Vietnam: The Signs of Stalemate

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U.S. marine wades through morass of Mekong River delta

By R. W. APPLE Jr. Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Aug. 6—A little more than two years ago, on July 28, 1965, President Johnson committed the United States more decisively than ever to the war in Vietnam by announcing the deployment of 50,000 more American troops to this stricken corner of Southeast Asia.

Last Thursday, in response to the urgent entreaties of his commanders, Mr. Johnson disclosed that he would send 45,000 to 50,000 more men, for a total of 525,000, by next June 30.

Between these two bench marks of the most frustrating conflict in American history, the fighting has careened along, week by bloody week, through wet seasons and dry, through two Christmas cease-fires, through peace feelers and escalations.

By this weekend, 12,269 Americans had been listed as killed and 74,818 as injured, millions of artillery shells and billions of rifle bullets had been fired, and 833 airplanes had fallen to enemy gunners.

The war costs the United States more than \$2-billion each month.

And yet, in the opinion of most disinterested observers, the war is not going well. Victory is not close at hand. It may be beyond reach. It is clearly unlikely in the next year or even the next two years, and American officers talk somberly about fighting here for decades.

The official statements from Washington and Salgon seem optimistic, as they have been Continued on Page 14, Column 1

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Vietnam War Shows Signs of a Stalemate Despite Increasing U.S. Commitment

American Deaths Reach 12,269; Enemy's Tenacity Undiminished

Continued From Page 1, Col. 8 155-mm. shell, aimed almost at for almost five years. Gen. random into the gloom, crashes William C. Westmoreland, the onto a sleeping hamlet, po-American commander in Viet- tential Vietcong are often crenam, said recently that his men ated in an instant.

had made "tremendous prog- The most damaging fact is ress." Secretary of State Dean this: Behind these dikes that Rusk said the enemy was have been manned at the cost "hurting very badly."

"Stalemate" is a fighting almost nothing has improved. word in Washington. President The North Vietnamese have Johnson rejects it as a descrip-tion of the situation in Viet-lairs, away from the hamlets nam. But it is the word used by and villages, but security in almost all Americans here, ex- the countryside is as bad as cept the top officials, to char- ever. "I've destroyed the acterize what is happening. They use the word for many Division three times," a senior reasons, including the follow- American general said the other

ing: The Americans and their units all over the country, and

allies, having killed by their the impact was zilch: It meant own count 200,000 enemy nothing to the people." troops, now face the largest So now the Americans, imenemy force they have ever plicitly admitting that they defaced: 297,000 men, again by spair of results from the South Vietnamese themselves, are their own count.

The enemy has progressed moving into action against the from captured rifles and skimpy guerrillas, while trying at the from captured rifles and skimpy guerrinas, while trying at the supplies to rockets, artillery, same time to keep the North heavy mortars, a family of au-tomatic infantry weapons and flame throwers, most of which has been brought into South Vietnamese off balance. Of the 25 American units of regimental or brigade size de-ployed in Vietnam, 14 are com-mitted to the grisly business of Vietname of America diagong out the mines in roods Vietnam in the face of Ameri- digging out the mines in roads can air power.

and defending tiny hamlets. "We are on the way to a **41.2** million allied troops have been able to secure only a fraction of a country less than one and a half times the size of found that unless we put enormous numbers of our own New York State.

GThe allies are reaching the bottom of their ready manpower pool, while the North Where Big Units Manage, Vietnamese have committed Smaller Ones Fail only one-fifth of their regular Where large units have been

committed - for example, the army. GAbove all, if the North Viet-First Cavalry Division (Air-namese and American troops mobile) on the Bongson plain were magically whisked away, and the South Koreans in the South Vietnamese regime Phuyen Province-progress has would almost certainly crumble been made. within months, so little have Where the same tactic has the root problems been touched. been tried with smaller units,

