

Vietnamese celebrate anniversary of war's end



HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam (AP) — Twenty years ago, Communist tanks rolled down a broad avenue and smashed through the gates of the South Vietnamese presidential palace to seize power and reunite the country.

On Sunday, more than 10,000 soldiers, students and children paraded down the same broad, leafy boulevard, carrying flowers and balloons and posing for pictures with their former enemies — Americans — to celebrate the anniversary of the war's end.

No recriminations were heard against the United States, with which Vietnam now wants diplomatic and trade ties. Mayor Truong Tan Sang opened the ceremonies by praising the patriotism that led so many to their death but never even mentioned the United States.

North Vietnam seized power from the last remaining officials of the U.S.-allied government on April 30, 1975, ending a war that cost more than 3 million lives. Most Americans had fled the city only hours earlier in a desperate helicopter evacuation.

On Sunday, Vietnamese scrambled to have their pictures taken with American journalists and tourists, and once past the reviewing stand soldiers flashed peace signs and thumbs up at an American veteran with a camera.

"It was like they were happy just to see me," said Jeff Fredrick of Tallahassee, Fla., who had part of his right leg blown away in 1968 by a mine. "I look at it detached, as a celebration of their independence. How could I hold a grudge?"

"My sole wish is to keep the peace in this land. I'm so afraid that one day my son and daughter will have to fight a war again. I would do anything to prevent that."

— **NGUYEN VAN XICH**
A Communist guerilla during the war

The friendliness is more than just official policy. To many Vietnamese, Americans coming back represent the return of commerce and tourism and revival of normal ties with the West after years of relative isolation.

Behind the smiles, however, Vietnamese emotions run deep about a war that set brother against brother.

"This celebration is for the winners," said a former southern army officer surnamed Tran, one of many still angry over the punishment meted out to them by the victorious North after 1975.

Even some Communists question whether their leaders threw away lives needlessly in open attacks against the mighty U.S. military machine, such as the 1968 Tet offensive. A teacher burst into tears when asked about her memories of the war, explaining that many relatives fought in the war and not all came back.

Unlike in the United States, where the war has been openly and hotly debated, the Vietnamese have never

been allowed such catharsis.

But across the spectrum of political views, Vietnamese young and old were emphatic in agreement that they never want another war.

"Never — never," said Tran, 54. "No one dares to say that terrible word."

Nguyen Van Xich, 60, used to set booby traps for American soldiers as a Communist guerrilla. "My sole wish is to keep the peace in this land," he said. "I'm so afraid that one day my son and daughter will have to fight a war again. I would do anything to prevent that."

Mayor Sang's speech emphasized the achievements of peace, especially the new burst of economic development in Ho Chi Minh City, called Saigon before 1975. Vietnam's economy stagnated for the first decade after reunification, but free-market reforms since the late 1980s have brought marked new prosperity.

That was reflected in the lavishness of the anniversary celebrations, which residents said were the biggest and most lighthearted ever.

Although hundreds of soldiers and militia marched in the parade, there were no tanks or other armaments, and most of the marchers were civilians who waved tiny paper Vietnamese flags, flowers or balloons.

Most of the city's 5 million residents could only watch the parade on television. As is common for such events in Vietnam, the parade route stretched only three long blocks and the sidelines were completely filled with participants awaiting their turn to march.

Survivors, rescuers solemnly remember liberation of Dachau

DACHAU, Germany (AP) — On a killing ground where Nazi SS men murdered inmates for 12 years, survivors and their GI rescuers solemnly marked the 50th anniversary Sunday of the liberation of Nazi Germany's first concentration camp.

During prayer services and speeches in a steady rain, they said fascism's crimes must never be repeated, its victims never forgotten.

"Never again fascism, never again war, never again Dachau," said Max Mannheimer, a 75-year-old Czech-born Jew who survived the camp.

Over 30,000 inmates died here — murdered, worked to death or simply allowed to succumb to disease. When U.S. Army units liberated the camp, they found railcars full of corpses and bodies stacked like cordwood outside the crematorium because the SS had run out of coal to burn them.

Least 2,000 people from at least 16 countries — survivors

and their families — returned for the half-century anniversary along with 95 U.S. veterans and their family members. They were hosted by the Bavarian state government and activists, who believe in keeping alive the memory of wartime atrocities.

Sheltering themselves with umbrellas, a column of survivors walked past watchtowers and now-vacant plots where filthy barracks had stood.

The procession moved past sites where guard dogs ripped prisoners apart and past the moat surrounding the camp where others were shot dead.

The survivors went to the crematorium, where SS guards hanged prisoners from hooks and then threw them into the ovens.

The head of Germany's Jewish community, Ignatz Bubis, thanked the American liberators of Dachau. Among the camp's survivors was the woman who would become his wife.

"We bitterly resent those whose arrogance imposed their

evil on humanity," said John McGovern of Toledo, Ohio, president of the 42nd Rainbow Division Veterans' Association. The veterans' group, he added, distinguished clearly between the Nazi war criminals and today's democratic Germany.

"It is only by being aware of past excesses and usurpation of individual rights, vividly demonstrated by 12 years of barbarism at Dachau, that the ever-present threats to your own liberty can be thwarted," McGovern said.

Bavarian state Gov. Edmund Stoiber told the survivors and several thousand Germans, "I feel ashamed that the crimes against those people were perpetrated by and in the name of Germans."

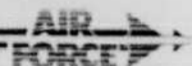
Adolf Hitler's political opponents were the first to be marched through Dachau's gates on March 22, 1933, a few weeks after he came to power. They were followed by clergymen, the handicapped, homosexuals, Jews, Gypsies, resistance fighters and prisoners of war.

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