

The United States Embassy Chancery was built over a period of two years by joint Vietnamese, American effort with materials from both Vietnam and America. It stands today on Saigon's broad Thong Nhut Boulevard, in the words of U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, "as a symbol of our commitment to the Vietnamese people".

The six-story, US \$2,600,000 building was dedicated September 29, 1967, "to the cause of peace" and in memory of the nearly one million fighting men and the more than 10,000 civilians who had served the United States in the Republic of Vietnam between 1954 and 1967. "Many of them", the Ambassador noted, "have given their lives in the service of their country and the cause of freedom".

In dedicating the sparkling white Chancery before an august assemblage of Vietnamese, American and foreign diplomatic officials, Ambassador Bunker recommitted the United States to the common goals shared with the leaders and the people of Vietnam "a permanent end to aggression, a just and durable peace, regional security order, and expanding economic progress".

Approved in 1960

The need for a new chancery building had long been recognized, and plans were approved in 1960; however funds were not available, and the Ambassador plus his immediate staff continued to work in the old building on Ham Nghi Street, near the Saigon waterfront, that had once been a Chinese apartment hotel. The consular staff and other Embassy personnel worked in pre-fab style buildings on a site adjacent to the new Chancery. Then the Viet Cong entered the picture.

On March 30, 1965, the communists blew up a car loaded with explosives outside the old Chancery. The explosion took 22 lives, including those of four members of the U.S. Embassy staff, and injured 188. Two days later President Lyndon B. Johnson asked the U.S Congress for funds to begin construction of the new Chancery. The Congress voted its approval.

Ground-breaking ceremonies, with Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat in attendance, were held June 11, 1965, and work on the foundation and ground floor structural base began in October of that year. This portion of the work was completed in less than two months by the Vietnamese and Americans employed by the building contractor, Raymond, Morrison, Knudsen-Brown-Root, Jones. RMK-BRJ is a consortium of U.S. construction firms formed to handle military construction in Southeast Asia. The consortium shared responsibility for the building's construction with the Office in Charge of Construction, Vietnam

(OICC/V).

The original plan, drawn up by the New Orleans, Louisiana, architectural engineering firm of Curtis and Davis, had called for a three-story structure, but it soon became evident that with America's increasing commitment in Vietnam, a larger building would be needed. In November 1965 the Los Angeles, California, firm of Adrian Wilson and Associates was selected to redesign the building in order to provide extra space while retaining as much as possible of the original design. Adrian Wilson and Associates designed a four-story building which later could be expanded to six stories. As it turned out, six floors were found to be needed before construction was completed.

There were delays caused by changes in plan and delays in receiving materials, but work progressed in 1966. At the peak of building activity in December of that year a force of more than 500 men, most of them Vietnamese, were at work. To conserve scarce Vietnamese commodities, most of the materials were imported from the United States. But the sand and gravel used in the concrete mix, the walkway tiles, and the bricks used in all the interior walls are Vietnamese.

Building Design

For aesthetic as well as security reasons, the rectangular building, 208 by 49 feet, was set back from the street. It rises in a walled compound enclosing an area 437 by 318 feet (3.18 acres). The Chancery is 60 feet inside the compound, protected from the front (Thong Nhut Boulevard) and side street (Mac Dinh Chi Street) by an eight-foot wall of polished white terrazzo — a 6-inch-thick mixture of cement and marble chips.

The ground floor is faced with 2,108 square feet of slabs made of black opalescent Minnesota granite, each polished slab two inches thick and three feet three inches square. From the first story to the roof, the entire building is sheathed in a protective sunscreen composed of 7,800 polished white terrazzo blocks. Each block is 22 x 22 x 12 inches and each is split by two 1 x 15-inch apertures slanting inward to let in light and air and designed to act as a blast shield should the necessity arise. This sunscreen, covering 26,964 square feet, is located nearly five feet out from the massive concrete walls and the shatterproof plexiglass windows of the building proper. The sunscreen seems to stand on a series of one-story-tall reinforced concrete columns which actually run to the roof. The total effect is of a large, white, rectangular gridiron, poised against the blue sky and surrounded by an abundance of tropical greenery.

Designed for a staff of 200, the building has 49,670 square feet of floor

space and 140 offices. The offices are spacious, and pleasantly furnished and decorated. The walls are a light cream with a soft, dark brown-green metal trim. The floor tiles are an off-white vinyl. Furnishings are of modern design with an accent on informality.

The executive offices on the third floor have gold-colored carpeting; these include the Ambassador's office, the conference room, and offices reserved for other ranking members of the Mission.

All offices have fluorescent lighting. The building is air conditioned by a unit with a 175 ton capacity (one ton equaling 12,000 BTU per hour heat-removal capacity).

On the roof is a 75x49-foot heliport, to provide senior Mission officials with ready access to a means of transport which has become as important in Vietnam as the automobile.

The Chancery has its own water filtration system and at the back of the compound is utility building housing a power plant consisting of four 350 kw generators.

Compound Landscaping

The landscaping of the compound, two thirds of which remains open lawn, preserves and enhances the natural beauty of the surroundings. Eight large white polished concrete terrazzo planters, just over two feet high, spaced along the front of the Chancery under the overhanging sunscreen. There are several more in the rear of the building. The planters are hexagonal and concave, flaring out upward from their small, round bases to give a scalloped effect. Each is planted with a Vietnamese pine (called *thông*) or a palm. In addition there are a number of round planting areas on the front and side lawns, each area framed by a border of white terrazzo in keeping with the Chancery's motif. They contrast strikingly with the surrounding greenery.

