the Saigon government Col John Walker, senior American adviser to the Vietnamese Fifth Division, north of Saigon, explains the difficulty:

The soldier has been promised many things but they have not always been delivered. So he remains skeptical.

Our people in the United States are raised from childhood to look on a deserter as a low form of criminal. This is just not true in Vietnam. Over the years the soldier has been exploited so he doesn't have the same feeling about desertion that Americans do. The Vietnamese just doesn't consider it bad.

The Vietnamese Fifth Division, which Colonel Walker advises, had one of the worst records for desertion of any in the country. It is stationed near Saigon; the bus that runs past its front gate every thirty minutes costs just 15c for a trip to the Saigon back-alley labyrinths in which a deserter can go underground. But in the Fifth, as in other divisions up and down the country, the tide has begun to turn.

One measure of progress came during the crucial Tet season, over January and February. Tet is an amalgam of our Fourth of July and New Year's holidays, a time when the Vietnamese likes to go home to his village and his family. Frequently, the soldier who goes home on leave during Tet decides to stay there. Last year, during Tet, there were more than 23,000 desertions. During Tet in 1967, the number was cut just about in half. And since Tet of this year desertions have continued at only half of last year's rate.

Cheered by those statistics, the Americans prepared a press release and suggested to the Vietnamese that they circulate it. Either from a sensitivity on the whole subject of desertions, or from fear that the downward trend will not continue, or possibly because desertions have increased in the Revolutionary Development teams, which are being hit with increasing and devastating frequency by the Vietcong—for whatever reason, the Vietnamese have not released the figures. Instead the Americans leaked them to reporters in Saigon. The South Vietnamese are in general reluctant to talk much about their troops, and perhaps it's understandable. Unfavorable comparisons can be made between their performance and that of the Vietcong and North Vietnamese. Those two armies, after all, are of the same stock, essentially the same background as the South Vietnamese. Yet they consistently fight with greater valor, demonstrate a tighter discipline both in their dealings with the civilian population and in battle. And the evident reason is that they are more strongly motivated; they feel a deeper sense of kinship with their top leaders, a deeper involvement in the cause for which they fight.

Perhaps the most crucial difference between the two opposing groups of Vietnamese fighting men is in the officer corps. With the Vietcong, a man achieves officer status by long and arduous performance in the field. Frequently he has come up through the ranks. There is little talk of nepotism and corruption in the Vietcong. But the South Vietnamese army is notorious as a haven for corrupt and frequently cowardly political hacks, officers with no taste for battle and little concern for the well-being of their troops.

This shoddy leadership is not overlooked by the men who do the fighting. It is reflected in the desertion rate which, though declining, remains a powerful indicator that the South Vietnamese army has little stomach for the jobs that have been assigned it. Some American commanders speak spiritedly—in public—of how their counterparts are developing the vital qualities of leadership, of how the Vietnamese troops are beginning to take hold and demonstrate valor and determination in battle. But privately, there are few Americans in Vietnam who feel real confidence in the capabilities of their allies. The desertion rate is coming down. But still, despite the tough new law, despite a raise in pay and markedly improved living conditions, most of all despite the fact that the battle reports indicate they're on the winning side, still a thousand Vietnamese soldiers every week are willing to take their chances and desert.

**WHAM!**

TED KOPPEL

Mr Koppel has been on assignment for A.B.C. in Vietnam since the beginning of March.

An Australian corporal walks into a snack bar near Vung Tau, South Vietnam. Marching up to the counter he makes his pleasure known: "Eh, Gook! Gimme a hamburger!" WHAM!

A pair of American civilians stand at a corner of the Tu Do Street in Saigon. It is approaching 11 P.M.; almost curfew time. Apparently they are looking for a taxi, but because they have been drinking rather heavily two or three of the midget Renault cabs slow down and then pass them by. The louder of the two civilians poises for the next taxi and then lets loose with a remarkably well-aimed kick at the left-rear fender. WHAM!

WHAM is a caustic acronym coined in Vietnam to represent one of the favorite slogans of American leaders here. It stands for "Winning the Hearts and Minds" of the people. WHAM might also be less imaginatively but more realistically defined as the distance between the ideal objective and the attainable goal. The time is perhaps long overdue for us to give up the naive assumption that
the bigot from Bayonne, the dropout from Dayton, the hood from Hattiesburg and the plain, uninterested marine from Montgomery have, in the long trip to Southeast Asia, been magically transformed into effective good-will ambassadors.

