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DAIRY OF SAIGON, FOLLOWING THE ALLIED OCCUPATION

IN SEPTEMBER 1945

BY

GERMAINE KRULL

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. [unclear]

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

DATE: Feb. 24, 1947

TO : FE - Mr. Vincent
 WE - Mr. Culbertson

FROM : SEA - Mr. Moffat

SUBJECT: C.I.G. Report #DB2970 (Confidential - Control)

FE
 WE
 SEA

The underlying diary by a former French war correspondent (Germaine Krull) describes the Allied occupation of Saigon, September 12 to 24, 1945. The report is by far the most graphic, vivid, and absorbing account of this critical period, which witnessed the beginning of the war in Indochina, which has reached SEA. Highlights have been marked in blue pencil, but the report is well worth reading in its entirety.

SSU has agreed to send a copy to Embassy Paris.

aka

SEA:COgburn:mtb

CONFIDENTIAL

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

DATE: February 28, 1947

TO :

FROM :

SUBJECT :
*WAB*Mme. Germaine Krull

? Her husband is Dutch. Maiden name is Ivens. She was a war correspondent in French Indochina until late 1945. According to a Mr. Thompson, an OSS man in FIC for some time and then Political Advisor to our Minister in Bangkok, she was persona non grata in 1945 because she disapproved of French operations and put out anti-French articles. Was considered by the same source to be very left-wing. Is a friend of André Maurois. She went from FIC to Bangkok. According to an item in BI files, DRF says she wrote some scorching articles for AP and UP, presumably along the above lines.

I believe we might have another article by her in our files and possibly other references, which I tried to find but couldn't since they weren't cross-referenced under her name. I can look further if you like.

mx

CONFIDENTIAL

U.S. GOVERNMENT

DAIRY OF SAIGON, FOLLOWING THE ALLIED OCCUPATION IN SEPTEMBER 1945
(Written by Germaine Krull, former French War Correspondent)

Return
SEA

The transport planes carrying British troops arrived in Saigon at one o'clock, the first Allied troops to reach Indo-China. They were General Gracey's first detachment of Indian Gurkhas. We had left Rangoon at three o'clock that morning. I was the only woman and one of the three correspondents to accompany these handsome, impeccable Gurkhas -- like over-grown children -- and their Scotch commanding officer.

I could not imagine what Saigon would be like. In Rangoon, I had learned from Jean Hertricht, the other French correspondent who was with us, that the Annamites had staged a violent demonstration and that there had been fighting and revolution for ten days. All our information, however, was vague and we actually knew very little, only that there had been skirmishes and that the Annamites were rebelling under Colonial rule. No one really knew what was going on. We might be heading into anything, even a massacre.

We found upon our arrival that an unusual situation prevailed at the airport. It was being serviced entirely by the Japanese. They were doing everything: driving trucks and cars, standing guard, carrying luggage and refueling. The British were in command of them and kept order. I might add that the Japanese performed their duties faultlessly and were perfectly disciplined. It gave me a curious impression to see no French, no Annamites, not even a French flag; just an empty airport personalized only by the hustle attendant upon a military convoy -- that was all.

On the way to Saigon, we drove through empty streets, watched furtively by a few sullen, stormy-eyed Chinese and Annamites. From the edge of town in, all the streets were hung with large banners and all the walls and official buildings bore inscriptions reading: "Down with French Imperialism", "Vive les Allies", "Welcome to the Allies", "Down with the Colonials", "The era of colonization is over", "Down with slavery", "Long live Liberty and Independence", "End Imperialism". There were flags everywhere, English, American, Chinese, Russian, and the Viet-Minh's big red one with the yellow star. The streets widened into handsome avenues as we approached the center of the city, which resembled some charming little French town in the provinces.

The French cheered wildly and were overjoyed to see us. When we arrived at the Continental, the hotel being used for Allied officers, in the heart of town, we were surrounded by the entire French population of Saigon which had gathered there. A heavy Japanese guard was stationed on the ground floor of the hotel to insure our safety. The French crowded around, literally throwing themselves upon us. A small group of Annamites, standing in a circle close by, watched us with curiosity. It is impossible to describe that mob and their frantic welcome. In an instant I was surrounded and bombarded with questions: "Are you French?" "Have you just come from there?" "How is Marseille? Dijon? Rouen? Tours? Limoges?" "What is Paris like?" "How is everything in France?" "What is the cost of living?" "Have you had any mail?" "Do you know if my mother, my father, my children, my family are still living and where?" "Do you know such and such a village or town?" "What have you heard about this or that person?" "How soon will we be able to go home?" "How much meat do you get each week?" "How much are eggs and butter?" "How is Normandy?" "Have the vineyards suffered much?" "When are the French troops coming?" "How much longer do we have to put up with this Annamite trash?" "Is travel easy in France?" "How much destruction has there been?" This flood of questions went on hours and hours. It took me two hours to get from the entrance of the hotel to the stairway. I was in a sweat and completely exhausted. No sooner had I broken away from them than I was engulfed by another wave of humanity. But for a British friend who rescued me by force I don't think I could have managed to get away from that mob.

At last I was alone in my room; but almost immediately someone started knocking. First one woman came in, then another, then a third and soon my room was overflowing with women. I had to clean up, change, unpack and finally spread everything out in front of them because there was no other way. The questions were still the same with a few minor variations as to persons and places. They mostly concerned living conditions and the opinion in France on the subject of Indo-China. No one asked me how much France had suffered, how the resistance movement had fared nor whether deportations had been serious. They were frightened people, starving for news, who knew little and understood less of what had happened -- in short, people who had lived in a vacuum. The world, for them, consisted of Saigon and Indo-China. To them, the 9th of March was a black day which marked the beginning of the war and of all their woes. I had to re-educate myself entirely. They complained bitterly that since that date the Japanese had forced them all to remain in Saigon. They said: "If you only knew how much we have suffered since the riots of September second! You cannot imagine how dreadful the Annamites are. They are nothing but thieving, lying, deceitful scoundrels without a shred of gratitude or decency...."

By the time I had managed to push everyone out of my room I was so confused that I no longer understood anything. From my window I could see Jean Hertricht still trying to fight his way out of the melee toward some haven. We had not eaten since three o'clock that morning. Our English friends, in desperation, asked me where they could find something to eat. I managed with some difficulty to find a few bananas and a bit of liquid which passed for tea; though not barely enough, it was better than nothing. It was late by now and already dark outside, but just the same I decided I wanted to see something of Saigon. However, when I went down again, the same bedlam still prevailed in the lobby. It was impossible to get out or even to take a step. Every time a British officer went by outside, the Japanese sentry barked a ferocious: "Who goes there?" The curfew hour was past, but the French were not paying any attention to it that night. Only those who lived far away had departed, leaving the lobby a little less crowded. Now I could at least see the people whose questions I was answering. It was not a delirious mob anymore. I was slowly able to gather the facts concerning the 9th of March and the second of September.

Everything was all right until the 9th of March. Business was carried on as usual. There were some privations -- inability to leave the country, lack of mail or news from France and the rest of the world -- but generally speaking they were not very serious. There were the Japanese, of course, and sometimes they interned those who displeased them and, of course, there was the war but these actualities were not of major concern. Cars were still running, though probably without the pre-war complement of gas; plantations were in good condition, and the piaster was quite stable. There were no French products, but the Colonials had managed to manufacture a good deal of their requirements right there. Several native plants and products were discovered to replace former medical and pharmaceutical supplies, such as quinine. They even made some aperitifs. There was enough to eat and none of the necessities were lacking. On the whole, life had not changed much.

