



Vol. 3, No. 1

FALL-WINTER, 1970

THUNDER!

CG COMMENDS CAMBODIAN OPERATION



Now that the Tropic Lightning Division, the Go Devil Brigade and attached units have returned from Cambodia, it is appropriate that we review and salute the results of our cross-border operations.

Every element of every unit—infantry, armor, engineer, artillery, aviation and logistic (both divisional and non-divisional) contributed to these operations.

Truly gallant efforts were waged. For example, the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry spent 50 consecutive days in the fields of Cambodia without return for rest.

Your dedication, courage and skill have deprived the enemy of staggering quantities of weapons, ammunition and supplies. You have deprived him of the use of sanctuaries inside Cambodia, temporarily halting and challenging the communists to undertake the costly and time-consuming job of rebuilding. You have captured volumes of important documents that have provided a clearer, and more detailed, picture of the enemy system of command, control and support from inside Cambodia.

A partial list of communist arms, ammunition and equipment which Tropic Lightning swept captured or destroyed inside Cambodia includes more than 700 individual weapons . . . just under 150 cross-fired weapons . . . and over 45 tons of ammunition.

You have captured or destroyed more than 1,500 tons of rice . . . more than 3,600 pounds of communications equipment . . . 56 vehicles . . . and almost 1,600 pounds of documents. More than 11,000 pounds of medical supplies will never again be used to sustain the enemy.

One of our most important tasks during the coming months will be to help the Government of the Republic of South Vietnam to strengthen its forces and solidify its people's defenses. The work that you have done in Cambodia will contribute immeasurably to this purpose. Any operation the enemy begins in South Vietnam will face critical shortages.

There can be no doubt that the cross-border operations of Tropic Lightning and its sister divisions have dealt the enemy a severe blow and have brought the war much closer to a successful conclusion.

Your blood, sweat and tears have contributed greatly to the success of the campaign in the III Corps Tactical Zone.

We will never forget the sacrifice of our comrades-at-arms who were killed or wounded. We pledge full measure of devotion to them.

May God bless and keep you all.

Edward Brautz, Jr.
MG, USA
Commanding



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THUNDER is an authorized publication of the 25th Infantry Division. It is published for the benefit of all members of the division serving in Vietnam. Views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Department of Army.

Front Map section of major logistical base areas in Cambodia.
Painting by SSG Paul MacWilliams

Back Forward Air Controller, OV-10 Bronco, flying in support of 25th Division troops during the Cambodian operation.





031820Z May 70 MISSION: The 25th Infantry Division prepares to attack into Cambodia and to destroy/disrupt enemy command and control elements and his logistical bases in areas 3-4 and 707.

Sanctuaries

Along the northwest edge of the 25th Infantry Division area of operations, the enemy had long used the Cambodian side of the border as an extensive base camp complex. The neutrality of Cambodia and the inviolability of the border region allowed the NVA a privileged sanctuary for their field headquarters, forward supply points and staging areas.

In War Zone C between the Parrot's Beak and the Fish Hook, the border curves sharply forming an elbow. This area is called the Dog's Face. From inside, the enemy rushed equipment along infiltration routes to points near Saigon where it could be turned against the very heart of South Vietnam.

