

# TIME

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TIME, MARCH 28, 1969

## A letter from the PUBLISHER

*James R. Shepley*

ARRANGING an interview with a head of state often involves a time-consuming and frustrating tangle of red tape. For TIME's Saigon Bureau Chief Marsh Clark, merely making a date with South Viet Nam's President Nguyen Van Thieu was a great deal simpler than keeping it. When he arrived at the presidential palace to interview Thieu for this week's cover story, Clark's press credentials did not move the guards to relax the caution of long experience. The office car, the two tape recorders Clark was carrying, everything got a thorough going-over. In a search for hidden bombs or bombers, one guard even poked under the chassis with a mirror fixed to the end of a long pole.

After that, the interview itself was perhaps the easiest part of the bureau's work on the cover. Thieu's English is not perfect, but he is a pleasure for a reporter to work with, says Clark. "He is clear, direct, candid and alert." Other sources were not always so cooperative, or so close at hand.

As its members fanned out across the nervous countryside for their report on the status of the war, the Saigon bureau was as thorough in its research as those palace guards. Clark, Wallace Terry, John Wilhelm, William Marmon, Burton Pines and the bureau's two Vietnamese reporters put together remarkably detailed files for the story that was written by William Doerner, researched by Sara Collins, and edited by Jason McManus. The men in the field interviewed soldiers and civilians, intellectuals and politicians. At the battle front and in the rocket-torn cities, in schools and on the Senate floor, they conducted their interviews.

As a journalist, says Clark, he worked for newspapers in St. Joseph,



CLARK & THIEU

Mo., St. Louis and Washington, D.C., before joining TIME's Chicago bureau in 1962. Since then, his assignments have taken him to Britain, Scandinavia, Africa, Canada and all over the U.S. But his only exposure to the sort of unpleasantness he has found in Viet Nam came in Oxford, Miss. "That was in the fall of 1962, when I cringed behind Doric columns at 'Ole Miss' to avoid Confederate fusillades unleashed to protest the enrollment of James Meredith."

For all his varied experience, says Clark, "nothing prepared me for covering Vietnamese politics, which are unfathomable to the Vietnamese themselves." Viet Nam and its troubles, he says, are an obsessive subject with everyone in the bureau. For occasional lighthearted relief, Clark reports that he and his colleagues have spent their spare time working out some novel methods for ending the war. It is doubtful that either statesmen or generals will agree on the peace-winning potential of the most imaginative of the bureau's ideas: "Drop 50,000 Honda motor scooters by parachute on Hanoi. In the hands of Vietnamese riders, they are peculiarly lethal weapons; and when they are not moving fast enough to cause casualties, they can be counted on to tie up the city in war-stopping traffic jams."

The Cover: Pen and ink on watercolor by David Stone Martin.

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MARCH 28, 1969

# THE VIET NAM: WHEN CAN THE U.S. BEGIN TO LEAVE?

David Stone Martin

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