At this time Numata was on an inspection trip throughout the vast area of Japanese Southern Army when Dempsey asked him to be completely frank in describing Field Marshal Terauchi's condition and whether Terauchi was really in charge or commanded in name only. Numata said that Terauchi now spent most of his time convalescing near the sea at Cap St. Jacques, and while his health had not improved, at least it was not deteriorating. He suggested making General Itagaki the Deputy

* Some British troops grumbled that Japanese senior officers still possessed staff cars.

Supreme Commander under Terauchi, and, despite misgivings over Itagaki's militaristic past this was done. Numata said that Itagaki's appointment to that position would be in accordance with the Demobilization Ministry (formerly the War Ministry) in Tokyo. On Itagaki's elevation, Numata (whose specific statements were "off the record" and not included in the SEAC report) thought that Terauchi's Headquarters could be moved to Singapore. Numata further said that it was Terauchi's wish to remain in the theatre of war in which he had fought, and not return to Japan too soon.

On the 15th it was Air Commodore Cheshire's turn to hand over, as RAF Headquarters, French Indochina, was disbanded — for the RAF, only No.2 Staging Post remained actively employed at Tan Son Nhut.⁹

With the British presence reduced to just two battalions,* Leclerc was beginning to show signs that he was feeling the increased pressure which had now descended on his shoulders (as illustrated in a report from Meiklereid to the Foreign Office, in which he described Leclerc's reaction to an article by a minor political newspaper).

A new weekly periodical, Justice, was the organ of the "Section Socialiste" of Saigon. It was normally little-circulated, except among Party members, but on 12 February its front-page leader was titled "Pacification". This was a "violent criticism" of the French Army, which was called too brutal, indisciplined, and so on. The article at first caused little comment, as the paper's background was well known, but much to everyone's surprise Leclerc chose to respond to it. On the 14th, Leclerc spoke to a large crowd outside the High Commissioner's palace (he was acting High Commissioner in D'Argenlieu's absence). He said that the reason for his address was attacks by the local press on his troops and the Army were not going to let their flag be besmirched without replying. He went on to summarize French successes despite difficulties with the rebels and that type of war.

Meiklereid thought it worthy of note that Leclerc's delivery — normally clear and precise, as Leclerc was an excellent extemporaneous speaker — was now halting, and he constantly referred to a sheaf of notes in his hand. A French businessman later said that the audience were embarrassed by the address.

* The 9th Jats and 4/10 Gurkhas had sailed for India on 12 February aboard the Orduna, the Jats to Bombay, then Bareilly for disbandment — 4/10 GR to Internal Security duties in a turbulent India until its disbandment in early 1947.

The United States, which had sided with the Communists in their bid for power in Vietnam, now expressed concern that the colonial powers -- treated as political pariahs by the Americans -- were not comfortable in their role as scapegoat. The British Cabinet had had enough, and refused to consider an American request that Indochina remain in South East Asia Command:

"We are unable to agree to the American argument for the continued inclusion of FRENCH INDO-CHINA in the SEAC Theatre.

Arrangements made under Terminal were based on operational requirements for the prosecution of the war against JAPAN. It has always been our intention that the FRENCH and DUTCH should resume full responsibility for their own territories as soon as they are in a position to do so.

Resumption of control by these powers cannot await repatriation of all Japanese which may take some 3 years to complete.

We consider that the arrangements proposed [earlier] would not entail renegotiation of general order No.1. It would only be necessary for the FRENCH formally to recognize S.C.A.P.'s authority as laid down in his directive and for appropriate instructions to be issued by S.C.A.P. to the Japanese. The position of the French would then be analogous to that of the Australians, who although not named in S.C.A.P.'s directive, exercise direct responsibility for the Japanese within their own area of command.

We appreciate, however, that it is unlikely that we shall get the Americans to agree to our point of view now and as an interim measure we would agree to an arrangement whereby Admiral MOUNTBATTEN hands over to the French full responsibility for Southern FRENCH INDO-CHINA, but continues as S.C.A.P.'s agent for the limited purpose of co-ordinating policy in respect of the disarmament and evacuation of the Japanese from Southern FRENCH INDO-CHINA. This arrangement would avoid the necessity of LE CLERC dealing direct with S.C.A.P." 10

Mountbatten affirmed that at midnight 4/5 March a public announcement was to be made to the effect that French Indochina would pass completely to French control, except for SACSEA's "continued responsibility as SCAP's representative for matters directly concerned with the repatriation of the Japanese."

The Japanese were concentrated in four general areas in the Cap St. Jacques/Baria area, and 9 FFR divided their area of responsibility into five sectors: Baria North, Xã Bang, Baria East, Long Hai and Cap St. Jacques; Companies were to "organise at least two patrols a week" in every sector except Cap St. Jacques, which would be patrolled locally under Battalion arrangements. In other words, the Japanese were left pretty much to themselves and their own officers. In a 9 FFR Operational Instruction dated 2 March 1946, these patrols were assigned twelve tasks, from checking on Japanese reports to "where timbers and local material are being collected."¹¹ -- there was now no mention anywhere of fighting the Việt Minh, clearing out hostiles, conducting sweeps, etc., except for a single sentence which said, "Under NO circumstances will armed action be taken against local inhabitants except when defensively necessary for your own security." Since the British and Việt Minh had been conferring at Cap St. Jacques, and as it appeared that there was nothing to be gained from fighting, the two sides left each other alone here. In the same vein, the Commander, Lieutenant Colonel M. Hayaud ("Gunga") Din,* wrote: "Do NOT render direct or indirect assistance to the French Forces unless ordered by me." Under these orders, one company at a time rotated through Baria, spending a week there before being relieved by another company.

Brigadier Maunsell wrote to Lieutenant General Browning from Saigon, in which he reported that the French (D'Argenlieu and Leclerc) were in complete agreement with the proposed handover of responsibility and the following proposed statement to be made simultaneously at SEAC Headquarters and Saigon:

"As from midnight 4/5 Mar. and in accordance with the agreement arrived at with the Allied Powers INDO CHINA South of 16 parallel will cease to form part of SOUTH EAST ASIA Command. From that date control of that part of INDO CHINA will be exercised solely by the FRENCH. However the SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER SOUTH EAST ASIA will continue to act as the representative of the SUPREME COMMANDER and the Allied Powers in the Pacific in the limited role of co-ordinator of the policy of disarmament and repatriation of all Japanese as far as Southern INDO CHINA is concerned." 12

* Later Major General Din, Pakistani Army. Here at this time, also, was Major Manekshaw, destined to become India's only Field Marshal.

The French assumed responsibility for Japanese administration on 15 March 1946:

"The handover has proceeded smoothly, and British Staff Officers are continuing work with French, by their request, for a further two weeks, but only in an advisory capacity. The French have assumed this responsibility without apparently realising all the repercussions that are likely to arise. No difficulty is, however, visualised in straightening these out with the French as these occur. The administrative handover has been without prejudice to finance, the responsibility for which the French will not accept without directions from their Government in Paris. This matter can only be resolved by negotiation between London and Paris."

Leclerc travelled to Haiphong to facilitate the entry of French forces to Tonkin. He returned to Saigon on 25 March and saw Maunsell the following day. Although Lu Han had been heavily bribed by the French (he had already been heavily bribed by HỒ Chí Minh), the local Chinese commander in Haiphong had apparently felt slighted, with results that are now history and are well recorded elsewhere. But events in Tonkin are briefly touched on only in regard to the involvement of two British officers, Lieutenant Colonel Trevor-Wilson in Hanoi and Commander Simpson-Jones in Haiphong (who, unknown to Gracey or, apparently, SEAC) had been sent to Haiphong by the British Pacific Fleet Headquarters.

Maunsell's message to SACSEA said:

"He [Leclerc] thanked me for Brit Military Mission in HANOI and said 'cannot tell you what comradeship of TREVOR WILSON and SIMPSON JONES* meant to me nor can I imagine how we could have obtained FRANCO Chinese agreement without them.'

Behaviour of Americans in HANOI HAIPHONG was apparently so pro-Chinese if not definitely anti-French that LECLERC has taken some, though not yet defined, action here. This has produced considerable consternation with SAIGON American reps.

From LECLERC staff and HANOI paper it appears that arrival TREVOR WILSON and SIMPSON JONES at official saluting base at HANOI was greeted with 'spontaneous and prolonged cheers from crowd.' " 13

* It was said that Simpson-Jones went out in a small boat and almost alone stopped the French-Chinese battle in Haiphong [Trevor-Wilson Papers].

The Americans were received in complete silence. Both Trevor-Wilson and Simpson-Jones have never received due recognition for their absolutely vital intervention during delicate negotiations involving the Việt Minh, Chinese and French. As neutrals they were trusted by all sides and acted as arbitrators and confidants in a number of ways. Both men held regular meetings with Hồ Chí Minh, more than once a week, and got to know Hồ as well as anyone could. Apart from their official duties they did a great deal of humanitarian work, and in noticeable contrast to the dozens of American officers in Hanoi, were responsible for providing relief (and in some cases release) for Frenchmen imprisoned by the Việt Minh. Trevor-Wilson wrote, "The extent of villainy of the Vietnamese police and army authorities was incredible. I was taken to see at the French police headquarters a number of French men and women who had been murdered in a vicious way. Many other people were chained together and marched off..."

Of particular interest was Hồ Chí Minh's assistance to Trevor-Wilson in the arrest of the Indian nationalist and Chandra Bose's deputy, Major General A.C. Chatterjee. As Trevor-Wilson later wrote:

"Another job I had to do, all alone, was to try to capture the members of the Provisional Government of INDIA who were in residence in HANOI. They were awaiting a plane to take them to MANCHURIA or RUSSIA. The Foreign Minister, Major-General A.C. CHATTERJEE, had taken over the command of the provisional government of INDIA at a time when the original commander, CHANDRA BOSE, was killed in an aircraft accident..."

In view of the fact that HO CHI MINH appeared to be friendly towards me, I decided to consult him first. I told him that I had received a message from INDIA (which was of course wrong) saying that the Indian Government would welcome the return of these people who would do better in India than in HANOI.

HO CHI MINH told me that he would place a cordon of his policemen around the 123 Rue Laloe if I went there. He gave me a whistle to blow if I had any disturbance, and then his policemen would come to my aid. In the airfield I had a Dakota with several Royal Air Force men aboard. I went to 123 Rue Laloe unarmed, as HO CHI MINH had said, and asked to meet CHATTERJEE. He later appeared in full uniform, with a revolver at his waist... somehow or other I managed to make him happy." 14

Trevor-Wilson persuaded Chatterjee and his staff to spend the night at the British Mission, and on the following day they all left for Saigon and Singapore.

Trevor-Wilson went on to France with H^o Chi Minh, and returned to Hanoi as Consul, where he stayed until declared persona non grata by General de Lattre de Tassigny in 1952.

On 18 March there was a parade in Saigon "marking the termination of the stay of Major British Forces in F.I.C."¹⁵ This was also the date that Gracey nominated Mr. Meiklereid for the 1946 Birthday Honours List. Mountbatten did not want to forward Meiklereid's name, because of his short period of service, but Gracey intervened strongly and the nomination for the CMG was approved: "His tactful determination to steer the political ship out of what promised to be very troubled waters has succeeded beyond all expectations in seeing it safely in harbour."

Terauchi had since been moved to Singapore, having sailed on the 13th on the Kashima Maru -- two days before the French assumed responsibility for the Japanese. He took with him a staff of 43, six tons of baggage and equipment and one car -- he had asked to take along gold bullion, and it is not clear how or why he still possessed wealth of this kind.¹⁶

As to Terauchi's future, Dempsey agreed with Mountbatten that the Japanese Field Marshal should be spared the rigors of a War Crimes trial. Sir Keith Park disagreed, and said that Terauchi should be tried, "especially in connection with his responsibility for the deaths which had occurred among those prisoners who had been forced to work on the Bangkok to Moulmein railway, unless he was actually certified insane."¹⁷ Mountbatten, at his 297th Meeting, thought that the real culprit was Tojo, and Terauchi was only an intermediary; Tojo, said the SAC, had ordered it built at all costs. In the event, Terauchi was not tried.

In mid-March, in Hanoi, the new Consul* (soon to be elevated to Consul-General) opened the U.S. Consulate, and

"expressed himself very dissatisfied with the results so far attained by the U.S. Mission and expects to have them replaced shortly by Military, Naval and Air Advisors attached to his staff. He fully realises the unfavorable comparison made by the French between the Americans and ourselves, and is obviously going to do his utmost to improve the situation; this probably will take the shape of purchasing facilities with U.S. and Concentrated American propaganda." ¹⁸

* Mr. Read, who went up from Saigon.

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In fact, he was appalled at the political damage wreaked by the OSS, not to mention their callous inhumanity to the French POWs, and had them unceremoniously removed with the utmost speed. Whether the OSS were really as ignorant of the political realities in Indochina and as gullible as their actions would suggest, or whether their conduct was dictated by their ideological sympathy with the Việt Minh and its Marxist leadership, remains an open question.

Mountbatten returned to Saigon in mid-March for a conference with D'Argenlieu and Maunsell, at which time the SAC asked the High Commissioner for an explanation of the difference between "Viet Minh" and "Viet Nam". The French reported that there was still trouble in the South, and that HỒ Chí Minh himself had earlier said he found it necessary to promote resistance in the South in order to provide him with political leverage. 19 It was now time for the last two British battalions to leave Vietnam, their responsibilities having been assumed by the French. For 2/8 Punjab, there had been a break in their routine when on the 11th an entire platoon in seventeen vehicles had to make the long journey to Siem Reap, Cambodia, in order to provide Mountbatten a suitable reception for his visit to Angkor Wat.* At 1030 on 29 March, 2/8 Punjab, less B Company (which remained to guard the Inter-Service Mission), embarked on the Islami and sailed slowly down the Saigon River for Cap St. Jacques.

At the Cape, 9/12 FFR had been reduced to a heavy schedule of cinemas, shooting competitions, football and swimming to keep busy -- a favorite pastime was putting to sea in Japanese trawlers to watch their charges fish. When the time came for 9 FFR to leave, the Japanese staged a farewell drama for the Battalion -- it was well received. There can scarcely have been a more bizarre relationship between victor and vanquished:

"As the concentration of surrendered Japanese troops increased, the men of the Battalion had naturally to come into closer contact with their late enemies, and had an opportunity to observe them closely. It is recorded that their discipline was first class, and they co-operated and carried out orders 100 per cent. Never was there cause for complaint, and the men grew to respect them and showed a tendency to fraternize." 20

* In addition to the considerable cost of moving an infantry platoon to Cambodia and back, a vehicle broke down en route and had to be abandoned.

When the Islami, with 2/8 Punjab aboard, moored at Cap St. Jacques and it was time for the 9/12 Frontier Force Regiment to go, a large number of Japanese senior officers and men lined the Battalion's route of march from their barracks to the jetty. The 9th formed up and marched smartly to the docks, "From lines to the Naval jetty drums and surnais were played. Men shouted their religious cries."²¹ Another writer said of that moment, "... it was a curious, if not pathetic, scene to find the very men who had fought against us so bitterly, now so manifestly sorry to bid the Battalion farewell."²² In a poignant and starkly memorable scene the Japanese along the route bowed to the Battalion as the last British troops marched away from Vietnam.

Maunsell came aboard to wish the battalions goodbye, and at 1215 on the 30th the Islami slipped her moorings and sailed for India.

The British had been responsible for the maintenance of the French and Japanese Surrendered Personnel (JSP) up to 31 March 1946. From 1 April onwards the French took over these obligations, and on 3 April the Combined Chiefs of Staff informed Mountbatten that he could handover his responsibilities for the Japanese to the French. The French accepted this duty with the proviso that the Japanese were gone before their eight or nine month stockpile of supplies (sold to the French by the British) was exhausted.²³

On 8 April there was a terrific explosion in Saigon when the main French ammunition dump blew up. The ceilings in Maunsell's office (two kilometers away) collapsed, and Saigon Radio, located nearby, was blown off the air. The explosion was caused by a careless French soldier who overturned his speeding truck in the depot, which embraced the area of the Botanical Gardens. The depot area was 500 yards by 350 yards, and contained a mixture of French, Japanese and British ammunition, and the total of 6000 tons called for a storage area of two square miles. The explosion destroyed virtually all French Army records, so that the screenings for war criminals, personnel files, records, dossiers, histories, etc. were lost.*

Mountbatten wrote to the Cabinet on 4 May, informing the Government that as a result of discussions between the Mission in Saigon and the French, the latter had agreed to accept complete responsibility for all matters affecting Japanese disarmament and repatriation as of midnight, 13/14 May 1946. When this information was passed to the U.S.,

* Destroyed also were the personal records and papers of Pierre Messmer, recently returned from Viet Minh captivity in Tonkin.

the American Chiefs of Staff wanted to know what time zone this referred to; they were told "GMT" -- Greenwich Mean Time, the standard time used for military operations the world over.

At 0001 on 14 May, SACMISFIC (the Inter-Service Mission) was disbanded; by 15 May all but 920 Japanese (retained by the French) had been repatriated. A reduced ALFSEA Liaison Detachment* replaced the SACMISFIC, and Maunsell left Saigon to become Commandant of the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. The last company of British troops, B Company of 2/8 Punjab, left Vietnam on the following day. The Liaison Detachment personnel eventually became the military attachés, and they met regularly with the Consul, Mr. Meiklereid. The RAF Staging Post, with a strength of 330, remained at Tân Sơn Nhứt, which had become a major stopover point.

From Hanoi, Simpson-Jones told Meiklereid that during his frequent and lengthy visits with Hồ Chí Minh -- he met HỒ at least three times a week, for never less than one and a half hours per visit -- HỒ had expressed the fear that the French would pull back into Cochinchina and cut Tonkin adrift.²⁴ Meiklereid also informed HỒ orally that the British Prime Minister had received HỒ's telegram, but it could not be acknowledged because of the status of the Việt Nam Republic, which was as yet undefined.

On 10 June 1946 occurred the last British casualties of the First Vietnam War, when a "Check Recce Party" was involved in the ambush of a small French convoy of three vehicles near Bãriã. The British (a group of ten in one truck) were actually travelling in the opposite direction, and, by the most unfortunate of coincidences, happened to pass by the French convoy during the first seconds of the ambush, and they were caught in it. The British party returned fire until their ammunition was exhausted, at which time the ambushers moved in for the kill. Six of the British were killed, including four Army, one RAF and one civilian interpreter -- but miraculously, four survived, though badly wounded. One man was missing, and the attackers were thought to have been Japanese rather than Việt Minh.

By July 1946 Saigon was still not quiet and the French were continuing their mopping up operations. At Meiklereid's 8th Staff Meeting with the British service representatives it was noted that there were still about 200 Japanese with the Việt Minh, and on 13 July a force of 150 Việt Minh, accompanied by 20 Japanese, had attacked and derailed the

* 7 Officers and 20 men, plus 3 Naval Officers to supervise refuelling and revictualling of transient shipping.

train from Saigon to Lộc Ninh. A strong French escort drove off the attackers, however. At Meiklereid's 24 July meeting it was reported that the Japanese Naval Headquarters had finally been wound up, and the Japanese Naval personnel had returned to Japan on the vessel Choran Maru. Of the Japanese only war criminals and witnesses remained, together with a few officers detained by the French. On 28 August it was announced that thirty-five Japanese war criminals were being returned from Singapore to Indochina to stand trial for the Langsón massacre.²⁵

The RAF in Saigon had now moved in to the Gia Long School from their quarters near Tân Sơn Nhứt, because of the unrest out there. The discipline of the French armed forces remained poor, and many Foreign Legionnaires (mostly German) were calling on the British Consulate seeking to enlist in the British armed forces.

On 11 September 1946* -- exactly one year after the advance elements of 20 Indian Division had entered a tense and frightened Saigon -- Meiklereid held his weekly staff meeting with the British military representatives. The most senior officer was a Lieutenant Colonel (the Press Officer, who was about to be demobilized) -- the remainder comprised an Army Major, a Naval Lieutenant Commander and an RAF Flight Lieutenant.

Footnotes: Chapter XVII

- 1 Gracey Papers, Rear Hq 20 Ind Div, No. 3370/GS, 2 February 1946.
- 2 W.E.H. Condon, The History of the Frontier Force Regiment (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1962), p.512.
- 3 GB, PRO, WO 203/5026, Minutes of Meeting at Saigon Airfield, 2 February 1946.
- 4 The French Order of Battle as of March 1946 was as follows:
 - ARMY: TOTAL 68,688, including 2450 enrolled partisans.
 - 9 DIC
 - 3 DIC
 - 1 Bde 2 DB
 - 1 BEO (Madagascar)
 - Corps Tps, including 1 BLMEO (Bde Leger Maritime Extreme Orient)
 - 2 armed regts.
 - NAVY (INDOCHINA).
 - 3 Destroyers (Somali, Senegalese, Algerian)
 - 3 Sloops (Annamite, Gazelle, Chevreuil)
 - 2 Tankers (Ilorn, Var)
 - Misc: 8 LCL(L), 2 LST, 6 MFV, 4 BYM.

* On the 11th it was announced that six Vietnamese were found guilty of the Cité Heyraud massacres of the previous year, and executed.

FAR EAST AND PACIFIC NAVAL FORCE.

- 5 Cruisers (Emile Bertain, Tourville, Suffren, Duquesne Gloire)
- 2 Flotilla Ldrs (Triomphant, Fantasque)
- 1 Acft carrier (Bearn)
- 1 Sloop (Savorgnan de Brazza)
- 3 Storeships (Quercy, Barfleur, Cap des Palmas)

AIR FORCE: TOTAL 1300 Men.

- 339th FTR WING
- 2 Spitfire Sqdns
- 2 Transport Sqdns (1 C-47, 1 JU-52)
- Misc units.

[GB, PRO, FO 371/53961, SEACOS 662, 17 March 1946].

- 5 GB, PRO, WO 172/1793, HQ SEAC War Diary, 26 November - 6 December 1945.
- 6 GB, PRO, Air 28/679, Log of RAF Station Saigon.
- 7 GB, PRO, FO 371/53959, 19 January 1946; also FO 371/53459.
- 8 Louis Allen expressed reservations about Meiklereid's assertion that the Japanese passed on large sums of money to the Viet Minh, but wrote:

I agree there's more to be known about Japanese funding of Vietnamese organisations, and I sometimes suspect I may have let the evidence slip through my fingers in 1946. In March of that year, when a number of civilian firms, including Mitsui, were shipping back their documents along with the repatriated soldiers, we established a rule that boxes and trunks should be presented for vetting unsealed and unlocked. One consignment contained a vast number of legal deeds of all sorts, and was in fact locked. My first instinct was to insist they opened the whole damn lot, but they produced a duplicated list of contents which they guaranteed, and some of the guarantors were people I'd known and been helped by before. On the other hand, I was no financial or legal expert, and couldn't be responsible for letting through documentation of this kind alone, so I submitted the list to the Finance Officer - I'm not sure of his exact rank or title - with the British Mission, and asked him if there were any papers in it which ought to be held or scrutinised. I suspect he was in the same quandry as myself, and wrote a self-guarding note, saying as far as he could judge there was nothing in the list which need be retained. So all the papers were shipped back without scrutiny. I don't think it matters a great deal, but it's just possible they might have contained accounts of dealings with VN organisations; on the other hand, it isn't very likely, since they must have known they'd have been vulnerable to a request for opening.

Louis Allen also kindly translated for the author a relevant portion of the Japanese official history (produced by the Self Defense Force):

Extract from Japanese official history of the war, fourth volume of Burma campaign, Shittan; Mei-go Sakusen ("Sittang, and the coup de force in Indo-China"), Asagumo Shimbunsha, Tokyo, 1970.

MONEY

p.683. Restraints on inflation

It was not only the three countries (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) which were poor, but the Japanese Army also. In Indochina military scrip was not used, and expenses incurred in army supply were agreed with the French Indochina authorities on an annual basis, and piastres were loaned by the FIC authorities. So it was natural that the volume was not great. When the Southern Area Army came to Saigon, there was no appropriation for buying of supplies for it, or provision of war materials. At that time, the Banque d'Indochine, the source of supply), was under Army control. However, Lt.-Gen. Tsuchihashi, the Army C-in-C, avoided as much as possible the release of currency, to prevent inflation. So no great inflation occurred. However, around July (1945), 500-piastre notes were issued, and used for military expenditure. These military notes did not command much confidence, and became ineffective after the end of the war.

