



YOUR STAKE IN VIETNAM

By General Wallace M. Greene, Jr.
Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps

WE SHOULD take great pride in the historical record of America's emergence as the citadel of freedom. The deep taproots of our heritage provide spiritual nourishment for strengthening our patriotism. We need this nourishment. Indeed, today patriotism is a key element in our defense of freedom and ultimate victory in Viet Nam.

But how much is "enough" patriotism? How does one plumb the depths of a nation's patriotism? How can we evaluate our collective devotion to America? How can we forecast our probable response in an hour of crisis, a moment of truth?

Although we can recognize the impossibility of applying a precise measurement to the status of patriotism, there are some useful clues and indications that should assist us in making our estimate. First, let us examine the debit side of the ledger.

Many of us were shocked, ashamed and disgusted at the degrading spectacle of Americans carrying Viet Cong banners during a demonstration in the nation's capital. Equally odious was the university professor who announced that he would rejoice in a Viet Cong victory. That any of the products of our bountiful

land could be so motivated is enough to give us serious concern. Just as reprehensible are those who mailed literature urging mutinous conduct to our fighting men in Viet Nam and who handed it to servicemen in the United States. The leaflets, prepared by the Viet Nam Day Committee, suggested that military personnel should refuse to fight and encouraged them to oppose the war: "You know better than civilians what sorts of opposition are possible." To whom, one might ask, was such an approach designed to give aid and comfort? Hanoi's leaders could not have asked for better support. We should remember that French efforts in Viet Nam were frustrated much more by anti-Viet Nam propaganda on the home front than by defeat at Dien Bien Phu.

The draft card burners comprise another group in which we can take no pride. These Americans enjoy the rights of citizenship but are unwilling to shoulder its responsibilities. They savor our nation's precious freedom but shrug off the personal inconvenience necessary to maintain it.

Then there are the noisy, peace at any cost, let's get out of Viet Nam, pull back to Fortress America demonstrators, a less harmful minority whose right to expression is also guaranteed by our Constitution.

To the extent that these people are sincere in their objections to our government's chosen course, and providing they do not translate their objections into obstructive tactics—like those in Oakland, Calif., who tried to impede the passage of a troop train—they should be free to demonstrate. But in an hour of crisis I would prefer a more dependable group of associates than the placard set.

These are some of the disturbing indicators in our current situation. Although comparisons with the past may not be very meaningful, we naturally look back to the "good old days" to determine whether we can detect any noticeable downward trend in our collective devotion to our country. Is there such a noticeable trend?

Patriotism in the past

I suspect that even among the brave farmers of Lexington and Concord who fired the shot heard round the world, there were those who lacked the will, faith and dedication to carry their share of the danger and discomfort. We can be sure that "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" were and are desirable goals for all Americans. It even seems probable that both extremes shared a pride in the young nation's accomplishments and a deep appreciation of the land's bountiful promise.

But the patriots manifested their affection for their country by positive action. The other group either passively avoided their responsibilities or actively brought aid and comfort to the enemy, carefully hedging their bets to insure that they backed both sides and thus the ultimate winner.

Still others were sunshine patriots, ready to proclaim their loyalty and anxious to be conspicuously patriotic once the storm of conflict had passed.

Analysis of other periods of crisis in our glory-rich history produces similar conclusions: Loyalty, patriotism and good citizenship were conspicuous qualities

in each instance but could never be claimed for the entire population. Each time, an uncooperative minority was identifiable just as it is today.

In our current crisis, we find remarkable examples of courage, uncommon valor and good citizenship. But does patriotism today measure up to the lofty standard of the past? Let us look at the evidence.

Last August, when the Marine Corps started feeling the first uncomfortable pinch of a rather heavy personnel commitment in Viet Nam, we extended an invitation to members of the ready reserve to volunteer for extended active duty. Certain necessary restrictions limited the number of these reservists eligible to volunteer. Nevertheless, in short order, 202 officers and 737 enlisted men indicated a desire to serve and a willingness to put aside their civilian pursuits until an important citizen's job was completed. Among our six-month reserve trainees we received similar strong support.

The retired personnel also responded to the latest crisis with an eagerness born of pride and devotion. To Headquarters, Marine Corps, came a deluge of letters expressing willingness to leave their homes and serve again the country they love so well.

