

Dramatic Viet Nam War Unreal to People Back Home

By NEIL SHEEHAN
United Press International
Saigon — (UPI) — The young West Point captain stood in the shade of a palm tree and watched the Vietnamese troops splash through the muck and glistening black water of the flooded rice field.

"Sometimes I think people back home don't know there is a war on in Viet Nam," he said. "My wife's neighbors don't even know where Viet Nam is."

The comment was typical of the lonely, often frustrating, and always intensely personal kind of war which U. S. fighting men are waging in Southeast Asia.

Even the sharply contrasting landscape of this ancient and violent land lends a dramatic and haunting quality to the daily ritual of killing and dying.

Into this drama, the ultimate stakes of which are perhaps all of Southeast Asia, have moved thousands of Americans whose background and education are as varied as their ages and places of birth. But they have two things in common — the same uniform and the same code of professional dedication.

Contact Enemy Daily
There are now some 12,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen in Viet Nam. About 4,000 of these field advisers, helicopter and airplane crews, pilots and special forces teams have almost daily contact with the enemy.

As in any war, many men are based at headquarters in Saigon, once called "the Paris of the Orient," and do the countless routine and unheroic jobs that must be done to keep an army on the move. Some use typewriters, purify water, operate radios, publish native language newspapers, cook and serve food and all the other essential chores of a military operation in a foreign land.

26 Killed in Action
The 4,000 men who risk their lives in combat range from the young private who mans a machine gun in a helicopter to the tough, hard-driving paratrooper and infantry colonels who run the field advisory detachments.

As of the end of January, 26

of these young Americans had been killed in direct action with the guerrillas and 21 others died in what have been called "combat-associated" accidents. Another seven died in ordinary accidents.

Their widows and families receive purple hearts, but no major medals such as the silver star of Congressional Medal of Honor, because the U. S. Congress has not yet approved such awards for this war.

The men who died, and those who will die before it is over, received no extra combat pay. The families of those who enlisted too late to take advantage of the government's Korean War insurance program will receive only six months pay and the costs of the funeral.

Leary Charged

Special Forces 1st Lt. Paul E. Leary, 27, Abilene, Texas, could tell the folks back home what the war is like in Viet Nam. Early in January a 57-millimeter recoilless rifle round ripped between his legs as he was taking off his boots, and a mob of screaming Viet Cong charged into his camp hurling grenades and firing submachine guns. Leary and the small group with him fought off the attack.

But for some of the Americans, Viet Nam was their first and last war.

Young Paratrooper Ctpa. Don J. York, 29, Nashville, North Carolina, was driving along a road just north of Saigon last summer when the nearby jungle suddenly erupted with gunfire. York died fighting under a hail of Viet Cong bullets.

Lt. William Train III, 25, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, was killed a month earlier on the same road in another ambush a few miles farther south.

Train, the son of a general, was carrying on a family tradition of soldiering common to many of the officers here. One who served his tour of duty and returned safely home was Col. Frank Clay, son of Gen. Lucius D. Clay and the scion of a distinguished military family.

Some Veterans

But all those who serve in Viet Nam are not green recruits or fresh military academy graduates. There are the veteran sergeants and colonels who have seen rugged duty in World War II and Korea. For them, Viet Nam is a new kind of war and a new challenge.

Lt. Col. John Vann, 42, El Paso, Texas, commanded a ranger company in Korea.

Vann, one of America's most highly regarded field advisers in Viet Nam, is a tireless officer with driving energy.

Ramrod Officer
Vann spends days plunging through the stinking filth of the paddies or supervising the helicopter evacuation of wounded under Viet Cong fire. Nights are spent writing those endless reports for the commanding officers in Saigon, or helping his Vietnamese counterpart plan the next day's operation.

Paratroop Col. Wilber E. Wilson, 53, Norman, Oklahoma, is a ramrod straight officer referred to affectionately by his subordinates—but not in his presence—as "Coalbin Willie."

For Wilson, one of the most brilliant and capable senior officers in Viet Nam, the army is his life, his home and a demanding taskmaster which consumes all of his time and energy.

According to legend, Wilson, who is a bachelor, once said jokingly to a homesick young lieutenant "Son, if the army wanted you to have a wife, they'd issue you one."

Special Services Sgt. Marvin Compton Jr., 36, Louisville, Kentucky, is a stocky muscular man who speaks in a soft deliberate voice. His balding head betrays his years of military service.

Compton put it simply: "I'm here because this is what I was trained to do, and it's my job."