Enemy's Tenacity Defies Awesome U.S. Effort

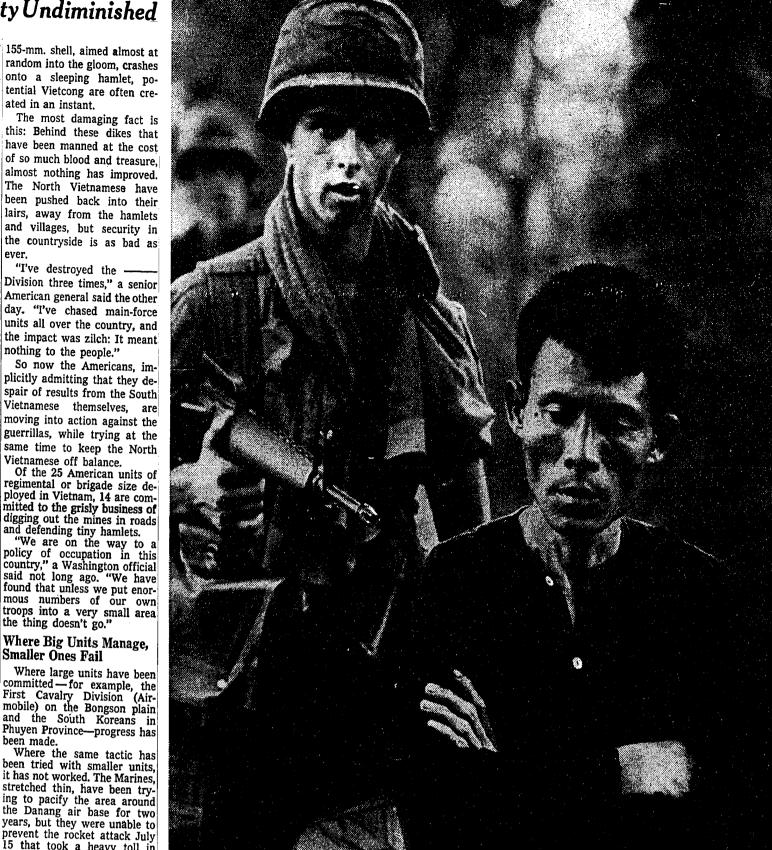
ing to pacify the area around the Danang air base for two It is true, as General West-It is true, as General West-moreland has often said, that years, but they were unable to the United States has built an awesome logistical empire in 15 that took a heavy toll in

the United States has built an awesome logistical empire in Vietnam, that the enemy sel-dom wins a major battle, that more highways are open than before, that American bombers have severely hampered Ha-noi's war effort, that the Viet-cong are suffering. But the enemy continues to fight with tenacity, imagination and courage, and no one knows when he will stop. Hereit the took a heavy toll in men and machines. Army units have been en-gaged for months in Operation Rang Dong, the struggle to se-cure the approaches to Saigon, but during the last two weeks the guerrillas have mined Route 4, the main road to the Mekong Delta, have struck with mortars at the Nhabe naval complex within sight of the lights of Saigon, and have fired

it has not worked. The Marines,

stretched thin, have been try

when he will stop. The goal of American policy, simply stated, is to defeat, to-gether with the other allies, the Vietcong guerrillas and their backers, the North Vietnamese, so that South Vietnam's na-tionalists can transform their society into something strong and durable. Complex when a light of Saigon, and have fired their rockets into key American bases. In all 53 districts of the III corps—the sector around Sai-gon where the earth has been scorched in Operations Junc-tion City, Cedar Falls and Man-thata—there remains a vir-tually complete guerrilla struc-



originally, American troops ture: a 10-man squad for each 26 are behind schedule. Ameri-until someone gets tired and

United Press International Operation Cedar Falls. Inhabitants, mostly women and children, were evacuated to a tent city 19 miles away. Despite action, area's guerrilla structure remains intact.

troops in combat are serving with the North Vietnamese or the Vietcong, heirs to the country's nationalist revolution against the French. Of all the Government officers serving as lieutenant colonel or higher only two fought on the side of the Vietminh in the war against the French.

Some potential leaders are languishing in exile as a result of the purges of the last decade. Countless others have been killed in battle.

