

The Soldiers' View from Viet Nam

Marines Protect A Bullet-Riddled Schoolhouse

By GEORGE ESPER

CAMNE, South Viet Nam (AP)—In the midst of this hamlet sits a run-down, bullet-riddled schoolhouse that has become a symbol in the Vietnamese war.

Sixteen U.S. Marines guard it around the clock. The Viet Cong fire at it by night.

"It is a symbol of American help to the South Vietnamese People," says Lt. Col. Robert Tunnell, Fallbrook, California.

He commanded the 3rd Battalion of the 9th Marine Regiment until Friday, when he lost his right leg. He stepped on a pound block of dynamite planted by the Viet Cong and set off by a homemade pressure fuse. While helping to evacuate him, Sgt. Adolf Hartschlag, Vista, California, stepped on a similar mine and lost his left leg.

Newsman Look

A few days before, Tunnell had taken two newsmen to the schoolhouse. His battalion only recently had moved into the Hoa-Thai village complex just south of Da Nang.

Speaking proudly of the Marines' determination to hold the battered schoolhouse, Tunnell said:

"It is a thorn in the side of the Viet Cong. I think they want to capture it rather than destroy it so they can say, 'We kicked the Marines out.'"

Tunnell said that a year ago Cam Ne was "a pure Communist town."

106 out of 600

Today, according to Nguyen Luong, 51, the village chief, there are 600 families in the Hoa-Thai village complex, which includes the hamlet of Cam Ne. Of these 600, he says, 106 are Viet Cong sympathizers.

Luong is under constant Marine guard while he is in the village area because he is on the Viet Cong's list for assassination.

The schoolhouse is about 75 feet long and has five small rooms. The Marines have established defensive positions inside; sandbags have been placed in some of the doorways and open windows.

Medical Aid Station

During the day, the schoolhouse serves as a medical aid station for villagers, treated by a Navy medic, Dennis Neu, 20, Santa Cruz, California.

The villagers and Marines plan to rebuild the schoolhouse and start classes again.

It was at Cam Ne that the Marines burned several huts last August after being fired at by the Viet Cong concealed inside the huts.

Luong said he thinks his people understand: "It is war and the Marines try to kill the Viet Cong and they don't like to burn houses."

"The people would like the Marines to stay here to protect them in rebuilding this village and try to clear out the Viet Cong."

Emerald Focus on the World

This is the first of a series of special pages on national and world news which we will run from time to time. The editors of the Emerald feel it is part of the newspaper's duty to present some background information on various non-campus topics.

This first page deals with Viet Nam at it's seen by the soldier in the trenches and the rain forests. This will probably be the first of several special pages on the war in Viet Nam, since that is a major topic of discussion at the University this year. Future pages will deal with other aspects of the war, as well as with other topics, such as civil rights, the war on poverty, other domestic legislation, and so on.

(Editor's note: the following letter was sent to us by Arthur H. Arp of Eugene. It was originally printed in the Arizona Republic as a letter to the editor but actually takes the form of an open letter to those protesting the war in Viet Nam. We are not necessarily printing it as a representation of the Emerald's stand on the Viet Nam war but only because we feel comment from soldiers actually stationed on the front in Viet Nam might add something to the current discussion of the war on this campus.)

First, I am going to ask you a question you probably cannot answer: "What are you really protesting about?" It cannot be the fact that you want to show your Americanism but that is not the American way. You are supposed to stand by and support your country. . . .

There is a simple answer.

Somewhere, someone has gone astray in your bringing up or you have had a bad accident that has damaged your brain, or even simpler, and more precise in your eyes, you are just afraid of being called to fight for your country and what it stands for and the privileges you are now enjoying.

I read an article in one of the few magazines we can get, and with the article was a photograph of a Berkeley student holding a sign which read: "13 Have Gone to Jail to End the War in Viet Nam. What are You Doing About It?"

Well, I'll tell you what we are doing about it. We live in tents with nothing but sandy earth for our floor. When it rains, which is frequent, we live in mud. We eat, but you can't call a constant diet of dehydrated pods really eating. We have all lost, on the average, 16 pounds. But is our morale low?

Morale High

No, it is not low, it is outstandingly high, even considering the little mail we receive. You know why? Because we are fighting for our beloved country that we may never see again, and to protect our loved ones, and kids like you, so you can go to your dances, parties, and those absurd protests.

We go on patrols not knowing when, where, or how many will hit us this time or will it be us that will never see home again. Then a sniper's bullet rings loud in our ears, at the same time a friend, a close friend, clutches his stomach with both hands, his eyes widen but see nothing and his lips mutter those heartbreaking words, "God—somebody help me."

But do we stop? No, we do not stop, because there is a job to be done, and God willing we will do it.

Yes, we are fighting the Viet Cong on their own terms, and we are beating them at their own game, because we are fighting for a much greater cause: so our families can live in peace in the greatest country in the world.