Our regular Marines have responded as expected. In South Viet Nam over 2,000 combat-experienced Marines have requested extensions of their duty tours.

During a visit in January, I had an opportunity to talk to some of these young Americans. One of these conversations was particularly enlightening to me. This occurred during a visit to the Combined Action Company, a unit composed of two platoons of U. S. Marines and three platoons of South Vietnamese militiamen.

I found the company providing security in a small village and was immediately impressed by the singleness of purpose, camaraderie and esprit displayed by Americans and South Vietnamese alike. Here was a "unit" in the fullest sense of the word—a team of allies dedicated to a common cause. Since I knew that 30 U. S. Marines in this company had requested extension of their tours, I took the opportunity to inquire into their motives. "Now, look," I said, "you had a chance to return home. Why didn't you go? What do you want to stay here for?"

Why they stay

Their answers, spoken by some, confirmed by vigorous nods from the others, ran something like this: "We feel that we are making a real contribution to our country. We like and respect these Vietnamese. We see the benefits from our combined operations here in civic action and in combat patrolling as well. Our job is here. We want to stay."

These answers came from young Americans of 18, 19 and 20 years of age. They recognize fully what is at stake in Viet Nam. They know that the preservation of our precious liberty requires sacrifice.

During a recent visit to the hospital on Guam, I talked with a great number of patients, most of whom were malarial evacuees from Viet Nam. These young Americans, soldiers and Marines, all were anxious to return to their outfits. Let me underline that point: Without my asking, every single one of these men with

whom I talked indicated a strong desire to return to Viet Nam and get on with the task at hand.

These young patriots like home comforts and conveniences as much as anyone; yet they feel that they have a job to do—a challenge to face. They neither shirk the job nor duck the challenge.

All Americans can take pride in the knowledge that our servicemen take to heart the sober words and spirit of the oath of enlistment.

Naturally such an oath should not seem alien to a young American who in kindergarten held his right hand over his heart and joined others in saying: "I pledge allegiance to the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands. . . ." This same young man a few years later joined the Boy Scouts and learned another oath: "Upon my honor, I will do my best, to do my duty to God and my country. . . ." Yes, unabashed love for our beloved country is firmly implanted at an early age. But patriotism is not just a passive love. To be meaningful, patriotism requires an active, zealous manifestation of love when the situation requires.

Manifestations of patriotism by our men in Viet Nam are positive and unashamed. From the scores of letters from fighting men that express mature, reflective analyses of America's Viet Nam commitment I have selected five excerpts:

"I joined the U. S. Marine Corps in 1962 like thousands before me, and there will be many more behind me. . . . I joined to serve my country, my God and my Corps to the best of my ability. . . . to keep my country and our allies free. . . . Demonstrate if you want, make fools of yourselves and the great America in which you live. You are only hindering our effort here."

"What has happened to the flag wavers—the pride in supporting our President and our nation and our own freedom of the world? Since when is it old-fashioned to love the sight of Old Glory, to celebrate the Fourth of July, to fight for the security of the world? I can't understand the ideas these young people have in their protest demonstrations . . . or the burning of Selective Service cards. . . ."

"If this letter will sway one person's thought from protest to patriotism, then I'll feel it was a success. . . . All we servicemen ask is loyalty from the people in the United States. Not just the majority, but all the people. It would make our job so much easier."

"My father fought in the Second World War, in the Pacific area. Now I am proud to serve my country, as he did. If it becomes necessary, I will lay down my life for the country I love and want to stay free for my sister's children. . . . I will fight to preserve my rights and to insure that generations that follow have the same rights."

"We all know we are here for a good cause. I can assure you of one thing, this is one Marine that is proud to be an American. After what I have seen here I know what it is to have freedom. These people here in Viet Nam need help. . . . These people deserve freedom as much as anyone else. We are doing our best to give them a chance."

Throughout the correspondence one can detect a sustained plea for unified support at home. What has

been the response to this plea? Let us examine the credit side of the ledger.

"What can we do to help?" Citizens, schools, church groups, corporations, civic and social organizations ask me this question in letters, telephone calls and during my visits to various parts of the country. In asking it, Americans reveal an eagerness to share some part of their nation's commitment to help the people of South Viet Nam break the communist stranglehold and embark on a life of liberty and orderly growth.