In their place stands a corps of young officers, often incompetent and more often corrupt. Weary of the war and cynical toward it, many of them work four-and-a-half-day week, leaving their troops at noon Friday and repairing to Cantho or Danang or Saigon in search of diversion. It is not uncom-mon to see two dozen off-duty situation does not change. This

army officers taking their ease can be explained only in terms of a Saturday night in Maxim's, of the population's indifference, a frightfully expensive Saigon or even hostility, to Saigon." nightclub.

that.'

National Liberation Front, po- flashy, too American, too much litical arm of the Vietcong. Saigon's army hardly seems pilot."

a likely force to lead a revolu-tion, and whatever can be said of the army can be said of the Government as well, for the army is the Government.

If the villagers resent soldiers who steal their rice and chickens, they resent far more the people behind Saigon, to ince officials, nearly all of them military men. They resent, for example, the delta province chief whose under the delta province chief whose under the delta province the corrupt district and provchief whose waterworks and possibly even to open the way electrical plant serve his head, to peace negotiations. electrical plant serve his headquarters and his house but not Habits of Dominance a single peasant hut; and they

resent the highlands province chief who sold them diseased pigs, bought with American aid persist; it would be unrealistic

Tales of Corruption Abound in Saigon

a diseased society — is most as a national hero, Maj. Gen. pervasive in Saigon. Many of Duong Van Minh, was refused the stories that float through the city's cafes are no doubt false; but in a sense, that does not matter because most of the people believe them.

This belief is a major politi- A Saigon newspaper spoke cal fact, contributing to cyni- for most of the country's intelceivably General X's wife did ticians when it said: "This may not buy and sell draft defer-succeed in keeping out [of ments; but everyone said she office] the people dedicated to did. The question has been radical social changes and re-asked: Is it reasonable to ex- forms, and to ridding our peoeagerly to fight for their tices with the perpetuation of country in this kind of atmos- which we would not triumph phere

nightclub. Watching one such group drive through town in a long black car recently, a Vietnam- or pocketbook isn't involved ese student commented, "Ngu-yen Huu Tho doesn't live like that." Mr. Tho is chairman of the national hero---too young, too

the playboy, too much the Confronted with these attitudes, and with open insurrec-

tion by militant Buddhists, the Government consented to na-tional elections this fall. They offer an enormous opportunity everyone here agrees, to rally

Persist in Military

But the military's old habits funds, at enormous profit to not to expect them to. At the generals' insistence, the only serious peace candidate, Au Truong Thanh, was ruled off the ballot, and the only nomi-The corruption-the sense of nee even remotely identifiable

> permission to return to the country. Several left-wing candidates

for the Senate were also denied the right to run.

cism and noncommitment. Con- ligentsia and most civilian poliover Communism."

La Thanh Nghe, a former The remaining candidates—a Cabinet minister, is accused of collection of middle-aged and having sold antibiotics to the middle - class conservatives -Vietcong and, at the same seem to offer no real alterna-time, of having earned almost tives. The most prominent of a million dollars in kickbacks these, Tran Van Huong, is confrom American drug suppliers, sidered an elderly, kindly and Policemen on duty at night thoroughly honest retired along Tu Do Street tell a jour-nalist that they will need \$3 to Premier in 1964 and 1965 was be sure his car is not towed characterized chiefly by his not towed away. Clerks on the piers, un- stubbornness. Even his supable to locate the papers porters concede that he is not needed to clear a shipment the vibrant national leader the through customs, suddenly find country needs.

or military shields, around criti- hamlet, a 30-man platoon for cal areas, so that the South each village, an 80-man com-Vietnamese, sheltered from pany for each district, and at North Vietnam's regulars, could regroup and build.

regroup and build. This is still the role of the gallant marines along the de-militarized zone, facing the North Vietnamese homeland, Who have lost 10,000 men killed North Vietnamese homeland, North Vietnamese homeland, Wietnamese homeland, Vietnamese ho or wounded since Jan. 1; of the attacking and falling back. Fourth Infantry Division, along For a Complete Shield, the Cambodian border, and of

other divisions that mount Eight Million Troops To repeat the pattern of Phuyen and Binhdinh in all the search-and-destroy operations in enemy base areas.