Cambodia

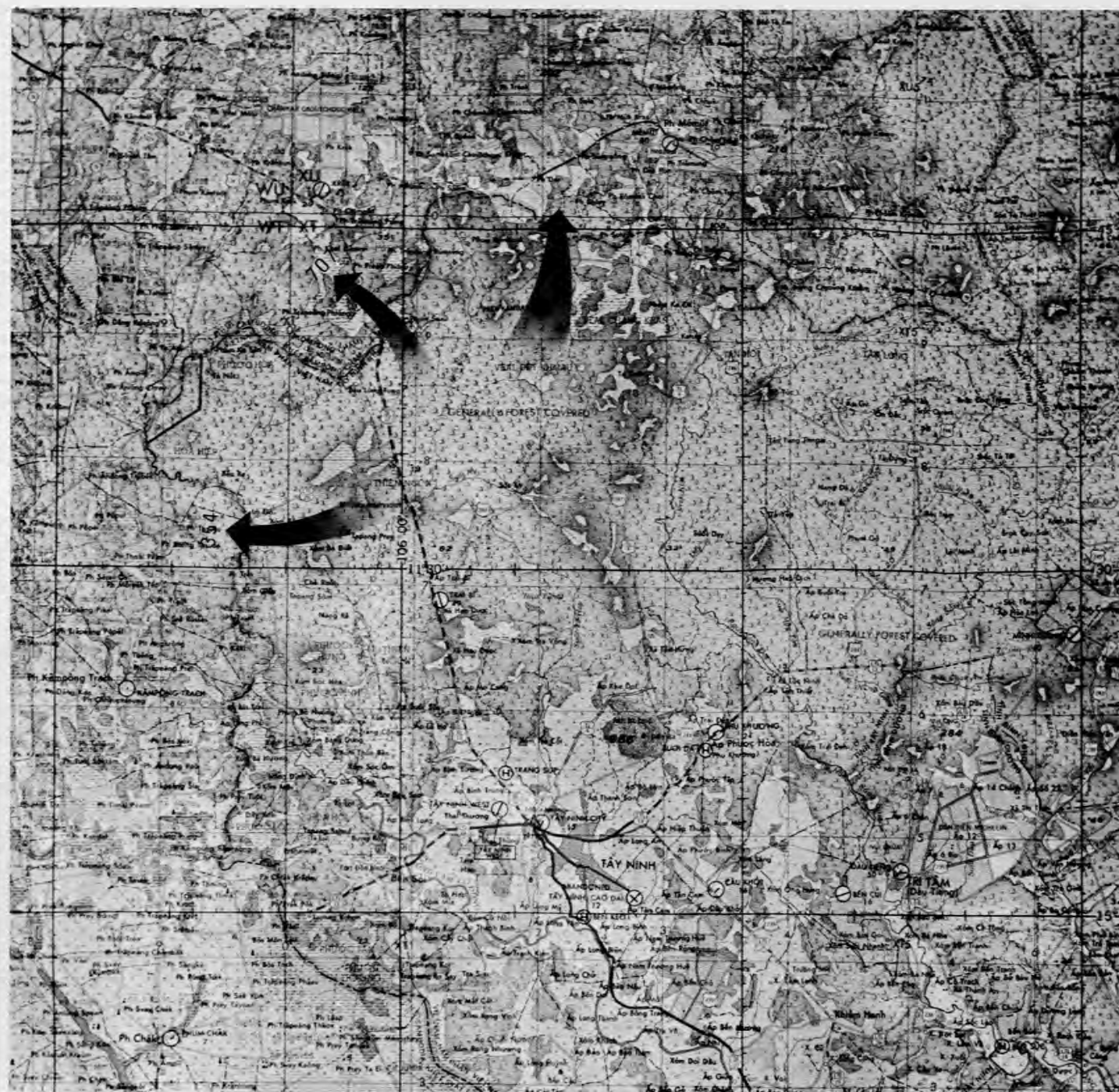
On May 1 1970, President Nixon announced that U.S. troops would begin military operations against Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia. Two days after the 1st Air Cavalry Division began its operation in the Fish Hook, the 25th Division swept across the border at the Dog's Face, isolating the enemy and halting the evacuation of supplies he had stockpiled there.

The Tropic Lightning move came in three bold strokes. The first, called Operation Bold Lancer (Toan Thang 44), was just south of the Dog's Face in base area 354; the second, Operation Toan Thang 43, was just northeast of the Dog's Face in base area 707; and the third, part of Operation Toan Thang 43, came halfway between the Dog's Face and the Fish Hook.

New AO

During the first week in May, the 1st Brigade of the 25th Division was shifted forward into War Zone C. Leaving well known areas of operation, the brigade took over a small airstrip north of Tay Ninh from the First Air Cavalry. Thien Ngon was a new name for most 25th Division troops, but it was to become an extremely well known forward supply area for Tropic Lightning Soldiers.

Fed by convoys moving up the 30 kilometers of Highway 22 from Tay Ninh to Thien Ngon, the former special forces camp grew in two days to a massive forward supply point for an endless stream of helicopters and C 130s.