One of our Vietnamese crews—Doan Van Tung the cameraman, Nguyen Xuan De the soundman and I—arrived one evening in the marine camp at Khe Sanh. The battalion commander, a colonel, graciously offered to let us sleep in his command bunker. Only the night before, Khe Sanh had been rather heavily mortared and the colonel felt we would be safer underground. While Tung, De and I go down into the bunker to drop our gear, the colonel tells a marine corporal to bring a couple of extra cots. The corporal and the cots arrive five minutes later. "You meanta say I lugged these f----g cots for these goddamn gooks?!!" WHAM!

The picture is not totally one-sided. I would estimate that the vast preponderance of Vietnamese don't like Americans either; but somehow, whatever their motivation, they are a shade more successful in disguising their feelings.

It is a multifaceted dilemma. Reduced to its simplest terms, it is as though you were to blindfold a man and then beat him insensible. When your victim regains consciousness, he is surrounded by ten men. Only four of the men, you tell him, are his enemies—the other six must be cultivated as friends. Regrettably, you say, you don't know which men fall into which category, but "do your best."

For his part, the GI must live with the daily paradox that exposes him on the one hand to the ARVN, whom the average GI appraises with something less than unalloyed admiration, and on the other to the ARVN's cousin or father, brother or fellow villager, the Vietcong. The more he condemns the merits of the ARVN as a soldier, the more the GI must ponder the undeniable tenacity and fighting ability of the Vietcong. They are cut from the same cloth, but seem to fight with disproportionate effectiveness. The American soldier's typical reaction is to reject all Vietnamese. They are all suspect. They are all gooks.

Then there is the dilemma of trying to unite Americans and Vietnamese in a common cause while keeping them at arm's length. The best interests of the South Vietnamese economy and of Vietnamese-American relations approach the irreconcilable. The flood of piasters that would be released were all American servicemen allowed free access to the cities and towns of South Vietnam would buckle the economy. The alternative is to limit contact between American and Vietnamese troops to purely military relations, or to the brief orgy of an in-country rest and recuperation period. Neither has proved conducive to a mutual blossoming of respect and admiration.

Even when they are fighting a common enemy, the American and the South Vietnamese soldier are fighting for different reasons. At best, the Vietnamese soldier is fighting because he loves South Vietnam and is firmly opposed to a Communist take-over. At worst, he is fighting because the Saigon government exercises a firm control around his home and could potentially cause him more trouble than could the Vietcong. Most frequently he is fighting because of a little bit of both. The American soldier, by and large, cares only rather vaguely about the threat of communism to South Vietnam. He is here, in effect, serving something that approaches jury duty; it is expected of him. He is prepared to serve his time and do his duty bravely; but he does it from obedience to his own country, not from any concern for Vietnam. Already, hundreds of seasoned professionals, American non-coms and officers with up to sixteen and eighteen years of service, are retiring after their Vietnamese tour, but before their twenty years are completed, rather than face returning for a second tour some two years hence. This is not lost on the Vietnamese. Few Americans are in Vietnam for "the duration" as they were in Europe during World War II. Most of them are in Vietnam for twelve or thirteen months. It's enough time for a man to do his duty, but not enough time to do the job.

The South Vietnamese are plagued on the one hand by the specter of an American pull-out that would leave them practically defenseless at the hands of the Communists, and on the other hand by the almost equally undesirable alternative of an American take-over. A few miles south of Da Nang I spoke recently with a small group of marines about to go out on an operation. One of them summed up the dilemma of American involvement neatly: "I told the mama-san who does our laundry, 'If you people don't shape up, we're gonna take this country away from you and make you all our slaves.'" He was joking, and the laundrywoman, so he says, knew it; but the joke is endemic to the problem. The frustration of fighting in Vietnam makes many an American soldier, officer as well as enlisted man, toy with the idea of how it might be if only the United States could "take over." Even as things stand, the increasing prominence of the American fighting machine in Vietnam makes many a South Vietnamese uncomfortably review his country's shrinking sovereignty. It is all very well for American statesmen and generals to speak glowingly of how unlikely, indeed practically impossible it would be for the United States to sustain a military defeat in Vietnam now. But the South Vietnamese have not forgotten the words of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson—each of whom said at one time that, in the final analysis, the war in Vietnam would have to be fought and won by the Vietnamese themselves. Seen from that perspective, each infusion of an additional 10,000 or 50,000 American soldiers bears witness to the fact that, if anything, the South Vietnamese are in less of a position to win this war on their own than they ever were. It represents a loss of face to the Vietnamese and a growing frustration to the Americans, who are finding it increasingly difficult to wage a bitter war on tiptoes.

A popular bon mot that has been making the rounds in Vietnam for some time is attributed to an American general who said: "Grab 'em by the balls and their hearts and minds will follow." The converse, it should be pointed out, is probably also true; but it is practically impossible to do both at the same time, and that is the most baffling dilemma of Vietnam.
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