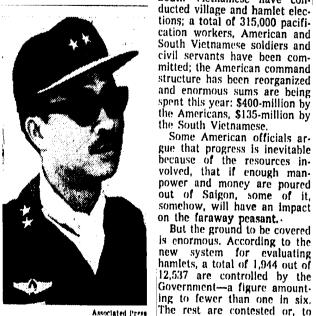
Americans Frustrated by **Hit-and-Run** Assaults

It is galling work. Because It is galling work. Because the enemy can fade into re-doubts or across borders where the Americans cannot follow him, the same unit must be smashed again and again. Gen-eral Westmoreland once con-ceded that he was unable to hurt any unit so hadly that it is galling work. Because westmoreland has acknowl-edged, the problem would not immediately be solved because if the Americans pulled back, the enemy would filter down from the hills. The situation has reminded

hurt any unit so badly that it more than one American in hurt any unit so badiy that it more than one American in could not be refitted in 90 days. South Vietnam of these lines Frustrated, the allies have by Lewis Carroll: turned increasingly to the use "If seven maids with seven mops

of artillery and airpower to hurt the enemy, substituting Do you suppose," the Walrus said, F-100 fighter - bombers and That they could get it clear?" 155-mm. howitzers for infantry. men. The natural tendency of a technological society is to impose is pasification - ro a technological society is to impasse is pacification — respend its steel and its inven- impasse is pacification — re-tiveness rather than its men. establishing the Government

But in Vietnam, technology is the peasants will want to deno substitute for the man on fend themselves and will have the ground. Artillery does not the means to do so. keep the Vietcong from moving To accomplish this, the at night; patrolling does. The United States has built schools, artillery, in fact, often hurts pigpens and marketplaces; the more than it helps. When a South Vietnamese have con-



PREMIER: Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky heads military junta that scems determined to retain power. fication is at best creeping tions.

populous areas of South Vietnam, one ranking American official has estimated, the allies would require eight million

The New York Times

outh Vietnamese have con-

Some American officials ar-

2,537 are controlled by the

some degree, controlled by the

Some of the most experi-

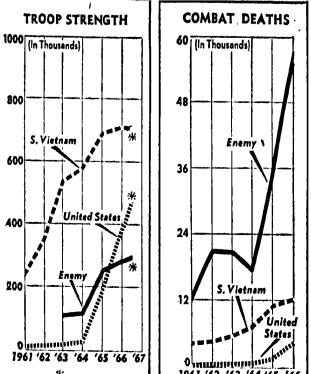
enced Americans here consider

a hamlet secure when its chief

Victoong.

harder to recruit; the goal of 41,000 by the end of 1967 will not be reached, and those al-ready at work are being killed at a rate near 15 a week. The 53 South Vietnamese Army bat-talions supposedly protecting the workers are not doing so. Morale is so bad that 13 of every 100 workers are expected

every 100 workers are expected given relatively little thought Considered Inept



GROWTH OF A WAR: Charts show increases in allied and enemy forces and deaths in fighting since 1961. For the first six months of this year, U.S. combat deaths totaled 4,378, South Vietnam's 6,735 and enemy's 46,731.

can officials concede that paci- quits, which could take genera-

ahead in three-quarters of the Central Fact in South: country and stopped cold in the Lack of Commitment

harder to recruit; the goal of Vietnamese society to work for with its magnificent Soviet- measure of our failure with the and signatures are required on one car-ownership document—

every 100 workers are expected to desert during 1967. A senior American said re-cently, "There is at least a the reality that the people they 2-to-1 chance that we will in-crease the momentum of paci-fication over the next 12 or 18 months." But nothing better than this can be hoped for, in the opin-in of many observers, without a thorough overhaul of South Vietnamese society—without a second revolution, however bogus, the revolution to counter the revolution, however bogus, the revolution to counter the revolution, however bogus, the revolution, however bogus, the revolution to counter the revolution, howeve second revolution to counter late to more equipment, better are often unable to rally their say when they know that they that the Vietcong have prom-ised for more than a decade. The peasants, by and large, are apolitical. They stand by and watch as they are buffeted