(Source: Postwar recollections of Tsuchihashi, and of Colonel Ogata, OC 38 Army Paymaster Department).

ARMS.

p.683 also refers to the period at the beginning of August when ammunition, bayonets, pistols and 10,000 rifles taken from the (French) army of Indochina were collected and sent off to Hue for use by the new Vietnamese government, but on the way fell into the hands of the Viet Minh (Source is Tsuchihashi, and reference is also made to Ellen Hammer, who in fact states the Japanese handed over arms to the Viet Minh). The arms and ammo were not greater than this in quantity, because Southern Area Army had earlier ordered that all weapons &c taken from the French should be sent off to the Burma front.

VIET MINH APPROACHES.

p.684. This page details approaches made to Viet Minh by the Japanese Army,* after the failure, in June 1945, of the punitive expedition in the North carried out by 21 Division. The proposed intermediaries were the Kam Sai, Ke Toai, and the mayor of Hanoi, Chan Ban Lai, who drew up a number of propositions describing what the Japanese wanted their relations with the Viet Minh to be, and asking Ho Chi Minh to send a representative for discussions. The end of the war intervened, so nothing seems to have come of this notion.

* i.e. Tsuchihashi (whose diary in Allen's view, is "one of the prime historical sources for the period" -- letter to author, 1 August 1977).

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Allen also provided an excerpt from the account of a Japanese journalist, who was in Saigon in 1944/45:

His name's Wada, and he was a Mainmichi Shimbun political correspondent, finally interned and shipped home in April 1946. In one of his chapters he says something of direct relevance to your theme, namely that he was once asked by a French lieutenant-colonel to report weekly to an agent on anything that might be interesting from the intelligence point of view. He names the agent, a French captain George Wagner, whom he met every Wednesday at the back door of the Cathedral. On one occasion Wagner let fly a storm of violent anti-British abuse, which Wada noted with some relish and retails in full, saying it was representative of the general coldness towards the British felt by the French in Saigon. I don't believe this was entirely true at all, though I quite accept they would use Japanese they believed to be friendly. Many of us were on quite cordial personal terms with the French, and there was some mutual entertainment at most levels, civil as well as military.

Of his own unit's role, Allen wrote:

My unit was "attached" to Maunsell's Control Commission, for the purpose of screening the Japanese. We were members of CSDIC (Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre) and SEATIC (South East Asia Translation and Interrogation Centre) Mobile Section, consisting of members of all services, and after the war we were chiefly concerned with checking up on Japanese intelligence activities and documenting war-time history. On a much smaller scale (and with, needless to say, nothing like the resources in men or equipment) we corresponded to ATIS. One unit with which we'd been connected in Burma, 55 Division, was by this time in Cambodia, and its senior staff officer, Lt.Col. Saito (I think I mentioned him) was involved with tracing Japanese deserters and wooing them back. He was one of the last Japanese to leave Saigon, but we were also in constant touch with some civilians...

When I returned to Saigon later in 1946, after the Mission had withdrawn, and there were only a few officers left, everything was on a much reduced scale, and we shared a house in the Rue Legrand de la Liraye, if I remember its spelling, near the Gia Long School. Screening usually consisted in scrutinising nominal rolls and ticking names off against laden Japanese climbing into rusty little ships. But it also involved the pathetic process of screening Formosans and Koreans, the former in particular a hapless lot caught up in something they were hardly concerned in, and having their lives uprooted for nothing. On the intelligence side, there were of course other chores, but somehow they lacked the excitement of similar exercises carried out in war-time. Having been a student of French, it was of course intriguing for me to see French overseas life at close quarters and it provided me with my first great disillusionment. I'd

expected them all, naively, to spout like Pascal or Racine, and to be intellectually, or somehow fascinatingly, motivated. Whereas there was little to choose between them and the colonial British overseas, both armoured against difference. Of the local population, we knew next to nothing; I'm still staggered at the vast ignorance we showed - partly, no doubt, because we were so exclusively occupied with the Japanese that there was little incentive or time to get to grips with what was happening politically in Saigon - all I remember is that we never referred to VietNam, it was always 'the Annamites', though we did know the Viet Minh and laid every exploding grenade or Boooomp in the Night to their door. Even so, Saigon was a real oasis for most of us.

- 9 Air Commodore Cheshire later provided a fascinating account of his employment of the Japanese Air Force -- the "Gremlin Task Force" earlier referred to in the log of 684 Squadron. Wrote Cheshire at the start:

"When Air Command Headquarters at Kandy detailed me for this appointment they were extremely vague about the duties and responsibilities involved, and this lack of positive instructions was further emphasised when the Staff invited me to write my own directive...

The RAF in FIC were also in difficulties but, unlike the Army, they were short not of men but of fuel. The squadrons had, in reserve, only one hour's fuel or, in other words, they could complete only one sortie each. Here again the Japanese were in a position to provide very useful help. Most of their aircraft had been grounded since the surrender, but many were still serviceable and could be flown. Backing these aircraft was a useful reserve of fuel which, for technical reasons, could not be used in our own aircraft. After some discussion the decision was taken to make limited use of the Japanese Air Force. The limitation was imposed for political reasons, based on the curious idea that bullets fired from aircraft were politically more reprehensible than bullets, equally lethal, fired from the ground." *

* by the Japanese Army.

001

The Japanese Commander seemed pleased at being assigned an operational role, which was confined to "transport and unarmed reconnaissance duties only." Continued Cheshire:

"The Japanese aircraft suitable for the tasks allotted to them ranged from a creditable Jap copy of a Dakota to a small passenger carrier capable of lifting four or five passengers. Some bomber types were also available, useless for passenger work but valuable for lifting cargo."

The daily procedure called for the Japanese Commander to notify Cheshire's staff daily of the number of aircraft available, at which time the tasking was done. Cheshire installed a Squadron Leader and interpreter in a hut alongside the Japanese Commander, and this arrangement worked very well, "confirming previous experience that simple organisations are also frequently the best... Experience in operations showed that once their aircraft were offered a task, there were few technical failures." The next step was to call this force something besides the Japanese Air Force:

"The next stage in the creation of this special force was to obliterate Japanese markings on the aircraft and replace them with R.A.F. roundels. Finally I decided to give this force a special designation, to distinguish them from the R.A.F. and the French Air Force, both of which were also operating in the area. Inspired by the U.S. example set in the Pacific, I selected the term TASK FORCE with the prefix GREMLIN because of its popularity in the R.A.F. at the time. Thus the Gremlin Task Force, or G.T.F., was born."

The Gremlin Task Force undertook a variety of assignments, and their major role in moving 684 Squadron to Bangkok was their last big operation:

"In the short period of their existence they had successfully completed over 2,000 sorties. By the standard of later massive operations, such as the Berlin airlift, this was small beer, but it had usefully filled an unavoidable gap in our logistic operation, and did so at little cost to the British Treasury. The RAF administrative tail supporting this effort consisted of two officers only; certainly one of the least costly air operations undertaken since 1939...

The Second World War and the troubled era that followed gave birth to many so called 'sideshows', the GTF was one of them and although not as unusual as some, I believe its existence and achievements to be worth recording."

These Japanese aircraft had proved extremely useful to both British and French Army Commanders, for much of their pre-operations reconnaissance was done in GTF aircraft.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Walter G. Cheshire, Letter to author, 16 November 1977 .

- 10 GB, PRO, WO 203/5026, Cabinet to SACSEA, No. 873, 26 February 1946.
- 11 GB, PRO, WO 172/10266, War Diary 9/12 FFR, "9 FFR Operational Directive No.6", 2 March 1946.
- 12 GB, PRO, WO 203/5556, COMD 32, 3 March 1946.
- 13 Ibid., COMD 51, 26 March 1946.
- 14 Papers of Lieutenant Colonel A.G. Trevor-Wilson; also personal interviews and letters, 1977.
- 15 GB, PRO, WO 172/10246, War Diary 2/8 Punjab, 18 March 1946.
- 16 GB, PRO, WO 203/2385, 13 March 1946. Terauchi's move had been planned for an earlier date, but it had to wait until 6 Brigade Headquarters moved to Seremban; Terauchi then moved into their vacated quarters.
- 17 GB, PRO, WO 203/5556, SAC's 297th Meeting, 2 December 1945.
- 18 GB, PRO, WO 203/5556, SACSEA to Cabinet, 17 March 1946; also, FO 371/53961, Meiklereid to Foreign Office, 27 March 1946.
- 19 GB, PRO, CAB 122/512, Report on FIC by Colonel Chapman-Walker, 17-29 December 1945.
- 20 W.E.H. Condon, The History of the Frontier Force Regiment (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1962), p.512.
- 21 GB, PRO, WO 172/10266, War Diary 9/12 FFR, 29 March 1946.
- 22 Condon, pp. 512-513.
- 23 Towards the end of March, M.E. Dening, in his capacity as Chief Political Adviser to SACSEA, submitted a final report to Mr. Bevin, the Foreign Minister. With the recent appointment of Lord Killearn as a special commissioner in South East Asia, Dening's functions as political adviser to Mountbatten had come to an end when on 15 March the office of Chief Political Adviser to SACSEA was abolished. In his letter to Bevin, Dening commented:

The report is, I fear, rather long in these days when there is too much to be read. But a great deal has happened in the period. While the war continued political events were subsidiary to the main conduct of the battle. When the war ended it was the political situation which influenced military events...

In the summary of my previous report I concluded with the words: 'But the conclusion of hostilities will give rise to a host of intricate problems.' That has proved to be true."

Some of the more germane portions of the report follow:

... As the year wore on, the campaign in South-East Asia became more and more a purely British-Indian affair. Towards the end of 1944 the decision had been made by the Sino-American command in China to withdraw two Chinese divisions from Burma to avert the possibility of an apparently imminent collapse. This was followed early in 1945 by a decision to transfer the remainder of the Chinese forces from Burma, and later the whole of the United States air forces operating with the South-East Asia Command. The sole American brigade which had operated in S.E.A.C. in conjunction with the Chinese forces in Northern Burma was also transferred to China.

American strategy, in so far as the Asiatic mainland was concerned, was, in fact, concentrating upon China to the exclusion of South-East Asia, whereas the strategy of S.E.A.C. was directed towards opening the Malacca Straits and gaining access to the South China Sea. In so far as the diversion of Sino-American forces to China created gaps in the S.E.A.C. order of battle, the operations of the latter were hampered. The subsequent decision to provide a British Commonwealth force to take part in the main American assault on Japan would have placed further restrictions upon the S.E.A.C. effort.

Militarily there can be no doubt that the Pacific strategy as a means of bringing the war with Japan to an early end was sound. Whether the China strategy, which was also an American concept, was equally sound is more doubtful. Historians may well argue that a combined, instead of a divided, effort might have led to an earlier opening of the Malacca Straits and thus greatly have facilitated redeployment at the close of the European war, whereas it was very doubtful whether the state of China would have admitted of any effective campaign through Chinese territory.

These military considerations are mentioned because they were not without their political cause and effect. The United States had come to regard the Japanese war as something peculiarly their own, just as they came to regard China as their particular protégé. Though commanders might or might not see eye to eye with their British counterparts (and on the mainland, on the whole, they did not), it is doubtful whether, in American eyes, there was any fundamental conception of a joint Anglo-American effort in the war against Japan, whatever might be declaimed from public platforms. In part there was resentment at the alleged unwillingness of Britain to do her share. But far more there was the feeling that this was an all-American show in which American arms both could and would demonstrate both their superiority and their authority over all others.

In this American conception of the Far Eastern war, which was little realised in Europe, S.E.A.C. was always a poor relation. It was the unnecessary front, and as such could always be deprived of resources or have them withheld. The slow progress of its operations, which was due in part to the withholding of resources, and, in part, to American insistence on securing the air route through North Burma to China, was always regarded as a legitimate target for criticism.

In spite therefore of the fact that S.E.A.C. was an integrated Anglo-American command, and in spite of the cordial relations between the integrated staffs, it cannot be said on balance that the campaign in South-East Asia resulted in a better understanding between Great Britain and America. Nor was the existence of the American "India-Burma Theatre" within the command conducive to good understanding. On the contrary, though through no fault of ours, S.E.A.C. was a constant potential source of friction. At the root of the matter lay the fact that America always suspected British Far Eastern policy, and that, in her new-found strength, she was satisfied that her own policy was not only the right one, but also the more disinterested. Whether it was so right or so disinterested remains to be seen.

However that may be, the end of the war with Japan found the British forces of S.E.A.C. and the Sino-American forces of China apart from one another and faced with entirely different sets of problems.

From those problems which now confront S.E.A.C., America has remained aloof. At the same time she has maintained through O.S.S. (now transformed into S.S.U.) detachments in various places, posts of observation which not improbably combine the task of economic penetration, while in Siam she has a strong foothold, including an air staging post, which is no doubt intended to be the forerunner of a commercial air line. For the rest, she retains and exercises the right to continue to suspect us and to criticise us. Individual relations, however, remain cordial.

Before proceeding to review the problems of South-East Asia by countries in their intricate detail, it is well to consider the position of S.E.A.C. when hostilities ceased. The end of the war with Japan found the Command militarily readier than any other to take immediate action. But General MacArthur, who had to take the initial occupation of Japan with comparatively slender forces, and who had by then been appointed Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, was anxious lest any incidents in outlying areas might render his task more difficult. He therefore forbade any reoccupation until he had taken the formal Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay, an event which did not take place until the 2nd September, 1945. A delay was therefore imposed upon S.E.A.C., which had important consequences, particularly in Indonesia.

On the very day that Japan agreed to unconditional surrender, namely, on the 15th August, 1945, Admiral Mountbatten became the unwilling inheritor of a large portion of the former South-West Pacific Command, including Java - unwilling because he was

given no additional resources to meet his largely increased commitment. Indo-China as far as the 16th parallel was also placed finally in his Command. He had thus an area of 1,500,000 square miles, with a population of 128 million to deal with, in addition to some 750,000 Japanese. As for the forces under his command, the additional formations and shipping from Europe which he had been led to expect were no longer forthcoming now that the war was at the end, while there was a steady depletion of the ranks of trained and experienced officers and men by the inexorable demands of release and repatriation.

It is important to remember these military facts, because they were largely responsible for the situation which subsequently arose and which has given rise to widespread misunderstanding as well as to widespread criticism. Admiral Mountbatten was not, in fact, given the tools to finish the job. It is not suggested that there were not good reasons for this. But the results were inescapable.

One of the liveliest targets for criticism has been the continual employment, months after the Japanese surrender, of Japanese troops for the purpose of maintaining law and order. There could hardly be anything more repugnant to the world at large or to the populations which, after years of Japanese occupation, are still compelled to obey Japanese orders (even though they be delivered in a somewhat different voice).

But there was never any likelihood that the forces available to the Supreme Allied Commander could stretch to every hole and corner of the vast area allotted to him. Except in Siam, there was no Government exercising administration, while the organised police forces which existed in South East Asia before the war had disintegrated under Japanese rule. The best that could be hoped for was that stable administrations could be set up at an early date in the areas to be occupied, and that the Japanese could thereafter immediately be disarmed and concentrated for ultimate repatriation. In the event, things turned out quite differently.

It was not only the absence of police forces which enlarged the task of the South-East Asia Command. Throughout the area there were already large quantities of arms in the hands of unauthorised persons. In addition, vast ammunition dumps and stores of arms and military equipment had to be guarded until they could be disposed of. There was thus plenty of material to put in the hands of an enormous population which, in the years of Japanese occupation, proved in the event to have suffered a serious decline in public morals.

The causes of this decline are not far to seek. Prior to 1941 the peoples of South-East Asia had lived in conditions of security and comparative plenty. Whatever the critics of colonial government may be pleased to say today, it is a fact that in South-East Asia the age between the wars was one of security, of comparative stability and of gradual development.

With little or no warning to the average person, his world was rudely shattered and his erstwhile governors and protectors ignominiously dispersed. All that he had looked up to had vanished without any immediate prospect of return, and in its place he was confronted with the harsh and inconsiderate rule of the Japanese, who, while they did nothing to improve the lot of the population, were indefatigable in their efforts to humiliate the white man and to prove that not only was his rule at an end, but that his return was something to fight against. These efforts were by no means entirely successful, but to a varying degree they left behind an unwelcome legacy which added to the already heavy burden of the S.E.A.C.

While the Japanese did their utmost to destroy what had been, they put nothing in its place and there grew up amongst native populations a spirit of resistance which manifested itself in covert attempts to evade Japanese regulations and to outwit them in devious ways. This spirit indeed formed the kernel of the resistance movements which were encouraged by our clandestine organisations, and which, in Burma and Malaya, rendered active assistance to the Allied cause.

But by its very nature this spirit of resistance encouraged a law breaking as opposed to a law-abiding temperament, and what was born of duress has to some extent become a habit difficult to eradicate with the disappearance of that duress. In particular this applies to the youth of the areas concerned, and even in Malaya, which compares very favourably with any other part of South-East Asia in its progress towards rehabilitation, juvenile delinquency is at a premium. Youth was neglected during the occupation except where it was deliberately cultivated to evil ends by the Japanese, as in the case of Java. There will be no complete cure until youth has found, or been given, a new orientation.

The tasks allotted to S.E.A.C. were to disarm and concentrate the Japanese forces and to succour Allied prisoners of war and internees. Together with these tasks there was the somewhat ill-defined responsibility for maintaining law and order, which, however, with the strictly limited forces available, could for practical purposes not extend beyond the areas of actual physical occupation. The preceding paragraphs have shown to what extent the vast quantities of arms and ammunition, the generally prevailing atmosphere of unrest and lawlessness and the absence of organised police forces added to the difficulties of the tasks which were set to the Command. These difficulties were general and not entirely unforeseen. The difficulties likely to be encountered in Indo-China were also not unforeseen. But it was the situation in Java, which was only included in the Command on the day of Japan's collapse, which upset all previous calculations.

It was the necessity to divert much larger forces to Java to cope with a politico-military situation which had not been foreseen which delayed the concentration and disarmament of the Japanese and made it obligatory, in the absence of any stable administration, to continue to employ them on guard duties and even on occasion to use them in a defensive operational role.

The conditions described in the preceding paragraphs were general to the situation as a whole. From the date of the Japanese surrender it was the political situation in the various areas which influenced the military situation and to a much greater extent the situation in non-British than in British territories...

There is no doubt that anti-French feeling in Siam is strong, and when the ex-Regent (now described as the Senior Statesman), who was educated in France, said that he loved France but hated the French in Indo-China, he was probably speaking for most educated Siamese. The fact of the matter is that the French of Indo-China, as they were before the war, earned the liking and respect of none and they have on occasion been described as the scum of France...

French Indo-China.

The relationship of Indo-China to the South-East Asia Command was unsatisfactory from the very outset. Early in 1942 Mr. Winston Churchill and the late President Roosevelt agreed to place both Siam and Indo-China in the Chinese theatre under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. That was when the recovery of these territories appeared remote, and it was presumably felt that something must be done to enhance the generalissimo's prestige at a time when neither Great Britain nor the United States could furnish him with any material assistance in his struggle against Japan.

Such was the position when at the first Quebec Conference in the summer of 1943 it was decided to create the South-East Asia Command. Siam was placed in this command, but, after second thoughts, Indo-China was not, and the subject was left for discussion between Admiral Mountbatten and the generalissimo, the United States being represented by General Brehon Somervell. When the three met in Chungking in October 1943, the generalissimo did not take kindly to the suggestion that either Siam or Indo-China should pass out of his command. Eventually a gentlemen's agreement was put forward whereby the forces of both commands would be free to operate in these territories, the boundaries to be subsequently determined by agreement. Both sides were also to be free to undertake clandestine operations in Siam and Indo-China.

This agreement was put forward at the Cairo Conference in November 1943, but it was not taken, and in the event it was never ratified, though in the absence of any substitute it was held by Admiral Mountbatten to be in force, while the generalissimo never specifically repudiated it.

This state of affairs was unsatisfactory and led to constant misunderstandings between the two commands. It was no doubt with the intent of solving the problem that the Combined Chiefs of Staff at Potsdam in 1945 resorted to the judgement of Solomon and decided to cut French Indo-China into two by the 16th N. parallel, and to allot the southern part to S.E.A.C. and the northern to the China Command. Unfortunately, the legitimate parent was not in this case consulted, so that dismemberment took place with results, which, if not fatal, were at any rate singularly unhappy, and which may lead to starvation amongst many thousands of people in the north.

The late President Roosevelt had on more than one occasion let it be known that in his view Indo-China should not be returned to the French. This opinion undoubtedly influenced the attitude of the United States Chiefs of Staff and of American officers in the Far East. It created not only difficulties with the Americans in an integrated command, but also with the French.

In October 1944 the French attached a military mission under Lieutenant General Blaizot to Headquarters, S.A.C.S.E.A. But early in 1945 there were still difficulties about the despatch of the 5th Regiment of Colonial Infantry, which the French intended to use in a clandestine role in Indo-China.

After the death of President Roosevelt the American attitude changed and it was agreed that French forces should be despatched to S.E.A.C. for employment in Indo-China. The French, on their part, replaced General Blaizot by General Leclerc, who was destined to be the military commander-in-chief in French Indo-China, and appointed Admiral d'Argenlieu as High Commissioner-designate. The personality of these two men has undoubtedly assisted the return of the French to Indo-China.

When Japan collapsed there were not sufficient French forces in the Far East to assume responsibility in Southern Indo-China. The Supreme Commander's first task there was to secure control of the Japanese Headquarters for the Southern Regions. This was accomplished by flying in to Saigon via Bangkok a brigade of the 20th Indian Division and the establishment of a control commission under Major-General Gracey, who was also the commander of the division and of the Allied forces.

In March 1945, the Japanese, who had become suspicious of French intentions, seized control of the Government of French Indo-China, under Admiral Decoux, which they had hitherto tolerated. There was some sporadic fighting by resistance elements which eventually escaped into Chinese territory. Thereafter the subjugation and humiliation of the French in Indo-China was complete. By their subservience to the Japanese they had earned the contempt both of the latter and the native population, and when the Allies reached Saigon French prestige had sunk so low as to be non-existent.

It is desirable at this stage to review briefly the political situation as it discovered itself upon our arrival in Saigon. The Japanese coup of March 1945 had rendered it more difficult to gain intelligence about Indo-China and though the existence of anti-French movements was not unknown, the situation was at first confused until a clearer picture could be obtained by observers on the spot.

A nationalist movement existed in Indo-China as long ago as 1911, but it was not until 1930-31 that serious disturbances occurred. These were rigorously suppressed by the French, as were further disturbances in 1940. The Ammanite United Independence party (the Vietminh) thereupon went underground.

During the Japanese occupation, while the Laotians and Cambodians continued on the whole to support the French against the Siamese and the Annamites, in Annam, Tongking and Cochin China the nationalist groups centred round the Vietminh were strongly encouraged by the Japanese. In March 1945 the Japanese proclaimed the complete independence of Cambodia, Luang Prabang, and Annam. In May, Tonking was incorporated with Annam, and, in August, Cochin China was incorporated, the name Vietnam being reintroduced. At first an empire, it subsequently proclaimed itself a republic.

France on her part had, in March 1945, proclaimed her intention to grant autonomy to French Indo-China within the French Empire.

With the connivance no doubt of the Japanese, the Vietminh were loud in their determination to resist the return of the French. In fact, the situation was not dissimilar to that which was subsequently discovered in Java, with the important differences that the Annamites had not been nearly as well trained and organised as their counterparts in Java, nor were they as well armed.

It was never the intention of the Allied Command to do more than to establish a bridgehead at Saigon through which French troops would eventually pass to the reoccupation of the country. The difference as compared with the Netherlands Indies was that whereas the French had battle-trained divisions which they could employ as soon as the ships could bring them, the Dutch had no trained formations at all.

It was inevitable that the Vietminh should accuse the British of supporting the French against them, and the Sino-American command north of the 16°N. parallel was either unable or unwilling to stem the torrent of abuse against Britain and France which poured from the Hanoi radio. The chorus was naturally taken up all over the world wherever it gives pleasure to criticise Great Britain.