As mile after mile of armored vehicles snaked their way up Highway 22 and wound past Thien Ngon to laager sites in the western part of War Zone C, the fighting spirit grew—the 25th was going to get Charlie where he lived—in Cambodia.

Phase I

At first light on May 6, assault helicopters at Cu Chi and Tay Ninh lifted off their pads and headed toward Fire Support Base Wood, just west of Thien Ngon. There they picked up troops of the 3d Battalion, 22d Infantry for an air assault into enemy sanctuaries south of the Dog's Face.

While Alfa, Bravo and Delta Companies of the 3/22d were air-lifted to Tasuos village four miles inside Cambodia, Charlie Company secured a bridgehead on the Cambodian side of the Rach Cai Bac river.

First contact was made in an open field outside Tasuos. "They seemed surprised mostly," said one soldier. "We caught them running across an open field and it seemed like the NVA just couldn't



believe we were really here."

Meanwhile, two mechanized units escorted the 65th Engineer Battalion to the Vietnam bank of the Rach Cai Bac river. In eight hours, the engineers spanned the river with a floatation bridge and the first tracks of the mechanized units crossed into Cambodia to secure the bridge for the night.

The next morning, the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry, and the 2d Battalion (Mechanized), 22d Infantry, roared through the heavy jungle along the river and across the dusty fields and rice paddies west of the jungle searching for enemy.

The 1/5th moved west to link with the 3/22d before moving further south. Meanwhile, the 2/22d swept south from the bridge in two columns. The 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry, was airlifted to a position between the two mechanized battalions and began a careful search for the training areas and staging points concealed in the jungle.

The brigade elements formed a giant pincer along both sides of a massive jungle sheath surrounding the river. The move drove the be-

wildered enemy south where the Vietnamese Navy stood guard on another branch of the river.

"We must have gone through at least two kilometers of base camps," said one 2/22d soldier. During the first phase of the operation, Tropic Lightning troops uncovered more than 270 tons of rice, killed 266 enemy and captured 41 detainees. Supplies captured included bicycles, motorcycles, trucks, 221 individual weapons, and 22 crew served weapons.

Soldiers were elated as they found and destroyed above ground structures connected by interlocking board sidewalks. Inside were blackboards and benches for classrooms, tables and mess facilities, living quarters with bunkers nearby and evidence of recent enemy activity.

But the enemy was gone. He was sometimes caught in small groups running away, but he fought only if he had to fight. One battalion commander put it this way, "We have destroyed in a very short time what it has taken the enemy months, perhaps even years to build."





Phase II

While the 1st Brigade was busily ferreting out enemy training and recuperation points, the 2d Brigade prepared to air assault the region north of the Dog's Face. At this time the 3d Brigade assumed complete responsibility for the Division's original (pre-Cambodian) area of operations.

On May 9, the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry, was airlifted deep inside Cambodia while the 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry secured the road ways north from the border.

The next day the 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry and the 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry were airlifted north of a heavily wooded area while the 3/4 Cav took up positions south and west of the same woods. The 2d Battalion, 47th Infantry rumbled into position east of the woods enclosing the area.

Inside was believed to be a major enemy headquarters. As the four units closed the sides of the box, they received sporadic contact with enemy trying to escape.

The units soon began to report finds indicating the area had housed a large base camp with sophisticated material like that used for a headquarters

type operation.

The 3/4 Cav uncovered what appeared to be the headquarters of the base camp complex. First they found a mimeograph machine, two brand new generators, 86 M-1 rifles, three .30 caliber machine guns and three typewriters. Next came two unused 75 mm recoilless rifles with carriages, 38 cases of .30 caliber ammunition, 100 81 mm rounds, four cases of 3.5 inch rockets, four cases of Soviet mines, one 60 mm mortar tube with bipod and one .30 caliber water-cooled machine gun. There were also 11 bicycles, 11 cases of AK ammunition, 100 60 mm rounds, nine rocket-propelled grenade rounds and 40 hand grenades.

In another part of the complex, the 2/27th discovered what was evidently a hospital complex. Large quantities of medical supplies were found in complexes similar to battalion aid stations.

