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VIET-NAM BULLETIN

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IN MEMORY OF HUE, TET 1968 (4-70)

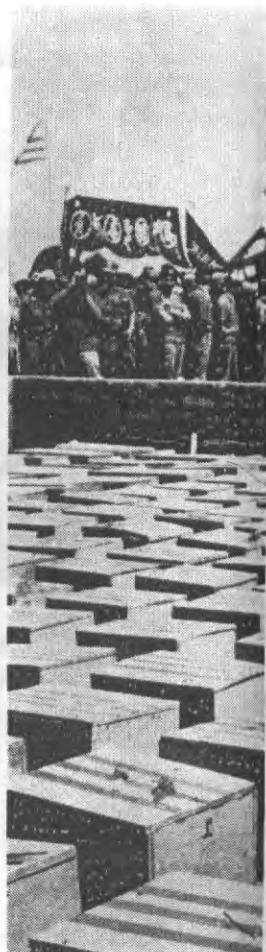


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HUE:



Relatives of victims of red mass murder during 1968 Tet (above) view remains recently unearthed (above). President Thieu (inset, at right) delivers address before rows of coffins at Hue mass burial held last October. Residents of Hue watch funeral cortege (bottom right).



MASS MURDER, MASS BURIAL

By TITO V. CARBALLO



HUE — The heady scent of incense filled the air. A group of Buddhist monks began to chant an elegy to the slow and muted beat of a drum. Beside them, a Roman Catholic priest almost inaudibly said a prayer for the dead.

The religious rites by representatives of two faiths last October 14 at the foot of a barren hill was held so that the souls of unknown victims of the Communist Tet offensive in 1968 could know peace and tranquility.

Under a scorching sun, the mortal remains enclosed in simple, hurriedly made coffins were arranged in neat rows for the mass burial.

Beside each coffin, two black-clad members of the Popular Force of Thua Thien province where this northernmost city of South Vietnam is located, stood at attention, awaiting for the funeral to start.

Some 15,000 mourners in white mourning clothes milled around



Grief was common

the sun-drenched area. Some wept in silence, others hysterically — occasionally looking at each other as if in search of assurance that this was not stark reality but merely a bad dream.

Over 2,000 victims of the red massacre have been found, many of them unidentified. It is estimated that more than 3,000 residents of Hue perished at the hands of the Communists during their occupation of this former imperial city.

Suddenly a hush descended over the area and all eyes turned to a spot where government officials had gathered to pay homage to the dead. President Nguyen Van Thieu stood behind a lectern to deliver a eulogy for the departed. The President, who had flown 1,079 kilometers from Saigon to attend the mass burial for 400 victims, stood silent for a moment.

«Look at these sad faces, then look at these coffins,» he said. «Is this the final freedom offered by the Communists — to lie in a coffin in the ground?»

The President spoke of grief, suffering, sorrow. And he pledged renewed determination never to allow the perpetrators of the brutal murders to again beguile his people with false promises that usually culminate in death for those who oppose them.

This oft repeated and sad scene began in the latter part of last year with discoveries of mass graves where victims were hastily buried before the Communists retreated in the face of a determined onslaught by allied troops to oust them from this city.

Last April 25, 342 bodies, 142 of which were identified and claimed by relatives, were found in a shallow, sandy grave in Vinh Luu hamlet, about 10 kilometers from this city. The 142 unidentified remains were buried some five kilometers from Hue in Nam Giao hamlet,





Madame Pham Thi Cuc, 32, weeps at the coffin of her husband, Pham Duc Do. He was taken prisoner by the Viet Cong and executed with others defending Hue during Communist Tet offensive in 1968. Peasant folk on street weep after sight of bodies found with arms behind them and chained together. Some were shot, some bludgeoned to death and some simply buried alive. Two young sisters (bottom left) tearfully watch ceremonies for their father, who served with the French military.

'Is this the final freedom...?'

where this latest burial was held. Province and city officials say this cemetery of the unknown dead will become a national shrine.

The 400 recently buried victims were discovered last Sept. 29 in a heavily forested area in Nam Hoa hamlet, about 15 kilometers from Hue. Woodcutters stumbled across the grisly discovery after a heavy rain exposed bodies in a common and shallow grave along a creek. The woodcutters hastily reported to their hamlet chief who in turn informed Thua Thien province officials.

Volunteers from the Popular Force were dispatched to the area to exhume the bodies. More than two dozen mass graves have been found in the vicinity where the Communists fought their last big unit battle with the allies (April 30 to May 2, 1968). The more than 2,000 bodies exhumed in and near this city usually were in areas where some of the heaviest fighting during the abortive Communist attempt to take over Hue in February 1968 occurred.

City and province officials said that before the Communists pulled out or were killed, they indiscriminately picked their victims for the massacre.

They said that documents and prisoner interrogation show that the enemy, beside singling out policemen and military men for killing, also murdered farmers, aged women, young girls, and children.

