

One of the most critical needs of the Vietnamese people today is effective and continuing medical care. Lieutenant Pete Ginder travelled to the US-advised hospital in Rach Gia to report on the strides being made in providing a well-trained, self-sufficient Vietnamese medical staff for the Delta area (story, page 20). Pete shot the cover photo while visiting the operating room at Rach Gia.

While in the Delta, Pete also found progress in many areas of the pacification effort and reports on these in his story beginning on page 25.

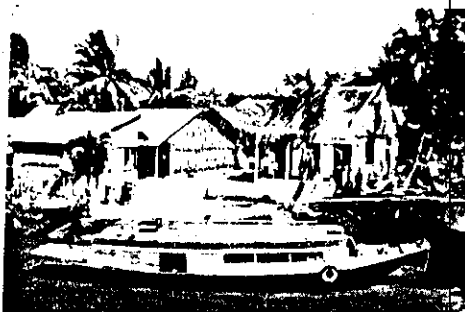
Staff Sergeant Jerry Van Drew made the rounds in Saigon to find material for his report on the Saigon Tea-houses and the girls who work there. His in-depth report on his experiences in the big city begins on page 2.

Also in this month's *Hurricane* is a look at small industry in Vietnam by Specialist Tim McGovern (page 10), a report on the air traffic controllers at Cu Chi by Specialist Mike Sharp and a short-story visit to Big Nguyen's Black Market Bazaar by Specialist Phil Schieber.

To add a bit of color, the *Hurricane* also visits the formal gardens at the Cao Dai Temple in Tay Ninh City in a photo feature starting on page 14. Captain Dave Givens shot the rear cover photo while on assignment in Tay Ninh.

The Editor

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The Hearts and Minds of Kien Giang Province

Progress in Pacification

by Lieutenant Pete Ginder

NUI DAI DUNG... it rises like an enormous gray tooth from the flat, lush rice lands of northwestern Kien Giang Province, only a few kilometers from the small port city of Ha Tien. Three hundred feet tall, its pockmarked slopes bear somber testimony to the war which has raged around its sides for the better part of two decades. Once it was a logistics base for the Viet Minh in their anti-colonial uprising of the early 1950's.

More recently it has been held by the Viet Cong, who found its proximity to the Cambodian border

and thick granite walls a welcome sanctuary from Allied troops and airpower. Although at one time it was controlled by the local Regional Force company, a determined VC force threw them off during Tet of 1968 and has held sway since. Intelligence sources estimated that over 100 hard core NVA were presently entrenched upon the mountain. That night it would be the job of the Regional Forces to assault and reclaim Nui Dai Dung.

"To say the least, Nui Dai Dung is a tough nut to crack, especially for the RF's," commented Lieutenant Colonel Edward P. Metzner, the Province Senior Advisor in Kien

Giang. His features were drawn, his mood preoccupied. A lean 24-year Army veteran, Colonel Metzner has spent over four years in Vietnam, including a tour in neighboring Choung Thien Province.

Soft-spoken, economical in speech and motion, he dictated instructions to the young artillery captain monitoring the radio while he discussed the situation confronting the government troops. "We couldn't move against Nui Dai Dung in the past because of its location along the border. Now that Allied forces are operating in Cambodia, we can seal the area and try to take the hill. The problem is that our men are tired, and the mountain is honey-combed with caves. Any point on the hill is accessible without ever going out of doors." He turned again to the radio and began running through a list of urgent supply needs, the most pressing of which included ammunition for the 106mm recoilless rifle and large smoke pots to cover the advancing troops.