The search of the area continued for the next week. More and more of the same type caches came to light, but another part became more important. Rice. Rice had been found during the early operations, but in Operation Toan Thang 43, rice evacuation grew to be a monumental task for division troopers.

On May 14, about 17 miles north of Thien

Ngon, Charlie Troop, 3/4 Cav found 170 tons of rice, packed in 220 pound bags. The next day the first cache was virtually duplicated when Bravo Troop of the 3/4 Cav uncovered 100 more large well-concealed bags of rice. Carefully sweeping the area, Bravo Troop located an additional 15 stacks, each containing the same number of bags. Within five days, the 25th Division cavalymen had collected more than 400 tons of rice.

Then the backbreaking labor began. Because the rice was found in triple canopy jungle, choppers were unable to get in to pick it up. Much of it was found in jungle too dense even for armored personnel carriers, so the rice had to be carried by hand to clearings where it was loaded on anything available—trucks, armored personnel carriers, tanks—almost anything going to the rear.

Twenty Fifth Division soldiers worked hard evacuating the stockpiled rice. As one soldier put it, "Charlie will at least have to tighten up his belt for quite a while."

Phase III

The final thrust began when the Division shifted





uncovered during the two operation northeast of the Dog's Face. The last weeks in Cambodia were spent digging out the rice, arms and ammunition.

To the men who had to do it, the task became boring and tiresome. But, they were glad it had been done. They felt like they had robbed the enemy of his reserve strength. One commander pointed out that the enemy would also be restricted by the difficulties of rebuilding during the rainy season.

In summary, Lieutenant General Michael S. Davison, the commander of all U.S. troops operating in Cambodia, described this complex as one of the COSVN (Central Office for South Vietnam) training areas. Davison said his forces "got a piece of COSVN," when troops of the 25th Infantry Division were operating four to five miles northwest of the Cambodian rubber plantation town of Memot, roughly 10 miles inside Cambodia, northwest of Tay Ninh.

"In that area," Davidson continued, "We found all of the sort of accouterments that you find around a headquarters—telephones, mimeograph machines,

generators for providing electric power. In addition, we found a modest amount of medical supplies, arms and ammunition and so forth, about at the level you would expect to find in a headquarters area."

Vietnam-Back Home

During the last few weeks in Cambodia, Division elements continued search operations for enemy cache sites. Enemy contact remained light and sporadic as Tropic Lightning troopers uncovered numerous small supply and staging areas.

As the 25th Division involvement in Cambodia approached the June 30 deadline, the returning battalions took advantage of the redeployment to repair equipment and catch their breath after seven long weeks of hard work.

On June 29, the last Division units returned to Vietnam. The Communist physical infrastructure had been devastated. More important, the surprise and effectiveness of the U.S. move posed a lasting threat to the enemy's ability to maintain sanctuaries in the border area.