Dedicated Soldiers

These battle scarred veterans are dedicated professional soldiers. They know what they are doing and why they are here.

But being advisers is not easy for men who have been trained to be leaders. Endless hours are spent trying to get ideas across diplomatically to their Vietnamese counterparts who frequently listen, and then reject, their American comrades' advice.

4,479 Offenses Reported in City

Medford police investigated a total of 4,479 offenses during January, according to a report by Chief of Police Charles P. Champlin.

Of the total, 82 of the cases involved major offenses, a decrease of 6 over the number reported for the same month last year. Thirty of the cases were closed, for a 36.6 percentage, the report showed.

Ten of the major offenses were burglaries, four less than January, 1962. Only one of the burglary cases was closed.

Forty-eight of the cases reported involved thefts under \$50. Twenty-three of those cases were closed.

A total of 226 tickets for traffic violations were issued to Medford drivers last month, a marked increase over the 65 issued during the same month last year. The report showed that 3,823 parking tickets were issued.

Eighty vehicle accidents occurred in the city last month. Eighteen persons were injured in the mishaps, according to the report, but there were no fatalities. This compares with 59 accidents last January, with 10 persons injured and one fatality, according to the report.

The job becomes an agonizing emotional torment when men die and battles are lost because of mistakes which the American can see happening, but which he is powerless to correct.

New Kind of War
Perhaps it is because of these frustrations and blind alleys that these Americans have thrown themselves so enthusiastically and forcefully into the struggle.

For one thing, it is a new

kind of war. American officers, trained to move tanks and armored battalions or infantry regiments in sweeping formations, have never before experienced this kind of hit-and-run war.

It is a type of warfare waged on terrain which nature seems to have designed especially for guerrilla fighting. The Viet Cong guerrilla is a fanatical and ruthless foe. He is very patient and self-critical, and seldom makes

the same mistake twice. He is willing to pay almost any price in blood to achieve the ends he has set for himself.

Surprise Attacks

When the Viet Cong attacks on any scale, it is usually with overwhelming force and the element of surprise. The U. S. advisor assigned to a lonely outpost somewhere in the mountains to the north, or the swamps in the south, it is a process of endless patrolling and uneasy waiting.

One night—if he is lucky—the dogs bark in the village near the defense post to give a few seconds warning. A stray shot rings out. Perhaps a mine thuds dully, and then the black-clad enemy comes boiling and screaming out of the darkness.

Or perhaps it will happen on some jungle trail or delta road. The birds suddenly stop singing and the chirping of the insects ceases. The mortars boom in over the tree tops and the machine gun begins its ugly death rattle up ahead.

Determined Foe

The Communist guerrilla in this part of what was once French Indo-China is one of the most determined foes the American soldier has ever had to fight. Across the havoc and agony of this civil war, the Viet Cong has won the respect of the professional fighting men from across the seas.

But with this respect comes an awareness of the brutality of the enemy, and a determination to trap and destroy him.

It is not hatred. It is just the calm determination of the professional soldier to do the job he was hired to do.

As one American special forces sergeant put it: "I used to feel kind of sorry for the Viet Cong, the way they live and fight in such miserable conditions and die of their wounds because they don't have much medical care. But when I saw how they ambush with the odds all on their side, butcher these little guys I've trained, kill my buddies, burn villages and all the rest of it, then I knew they were my enemy, too. I still don't hate them, but I'll kill every one of them that gets in my way."

Gamble With Death

Back home in the United States, the war in Viet Nam may be on the front pages or flash across the television screen once in a while. To the Americans stationed here, however, it is a daily gamble with death.

There are no medals and no extra pay. One helicopter pilot said there are no heroes here, either.

"We're doing the same thing here we'd be doing in any war," he said. "We take the troops into battle and we get shot at."

It is "a dirty little war," as one American general described it, but it is a war into which the United States has plunged some of its finest young men.

When they fall in battle here, the flags do not come to half staff in Washington. There are no solemn funeral processions down Pennsylvania avenue with a mourning nation paying tribute.

No Tribute Paid

There is a simple ceremony at the Saigon airport. The roar of engines on the busy airstrip and the sounds of a nation at war drown out the chaplains' prayers.