Outside the dimly-lit command post the remainder of Kien Giang Province basked contentedly in the bright sun of another flawless morning. Farmers plodded behind muddied water buffalo preparing the paddies for the coming months of rain; fishermen turned their beamy, colorful craft out to sea to begin reaping the day's marine harvest. Cyclists sped along the black as-



phalt road leading into Cambodia, pausing only to glance at the massive artillery pieces being brought

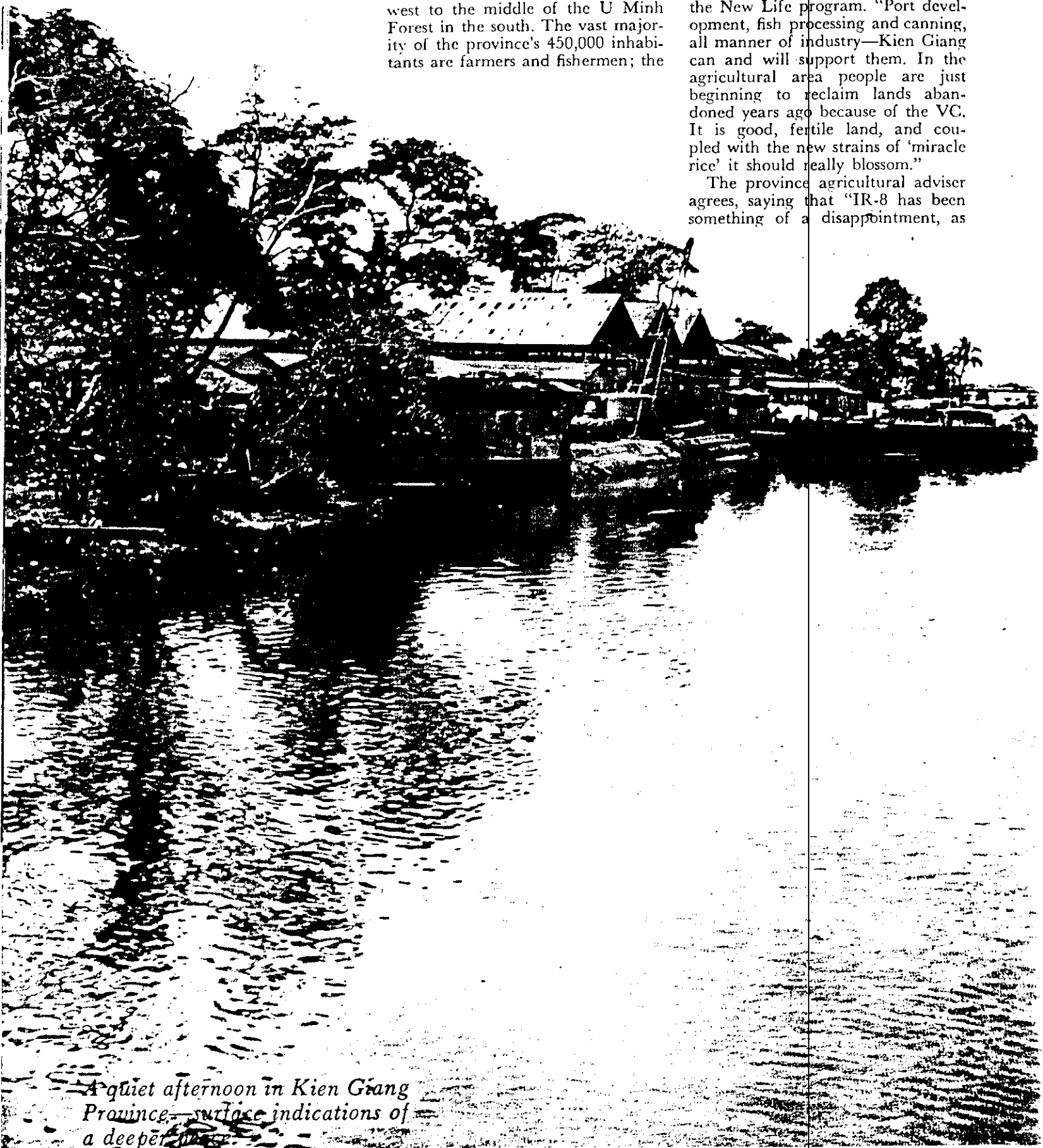
in to "soften up" the enemy-held hill.