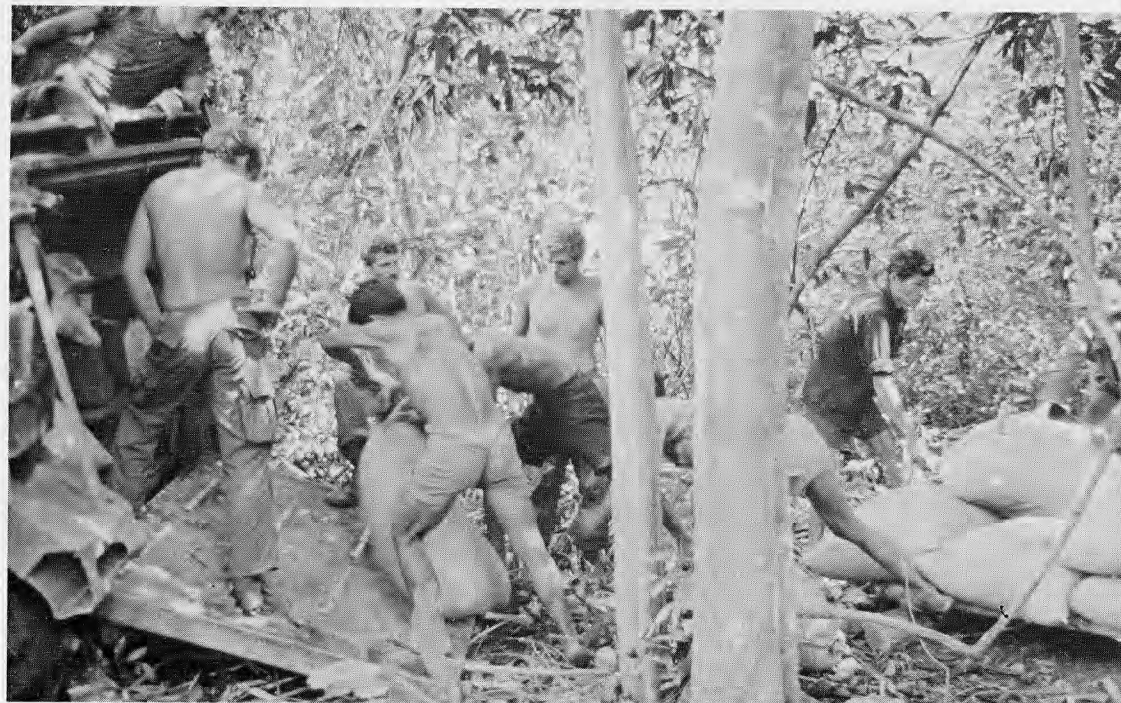
its operation east from the area where they had discovered the enemy headquarters. On May 17, the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry, searching a heavily wooded area east of the Dog's Face, uncovered one of the largest communication caches of the war.

The 1/5 infantrymen found 135 bunkers, 47 hootches, 10 classrooms; they also found 28 Chinese communist and 9 other generators, 67 AM radios, two of which were UHF equipped, 61 FM monitors and 209 radio cases. In the same area they found 100 pounds of commo wire, two sets of earphones, one intercom system, eight Chi-com field phones, 33 Chi-com voltage meters, 75 telephone hand sets and six unknown type field phones.

The area was not only used for construction but also for instruction. A classroom complete with charts and diagrams explaining how to maintain radio sets was found.

Continuing their search, the 1/5th infantrymen swept through an enemy hospital complex composed of 50 hootches, 130 to 150 bunkers, and three kitchens.

Numerous small caches were found. They seemed to be part of the same complex which was





CULTURE

"There were rumors of strange things happening in the world outside. Elves, who seldom walked in the shire, could now be seen passing westward through the woods in the evening, passing and not returning. Trolls were abroad, no longer dull witted, but cunning and armed with dreadful weapons. And there were murmured hints of creatures more terrible than all these, but they had no name.

Little of all this, of course, reached the ears of the ordinary hobbits. But even the deafest and most stay-at-home began to hear queer tales. And those whose business took them to the borders saw strange things."