Then came the 9th of March, the darkest day in the history of Indo-China. An order from de Gaulle's Government in France put Admiral Decoux in the position of having to refuse certain demands made by the Japanese, but the truth is that no one really seems to know what actually did happen on that day. The one established fact is that on the 9th of March the Japanese who, in reality, had been running everything in that part of the world since 1942, officially took possession of Indo-China. The French garrison was in no position to fight -- why, no one knows yet -- and it seems that the actual occupation was accomplished so rapidly by the Japanese that it was all over before the French troops could even be called out. The majority of men and officers were taken prisoner immediately, whether in their homes or in the barracks. A few isolated troops did resist, especially in the North where some of them fought heroically and managed to join the Allies by way of China. But generally speaking no one

resisted, not even the famous 11th Colonial Division in Saigon.

The entire French population was made to remain in Saigon and from that day on suffered many indignities, including imprisonment, at the hands of the Japanese Secret Police. But it was only an operetta compared to the regime in France under the Germans. They suffered mainly in that their ease and comfort were greatly reduced. They were deprived of their houses, their cars and their freedom to circulate. People who had formerly enjoyed privacy were forced to move under a common roof with friends and others.

It seems that little by little the Japanese let the Annamites take over the reins of the Administration. Since the French troops were in internment and the French civilians without arms upon the surrender of Japan, the Japanese troops continued to be responsible for order on behalf of the Allies until the arrival of the English. The surrender had changed nothing for the French. The Allied troops en route were therefore the liberators. Several French parachutists had infiltrated here and there since the month of August and were trying to establish contact. But since they were either arrested and imprisoned by the Viet-Minh authorities or else forced to hide out with friends or in the jungle, they were not in touch with the French population at all.

Then came the second of September, the other fateful date. On that day the Annamites held a huge demonstration in the streets of Saigon. According to varying estimates, anywhere from 2,000 to 20,000 took part in it.

The French were watching from behind shuttered windows. At a given moment several shots rang out and the rioting started. An enraged mob rushed into the houses. Women and children were beaten up and men taken off to prison. A smoldering hatred was suddenly unleashed. The enemy was yesterday's houseboy and coolie seeking revenge on his former master. Five French and some Annamites were killed. No one knows what might have happened to the women and children during the fighting if Allied prisoners of war had not scaled the walls of their Japanese camp and brought them back there for protection. They were helped by the few American officers who were in Saigon at the time. The Continental Hotel was bought for the price of one piaster, and from that day on became the property of the Allies. That day and the following night were extremely tense.

All those who had been taken to prison were released in a day or two through the efforts of the Allied officers and of Colonel Cédille*. He was the civilian representative of the new Government of French Indo-China, who had parachuted in at the end of August. The Viet-Minh administration in power cooperated with him and the Allies and threw the entire blame for the revolt on the local French. They maintained that the French had been the first to fire.

The majority of the French population came to hate the Annamites and would never forgive them for nor forget the second of September. They claimed that it was instigated by a few powerful leaders at the head of outlaws, and that the true Annamite wanted no part of this uprising. "The Japanese are behind this", they said. Nevertheless, the French and the Annamites viewed each other with hatred and suspicion.

September 13: A military communique might have read "Nothing new", but my day started off with an interminable battle with the only houseboy on the floor in an attempt to get something to drink. He finally brought me a liquid which he called coffee, a hard object full of sawdust, supposedly bread, and a green banana.

At nine o'clock we went to the airport to meet General Gracey. All the officials were there -- a few high-ranking British officers, some Americans, a group of important Japanese officers, complete with their glasses and their huge sabers which they carry like canes, and finally ourselves, that is to say the press.

* col Cédille

We were all there: the Major who was in charge of us, the censor, the Public Relations Officer, and the only three correspondents, Jean Hertrich of A.F.F., Harry Kinslay of U.P., and myself. As usual, we had to wait for three hours. What struck me the most was the ugliness of the Japanese. Even though their faces are generally extremely intelligent, invariably bespectacled, and their hands finely made and delicate, they are unspeakably ugly. When they laughed, they revealed rows of gleaming teeth -- grimaces fiendish enough to frighten a child.

General Gracey's arrival resembled that of any high official. The only thing I noticed was the marked contrast in demeanor between the Japanese, bowing obsequiously with eyes cast downward, and the British, erect and supercilious. The General spoke a few words to the interpreter and, without a glance at the Japanese, got into his car and drove off with his staff. The British had already arrived and taken over. There was not a single Frenchman at the airport, despite the fact that Colonel Cedil, the delegate of the Government of Indo-China, and some French parachute troops were present at the time in Saigon.

As for myself, I went off on my own to see the town. Rue Catinat is in the heart of it, and it was between there and the corner of the Continental Hotel that everything happened. Here beat the pulse of the city. It was a wide handsome street, lined by beautiful trees and attractive stores and shop windows: photographer, beauty parlor, dress shop, bookstore, florist, tobacco stand, a good restaurant, a theatre, a pharmacy, a jewelry store, fabrics, shoes, gloves, bags, belts, and many others. It was the kind of attractive street that one might find in any small French provincial town. It suggested nothing of the Far Eastern or the colonial. All the stores were French with the exception, perhaps of the beauty parlor, but that at least was "French style".

The street was teeming with French people; there were a few Chinese, but not a single Annamite, not even a rickshaw. There were a great many bicycles and every make of car, handsome American ones, for the most part, with Japanese chauffeurs driving British officers, and jeeps driven by Gurkhas. I met many people on the street and everything I had learned the night before was confirmed. The population was in a state of panic. The sight of an Annamite passing nearby started a fresh wave of intense fear and dislike. In the small, neighboring streets there were Chinese shops and the opium dens which the coolies frequent. The houses on the main thoroughfare were beautiful and it was difficult to believe that any Annamites lived in the city.

A wide avenue ran from behind the Rue Catinat to the Town Hall, which had become the seat of the Viet-Minh Government. All the Allied flags were on display there with the glaring exception of the French. In the middle, of course, was the familiar red one with the yellow star of the Viet-Minh. Annamite soldiers stood guard at the entrance. Their uniform was a combination of Japanese and pre-war French. They carried guns and watched closely all French passers-by. However, there were not many of these, and the few who did have to come through this part of town glared furiously at the guard. Magnificent cars bearing the Viet-Minh emblem kept driving up and there was an incessant activity of coming and going at the door. Great banners reading "Down with Imperialism" and "Slavery is over" were hung everywhere. Everywhere, that is, except in the Rue Catinat.

The former Department of Information was in the hands of the Viet-Minh; it was teeming with Annamites, inside and out. Well dressed young men, leaning on their bicycles, were reading notices and looking at posted photographs.

As I entered the Hall, no one did anything, but I knew that my appearance caused a great deal of suspicion. In other quarters farther away from the Rue Catinat there were no more French on foot; only a few went by on bicycles. In

the exclusively Annamite section, the atmosphere was sullen and defiant. I was ill at ease, all alone there, but nothing happened. I nevertheless had the strong impression of being in a city where I and my kind were detested. They did not know whether I was French or English, but their reaction was not very encouraging. Not a smile, not a friendly glance anywhere.

During the day I met some of the Resistance group. They were generally Leftist, but despite the sympathy they felt for the Annamite movement they too had become quite frightened and suspicious. They still thought that a conflict could be avoided although it would take much skill and a greater awareness of the human element of the problem. The Leftists were violently anti-Vichy and feared above all that the Vichy influence would continue to make itself felt. They also distrusted the French who were coming because they disapproved of the fact that Colonel Cedil had not appealed to them immediately. They blamed everything on the petty colonial bureaucrat and on the self-important military and their wives. I also met what I believe was the only really active and humane woman in Saigon. She was a businesswoman who, during the occupation, had organized a program for distributing food and medical supplies, and furnishing money and the necessities of life to the Allied internees and prisoners of war. She was an admirable woman, simple and modest, who had done what she considered her duty. She told me about the Annamites whom she knew well and liked. None of her employees left her on the second of September, nor did she have any trouble with them. She told me how helpful they had been, how they had distributed medical supplies in the camps, how many wealthy Annamites had sent her money and food. At the same time she said that the rich French had offered practically no assistance either to the prisoners of war or to the Resistance movement in general.