Kien Giang is the largest province in the delta. It is shaped roughly like a boomerang along the west coast of Vietnam, stretching from the Cambodian border in the northwest to the middle of the U Minh Forest in the south. The vast majority of the province's 450,000 inhabitants are farmers and fishermen; the

prosperity of their land is evident to even the most casual observer.

"There is a tremendous potential here for growth," says Charles Rheingans, a career United States Agency for International Development (USAID) official in charge of the New Life program. "Port development, fish processing and canning, all manner of industry—Kien Giang can and will support them. In the agricultural area people are just beginning to reclaim lands abandoned years ago because of the VC. It is good, fertile land, and coupled with the new strains of 'miracle rice' it should really blossom."

The province agricultural adviser agrees, saying that "IR-8 has been something of a disappointment, as



A quiet afternoon in Kien Giang Province—surface indications of a deeper peace.

the people don't care for the flavor. IR-22, however, comes much closer to the taste of the local product, and will enormously increase yields all over Vietnam."

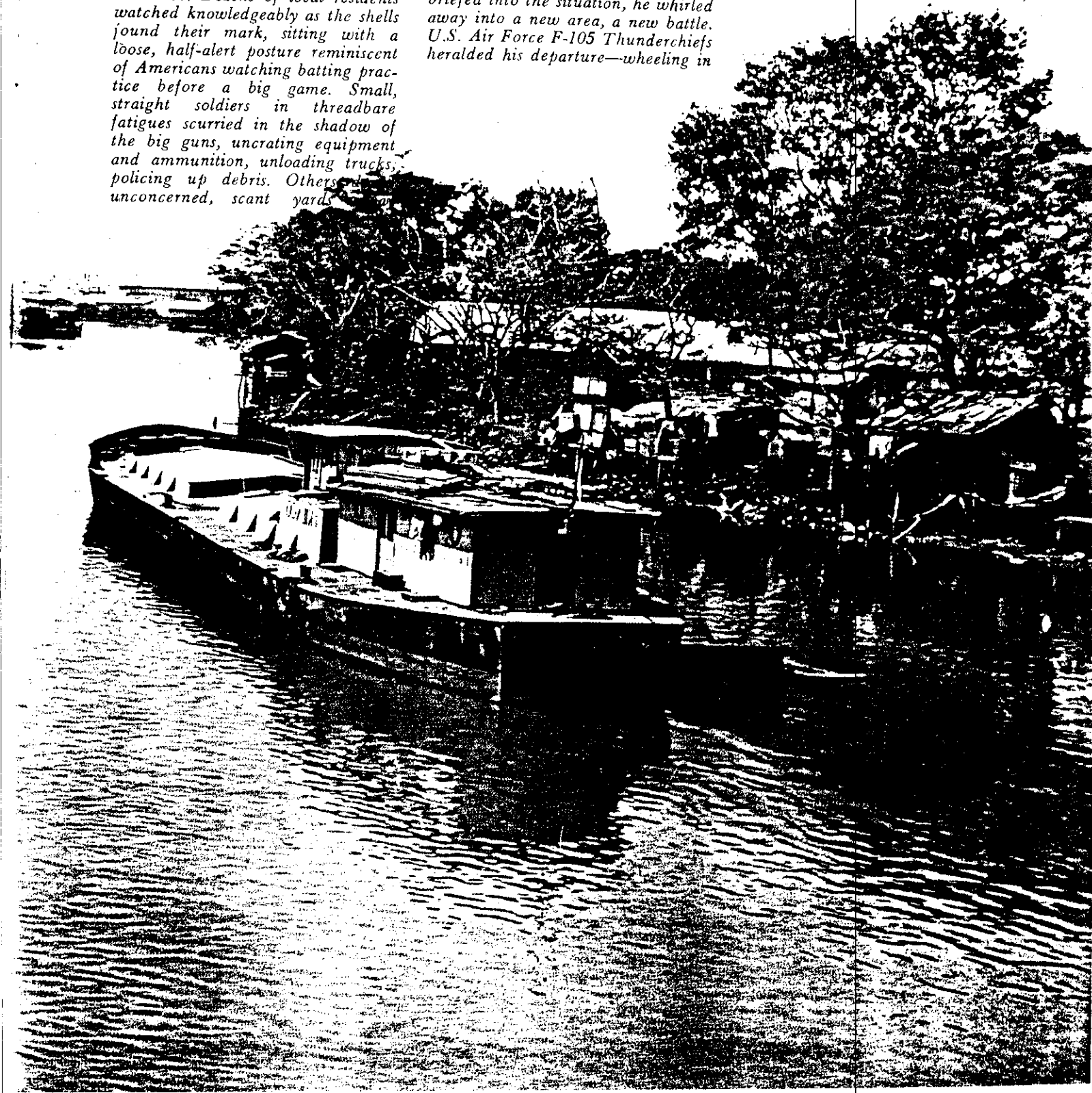
The morning passed rapidly for Colonel Metzner as the preparations for the night assault continued. Three ARVN artillery pieces, 155mm howitzers, fired salvo after salvo into the mountain's weathered flanks, shattering the early-morning calm with thunderclaps of exploding ordnance. Dozens of local residents watched knowledgeably as the shells found their mark, sitting with a loose, half-alert posture reminiscent of Americans watching batting practice before a big game. Small, straight soldiers in threadbare fatigues scurried in the shadow of the big guns, uncrating equipment and ammunition, unloading trucks, policing up debris. Others, unconcerned, scant yards