the Mekong Delta. One recent instance of inac-tion by Government troops oc-curred in the middle of May. badly led and poorly motivated. The Vietcong overran a bat-talion command post in the Most Talented Men Are delta, killing three American Lost to the Cause advisers and 29 South Vietadvisers and 29 South Viet-namese. One enemy body was The lack of leaders is heart-found after the attack. Three breaking to those who would fect. Since then, the subject those things. I shall just have South Vietnamese companies reform the army. The best tal-has been dropped, and only one to wait longer." sat out the action only 300 ent in the current generation field-grade enemy officer has yards away. has long since been lost: Thou- turned himself in. yards away.

'Need for Reinforcements A Measure of Our Failure'

After years of cajolery by their advisers, Government units still operate ineffectively recently inspected three "night patrols" in three parts of the country. One was walking down a highway with transistor radios blaring, one was asleep in a house and the third was hiding in a cave,

fused to demand the removal

"Every time Westy makes a speech about how good the

leading

Q.

6

South Metzikani

O Other allied un

X)Menior cuis Lennes

*U.S. unita

NOUTH

VIETNAM

CAMBODIA

6

them when \$10 passes across Outlook After the Voting:

Premier Nguyen Cao Ky and heavy-handed police tactics, Lieut. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, the same generally corrupt of the chief of state say all the justice, an end to corruption war. and a liberal revolution that

But Premier Ky also once ese. advised Western journalists to

tion," supposedly the beginning leadership? Join the Vietcong?

sands of men who might be Four men who know Viet-leading South Vietnamese nam well have also watched. They recently said the same thing in different ways.

A former Premier com-mented: "The problem isn't the North Vietnamese Army. It's the South Vietnamese Government."

An American who has worked in the provinces for more than five years: "Nobody considers the Victorg Robin Hood any more. But the Gov ernment and the army are still the Sheriff of Nottingham, and you'll never sell that." A Saigon editor: "What is

needed is someone who can seriously make the same claim on the loyalty of the people as Ho Chi Minh does in the North Without that, there can be nothing. The Americans will never understand, but it is ob vious that the problem is not military but political, not American but Vietnamese. W have more of everything milltary — more bombing, more troops, more money-vet the AUK 7, 1967

No Basic Changes

Neither Mr. Huong nor any of the nine other civilian candidates is given more than a slight chance of winning, even if the balloting is scrupulously honest, which few expect it to be. The built-in advantages of incumbents, here as elsewhere, are so great that only a figure

of great charisma can over-come them. So the outlook, four weeks before election day, is for a ratification of the Thieu-Ky regime, with all that would mean: a "legitimized" but es-

sentially unchanged central

the chief of state, say all the ficials in the provinces, the right words, promising social same dispirited army, more

The prospect may be agonizwill make the task of the ing to Americans, but it is far worse for the South Victnam-

"What am I to do?" a young "watch what I do, not what I businessman asked a friend not say" — and watching is not long ago. "Vote for Thieu and

often encouraging. Ky, and watch my country get After months of American torn apart for four more years? prodding, for instance, the Vote for one of the civilians, Government issued its "procla- when you and I both know mation of national reconcilia they can't provide any real



COMMANDER: Gen. Willlam C. Westmoreland remains an optimist desplte the long ordeal of war.

54 As of June 30, 1967 1961 '62 '63 '64 '65 '66

at night (as, indeed, some American units do). A visitor

The American advisers whose superiors, including General Westmoreland, have re-

of incompetent leaders-have had little impact. One former

South Vietnam Army is," an-other general has said, "I want to ask him why he keeps call-

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adviser described his role as that of "a glorified radio operator, tolerated only because could call in air strikes."