"But, of course, today they will all tell you that they were pro-Allied; you won't find a single Vichite among them. They would shudder to have you even suspect that they had toasted each Allied defeat in champagne."

I met a little Corsican who told me confidentially that he was about to reinstate the S.F.I.O. party, that he was planning an appeal and that the Leftist wing was very strong in France. It was therefore necessary to put the party back in authority here. He warned me against various people with whom he had seen me talking. He said: "Those people are reactionaries of the very worst kind. They are trying to get the upper hand, but we are on guard against them." Intrigue was increasing on all sides in the competition for supremacy.

A group of foreign war correspondents had arrived -- Australian, English, American, and Chinese -- and were immediately engulfed in the conflict. Having just seen very real theaters of war and battlefields, they were not long in siding against the French. A mad scramble for invitations started. Everyone wanted to be in with the British and the women flirted with all the Allied officers.

While the French dramatized their plight and convinced themselves more and more of the horror of the Annamite menace, they were at the same time trying to impress upon the Allies that this was only a temporary crisis, caused by a few ill-advised leaders. On the dissenting side, a small minority tried equally hard to impress upon the Allies the fact that this so-called outbreak was in reality a major revolution and that nothing could stop it. But then this was only the minority opinion....

Annamite newspapers, violently anti-French, were being sold on every street corner. Houseboys were being urged to leave their jobs and desert their masters, to refuse to sell anything to the French. The atmosphere became more threatening each day. From time to time a lone woman would be manhandled in the Annamite quarter and very unpleasant soto voce remarks were being made to French

passers-by. Most of the houseboys had left their jobs, shopping became more difficult and food was quite scarce. French families were reduced to doing their own marketing and housework. Many of these families joined forces and shared apartments and houses. They took in former Dutch prisoners of war, the only ones left since all the British prisoners of war had recently been evacuated. These Dutch people had moved in all over town; they helped with the housework, ran errands and accompanied the women to market. Since the second of September, they had assumed the role of friend and protector to all the French people. There were about five thousand of them in Saigon.

September 14, 1945: The same confusion reigned at the hotel. Those who spoke English crowded around the British and Australian correspondents to tell their tale of woe. The Palais du Gouvernement de Cochinchine became temporary headquarters for the British. A press conference was to be held every day to keep us informed. Order reigned there, as is usual whenever the British are in charge. The Gurkhas stood guard at the entrances and exits and British sentries guarded General Gracey's suite. We learned nothing at the conference that day; we were told only that the troops were so scarce that it was of the utmost importance not to start any trouble. We were advised to stay away from the other parts of town unless the whole city were taken over by the Annamites. The Japanese were responsible for law and order and the Japanese General had given his word that his men would protect the Allies and the population. However, we were not able to see him because he was ill. We asked if it were true that the French flag had flown only for a short time that morning, and were told that because there were not enough French troops to assure its defence the flag had been lowered rather than run the risk of having it desecrated. The French delegation, which had moved into the Palace of the Governor General, consisted of Colonel Cedil (who turned out to be an old friend of mine from the Cameroun), a few officers sent from Kandy or Calcutta, most of whom I had known somewhere at the front in France, and the civilian staff, whom I had seen a few days before in Kandy. Colonel Cedil was terribly anxious to reorganize the Administration and clear up the present confusion. He told me how he had parachuted in at the end of August and had been able to reach Saigon with the aid of the Annamites, how he had lived in hiding for a few weeks, and finally how he had witnessed the entire demonstration on the second of September. Any thing might have happened that day had the Annamites really been as bloodthirsty as the French would have one believe. I learned more of the magnificent behavior of the prisoners of war and the few American officers who assisted in releasing those who had been captured during that day. Personal revenge seemed to have played a great part in these Annamite reprisals. Though it was a difficult fact to ascertain, he was of the opinion that the Annamites had fired the first shot, as the Viet-Minh Government was not yet in full control of its forces.

"Have you spoken with the Viet-Minh people, and are you still in touch with them?"

"Certainly. I have seen them all. It's going to be very difficult to reach a compromise, but I think we will be able to do it".

"Do you think this movement is only superficial?"

"I really don't know. It is true that they have been influenced by the Japanese, but on the other hand we French have been very badly informed. We knew nothing of all this in France, nor in Kandy, nor even right here. The terrible thing is that I am unable to receive any orders from France, or even from Kandy. All communications come from the British, via Kandy. My hands are tied. I can't even keep my Government informed of what is going on."

"What do you think of the French population?"

"They are panic-stricken. After five years of Vichy, they know nothing of what has been happening in the world."

"Have you seen any of the Resistance group?"

"I have seen many who claim to have been, but how can I tell what is true

and what isn't? People come to me all day long with various tales of an Annamite uprising here or a plot there. These rumors are almost impossible to confirm with the population so undisciplined and in such a state of panic."

Colonel Cedil ran into endless obstacles in his attempts to re-establish some kind of administration. He lacked everything: typists, telephone operators and secretaries. He needed tables, chairs, paper and pencils. It was complete chaos and we strove desperately to attain the kind of organization that prevailed already at the British Headquarters.

In a small adjoining building a group of Frenchmen were printing a bulletin to distribute the news. It was the beginning of the Agence de France press. The whole French administration was clandestine. The news bulletins were run by a staff which was changed from day to day whenever their sympathies seemed to be too pro-Vichy. Some French had moved into the town somewhere. They were nice boys who had just come from France and found it difficult to sympathize with the French of Saigon. "They are nothing but Vichites", they told me.

That afternoon, General Gracey decided to make an inspection tour through the whole city as far as Cholon, the Chinese town, a few kilometers from Saigon. We all wondered and worried about the outcome of the proposed trip. The General departed in his car, driven by a Japanese chauffeur and accompanied by his aide-de-camp and a Japanese officer. He was preceded by five Gurkhas in an armed jeep and followed by the press car with five of us correspondents. We went everywhere. Startled Annamites watched us from their huts as we drove through the narrow streets of their quarter. We were far from the beautiful, French part of Saigon. The shacks along here didn't differ much from those I have seen in the negro villages of Africa. There were more of these same little wooden houses and huts on the way to Cholon.

Here was the real Orient with its teeming poverty. There were many children but few men to be seen. Viet-Minh flags were hung everywhere and there was a great feeling of tension in the air. Cholon was a completely Chinese town full of stores and unceasing activity, but there was no serenity nor friendliness here either; surprise was the only reaction to our arrival. Our tour lasted two hours. We drove by the docks where the General got out and inspected the plan and working details of the pier. The waterfront was guarded by the Japanese and some British soldiers. There were Japanese sentries everywhere.

September 15, 1945: The tension between the French and the Annamites was increasing. Since editorials were becoming more threatening, General Gracey posted a notice forbidding the publication of all newspapers. The French bulletins were printed by hand secretly. One didn't quite know whether the staff feared a British or an Annamite investigation. Hertricht and I saw many of his old friends who had all been pro-Annamite, but had become terribly disillusioned since the second of September.

All day long, people streamed into the hotel with sensational information, such and such a house had been broken into, a great concentration of Annamites was massed on the edge of town, an entire army was approaching Saigon. At the press conference, held by General Gracey himself, we were told that a certain house had indeed been broken into and the owner tied to a chair and beaten. But further investigation revealed that it was an act of personal revenge by a houseboy upon the proprietor who was a homosexual. There was no concentration of forces outside the city. The big plantation owners of the interior were still remaining there. There was no news at all from Hanoi. Hanoi was above the 16th parallel and therefore under Chinese occupation. Japanese patrols maintained order in all parts of the town; the public utilities were guarded by the Japanese and operated by the Annamites. Shots had been fired here and there, but were traced to small, apparently undisciplined bands. General Gracey

repeated that he received information and warnings on all sides throughout the day, but that, generally, they were without foundation. The population was as nervous and frightened as ever.

