

Viet Troops Abandon Fort System

SAIGON, South Viet Nam, (UPI)—Government troops are abandoning an outmoded system of forts in the Mekong Delta in the face of mounting Communist pressure. It was learned today.

The delta, Viet Nam's rice bowl and main source of income, is also one of the heaviest areas of Communist penetration. It lies south of Saigon, between the capital and the South China sea coast.

The last remaining symbols of central government authority for thousands of Vietnamese peasants are now being erased as the small detachments of government troops in the old mud-walled forts are marched away.

The withdrawing troops pull down the yellow and red striped government flags from the watchtowers where soldiers have guarded roads and canals and villages in the five southernmost provinces making up the defense area of the Vietnamese 21st division.

The price in blood has become too great to hold the forts. At one time, the spike-studded mats and mud walls could hold back the badly armed guerrillas.

But now, even barbed wire and minefields surrounding the fort do not offer enough protection against the mortars and other weapons of the Viet Cong.

Since the military junta seized power last month, its officers have been reevaluating the government's tactics in the war against the Communists. The decision to pull out of the old forts was a result of that study.

Ex-Colonel On Trial In France

PARIS (UPI)—Former Col. Antoine Argoud went on trial here today on charges of treason and plotting to kill President Charles de Gaulle.

Argoud had threatened to refuse to attend the trial, but he allowed himself to be led into a crowded courtroom in the heavily guarded Hall of Justice.

Under Article 411 of the French penal code, defense attorneys would not have been allowed to plead for him if he had not been present.

Argoud, 49, a former tank corps commander with a brilliant World War II record, appeared in court 10 months to the day after he was found gagged and bound in a small truck here.

'Watchdog' Agency Spent \$48 Million, But Saved U.S. \$247 Million

WASHINGTON (UPI)—The federal "watch dog" agency spent \$47.8 million last year to see that the government wasted as little money as possible. It reported today that its investment paid off with a saving to the taxpayers of \$247.5 million.

In other words, for every dollar spent by the General Accounting Office (GAO), there was a return in savings of more than \$5.

The five-to-one ratio was a considerable improvement over the previous year when the GAO paid out \$48.2 million to produce savings of \$162.8 million—a return of slightly more than three-to-one.

The latest figures were contained in GAO's annual report for the fiscal year that ended last June 30.

The 42-year-old agency is an arm of Congress and was created to keep a continual and wary eye on the spending practices of the many federal departments and offices.

It employed 4,650 people during fiscal 1963 to determine exactly how the government spent \$90 billion or so that it collected from the taxpayers that year.

The GAO turned out hundreds of reports and audits on hundreds of activities and forwarded them to Congress and the agencies involved.

The \$247.5 million in savings described in its report was made up of "refunds, collections, measurable savings, and other financial benefits resulting from the work of the GAO."

Actual refunds totaled \$29.1 million, according to the agency. The GAO's biggest concern was the Defense Department. This is by far the biggest federal agency, spending more than half of the entire budget.

Among some of the GAO findings and subsequent savings noted in the report:

—The Army and Air Force were spending about \$66 million a year more than they should on repair and maintenance of non-combat vehicles because of practices that were "wasteful and inefficient."

—Over a four year period the services lost at least \$18 million in unrecoverable overpayment to military men.

—The Army could have saved as much as \$5.7 million in contracts on the Redstone and Jupiter missiles had it bought certain parts directly from a manufacturer and supplied them to the contractor rather than have the contractor sub-contract for the components.

Fire Claims 12 Children

CHARLESTON, S.C. (UPI)—Twelve sleeping children never awoke Wednesday to receive the Santa Claus surprises arranged for them.

A portable oil heater tipped over by their parents as they put gifts under the Christmas tree spewed flames throughout the wooden tenement where the children slept killing them as they lay in their beds.

The children, ranging in age from 20 years to two months, were all brothers, sisters and cousins.