J.R.R. TOLKIEN
THE LORD OF THE RINGS

IMPACT

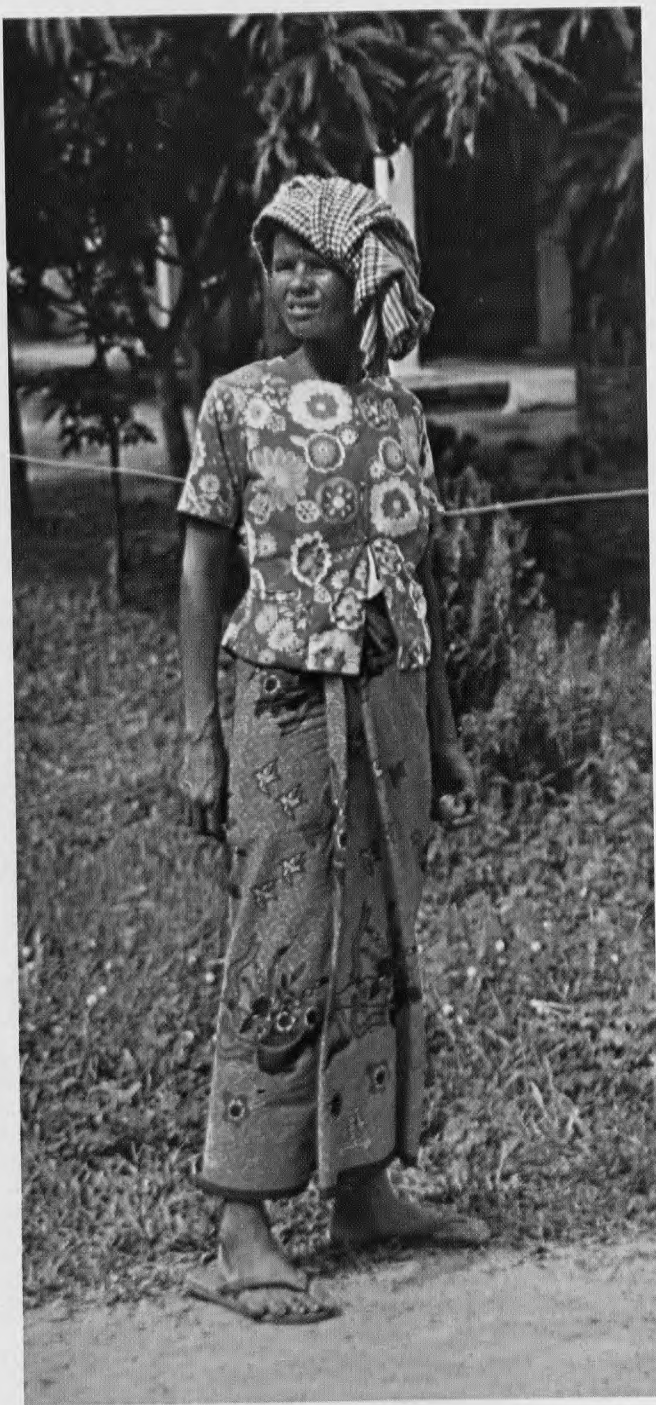
STORY BY SP5
STEPHEN F. KROFT

The mysterious flying ships with the shrieking loudspeakers were soon followed by a more ominous rumbling sound that steadily grew in volume until it became a deafening roar.

The handsome villagers were lining the roadway as the armored personnel carriers rumbled into the village of Tasek spewing red dust and scorching exhaust like a welcome wagon from the 20th Century.

Even the most callous observer had to be impressed with the moment. Two distinct cultures rubbing together for the first time gave a profound sense of history to those early days of the Cambodian operation; the heirs of the ancient Khmers meeting the Joneses from Muskegon in the last chapter of next year's history books.





The diplomatic ramifications of those encounters would far outweigh anything transpired in the oval office of the President or the staid conference rooms of the State Department. Thousands of Cambodians living in the border areas would construct permanent impressions of America from the youthful faces atop those APCs.

It is doubtful that 25th Division troops had given much forethought to these diplomatic responsibilities. Waiting at Thien Ngon and Fire Support Base Wood to make those initial thrusts, they were preoccupied with the cold prospects of survival. No American troops had ever been to Cambodia, so everything was open to conjecture.

Tropic Lightning troops negotiating those first few uneasy miles did not find the enemy gunships and heavy artillery rumored to be there. In fact, enemy resistance was much lighter than had been expected. They did however, find themselves in the midst of an entirely different culture, and the usually skeptical GIs were impressed.

The colorful Cambodians and their simple thatched houses raised on wooden piles appeared to be straight from the slick pages of the *National Geographic*. One had to look hard for signs of western influence and the only visible evidence of modernization were bicycles and a few transistor radios. Even on the elegant French rubber plantations near Krek and Memot there seemed a happy coexistence between past and modern modes of life.

The Americans seemed to sense a simple, uncomplicated way of life held together at the village level by strong family ties. They also detected something very unsettling—a heavy atmosphere of fear.

The Cambodians had been primed with enemy propaganda; they expected “invaders” to destroy their homes, kill their livestock and rape their women. The sight of the advancing American Army, with all its awesome firepower, probably did little to dispel this fear. South of the Dog’s Face section of the border, groups of innocent villagers tried to surrender to 1st Brigade troops, hoping only to avoid the genocide sure to follow.