But, in fact, the British forces went to Saigon to accomplish their main tasks of disarming and concentrating the Japanese and of rescuing prisoners of war and internees and having accomplished this task they have come away again, with the exception of a small force guarding the Japanese, which will gradually be withdrawn.

The rest has been done by the French. On the night of the 23rd September, they staged a coup and recovered from the Annamites government buildings and police stations in Saigon. Some fighting ensued, in which, from time to time, British forces were inevitably involved. But gradually the area of control was extended and order restored. In the meanwhile the French had held early conversations with the Annamites and they had continued a policy of negotiation while imposing order by force where necessary.

By the end of January it was possible for General Gracey to relinquish command at Saigon and for the greater portion of the 20th Indian Division to be withdrawn. On the 4th March, 1946, S.E.A.C. relinquished control over southern Indo-China, though Admiral Mountbatten continues to act as the agent for General MacArthur, as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, in the disposal of Japanese surrendered personnel. A small British military mission remains at Saigon.

The troubles of the French are not over, but they do not fall to be dealt with in this report. In October 1945 Mr. E.W. Meiklereid proceeded to Saigon as Political Adviser to General Gracey, and on the 18th February he assumed his functions as His Majesty's Consul-General at Saigon. He has reported in detail the events which have taken place since his arrival in Saigon.

Looking back, it is possible to say that Great Britain has liquidated her military commitment in Indo-China with less difficulty than might have been anticipated. It is to be doubted whether our operations will have caused any permanent anti-British feeling amongst the native population as a whole, and the vituperation has died down. When one considers how traditionally easy it is for British and French temperaments to clash, it is very satisfactory that we should be leaving Indo-China on good terms with the French civil and military authorities and great credit is reflected upon all concerned. The future of Indo-China now rests with the French, and it remains to be seen how they will discharge their undertakings...

... Mention should be made of the conduct of our forces, both British and Indian, who, though the war was over, continued to operate in circumstances of great difficulty and often of great personal danger, not only without complaint, but with the same devotion to duty which they had displayed while the war was still in progress.

Economic Factors.

The sudden end of the war with Japan brought S.E.A.C. face to face with economic conditions which, though they were not entirely unforeseen, yet demanded measures which the command was not equipped to undertake. Whereas in Europe elaborate planning had preceded the collapse of Germany, in the case of Japan planning was, almost up to the moment when the last shot was fired, based on the premise that the war would end in November 1946. The results of this unpreparedness, for which S.E.A.C. was in no way responsible, were unhappy. In the circumstances it is surprising that things have gone as well as they have.

The conduct of the war in South-East Asia had demanded the setting up of civil affairs organisations and of planning against the day of reoccupation. But while hostilities were in progress reoccupation envisaged no more, at any rate in the initial stages, than the prevention of disease and unrest amongst the population, and rehabilitation and reconstruction only to the degree that they facilitated the conduct of military operations. With the end of the war, however, rehabilitation and reconstruction are no longer of secondary, but of primary importance, and special machinery is required to bring conditions back to normal with as little delay as possible.

In the case of S.E.A.C. the sudden end of the war meant that there were only the war staffs to deal with the host of economic problems which were to descend upon them. Not only were the military staffs not reinforced, they became more and more depleted as time went on with the demands of retrenchment and demobilisation. The

civil requirements of tens of millions of civil population had to be screened by the Principal Administrative Officer's staff. The military administrations, known somewhat misleadingly as civil affairs, which had always been starved of man-power, were called upon to perform superhuman feats, while the Economic Intelligence Section of the Directorate of Intelligence, originally created for a totally different purpose, was saddled in the early stages with the task of collecting the data without which future requirements could not be estimated. Great credit reflects on those who, with little or no warning, readily undertook new and in many cases unaccustomed labours.

But with the best will in the world the military command, with its operational commitments and the responsibility for the welfare of large military forces, could do no more than devote part-time attention to what is unquestionably a whole-time job. The lesson to be learned from this is that it is as necessary to plan for the end of the war as it is for the beginning and for the conduct of it. Once again S.E.A.C. had not been given the tools.

The main economic problems confronting the command did not differ from those prevailing in other war-stricken areas. They were, and still are, shortage of food, of transportation and of inducement goods. In addition, Burma has been shattered by war; Siam is in the throes of a fearful inflation, while the political situation in Indo-China and the Netherlands Indies has prevented the movement of goods and the restoration of economic life, though in the latter area certain islands (such as Celebes) have made greater progress than others. Only in Malaya has there been steady progress towards recovery, though much remains to be done.

Rice being the staple diet of South-East Asia, the shortage of it is likely to have most serious consequences. Burma, the largest surplus producer of all, has been able to furnish a negligible quantity. In Siam, where there is known to be a considerable surplus, the political situation, inflation and general inefficiency have together conspired to prevent more than a trickle from flowing to deficit areas. In Indo-China, the arbitrary division of the country for military purposes, and the general unrest make it impossible to estimate at present whether any surplus will be available for export. Java, which was at one time self-supporting, has now become a deficiency area. The prospect is not an encouraging one.

Two immediate problems present themselves. The first is to extract and distribute available stocks. The second is to ensure maximum planting in the coming season. It is in connexion with this second problem that we come up against the question of inducement goods. The result of the introduction of Japanese currency and the debasement of existing currencies by the Japanese has been to destroy the faith of the peasant in money. That faith can only be restored if he is able to buy for the money which he receives in payment for his products the goods which he requires. Until he can do this he is unconvinced of the value of paper and will tend to grow only for his own requirements. The need, therefore, to provide goods, and in particular textiles, which will induce the farmer to grow a maximum crop, is an urgent one.

As was to be expected, the end of the war found South-East Asia in financial chaos. In Burma and Malaya it was found possible to ban Japanese currency with the entry of our troops. This somewhat drastic step cannot have failed to cause some temporary hardship, but it was effective. It has, however, had a curious after-effect in contributing to the lack of faith in paper money which still prevails amongst the ignorant, who reason that if one currency can become valueless overnight, what is to prevent the same thing happening to any other paper currency.

In Siam the note issue is eight times that of pre-war days, and Herculean steps will have to be taken to provide a remedy. Whether the Siamese are capable of Herculean steps remains to be seen.

In Indo-China the French maintained the value of the piastre. But in view of the division of the country it is likely to be some time before the financial picture becomes clear.

In the Netherlands Indies the Dutch successfully introduced a new N.E.I. guilder issue in many of the outer islands. But in Java and Sumatra the Indonesians murdered anyone found in possession of Dutch notes, and as our position was for many months so insecure even in the areas nominally under control, the Japanese guilder continued to circulate, without any foreign exchange value at all. Only in March 1946 was it found possible to introduce the N.E.I. guilder within a limited area, while the Japanese guilder was given a temporary exchange value of 3 Dutch cents until it could be withdrawn. It is as yet too early to estimate the effect of this measure. The exchange rate of 2s.7½d. to the new N.E.I. guilder is considered by a British financial expert to be too high, since that in Holland is understood to be only 1s.10½d.

The Japanese.

Even to those who knew the Japanese before (if anyone knows a Japanese), it could only be a matter of conjecture in August 1945 how they would behave in defeat, since they had never been defeated before in living memory. It was, therefore, with mingled sentiments of curiosity, suspicion and doubt that a party set out with Admiral Mountbatten's Chief of Staff in August to meet Field-Marshal Count Terauchi's Chief of Staff, who had been summoned to Rangoon to discuss the implementation of the surrender terms.

In the event the Japanese were correct, if ill at ease. Though as an act of courtesy they were allowed to retain their swords (since the formal surrender was not to take place until the 12th September in Singapore), for which they rendered formal thanks, their escorts and their close surveillance can have left them in no doubt of their defeat.

From the outset - though on our part suspicion naturally died slowly - it became evident that the Japanese, having been ordered by their Emperor to surrender, intended to obey that order to the letter. Indeed, except for isolated instances and more particularly in Java, the Japanese have carried out their obligations.

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From the first they pleaded that they should carry out the surrender voluntarily themselves. That is to say, having received the orders of the Supreme Allied Commander, the Japanese High Command would then convey these orders to subordinate commands and accept responsibility for their execution. They also asked that all orders given by the Allies should be in the name of the Supreme Allied Commander. Both these requests were granted, and in practice, with only few exceptions, the procedure has worked very well.

It has already been explained in this report why it was necessary to continue to use armed Japanese for defensive and guard purposes in certain areas. At times they became involved in hostilities and on occasion displayed as much gallantry and devotion to duty at the behest of the British as they had in the days of their own arrogant domination.

Elsewhere the Japanese were employed as labour, and here, too, they performed the tasks assigned to them without question and with an efficiency which often compared favourably with the performance of local native labour.

The effect of all this has been vaguely disturbing. The Japanese have, in fact, been carrying out their "defeat drill" with the same discipline and determination which characterised their aggression. It is a mistake to assume that the spirit which animates them is not the same. But their general behaviour has been such as to give rise to a sneaking sense of almost admiration amongst the citizen-soldiers of a nation which notoriously cannot hate for long.

Fraternalisation with Japanese is fortunately not in question, for the customs and habits of our two nations are so different as to render anything of the sort distasteful. But the orderly behaviour of the Japanese in the midst of disorder; their efficiency, which is without doubt incomparably greater than that of most of the indigenous inhabitants of this part of the world, and their ready acquiescence are liable to give rise, even if only sub-consciously, to the thought that "they are not so bad after all."

Nor would they be, if they were animated by a different spirit. But there is no convincing evidence that the Japanese in South-East Asia are changed in spirit. At any rate at first they did not even admit defeat. The vast majority of them had not been in Japan for a long time and had not witnessed its destruction. Their view was that they were undefeated, and that they were merely obeying the orders of their Emperor, who, in order to avoid further bloodshed in the world, had told them to lay down their arms.

Today most Japanese in this area are probably conscious of their defeat and to this the efforts of our former political warfare organisation have without doubt largely contributed. But what next? It is not difficult to change the words which issue from the lips of a Japanese - one could occasionally accomplish that even in the bad old days - but it is quite a different thing to change his way of thought. And it is far from being an advantage to have him under one's control far from his own country, since it is only in Japan that his regeneration can take place - if at all. However excellent our propagandists, they are too few in number even to begin to know what three-quarters of a million Japanese scattered over a wide area are thinking.

The Japanese in South-East Asia have, in the main, not been defeated in battle (except those who were in Burma). They may be convinced of their defeat, but they may equally well be determined to do it again when opportunity offers. Segregation in remote areas will do nothing to convince them to the contrary. They will be outcasts in an alien land with much time for thought, which may well breed a spirit of revenge.

There is another danger and that is that present discipline may break down. This may, in non-British territories, lead to reprisals, or it may, particularly in the case of Siam, lead to a restoration of Japanese confidence as a result of their ability to defy authority.

Everything, therefore, points the same way, namely, that the Japanese should be repatriated to Japan as soon as possible. But S.E.A.C. has not the resources and the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers has so far not proved helpful. At the present rate, repatriation will take several years, with consequences which can only be bad. The problem is an extremely serious one, which must be tackled resolutely - and soon.

[GB, PRO, FO 371/53995 (F.5093)].

24 GB, PRO, FO 371/53964 [F 9106].

25 Numbers of Japanese in Indochina as of:

	<u>14 August 1945</u>	<u>14 August 1946.</u>
[SOUTH]	71,000 military 5,000 civilian	400 military 50 civilian + 500 deserters
[NORTH]	50,000 military 2,000 civilian	15,000 military 250 civilian

[FO 371/53965; Meiklereid's Meeting Notes, 4 September 1946].

CHAPTER XVIII

EPILOGUE

Considerable, if less well-defined, administrative and political responsibilities were also assumed by the British military authorities in the foreign territories of Indo-China and Indonesia...

Admittedly no formal British Military Administrations were proclaimed in these countries, but within certain limited areas administrations came into existence of a clearly military character since they were set up by the local military commanders and remained responsible to the latter in administrative, and, even more markedly, in political matters. And these commanders were British. And again, although the staffs charged with general administration were not in the main British, yet it was British military technicians who were largely responsible for the revival of essential public services. Furthermore, outside these limited areas of active administration, the vacuum left by the absence of any effective government tended always to suck the British military commanders into situations in which they found themselves driven to accept varying degrees of political or administrative responsibility...

But throughout the first months after landing of British forces the question was always present whether, and if so to what extent, the British commanders should assume political or administrative responsibilities outside these limited areas. Some description must be attempted of the sharp and distressing dilemma facing these commanders and of the manner in which it was met. 1

F.S.V. Donnison.

In the vast, complex and bloody story of post-war Indochina, Gracey's relatively small band operated in a restricted area of Vietnam for a brief period of time. Yet their presence was of profound importance with far-reaching consequences out of all proportion to their numbers and length of stay. Central to this history was the character of Douglas Gracey, a misunderstood and unjustly maligned officer who has fallen victim to the spate of ideologically motivated historians spawned in the postwar era. These academic Pied Pipers have led a curious assortment of followers -- journalists, politicians, "instant historians", and the rest -- to mimic their criticisms of Gracey. Scarcely any of the authors in question had either met Gracey or spoken to any of his principal subordinates and, because the main body of official records did not become available to historians until very recently, the writing about this period tended to be a "fashionable" reflection of the prevailing ideology of certain factions in the academic community, based upon personal political prejudice and guesswork.

Gracey's accomplishments are rendered even more impressive when viewed against the background of conflicting pressures under which he was operating. Squeezed on the one hand by the French and Việt Minh, with all that implied, and on the other by an ambitious and politically sensitive Supreme Commander, a Socialist home government and the Viceroy and Commander in Chief, India, he performed his mission in an area where tension ran high with a small force amidst a numerically superior and undefeated Japanese Army. An officer with anything less than Gracey's professional competence, common sense and force of character might not have proved equal to the task. When he left Vietnam he had accomplished all he had been asked to do and had earned the respect of the French, the Japanese and, as is attested to in official sources, the Vietnamese.

Germane to this history are passages from F.S.V. Donnison's official history, British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943-1946. Donnison explained the differences between the Dutch and French approaches to their respective returns to Indonesia and Indochina.

French sensitivities appeared to have played a major part in the decision to send a small British force to Indochina:

"There was a different approach in French Indo-China. Before any planning for overt operations began, and before the French had been able to

turn their attention from Europe to the Far East for the purpose of any detailed planning, it became clear that the re-occupation would take place as the result of the surrender of the Japanese and not as the result of military operations. The French, for their part, were dedicated to the task of re-building their lost prestige as a great power. Consequently, while the Dutch planners for Indonesia accepted dependence upon SEAC for the re-establishment of their administration, French plans, drawn up at a much later stage, were far more concerned to avoid the disadvantages that must ensue if their administration appeared to have been re-established, not by themselves, but by foreign forces. Accordingly the agreement between Admiral Mountbatten and the French provided that the forces of South-East Asia Command would enter the country only to enforce surrender of the Japanese forces and to liberate Allied prisoners of war and internees. No responsibility was placed upon them to maintain order*or to re-establish French administration. No notice or proclamation was to be issued by the Allied Commander. The law to be administered, and the manner of its promulgation, were matters for the French, not for the occupying forces of South-East Asia Command. In all cases the Allied (but in fact British) Force Commander was to be required to conduct his dealings with the civilian population through the agency of the French Administration. It may be noted in passing that the inevitable paramountcy of military interests and the inability of the French Administration to function without the support of British troops ultimately drove the Force Commander in French Indo-China to issue a proclamation on 19th September 1945, announcing his intention to ensure the maintenance of order in that part of Indo-China which fell within his command. But he did not proclaim any law that would be enforced." 2

Donnison's description of the postwar atmosphere in Asia, marked by the various nationalist explosions, provides an excellent background for an appreciation of the milieu into which Gracey was "pitchforked" (to use General Kimmins's apt expression):

"In those dependent territories of south-east Asia where nationalism was a force to be reckoned with before the second world war, the attention of the casual observer was apt to be monopolised by the clamour of the small groups of extremists

* Throughout French Indochina.

dedicated to the attainment of national independence immediately and by the use of force if necessary. It was consequently easy to assume an absence of nationalist feeling in the people at large. But there was in most of the countries concerned an underlying and widespread preference for self-government, even if this was to be bad government, springing from a natural pride strongly reinforced by the political teachings of the West. This preference mostly found no expression and seldom led to action. There were many reasons for this. There was fear of the power that the European wielded. There was respect for his scientific knowledge and practical ability. There was, here and there, a true feeling for European culture and political ideals. There was genuine friendship for individual Europeans. Many Asians had begun to acquire a vested interest in the undoubted material benefits that European rule had brought - greater security for all, a higher standard of living and culture for some. At the same time there was a scarcity of leaders of the necessary stature among the extremists, for the ablest men were likely to find a career within the existing framework. Again, before the war there had been no obvious occasion for the detonation of revolution. Above all, perhaps, there was the mere habit of being governed, which ensured that most people accepted the existing administration without much more than a grumble, and preferred to approach independence by decently-spaced stages. It was only the few who broke through these restraints; and this not always because they were more courageous, or more patriotic, but often because they had less to lose by destroying the existing social order and plunging the country into chaos and violence. They were often, and were often felt by their own compatriots to be, irresponsible, and were accordingly, in a sense, unrepresentative of their people. In a wider sense, however, most of the latter were at heart in sympathy with the ultimate objects of the extremists and could not but be stirred by the thought of their personal bravery, however much they might disapprove of their methods.

Much of this inertia was broken down by the war. Respect for the foreign rulers, fear of their power, ebbed away as the Europeans were defeated and fled before the Asian conquerors, or were imprisoned and humiliated by them - though personal friendships often survived. Vested interests disappeared as the old society crumbled away. The habit of generations was rudely broken.

The absence of Europeans opened to larger numbers than before the experience of employment in administrative work and thus, rightly or wrongly, dispelled diffidence in their own ability to do the work of Europeans. And chaos both threw up the leaders, giving the tough and ruthless their opening, and brought the opportunity to break with the past.

Nationalism, thus released from its inhibitions, was deliberately encouraged by the Japanese, at first with the aim of enlisting its support in the crusade against the white man, later, as the possibility of defeat forced itself upon them, in order to leave a legacy of trouble to the forces of re-occupation. In particular, youth movements were formed, sometimes armed, and trained to violence against Europeans and Americans. In quite a different, unintentional way the Japanese did almost as much to stimulate nationalism by their arrogance and brutality. These roused hatred against themselves as foreigners and so strengthened feeling against other foreigners also.

But it was not only the Japanese who encouraged nationalism for their own ends. There were few countries in south-east Asia where Communists did not seek to work their way into power under cover of such movements. And there were few countries in which the British and their Allies did not also seek to raise the forces of nationalism against the Japanese. Local underground movements were befriended, training was given in sabotage and guerilla warfare, arms and money were supplied. In fact all parties, friend and foe alike, were vigorously engaged in whipping up nationalist enthusiasm.

It was hardly a matter for surprise, therefore, that when the Allies re-entered Burma, Indonesia, and Indo-China, they found a nationalism that was a very different force from that which they had known before the war. Nearly all the inhibitions which had kept it in check had been dispelled so that the movement had gained in strength and confidence. Everywhere nationalist armies had been raised, whether to eject the Japanese or to resist the return of the Europeans, or both. These armies, by western standards, were ill-equipped, ill-trained, ill-organized, and not very large. Yet they had their own limited, but not ineffective techniques; and their members had fought, and some had died, for the independence of their people; there could be no greater stimulant to nationalism. And everywhere its leaders called for 'freedom', a slogan that few dared resist - neither the indigenous

moderates, shamed or terrorised into support by their fiery compatriots, nor most of the returning European powers, bound by their own professions in the Atlantic Charter, conscious also of world opinion, and influenced by the steady growth of a social conscience in the west which had coloured the whole trend of their colonial policies. There was no doubt of the new strength of the nationalist movements.

It is more difficult to answer fairly the question whether the movements were in fact representative of the majority of the people or not...

The British Government's ultimate policy had been repeatedly asserted both in and out of Parliament. In regard to India, the Acts of 1919 and 1935 made substantial transfers of power. In 1940 the British Government had accepted the principle that Indians should themselves frame a new constitution for a fully autonomous India. In regard to Burma it had been stated in Parliament on 22nd April 1943 that the aim of the British Government was to assist Burma to attain complete self-government within the British Commonwealth as soon as circumstances permitted.

The Dutch, in December 1942, looked forward to '..... a commonwealth in which the Netherlands, Indonesia, Surinam and Curacao will participate, with complete self-reliance and freedom of conduct for each part regarding its internal affairs.....'

The French, in March 1945, declared their intention to create a French Union that should include an Indo-Chinese Federation and said 'Indo-China will enjoy, within this Union, its own freedom.' The inhabitants of the Federation '..... without discrimination of race, religion, or origin and with equality of merit..... will have access to all Federal posts and employment in Indo-China and in the Union.'

The vaguely liberal tone of these pronouncements was given further expression in the Atlantic Charter of 1942 to which the colonial powers concerned had signified their adherence. The second clause of this charter read '..... they [the United States and the United Kingdom] desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned.' The third clause

read '.... they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.' The Charter of the United Nations included the following aims: '.... to re-affirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small; ... to ensure... that armed forces shall not be used, save in the common interest

Against the background of these professions there could be little doubt what attitude would be taken by world opinion towards any attempt to re-establish colonial rule against opposition. And, whether this opinion was right or wrong, superficial or well-informed, it could not easily be disregarded. Britain could afford, even less than most, to disregard and so to stultify the organization for mutual security that she was helping to build and upon which she must expect increasingly to depend for protection against major aggression!"3

Addressing specifically the problems faced by officers like Gracey, Donnison went straight to the heart of the matter:

"Considerable, if less well-defined, administrative and political responsibilities were also assumed by the British military authorities in the foreign territories of Indo-China and Indonesia, and this narrative would be incomplete without some account of these. Admittedly no formal British Military Administrations were proclaimed in these countries, but within certain limited areas administrations came into existence of a clearly military character since they were set up by the local military commanders and remained responsible to the latter in administrative, and, even more markedly, in political matters. And these commanders were British. And again, although the staffs charged with general administration were not in the main British, yet it was British military technicians who were largely responsible for the revival of essential public services. Furthermore, outside these limited areas of active administration, the vacuum left by the absence of any effective government tended always to suck the British military commanders into situations in which they found themselves driven to accept varying degrees of political or administrative responsibility. A full political history of these times and of the complex and delicate problems arising would fall beyond the scope of this book. But throughout the first months after landing of British

forces the question was always present whether, and if so to what extent, the British commanders should assume political or administrative responsibilities outside these limited areas. Some description must be attempted of the sharp and distressing dilemma facing these commanders and of the manner in which it was met. This dilemma, was mainly the result of three conflicting considerations. On the one hand were the obligations of friendship felt by the British towards their Dutch and French allies. On the other was loyalty to the liberal policies focused in the Atlantic Charter. Thirdly, the balancing of these first two considerations had to be undertaken in full knowledge of the restrictions imposed upon the British commanders by the fact that virtually all the troops under their command were borne on Indian, not British, establishments...." 4

Donnison further discusses the use of Japanese troops, another point on which Gracey has been frequently criticised:

"Nor was it certain whether the Japanese forces in this area would obey the Imperial order to surrender. Most of them were undefeated and some had threatened to continue fighting. To minimise the possibility of resistance it was ordered that no Japanese-held territory should be occupied until the general surrender had been formally made to General MacArthur in Tokyo Bay. And after this it became of the first importance to establish control of the main Japanese headquarters in Saigon. Only after this had been done, and the new base at Singapore had been established, could general re-occupation be undertaken. Weeks must clearly elapse before British troops could be landed in Indonesia.

The increase in the Supreme Allied Commander's responsibilities was far greater than the mere increase in the area of his command. Nowhere throughout the new area was there any government functioning at the time of the surrender...

