

Letter

To the Editor

Volume 25 of *Spritsail*, the WW II issue, included a piece I had written entitled Mission to Hanoi. Somehow the last part of my account was left out. And that part has a poignant relevance today.

The second A-bomb had been dropped on August 9, 1945, and a cease fire was supposedly in effect. Six of us wanted to keep on flying and a cargo squadron needed us to fly from Chengkung into Viet Nam. So, in two days I was co-piloting a C-47 with a cadre of OSS men on board, headed for the heavily defended Hanoi airfield. We were met by armed Japanese soldiers. After a few uneasy moments, the cease fire was acknowledged and a truck was mobilized to transport us to Hanoi.

During the truck ride, I recalled earlier preflight briefings before a mission south into French Indo-China. We were told this was not China where the population came to the aid of downed fliers. Here the French had accepted Japanese occupation and to most Vietnamese all foreigners were unwelcome. "If you bail out and avoid immediate capture, don't count on the native population to help you. Be wary of the French, some of whom are collaborators. There was one exception, the guerillas! "Try to hide until they find you. The password is Viet Minh."

And now from the back of that open 6x6, we saw that the Viet Minh were already there to greet us. Great banners, such as we see here on holidays or college homecomings were stretched across the streets. All in English they read, "Welcomed Brother Americans." "We want freedom like you." "Don't return us to French Misrule."

Of course, they were Communists. And soon the U.S. was caught up in the "Domino Theory" and the Cold War. But, what if we had heeded that plea for freedom and not handed their country back to the Colonial French? Might Viet Nam have more quickly become the same friendly trading partner that it is today? And perhaps there would be no Viet Nam War Memorial in Washington.

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