Nothing in particular happened; there were still fewer Annamites to be seen on the streets and almost all of them had left their former jobs and masters. For the first time, French women were forced to do all their own work themselves, which did nothing to temper their feelings toward the Annamites. This mass desertion, reducing them temporarily to the rank of domestics themselves, was the one sin they could not forgive.

We went to lunch at some friends of Hertricht's; it was cooked and served by some Dutch prisoners of war. His friends were charming, intellectual people who had lived in Saigon for a long time and were undoubtedly pro-Allied. They lived in a three-room apartment, below an Annamite Youth Center. There were six of them living there together, in addition to four prisoners of war they had taken in. It was a regular camp, with beds and cots everywhere.

"We apologize for luncheon, but you can't imagine how dark and stuffy our kitchen is!"

"But if that has always been the kitchen, how do you suppose your cook managed all these years?"

"Oh, the Annamites don't mind that sort of thing. They are used to it."

And these were people who really liked the Annamites.....

That night we dined with a young French couple. He was a professor of French at the University and had taught the Annamites for years. His wife was also a teacher in an Annamite school. They liked them, knew them well, spoke their language and had always tried to better their relations with the French. He said: "You can't imagine how they behaved on the second of September! They spat at me, I who had been their professor. My houseboy hit me over the head with a stick. I just can't feel any sympathy for them now. They are completely heartless. They treated me just as they did the others, I who spent so many years working for them, I who endangered my reputation and career for their sake. If my wife and children had not barricaded themselves until the arrival of the prisoners of war, I really don't know whether we would have been here tonight. It is not as if we had been in the center of town -- we were here, away from everything. They were like savages. They hate the white people and are capable of anything. I would never have believed it possible. I can understand revenge, but not this kind of blind, wild fury."

Dinner was very pleasant. We decided to spend the night there as the hotel was quite far away and the curfew sounded at ten. As the evening wore on, our host and hostess became very nervous, and said: "There are people milling about outside; for all we know, they might break in and kill us." We tried to reassure them, but it was useless. Hertricht and I finally retired; they, however, stayed up all night pacing back and forth, peering through first one window, then another. This incredible state of nervous tension existed almost everywhere.

September 16, 1945: Nothing new. Rue Catinat was filled with rumors which were snowballing into gigantic proportions.

A few British officers and I went for lunch at the house of some wealthy colonials. It was a magnificent repast, complete with wines and champagne, pleasant conversation and immaculate service. The cooks and houseboys were Chinese.

"No, we could not dream of employing Annamites. You can't trust them. What a relief it will be finally to leave this wretched country. If only they would let us have a good, strong reprisal, everything would be over in a few days. This same sort of thing happened in 1942, but we put a swift end to it. The leaders were sentenced and most of the followers arrested -- that was all. It is the only way to deal with people like that. Force is the only thing they understand. Everything else is useless. Colonel Cedil isn't ruthless enough. We hear that General Gracey is worried because he doesn't have enough troops. If so, why don't they let us take over? We could muster enough arms and volunteers. We have ways of making them wish they had never started this. In 1942, I was in charge of re-establishing order at X. Well, we burned a few villages, jailed a few hundred natives, sentenced their leaders and that was all there was to that disturbance. Everything went back to order and the coolies went on working as before. They don't want anything else. They expect that of us."

That night we dined with some plantation owners of the Terres Rouges district. They too were sharing an apartment with another family but it was quite large and comfortable.

"This isn't a very good dinner, but there was very little food for sale this morning. They won't sell us anything. Fortunately, we can still deal with the Chinese, but not openly because they are too afraid of the Annamites."

"But things will be different as soon as the troops arrive. As soon as they come the coolies will be only too glad to resume work. The plantations have been abandoned for quite a while, and it's high time we got to work again. The country natives are loyal, but they don't know what is happening. They are only waiting for us to start work again, but in the meantime they are being terrorized by a band of communists and intellectuals who have become intoxicated with the education we provided for them. Then there are the Cao daistes, a fanatic anti-white sect which has always existed. Morning and night they pray: "May devils eat up the red-haired men". We have had to deal with them from time to time, but they don't present any problem -- just a few crackpots, led by a man whom they call "pope". We have learned all about them in the twenty years that we have been here. These rebellions occur periodically and die out as soon as we display our strength. I personally halted several thousand armed coolies who were converging on the plantation one morning. I went out and told them that if they didn't go back to work immediately, I would open fire. I fired one shot in the air and they scattered like frightened birds. The same thing is happening right now. They are standing guard in front of the Town Hall, but the sight of a single machine-gun would be enough to make them all turn and run. Not one of them would fight. They are much too cowardly for that. They think they have the upper hand now because we were not ready on the second of September. If we had been, it would all be over by now. They would vanish at the sound of a shot."

"But how do you explain that the shots fired on the second of September seem to have had exactly the opposite effect?"

"Those shots were not fired by us; it was their own signal to start the massacre."

"Do you believe they could have massacred all the French on the second if they had wanted to?"

"Without a doubt. There were more than 20,000 of them, armed, as opposed to a small number of us, without arms."

"Well then, how do you explain the fact that there were only five French killed if they were so determined to kill them all?"

"There are two reasons. In the first place, the coolie is still deathly afraid of the white man. In the second place, the Government, that is to say those who choose to call themselves Government, did not want any overt aggression because they were not yet sure of their men. Therefore, they had to stave off the serious fighting until they had consolidated their shaky position. They are all out to line their pockets. Individuals like Dr. Bach, Dr. Tak, and Dr. Dee are rich landowners and cultivators. They are determined to get richer and to exploit the others in order to do so. There is no other motive. Take our word for it. They want to rob us of everything we have worked hard to build up, and lead an easy life. They want to run our plantations which they would be incapable of doing, even if they did succeed in getting them away from us. You must not believe the old tale of the colonial exploiting his coolies; we have done everything for them. If you were to visit our plantations and could see the social measure we have adopted, the schools and hospitals we have provided for them, you would be the first to deny the old-time legend about the plantation owner, whipping his coolies to death. As a matter of fact, such things never did take place. They are only the invention of journalists and novelists."

September 17, 1945: More and more correspondents were arriving, and their sympathies were mostly anti-French. A few French correspondents had also arrived, some to look into the Banque d'Indochine, others to get first-hand information from the population. Annamite bands continued to break into isolated houses and the tension was ever-increasing. Some reproached Colonel Cedil openly for not asking the British to intervene and accused him of being hesitant, badly informed and unwilling to accept advice. The Leftist group blamed Cedil for wanting to bring in the reactionaries, ignoring the Resistance party and declaring open warfare on the Annamites. Everyone was suspicious of everyone else and furious at Colonel Cedil for a variety of reasons. Despite the suppression of the press, the Annamites had published an appeal to Andre Malraux, Joliot-Curie, Andree Viollis and the Leftists intellectuals of France, begging that their independence be recognized and that no troops be sent to repress it. They sent their appeal by short wave, but who knows whether or not it was heard in France?

An Australian journalist arrived by car from Hanoi with a permit from the Viet-Minh. He reported that: "Everything is all right in Hanoi. The people are well off and the French are safe. This movement is widespread, however, and the Annamites will fight for their freedom. Everything is in the hands of the Viet-Minh and is being well administered. There is no fighting or disorder. There are a few British there and one French correspondent who can't do much. Ho Chi Minh is a wise and admirable old man. You should go there and see for yourself. There wasn't a single incident on the road from Hanoi to Saigon. The whole way was clear and with a Viet-Minh permit, it was perfectly easy to get by the few Annamite posts."

