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Saigon: French Island in a Sea of Rebellion

French reinforcements continued to pour ashore in Indo-China last week. They gradually began to bring the turbulent natives under control. Ragged, undisciplined Annamite rebels were no match for well-equipped French troops. But the underlying bitterness against the French remained. In the following dispatch, Harold Isaacs, NEWSWEEK correspondent, tells how this virtual civil war looks from the Southern Indo-China capital of Saigon.

Saigon is like a stubborn foreign island in a turbulent Annamite sea. Its buff-colored, red-slate-roofed residences along the quiet tree-lined streets might be those of any drowsy Southern French provincial town. Only this city is suffering from slow strangulation. The Annamites' total strike has closed almost all the shops and stripped hotels, stores, and homes of help. The Annamite population has melted away.

The downtown streets are filled with French soldiers, sailors, and civilians, British Indian soldiers, and a few Tommies. In the early mornings French housewives walk or bicycle their unaccustomed way to market, where a small number of Chinese sell limited quantities of meat, fruit, and vegetables. Most French male civilians have been drafted for military service. Others stroll around with rifles in vigilante patrols.

At nights the town closes up. Long before the 10:45 curfew, its streets are dead except when bands of drunken French sailors or soldiers split the somber darkness with song. In the later, smaller hours there is only occasional gunfire.

Lend-Lease Victory: French troops march battalion by battalion through Saigon streets to the delighted applause of French residents. Most of these men, fresh from Europe, are equipped from head to foot with American clothing and weapons—carbines and 45s—and have brought with them American Lend-Lease jeeps and trucks.

As these troops arrive they are being moved out to take over important garrison points from armed Japanese who had been left to protect towns from Annamite guerrillas. This is a deliberate British policy, I was told at Allied Commission headquarters here in Saigon. British landing craft, also Lend-Lease, are being used to move French troops up the maze of waterways beyond Saigon.

Having given the French a good start on reconquest of Indo-China, the British here now indicate they hope to complete the job of concentrating and disarming Jap troops, and pull out. Maj. Gen. Douglas Gracey, the British commander, says: "We've done our level best to help the French and now we've got to finish off our job with the Japs." Expectations are that the program will be complete in about two months.

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Whose Indo-China?

In South China, 6,000 French troops stood ready to reenter French Indo-China. A portion of the French Fleet and a French air force unit prepared to back them up. Suddenly, in London, a Foreign Office spokesman announced that France was not "at the moment in a physical position to take over the responsibilities" of administering its colony immediately after its liberation. Instead, the Chinese Government and the Southeast Asia Command under Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten would march into French Indo-China. When French administrators arrived, the job would be theirs.

French officials promptly raised angry cries of protest. One of Gen. Charles de Gaulle's attachés declared: "We are definitely taking over." In Washington, another French official insisted: "We have the forces necessary to occupy and administer Indo-China any time the Allied shipping pool will give us our own ships to transport them out there."

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