Admiral Mountbatten had no option in the circumstances but to place upon the Japanese Supreme Commander and his forces the responsibility for maintaining order until the Allied forces could arrive to relieve them." 5

Dennis Duncanson further described the situation in south Indochina:

"The principal elements in the situation were that the French authorities in Indochina had thrown in their lot in 1940 with Vichy, so that, although metropolitan France was one of the Allies, French officials in Saigon were, as a group, technically traitors and liable to be treated as enemies; that, on March 9, 1945, the Japanese had interned the whole French administrative cadre and members of the military garrison; that the Japanese had nevertheless not formally proclaimed a military occupation - they were with local French consent given under duress, not by request - or set up any military administration in place of the deposed French administration, except in areas where they had some definite military interest; that the Japanese had recognized the Emperor Bao Dai as henceforward being independent of French protection in Annam and Tonkin and, a few days before the ceasefire, as sovereign in the French colony of Cochinchina as well - although such unilateral acts by an occupying power would have no validity in international law and the Emperor lacked the administrative machinery through which actually to govern; that the Indochina Communist Party, in the guise of the Viet Minh, had taken advantage of - and in many places deliberately aggravated - the administrative vacuum and the breakdown of the retail trade in food in order to establish their own cadres, at gunpoint, in strategic positions in Tonkin and northern Annam; that various sectarian and bandit groups had done the same in the countryside of Cochinchina; that the Emperor was in process of abdicating in Hué under Communist pressure from Hanoi (August 25), clearing the way for the declaration of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam by the Viet Minh (September 2, the day of the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay); and that Viet Minh agents in Saigon had set up a Committee for the South, which was inviting other groups, by persuasion or coercion, to join it, in order to procure a popular mandate for accession of Cochinchina to the new republic in Hanoi. It was extremely difficult to know who was who. In any case, the elements in the situation summarized here were at best sketchily known outside the country, where military and political decisions had to be made by the victorious powers, uncertain what precedents in international law they should act on, if indeed the circumstances were not altogether novel...

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The compromise reached by the Joint Chiefs of Staff at Potsdam ratified at last the two de facto spheres of operations by fixing a formal boundary between them at the 16th parallel; the southern half of Vietnam thus fell to British occupation because South-east Asia Command was a British command, not because of any implication of British political rights in Indochina. Indeed, it was no function of a wartime military conference, such as that at Potsdam, to commit the participants or anybody else to permanent disposal of the territories being fought over, or to transfer of sovereignties and so on; such matters must fall for decision after the heat, the pressures and the tension have passed and when all the relevant information is to hand, in the eventual peace treaties. The task in hand at Potsdam was to make arrangements, largely of a humanitarian kind, for safeguarding Allied prisoners of war, for the physical removal of Japanese forces, for the welfare of civilian populations, and for the care and maintenance of public installations and institutions. The contrary view, that conquest bestowed absolute rights of decision on the conqueror - implicit in current strictures on General Gracey - is supposed by writers on international law to have gone out with the eighteenth century." 6

Duncanson went on to make a telling point in the central issue of the controversy over General Gracey:

"By agreement between the British Government and the Government of General de Gaulle, which all the Allies recognized as sovereign in Indochina, the duties of the Control Commission were (a) to enforce surrender and disarmament of the Japanese armed forces throughout South-east Asia Command [sic], and (b) to liberate Allied prisoners of war and internees in Indochina. It is this instruction which may, in part, have given rise to misunderstanding that General Gracey's subsequent actions went beyond his mandate; in reality, he had other tasks as well, arising from his command of Allied Land Forces. These were "to secure the key area of Saigon, to maintain order, and to liberate Allied territory as far as his resources permitted." The word "liberate" was no doubt vague, but the one among these tasks which gave rise to controversy was the maintenance of public order. Yet a little reflection will show that it could not well have been omitted from the list. Not only would it then have been impossible to discharge the other tasks, but General Gracey was in fact, even though there had been no fighting, an occupying military power and liable to perform the duties

falling to an occupying power under the laws and usages of war on land. The Hague Regulations were explicit, placing this duty before all others:

'The authority of the power of the State having passed de facto into the hands of the occupant, the latter shall do all in his power to restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety, respecting at the same time, unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country.'

Even if a British Commander of an occupying force were not given explicit instructions on this point - and General Gracey was - he would still be bound by the British Manual of Military Law, which reproduces the Hague Regulation word for word and so makes its observance by British forces mandatory.

However, when General Gracey's men began to arrive at Saigon, from September 13 onwards, they did not come as a military administration. An occupying power is not obliged to discharge the duty of keeping order by setting up his own administration, and on this occasion the expectation was that the existing French administration, released from Japanese captivity, would take over, subject to such purge or other adjustment as the Government of General de Gaulle might see fit to make; the tasks falling to the British would then be limited in practice to the Control Commission aspect. This was the subject of the Anglo-French agreement already referred to, and a French Commissioner entrusted with supervision, a M. Cédile, had been parachuted into Cochinchina three weeks earlier (apparently without Admiral Mountbatten's consent)* although he had met with foreseeable difficulty in obtaining Japanese recognition in advance of the arrival of the Control Commission. Except perhaps for this literally precipitate arrival of the French Commissioner, which had no affect on the

* Actually, Mountbatten probably did know of Cédile's jump into Cochinchina, for Cédile's inspection tour of British Military Administration in Burma had been instantly cut short by Japan's sudden surrender, and he was taken to Jessore where arrangements were made by RAF Special Duty and Force 136 personnel to drop him into Indochina. Also, Mountbatten stated that he had parachuted Pierre Messmer into Tonkin [Letter, Lord Mountbatten's Private Secretary to author, 1977, and interview with Pierre Messmer, 1977], so that the SAC was no doubt cognizant of Cédile's actions as well.

course of events, the arrangements described were in full accord with the principles of international law and custom, and General Gracey was adopting a very correct attitude when he told M. Hertrich at Rangoon on the eve of the latter's departure for Saigon that it was up to France to re-establish an administration there - "La question du gouvernement de l'Indochine est exclusivement française." It was not up to General Gracey - or Admiral Mountbatten or the Potsdam Conference - to prejudge the future political settlement of Indochina - only to ensure public order temporarily against the consequences of the war, until the surrendering enemy forces were out of the way and the power recognized by the Allies as sovereign, namely France, was in a position to resume its administrative responsibilities.

In the event, the situation in Saigon and the "key area", stretching roughly twenty-five miles round the capital, was much more chaotic than had been envisaged, thanks in part but not solely to the activities of the Viet Minh. The British - that is to say, Indian - forces of General Gracey came in contingents, starting on September 13, and at first their small number put even their own defence in jeopardy, not to speak of wider responsibilities. Although "many Annamites [i.e. Vietnamese] wished to co-operate with the French and British in restoring order and viewed with disgust the brutal methods adopted by the Viet Minh extremists", General Gracey, as Commander Allied Land Forces, could do little more than call on the Japanese commander (Field Marshal Terauchi) to restore order; the latter was under an obligation so to do until relieved by the occupying force, and his reluctance to carry it out before being explicitly ordered to had not been correct. Restoring order, moreover, was far more complicated than mere protection of public buildings, all of which had been seized by the Viet Minh: it meant restoring the electricity supply and other public services, whose workers were being intimidated into abandoning their posts, as well as the flow of food from the countryside, where peasants were being intimidated into staying away from the market. Saigon was threatened with famine and disease as a consequence of the rioting, looting, murder and arson. After a week of frustrated efforts to calm the situation through appeals to Mr. Thach and Mr. Bach but with the active help only of the Japanese, General Gracey decided on September 21 to assert his authority as Commander of all armed and police forces in

southern Indochina by means of a proclamation; the proclamation at the same time threatened summary execution for looters, saboteurs and other wrongdoers who prevented "the transition from war to peace conditions peaceably and with minimum dislocation to public and utility services, legitimate business and trade, and with the least interference with the normal peaceful activities and vocations of the people." Now, it had not been intended that he should assume any responsibility for law and order outside the "key areas" - that is to say, the areas where there were either Japanese troops to round up and disarm or Allied prisoners to release and evacuate. Admiral Mountbatten, more distant from the trouble spot but constantly concerned about the effect of press reports, especially in India, that Indian troops were being employed, not to protect civilians from the misdeeds of criminals, but to repress a declaration of independence by another Asian people - a line which Viet Minh broadcasts very naturally adopted - took fright, not at the assumption of responsibility for keeping order in Saigon, but at its extension to the whole of the area designated at Potsdam for occupation by his Command. He referred to the Chiefs of Staff in London the question whether the proclamation, by extending jurisdiction in this way, amounted to an excess of duty on the part of General Gracey; the Chiefs of Staff judged that, in the circumstances, it did not, and General Gracey was later commended for his forthright action. Undoubtedly the proclamation could have been criticized on points of form, whose deficiencies were probably due to lack of models and of professional drafting staff.* But luckily the form of the proclamations was not destined to be put to the test. There was not much improvement in the situation, however, largely because it was harder for the Viet Minh leaders to stop the disturbances than it had been to encourage them before: to extend the metaphor of Kahin and Lewis, their "nascent" administration had been conceived but had not actually been brought forth yet. The General consequently ordered French Commissioner Cédile, with a small number of released French troops armed for the occasion, to evict the Viet Minh leaders on September 23 from the Government buildings they had occupied - an action that even Admiral Mountbatten referred to later, with clear disapproval, as a coup d'état. If anything, there was further deterioration in the situation, from

* This is correct [Interview with Brigadier Maunsell, 20 April 1977].

reprisals both by the indignant Viet Minh and by the French, who, now that some of them had arms in their hands, began to pay off the scores indiscriminately. General Gracey promptly took back the French arms and, while still employing Marshal Terauchi's forces on guard duties, finally persuaded Commissioner Cédile, after the latter had been flown to SEAC Headquarters for a pep talk from Admiral Mountbatten, to negotiate a ceasefire with the Viet Minh (October 2). Several hundred Europeans had by now been massacred, but, again, Hertrich commends the General for his patience: "il veut aller jusqu'au bout dans la voie des négociations."

No summary executions under General Gracey's proclamation were ever carried out, nor did he in practice exercise any jurisdiction outside the vicinity of Saigon." 7

Louis Allen, with unique access to Japanese sources, wrote the following:

"... the really crucial year in French Indo-China history is the year between the Japanese coup d'état of 9th March 1945, and the March 1946 discussions at Fontainebleau.

At the first date, the Viet Minh were merely a problem of *chian iji* ('the preservation of order') as far as the Japanese were concerned, at any rate in the south, in Cochin China. By the latter date, the Viet Minh and Ho himself - by this time President - were factors of importance well outside the French Union, and the future lines development of what we now call Vietnam were clear enough to see." 8

Regarding the British role, as carried out by officers like Gracey:

" First, the role was brand-new. Until the day of the Japanese surrender on 14th August 1945, South-East Asia Command boundaries, although they included Siam stopped at the Mekong. Of the pre-war Netherlands East Indies only Sumatra was included. The new tasks were enormous. The area contained 128 million people included 122,700 prisoners of war and internees in desperate need of help of all kinds, also three-quarters of a million Japanese troops and civilians (633,000/93,000), and 10,000 Formosans and Koreans, to be disarmed, concentrated and repatriated. There seems to have remained some doubt in Mountbatten's

mind whether the Japanese generals in South-East Asia Command would obey orders, but a meeting in Rangoon with Numata, Terauchi's Chief-of-Staff, on 27th August 1945, convinced him that he could by and large rely on their surrender if not their goodwill...

It may be seen that General Gracey had landed himself in quite a complex political situation. His mission was to establish control over Terauchi and the Southern Area Army HQ, and ultimately to repatriate the Japanese of whom there were 72,000 in Southern French Indo-China (the second mission was christened 'Operation Nipoff' by a wag in Mountbatten's headquarters, and became known as this in official documents.) The environment of this mission was a country in which the Viet Minh 'were in complete control' [Mountbatten, op,cit. p.287] outside key areas, in which the Japanese had expelled or imprisoned the French military presence seven months previously, though there were a few resistance groups still operating; and in which the native element itself was nationalist but with the entirely contrasting options of monarchy (Bao Dai) and communism (Ho Chi Minh). To Gracey's North, across the parallel, Chinese troops flooded in, looting and pillaging. Ho Chi Minh, who had no more than 5,000 reliable followers at the time, had already proclaimed the independent Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi, under the benignly approving gaze of the American OSS detachment for whose benefit independence banners in English were suspended across the main avenues of the city. Gracey's problem would have been diminished by a proper French military presence, and indeed de Gaulle had already envisaged the necessity of this long before..." 9

In listing the few French forces available to Gracey, Allen wrote:

"Now this fact clearly altered the whole feasibility of Gracey's carrying out his mission smoothly. It was all very well for Mountbatten to transmit to him the orders of the Combined Chiefs of Staff to the effect that the responsibilities in French Indo-China of the Supreme Allied Command South-East Asia 'were strictly limited and temporary'. Gracey knew that neither the Viet Minh nor the Japanese had an interest in maintaining public order, and that French attempts to enforce it in the North by parachuting plenipotentiaries, to take control wherever possible, had met with resistance from Viet Minh, Chinese and the OSS.

Many members of these groups were killed or taken prisoner by the Vietnamese. Pierre Messmer, designated as Commissaire de la République for Tonkin, was taken prisoner and later had to escape from his captors. Only Jean Sainteny managed to make any kind of a showing and set himself up, after a flight from Kunming with the OSS Major Patti, in the Gouvernement Général in Hanoi. Here Giap and a delegation came for talks on 27th August, but Devillers is convinced that the possibilities of good relations were at once halted by the Americans who promised American support to the Viet Minh if they resisted French demands. Soon Sainteny and his four companions were isolated in the Gouvernement Général under the eyes of Japanese sentries (Devillers, op.cit. p.151 and n.4)...

Gracey was faced with a similar situation, though of course he did have force at his disposal; but not a great deal. There had been riots in Saigon on 2nd September, before Gracey's troops arrived, and only the intervention of released Allied POW's prevented this becoming a massacre of French citizens. The Vietnam Republic was proclaimed on 17th September and on that day the Viet Minh enforced the closing of the Saigon markets and a boycott of all French employers. 'Sporadic fighting... and hooliganism' took place in the town. Mountbatten comments that this was 'mainly unpolitical' (Mountbatten, op.cit. p.287) but that it showed no legal writ ran, and 'that the Viet Minh party (who claimed to be in control) were taking no steps to see that order was maintained'. (ibid.).

So Gracey cracked down hard. Four days after the riots, he has posted in all the various languages throughout Saigon and Cholon a proclamation that he intended to carry out the transition from war to peace 'with the minimum dislocation of public services, legitimate business and trade; and with the least interference with the normal peaceful activities and vocations of the people' (ibid.)...

Gracey hesitated at first when Cedile approached him to apply firm measures against the Vietnamese, according to Devillers, because he knew London wanted no complications... None the less, when the Viet Minh informed him they could not restrain all elements of the population, Gracey acted swiftly on behalf of the French...

It must not be forgotten, though, that in her attempt to fulfil her duty towards her French ally, Great Britain had to employ two armies raised in Asia, one impregnated by, and the other touched with, the fever of Asian nationalism. The Indian Government was not particularly pleased to see its forces used in French Indo-China and Indonesia to support a colonialism which it was preparing to throw off at home; and Japanese attempts to encourage Vietnamese nationalism against the French had been in terms of traditional monarchical institutions (it was Bao Dai, as Emperor of Annam, who had proclaimed national independence after 9th March 1945) and their sympathy with the communists was minimal. Yet contact had been established with the Viet Minh, and at least one Japanese general had been won over to a policy of supporting it." 10

In the light of the circumstances obtaining in Vietnam at that time, the attacks levelled at General Gracey in some of the better known histories of this period are seen to be personal in nature and to transcend the bounds of academic criticism. Some are easily explained, as in Isaac's case, by the US Army's Office of History when one of their well-known historians brushed aside Isaacs by saying that the latter's ideological antecedents were well known -- and, as has been mentioned, Trotsky had recommended Isaacs.

Joseph Buttinger's own background as an Austrian Socialist is plainly reflected by his treatment of Gracey and he, like Leclerc who was cautioned by Gracey, seems to know very little about the Indian Army or its traditions. Buttinger thought that the Indians and Gurkhas were "astonishingly loyal" in the performance of their duties in Indochina. The following passage may help to explain in part what appears to be "astonishing" to civilians, writers like Buttinger whose military experience is anything but extensive; in the first place, few of those writing about this period had any great knowledge of the Indian Army:

"Disbandment of the 4th Battalion took place at the Regimental Centre in an impressive parade attended by Lieutenant-General Douglas Gracey, C.B., C.B.E., M.C., the inspired leader of the 20th Indian Division in which the Battalion had fought... and had made for itself a name worthy of the high reputation of the Regiment and the Gurkha Brigade.

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The passing of a fighting unit is always a sad occasion and few remained unmoved as this grand Battalion marched past for the last time to the stirring music of the Regimental March, the Battalion flag was lowered and the 4th Battalion 10th Gurkha Rifles passed into history to the haunting strains of "Auld Lang Syne". 11

The above was written by a chronicler of the 4/10 Gurkhas, describing the moving scene which became a familiar one as wartime battalions, brigades and divisions were disbanded.

Scarcely less important was the philosophy set down by a Jat writer in the following passage:

"Eventually we were told that SAIGON in F.I.C. was our destination, though we were still uncertain how we were to get there. To the officers SAIGON, known only by name for the quality of its pre-war Radio programmes, conjured up pictures of a Paris of the East complete with the traditional gaieties and amenities of its original in the West, and the prospect was greeted with enthusiasm. For the men SAIGON was just another place in the world they would be able to say they had visited, but to date its very existence was unheard of. They displayed no surprise at the news, and with a polite "Achha bat sahib", dismissed the matter, and waited for the order to move. Had our destination been the North pole, they would have displayed the same fatalistic outlook. Not that it denoted indifference, far from it, for the Indian soldier loves seeing new places, and there was no great wish to return to India. So long as they could get back to their families once a year on leave, they were more than content to remain on service indefinitely enjoying plentiful rations, and increased pay, and accepting risks and discomfort with a fortitude that deserves and gets the admiration of the officers who lead them." 12

Although most of Gracey's critics never knew him personally, some felt able to make personal criticisms of the General. Buttinger's prose provides an example:

"... Gracey's simple political convictions excluded the possibility that an eastern country could cease to be a colony ... Had the Potsdam conference decided that the states of Indochina no longer should belong to France, General Gracey

would have been as shocked as the French. But since no such outrage had been perpetrated, the general regarded the right of the French to reoccupy Vietnam as self-evident... This view remained the point of departure not only of Gracey's thinking, but also of his actions, even after it had led him to violate his political instructions... The idea of trying to re-establish order by siding with the Vietnamese authorities never even entered Gracey's head..." 13

But if one, like Buttinger, may imply the gift of clairvoyance, the strongest challenge could be made to his statement that Gracey "regarded the right of the French to reoccupy Vietnam as self-evident", and Gracey "would have been as shocked as the French" had the politicians at Potsdam not decided to return Indochina to France. The fact is that Gracey personally was little concerned with who ran Vietnam, and the evidence of his character and conduct makes it plain that he would have kept the French out had he been so ordered. In no official documents, the General's own papers or in interviews with his closest subordinates can any evidence be found that Gracey at that time was particularly sympathetic to the return of the French to Indochina. As Dennis Duncanson has mentioned, Gracey was simply reiterating his government's policy when he stated that the French were responsible for the administration of Indochina. It is thus apparent that a great deal of poetic license has been used by historians and journalists in writing of these events.

The implication in all this is that Gracey was politically naive and did not think much of the Oriental's ability to manage. Yet some of Gracey's own regimental commanders were Indian, and the General had spent years in building the Indian Army. And to say that he could not entertain the possibility of an eastern country ceasing to be colony is again not entirely correct, since Gracey knew very well that India itself, the "brightest jewel in the empire", was on the road to independence. The entire discussion of Gracey very much underestimates the man who rose to become Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistani Army and who, with the Indian Commander, General Bucher, personally averted a war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir in 1948 by talking their respective governments out of it.

Dennis Duncanson has himself discussed the fashionable criticisms of Gracey, recognizing that, indirectly at least, Gracey stood accused of contributing "to America's subsequent embarrassments and quandaries over Vietnam."

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Wrote Duncanson [in quoting Buttinger]:

"Mr. Joseph Buttinger alleges that the General's efforts to restore order 'intensified the crisis' — adding somewhat gratuitously, since it never happened:

If the British had occupied the North also, General Gracey might still have interfered in the internal affairs of Vietnam but he would have lacked the pretext offered him by the Vietnamese in Saigon for interfering on behalf of the French." 14

Duncanson also addressed the writings of Professors Kahin and Lewis (who by now had inflated to nearly 5000 the number of 11th RIC troops rearmed by Gracey prior to 23 September), and Theodore Draper (who, like Hammer and nearly everyone else, apparently had no knowledge of Gracey's orders in writing that Gracey had been limited to disarming the Japanese).

Jean-Michel Hertrich, a Viêt Minh sympathizer, was given by Gracey a seat on the first RAF aircraft to land in Saigon in late August, 1945. He also reported that Gracey was initially sympathetic to the Viêt Minh, until the outrages began and until they told Gracey that they could no longer control their followers. Said Duncanson:

"It appears from this evidence that, even if the Viet Minh spokesmen who came forward to meet General Gracey in Saigon (a Dr. Pham-ngoc-Thach and a Maître Phan van-Bach) had not themselves faded swiftly into oblivion thereafter, they hardly had grounds for bearing the lasting grudge to which some American writers wish to attach so much historical importance. The impression General Gracey's remark in 1953 seems to have meant to convey was that he had unequivocally declined to recognize the precarious authority which his virtually anonymous Communist contacts in Saigon were claiming, on the fragile evidence of messages being broadcast over Radio Hanoi in the name of the self-proclaimed Democratic Republic.

Was this stand in itself an improper one for the British Commander to take? The answer must turn on what the status of General Gracey's force in Vietnam was and whether, as a matter of fact, he departed from his prior directives — some allowance being due, of course, for the possibility that the directives did not entirely meet the "bizarre" situation he found on arrival." 15

As Duncanson so correctly pointed out, many of Gracey's critics have seized on a quote by the late Bernard Fall as proof of Gracey's perceived prejudice:

"As evidence of the General's supposed personal prejudice, some writers quote a remark he made in 1953 at a meeting of the Royal Central Asian Society, of which he was a distinguished member:

I was welcomed on arrival by the Viet Minh, who said "Welcome" and all that sort of thing. It was a very unpleasant situation, and I promptly kicked them out.

These sentences are invariably taken, incomplete and out of context, not direct from this Journal but from the late Mr. Bernard Fall - although the latter was not himself critical of General Gracey. Since it is clear from the occasion when the General made this remark - during the discussion following a talk on the military situation in Indochina by an American Air Force colonel - that it was spontaneous and unconsidered, picked up automatically by the stenographer and recorded in these pages for all time, almost certainly without prior reference to him, it seems only right to note in the Journal whatever can be noted in his defence; his critics, without exception, base their judgements - on what was a question of international law, not one of political favour - upon a very limited selection of the evidence available.

To begin with, there is outside evidence that General Gracey did not in fact treat the Viet Minh spokesmen in 1945 quite so peremptorily as he later gave the impression of having done. On that afternoon in 1953 the point under discussion was whether the Viet Minh stood for a Communist takeover of Indochina; the General was concerned to convince the audience that he, for one, had never been taken in by suggestions that it had ever stood for anything else:

"I am quite certain that Ho Chi Minh's resistance movement was leading up to such a result all the time and that anything he did was for himself and his party alone and not for the good of French Indochina as a whole... They are obviously Communists." 16

These extemporaneous remarks by Gracey deserve closer scrutiny, in context. The hitherto little known lecture in question was delivered by retired US Air Force Colonel Melvin Hall, who had earned a DSO with the BEF in France during the First World War; the title of the lecture

was "Aspects of the Present Situation in Indo-China", and was delivered on 29 April 1953 at a meeting of the Royal Central Asian Society chaired by Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt. Hall began by saying, "Indochina has been described as a 'basket of crabs'. If that gives you some idea of what the situation is, I can assure you that trying to trace out the movements and manifestations of a basketful of crabs is no more difficult than following events in Indo-China."