Many grunts felt an almost desperate urgency to make the Cambodians understand that we had no intentions of harming them, but language was a formidable barrier. Some tried to reach the Cambodians through “pidgin Vietnamese,” that curious corruption of French, Vietnamese and English that the Americans think is Vietnamese and the Vietnamese—American. But the Cambodians didn’t *bic* the *beaucoups* and *ti tis*.

One ambitious young intelligence officer formed a small party, including two Kit Carson scouts, and ventured into a nearby village hoping to establish a rapport with the villagers and possibly gather intelligence.

Applying western logic to the situation, the young Captain asked a greeting party if it might be possible to arrange a conference with the village chief. After five minutes of cross-translation the reply was



fed back to the Captain. "There was no village chief."

Undaunted, he pressed on and was successful in arranging a meeting with a number of local patricians. The pow-wow took place in the village square over coconut juice and mangos.

Occasionally finding it necessary to raise his voice to drown out nearby airstrikes, the officer began the difficult task of explaining the presence of his mechanized battalion across the road from the village. He ended up trying to explain U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia through two Vietnamese interpreters to a group of villagers who had no concept of international relations and who possessed little knowledge of the world outside the village proper.

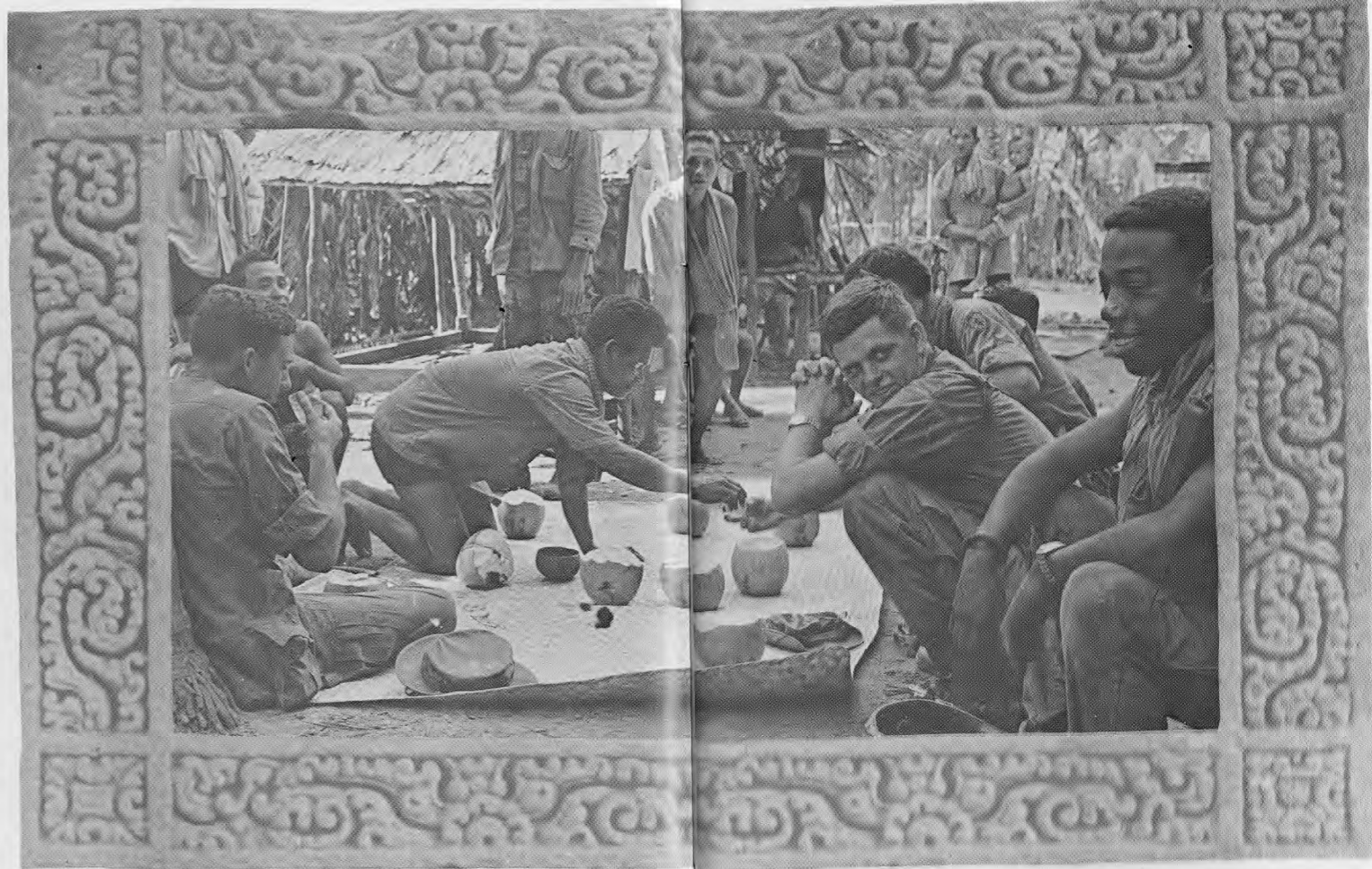
This incident characterized the frustration of those first few days inside Cambodia. Most likely the concepts of self-determination and unwarranted aggression were lost somewhere in the translation.