I decided that there was no reason for me not to go and talk to the Viet-Minh people in Saigon, especially after the appeal they made to Malraux, who was an old friend of mine. Jean Hertricht advised me to tell them that I was British, but I refused. After all, they would soon find out who I was as the insignia on my uniform read "French War Correspondent". I had never taken it off, not even in Germany, so why should I start now? I did not want to deceive them in any way. I only wanted to talk to them. Jean Hertricht was not too convinced and added that if I were not back in three hours, he would send a British patrol out to look for me.

At the Town Hall, the sentry was very surprised to see me, but did not bar my passage. There was a milling, teeming mob inside; here again my appearance caused surprise. I finally managed to present my request to an Annamite who told me to follow him upstairs. There were armed sentries everywhere, at the

foot of the stairs, all the way up and in front of each door. My progress was temporarily halted, but after a few words from my escort I was given a chair and then promptly forgotten. Busy people came and went on all sides. I had asked to see Dr. Bach who had signed the appeal to Malraux. After waiting a long time, I was told that I would soon be able to see him. I was reminded of the atmosphere at Marseille after the landing in France; an atmosphere of rebellion, distrust, and agitation. I was finally ushered into an immense room which must have been the old Conference Hall. A dozen people or so were seated around a table, talking, discussing and looking at various papers. In a corner, was another group. There behind a large desk sat Dr. Bach definitely dominating the entire room. Two telephones rang incessantly at his elbow. He seemed to be about thirty, although it is hard to judge the age of Annamites. He was a man of proud bearing -- an intellectual with a fine, intelligent face, straightforward, honest eyes and delicate hands. He spoke beautiful French and was extremely amiable. Our conversation was easy and devoid of suspicion. I told him that I had come to talk to him, to find out what his party wanted and that I would like to know the context of the appeal to Malraux.

"We want our independence and we are ready to fight for it. All of us are willing to die for our freedom. We don't want to be a colony anymore. We don't want a Residing Governor General, and we don't want to be treated like inferiors. As things are now, we cannot hold the same positions, we do not receive the same salaries, we are not on the same level as the French. In France, they like us and think of us as friends and brothers, but when we return to the French here, we are not treated as equals. The French fall into two categories: The French of France and the French of the colonies. We don't want the latter and the whole country is ready to fight them. They must not send for troops. We need instead men like Andre Malraux, people like Andree Viollis who will discuss this problem with us, who understand us and know that we are big enough to be on our own. You say that things have changed in France and we believe it. The very fact that you are here today to talk to us proves that there must be a new France. But this new France must not send us troops. Why have they sent an Admiral out here to govern us? Why do the French military come back here with the British, disguised in British uniforms? And why do they come armed?"

"But, Dr. Bach, France knows nothing of what is going on. They thought that you were waiting for us, and without knowing anything of your plans, the Government was already planning a change in the future of your country."

"Your declaration from Brazzaville sounded ridiculous to us. It didn't mean a thing to us; what we want is full independence."

"But wouldn't it be possible for you and Colonel Cedil to sit down calmly and discuss all this before taking any action?"

"Cedill is the representative of the Governor General of Indo-China. We don't want anything more to do with him. Of course, we are willing to talk, but not on his terms."

"Your troops are pillaging every day and, after all, there was a riot on the second of September."

"Our troops are not pillaging, although there are wild incidents in every revolution. Nothing would have happened on the second if the French had not fired into the crowd. The proof of that is that we had covered the entire length of the Rue Catinat without a single incident. It was when we passed the cathedral that the French fired. And do you know how many Annamites were killed on that day? More than fifteen, as compared with five French. Even so we were able to quiet the crowd, and that evening or the next day, all the French who had been captured were released. We have actual proof that the French were the first to fire. All the public utilities are still functioning. Nothing would

have happened if the French had not fired upon us."

"Why did you post notices, asking the Annamites to leave their jobs and refuse to sell to the French? If you really want to negotiate, why create such a hostile atmosphere?"

"The French provoke us at every turn and will not recognize the fact that we are in power now. They have mistreated us for years. The only thing you can do for us is to persuade them not to send their troops. We should not be blamed for the wild behavior of certain isolated troops. The hardships that accompany any kind of uprising such as this must not be over-dramatized, especially since the French have abused us for years without anyone paying the least attention. A revolution can never take place without some trouble. Help us before it is too late, before this turns into war. My heart aches when I think of our people. So many of them will be killed if troops are sent out here. Our salvation lies with the French of France who have always been on our side."

"Give me a copy of your appeal to Malraux and I will see that it reaches him as soon as possible. How else will those in France know what is going on?"

"We have told the whole story and broadcast it over the radio. Everyone must know it. We are through with the old regime. Send us men, but not armed ones. The arrival of soldiers would mean war."

He told me about the 9th of March, how the French had abandoned them to the Japanese. They had simply pulled out and left them at the mercy of the enemy. He told me how Annamite guerillas had sided with the Chinese and a few remaining French to fight the Japanese undercover. He added that now they were being accused of sympathizing with the Japanese and of having Japanese officers, they, who had fought them during the long years when the French offered not the least resistance! He told me how deep-seated was the desire for freedom, even in the smallest village the poorest peasant women donated their only pieces of jewelry to further the cause. He told me about their great leader in Hanoi, and said:

"We like the French and our culture is French. I, myself, not only speak the language but I think in it. But we will not be a colony anymore."

He kept stressing the fact that the French despised the Annamites and had not done enough for them. Over and over again, he underlined the irreparable damage the French had done the Annamites by their desertion on the 9th of March and the profound effect it had had on the native population. It was at that moment that the French really lost all standing with the Annamites. Furthermore, they resented the French returning in British uniforms. (I had heard this complaint all over the East for months.) They did not realize that all Allied troops wore the same kind of uniform, and thought it was a ruse on the part of the French. He said:

"We were the ones to overthrow the Japanese administration. We were the ones who liberated entire provinces in the North in August of 1945, before the arrival of the Allies, and now the same French who did nothing to defend us are back here again, expecting to rule us as before. We refuse to submit to them. We will fight and die for our liberty which is, after all, one of the principles upon which France itself is built. We are through with French imperialism. We will treat with the new France, but not with its troops."

"Dr. Bach, would you be willing to talk with Cedil just once more? He represents the new France?"

"We are always willing to talk, but it will have to be on a common basis. They should try to remember the statement of the French colonial Minister in May of 1945, which said: "The age of colonization is over."

September 18, 1945: At the press conference we were told that Japanese reinforcements had just arrived, that all the various parts of town were guarded by them and that all the utilities were in their hands; that Annamite gangs continued to plunder here and there on the edge of town where the tension continued; that they were preventing food supplies from reaching the markets. We asked whether French newspapers would be published again, but were told that it was impossible at the present. We learned that some Dutch prisoners of war, accompanied by British and Japanese guards, had left for the North to pick up some ammunition from a Japanese depot.

I had lunch with Cedil and told him about my interview with Dr. Bach. He agreed that we had to negotiate with the Annamites and do something before it was too late, and said:

"I would be more willing to talk to them if only I could receive my orders from Paris; nevertheless, I want to see them again whenever or wherever they so desire. If they are afraid to see me personally, I will send someone in my place to meet them wherever they wish. Try to get that message to them; it is very important. Above all, we must prevent the Vichyites, whom they despise so, from conducting any negotiations. Actually, it's a blessing in disguise to have the Japanese patrolling everything. No matter what happens, we must not use the 11th Division. Many people who have lived here for a long time would like nothing better, and I am sure that the 11th would do anything to vindicate itself in the eyes of France for its complete lack of resistance on the 9th of March. But even if they wanted to fight, they are in no condition to do so. General Gracey has been warned for days against an Annamite attack, possibly a massacre, and told, at the same time, that the whole thing could be avoided by the immediate use of armed force.

"Colonel Riviere, the representative of General Leclerc, has just arrived. We have the same degree of authority, his delegated by General Leclerc, mine by Admiral d'Argenlieu. At that rate, how can we decide who is really in charge?"

