

Vietnam: Setting The Record Straight

celebrating the two hundredth anniversary. More than 50,000 Americans lost their lives because we misunderstood the Vietnamese Revolution for too many years.

Journalist Francis Fitzgerald painstakingly studied the Vietnamese Revolution for many years. The book "Fire In The Lake—The Vietnamese and The Americans In Vietnam," is the fruit of more than five years of work by her. In it she writes:

In raiding the NLF villages, the American soldiers had actually walked over the political and economic design of the Vietnamese revolution. They had looked at it, but they could not see it, for it was doubly invisible: invisible within the ground and then again invisible within their own perspective as Americans. The revolution could only be seen against the background of the traditional village and in the perspective of Vietnamese history.

In the old ideographic language of Vietnam, the word *xa*, which Westerners translate as "village" or "village community," had as its roots the Chinese characters

American advisers, however, did not, or could not, learn from the French example. Following the same centralized strategy for modernization, they continued to develop the cities, the army, and the bureaucracy, while leaving the villages to rot. As it merely permitted a few more rural people to come into the modern sector in search of their souls, this new national development constituted little more than a refugee program. For those peasants with enough money and initiative to leave their doomed villages it meant a final, traumatic break with their past. For the nation as a whole it meant the gradual division of the South Vietnamese into two distinct classes or cultures.

Of necessity, the guerrillas began their program of development from the opposite direction. Rather than build an elaborate superstructure of factories and banks (for which they did not have the capital), they built from the base of the country up, beginning among the ruins of the villages and with the dispossessed masses of people. Because the landlords and the soldiers with their

conclude from examination of the NLF's goods and tools, the guerrillas were attempting not to restore the old village but rather to make some connection between the world of the village and that of the cities. The land mine was in itself the synthesis. Made of high explosives and scrap metal—the waste of foreign cities—it could be used for the absolutely comprehensible purpose of blowing the enemy soldiers off the face of the village earth. Having themselves manufactured a land mine, the villagers had a new source of power—an inner life to their community. In burying it—a machine—into the earth, they infused a new meaning into the old image of their society. The Diem regime had shown a few of them a way out of the village. The NLF had shown all of them a way back in, to remake the village with the techniques of the outside world. "Socialism"—*xa hoi*, as the Viet Minh and the NLF translated it—indicated to the Vietnamese peasantry that the revolution would entail no traumatic break with the past, no abandonment of the village



Staten Island's Vietnam Veterans paid their respects to buddies who perished in Vietnam.

The war in Indochina is historic for Vietnamese and Americans. And it is crucially important for us to understand it—to not be confused and misled by the press which acts just as desperately at times as the government. Indeed the battle is "cruel," especially for the civilians but it is nothing less than an obscenity to call it "futile" as the New York Times does on their April 3 editorial page.

I am quite confident, from careful reading and common sense that it will be proven that the atrocities carried out since March 10, when the current fighting began in earnest, are the conscious doing of Thieu's historically brutal regime and the confused acts of his routed army and air force. And since Thieu could not last a single day without aid, his is a puppet who his people will remove as soon as they can—the United States Government is directly responsible.

The press has lied about or misunderstood the revolutionary process there ever since the Vietnamese led by Ho Chi Minh first rose up to fight for their independence from imperialism during World War Two. They have called the war an invasion from the north and disavowed the existence of substantial forces in the South, the National Liberation Front, whom to this day they slander by calling them Viet Cong. This is so even though the true name of their government, the Provisional Revolutionary Government, is less than an inch from the American signature on the Paris Peace Accords.

For Americans to fall for this is no less pitiful than for them to misunderstand the meaning of their own American Revolution, of which they are

signifying "land," "people," and "sacred." These three ideas were joined inseparably, for the Vietnamese religion rested at every point on the particular social and economic system of the village. Confucian philosophy taught that the sacred bond of the society lay with the mandarin-genie, the representative of the emperor. But the villagers knew that it lay with the spirits of the particular earth of their village. They believed that if a man moved off his land and out of the gates of the village, he left his soul behind him, buried in the earth with the bones of his ancestors. The belief was no mere superstition, but a reflection of the fact that the land formed a complete picture of the village: all of a man's social and economic relationships appeared there in visual terms, as if inscribed on a map. If a man left his land, he left his won "face," the social position on which his "personality" depended.

In the nineteenth century the French came, and with their abstraction of money they took away men's soul—men's "faces"—and put them in banks. They destituted the villages, and though they thought to develop the economy and to put the landless to work for wages in their factories and plantations, their efforts made no impression upon the villagers. What assets the French actually contributed to the country in the form of capital and industrial plants were quite as invisible to the villagers as the villagers' souls were to the French. At a certain point, therefore, the villagers went into revolt.

Ngo Dinh Diem and his

foreign airplanes owned the surface of the earth, the guerrillas went underground in both the literal and the metaphorical sense. Settling down among people who lived, like an Orwellian proletariat, outside the sphere of modern technology, they dug tunnels beneath the villages giving the people a new defensive distance from the powers which reigned outside the village. The earth itself became their protection—the Confucian "face" which the village had lost when, for the last time, its hedges had been torn down. From an economic point of view, their struggle against the Diem regime with its American finances was just as much of an anticolonial war as that fought by the Viet Minh against the French—the difference being that now other Vietnamese had taken up the colonial role.

As an archaeologist might

earth and the ancestors. Instead of a leap into the terrifying unknown, it would be a fulfillment of the local village traditions that the foreigners had attempted to destroy.

Nothing would be more telling than the difference between the liberation army, the National Liberation Front, which has fought courageously, and intelligently through incredible hardship and the Saigon forces which have been corrupt, undisciplined and ineffective since the beginning. There are innumerable cases of soldiers who have deserted from the Saigon army and have then fought commendably with the N.L.F.

The people of Vietnam, led by the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, have sacrificed indescribably to win their independence from foreign domination. As the hour of their final victory nears, they deserve the heartiest comradly congratulations.

G.T.

A Teach-In On Vietnam

about the history of resistance of the Vietnamese people, from the Indo China Solidarity Committee.

MOVIE. "The 79 Springs of Ho Chi Minh."

Folksongs, Karen Landy and others—including you.

Third floor lounge
Free-All invited

Wednesday - April 16th - 1:00 PM