Continued Hall:

"The Viet Minh started as a resistance movement against the Japanese. In 1946, after the expulsion of the Japanese invaders, Ho Chi Minh signed with the French two separate agreements. That was at the time that Russia was still, in a manner of speaking, an ally and had not turned against the West. Ho Chi Minh had been educated in Moscow, and as soon as Russian policy turned against the West he received certain instructions - I do not pretend to know precisely what those instructions were - and immediately began the elimination of all the non-extreme-Leftist groups of the Viet Minh, until today they march with the Communist world attack...." 17

As soon as Hall had concluded his talk General Gracey, now retired from active service, rose and added the following remarks; because of the circumstances in which he was speaking, and to avoid lengthy explanations about what was done and said on his arrival at Tan Son Nhut airport, he simply used a piece of somewhat colloquial verbal shorthand:

"... I was interested in what Colonel Hall said about Ho Chi Minh's resistance movement, because I am quite certain that it was leading up to such a result all the time and that anything he did was for himself and his party alone and not for the good of French Indo-China as a whole.

I was welcomed on arrival by the Viet Minh, who said "Welcome" and all that sort of thing. It was a very unpleasant situation, and I promptly kicked them out. They are obviously Communists, and I think, as does Colonel Hall, that it is a very dangerous situation and that unless we do everything in our power with all the determination we possibly can, the only hope for the independence of Indo-China is under Ho Chi Minh. Otherwise I think that the French and the Vietnamese are at a very great disadvantage." 18

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Gracey added that the incompetence of the Communists was a factor in their long struggles in Indochina:

"When I was out there two years ago there was one question that the Vietnamese asked me. I think that that was the reason why the French asked me out there, so that I could give the answer. This is what they said: "The French say that they cannot nationalize or give us an army under fifteen or twenty years - without French assistance. How is it, first of all, that the Pakistan army has been able to be reorganized in three years? And, secondly, how is it that the Viet Minh forces are able to find their officers? After all, they have not been going at it very much longer than we have." The first part was easy to answer. I merely pointed out that we had been nationalizing the Indian Army, of which the Pakistan army was only an offshoot, for thirty years. That was an easy one to answer, but the question of Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh officers was a very difficult one to answer. The only answer I could give to that was that if the Viet Minh had had decent officers, they would have had possession of French Indo-China long ago." 19

Duncanson is correct when he wrote:

"Many years will pass perhaps before the last word is said about events in Vietnam in 1945; but it seems not unreasonable to suggest, on the basis of the facts and the law summarized above, that General Gracey, while in Saigon, did not really depart from his instructions and that, far from adapting them to the perplexities of the actual situation with impatience, he exercised under wartime conditions a forbearance in his methods for preserving law and order greater than is often shown in many countries in peacetime. He received the first of his knighthoods in recognition of his war service; this had been primarily in Burma, but the honour was sign enough that no official displeasure existed over his conduct in Indochina. In interpreting what British policy was in regard to independence for colonial peoples in the wake of the war, Miss Hammer, quoted at the beginning of this article, might have noted the prophetic words of Sir Stafford Cripps in the House of Commons in June 1945:

We do not want to see in Burma, or in any other country, the rapid seizing of power by any particular group of people, in order to improvise some form of government.[quoting Donnison, p.370].

Soon after these events, General Gracey had an opportunity to demonstrate in practical fashion his sympathy with Asian emancipation: on Independence in 1947 he became Chief of Staff to the Army of Pakistan, and Commander-in-Chief from the following year until his retirement in 1951. The issue that faced him in Saigon was not that of colonial emancipation, but the ordinary decencies of life and the protection of individual people from terror, injury and robbery - a duty falling to all persons thrust into positions of authority but often callously disregarded by revolutionaries. There is surely nothing inconsistent between the view that France ought to have granted Vietnam independence straightaway after the war - even that the Indochina Communist Party was, on ideological grounds, the proper group to hand over to - and the view that the rule of law should be upheld impartially by occupying powers in wartime." 20

The volume of evidence now available -- official documents, contemporary comment, interviews with the original participants, etc. -- warrant the drawing of several conclusions about Gracey's role in Vietnam, conclusions which should be stated if only to rebut the politically biased (and often incorrect) histories written about this period. Firstly, those writers (Hammer and Buttinger were two such, and there were many more who were influenced by them) who asserted that Gracey's tasks did not include the maintenance of public order are guilty of historical inaccuracy. Gracey's own orders as Commander, Allied Land Forces French Indo China, are represented in this study. That the maintenance of law and order was one of Gracey's principal tasks was generally known except, apparently, to some of the writers who set themselves up as historical authorities on the period. The US Government was unquestionably aware of it for, on 24 September 1945, a memorandum by the Director of the office of Far Eastern Affairs, Mr. John Carter Vincent, records a meeting in Washington between Sir George Sansom of the British Embassy, Mr. Vincent, and Mr. Abbot Moffat, Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs. The following is an excerpt from that memo:

"Mr. Moffat inquired whether Sir George was familiar with the statement of General Slim, Commander of the SEAC land forces, that the British would be in Indochina to disarm the Japanese and to maintain order until French troops could arrive." 21

Any researcher who had taken the elementary step of enquiring from Maunsell or Taunton or Woodford, for example, would certainly have been informed about it.

A second conclusion, and one which requires particular mention, is the reasoning which prompted Gracey's decision to force the French into assuming responsibility for civil administration on 23 September. The current literature depicts Gracey as an officer who went to Saigon impatient to conduct a coup and restore political power to the French. It is incorrect and misleading to do so, for Gracey was fully cognizant of his government's policy of minimal involvement while recognizing (with the United States) France's sole sovereignty in Indochina. Gracey was persuaded that the coup was necessary by the knowledge that, without it, complete anarchy would quickly develop in Saigon, which would almost certainly result in the massacre of the French population. The evidence which led him to this conclusion was there in the form of mounting personal atrocities against the French, and his Intelligence officers had warned him of impending disaster. This, coupled with what the released Allied POWs had told him of the anarchy in Saigon prior to his arrival, convinced Gracey that, no matter what the personal consequences to him, he could afford to wait no longer.* But had Gracey's own division not initially been withheld from him by Mountbatten it is conceivable that the coup would not have taken place, for Gracey would have disposed enough force to guarantee the public safety in Saigon without resorting to French help. But as Gracey later told Mountbatten, he had only few companies at his disposal at that time to accomplish his tremendously complex tasks in an area relatively bigger and more important than Liverpool. Also, the Japanese (largely "on the fence" or sullenly hostile at the time) would not be impressed with the spectacle of the Allied Commander dancing to the Viêt Minh tune.

On several occasions Gracey took the French to task for not according proper treatment and respect to the Asians, which is scarcely conduct to be expected from the colonialist bigot that some historians describe. During the four and a half months he was present in Saigon, Gracey prevented the massacre of the French civil population, secured the Japanese Supreme Headquarters, kept the capital city alive through a Viet Minh seige, and was the instrument by which the Communist presence was ejected from Saigon. What happened in Vietnam was unique

* On 6 October 1945 General Slim informed the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that, in addition to everything else, a rising of the French civilian population had been a real possibility.

in that other postwar coups were of the reverse character, that is, Communist power liquidating the existing administration. This was the only contemporary example of the Communists suffering a reverse, and it happened at Gracey's hands.* The political Left and their sympathizers have never forgiven him for this.

A further matter which needs to be clarified concerns the figure of 2700 Việt Minh killed, cited by several histories. The total is correct, but what all of them omit to state is that slightly more than 600 of them were actually killed by British/Indian troops. The remainder, more than 2000, were killed by the French and Japanese who, outside key areas, were not under direct British supervision.

Typical of the elementary errors which abound in Hammer's history of the period are her statements that Gracey departed from India for Saigon — he actually set out from Burma — and that the OSS dropped Cédile into Cochinchina from a US C-47; in fact, Force 136 and RAF SD B-24s did. Again, if "liberals" in London "recoiled", it was not over the use of the RAF, for this was minimal, comprising a single attack, in which no personnel were hit.

Buttinger's personal prejudices emerge more clearly than Gracey's from his criticisms of Gracey, while virtually every historian of the period has unquestioningly followed Isaacs in stating that Vietnamese sentries were "shot down" and killed during the 23 September coup. Yet it has been shown that only Frenchmen were killed during the coup — no Vietnamese had been "shot down". And if the French overreacted by behaving outrageously for a few hours before a furious Gracey disarmed them, it must be borne in mind that Việt Minh jailers had replaced Japanese guards on the French POW camps. The British did not kill 2700 Vietnamese, and Gracey did not "take it upon himself" to restore the French to Indochina.

Another American writer, Robert Shaplen, who like Isaacs was employed by Newsweek magazine, wrote that the Committee for the South was "running a government", that the French spread rumours about the Japanese arming the Việt Minh — thus implying it had not happened — and then went on to describe his meeting with a Việt Minh man (said to be the eldest of twenty children) in whom "the seeds of discontent were probably sown" at the age of only two years!²² Shaplen also

* This may explain, in part, why DRVN and SRVN official publications have given such scant notice of Gracey and the British occupation of Saigon.

stated that Trần Văn Giàu "recognized the authority of the new Republic of Viet Nam in Hanoi", suggesting that Giàu was to some extent independent of Hanoi. The riot of 2 September, continued Shaplen, may have been instigated by the Japanese employed by French as provocateurs [this is really the least likely explanation], and the Gurkhas engaged in looting, something which the Vietnamese, it appears, never did [in fact, the Việt Minh stripped the palace of the Governor of Cochinchina, and were ordered by Gracey to return the furniture and crockery].

Robert Denton Williams, a captain in Taunton's 80 Brigade, later asserted that Ernest Bevin started the war in Vietnam.

In authorizing publication of the story in Peace News, an antiwar publication of the Sixties, Williams implied that, as of September 1945:

"In a command paper (R 2817; March 25, 1954), and also in other papers before and since, the Central Office of Information (COI) gave it out that, because of "unrest and terrorism", General Gracey had given orders to arm the French. Both parts of the statement were wholly untrue. There was at this time no unrest and no terrorism, and General Gracey did not give the order to arm the French. The order came from the Foreign Office, through an FO official in Saigon, and it was delivered to the local British commander (Taunton).

As many British and Indian officers in Saigon understood it, a deal had been done between Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Secretary, and Massigli of France. Under this secret agreement, the French were to be allowed to re-establish themselves in Indo-China on the understanding that they would not attempt to return to Syria and the Lebanon. The Committee of the South, in the face of Western perfidy, resolved to fight; and nightly attacks on Saigon began." 23

The problem with this theory is that there was no Foreign Office presence in Saigon before 23 September 1945. As Gracey himself wrote, the failure of SEAC Headquarters to provide him with a Financial Adviser and a functioning Civil Affairs Staff "was a boob by S.E.A.C. as was their failure to supply me with a high level political adviser from the start." Sir Norman Brain, in an interview with the author, confirmed that he had arrived in Saigon after the 23 September coup, and was in fact unable to say what his advice to Gracey would have been had he been there prior to 23 September.

As recently as 1971, the view that the British were bloody butchers who bombed and shelled the Vietnamese at every opportunity was expressed in a slight volume entitled The British in Vietnam. In it, the author, George Rosie, aired his almost hysterically anti-British sentiments. Its influence cannot have been extensive, for it was printed in a limited edition, was filled with typographical errors and now has gone out of print and almost out of sight. According to Louis Allen, Rosie "suffers from the historical malady of hindsight in a very acute form."²⁴

Rosie gained an interview with Brigadier Maunsell by writing on stationery bearing the letterhead of a well-known London newspaper, and opened the conversation by saying that General Gracey had never received the credit due him and he wished to do something about this. He listened to Maunsell for forty minutes, "never took a note"²⁵ and subsequently wrote a vicious attack on Gracey and the British in Vietnam. The British Broadcasting Corporation, for reasons apparent only to itself, commissioned Rosie to write the script for a radio broadcast about the battle of Điện Biên Phủ. The broadcast, narrated by René Cutforth in 1977, opened with the statement that Gracey, described as "peppery" and "little" [he was not a "little" man but a powerful man of at least average height or better], singlehandedly caused the start of the Vietnam War — neither Hồ Chí Minh, Giáp, Trần Văn Giàu nor other lifelong fanatical Marxist revolutionaries were mentioned in this regard.

However, in all of this the nature of the professional military officer should be taken into account when analyzing Gracey's actions. Would any other general on the spot have acted differently, and would history have taken another course had there been another commander on the spot? Probably not. Gracey made tactical decisions on his own, but that is why he achieved high rank in wartime. Had he waited for guidance about every problem that came along, he probably would have remained a captain all his life. A more cautious commander might have been able to drag out the end of the beginning (the expulsion of the Việt Minh from Saigon) for a few more weeks, but the end would have been the same: the French returned to power. Allied policy was quite clear on the matter. It should be obvious that if Gracey were indeed sympathetic to the Vietnamese, blocked the French and strengthened the Việt Minh in office, he would have been instantly recalled to Singapore to explain his refusal to follow orders, removed from his present and any future command, and replaced.

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The British legacy in Vietnam was, for thirty years, the state of South Vietnam. The French were too weak and disorganized in the Far East to turn the Việt Minh out, and a large measure of the French troops carried East from Europe were brought in Allied ships. Saigon was economically and politically crucial. Even if the Việt Minh had captured ninety percent of the south without taking Saigon they would still be regarded as rebels, and not as a government. Conversely, the occupiers of ten percent of the country which included Saigon would be recognized as the government. The British drove the Viet Minh from Saigon and left it to the French. When the French returned to Indochina in strength they came first to Cochín China and Saigon. The Việt Minh were thus never able to consolidate their position in the south. Had the Chinese in North Vietnam done the same favors for the French, it is not entirely unlikely that the Việt Minh could have been smothered before reaching full bloom. What they may have meant to the subsequent histories of France, Vietnam, and the United States is something to think about.

Thus, the obvious question arises from the earlier French suggestion that SEAC be responsible for northern Indochina as well. Supposing a Gracey had also been sent to Hanoi, and had destroyed the government of Hồ Chí Minh — would the Việt Minh have survived, and would that part of the world have thus been spared three decades of incessant warfare and the accompanying hundreds of thousands of deaths since 1945?

The British legacy in Vietnam could well have been the state of South Vietnam, which endured for 30 years against the onslaughts of a communist enemy supported by the resources of the whole communist world. Lord Mountbatten opined, many years after he had completed his mission as Supreme Allied Commander, that the Vietnamese communists would never have been able to take over the country had his command been given responsibility for the north as well as the south. What he had in mind was a situation in which another General Gracey was sent to Hanoi where, like his counterpart in Saigon, he had perceived the hollowness of the Việt Minh claim to speak and act for the whole of the Vietnamese people and refused to accept its pretensions to be the effective government. By maintaining law and order, ensuring essential supplies and services, and protecting the ordinary people from coercion and terror from armed political thugs, such a commander might have provided the period of respite necessary for the mass of the people to express, and maybe even realize, its aspirations. These were quite certainly not for a communist

state. Perhaps the opinion was fanciful. Perhaps the tiny communist party, with the backing of the OSS's vast material resources and no less vast political naivete, would have emerged the victors anyway. Nevertheless, some explanation must be found for the fact that France's military might was defeated by the communists in the north within a few years, but not in the south; for the unbroken resistance of the southern people over so many years; even for the continuing resistance to communist rule after the victory of 1975 and the readiness of so many Vietnamese to risk their lives in tiny craft on monsoon seas rather than live under this. It is possible, to put it no stronger, that the cause of the great differences between the behaviour of North and South Vietnam was the vastly different experiences of the two regions in 1945, when General Gracey assumed responsibility for the south and General Lu Han with his Chinese forces for the north.

The official version of events in Saigon compiled by the SEAC Recorder on the instructions of Mountbatten was evidently regarded by Gracey as little better than propaganda and he took strong exception to it. Mention has been made of this document earlier, but it is necessary at this juncture to list the remainder of General Gracey's corrections to it. The matters with which these corrections are concerned will be apparent to the reader:

"It was decided that it should be made clear to all at once by a proclamation that the S.A.C. was determined to ensure that law and order were kept in Southern F.I.C. south of the 16 degrees parallel, and that he, through his local commander, was prepared to take stern measures with all the forces available to him to ensure this.

The Japanese were inclined to regard the situation as one in which, by virtue of the fact that they had large armed forces, they held the whip hand. The proclamation made it quite clear to them all, as it had been made clear to their senior officers in RANGOON, that the British commander was going to stand no nonsense from them, or anyone else, for that matter...

Outside the British perimeter, as each detachment arrived, the French forces (army, navy and air), under General Le CLERC, acted with great speed and determination, in spite of their administrative services being lacking or ill-found.

(2)

Until French forces arrived in sufficient strength to move out and clear areas outside the perimeter - this was done in the order, southwards, westwards, and then finally northwards - the Annamites picketed all the roads and imposed a rigorous food blockade on SAIGON and CHOLON. By vigorous action via canals and the MEKONG river into CAMBODIA and back, and by their own transport aircraft, the Japanese troops broke this blockade and brought in ample supplies, which were most ably distributed to the enormous population - French, Annamite and Chinese - swollen as it was by innumerable refugees - by a Food Control Board, organized, run and staffed by H.Q. 20th Division assisted by some French civilian officials. This Board, by its energy and hard work, overcame all difficulties, and ensured an adequate ration for all, special attention being paid to children and babies.

As regards the officers and men of 20th Indian Division, and the units attached to it, their bearing, discipline, and speed and efficiency in dealing with each unpleasant military situation as it arose were beyond praise and had the most remarkable quietening effect on the frayed nerves of the local inhabitants, a very restraining influence on the activities of the Annamite hooligans, earned the admiration of the Japanese forces, and had a most steadying influence on them.

There is absolutely no doubt that the clear-cut enunciation of policy which was given out to every man on his arrival was largely instrumental in keeping morale high, when facing a situation which might otherwise have been misconstrued. In no instance did the troops open fire until they were fired upon; the strain on them can be imagined. In the first two months, some heavy fighting was essential to defend vital installations, to clear streets of rebels armed with mortars and heavy and light automatics, and to clear areas up to the agreed outer perimeter line. That the Division lost so few during the period it was in F.I.C. was due to their own high qualities as battle-seasoned soldiers...

The work of the staff of the Allied Mission, including that of Mr. MEIKLEREID, the F.O. adviser, who relieved Mr. BRAIN, of the Naval and Air Commands and of 20th Division (A.L.F.F.I.C.) was equally successful.

In addition to complicated operations, the control of Japanese Southern Army H.Q., the technical inspection, collection and destruction of a mass of equipment and stores, the opening and the working of the port, the control of civilian ration arrangements, the control of the very considerable Japanese naval, military and air forces, the feeding and transportation arrangements for the French forces, the accommodation of troops in an area already over crowded, the supervision and management of a worn-out electric and water supply system, the collection and documentation of Japanese valuables and treasure, and a hundred and one other problems were tackled and carried through successfully with great calmness, enthusiasm and efficiency, and in great harmony with the French commanders, troops and civilians...

The majority of the Annamite population was horror-stricken at the turn of events, and at the barbaric and monstrous cruelties of the puppet forces. Though imbued with the thought of independence, without much idea as to what it meant, they were soon alienated from their so-called deliverers. As they were progressively released from the ruthlessly terroristic attention of the rebels, they resumed their work and opened their markets. The intelligentsia were mainly, and quite justifiably, concerned with removing the many discriminations in pay and status between them and the French.

As regards LAOS, and the rest of F.I.C., I am not in the position to give a true picture. I doubt if anyone can, and under the circumstances, the less said the better. I consider it would be best to leave LAOS out all together - it was an unpleasant situation, outside the orbit of the forces under the S.A.C.

I have however made comments on the appropriate paragraphs, where there are known inaccuracies in them...

The French will strongly dislike the statement that the Chinese pursued a strict policy of non-intervention in LAOS. This, I should say, was quite incorrect...

I wish to draw the attention of the Recorder to the correct way in which the keeping of law and order is stressed in these paragraphs, with special reference to the omission of this fact in the story of F.I.C. Unless paragraph 124 is suitably amended it is most misleading and unfair to the Allied commander...

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Para 120 - "remainder of 20th Division"

Amend in accordance with the facts.

The "build-up" was as follows:-

13 - 28 September - 80 Brigade and 1/1 Gurkha Rifles flown in.
7 October - - - - 32 Brigade and 2/8 Punjab arrived by sea.
12 October - - - - 9 F.F.R. arrived by air.
13 October - - - - M.G. Jat arrived by air.
17 October - - - - 100 Brigade, less 1/1 Gurkha Rifles
arrived by sea.

Para 121.

Main H.Q. opened as H.Q. A.L.F.F.I.C. on 8th October. This gives a most unfair picture. No one accepted the situation after 9th March. The [French] Army, except for those who escaped to form guerilla bands mostly in Northern F.I.C. and CHINA, were put into prisoner of war camps; civilians were either interned or put under strict and severe restrictions.

The date 17th September is very misleading. The Annamite government in COCHIN-CHINA took complete charge after the unconditional surrender in August...

Unless paragraph 124 is amended to include A.L.F.S.E.A.'s task of maintaining law and order, it will be most misleading and will give a false picture.

To get the correct chronology, I consider the date of COSSEA 314 should be checked. My recollection is that it was not received till later; I may be wrong.

General GRACEY was fully in this picture before he left RANGOON and had already taken action... In fact, this information came from the Allied Commander ! [Gracey].

This date is most misleading. After the Japanese surrender on August 12th, the Annamite government in COCHIN-CHINA took complete charge, having already, under Japanese sponsorship, been functioning some months before. Shortly after the coup d'état in March, Annamite troops and police were in possession of the barracks and police stations, jails, etc. and were guarding certain key points by the middle of August...

Comments. lines 11-14. There was never any question at the time of the publication of the proclamation, as far as 20th Division was concerned, that the whole of it was not to be sent to F.I.C.

Last sub-para. There was never any intention in the mind of the Allied commander to interfere in the internal affairs of a foreign country. The proclamation followed by the eviction of the puppet government saved a massacre!

General. In the story of the Indonesian affair, the Recorder has stated that strong action at the start would undoubtedly have saved many casualties later. Why not apply this to F.I.C., and state categorically that the strong action taken by the Allied commander, his staff and troops did that, and more.

Para. 131, lines 6 - 9.

Unnecessary. There was never any doubt in General GRACEY's mind nor in that of his troops that we were then in a preventative role. Why imply otherwise?

Para. 132.

This meeting [with the Viet Minh] had already been arranged before we came to SINGAPORE. Negotiations to arrange this meeting started two days after the coup d'état, i.e. on September 25th." 26

In a number of places Gracey posed this question:

"Why the "I"?* Why not the Allied commander** who did it!" 27

It should be clear by now that Mountbatten's "colossal" staff (in the words of the British Chiefs) was guilty at best of poor staff work in their recording for posterity the history of the events in which SEAC was involved. Gracey had no known wish to be remembered in history, and his objections were not to occasional errors but to what appeared to him to be a deliberately and grossly distorted record of what really had happened in his sphere of operations. He also took full and public responsibility for what he knew would be controversial decisions, such as that which brought about the coup, but at all times he was guided by what he considered best for the common good, regardless of personal risk to himself. As Brigadier Woodford has pointed out, this characteristic had kept him as a Major General when it was considered that he had the capacity for higher rank and greater responsibilities. [Indeed, when Gracey finally left Mountbatten's command he rose to four star rank].

While a senior commander in India just prior to independence, Gracey fully supported and amplified the remarks by Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Smith of the General Staff:

"As professional soldiers and as British officers who have helped, whether old or young, to make the Indian Army one of the

* Mountbatten

** Gracey

best Armies in the World, we all have a responsibility to that Army and to the men in it which we must not fail to carry out. We all want to see the Indian Army remain efficient, contented and reliable as it is today. If this is to be achieved, it is essential that it should have the best officers it is possible to get. The quality of an Army is the quality of its officers.

It has been decreed, and in my opinion inevitably decreed, that we - the British officers - are to go. Before we go, it is our bounden duty to do all we can to ensure the continued well-being and efficiency of our men and of the Army we have loved so well and served so long." 28

Gracey became the first Commander in Chief of the Army of the new nation of Pakistan -- hardly a fit post for a known colonial bigot, since he was particularly asked for. Pakistan named her first military hospital after him. In 1951, just prior to his retirement, he received a flood of letters from his former soldiers. For example, Jemedar Imdad Hussain Hashmi wrote:

"You are going much against the wishes of thousands of soldiers whom you so dearly loved and patronized like your own kith and kin. Millions of Pakistanis, though not in uniform, have seen you working more than a Pakistani in the true patriotic spirit - they too are unhappy on hearing that you are departing very soon. And last but not least your humble servant, Hashmi, is perhaps most unhappy on hearing this bad news. Whenever I read in the news paper about your "fare-well" tours to various Units these days, my heart begin to sink - I do not know why.