"Colonel, I know that you realize that the whole issue out here is a question of saving face. The Vichy people have lost all standing and we must be careful lest the same thing happen to us, especially if our troops, which are already in Ceylon, do land here."

Cedil asked me to see Dr. Bach again and find out if another meeting could be arranged.

Dr. Bach was not at the Town Hall, and would be gone two days. I tried to see Dr. Tak, but he was also away.

One of the recently arrived French correspondents obtained admission to the Town Hall by pretending to be American and was permitted by the Viet-Minh to go out of town on a search for Admiral Decoux. Cedil and Gracey begged him not to undertake the trip, but to no avail. He returned that night, reporting that everything seemed quiet, that the sentries had to let him through everywhere and that he had seen some of the French landowners who were still living on their plantations. He saw Decoux and wrote a sensational article which the British censor withheld for eight days. The story was finally published after Decoux's departure for France.

The tension and rumors increased. Jean Hertricht was furious and spent his time telling people to go and talk with the Viet-Minh. The more than thirty correspondents were so anti-French that he and I were beginning to feel quite uncomfortable during the press conferences. From time to time I tried to persuade Cedil to hold a conference for them, but he was over-cautious and frightened and maintained that he had nothing to say, which was probably true.

September 19, 1945: At the press conference we learned that the trucks returning with Japanese arms and ammunition had been attacked on the way by the Annamites. One of the trucks was captured and one Dutch officer and two soldiers wounded. The Japanese were in the first truck. When they saw that the last one had been attacked they turned back to defend the others.

There was an extraordinary amount of commotion around the Town Hall that morning. Viet-Minh cars crowded the streets. The markets were almost deserted and there were no Annamites anywhere. Some of the Chinese ventured into the Rue Catinat to peddle their wares at rather fabulous prices. The entire population seemed to have gathered from one source or another that Annamite troops were massing on the outskirts of town. British planes reconnoitered the countryside, but reported nothing.

I interviewed Dr. Tak at the Town Hall, but our meeting was rather strained. Like Dr. Bach, Dr. Tak was quite young, very polite and intelligent and had a background of French schooling. But he was much sterner and more withdrawn than Dr. Bach. He said:

"The fact that the British sent for supplies of Japanese arms proves that they are playing along with the French who want to massacre us. French troops are on their way here. Is that how your new France behaves? Nothing has really changed in France -- just more empty promises. Talk to Cedil, why not? But it will be useless. He will only repeat that he hasn't received his orders from Paris. We are willing to talk to him or anyone else, but not if they are only setting a trap for us. Bach will probably be here tomorrow; let them come and see him then. But don't forget that we are in the same position as Cedil. Our orders come from Hanoi and we have no authority to make any arrangements with Cedil. In the meantime, the French soldiers will be arriving and the war will be on."

"But, Dr. Tak, don't you want to avoid open fighting? Won't you make a sincere attempt to talk to Cedil?"

"Certainly, we are always ready to discuss anything on reasonable terms. But the French provoke us incessantly on all sides. Only this morning, they beat a young Annamite into bloody unconsciousness -- one Annamite against four French."

"But why do they continue to insult and attack us?"

"Well, after all, you can't expect the Annamites to like the people who have always persecuted them."

The atmosphere was decidedly worse than the day before.

September 20, 1945: There was definitely something in the air that morning. I hung around the British Headquarters and heard that the British were going to take over the prison which was in the hands of the Annamites. I saw Colonel Cedil, in battle dress, leave the Headquarters with one officer, two non-commissioned officers and four Gurkhas and walk rapidly toward the prison. I followed them without a moment's hesitation. After a few moments, the door of the prison was opened to us. Armed Annamites watched us. Colonel Cass asked to see the Director of the prison and had everyone gather in the courtyard; chairs and a table were brought for us. Colonel Cass sat down and addressed them in French, in a speech which read more or less as follows:

"We have no desire to harm you; we only want to establish order. Your gangs are invading the town and arbitrarily taking prisoners right and left. Imprisonment is reserved for lawbreakers, and should not become a means of personal revenge. We want everything to be run in an orderly way. We will leave you in control of the prison and will allow you to retain your system

and your guards, but we are going to leave four men here who will be in charge of maintaining order. Are you holding any European prisoners?"

One officer and two Gurkhas went off on an inspection tour of the prison, accompanied by a warden. In the meantime, the Director assured Colonel Cass that everything was in order and that he was willing to accept his demand. The tone of the conversation was polite and even courteous. Colonel Cass requested that all arms and revolvers be brought out for inspection. There were more than seventy revolvers and some guns. The non-commissioned officers counted them and listed them on a record which the Director was made to sign. Colonel Cass then returned the revolvers to the Director and to the Chief Warden. The whole affair was conducted under the most favorable conditions. Upon leaving, Colonel Cass congratulated the Director on the orderliness of the prison and thanked him for his cooperation. The British had already moved in and the Gurkhas were posted at the door.

Lady Mountbatten arrived that evening to visit the prisoners of war and held a conference for us. She was charming and told us how good the French had been to the prisoners. She cited the example of the French woman I had met earlier and admired so much.

Meanwhile, the French were delighted to know that the British had taken over control of the prison. To them, it meant that everything would soon be back to normal. Cedil told me that night that it was a victory for Colonel Riviere who had been asking General Gracey to take some action.

September 21, 1945: Conferences between General Gracey and Colonel Riviere were in progress. More and more they spoke of arming the 11th Division and even the Dutch prisoners of war. The tension was almost unbearable. The Annamite spy ring kept them informed of everything, often to the point of exaggeration. It was now impossible to see anyone in the Town Hall. The Annamites were convinced that the English were on the side of the French and would cooperate wholeheartedly with them. The administration of the French Gouvernement General was slowly beginning to reassert itself. Clandestine French newspapers appeared each evening with news of the outside world.

The agitation in the streets continued, especially around the Town Hall. The air was heavy with premonitions of danger. I myself was caught up in this feeling. Something was bound to happen soon and everyone awaited it with taut nerves and drawn faces.

That afternoon, the British occupied one Police Station peacefully, but ran into trouble at the next one -- an Annamite, a revolver in hand, wheeled suddenly as the Gurkhas entered, carrying their knives, and was brutally stabbed. Without further ado, the Gurkha hailed a passing Japanese truck and had the bleeding Annamite taken off.

A few Englishmen were attacked on the outskirts of town. The road to the airport was not safe anymore, and some passing jeeps were fired on by machine-guns. Everything lead General Gracey to believe that it was time to arm the 11th Division.

We visited their barracks. The entrance was strongly guarded, but I managed to get in with the help of a sergeant who was a friend of mine. The corridors of the long buildings were filled with men of all ages, most of them older than the average soldier and most of them affecting the Foreign Legion style of beard. They were dressed in shabby, unassorted shirts and shorts. Some wore officer's hats, others dirty caps, and still others just a handkerchief tied around their head or a beret. They were all unshaven, sloppy and unkempt. No two of them were dressed alike. At the time of the occupation, the Japanese had taken everything away from them except for what they had on their backs.

It was a completely undisciplined outfit, common, slovenly and foul-mouthed. Their step was slow and weary. Being restricted to quarters had put them in a very bad humor.

"How much longer are we going to be kept here? How soon can we return to France? Why do they let the filthy Annamites get away with this?", they asked.

I shuddered to think that these troops might be unleashed upon the city. I can only explain their disintegration by saying that they had had nothing to do for four years, and had been interned in the same camp since the 9th of March, 1945. They had been deprived suddenly of their comfort and freedom and mistreated by the Japanese, and had received no sympathy from the Annamites. It was true that they still had their women, but the Congai girls were not as willing and pleasant after the handsome soldiers became Japanese prisoners. They who had been used to plenty of hard liquor were deprived of it. Interned there in that square courtyard, under the glaring sun, without any outside distractions, they had become completely lethargic. Were these the men who were going to be called on to fight? The British could't possibly consent to it. But the French officers wanted to prove that they had their men well in hand. They spoke convincingly of their fighting outfit, supposedly two thousand men to put into the campaign. Some men and some campaign!...

