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YOUR WASHINGTON REVIEW

By Gerald R. Ford, Jr.

(As we told you in last week's column, Congressman Ford is writing a series of letters to his wife, Betty, and their children, Mike and Jack, on his trip to the Far East. Here is another letter from Jerry.)

Written enroute to Taipei,
Formosa, August 9th.

Dearest Betty, Mike and Jack,

Our inspection group spent 2 1/2 days in Saigon, Indo-China, practically half way around the world from Washington, D.C. Some statistician has figured out the White House is 65 miles closer to Saigon if you travel via Europe rather than over the Pacific. Its a gross understatement to say, either way its a long trek homeward.

An old friend from Grand Rapids, Bud Vestal, works for Uncle Sam in Saigon, in the U. S. Information Agency. Unfortunately I didn't have too much time in the crowded schedule to see him and his family, but we did get together for a short session where I brought him up-to-date on news from home, and he reciprocated with his personal comments on the dangerous communist activities in Indo-China.

Saigon is a relatively modern city in appearance, certainly far different from war torn Seoul in South Korea. Its a city built up by the French as part of their colonial empire, and their civilian and military installations over the years have cost them many millions of dollars. These investments, and the potential wealth in natural resources, has probably caused their reluctance to pull out and let the Vietnamese, the Cambodians, and the Laotians set up their own governments.

Since 1946 the Communists have had their eye on Indo-China, and have waged vicious war on the French and local forces in an effort to capture this key area in the very heart of the Far East. It has been a bloody and expensive struggle with no decisive victory for either side. In the last several years the United States has supplied the anti-communist forces with military equipment. More help of this sort is contemplated in the months ahead so the communist threat can be turned back.

During our visit we had full and complete briefings on the military picture and made careful checks on the past and planned "end-use" of the military supplies being furnished by Uncle Sam. The American Ambassador filled us in on the political picture which is complicated by the varied problems resulting from the desire of the local people to achieve full independence from the French at the earliest possible date. Fortunately, and wisely, the French, on July 3rd, agreed to independence for the three associated states forming Indo-China. The sooner this autonomy is

achieved, bearing in mind the manifold administrative difficulties, the greater likelihood of victory for the anti-communist forces.

The Indo-China war has had a heavy toll on the civilian population as evidenced by the thousands of rural families displaced from their ancestral homes by the ruthless tactics of the communist soldiers. These refugees with no means of livelihood, having fled from the communist held areas, have been helped by the combined efforts of the local government and the American technical assistance experts. Fifteen miles from Saigon I saw a newly built thatched-roof village, surrounded by many acres of rice paddies, where approximately 600 native families (4000 persons) were getting a new start in life. This rehabilitation program is bound to be effective. The communists in Indo-China have promised the natives land and "model villages". In reality the Reds have driven the families from their homes. The local governments with our help have provided homes, a means of livelihood, medical care and basic educational opportunities for these refugees. With only two classrooms and two teachers, it is unfortunately impossible to teach all of the village's 1200 children, so one child is chosen from each family to be educated until more facilities can be made available. Certainly in this situation the false promises of the communists have been exposed to the fullest, while the anti-communists with 21 such villages have lived up to the concept that the "free world" does help the needy.

The two and a half days passed quickly because of the heavy schedule. Although local custom dictates a three hour lunch period (because of the noon-day tropical heat), our inspection group worked right through the siesta period each day. It was the only way to see and hear all of the facts. Some day a more leisurely trip to this area and its fine people would be a wonderful and pleasant experience.

The trip homeward has started, although it will be a week or more before we land at the Nation's Capital. The first leg from Saigon to Hong Kong was uneventful, but certainly this vast and beautiful city off the south China coast is a sight to behold. From Hong Kong to Taipei, in Formosa, was the second hop, and I will write later of what we saw on this controversial island where Chaing Kai-Shek and the Chinese Nationals await the day to return to the mainland.

Love to you all. It won't be too long before we'll be back.

Jerry