From the hearts of my heart I reveal this once again that I will miss you most. From the past many years I have been a source of trouble to you - in 1946, just before the disbandment of our "Happy Family", I was caught up as a law breaker by writing a letter to Pandit Nehru and you saved me - then ever since the inception of Pakistan I came to you frequently, at one occasion for a Commission, at other for a house and for financial help. I hope most sincerely that you will forgive me for all that I have been doing in the past.

I am ashamed my financial position is still not encouraging and I may not be able to return the amount borrowed from you but I assure you, Sir, that I will certainly do so as and when my hands are free - no matter where you may be at that time.

I am not discouraged to find out that I could not get a Commission - perhaps I do not deserve one. All I wanted was to get rid of this clerical job - but it appears to be that it will continue to stick to me till I die. I wanted to be a soldier in real sense - to prove my worth in the battlefield but I feel I am destined to finish off in heaps of paper around me. I am sorry I prolonged this unpleasant subject which is unsuitable to the occasion.

My last two desires are

(a) Please allow me to serve you with a cup of tea at my place at any convenient time and date

and

(b) A photograph where I may have the honour to stand by your side." 29

On retirement Gracey became Chairman of the Royal Hospital and Home for Incurables in Putney. Although on strict doctor's orders to curtail his activities because of heart trouble, he always made a weekly visit to the Hospital, where he was immensely popular with the staff and the patients alike. He never publicized his own direct involvement in history, and members of the staff in later years were astonished that such a kindly gentleman had grappled with such momentous challenges. He died in 1964, while on his feet at home, when his heart suddenly failed. After his death Pakistan commissioned the Gracey Memorial Pavilion at the Hospital.

In an earlier publication the author wrote the following:

"The rain clouds which had sprinkled Saigon were soon to burst open and unleash torrents throughout all Indochina. The last Englishman and Indian to sail away would eventually be joined by a last Frenchman, a last Australian, a last Korean, a last Thai, a last Filipino, New Zealander and a last American. Who would next be the last out of Vietnam?"

As often happens in life, the answer to this question turned out to be the unexpected: the last out of Vietnam were the common Vietnamese themselves, in numbers vastly exceeding those of their former colonizers and occupiers -- and they are still leaving.

In Saigon's last years, few South Vietnamese knew of General Gracey and how he influenced their history. That was a pity -- both deserved better.

Footnotes: Chapter XVIII

- 1 F.S.V. Donnison, *British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943-46*, London (HMSO), 1956, p.401.
- 2 Ibid., pp.294,295.
- 3 Ibid., pp.332,333,340.
- 4 Ibid., p.401.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Dennis J. Duncanson, "General Gracey and the Viet Minh," Royal Central Asian Society Journal, Vol. LV, October 1968, part III, pp.290-292.
- 7 Ibid., pp.294-295.
- 8 Louis Allen, "Studies in the Japanese Occupation of South-East Asia 1942-1945 (II)", Durham University Journal.
- 9 Ibid., p.122.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 123-129.
- 11 B.R. Mullaly, Bugle and Kukri (London: Blackwood and Sons, 1957), p.404.
- 12 Gracey Papers, 9th Jat Newsletter.
- 13 Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Political History, Vol.I (New York: Praeger, 1963), pp.325-326.
- 14 Duncanson, "General Gracey and the Viet Minh", p.288.
- 15 Ibid., p.290.
- 16 Ibid., p.289.
- 17 Colonel Melvin Hall, DSO, "Aspects of the Present Situation in Indo-China", Royal Central Asian Society Journal, Vol. XL, Parts III and IV, July-October 1953, pp.204-211.
- 18 Ibid., pp.213-214.
- 19 Ibid. The full text of Gracey's extemporaneous remarks is as follows:
 General GRACEY: I hope that this excellent address today has told those who were doubtful about it what a magnificent job of work the French are doing in this almost impossible situation. There is an awful lot of criticism of the French out there which is absolutely

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unfounded. I went out there after the war and saw the French after they had been through a most uncomfortable time with the Japanese - again, placed in an impossible situation by the fact that they were never helped by the Allies at a time when they needed every possible help; and they could not possibly hold off the Japanese. They did the next best thing, and their resistance movement was excellent.

I was interested in what Colonel Hall said...

I was very impressed by the Viet Nam rank and file. The French were training them properly, for Viet Nam and not for France. Before the war it was all for France, but now it was for Viet Nam. There was a good spirit and they were tough chaps, but their officers were deplorable and of the wrong type. They are very young and, like so many of these people, the moment they put anything on their shoulders they are apt to get the wrong impression. If a lieutenant put on a general's uniform, he thought he was a general and had to be told that he was still a lieutenant. They were impossible. I hope that anybody who goes out there and who is ever asked about this by the Vietnamese will stress that no matter how good the rank and file, if the officers are not up to the mark, the rank and file will be destroyed and a lot of valuable lives will be wasted. The solution, I think, is that if it is to be kept an anti-Communist country, we must give them all the assistance we can and we must keep them going until the Government have a good, strong army. If the army has the right spirit, it has a chance. If it does not have the right spirit, it does not have a hope. (Applause).

Gracey's remarks were only too prophetic.

- 20 Duncanson, p.297.
- 21 Foreign Relations of the United States, Vol. VI (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1969), p.313.
- 22 Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution: Vietnam 1945-1965 (London: Andre Deutch, 1966), p.17.
- 23 Peter Cadogan, "Did Ernest Bevin Start the Vietnam War?", Peace News, (London), 11 November 1966, p.1.
- 24 Louis Allen, "Studies in the Japanese Occupation of South-East Asia", p. 130.
- 25 Brigadier M.S.K.Maunsell, Personal Interview, 20 April 1977.
- 26 Gracey Papers, 3 October 1946.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Gracey Papers.
- 29 Gracey Papers, Letter from Imdad Hussain Hashmi to Gracey, 4 January 1951.

APPENDIX A.

Franco-Japanese Protocol Concerning
Joint Defence of Indo-China
July 29, 1941.

The Imperial Japanese Government and the French Government
Taking into consideration the present international situation:

Recognizing that in consequence, in case the security of French Indo-China is menaced, Japan will have reason to consider that the general tranquility in East Asia and her own security are in danger:

Renewing on this occasion the engagements taken, on the one hand by Japan to respect the rights and interests of France in East Asia and especially the territorial integrity of French Indo-China and the sovereign rights of France in all parts of the Indo-Chinese Union, and on the other hand by France not to conclude in respect to Indo-China any agreement or understanding with a third power anticipating political, economic and military cooperation of a nature opposing Japan directly or indirectly:

Have concluded the following arrangements:

- (1) The two governments promise to cooperate militarily for the joint defence of French Indo-China.
- (2) The measures to be taken for the purpose of this cooperation shall be the object of special arrangements.
- (3) The above arrangements shall remain effective only as long as the circumstances which constituted the motive for their adoption exist.

In witness whereof, the undersigned, duly authorized by their respective Governments, have signed this Protocol which shall be enforced from this day, and have affixed their seals.

Drawn up in duplicate, in the Japanese and French languages, at Vichy, 29 July, 1941, corresponding to the 29th day of the seventh month of the 16th year of Showa.

Kato Sotomatsu (seal)

F. Darlan (seal)

Signed at Vichy on July 29, 1941, the 16th year of Showa; put into effect on the same day of the same year; promulgated (in the August 2nd issue of the Gazette) on August 1, 1941, the 16th year of Showa.

APPENDIX B.

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Executive Order July 6, 1946, has awarded the Medal of Freedom to

MAJOR MARCEL MINGANT, FRENCH ARMY

for meritorious service:

Major Mingant, French Army, performed meritorious service as a member of an Intelligence Net operating in the China Theater from January 1942 to March 1945. He remained loyal to the Allies throughout the war and helped organize and direct a net of agents that covered all of Northern Indo-China. His organization rescued several American aviators who were shot down behind enemy lines. Major Mingant's extremely valuable assistance to the Allied cause made an important contribution to final victory.

[SEAL]

APPENDIX C.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES OCCURED TO THE JAPANESE FORCES IN INDOCHINA (38th ARMY).

1) Following the transfer of the Japanese South Area Command from Saigon to Singapore in December 1942, the 38th Army was formed and installed its headquarters in Saigon, for the defence of Indochina, according to the Japanese-French protocol signed in August 1941, and was put under the command of the South Area Command.

The main disposition of troops at that time was as follows:

- South Indochina Area --- 82nd Infantry Regiment of the 21st Division (Saigon)
- North Indochina Area --- Main forces of the 21st Division (Hanoi)

2) Later, with the developments of general situation in the Southern area, the 34th Independent Mixed Brigade (formed in Japan proper) was stationed in Tourane district in March 1944, and in December 1944 the 70th Independent Mixed Brigade (formed by surplus troops in Indochina) was quartered in Saigon district, thus enforcing the Japanese-French defence power in Indochina, and increasing the total reserve troops of the South Area Command.

3) In December 20th, 1944, the troops stationed in Indo-china were reformed under the 38th Army Command, which gave to the 38th Army the character of an operation army.

The main disposition of troops at that time was as follows:

- North Area --- Main Force of the 21st Division
- Central Area --- The 34th Brigade
- South Area --- Part of the 21st Division & the 70th Brigade

4) In February 1945, the navy units which were stationed in the operation zone of the 38th Army, were put under the command of the Army Command so far as ground defence was concerned. The main navy units thus put under the army command were, the 11th Navy Base Unit,

5) Since December 1943, the 38th Army under the above-mentioned formation, took the responsibility for the common defence of Indochina, based upon the Japanese-French Protocol, though once engaged in minor operations in the north frontier districts.

6) Judgement of the general war situation in January 1945.

As the U.S. Army main forces attacked Luzon in the beginning of January, the next points of disembarkation were judged to be either South China (including Hainan island, and Lei-Chou peninsula), Central China, or Okinawa. The 38th Army prepared the necessary counter plans, forecasting a landing in North Indochina, in case of an attack to South China.

7) According to the scheme of the South Area Command aiming to divert the U.N. main forces' movement from going to Japan proper, and to turn it southward, the 38th Army was obliged to concentrate its main forces in North Indo-china.

8) According to the forecast and scheme as stated above, the troops were concentrated as follows:

a) The 37th Division was transferred in the middle of February from South China (11th Army) to North Indochina.

b) The 22nd Division was transferred in the beginning of March from South China (23rd Army) to North Indochina frontier districts.

c) The 2nd Division was transferred gradually from March to June from Burma to Saigon District.

9) The incident of March 9th (details apart).

Troops used in March 9th incident were as follows:

North Area - 21st, 22nd, 37th Divisions

Central Area - 34th Brigade

South Area - 70th Brigade & part of 4th

Division (T), 1 regiment of 20th

Division

10) Transfer of Army Headquarters to Hanoi.

The 38th Army Headquarters advanced its commanding-post from Saigon to Hanoi in May 1945, to facilitate the command of troops concentrated in North Indochina.

11) Forecast of war situation in May 1945.

With the landing of the U.S. Army main forces on Okinawa, the possibility of an attack to South China or to Indochina much diminished, the chief enemy of the South Area Command shifted from U.S. Army to the British Army, and the strategic object was judged to be Singapore.

12) With the above judgement, the troops stationed in Indochina were transferred in the following way, according to the orders of the South Area Command:

- a) The 70th Brigade from Saigon district to the central Malay, in the middle of May
- b) The 37th Division to Bangkok district in the middle of May, to be used either in Burma front or in Malayan zone
- c) The 22nd Division, since the end of May, to North Eastern Siam

13) Main operations executed by the 38th Army

Co-operation with the China Area Command in the operations jointing Central and South China (under separate cover).

14) Situation at the time of surrender

Following the rapid development of war situation in Burma, the South Area Command established plans to make French Indochina and Malay the defence centre of southern area. Accordingly the 38th Army was planning to enforce the defence of Hanoi and Saigon districts in the following manner, when the war ended:

- a) Formation of defence units of Hanoi and Saigon
- b) Strengthening of the organisation of the 34th Brigade
- c) Strengthening of the organisation and equipment of the 2nd Division
- d) Reconstruction of the 55th Division./...

APPENDIX D.

PART III : MARCH 9TH INCIDENT

1. The movement of the main force of the Division was completed at the beginning of March and then Army Orders were issued to the effect that the Division, as the Western Defending Troops, was to defend Laos and Cambodia Districts south of Kemmarat in co-operation with the French Forces.

The outline of the disposition of our troops at the time was as follows:

THE DIVISIONAL HEADQUARTERS : PHNOM PENH.

Approximately one infantry battalion strength under the command of the Commander of the 29th Infantry Regiment:

Laos south of Kemmarat and Cambodia east of the River Mekong.

Approximately two squadrons and a company strength under the command of the Commander of the 2nd Reconnaissance Regiment.

Cambodia west of the River Mekong and north of Tomle Sap.

Approximately two company strength under the command of the Commander of the 2nd Battalion, the 29th Infantry Regiment.

Cambodia north of Phnom Penh and south of Tomle Sap.

Approximately one battalion strength under the command of the Commander of the 428th Independent Battalion.

Phnom Penh and its vicinity and Cambodia south of Phnom Penh.

2. At 2200 hours on March 9th the Order of Disarmament was issued and our units in each area disarmed the F.I.C. Forces and also garrisons (HOAN TAI) which resisted us.

The Division henceforth urged the F.I.C. Forces which fled to return and on the other hand made its best effort to make it fully understood by the general public that the Japanese Army had no other intention than the disarmament of the F.I.C. Forces and thus tried to establish law and order.

PART IV : THE DEFENCE OF SOUTHERN F.I.C.

1. At the end of April the Orders were issued by the 38th Army to the effect that the Division, as the Southern Defending Troops, should defend Annam, Cochin-China and Cambodia south of the line which connects Kana with the point where the said three districts meet together.

The outline of the disposition of our forces at the time was as follows:

The Headquarters of the 2nd Division.	...	SAIGON
The 1st Battalion, the 29th Infantry Regiment.	...	do
The Headquarters of the 2nd Field Artillery Regiment.	...	do
The Signal Unit, the 2nd Division.	...	do
The Headquarters of the 29th Infantry Regiment.	...	BIEN HOA
The 3rd Battalion, the 29th Infantry Regiment.	...	PHANTHIEP
The 2nd Battalion, the 29th Infantry Regiment.	...	PHNOM PENH
The 2nd Reconnaissance Regiment.	...	KOMPONG CHAM
The 2nd Artillery Brigade, the 2nd Field Artillery Regiment.	...	PUSAR UDONG
The Main Body of the 2nd Engineer Regiment.	...	do
The Main Body of the 2nd Commissariat Regiment.	...	TAININH
The Ordnance Unit, the 2nd Division.	...	PHNOM PENH
The Sanitary Unit, the 2nd Division.	...	KANTHO
The 1st Field Hospital, the 2nd Division.	...	KRATIE
The 4th Field Hospital, the 2nd Division.	...	BIEN HOA
The Sick Horse Depot, the 2nd Division & the Anti- Infectious Disease & Water Supply Unit.	...	PUSAR UDONG

In June the Order pertaining to the reorganisation of the Division was issued.

With our reinforcements arriving and our strength left in Burma and Java returning successively in and after July, the reorganisation was started in accordance with the Divisional Order issued on August 5th and was expected to be completed at the end of August but it was given up halfway because of the surrender of Japan.

(B) OUR APPRECIATION OF THE INTENTIONS OF THE ALLIED FORCES.

1. THE DEFENCE OF BASSEIN AREA:

(1) The Allied Forces will carry out landing employing the main body near Pagoda Point on the one hand and a portion near Sandway, Gwa, and Baumi on the other hand, while they will send down a powerful parachutist unit in the vicinity of Bassein.

(2) Allied units of small strength will successively penetrate making use of the streams in the Delta Area and at the same time will plan to go up the Bassein River.

2. THE DEFENCE OF NAUNKAUN AND ITS VICINITY:

(1) As soon as the monsoon season is over the Allied Forces will advance in the vicinity of Bhamo from the direction of Myitkyina while a powerful paratroop will descend on the Naunkaun Plain.

(2) It will be probable that a powerful portion of the Allied Forces in the vicinity of Lungling will try to advance in the area east of Bhamo.

3. FIGHTING NEAR DUNGLING.

(1) The Allied Forces will try to advance in the direction of Lungling defeating our forces in Lameng in detail. They will at least make their best effort in securing firmly the key positions east of Lungling.

(2) Once our troops were forced to take the defensive structure the Allied will try to penetrate into the Naunkaun Plain from every direction.

4. THE DEFENCE OF MUSE AND ITS VICINITY:

The Allied Forces will advance in the vicinity of Nankingli, seize Wanching and its environs, thus threatening our right near flank, and at the same time send down a powerful air-borne troop in the Naunkaun Plain and then attack us in co-operation with the superior Air Force.

5. THE DEFENCE OF SOUTHERN F.I.C.:

It was our appreciation that the Allied Forces would carry out landing at Phanthiet and Capt.St.Jacques.

(C): THE OUTLINE OF OUR ORGANISATION.

THE DIVISIONAL HEADQUARTERS.

- Infantry Regiment (3)- Battalion (3)- Company (3)- Platoon(3);Section(4)(One L.M.G. in each Section)
- : :
- : :M.G.Company(1)-Platoon(4);Section(2) (One M.G. in each Section)
- : :Battalion Gun Platoon(1)(Two 70m.m. guns)
- : :
- :Regimental Gun Company(1) Platoon(2);Section(2) (2 75m.m Guns in each Section)
- :Quick Firing Gun Company(1)-Platoon(2)- (2 37 m.m. guns in each Platoon)
- :Signal Company (1)

RECONNAISSANCE REGIMENT (1):Headquarters

- :
- :Riding Company(2) : Platoon(3) : Squad (4).
- : :
- : :Quick Firing Gun Squad (1) : (one 37m.m. Gun).
- : :
- :Armoured Car Company (2) :Platoon (2) (3 Armoured cars in a Platoon).

ARTILLERY REGIMENT (1) :Headquarters

- :
- :1st Brigade : Battery(3) : Art.Section (2) : Gun Section (2) (One 75m.m. gun in each Gun Section)
- : :
- : : Wagon Line.
- : :
- : 2nd & 3rd Brigade: Equal to 1st Brigade but one 10 c.m. howitzer in each Gun Section).

ENGINEER REGIMENT (1) :Headquarters

- :
- : Company (3) : Platoon (4) : Squad (4)
- : :
- : Engineer Material Platoon (1)

COMMISSARIAT REGIMENT (1) : Headquarters
 :
 : Company (2) : Platoon (3) (Total number of
 vehicles: 40)

SANITARY UNIT (1) : Headquarters
 :
 : Company (3) : Platoon (3) : Squad (3)

Field Hospital (3):

..... REMARKS.....

1. The Strength of the Division: Approximately 14,000.
2. The number of vehicles: Approximately 400.
3. In place of some vehicles in the War Establishment approximately 1,200 craft or pack horses are used.
4. The plan of our reorganisation at the beginning of August, 1945 was as follows:
 - (a) The Infantry Regiment will be composed of three Battalions besides one Company under direct control. A Battalion will be composed of four Companys besides one Battalion Gun Company.
 - (b) The Reconnaissance Regiment will be composed of one Riding Company, one Light Tank Company, One Battery, and one Infantry Battalion (3 companys).
 - (c) An Infantry Battalion under direct control of the Division will be organized. (This Battalion will be composed of three Companys. Besides this, the organisation of the Battalion in the Infantry Regiment will apply correspondingly to this Battalion).
 - (d) The Artillery Regiment will be composed of four Brigades.
 - (e) The Commissariat Regiment will be composed of two Motor-Car Companys and one Draft Horse Company.
 - (f) The strength of the Division will be approximately 16,000.

APPENDIX E.

THE DISPOSITION OF FRENCH INDOCHINA.

1) The purposes of the disposition of French Indochina.

The attitudes of the French authorities towards the Japanese-French common defence of Indochina were rapidly lacking sincerity in accordance with the general war situation, especially with the American progress in the Phillipines. In spite of the repeated expostulations of the Japanese authorities, the French at last came to prevent the Japanese war preparations in Indochina in every sphere, and it became evident that, if the Japanese left the situation at that, they would find themselves in quite a difficult position, between the devil and the deep sea, in case of the landing of American forces. Thus the disposition of French Indochina was attempted to awake the sincerity of the French authorities and to make them contribute to the full extent to the Japanese war preparations.

2) The general policies of the disposition.

The Japanese Government, in order to apply to the changed situation, decided, at the Supreme War Guiding Conference in February 1945, the following policies concerning French Indochina:

Japanese authorities, taking into account the general situation, especially the American progress towards Indochina regions, and in order to accomplish the defense of Indochina, will demand that the Governor General of French Indochina should consent to the following propositions, as a concrete token of the determination to defend the Indochina territory against the eventual American operations towards it, in collaboration with the Japanese, according to the fundamental spirit of Japanese-French common defense of Indochina (See the appendices; No.1. - Protocol concerning Japanese-French Common Defense of Indochina; No.2. - Local Treaties based upon the Preceding).

a) As long as the present circumstances last, the French troops and armed police will be put under the Japanese command and will act solely according to its directives as for the organisation, disposition and movement, of the troops, arms and ammunitions, and materials.

b) The organisations particularly necessary for the war conduct, such as railways, sea transportations, and communication, will be put under the Japanese control.

c) The Governer General will immediately give instructions to all the organisations in French Indochina to collaborate fully and faithfully with the Japanese upon their demands.

(The above three items were in fact presented officially in the demand which Ambassador MATSUMOTO made to Governer General DECOUX on March 9.)

In case if the Governer General accepts fully the Japanese demands, the Japanese will not go beyond the reorganisation of the French troops and armed police. If not, the Japanese will be obliged to appeal to arms and resort to military control. In that case, the following principles will be adopted:

a) Even if the French rejects the Japanese demands, the relations between the two countries will not be considered as being at war.

However, Japan will not be bound by the existing treaties concerning French Indochina.

b) Japan will not admit the execution of functions to the Governer General and his leading staff of the Government, but their personal treatment will be as moderate as possible.

c) The lower organisations of the government will not be touched and will be utilized as they are.

d) The French troops and armed police will be disarmed and reorganized. Those who resist at the disarmament, however, will be treated as prisoners.

e) The French civilians and their properties will not be treated as of enemy nation, but will be treated as moderately as possible. However, in case of military necessity, the Japanese may procede to the control of private properties and the restriction of habitation and movement.

3) The development of the disposition.

On March 9, 1945, at 1900 (Japanese time), Ambassador MATSUMOTO visited Governer General DECOUX at his official residence in Saigon, according to the instructions of the metropolis. They talked about the general war situation, and after the various discussions, the Governer General admitted the possibility of American forces' landing in Indochina. Hence, the Ambassador requested him in qulity of Governer General

invested with full powers to manifest his sincerity towards Japan in strengthening Japanese-French common defense in the present circumstances. He explained the above-mentioned conditions which the Japanese Government had instructed him to propose to the Governor General, and asked to give reply by 2200. He took leave after having warned that the Japanese army would be obliged to take necessary measures if the reply was not favourable.

About 2220, Captain ROBIN brought the reply of the Governor General to the Ambassador, which was found qualified and which the Japanese authorities could not help considering as rejection.

On this, the Commanding General of the 38th Army found himself under the necessity of taking decision to appeal to arms, according to the instructions which had been given him by the General Headquarters, and ordered all his forces immediately to disarm the French troops and armed police.

b) The Japanese forces succeeded in disarming the main forces in a few days, though they met some resistance in Hanoi, Saigon, Phnom-Penh and Nhatrang. However, the Japanese paid considerable sacrifice in disarming the French troops which resisted in the strong fortresses in the north frontier regions, such as Lanson, Dong Dang, and Moncay.