Deprived of verbal communication, the grunt used the accessories from his C-rations as a field-expedient goodwill packet. Small gifts from the land of tall buildings always seemed to bring cautious smiles from the local population.

But after the infantry had completed their massive battalion sweeps, and the countryside was secured; the cigarettes and chewing gum gave way to medicine, soap and leaflets.

Our first dust caked envoys were closely followed by PSYOPS and Civil Affairs people bearing a more institutionalized form of goodwill. MEDCAPS and other civic actions programs, long





successfully employed in Vietnam, were moved across the border.

The natives were apprehensive at first, and early attendance was low. But enough satisfied customers returned with family and neighbors so that by the end of May some battalions were treating more than 200 people a day.

From that point on, the gradual acceptance of the MEDCAP program seemed to closely parallel our budding relationship with the Khmers. Ever so slowly their early fears were dispelled as they watched the "invaders" distribute rice, heal the sick and bulldoze new roads.

It was frustrating trying to fight the war around the Cambodians and at the same time convince them that we were their friends. Tropic Lightning troops and commanders displayed a remarkable amount of restraint in order to spare Cambodians the suffering and destruction of war. Where there were isolated incidents of civi-

lian casualties, U.S. forces responded by doing everything humanly possible to rectify the situation.

Take the case of Mrs. Ninh Yan, an 18-year old Cambodian who was caught in a crossfire and critically wounded while walking across an open field with her family. No one can say for sure what was going through the minds of the local villagers as they watched a helicopter drop out of the sky and fly off with Mrs. Yan, but they seemed surprised when another helicopter returned her to Chipeau, completely recovered, 52 days later.

The village of Xa Ohm was another casualty of the fighting west of the Fishhook. The conservative villagers seemed to stoically accept destruction as a consequence of war. As they prepared to abandon their village, an American convoy broke through the bush carrying food and building materials. A loud speaker was set up at one end of the village as the 1st Brigade troops announced their intentions



to help rebuild Xa Ohm.

Adding a touch of Western organization to the operation, the entourage worked with the village spokesman in setting up equal distribution of supplies while a Chinook dropped in sheets of tin roofing.

While these efforts were simply making the best of bad situations, they also constituted a display of good faith on our part. The Cambodians learned that Americans, who possessed such an awesome capability to make war, also possessed the equally impressive powers to do good.

By the end of May the villagers were out and about, young women were no longer hiding in the woods, and near Fire Support Base Sharon the standard rate of exchange was one Cambodian pineapple for eight American cigarettes.

A young civil affairs officer attached to the 2d Brigade summed

up the whole adventure very well. One afternoon in Tay Ninh, he made an attempt to put everything into perspective. "Suppose you have a foreigner come into your town," he mused, "who is shaped differently than you, colored differently than you, and dressed differently than you. He is carrying firearms. He doesn't have any women with him, just men and they are all ready for war. You would be a little up-tight too.

"But then you see that these people are honestly trying to help. I can see that we haven't done too much damage to the Cambodian people. We left them pretty much unscathed. And leaving the Cambodian people unscathed, and getting rid of the VC is about as good as you are going to do anywhere, anytime."