from the thundering cannons waking only during the infrequent silences.

A light patch of granite uncovered by the shells was thought at first to be a white flag of surrender—hope was a palpable presence until a heavy-duty pair of field glasses revealed the cruel error. The firing was interrupted only one other time—a chopper carrying Major General Hal McCown, IV Corps Senior Adviser, landed in an adjacent rice paddy. After being briefed into the situation, he whirled away into a new area, a new battle. U.S. Air Force F-105 Thunderchiefs heralded his departure—wheeling in

low from the southeast they disgorged tons of napalm on the target, sending oily gouts of smoke and flame into the lazy blue sky. The assembled crowd cheered and slapped each other on the back.

"Perhaps the best way I can describe the situation existing here today is to say that we have come full-circle in the last two years," stated Colonel Metzner the next day in the provincial capital of Rach Gia. "Two years ago in the Delta,



government troops enjoyed immunity only in certain areas; when they left these areas they were restricted to making brief stabs into the VC-controlled hamlets, and then had to withdraw. They were denied the proper base for taxation, recruiting and food.

"Today, however, all has changed. The VC have been thoroughly decimated and driven into the uninhabited areas. They are capable only, for the most part, of abbreviated raids and then must depart. They exist solely because the NVA have been used as filler to beef up their ranks, and seem completely incapable of replacing homegrown guerrillas." He went on to add that, "it is difficult to make any projections about the immediate future. The enemy could mass here," he stated, stabbing his index finger into the northern end of the U Minh, which was shown in green on the map, "and come out with a couple of battalions, and a lot of people would get hurt. But they would pay a heavy price."

Two maps are of special interest in his office. One shows the situation which existed in August, 1968—dozens of red dots freckle the map, indicating hamlets considered to be VC-controlled. Others, grey-green in color, were considered "contested." The adjoining chart, drawn from a recent hamlet evaluation survey, shows only a handful of red dots, and these widely-scattered outposts are engulfed in a sea of villages considered to be firmly in the hands of the government.