Then the Japanese army proceeded to suppress French detachments stationed in the remote countries and wipe out French contingents who had escaped into mountains, while endeavouring to reestablish the public order and to revive the administration. In about one month's time, public order was gradually reestablished, except in the remote corners, public feelings were reassured, and various organisations generally recovered their former activities.

It took a considerable time to clear the mountain range of Annam, Chinese frontiers, mountaineous regions of Laos of the remnants of French troops and it was May 15 that the Japanese army finished its armed operations.

Meanwhile, the activities of Viet-Nam Party in the Northern Indochina became more and more vigorous, and especially its disturbances of public security, aiming to dispel Japanese forces in order to accomplish the full independence of their people, grew rife. The Japanese army was compelled to continue to employ a considerable

strength in painstaking work of sweeping Viet-Minh partisans, until the cessation of hostilities of August 15.

c) The French troops disarmed were divided into the Frenchmen group and the native group; the former was concentrated and interned chiefly in Saigon and Hanoi, and as for the latter, a part of it was adopted in the Japanese army as auxiliaries, and the rest was planned to be reorganized into the voluntaries and the national armies, but that plan was not achieved, though preparations were being made.

d) As armed police was indispensable for the maintenance of public order, the Japanese army re-armed the minimum native policemen, excluding French ones, and distributed them to each province. But the total numerical strength of them was below the half of the former one.

e) As for French civilians, the Japanese army, both on military necessity and for safeguard's sake, restricted their residence in Hanoi, Haiphong, Hue, Nhatrang, Saigon, Phnom-Penh and Dalat.

f) Governer General DECOUX and other leading figures, military and civil, were made to live with their families in safe places and the Japanese army paid special attention to their well-treatment.

g) Administration organisations were left intact, and though a small number of Japanese officials took charge of some important positions, almost all officials, both French and Annamite, were permitted to remain at their posts. Thus the Japanese army arranged to reestablish public order as soon as possible, preventing social uneasiness and disorders and to make all Indochina cooperate with the Japanese in war preparations.

h) As a logical result of Japan's disposition of French Indochina, Annam and two other nations proclaimed their independence for themselves and were realizing their independences substantially. The Japanese army took the attitude not to interfere in the internal affaires and left them free to do what they wanted. Meanwhile the Japanese army kept their actions always under eye lest they should be off the rails, ridden by a mistaken idea of independence and race-consciousness, and always paid minute attention not to make them repeat the same incooperative attitudes as the French regime.

i) The progress of battle at the moment of the disposition of French Indochina is shown in the appended plan No.1.

4) The conclusion.

Japan's disposition of French Indochina was really inevitable step as the result of the fact that, facing eventual American invasion, the French authorities could not be hoped to correct their unfriendly

attitudes and to cooperate with the Japanese in rapid war preparations and to facilitate the operations. It was not that Japan regarded the French as enemies, or attempted to occupy the Indochina territory, or tried to set the Annamite on the French.

Moreover, the disposition of French Indochina was based upon the directives of Tokyo, and was not an arbitrary decision of local Japanese army. All the Japanese troops, militaries, officials, civilians, however humble their posts might have been, always acted solely by orders of superior commanders, and fulfilled their responsibilities most faithfully according to each given duty./.

APPENDIX F.

COPY

TO: The Supreme Commander,
Japanese Expeditionary Forces,
Southern Regions.

DETAILED ORDERS
FOR THE EVACUATION OF CERTAIN AREAS REQUIRED IN PURSUANCE
OF THE LOCAL AGREEMENT SIGNED AT RANGOON ON 27TH AUGUST
1945 REGARDING PRELIMINARY ACTIONS TO BE CARRIED OUT BY
THE JAPANESE FORCES UNDER THE COMMAND OR CONTROL OF THE
SUPREME COMMANDER JAPANESE EXPEDITIONARY FORCES SOUTHERN
REGIONS PRIOR TO ANY FORMAL SURRENDERS THAT MAY BE MADE.

1. In pursuance of the Local Agreement signed at RANGOON on 27th August 1945 regarding preliminary actions to be carried out by the Japanese Forces under the command or control of the SUPREME COMMANDER, JAPANESE EXPEDITIONARY FORCES, SOUTHERN REGIONS prior to any formal surrenders that may be made (hereinafter referred to as the "Local Agreement"), the following immediate orders are now issued by the COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, ALLIED LAND FORCES, SOUTH EAST ASIA in the name of the SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER, SOUTH EAST ASIA.
2. These orders are issued in addition to orders set out in Appendices A and B to the "Local Agreement".

CLEARANCE OF AREAS

3. Certain areas, within JAPANESE occupied or controlled territories, are required to be evacuated of all JAPANESE personnel, less those essential for the maintenance of LAW AND ORDER and of ESSENTIAL SERVICES; all areas are shown clearly on the attached maps, of which two copies are supplied for each area.

Areas to be evacuated in whole or in part are:-

MOULMEIN	SINGAPORE
PHUKET	KUANTAN
PENANG	KHOTA BHARU
PORT SWETTENHAM	BANGKOK
MALACCA	SAIGON

4. Areas will be evacuated forthwith and personnel will then be concentrated outside these areas and will NOT re-enter them.
5. The following additional instructions apply to areas evacuated:-
 - (a) All CIVIL POLICE will remain in these areas, and under JAPANESE control will help to enforce Law and Order, the Safety of Property, and the Prevention of Looting.

- (b) Any Allied Prisoner of War or Internee Camp, situated within an area to be evacuated, will remain the responsibility of the JAPANESE COMMANDER, who will ensure the Safety and Well Being of all occupants.
- (c) All local Military Motor Transport will be concentrated within areas to be evacuated; such Transport will have their drivers available and their tanks filled with petrol and oil.
- (d) Local sources of Labour will not be dispersed from docks or airfields; the necessary information of all sources of local supply of labour will be made available for the COMMANDER OF THE ALLIED FORCES immediately on landing.

6. The following information will immediately be required by the COMMANDER OF THE ALLIED FORCES on landing:-

- (a) The local ORDER OF BATTLE of all JAPANESE AND JAPANESE CONTROLLED forces, with their locations: marked maps of such locations.
- (b) A DIRECTORY of local COMMANDERS of the rank of MAJOR GENERAL and above.
- (c) The Details of any Lawlessness which may exist locally.
- (d) The LOCATIONS of dumps of:

- Arms
- Ammunition
- Equipment
- Vehicles
- Warlike Stores
- Supplies, both Military and Civil
- Petrol, Oil and Lubricants

(e) The LOCATIONS of:

- Airfields
- Aircraft and Equipment
- Radar Equipment

(f) The LOCATIONS of:

- Fortifications
- Fixed Defences
- Booby Traps
- Minefields and Dangerous Areas

(g) DETAILS of SIGNAL COMMUNICATIONS, including LOCATIONS of TRANSMITTERS etc., and DETAILS of CODES, CYPHERS, RECORDS etc.

(h) DETAILS of:

- Medical Equipment available
- State of local health (military and civil)
- The presence of infectious disease or epidemics.

- (i) The NAMES of all LOCAL INTERPRETERS.
 - (k) Marked maps showing the state of local road and rail communications and locations of centres of essential services.
7. In addition to the information required in para 6 above, details of Allied Prisoners of War or Internee Camps will be required by the COMMANDER OF THE ALLIED FORCES; the details required are as already set down in Appendix "A" to the Local Agreement.
 8. The evacuation of the areas described in para 3 and the execution of the INSTRUCTIONS in this ORDER, will be put into effect forthwith.

PROVISION OF STAFF OFFICERS

9. HEADQUARTERS, SOUTHERN ARMY will supply each evacuated area with an accredited representative, who will ensure the smooth working and proper execution of these Orders and any others issued by the COMMANDER OF THE ALLIED FORCES. The accredited representative will be a Staff Officer of sufficient Seniority to issue to the local JAPANESE COMMANDER all necessary executive orders; he will be supplied with an interpreter by HEADQUARTERS, SOUTHERN ARMY.
10. These Staff Officers will be flown to the areas concerned at once and prepare the necessary detailed Information against the arrival of the ALLIED FORCES. The details of each flight will be sent by wireless to the SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER, SOUTH EAST ASIA, giving type of aircraft, markings, route, timings.

HEADQUARTERS SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER SOUTH EAST ASIA CONTROL COMMISSION TO THE JAPANESE HEADQUARTERS SOUTHERN REGIONS: SAIGON/DALET

11. The SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER will send a CONTROL COMMISSION to HEADQUARTERS, SOUTHERN REGIONS at SAIGON/DALET.
12. The object of this COMMISSION will be to ensure that orders for surrender are smoothly carried out, and properly controlled, and to provide a channel for the transmission of orders.
13. HEADQUARTERS, SOUTHERN REGIONS will now make all arrangements for accommodation and the provision of guides and transport.
14. The COMMISSION will move into SAIGON at a time to be notified later after the signing of the INSTRUMENT OF SURRENDER in TOKYO; all arrangements for its reception will therefore be made immediately; warning of its arrival will be given later.
15. The COMMISSION will travel to SAIGON by air; the aerodrome will therefore be made immediately ready to receive DAKOTA aircraft.
16. The composition of the COMMISSION will be as given below; appropriate and self-contained accommodation will be handed over to house and provide office accommodation for the COMMISSION.

THE COMMISSION

A First Party; to arrive from 2 September onwards.

Senior Officers	15
Other Officers	120
Other Ranks	250

B Second Party; to arrive later

Officers	100
Other Ranks	600

17. The transport required for the COMMISSION will be supplied by HEADQUARTERS, SOUTHERN REGIONS and will meet the aircraft of the COMMISSION as they arrive. The following transport will be set aside for use by the COMMISSION:-

	<u>Load Carriers</u>	<u>Communication Vehicles</u>
For Party A	25	20
For Party B	<u>30</u>	<u>10</u>
TOTAL	<u>55</u>	<u>30</u>

18. On arrival of the COMMISSION the following action will be taken:-

- (a) JAPANESE personnel manning Radio Stations will be kept to a minimum and will be segregated.
- (b) JAPANESE Communications by telephone and other means of communication will be limited to those essential for carrying out the orders of the SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER, SOUTH EAST ASIA. All such Communications will be conducted in clear.
- (c) All JAPANESE Cyphers and Codes will be handed over to the COMMISSION in arrival.

19. Any other details, including time of arrival and information other than that contained herein, will be sent, by wireless, to HEADQUARTERS, SOUTHERN REGIONS - SAIGON/DALET.

20. On arrival at SAIGON, details required by Appendix "A" or "B", to the Local Agreement, or by these orders, will be made available for the GENERAL OFFICER, COMMANDING THE COMMISSION.

(Sd) M.S.K. MAUNSELL,
 Brigadier,
 for Commander in Chief,
 ALLIED LAND FORCES,
 SOUTH EAST ASIA.

In the name of

The Supreme Allied Commander,
 SOUTH EAST ASIA.

=====

C O P Y

SOUTH EAST ASIA COMMAND HEADQUARTERS

TO: Commander-in-Chief,
Allied Land Forces,
South East Asia.

1. The Supreme Commander, Japanese Expeditionary Forces, Southern Regions, hereby acknowledges receipt of detailed orders dated 27th August 1945 for the evacuation of certain areas required in pursuance of the local agreement regarding preliminary actions to be carried out by the Japanese Forces under the command or control of the Supreme Commander, Japanese Expeditionary Forces, Southern Regions, prior to any formal surrender that may be made. He understands that he will be informed by wireless signal from the Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia immediately the Instrument of General Surrender has been signed in Tokyo.

2. Immediately on receipt of this wireless signal the Supreme Commander, Japanese Expeditionary Forces, Southern Regions, hereby undertakes immediately to send a signal by wireless to the Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia to inform him that all orders and instructions contained in the detailed orders referred to in para 1 above have been carried out effectively and completely.

(Sgd)

for Supreme Commander,
Japanese Expeditionary Forces,
Southern Regions.

RANGOON,
27 August 1945.

APPENDIX G.

TOP SECRET28 Aug 45ALLIED LAND FORCES SOUTH EAST ASIA OPERATIONAL
DIRECTIVE NO 12Operation MASTERDOM

TO:- Maj Gen D.B.* GRACEY, CB,CBE,MC,
GOC, 20 INDIAN DIVISION.

COMMAND

1. You are appointed Commander Allied Land Forces for the occupation of French Indo China, South of Latitude 16 degrees NORTH.
2. You will command all French forces in your area until it is decided by Commander in Chief, Allied Land Forces, South East Asia that the French can set up an independent command.
3. Prior to your division leaving BURMA you will remain under command of the General Officer Commanding in Chief, Twelfth Army, who will be responsible for mounting Operation MASTERDOM. On arrival in French Indo China you will come directly under command Commander in Chief, Allied Land Forces, South East Asia.
4. Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia Control Commission.

You are also appointed Head of the Control Commission (Army) for French Indo China and in this capacity you will be responsible direct to the Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia. You will receive his directive separately.

TASKS

5. As Allied Land Force Commander you will carry out the following tasks:-
 - (a) Secure the SAIGON area, including Headquarters, Japanese Southern Army.
 - (b) Disarm and concentrate all Japanese forces in accordance with the policy laid down in this Headquarters letters 10028/G(0)1 dated 19 and 28 Aug 45.
 - (c) Maintain law and order and ensure internal security.

* sic.

- (d) Protect, succour and subsequently evacuate Allied prisoners of war and civilian internees.
- (e) Liberate Allied territory in so far as your resources permit.

You will give such directions to the French Indo China Government as are required to effect these tasks. In these matters you will consult the senior French Land Forces Commander.

CLANDESTINE FORCES

- 6. Control of all clandestine forces will be exercised by the Allied Land Force Commander. A P Division staff officer will be provided for this purpose.

At Appendix "A" is the policy you will adopt in dealing with clandestine forces.

CONDUCT OF OPERATION

- 7. There is every indication that the senior Japanese commanders intend to comply with the terms of surrender. There remains, however, the possibility that dissident units or individuals may create incidents.
- 8. All troops will, therefore, be warned that this is not an operation of peace, that resistance may be met and that therefore the initial landings will be made tactically.

OUTLINE PLAN

- 9. The following is the broad outline plan for Operation MASTERDOM. Timings are in relation to Z Day, being the day forces are landed at SINGAPORE:-

<u>Date</u>	<u>Formation Moving</u>	<u>Planned air lift available for army personnel</u>
Z + 1	Fly in of the Control Commission, escort and press to main airfield at SAIGON.	500
Z + 11)	Fly in one bde gp of 20 Ind Div	
Z + 15)	and part of 5th Colonial Regiment	3,840
Z + 19)	to SAIGON.	
Z + 19)	Remaining personnel and vehicles	
Z + 24)	of 20 Ind Div leave RANGOON by sea.	
Z + 29)	Remaining personnel and vehicles	
Z + 34)	20 Ind Div arrive SAIGON.	

* The air lifts are based on the following planning figures:-

(i) Average overall weight of a man and his kit	-	225 lbs.
(allowances for personal kit are:		
Officers	-	65 lbs,
BORS	-	30 lbs,
IORS	-	20 lbs.)
(ii) Allowance for G 1098 equipment, per man	-	<u>10 lbs.</u>
TOTAL		235 lbs <u>per man.</u>

The additional air lift available from the five DAKOTA squadrons operating will be used for RAF administrative personnel, stores, food and POL.

- 10. A more detailed staff study of this operation is being prepared by Headquarters, Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia, Joint Planning Staff, and will be forwarded to you later.

FORCES AVAILABLE

- 11. The necessary additional forces to make 20 Ind Div a balanced force will be provided as far as possible by Twelfth Army. A detailed Order of Battle is being issued separately.
- 12. To assist you with the control and evacuation of RAPWI, a RAPWI control staff will be attached to your headquarters.

RE

- 13. Engineer Works
 - (a) The priority of works is shown at Appendix "B".
 - (b) Work on these tasks will be limited to that essential to maintain the operation.
 - (c) CRE 20 Ind Div will be required to fulfil the role of CRE (Works) in addition to that of CRE, 20 Ind Div.

RAF

- 14. The RAF forces which are planned to accompany your force will consist of two MOSQUITO squadrons.

ADMINISTRATION

- 15. Administrative Instructions are being issued separately.

INTERCOMMUNICATION

- 16. Instructions regarding the use of wireless will be issued to you later.
- 17. You will be allocated three special wireless sets (SCR 399) in addition to those being provided for the Control Commission, to establish the following wireless links:-

SAIGON to DALET,
SAIGON to BANGKOK (RAF Set).

Z DAY

- 18. On present plans Z Day will be 5 Sept 45.

ACKNOWLEDGE

F.C.Scott
B.G.S

for General,
Commander in Chief,

ALLIED LAND FORCES, S.E.A.

ALFSEA 133
RFS/SCI

APPENDIX I.

TOP SECRET

HEADQUARTERS, SUPREME ALLIED
COMMANDER, SOUTH EAST ASIA.

Copy No.....⁸

To: Major General D.D.Gracey, C.B., C.B.E., MC.

Copy for Information to:

- +Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Fleet.
- +Commander-in-Chief, Allied Land Forces, S.E.A.
- +Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, S.E.A.
- +Lieutenant General Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, V.C.,
K.B.E., C.B.,C.M.G.,D.S.O.



COMMAND

1. You are appointed Head of HQ SACSEA Control Commission to HQ. Japanese Southern Army at SAIGON.

ORGANIZATION

2. The following directive refers to your duties in that capacity in which you will be responsible directly to me. Your duties as Officer Commanding Allied Land Forces will be detailed in a further directive from Commander-in-Chief ALFSEA.

- (a) Your Commission will be organized according to Annex 'A'.
- (b) Annex 'B' gives information on Japanese formation Headquarters under command of Southern Army.
- (c) Annex 'C' is a copy of the instrument and orders for surrender.

TASKS

3. You will assume control of Headquarters Japanese Southern Army at SAIGON and supervise its fulfillment of the orders of surrender imposed.

4. You will transmit through that Headquarters such orders to the Japanese as you receive from me.

5. You will obtain and transmit to me information regarding Japanese dispositions. With regard to stock of war materials and foodstocks within territory formerly controlled by the Japanese Southern Army the Japanese Plenipotentiaries at RANGOON have been asked to provide the information and take the appropriate action shown in JLPC Secretarial Memo No.59 attached as Annex 'D'. You will obtain and transmit to me such information as is available and instruct the Japanese authorities to take the action indicated.

6. You will exercise such control over Japanese communications circuits as your resources will permit.

7. You will study the problem of assistance to RAPWI and will render such practical aid as is possible.

8. You will study and report on the state of land and water communications and airfield facilities within FRENCH-INDO-CHINA and port facilities at SAIGON.

9. You will make every endeavour to open the river and sea approaches to SAIGON at the earliest possible moment and not later than 1 October 1945, making use of Japanese minesweeping, salvage and survey resources. You will also prepare a pilotage service for our use.

10. In conjunction with your functions as the Commander of the Allied Land Forces, you will reduce the size of Headquarters Japanese Southern Army to the minimum necessary to enable it to perform its functions of control as required by you. Such high-ranking Japanese Officers as are not classified as War Criminals or Prisoners of War, and are not required by you to exercise control, should be dealt with in the same way as other Japanese Officers. A list of Japanese classified as War Criminals will be communicated to you in due course, as will also the policy to be followed as regards classification of Japanese as Prisoners of War or "surrendered enemy personnel".

11. You will maintain liaison with the local French Government and keep me informed as to the general situation.

MOVEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

12. Commander-in-Chief ALFSEA will be responsible for the assembly of your Commission, and, in conjunction with the Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, for the movement of your Commission by air to SAIGON.

13. Commander-in-Chief ALFSEA, in conjunction with the Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, will be responsible for the maintenance of your Commission until such time as air supply can cease; thereafter Commander-in-Chief ALFSEA will assume this responsibility.

14. At Annex 'E' is a summary of information supplied by Japanese Plenipotentiaries at RANGOON.

(Sd) Louis Mountbatten,

29 August 45.

SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER

+Less Annex 'C', 'D' and 'E'.

Annex 'A' - Composition of HQ SACSEA Control Commission to the Japanese Southern Army HQ at SAIGON.

Annex 'B' - Japanese Chains of Command.*

Annex 'C' - Draft Instruments of Local Surrender and Accompanying Orders.

Annex 'D' - JLPC Secretarial Memo No.59.

Annex 'E' - PAO(SEA)2300/Q1 Information obtained from Japanese Plenipotentiaries.

* Japanese Chains of Command, see Lord Mountbatten's Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

CONFIDENTIALANNEX A TO DIRECTIVE TO MAJOR-GENERAL D.D. GRACEYCOMPOSITION OF HQ.SACSEA CONTROL COMMISSION TO THE JAPANESE SOUTHERN
ARMY HQ. AT SAIGON-----
(Based on WE SEA/503/1/45.)

Commander (Major General)	1
Chief of Staff (Brigadier)	1

1. CONTROL TEAM

G.S.O. I.	1
G.S.O. II.	2
A.Q.M.G.	1
D.A.A.G.	1
D.A.Q.M.G.	1
S.O. I.R.E.	1
A.D. Survey	1
Cdr. R.N.	2
Lieut. Cdr.R.N.	1
Foreign Office Representative	1
S.O. I Civil Affairs	1
S.O. II Civil Affairs	1
French Liaison Officers	2
Petty Officer R.N.	1
Clerks R.A.S.C.	14
" (Field Svy) R.E.	1
" R.E.	1
Draughtsman (Topog) R.E.	1

Air Section

Air Cdre R.A.F.	1
W/Cdr. (Air Staff) R.A.F.	1
W/Cdr. (Sigs) R.A.F.	1
S/Ldr. (Air Staff) R.A.F.	1
Clerks (GD) R.A.F.	4

For Duty at Japanese Air H.Q.

W/Cdr. R.A.F.	1
S/Ldr. R.A.F.	1
Clerks (GD) R.A.F.	1

Two Reconnaissance Teams each:-
(to be flown in later)

W/Cdr. R.A.F.	1
S/Ldr. (Eng) R.A.F.	1
S/Ldr. (Armt) R.A.F.	1
S/Ldr. (Sigs) R.A.F.	1
S/Ldr. (Eqpt) R.A.F.	1
S/Ldr. (Int) R.A.F.	1
N.C.O. R.A.F.	5
Clerks (GD) R.A.F.	2

2. INTELLIGENCE TEAM

G.S.O. I 1

Examination Section

G.S.O. II 2

G.S.O. III 2

S.O. II R.E. 1

Cdr. R.N. (Int) 1

W/Cdr. (Int) R.A.F. 1

S/Ldr. (Int) R.A.F. 1

Clerks G.D., R.A.S.C. 6

Draughtsman (Topog) R.E. 1

Counter Intelligence Section

Majors or Captains 2

Serjeants 2

Signals Intelligence Section

G.S.O. II 1

G.S.O. III 2

3. SIGNAL TEAM

W/Cdr. (Sigs) R.A.F. 1

Cipher Operators 8

Telephone Mech. 1

Despatch Riders R.Sigs 4

R.S.S. Team 5

Wireless Operator Mechs R.A.F. 8

Radio Mechs RN. 4

Aircraft No.1

Pilots - USAAF 2

Navigator USAAF 1

Engineer USAAF 1

Radio Operators USAAF 3

Aircraft No.2

Pilot R.A.F. 1

Navigator R.A.F. 1

Wireless Operator R.A.F. 1

Flight Engineer R.A.F. 1

Operators Wireless and Line R.Sigs 3

Cipher Operators R.Sigs 4

Signals Officer R.Sigs 1

4. MEDICAL TEAM

D.A.D.M.S. 1

Clerks R.A.M.C. 1

Medical Orderlies 2

5. ADMINISTRATIVE

Camp Comd (Q.M.) 1

C.Q.M.S. 1

Mess Units and N.C.E. 51

6. ATTACHED

Two F.S. Secs	20
Japanese Interpreters	7
Japanese Translators	2
G.S.O. II	1
Signal Liaison Unit Officer R.A.F.	1
Signal Liaison Unit Clerk (Sjt)	1
R.C.M. Officer R.A.F.	1
E. Group Officer	1
E.I.S. Officer	1
Naval Intelligence Officers	2
Force 136	7
O.S.S.	3
I.S.L.D.	4
C.S.D.I.C.(I)	3

APPENDIX J.