The answer—that the South Vietnamese desperately need soap, clothing and medical supplies—brings forth a heart-warming response. The needed items flood to collection points for onward shipment to Viet Nam. Navy-Marine Corps handling of these donations is through Project Handclasp. Other similarly inspired programs have resulted in the accumulation of tons of gifts from generous American donors to needy Vietnamese recipients.

Scores of American businesses and trade and civic organizations have given goods, services and money for servicemen and the Vietnamese.

Another movement, oriented more toward support of U.S. combat forces, has resulted in thousands upon thousands of expressions of sincere appreciation and approval of the job done by our servicemen.

A group of businessmen in Escondido, Calif., for example, prepared a resolution of support on which they accumulated some 10,000 signatures of endorsement before turning the document over to the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* and other media for wide publication to our Viet Nam fighting men.

Do such gestures mean anything to our men in Viet Nam?

Yes, a firm, unequivocal yes. All human beings need to be reassured from time to time that what they are doing is important and is appreciated.

I saw the impact of this type of support during January of this year in the I Corps area in Viet Nam, where some 42,000 of my fellow Marines are working with our South Vietnamese counterparts to bring security and re-establish orderly governmental processes.

Our Marines there received over 323,000 pounds of special Christmas mail—special in that it came not from family and close friends but from other strong supporters on the home front. This mail came from points all over the United States addressed variously to "Marines in Viet Nam" or to "A Fighting Marine."

We put our chaplains to work insuring systematic distribution of this mail so that each unit received its proportionate share. Here was a positive, spontaneous expression of patriotism and support. To men who had read about the anti-Viet Nam demonstrations and draft card roasts, this mail seemed like a breath of clean, fresh air. I sensed this myself on seeing a scroll, some 20 feet long, from a small city in the Middle West. Hundreds upon hundreds of citizens had affixed their signatures below a caption that declared enthusiastic support and appreciation.

Letter to a Marine

I think this story illustrates the impact of the correspondence:

During a mine-clearing operation near Chu Lai, a Viet Cong ambush killed two Marines and wounded another. The latter, shot in the shoulder, was quickly bandaged and readied for helicopter evacuation.

He insisted on the return of his bloodied utility coat, which had been torn off during first-aid efforts. Once he had the coat again, he reached into the breast pocket and retrieved a letter. It was from a stranger in the United States, expressing appreciation to a fighting Marine. "It's such a nice letter," the wounded man explained, "that I want to make sure that I keep it so I can write a reply."

I have leaned heavily on Marine Corps examples. I am sure the other services have examples as numerous and as persuasive.

In my opinion successful consummation of the Viet Nam War will require continuing united support on the home front. Indeed I consider this to be one of the vital ingredients in the complex recipe for success. No one should expect us to resolve favorably the current struggle for freedom without displaying monumental courage and undergoing considerable sacrifice. But, in the words of Thomas Paine, "Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it."

In evaluating the current status of American patriotism, I conclude that the vast majority of our citizenry is as devoted to the nation as at any time in our history and stands ready to prove that devotion whenever and wherever required.

Even among the people who comprise the minority that challenges the wisdom of our government's chosen course, most are good citizens who believe that their patriotic duty requires them to make known their opinions.

This leaves only a small fraction whose activities should give us all serious concern. I refer to the propagators of literature suggesting mutinous conduct by armed forces personnel, the Viet Cong flag bearers, the draft card burners and the direct obstructionists.

Would we have permitted anyone to parade through the streets of the nation's capital carrying a German flag during World War I? Or the Japanese Rising Sun during World War II? Of course not! But remember that our involvement in both of these conflicts followed a catastrophe that excited the emotions and induced passionate patriotism. In the absence of a Lusitania sinking or a Pearl Harbor bombing, neither the Korean War nor the Vietnamese commitment produced this nationalistic fervor.

Today's patriotism, characterized less by hysteria and more by business as usual maturity, is still strong and dynamic. Beneath the surface it retains its mercurial qualities, volatility being proportional to the recognized peril to the nation.

Perhaps today is not the day for a modern Paul Revere to gallop through every Middlesex village and farm awakening the populace to imminent dangers.

With some notable exceptions, the temperature of our patriotism is normal in the current situation and its status is healthy: noble without being aloof, proud without being haughty, calm without being apathetic and patient without being passive.

END