"A couple of years ago I hated to see the sun go down," remarked Colonel Metzner with a grin. "It meant another night in the Alamo." Today the position of the sun in the sky appears to make little difference to him.

The responsibility for providing security in the hamlets and villages of Kien Giang is divided among several different agencies. At the hamlet level, marauding terrorists are most likely to encounter elements of the People's Self Defense Force (PSDF). Generally quite young and in many areas haphazardly armed, they comprise the village's first line of defense. "The quality of the PSDF is totally dependent on the local leaders. If they are properly led they can generally keep the VC out of their villages and prevent a lot of harassment. Before the establishment of the PSDF, the enemy could walk into villages, propagandize, tax, and recruit."

"Today they are faced with a lot of question marks: will they walk



Lieutenant Colonel Edward P. Metzner, Kien Giang's Senior Province Adviser (left) and Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Van Tai, Province Chief, plan operations to attack Communist troops on Nui Dai Dung.

into an ambush, will they have to fight their way in—and out? If they do fight their way in, they know the people will not be particularly responsive to their requests." Another factor, according to Colonel Metzner, in the enemy's inability to move freely, is their knowledge of the artillery and air support which can be brought to bear as soon as their presence is charted. "It makes them think twice about coming out of hiding," he declared.

An optimistic viewpoint concerning the situation in Kien Giang is echoed at district level by Major Charles H. Kone, the 38-year old District Senior Adviser in Kien Binh, an inland agricultural center located due east of Rach Gia. It is a pastoral, scenic area. Meticulously-worked rice fields stretch to the horizon, broken only by narrow earthen dikes. Shallow canals, each with its quota of boats on their way to market, crisscross the alluvial plain. Simple homes, shaded by palm trees, dot the banks. "There are about 50,000 people currently in Kien Binh district, a significant number of them Cambodians," states Major Kone. "It's a rich area, no question about it. When we go on operations we don't take any food—it can be purchased almost anywhere we're likely to go."

Major Kone is something of an anomaly in the present-day Army structure. A tanned, weathered resident of Eagles Pass, Texas, he is the "only member of the Texas National Guard presently on active duty in Vietnam." When he leaves the Republic he will return to his

cattle ranch and duty with San Antonio's 36th Separate Infantry Brigade. He laughingly describes his career pattern as being, "in order: aboard ship, a cook, a cowboy, an infantry leader, a bank president and a cattle rancher."

In a more serious vein he comments on his activities at the district level. "The basis of our operations in the district lies in the principle of denying the enemy access to the population, thereby effectively cutting them off from their tax, food and recruiting base. The various hamlet evaluations indicate a significant improvement in this region. These are not empty statistics... we have made a lot of progress here."

Major Kone cited the downward spiral of enemy activity, the opening of 9 new government outposts, the "greatly increased" GVN recruiting. "Most of all," he says, "you can just plain feel it in the air. A year ago it was a common thing to take mortar rounds at night; we haven't been mortared since January. It's my opinion that without the infusion of NVA troops the VC would have been almost totally eliminated as a threat by this time."

Major Kone, who speaks "workable" Vietnamese and enjoys astounding rapport with the people, is keenly interested in the politics of the area, seeing it as the cornerstone of effective pacification. "To the villager, the government of Vietnam is represented by his local officials. Currently all eight of our hamlets have their own elected hamlet chiefs. They have proved to be honest and competent; for this rea-

son the people prefer the GVN—by giving us information and support they avoid VC recruiting and harassment.”

The afternoon passed slowly north of Ha Tien. By a tacit, unspoken agreement common in Vietnam both sides broke for lunch. Americans and Vietnamese in the command post shared C-rations and steamed rice, topped off with local produce and a warm beer. Several American infantry advisers, their faces and uniforms showing signs of twelve consecutive days in the field, talked in a subdued, almost perfunctory manner about home, the upcoming operation, the joys of an all-too-short Hawaii R&R.