September 22, 1945: It was like being on top of a volcano about to erupt. Nothing actually happened, but from moment to moment panic-stricken people would rush into General Gracey's or Colonel Cedil's offices with the news that the Annamites had been seen either here or there or that the car of such and such a leader had been spotted. To an even greater degree, it was the same atmosphere of hysteria which had prevailed on the day of our arrival. They all asked:

"Why don't the British send for reinforcements? And if they can't, why not arm the Dutch who are standing by and why not use the 11th Division which is idle and would soon know how to deal with the Annamites?"

A Chinese doctor by the name of Lieng invited Hertricht and me to have dinner with him that evening in Cholon. Dr. Bach had not returned, and the Town Hall was almost deserted. There were two press conferences during the day. Several Dutch, English, and Japanese military convoys had been attacked. The situation became more and more serious. There seemed indeed to be a greater concentration of people on the outskirts of the city; but, still, nothing definite. Isolated gangs continued their plundering and the shooting increased. The British Headquarters were beginning to express great concern. Important plantation owners conferred with Gracey and Cedil. Colonel Riviere was more determined than ever to take action. The British belief, that if anything were to happen there would not be adequate means of protecting the population, was widespread.

Cedil looked terribly worried and told me: "I am hoping and praying that the 11th Division will not be allowed to take part in this. Personally, I am convinced that nothing will happen before the arrival of the French troops. But if Riviere has as much authority as I have and manages to persuade the British to crack down, then we will be in real trouble."

"In any event, Colonel, the Vichyites must be kept out of it. It will be different with the other French who are on their way here."

"Yes, I know all that, but my hands are tied. What with Gracey being so nervous himself, who knows....."

The Chinese doctor came to pick us up around five. He asked whether we had a car; as we did not have one at our disposal, he departed in search of one, looking rather perturbed.

"Don't breathe a word of French", he told us when he returned, "I told our Annamite chauffeur that you were American, otherwise he would not take us there, so don't forget -- not a single word of French". Hertricht and I looked at each other in wonder, and off we went.

The Annamite driver looked us over rather doubtfully. Did he suspect who we were? Our destination was unknown and no one knew we had left. This night ride through the Annamite quarter, with no Allied soldiers for miles around, alone in a car with a Chinese whom we hardly knew and an Annamite chauffeur, was a rather nerve-racking experience. We spoke in English, but the Chinese doctor was as worried as we were, if not more so. Hertricht and I were so eager to see Cholon again and there were, after all, so many unsubstantiated rumors about that we tried to conceal our anxiety, although neither of us was really comfortable during the trip.

We went to one of the best restaurants in Cholon. It was the first time I had ever eaten in an exclusively Chinese place, and this added somehow to my general premonition of danger. It was a magnificent dinner, as much a treat for the eyes as for the palate. Jean Hertricht, who liked Cholon and had been there before the war, was enjoying himself immensely. It was also a new experience to listen to the orchestra and the thin, sharp tones of the singers. Around ten o'clock we were informed that our driver had disappeared and that there was no way to get back to Saigon. We left to explore Cholon, it was a brightly-lit, dazzling scene filled with unceasing motion. "This is a part of Cholon which very few Europeans ever visit", Jean whispered to me in French. Slender Chinese girls passed by. There was music and great activity wherever we looked. After much conferring, the doctor managed to hire three rickshaws. It was the only time I ever had occasion to use one in Saigon.

The curfew had sounded. It was very dark as we plunged into the night, each in our own rickshaw. The doctor was ahead of me and Hertricht was behind. Our journey lasted three quarters of an hour. We passed many other rickshaws carrying Annamites and Chinese. We were the only Europeans among all these people. From time to time we spoke a few words in English just to reassure each other of our presence and to break the stillness of the oppressive darkness. The night was filled with shadows; there were many people abroad who should have been asleep. Viet-Minh cars speeded by.

I must admit that I breathed more freely when we found ourselves once more in front of the Continental Hotel. Jean Hertricht smiled at me and said: "Well, we made it, but it wasn't easy going. What a relief to be back here safely."

During the night I was awakened by a wild burst of gunfire, but I didn't pay much attention to it until I heard the noise of machine guns and hand grenades. I looked outside. The streets below were filled with people and cars, but I knew it would be useless to go down. I had no trouble in going back to sleep, as I had become quite accustomed to the noise of shooting since the beginning of the war and having been up at the front -- besides, I was nervously and physically exhausted after our rickshaw ride. But the shooting continued all night.

September 23, 1945: I got up at five in the morning, because the shooting was still going on, and went downstairs. Everyone else was up too.

"It's all over now. The Town Hall was captured last night, but all the scoundrels had fled."

"Who took the Town Hall?"

"We did -- the 11th Division".

I rushed over to the Town Hall, but it was too crowded to enter. A strong guard stood at the entrance with strict orders to let no one in. They were strangely dressed, wild-looking soldiers. I got into the car of an officer of the Parachute regiment who said: "Come along with us. We are about to take their radio station and we must get there in time to keep them from cutting the cables. The 11th captured the Town Hall at two o'clock this morning, but it was deserted. They shot like maniacs at a few defenceless men who were still there. They took quantities of prisoners. What an outfit! They behave more like bandits than soldiers."

When we arrived the station had already been taken over, so we returned. In the great hall, about a hundred Annamites on their knees with their hands over their heads, were being guarded with ferocious watchfulness by the 11th Division. If they dared to lower their hands so much as an inch, they were instantly and viciously jabbed with the butt of a gun. It was disgusting to see such a spectacle. I couldn't stand it any longer, but as I was about to leave, the place was taken over by a French parachute outfit. As soon as they entered they asked if the kneeling prisoners had been disarmed. Upon being informed that they had been, they exclaimed: "Why treat them like this? Either take them into safekeeping if they were armed, or let them go."

I left to inspect some of the other buildings; the same thing was happening everywhere. An English friend of mine and I made a tour of the city. First of all, we went back to the Town Hall. We immediately ran into trouble with the guards of the 11th Division. They barred our passage with bayonettes. It made me very angry and I had to remind them that a war correspondent has the rank of captain -- it seemed to mollify them.

"Who are these armed civilians?" my friend asked me.

I told him that they were not armed civilians, but the soldiers which General Gracey had ordered out, the 11th Division of the French Colonial Army.

"But they aren't even in uniform; they don't have any discipline at all."

He was right. I have never seen such unmilitary bearing or behavior. They beat up their wretched prisoners as soon as they got their hands on them.

Outside a group of Marines was conducting a house to house search. We accompanied them, but everything was deserted. We even looked under beds, but found nothing. Everything was upside down and empty. There were many strong French patrols, further out on the edge of town. Not one of them knew how to march properly. They wandered through the streets as if celebrating the 14th of July, their guns slung over their shoulders, cigarettes dangling from their lips. There were barricades almost everywhere. The officers of the 11th were filthy and unshaven and the men resembled a rioting civilian population. I set out to find Cedil, completely disgusted by what I had seen. I said to him:

"You wanted war, and how do you like it now that you have it? Who gave the orders for this?"

"The ammunition was supplied by the British, and Colonel Riviere finally won consent from General Gracey to open hostilities."

Cedil, accompanied by the head of his civilian staff and by the Chief of Police, spent all day inspecting the city, trying to estimate the destruction and to prevent any further harm. At the Police Headquarters, he found several hundred prisoners on their knees with their hands raised. At each battle station, Annamites with their hands tied behind their backs, were waiting in the hot sun to be taken to Headquarters or to be liberated.