They were asleep in one room on the upper floor of the two-story structure in a slum section of this old city at the time of the pre-dawn fire.

Fire department officials said the fire apparently started when either Walter Johnson, 51, or his wife, Mary Lee, 47, attempted to move the portable heater and it tipped over.

Flaming liquid spread throughout the structure. Bodies of the children were found in bed — five on a studio couch, two on a single bed, three on a folding cot and two more on a pallet on the floor.

An electric train stood on its track in the burned-out shell of the home and charred dolls and trucks were strewn among the debris.

Johnson was critically burned in the blaze. His wife was the only other person to escape. She was not injured.

The victims were:

Mildred Wilson, 20, Lelia Wilson, 19, Thomasina Wilson, 17, Irene Wilson, 15, Benjamin Johnson, 12, Annette Johnson, 11, Raymond Johnson, 10, Althames Johnson, 6, Zoraida Johnson, 2 months, Jerome Wilson, 4, Jacquatta Wilson, 2 months, and Anthony Wilson, 8 months.

ELLINGTON VISITS JOHNSON

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UPI)—Former Gov. Buford Ellington flew to Texas Christmas Day to join President Lyndon B. Johnson at his LBJ ranch near Johnson City.

Before leaving by chartered aircraft, Ellington said he hoped to chat with the President and to do some deer hunting. He said the trip had no political significance.

Unexpected Visit Delights Romans

VATICAN CITY (UPI)—The people of Rome took Pope Paul VI to their hearts today because he walked through mud to visit an invalid woman on Christmas Day and smiled when a rambunctious lamb was thrust into his arms as a present.

The Pope, once thought of as a cold intellectual, won the affection of his Roman parishioners Wednesday in a morning visit to Pietralata, a bleak working-class suburb of concrete buildings.

The pontiff chose an area of the city where the Communist Vote is heavy.

He was received there with wild enthusiasm when he arrived to say Mass at the simple parish church.

A little girl thrust a lively, kicking lamb into the Pope's arms. He smiled, gripped it firmly and held it up for the cheering crowd to see.

After the Mass, the Pontiff's limousine made an unscheduled stop at an apartment house near the church.

Pope Paul, dressed in white robes, left the car and walked through a muddy courtyard to pray beside 65-year-old Emilio Proietti, bedridden for 15 years with paralysis.

On his way back to the Vatican, Pope Paul called at the Don Gnocchi school for disabled children.

"Can we go to the Holy Land with you?" asked a four-year-old boy with no right hand.

The Pope, who will visit sacred Christian shrines in Jordan and Israel Jan. 4-6, replied: "Let's make a pact. You pray for me and I'll come back and see you again."

Coon, Beaver And Possum Head Free Holiday Menu

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (UPI)—Barbecued coon, baked beaver, roast possum, fried snapping turtle . . . a real Christmas feast.

No, it's not the menu from an expensive restaurant. It's just part of a twice yearly dinner prepared by a generous Negro couple of modest means.

Willie and Lulu May Carroll celebrate their birthdays each year by throwing open the door to their home to anyone who cares to join them for good food and fellowship.

Lulu was 51 Wednesday. Willie, a 53-year-old porter at Union Railway Station, celebrates his birthday May 21.

They began the parties in 1944 with just Willie, Lulu and a few friends attending. Soon, however, word got out that Lulu was quite a cook and for 19 years friends and strangers have turned up on Christmas Day and on May 21 for the birthday parties.

"We just open the doors to everyone now," they said. "It don't cost us much. Just a little time and effort."

Most of the game, fish and vegetables served come from Willie's hunting, fishing and gardening. Lulu does all the cooking.

Kennedy Grave Attracts 15,000

WASHINGTON (UPI)—An estimated 15,000 persons visited the grave of President John F. Kennedy at Arlington National Cemetery on Christmas Day.

Many family groups were among the mourners who made the long walk up the snow-covered hillside where Kennedy is buried. Some placed flowers on the grave.

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