Colonel Metzner returned from the crest of a neighboring mountain, sweat-soaked and reddened from the blazing sun, and briefed his men thoroughly and professionally. An American major put the finishing touches to the operations order which would guide the troops. Cigarettes were smoked, confidences shared, people dozed. The long, somnolent afternoon wore on.

The major portion of the fighting in Kien Giang Province is done by the Regional and Popular Forces, men who generally fight close to home in the small, vicious skirmishes so common to this particular conflict. They are assisted by a dozen American Mobile Advisory Teams (MATs), who accompany the RF/PF on operations and learn as well as teach. Elements of the main-force Army of the Republic of Vietnam operate in Kien Giang and

are available, if need be, to back up the local forces.

A major factor on the military side in the province is the role of the U.S. Navy and its Vietnamese counterpart. Based largely at Rach Soi, a diminutive port south of Rach Gia, the PBR's and "Swift boats" of the "brown water navy" patrol both the inland waterways and the shoreline to prevent infiltration into, or out of, VC strongholds.

Other naval forces are located at An Thoi, on Phu Quoc Island, which lies to the north and west of Rach Gia. Large, mountainous and heavily forested, Phu Quoc is considered part of Kien Giang Province, as are several smaller offshore islands. Phu Quoc is distinguished by a large prisoner of war camp and what is universally considered to be the finest nuoc mam made in all of Vietnam.

The pace had picked up considerably around Nui Dai Dung. The artillery was again active, alternating white phosphorous and high explosive shells under the watchful eye of the province chief. An "Early Word" broadcast ship from 10th Psyop at Binh Thuy made pass after pass over the mountain playing a taped message promising amnesty to its defenders if they would lay down their arms. It was met with silence, and the shelling resumed.

Late that afternoon the American advisers left the command post to return to their units, scooping up extra "C-rats" and cigarettes as they went out the door, promising each other cold beers "when this is all

over." Americans and Vietnamese alike mulled over the instructions printed on the squat, grey smoke-pots which had been piled outside ("Hit that striker once, Jerry, and then I'll kick it the hell out the door—hesitate a second too long and the bird will be just full of that stuff"). Two choppers were down and out of touch; the promised 106 ammunition was late and unaccounted for. Tension crept slowly through the command post like smoke filtering through a tunnel.

"It's hard to say what will happen here," mused Colonel Metzner as he took a break after dinner. He surveyed the gaudy orange seascape unfolding beneath us and shifted his position on the sandbagged mortar pit. "I've been here a long time and have become passionately involved with the land and the people. It will be a wonderful day when the people of Vietnam can bring this war to a close and throw away their rifles. But it must be a just peace, a lasting peace. Anything else would lead only to more suffering."

As if in counterpoint an automatic weapon clattered sharply on the valley floor far below. Colonel Metzner's look of concern softened as he saw a flight of what appeared to be geese scatter and then regroup. "Although it is a bit early to relate the Cambodian penetration to our own tactical situation, province-wide I think it will be a big assist. We've already started to see an upsurge in minor enemy incidents, which indicates to me that they are already starting to feel the pinch as far as supplies."

"What must be remembered is that pacification in the Delta has undoubtedly been a success. The focus of my job now is to push, and keep pushing, to consolidate our gains and secure our base. Complacency could hurt us badly and our gains have been so great, in such a short period of time, that it would be a natural tendency to let down." With one final look at the sky and the sea he returned to the command post.

That night, three companies of Regional Force soldiers assaulted across 300 yards of open fields and gained a foothold on the lower slopes of Nui Dai Dung. One man had been killed and eight wounded, including an American enlisted adviser, who now lay in a narrow cave on the mountain awaiting medical aid. The difficult job of rooting the enemy out of the tunnels was just beginning, but an important step had been taken. No one had really thought they had a chance. ↑

Across the plains of Kien Giang, a view of Nui Dai Dung, last refuge for the enemy in the Delta province.