Medical examination of the remains revealed that the majority had their heads bashed in with rifle butts, many had been shot after they were trussed up with wire, their hands behind their backs, and some buried alive hurriedly in shallow graves.

Hoi Chanh (returnees) who rallied to the government side under the **Chieu Hoi** (Open Arms) program pointed out many of the mass graves. These returnees told of a «death march» of innocent

civilians. They related seeing on February 5, 1968 more than 300 persons, young and old, led away by their Communist captors from the Catholic diocese of Phu Cam village where they had sought shelter.

Later in the day, those rounded up had their hands tied behind their backs, were chained together, and forced to march to a site near a tributary of the Perfume River to face a kangaroo court. Some 30 were found «guilty» and were killed on the spot. This was borne out by the discovery of their remains in early August last year.

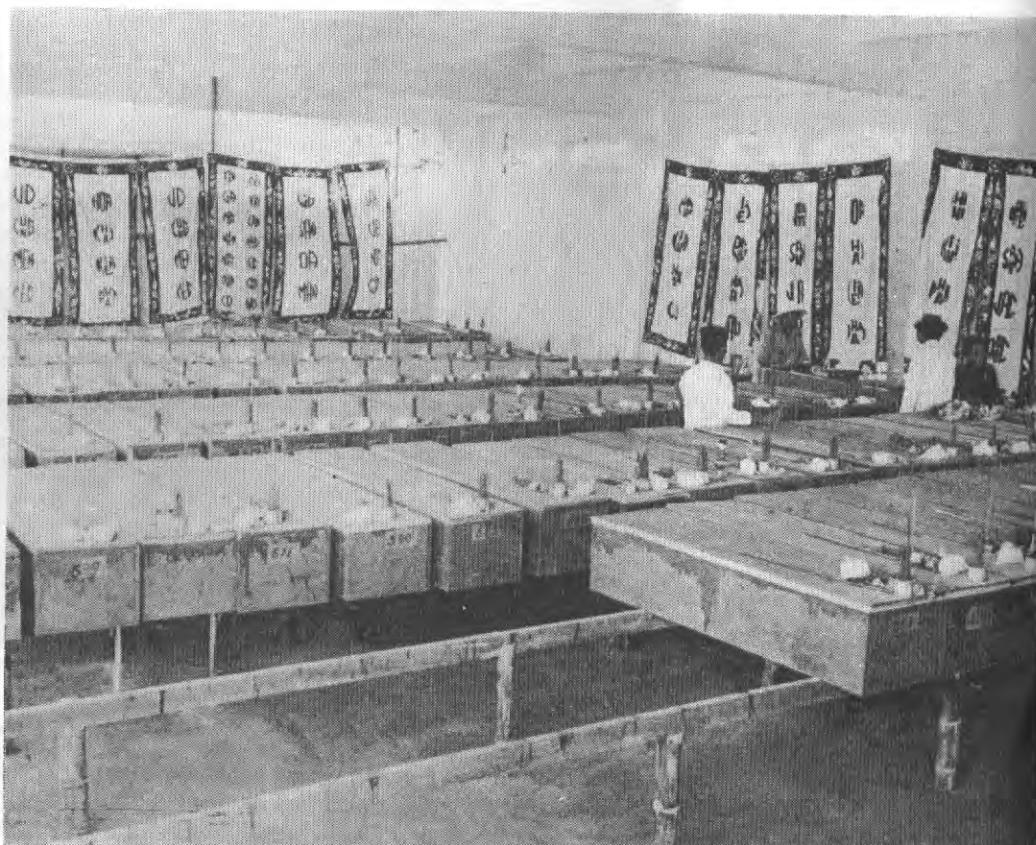
Those spared were given a long lecture by the Communists and warned that the reds were giving up the city after 25 days of occupation only «temporarily.» They said they would be back and expected the people to stay «loyal to Communism.» Failure to do this, they warned, would mean «liquidation» upon their return.

A total of 230 more bodies, among them those of 15 school children, have been recovered since November 12 in Phu Thu district, 14 kilometers southeast of Hue. The children, all about 15 years old, were kidnaped by the Communists from various schools in Hue during the battle for the city during Tet 1968.

Farmers of Duong Mong village vividly remember one night 20 months ago. «They marched the children to the bank of a stream,» one elderly farmer related. «We could hear their cries and screams. Then they killed them.»

On November 14, these newly-found victims of the Communists were buried along with 170 others exhumed recently in Phu Thu district. Some 50,000 lined the roads to the former imperial city. And again, Hue wept openly and unashamedly. — Editor.

Rows of rough plywood coffins with unidentified bodies lie in a school.