Spotted about the grounds and lining Thong Nhut in front of the compound are a number of flame trees, called *diệp* or *pluong*, which put forth bright red or pink flowers as they bloom in the late spring. One of them, a truly ancient tree, has a trunk nearly 10 feet thick and stands about 50 feet high. Another flame tree sweeps up over the 60-foot covered walkway leading from the street to the main entrance of the building. The roof curves around the big tree trunk, making for a disarming piece of architectural informality as one enters the gate and walks toward the great teak doors at the entrance.

Also planted in the compound are banyan (*da*), tamarind (*cây me*), and coconut (*dừa*). In the middle of the asphalt parking area behind the Chancery is a large mango tree (*soài*). Along the side of the utility building are three big, beautiful, red jasmines. The compound thus is a handsome addition to Saigon's Embassy Row, which stretches along Thong Nhut from the Độc Lập (Independence) Palace four blocks to the south of the Chancery, to the zoo and botanical gardens two blocks to the north.

The Chancery is centrally situated, on the edge of a residential district not far from the heart of the city. It is about 12 blocks from the old building on Hàm Nghi which served as the U.S. Consulate in 1953, the Legation in 1954, and the Chancery of the Embassy from 1955 on. The new Chancery is four blocks from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, seven blocks from the old Opera House which serves as the Assembly building, and two blocks from Basilica (Cathedral) on John F. Kennedy Square.

The Dedication

Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Thieu, then Vietnam's Chief of State and Chairman of the National Directory; Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, then Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister Tran Van Do were among the 200 guests attending the dedication ceremonies. At Ambassador Bunker's side were Deputy U. S. Ambassador Eugene M. Locke and General William C. Westmoreland, commander of U. S. forces in Vietnam. The simple but impressive ceremony was concluded as three U.S Marines, immaculate in dress uniforms, ran up the American flag and a U.S. Army band struck up "The Star-Spangled Banner".

General Thieu declared that Vietnam was "on the threshold of a new era" and asserted that "there is no challenge which cannot be met if we remain unified. and persevere in our efforts".

Then Ambassador Bunker unveiled a bronze plaque to be placed in the entrance of the new Chancery:

*Embassy of the United States of America
Built in Time of War:
Dedicated to the Cause of Peace:
In Memory of Those who have
Served Their Nation in Vietnam.
Ellsworth Bunker
Ambassador*

*The following was a statement made by
Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker*

When I arrived in Saigon a little over five months ago, I brought with me President Johnson's renewed pledge of our nation's commitment to support the great work of nation-building in Vietnam. That pledge has been made clear at Honolulu, Manila, and Guam. Today, as we dedicate this new Embassy of the United States of America, it is fitting that we should again dedicate ourselves and the efforts of every American in Vietnam to the goals we share with the leaders and people of Vietnam: a permanent end to aggression, a just and durable peace, regional security, order, and expanding economic progress.

I can think of no other time in history when two nations have come together in such a short time to work so closely in so many different ways — fighting together, building together, teaching together, and planning together for the future. Our nations have had to get to know each other while embroiled in war; endangered by terrorism, and challenged by the economic and political strains of nation-building. Out of this travail there have grown many bonds that have kept us side by side throughout the long and costly struggle.

From the first, ours has been an alliance of the two sovereign peoples. We have learned much from each other. We know that the success of the true revolution in Vietnam — the conquest of hunger, disease, illiteracy, and social justice — depends upon Vietnamese solutions to Vietnamese problems. We have learned both the demands and the boundaries of cooperation between our two nations in the great work of nation-building.

That cooperation has taken many forms. From Saigon to the villages and hamlets of the Vietnamese countryside, on jungle trails and through muddy fields, in province headquarters and village council rooms, in television studios, classrooms, and hospitals, Americans and Vietnamese are working side by side to meet the needs and aspirations of the people of this brave country. What they accomplish each day is rarely spectacular and always hard-earned. But out of their efforts, and the efforts of the free world nations who stand beside us in Vietnam, is coming steady, lasting progress toward a better standard of living, freedom from the aggressor's violence and threat of violence, and the chance to choose and influence a government responsive to the people.

Today we dedicate this building "to the cause of peace". That cause, as the Vietnamese people can well testify, has never been a simple or easy choice. Each day, it demands new resolution to persevere through both

the fire of battle and the ordeal of change that must come on the path to economic and social justice.

Let it be clear. This building in Saigon stands as a symbol of our commitment to the Vietnamese people. But no less impressive are hundreds of smaller buildings scattered throughout every part of this nation. From schoolhouses in the Mekong Delta to hospitals in the Central Highlands, there are many buildings which, like this one, have been "built in time of war and dedicated to the cause of peace". President Johnson speaks often of the "footprints of America" in Vietnam, and there are no better examples of his meaning than these buildings.

Moreover, our commitment need not be measured only by the tangible products of our presence. Personal sacrifices are also a standard of a people's dedication to their work, and it is fitting that today we dedicate this new Embassy in memory of all those who have served their nation in Vietnam. That is a noble band of Americans, men and women of whom our nation can be proud indeed. Nearly a million fighting men and more than ten thousand civilians have served the United States in Vietnam since 1951. Many of them have given their lives in the service of their country and the cause of freedom. Many of them have volunteered to return to Vietnam, some for the third and even fourth time. All have accepted the hazards of a war in which there are no front lines. All have accepted the hardships of being far from their own homes and their own families. These are very special Americans, who justly deserve to be remembered by their countrymen. In their names today we shall dedicate this new Embassy of the United States of America.