

Vietnamese wartime tunnels visited

By the Associated Press

(Cu chi, Vietnam) — As Lt. Col. George Eyster lay dying from Viet Cong sniper bullet wounds on a jungle trail, he said to me, "before I go I'd like to talk to the guy who controls those incredible men in the tunnels."

Eleven years later I met that man and he showed me the inside of the fantastic tunnel octopus that took 30 years to dig and stretched 150 miles, with tentacles sometimes winding right under the chairs of U.S. commanders as they sat in their headquarters.

Eyster, a tall West Pointer from Cocoa Beach, Fla., died in a field hospital while his battalion, the Second of the 28th Regiment, First Infantry Division, was trying to fight its way out of the vast underground complex 20 miles northwest of Saigon.

The now peaceful tunnels were on the itinerary of a German tourist group I traveled with on a rare two-week trip to Vietnam.

One of the briefing officers at district headquarters was Capt. Nguyen Thanh Linh. Dressed in an olive drab North Vietnamese uniform and Ho Chi Minh rubber tire sandals, he said in answer to a question that he had commanded the Cu Chi Liberation Battalion during 1966.

That was the unit the American colonel's "Black Lion" battalion had opposed. The slightly-built, 45-year-old Capt. Linh looked quizzically as I pursued my questioning. Yes, he said, intelligence reports had informed him at the time that the opposing American battalion commander had been killed.

As he recalled those days for our tourist group, the horror of a war I had witnessed from only one side became vividly real.

Capt. Linh spoke in French with grudging respect and almost without hatred about his former enemies, the Americans. The death of Eyster and many other Americans in those early war years shocked the American public, but as the captain talked it was evident the battles had not been one-sided.

Of the 600 men in the Cu Chi battalion that fought Eyster's Black Lions in January 1966, only four survived the war, two officers and two non-commissioned officers, said Linh.

The battalion itself "was wiped out several times," he said. "Each time we reconstructed it. In the whole sector we lost 12,000 men in the course of the war."

The former battlefields looked lush and sleepy as our group drove from Saigon northwest along the river bearing the city's name. Some deep B52 bomb craters were still visible, retained as fish ponds or wallowing holes for animals.

Youth labor gangs were widening a road, and occasionally a reminder of the war would appear. A rusting armored personnel carrier with First Infantry Division markings and "Little Rose" painted on its side loomed out of a bamboo thicket. The wreck of a U.S. helicopter was overgrown with elephant grass.

The battleground we were being taken to lay beneath our feet, at one, two and three levels underground. It was a twisting octopus of tunnels and caverns stretching from Cu Chi towards Saigon and the surrounding provincial capitals.

The tunnels were marked in black lines on a 12 by 12-foot map hanging from a briefing room wall, and my first reaction was that it looked like a map of the New York or London subway system, with dots not for stations but for fighting positions and secret entrances and exits.

The slippery, humid corridors, about two feet wide and two feet high, blocked with wooden trapdoors at underground intersections, spanned the history of the whole Vietnam war, starting from the days when Communist agents hid from the French police. But it was during the American phase of the war, Linh said, that the system was truly tested.

"As more and more American soldiers arrived to occupy the surface above, the more we extended our system below," said a senior officer at the briefing, Col. Duong Long Sang.

"At the end we had a three-tier tunnel system and everything was underground — the toilets, the hospitals, all our soldiers, many civilians and even water buffalo."

The colonel continued: "We literally dug for 30 years, usually in the dark, squatting down. We carved out about a meter every eight hours, and women distributed the earth on the surface, hiding it under fallen leaves."

The tunnels crept under some U.S. positions. "Several times we knew that American field commanders would sit like this on their metal chairs directly above us," said Linh with a grin.

The Vietnamese took our group for a visit, and as noisy swarms of mosquitoes buzzed around our heads

we pushed ourselves through the narrow corridors, obviously built by and for slender Vietnamese.

"We always moved in the dark, saving our candles and torches for emergencies," said Linh. "Our amputees lay in the dark, sometimes for months."

But eventually the Americans figured out the counterattack.

First they used hunting dogs "and we battled them underground with rifle butts, mines and knives," said Linh. Then somebody had the idea to use American toilet soap and the Vietnamese started smelling the same as the GIS. "That stopped the dogs," Linh said.

Next came the "tunnel rats — small, tough Americans, like us," Linh said. "They crawled into the tunnels with explosives and gas to blast us out. We installed more escape routes, more tiers, but sometimes we were cornered and we tried to kill them with bayonets so as not to give our positions away."