20 INDIAN DIVISIONOPERATIONAL DIRECTIVE No.1THE OCCUPATION OF FRENCH INDO - CHINA.POLITICAL

1. The political situation within FRENCH INDO-CHINA is still obscure. The latest information will however, be issued by this H Q from time to time as it comes in and the general situation should be much clearer by the time we arrive at SAIGON.
2. As far as our information goes at present, it appears that there is a revolutionary-cum-nationalist movement called the 'VIET MINH', which is causing trouble. This party is reliably reported to be in possession of plenty of arms. It is Anti-French and as we are going to INDO-CHINA to take over the country on behalf of the French, we may expect it to be equally Anti-British.
3. It is NOT our job to become involved in politics, in fact we must NOT do so. Our sole job in this connection is the maintenance of LAW and ORDER. But in order to carry out this task it is necessary for Comds to keep abreast of political happenings.

MAINTENANCE OF LAW AND ORDER

4. In our task of maintenance of Law and Order we must be prepared to deal with
 - (a) Armed bands of revolutionaries, bandits etc.
 - (b) Mobs intent on rioting, looting or killing French Civil Officials, etc.

5. Armed Bands

Those will be treated as enemies and the minimum ruthless force necessary, as outlined in Div Comds Conference on 25 Sep, will be used to suppress them.

6. Mobs and Civil Disturbance

These will be dealt with on the normal "Internal Security" principles. All Comds must be reminded that in dealing with hostile mobs, troops must NOT be used as police.

Charging a hostile crowd with pick helms or rifle butts has been proved to be useless. Actual physical contact with the crowd must be avoided.

Exactly the same principles as have always been used in peace for dispersing hostile crowds will be used, i.e. Draw the attention of the crowd to the fact that if they do not disperse, the troops will open fire. If it is necessary to open fire, then only the minimum force necessary will be used trying at first to obtain one's object by shooting the ringleaders.

7. Curfew

A curfew is at present in force from 2130 to 0530 hrs. This applies equally to our own troops except those required to be out between those hours on duty.

PROTECTION

8. Unless the situation alters in the meantime the following measures will be adopted on arrival in the SAIGON area.

- (a) All ranks will at all times carry their personal weapons. Bren guns need not be carried by No.1 unless they are actually on duty. They will be armed with rifle and bayonet if proceeding out of their lines NOT on duty.
- (b) Parties leaving unit lines or barrack areas must not be less than three in number. This refers equally to officers who must always be accompanied by their personal escort who should walk some paces in rear to guard against attack from behind.
- (c) Units are responsible for posting adequate sentries and guards on their areas in accordance with the situation. Special attention must be paid to areas where officers live. Until we hear to the contrary we must guard against the possible terrorist, or fanatical nationalist, endeavouring to assassinate officers.

RELATIONS WITH JAP FORCES

9. General Instructions have already been issued in Appendix 'B' to 20 Ind Div O O No.13, and its Annexares.

10. (a) Jap troops less guards for V Ps, hospitals, sanitary organisations and H Qs have already been ordered to concentrate in the following areas.

LAI THIEU	R J	2269
BIEN HOA	R J	3574
BARIA	R J	7820
TAHAN	R H	8824
BENCAT	R J	0899
LOC NINH	R D	0882

(b) They have also already been ordered to collect in dumps all weapons and arms except rifles, pistols swords and bayonets with 25 rounds per rifle and 6 rounds per pistol.

11. Disarmament

The collection of all heavy weapons and the concentration of Jap troops in the above areas will probably have been completed by the time we arrive in SAIGON.

We will, however, probably be called upon to complete their disarmament in respect of the weapons given in para 10 (b) above.

12. Principles to be followed in carrying out this disarmament are given in para 16 of Appendix 'B' to 20 Indian Division O.O. No.13. Comds must however, always have troops suitably dispersed in the disarmament area to guard against possible treachery and to enforce, if necessary, orders issued.

13. Trophies

All individuals are strictly forbidden to possess themselves of any Jap arms or equipment as trophies.

The Divisional Commander will, in due course, be authorizing units to draw a proportion of Jap equipment as trophies.

14. Relieving Jap Guards

On our arrival a number of V.P's will still be guarded by Japs and we will have to take over their guards. There will be no elaborate ceremonial for taking over these guards. The procedure will be:-

APPENDIX K.

THE GREMLIN TASK FORCE

By

W.G. Cheshire

It is rash to embark on a new venture on a Friday the 13th according to many but, fortified by personal experience to the contrary, I take the opposite view.

When, therefore, I set off on Friday, September 13th, 1945, for Saigon with the Allied Disarmament Mission, I looked forward to an interesting and unusual experience. Unusual it proved to be from the outset. When Air Command Headquarters at Kandy detailed me for this appointment they were extremely vague about the duties and responsibilities involved, and this lack of positive instructions was further emphasised when the Staff invited me to write my own directive.

The Mission, an Inter-Service one, with United States and French observers attached, had a two-fold task. Firstly it was to be the link between the Allied Supreme Command (Admiral Mountbatten) of the South East Asia Command and the surrendered Japanese opposite number (Field Marshal Terauchi) based in Saigon. Secondly, the Mission was to supervise the disarmament and repatriation of Japanese troops stationed in the South of French Indo China (now South Vietnam and Cambodia).

For political reasons, which no doubt seemed good at the time, French Indo China had been divided into two zones for the task of disarming the Japanese troops in that country. We were allotted the area south of the 16th parallel, and the Chinese, then still under Chiang Kai Shek, the area north of the line. This division set an unfortunate precedent which has since been perpetuated in the intense struggle between N. and S. Vietnam.

The members of the Mission assembled in Rangoon, in the first instance to discuss plans and procedures we were to follow and, secondly, to meet the Japanese representatives headed by General Numata, Chief of Staff to Terauchi, to make arrangements for our reception in Saigon. I was curious to meet the Japanese, who by their lightning victories in the early days of the war, had established for themselves a reputation as supermen. My only, and unsought,

previous contact with them had been in Moscow in 1943 where, because of the Soviet Protocol Office, I found myself embarrassingly alongside the Japanese Ambassador's staff at a social function.

When the tide of war eventually turned against the Japanese, they fought on with undiminished determination and displayed a fanatical opposition to personal surrender. Very few prisoners had been captured, and I had seen none. A face to face encounter at the conference table provided a surprise and a disappointment. Their officers were unimpressive to look at, short, stocky, dressed in ill-fitting uniforms and nearly all wearing spectacles. They did not conform to my idea of dashing soldiers who had contrived to overrun so much of Asia and who had, in the process, reached the frontiers of India. Their personal appearances notwithstanding, the Japanese proved to be competent negotiators, and suitable arrangements for our reception in Saigon were soon agreed.

The Japanese surrender had caught us by surprise, and when it took place the staffs at S.E.A.C. were in the throes of planning the recapture of Singapore (Operation Zipper), the agreed next phase in our war plans. The end of hostilities thus entailed much re-planning, but it was decided to continue with Zipper, treating it as an unopposed landing. Additional plans to move contingents to other areas under Japanese occupation, including Siam, French Indo China and the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia) had to be hurriedly produced. These necessary moves were to stretch our air transport and shipping resources to the utmost, with resultant delays in the build up of our forces to their planned numbers. As will be seen, these delays proved to be a source of embarrassment to us in Indo China.

So much for the immediate background. The confused and delicate political situation then existing in F.I.C. had its origins in 1941. Because Vichy France was susceptible to Axis pressures the Japanese were able to secure an unopposed entry into French Indo China. In return for this accommodating attitude, the French were allowed to exercise local authority in F.I.C. This enforced partnership between Vichy and Tokyo continued, apparently undisturbed, until the end of 1944 or early 1945, at which stage the French in F.I.C. began to appreciate that they had, willingly or unwillingly, backed the wrong horse. Their attitude towards the Japanese then hardened, with the

result that they found themselves unseated and replaced by Vietnamese. At the time of their surrender the Japanese were still in overall control of F.I.C. and retained this control until we could take over. A struggle immediately broke out over local control between the entrenched Vietnamese and the resurgent French.

As our aircraft took off from Rangoon we speculated about the reaction of the Japanese forces to our arrival in Saigon, where for some time to come they would outnumber us by at least five to one. It was true that General Numata and his staff had behaved correctly, and without rancour, during our preliminary discussions in Rangoon, but extreme Japanese aversion to surrender had been well publicised during the war, and it seemed at least possible that a proportion of the officers might demonstrate their opposition in forcible fashion. In the event Japanese discipline and behaviour in F.I.C. gave us no cause for anxiety and, as will become clear, we had cause to be duly grateful for this.

After an uneventful flight, with only a brief refuelling stop at Bangkok, we reached Saigon late in the afternoon. The town lies a few miles up river from the sea in rather dull countryside. It was attractively laid out, with broad tree-lined roads and many large houses in well-kept gardens. There was also something indefinably French about the whole place. Saigon had not been much ravaged by war and, compared with Rangoon, it presented a superficial air of prosperity.

At the airfield we were welcomed, among others, by Japanese staff officers ready to carry out our orders. Waiting also was an assembly of staff cars ordered for our use. It was of interest that not one of these cars was of Japanese make, all had been requisitioned in the early days of the occupation either locally, or from as far afield as Singapore. At a later date various original owners appeared at our H.Q. to claim their cars.

The car allotted to me was driven by a Japanese soldier. He was a thrusting driver and firmly believed that his passenger's seniority entitled him to priority at cross-roads. This was a perilous assumption because there were several other Japanese drivers with similar ideas about the right of way and it needed many alarming near-misses to convince my driver that seniority, which could not be determined in time, conferred no precedence.

The members of the Mission were not the first Allied representatives to reach Saigon following the Japanese surrender, as we had been preceded there by RAF Transport Command crews, some Army personnel, and a few French representatives. Nevertheless, some people turned out to greet us, among them some friendly locals and a few rather subdued French. I was surprised to see one of the banners of welcome inscribed in Russian. At that stage I had scarcely heard of Ho Chi Minh, and certainly knew nothing of his political affiliations, but his influence and its orientation soon became apparent.

The Senior Officers of the Mission were housed in a splendid mansion, formerly the residence of the Governor of the Province of Cochin China. In the turmoil following the surrender this building had changed hands more than once and, in the process, some of its furniture had disappeared with the departing occupants. To make up for the deficiencies so created some of us had to make do with camp beds and their utilitarian appearance made a sharp and amusing contrast with the remaining interior opulence of the residence.

The building was rat infested, and these unwelcome inhabitants made their sorites noisily at night. When the civil war flared up in earnest and marauders were about, it was difficult to determine in the dark whether the intruders were rebels or rats.

On arrival we had been advised by a well-meaning Frenchman to engage a Chinese contractor to run our Mess. An applicant for the post turned up and was soon installed. The food he produced was superb and would not have been scorned by Lucullus himself. We congratulated ourselves on our good fortune, but disillusionment set in with the first week's bill which amounted to the equivalent of £5 a day each. This was altogether too much; we were happy to eat in the style of Lucullus but were in no position to pay like Croesus. The Chinaman was packed off and succeeded by a fellow-countryman whose ideas on catering standards were more attuned to our means.

One of the irritating features of life in Saigon proved to be the recurrent failures of electricity supply. The municipal power station had received little attention in the years of the war, and was sadly in need of repairs. It was rumoured, perhaps unkindly, that the boilers were in such a dangerous state that only the Japs would unflinchingly stay and work in their vicinity. Certainly when the

Japanese eventually took over the power-house the supply of electricity became much more reliable. Supply of fuel for the power station provided a further problem. Coal stocks had been allowed to run down to nothing, the nearest source of supply was Hanoi, then in the uncooperative hands of the Chinese. The latter had consistently refused to allow any traffic between the two zones. In this instance, however, the authorities in our zone held a trump card. The rice producing areas were almost without exception on our side of the dividing line, and so long as all movement between the zones was obstructed, we would continue to accumulate a rice surplus while the Northern Zone would continue to starve. The force of this argument was apparent even to the Chinese, so with some show of reluctance they agreed to barter coal for rice.

Local currency, which had been indiscriminately printed and broadcast by the Japs, created some controversy between the French and ourselves. The flood of unsupported paper money circulating in the country was a source of embarrassment to the French, and in order to bolster up their tottering currency, they declared that notes of certain denominations were valueless with immediate effect and with no compensation. This sudden announcement caused us considerable concern because numbers of such notes were legitimately held by our troops who would now be out of pocket. This was a poor return for all the benefits the French were deriving from the presence of our troops. After protracted arguments the French agreed to redeem all cancelled notes in the personal possession of Indian and British troops. As could have been foreseen this concession opened the floodgates to anybody with friends or acquaintances among Allied forces, once more illustrating the difficulty of enforcing ill-considered and hastily imposed currency restrictions.

All these were minor difficulties when compared with the violent differences developing between the French and their former colonial subjects. It was proving more and more difficult to prevent an armed conflict. Eventually the Vietnamese appreciated that the French would in due course assume full and unfettered control and, in retaliation, the former proceeded to mass armed forces on the approaches to Saigon.

For the reasons already explained the build-up of our forces had been delayed, and it was questionable whether in their present reduced numbers they were in a position successfully to resist the advancing rebels. One possible source of reinforcement existed in F.I.C. itself. The Japanese still had a number of fully armed divisions awaiting repatriation. After some understandable hesitation it was decided to summon them to assist in the maintenance of law and order. The situation thus became somewhat Gilbertian since we were now seeking armed assistance from the very forces we had planned to disarm. The Japanese accepted these unexpected orders without demur and were immediately allocated a number of defensive tasks, including the protection of the vital road connecting Saigon with its main airfield. The Japs performed their duties with competence and, when necessary, fought with courage and determination. Had they been Indian or British troops they would, without doubt, have earned decorations.

The R.A.F. in F.I.C. were also in difficulties but, unlike the Army, they were short not of men but of fuel. The squadrons had, in reserve, only one hour's fuel or, in other words, they could complete only one sortie each. Here again the Japanese were in a position to provide very useful help. Most of their aircraft had been grounded since the surrender, but many were still serviceable and could be flown. Backing these aircraft was a useful reserve of fuel which, for technical reasons, could not be used in our own aircraft. After some discussion the decision was taken to make limited use of the Japanese Air Force. The limitation was imposed for political reasons, based on the curious idea that bullets fired from aircraft were politically more reprehensible than bullets, equally lethal, fired from the ground.

The aircraft, flown and kept serviceable by their own crews, were to be employed on transport and unarmed reconnaissance duties only. The decision to use Japanese aircraft once taken, I sent for their Commander to tell him what I had in mind. He made no difficulties and seemed pleased to take on the commitment because, possibly, his crews had found their prolonged and enforced idleness irksome. The Japanese aircraft suitable for the tasks allotted to them ranged in types from a creditable Jap copy of a Dakota to a small passenger carrier capable of lifting four or five passengers. Some bomber types were also available, useless for passenger work but valuable for lifting cargo.

The procedure adopted to control the operations of the Japanese aircraft was straightforward. Their Commander was to notify my staff daily of the number of his aircraft available, and we would then allocate individual tasks to them. To facilitate the transmission of information and orders, I installed a Squadron Leader and an interpreter in a hut alongside the Japanese commander. This simple and very economical arrangement worked extremely well, confirming previous experience that simple organisations are also frequently the best.

We were interested to discover, among other things, that the Japs had eminently sensible ideas about the importance of adequate servicing of their aircraft. Influenced by the stories of numerous suicide (kamikaze) attacks carried out by the Japanese towards the end of the war, I came to believe that they would fly aircraft in any state, provided they could get them into the air. However, it soon became apparent that they were grounding individual aircraft for much the same reasons as we would. Taking into account the long standing shortage of spare parts, brought about by the virtual impossibility of moving anything between Japan and the occupied territories, the state of serviceability achieved by them was creditable and bore comparison with our own results. Experience in operations showed that once their aircraft were offered a task, there were few technical failures.

The next stage in the creation of this special force was to obliterate Japanese markings on the aircraft and replace them by R.A.F. roundels. Finally I decided to give this force a special designation, to distinguish them from the R.A.F. and the French Air Force, both of which were also operating in this area. Inspired by the U.S. example set in the Pacific, I selected the term TASK FORCE with the prefix GREMLIN because of its popularity in the R.A.F. at the time. Thus the Gremlin Task Force, or G.T.F., was born.

Mention of the United States recalls to mind the official attitude to the course of events in F.I.C. It was made clear that they did not approve of much that was happening which, to them, smacked of colonialism. The U.S. observer with the Mission, a much decorated and very gallant Colonel, tended to keep aloof and elected to live in a house on the outskirts of the town, far removed from the Mission. When armed conflict broke out, the isolation of his house became a source of danger, but he stoutly maintained that his nationality

would protect him. In the event he was proved wrong as he was ambushed by rebels near his house, shot dead and his body spirited away. In spite of the most diligent search and appeals to the rebels, his body had not been found by the time I left Saigon some three months later. He was the first, and, to my knowledge, the only U.S. casualty in that phase of the war in what is now called Vietnam.

Once the G.T.F. was launched it quickly got into its stride with the main effort directed to transport operations. The R.A.F. Command's own air transport resources had been stretched to the utmost, and the contribution made in this field by the GTF was most welcome. They were employed principally in FIC, with occasional flights into neighbouring Siam, carrying passengers, food and general stores; in other words, the normal routine of any air transport organisation.

Apart from the routine tasks described above, the GTF were occasionally assigned to special duties, and some of these stand out in memory. The first arose soon after the GTF had been launched. We received an appeal from the French on behalf of their compatriots, marooned and starving on the Chinese side of the 16th parallel. The Chinese, still unfriendly, had refused to help. We rapidly assembled a force of assorted aircraft, loaded them with rations, and with two RAF officers to supervise, despatched the small armada to the North. Radio communications were poor throughout the area, and we soon lost touch with the aircraft on their relief mission. There was absolute silence for two days, then on the third a garbled message arrived and, after much difficulty, was decyphered to mean that, pending settlement in full of the refuelling bill, the Chinese had impounded all the aircraft. Protracted negotiations conducted with great difficulty via an indifferent radio, eventually secured the release of all but one aircraft. This one had developed a technical fault and had to be abandoned, the Chinese pursuing a policy of near Soviet pattern of non-cooperation, had refused entry to another aircraft flying in with the necessary spare parts.

Because of the difficulty of keeping up reliable radio communications it was frequently quicker to send an aircraft from Saigon to Singapore, a distance of some 600 miles, and return with the answer rather than trust the vagaries of the other. On one occasion a Brigadier on the staff of the Mission needed to get a message to Singapore, and since no RAF aircraft was available I decided to send him in a Dakota of the GTF. The Brigadier had an uneventful flight to Singapore, where

the approaching aircraft was assumed to be a Dakota of the RAF. However, when the crew emerged they were recognised to be Japanese and narrowly escaped internment in the nearest POW camp. They were rescued from this fate by their passenger, who thus made sure that there would be an aircraft to fly him back to Saigon.

Another memorable GTF incident, this time a personal one, was an early trial flight in one of their aircraft. Among the various Japanese types we had found at Saigon was one designated Dinah, a high performance, long range reconnaissance aircraft of wooden construction, roughly corresponding to our own Mosquito. Many of us had been interested in its performance and I ordered one to be produced for inspection. A Dinah duly appeared and through an interpreter I told the pilot what he was to do. We did a normal take-off and then climbed rapidly to 20,000' as ordered. At this stage the pilot started a very steep dive for the ground, a manoeuvre not in the programme and therefore unwelcome. As we hurtled downwards the thought flashed through my mind that I had at last met a true Kamikaze pilot who was about to demonstrate this peculiarly Japanese technique to its fatal conclusion. Various other thoughts succeeded one another with great speed, the predominant one being that I was powerless to avert the crash on which the pilot seemed to be set. There were no controls in the rear cockpit where I was uncomfortably ensconced, the pilot and I had no common language, and I had no parachute to bale out in case of need. At this stage the pilot gradually levelled out, and then completed the remainder of the schedule without further flourishes. As soon as we landed I indignantly sought an explanation through the interpreter. It transpired that the pilot, who was very young and proud of his aircraft, had been anxious to impress me with its diving prowess. In this he had succeeded admirably, and doing so had established his claim to the nickname Gremlin, which is defined in the dictionary as "a mischievous spirit".

Air operations intensified and I moved into a house near the airfield. This house, like the airfield itself, was in a disturbed area and the Japanese were told to provide a guard who were also to act as servants. The soldiers, as could have been expected, were strangers to the Western way of life nor they did understand any English. In spite of this double handicap they soon learnt what was expected of them, and astonished me daily by their photographic memories and uncannily quick anticipation. As sentries they were equally effective and no troublemaker ever made his way into the house.

While all this was going on the French Air Force were attempting to achieve the impossible with the few aircraft at their disposal, which in any event were museum pieces. To improve their operational capability they tried to borrow aircraft from the RAF, but for various good reasons none could be spared. As an alternative I offered them some Japanese fighters of good performance which the Japanese were not allowed to fly. After some hesitation the offer was accepted, but not very graciously. The fighters were moved to another and less congested airfield where French pilots could learn to fly them. They were then not under my direct control and so passed out of my ken, although a rumour did reach me that this particular experiment had not proved a great success.

When French reinforcements, both ground and air, began to reach F.I.C. there followed a reduction in calls on the GTF. This was just as well because apart from the perennial shortage of spare parts, many of the aircraft were reaching the end of their useful lives. There was, however, one more special task for them to perform; one of the RAF squadrons at Saigon airfield was due to move to Bangkok, to make way for the incoming French squadron. There was insufficient RAF airlift available to transfer all the squadron ground personnel and ground equipment, so the GTF were called in to take part in the move of 684 Squadron.

This was, virtually, the end of the GTF. In the short period of their existence they had successfully completed over 2,000 sorties. By the standard of later massive operations, such as the Berlin airlift, this was small beer, but it had usefully filled an unavoidable gap in our logistic organisation, and did so at little cost to the British Treasury. The RAF administrative tail supporting this effort consisted of two officers only; certainly one of the least costly air operations undertaken since 1939.

At about this time Air Command HQ appreciated that the GTF had been carrying non-Japanese passengers, this constituted a departure from regulations, and I earned a reproof for displaying too much initiative in not seeking proper authority. Since, however, the task of the GTF was completed, and what they had done could be considered a success, I heard no more.

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My connection with the GTF ended on a note of semi-comedy. There was a rule in the Command that Japanese officers were to surrender their swords to mark their defeated status. Admiral Mountbatten himself received Terauchi's sword at a special ceremony in Saigon. When the end of my stay in FIC was in sight, I told the Japanese airfield commander that I would take his sword. He replied courteously that this would be an honour and sought permission to make a speech during the ceremony. I agreed, providing the speech contained no reference to Bushido, the Japanese war spirit. There was a set form of ceremony for these occasions, and on the appointed day the Colonel appeared, more smartly turned out than usual and accompanied by an interpreter. As was the custom he saluted the Union Jack, and then embarked on his speech. I do not understand Japanese and paid little attention to what he was saying until, about halfway through, I heard him utter the words "Air Commodore". That alerted me because I knew the Japanese for Air Commodore was quite different and did not sound remotely like it. Concentrating my scattered thoughts, it dawned on me that the Colonel was speaking execrable English, extremely difficult to understand. Through inattention I had missed most of his speech but I was given a written version at the end of the ceremony, so honour was satisfied.

The Second World War and the troubled era that followed gave birth to many so called "sideshows", the GTF was one of them and although not as unusual as some, I believe its existence and achievements to be worth recording. My sole memento of it, apart from the Colonel's sword, is a small notice board displaying the RAF roundel and the words GREMLIN TASK FORCE. This used to hang outside the hut occupied by my Squadron Leader next door to the Japanese airfield commander and it now decorates my study wall.

When I finally took off from Saigon for Rangoon I had time to reflect that my expectations of September 13th had been fully justified. I had found the behaviour and discipline of the Jap Forces in defeat an interesting study as also the unrelenting struggle between France and certain parts of Vietnam. I had not expected to command a sizeable component of the Japanese Air Force on operations, nor to fly several of their aircraft, and most certainly not to be guarded and protected by the very force we had set out to disarm!

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