Nobody Made Us

When we joined our country's greatest fighting organization nobody made us do it and we knew its past glory, and we also knew the chances we were taking if any country forced us to move, and there is not one of us here who is sorry to be in Viet

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A Viet Cong Talks about Hunger, Fatigue, and Death

By HUGH A. MULLIGAN

GIA NGHIA, South Viet Nam (AP)—Dang Van Trong, a Viet Cong second lieutenant, came out of the jungles on a steaming hot day with a few dried beans clutched in his hand.

For him the war was over. He had had it.

Lt. Trong had been walking for three months and four days. An infiltrator from North Viet Nam, he left a staging area above the 17th Parallel with a platoon of 28 men. Only 18 were left. Ten had died in the past week, four of starvation.

That in statistical form was Trong's story. How much he held back or how much he invented can only be ascertained by trained intelligence teams.

Trying for Zone D

Trong said his orders were to get his men to Zone D, a vast jungle area 100 miles wide and 60 miles deep. Government troops have penetrated only its fringes. The Viet Cong is suspected to be staging a massive troop buildup there with fresh units infiltrated from the North. But Trong, a North Vietnamese regular, never got there.

Instead, he slipped away from his men in the dense jungles of Quang Duc Province, somehow made his way to Route 14, walked into the nearest Montagnard village, and gave himself up.

He was given some beer and rice, which immediately made him sick, and was treated kindly by the raggedly uniformed popular force guards who man sandbagged outposts in the little hamlet.

Treated Kindly

The Montagnards passed Trong onto Gia Nghia, the province capital, where again he was treated kindly and taken to the officers club for beer and rice, while waiting to be shipped on to corps headquarters at Pleiku for extensive questioning.

Although he never heard of the expression, Trong was treated as a "chieu hoi"—received with open arms, which is what the program means in Vietnamese. The government's chieu hoi is designed to encourage defectors.

When he surrendered, Trong had on the traditional black pajamas of the Viet Cong fighter. In the compound at Gia Nghia, where he chatted amiably through an interpreter, he was dressed in garrison fatigues

which he had carried in his rucksack. His captors had laundered them for him.

Loose Uniform

Trong had lost so much weight that the fatigue uniform hung loosely. His cheeks were deeply recessed, his eyes dull and his arms thin and covered with leech bites. His sandals had been worn down at least a quarter of an inch.

Why had he decided to call it quits?

Trong was hungry and tired and disenchanted. He said he had been led to believe at least four-fifths of the people of South Viet Nam were friendly to the Communist cause. But he found himself walking for weeks without being allowed to talk with anyone, friendly or unfriendly.

Trail Doubted

Some observers of the war doubt there is such a thing as the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail, the series of

Editor's Note—Reporters in Viet Nam seldom get to interview a Viet Cong defector before he is handed on to higher authorities for intelligence de-briefings. Hugh Mulligan, hunting for stories near the Cambodian border, talked for nearly an hour with a North Vietnamese officer.

trails through Laos and Cambodia for infiltrating men and supplies into South Viet Nam.

Trong had never heard it called by that name, but he said he crossed the border into Laos three miles above the 17th Parallel, walked south through Laos and Cambodia, then crossed into South Viet Nam in Darlac Province.

There his real troubles began.

His 28-man platoon was part of a force of more than 400 being infiltrated at that time, he said. He never saw any of the others, because each platoon moves separately through the jungles and is passed from station to station.

Always Two Days Apart

The stations, Trong said, were always two days apart. Each station knew where the unit was heading

next, and so directed them, but never knew where they came from. The lieutenant found such security procedures strange in a country where he had been led to believe the Communists were overwhelmingly popular.

Air Force and Navy bombers have been pounding the jungles with air strikes for months to prevent mass Communist infiltrations.

Trong never saw or heard an air strike during his three months in the jungles, but he knew they must be awesome because people operating the jungle stations spoke of them in terrifying terms.

Plenty to Eat

The jungles abound in fresh fruits and wild edible plants, but the lieutenant's platoon found themselves slowly starving to death. After a lifetime of eating rice, the jungle food made them sick. Malaria and dysentery killed six of his men.

Trong used to hoard his few handfuls of beans and dry rice to keep his men from trying to jump him and steal his fast dwindling supplies. The few beans he had when he walked out on Route 14 were all the food he had left. Like the others he dared not pluck a banana or a mango from a tree.

The platoon was under orders never to fight. Their assignment was to get to Zone D and avoid contact with the enemy before getting there. They never dared shoot a deer or kill a lizard or snake to eat, lest government forces find their campfire or discover a carcass.

Went North

The lieutenant had gone north to join the Communist cause after the armistice with the French in 1954, but now he was 32, wiser and weary of war.

He spoke in an abstract way, as if it no longer concerned him, about the island of Hainan in the Gulf of Tonkin. He had been told that 200,000 Chinese troops were waiting there to join the war. No one had told him that the U.S. 7th Fleet was in the gulf waiting for that possibility.

He spoke of a Hanoi factory where machine guns and mortars were stamped with Chinese markings as they came off the assembly line, so that people in the South would get the idea that China was supporting the war in a big way.

Finally, he spoke of the jungles where his friends had died and his cause had vanished, and he said he never wanted to see those dense rain forests again.