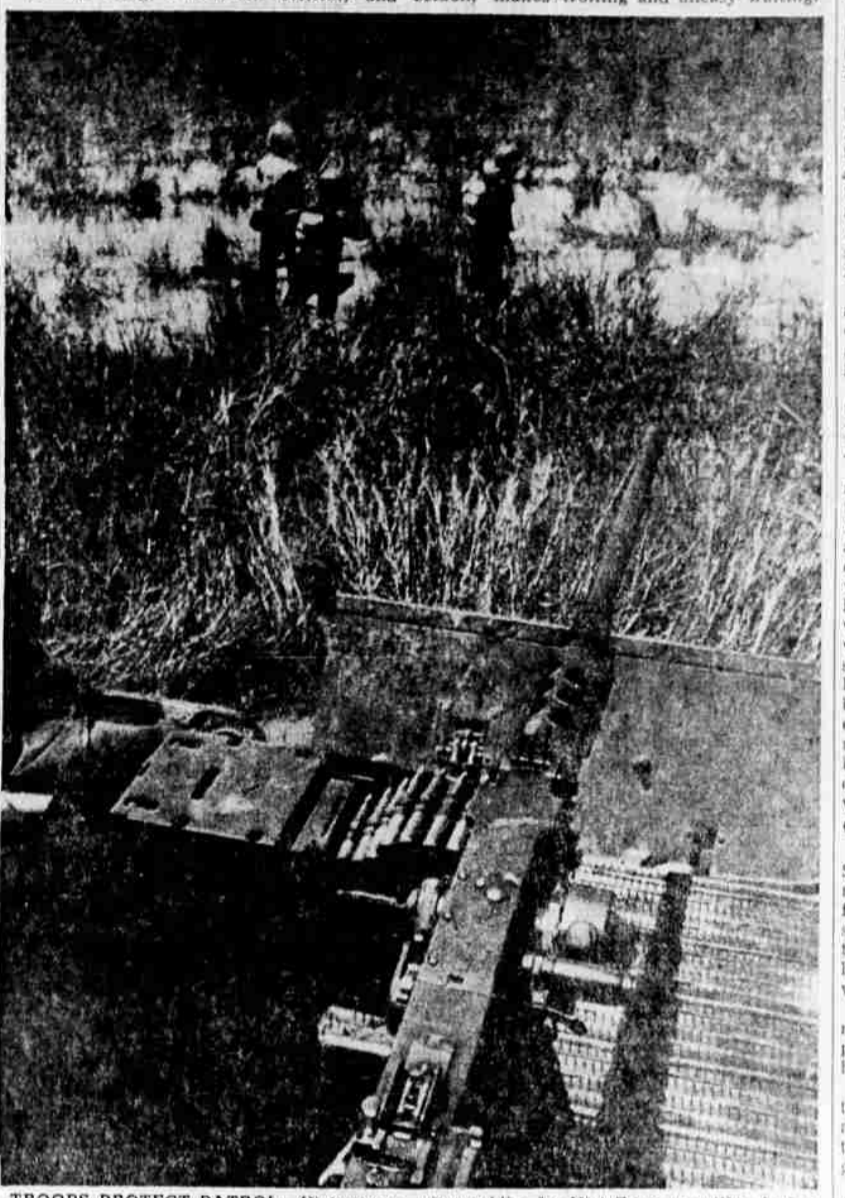
Buddies and friends stand at attention in their starched khakis. The hands snap up smartly in a final salute—a soldiers' farewell—as the flag-draped coffin is carried slowly aboard a waiting transport plane for that final trip home

across the wide stretches of the Pacific.

When Viet Nam was part of the great French empire in Asia, France poured millions of francs and the blood of her finest sons into the futile struggle to hold onto this faraway place.

There is a French military cemetery just outside Saigon. A single tricolor ripples gently in the breeze, keeping silent vigil over the white headstones set row upon row in the reddish brown soil. One corner of the cemetery is empty.

According to legend, the French say it was left for the Americans who would someday die in Viet Nam.



TROOPS PROTECT PATROL—Vietnamese troops in manned-armored vehicles give protective cover as three-man patrol searches rice paddies for Viet Cong guerrillas during operation "Morning Star" at Saigon. (UPI)



OFFICERS ACCOMPANY TANK—U. S. Infantry officers Lt. Col. John P. Vann (left), senior advisor to 7th Infantry Div., and Brig. Gen. Gerald C. Kelleher, of Armored

\$38.3 Million Budget Submitted to Board

Portland (UPI)—School Superintendent Melvin Barnes told the Portland school board Monday night that if a \$2.5 million operational levy is not continued April 26 "it will be almost impossible to operate the school system without selling some of the furniture."

Barnes made the comment in submitting a tentative budget of \$38.3 million for 1963-64, about 3 per cent more than the current budget.

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