"Many Americans died in the tunnels. They wasted much time pulling their dead back. That gave us time to regroup. The more we killed, the fewer problems we had," said Linh.

The Americans tried flooding the tunnels "and we lost many men until we constructed upper tier escape levels," Col. Sang said.

Finally, Linh said, came the "scorched earth" policy that from 1968 on saw regular B52 bombing of the tunnel complexes. Only direct hits killed, Linh claimed, but he described the awesome experience of a near miss: "Fire would be everywhere, the body would be thrown back and forth in the tunnel, shirt and pants would be ripped apart by the suction of the air blast."

Sang stated: "The Americans used to say that as long as there were soldiers of the Liberation Front in the Cu Chi tunnels, Saigon would be in danger. They were right."

"We planned the 1968 Tet attack against the U.S. Embassy in Saigon from here. And it was also from here that details for the final, successful liberation of Saigon on April 30, 1975, were drawn up."

"The greatest pleasure in those days was to stick one's head out to the surface and just breathe air," said Linh as we climbed into our vehicles for the ride back to Saigon. I watched him take a gulp of the heavy, humid and undisturbed air that hangs over peaceful Cu Chi today.

Weaver calls gas deregulation 'robbery'

By JOHN RIMEL
Of the Emerald

U.S. Representative Jim Weaver, D-Ore., said Monday in a news conference the deregulation of natural gas prices would drastically increase both unemployment and inflation.

"Deregulation would be a massive robbery of consumers, as much as \$10 billion to \$20 billion a year," he said.

The Fourth District Congress-

man said if gas prices are allowed to rise, all other energy prices will go up and unemployment also would increase because the American public's purchasing power would be diminished.

Dave Fidanque, spokesman for Weaver's Eugene office, said that since 70 per cent of Eugene's natural gas comes from Canada, the impact on the Eugene area would be only indirect. Industry would pass the increase in gas costs to consumers, and prices of

gasoline and other petroleum products would rise because of their increased competitiveness with natural gas.

Natural gas pricing is one of President Carter's major energy proposals. Carter proposed ending the dual market under which gas in interstate pipelines is regulated at \$1.46 per thousand cubic feet, while gas used in the states where it is produced is free from controls. Carter has instead recommended a new uniform ceiling on all newly discovered gas start-

ing at \$1.75 per thousand cubic feet and rising to about \$3.36 by 1985.

The House approved this proposal in August, along with much of the rest of the President's energy program. However, the Senate adopted the opposite approach and approved the Pearson-Bentsen substitute, an amendment that would lift all federal price controls on new natural gas.

According to Weaver, "The only argument the industry gives for deregulation is the incentive to

produce more gas, and this is patently false." He added that "at \$1.40 per thousand cubic feet, there is a proven strong profit incentive. The price set in the House bill is \$1.75 per thousand cubic feet, easily more than the industry needs."

A House-Senate conference committee will try to reconcile the differences and put together a compromise bill. Carter has said he will veto the legislation if it contains deregulation like that voted by the Senate.



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Ballot Measure #2 gets nods

Two new statements of support for Ballot Measure No. 2, the referendum for development of non-nuclear energy sources to be voted on Nov. 8, have been issued by major Oregon environmental groups.

The Oregon Environmental Council (OEC), a citizen organization, and the Many Rivers Group of the Sierra Club both declared support this week for the measure. The proposal will make available low-interest money, backed by state bonds, for new energy sources within the state.

The OEC gave its support, it said, because the measure "provides a needed mechanism for stimulating development of environmentally sound, decentralized non-nuclear energy resources in our state."

The decision came after long discussion between board members over what they perceived as ambiguities in the language of the measure.

"Many board members expressed concern that major utilities, oil and gas companies could easily gain control of most of the funds,

effectively frustrating the kinds of small scale, decentralized energy development projects the measure purports to encourage," OEC President Vern Rifer said.

However, he said, the OEC board decided to support the measure "because it represents a step forward in energy policy, and a move toward development of more environmentally sound energy sources."

The Sierra Club's Many Rivers Group, with members in Coos, Crook, Deschutes, Douglas and Lane Counties, issued unqualified support for the measure. The group is encouraging a "yes" vote, saying, "We must now shift our energy base from nuclear and fossil fuels to renewable energy resources such as solar heating and cooling, wind generation and recycling waste heat."

The measure would enable Oregon to allow "smaller utilities to generate electricity near consumers, which reduces waste and provides economic stimulation in the ratepayers' communities," said the Sierra Club group.

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