It is impossible to describe this day, which marked the beginning of the war in Indo-China. I went all over town on foot and by car, in the company of Cedil, of various officers and journalists, and alone. I saw everything with my own eyes -- Annamites tied up, some of them tortured, drunken officers and soldiers with smoking guns. On one occasion when I was with the head of the Civilian Staff, he stopped his car, disgusted by the sight of a group of soldiers, smoking and loitering: "I must speak to them, this is intolerable." But he returned, enraged and muttering: "That is what happens when you don't have a unified command."

On the Rue Catinat, I saw soldiers driving before them a group of Annamites bound, slave-fashion, to a long rope. Women spat in their faces. They were on the verge of being lynched. In more distant sections I saw French soldiers come out of Annamite houses with stolen shoes and shirts, saying: "At least, we will be able to wear clean linen this evening...."

"Aren't you ashamed of plundering like the Annamites?" I asked them. "Certainly not", they replied, "They have been stealing from us for months."

From time to time, an Annamite dwelling would burst into flame. Women and children were fleeing. That night, French soldiers strolled on the Rue Catinat, a gun on one arm, a woman on the other. I have never been so deeply ashamed as on that day of September 23rd. When I returned to the hotel, the faces of the English were expressionless and conversations stopped as I went by. I remember the horror and shame I had felt in June of 1940 when Vichy was established, but never in my life had I felt such utter sadness and degradation as on this night.

These men, who were supposed to be the soldiers of France, this undisciplined horde whose laughing and singing I could hear from my window, corrupted by too many years in the tropics, too many women, too much opium and too many months of inactivity in camp, they were the ones to whom the task of re-establishing "order" had been entrusted. That night I realized only too well what a serious mistake we had made and how grave the consequences would be. It was the beginning of a ruthless war. Instead of regaining our prestige we had lost it forever, and, worse still, we had lost the trust of the few remaining Annamites who believed in us. We had showed them that the new France was even more to be feared than the old one.

September 24, 1949: The noise of shouting, traffic, machine guns and hand grenades went on all night. In the morning everyone was out in front of the hotel. A communique from Cedil announced that the capture of all the public utilities had been accomplished without combat and that only two Europeans and no Annamites at all had been killed. The population was as hostile as ever toward Cedil and resented his emphasis on the fact that there had been no Annamites killed. At the press conference all the correspondents were bitterly anti-French. They asked:

"Are these armed civilians going to be allowed to roam the streets and plunder Annamite houses? Is the British Command responsible for what happened yesterday? Why were arms given to men who don't know how to use them? What was the reason for this maneuver? Is it a question of taking political sides? Do they want to use British troops to repress the independence movement in Indo-China, in exchange for French aid in India? Were they sent here for political reasons?"

Colonel Cass spoke for General Gracey and said that all the French troops had been recalled and ordered back to their barracks, that to avoid the danger of a riot, and to insure the safety of the population, it had been deemed necessary to arm the French troops which, until then, had been interned, but that since midnight the entire division had been consigned to quarters. The water and electricity were being guarded by the Gurkhas and serviced by the Japanese. Japanese and Gurkha patrols maintained order. General Gracey had asked the Japanese for reinforcements as an Annamite reprisal was expected any moment.

Possibly Colonel Cass might have said a lot more but for the presence of four French correspondents; Hertricht and I felt very ill at ease.

The reprisal was not long in coming. A burst of gunfire greeted us at the entrance of the British Headquarters as we left the press conference. In every street from every window, the Annamites opened fire. The Bastos factories burst into flames, as well as enormous supplies of rubber; barricades were set up everywhere, cutting off the streets. The Annamites were all around the Rue Catinat, although there wasn't a single one in sight. Bullets whined through the air as people fled for their lives on all sides.

Back at the hotel, the Dutch were in charge of the housekeeping and the cooking; the latter did not present a great problem, as the only thing we had left were army rations. The population had no means whatsoever of obtaining food. It was impossible to go anywhere in town. Entire streets were cut off, the French civilians swarmed around the hotel. The Japanese kept the Annamites from surging into the city, but the docks were already in their hands. We were severed from the airport and from the rest of the country. Whenever we went out, we had to hug the walls for fear of being shot in the back at any moment. A charming atmosphere.....

I came back quite late that night, because I had been with Cedil who was very worried; it was known that the Annamites were now everywhere, all over the city, although no one knew how they had infiltrated. The night was filled with a growing premonition of massacre.

An unexpected situation awaited me at the hotel. The lobby was so crowded with men, women, and children that it was almost impossible to get through. People had moved in everywhere -- in all the corridors and in the rooms of the British officers and of the correspondents. They were the French civilians, huddled together in fear and trembling. Not one of them attempted to help in any way; they did not even offer to assist the Dutch who were doing the cooking. None of them volunteered to stand guard at the door or at the windows nor gave a thought to protecting the women and children. The British and the war correspondents took over those duties. They were on the go all night, never taking a moment to rest, while the French, for whom they were risking their lives, sat on the edge of their beds, smoking and shaking with fear. I visited all the rooms and corridors that night and saw for myself how completely useless the French were.

I have witnessed panic before, but never in my life have I seen such cringing cowardice. To make matters worse, the lights went out. The women and children began to scream and the men rushed for safety to the inside corridors where there were no windows. I regained my room which was at the head of the stairs; it had four windows and was empty, obviously having been judged unsafe as a refuge. I started to write by candlelight. I could hear machine guns right next to the hotel; a bullet whizzed by my window. From the suddenly increased screaming, I decided that the Annamites had begun their attack on the hotel. As I left my room a bullet just missed my head. My English friends shouted to me to come into one of the inner corridors for protection. Wild panic reigned, with people running and shouting. It was impossible to quiet them. The orders were not to go downstairs nor to move around at all, but to remain in the corridors. I spent my time trying to calm the women and children. Everyone wanted to see what was going on, to go down stairs and to be ready for whatever might happen. They crowded around the stairs and the door.

The British officers became very angry and had to issue sharp orders. I remained at the head of the stairs for hours trying to keep them from going down. Finally the lights came back on and people began to calm down a little. The officers who had been out in search of the Annamites returned, and reported that they were not on the roof of the hotel or the neighboring houses anymore.

I ran into the wife of a plantation owner whom I had met a few days before. She was with her seven year old daughter who was badly frightened, and her eighteen year old son who was even more so. When I had last seen her she had told me: "We have never been afraid of the Annamites, because we are used to them. Our plantation is in the Moi country and we know the people well. Our sons have always associated with them. If we show a little courage, they won't harm us."

These people, who had only to "show a little courage", were nevertheless shaking with fear. I offered my bed to the child, the sofa to the mother and found a blanket for the boy. But they were not satisfied with my room.

"If the Annamites come up the back stairs, they will kill us."
"But there is a Gurkha sentry at the door."
"Supposing the sentry doesn't see them?"
"Well then, we will all be killed."

They decided to stay. The little girl slept while I kept on writing my article to the sound of the mother's sobbing and the boy's snoring. In the morning my guests had disappeared.

I left by plane on the next day, the 25th of September. Saigon was in flames as we flew away.

The last ten days in Saigon proved to me that the French population understood nothing of the situation and knew nothing of the outside world; that it consisted of people who would not tolerate the least infringement upon their comfort and who also were incredibly cowardly. Never have cause and effect been so closely linked. The events of the 22nd of September determined the issue of the conflict. Everything which happened thereafter can be directly traced to that date -- women captured and mistreated, men and children assassinated, Dutch, English and American officers killed, shooting, burning factories, mysterious disappearances, all these and more happened. The French, terrorized by their lack of foresight and motivated by avarice, were unwilling to give up even one piaster. They are responsible for what happened.

The Annamites will win their independence because they are ready to die for it. We must recognize this inevitable fact -- in a month, a year at the most, we will have to come to an agreement with them.

It may be too late already. We may never regain face, but if we do, it won't be with the assistance of machine guns. The "good old days" are gone forever.