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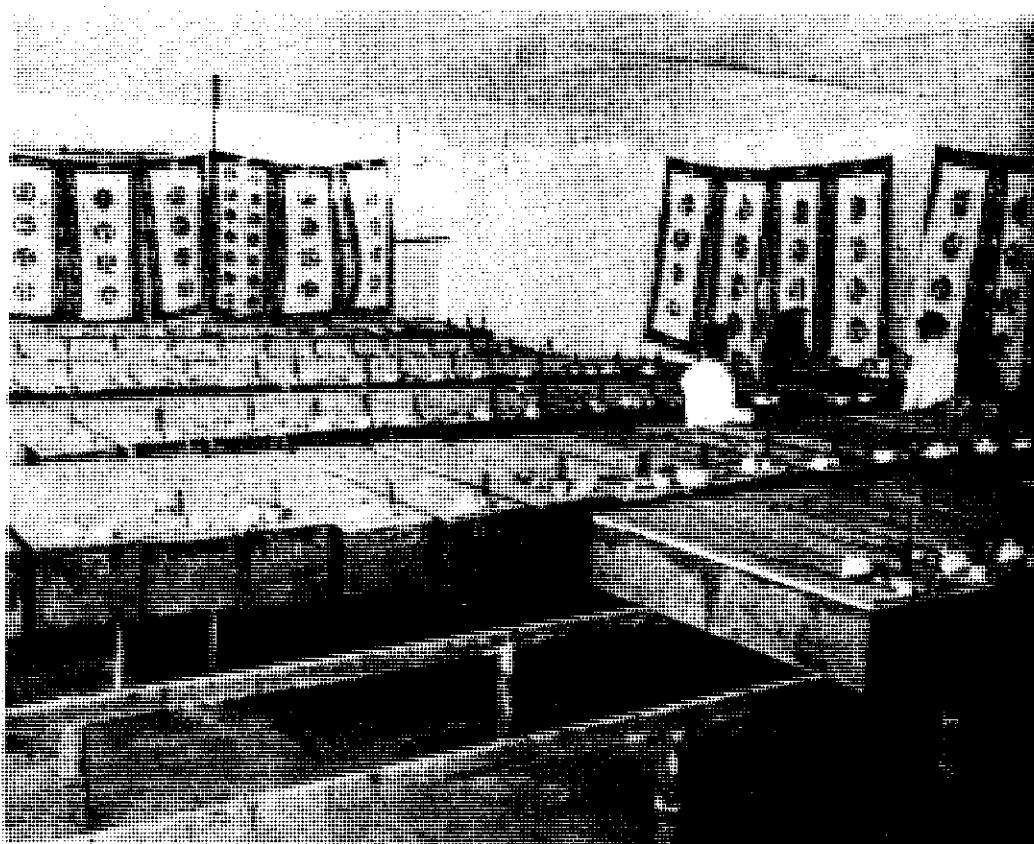
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Gravedigger pulls wire used to tie red victim. Skeletal remains are unloaded from truck in bundles (left). Widow mourns before husband's numbered grave. Coffins are readied for mass funeral.



IN MEMORY OF TET 1968

By Phu Si

In 1968, as the traditional Tet celebrations began in South Vietnam, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces launched an all-out offensive, on the very day that a mutually agreed upon cease-fire went into effect. In the annals of history that Tet offensive will go down as one of the most treacherous and deceitful acts in modern times, surpassing the «Day of In-

famy» at Pearl Harbor in December of 1941.

All of South Vietnam suffered during the Tet offensive, but hardest hit was the city of Hue, the old imperial capital of Vietnam, located on the South China Sea. A mere recounting of statistics would add little to what has not already been said and written

about Tet 1968. But now that two years have gone by and the nation wonders what this year of the Dog will bring, a brief account of what this tragedy meant to one family will place the memory of the Tet offensive into a more personal perspective.

Mr. Tran Xuan Duc, an elderly widower retired in Hue, where he lived with his two teen-age sons. To a large extent he depended upon the support of his eldest son, Tran Xuan An, who was a village schoolteacher, married and father of three young children. The day before Tet, An and his family came to his father's home to celebrate the Lunar New Year. As usual, at twelve midnight, the noise of firecrackers welcomed the event, but was then followed by the intermittent crackle of rifle fire. At first the family thought that soldiers were firing their guns to welcome the New Year. But when the shooting grew heavier and was joined by thundering blasts of heavy howitzers, they realized this was no Tet celebration.

At dawn, the shooting died down. Through the cracks of his door, Mr. Duc saw six Viet Cong soldiers guarding a streetcrossing near his home. For the next few days the enemy did little to disturb the people. Viet Cong cadres went about ordering families to raise the Buddhist flag. They distributed National Liberation Front flags to every third house and ordered the homeowners to display it alongside the Buddhist one. On the fourth day, the enemy ordered all civil servants and military personnel to surrender to them.

Mr. Duc advised his son An not to surrender immediately, but to wait and see. Some others on the street did go and returned shortly and reported that nothing much had happened. The enemy soldiers took their identification cards, registered names, organizations, positions and addresses and then is-



Tet holds sad memories for Mrs. An and her three young sons.



Memorial service for Tran Xuan An, who was murdered during the enemy's Tet offensive on Hue in 1968.

sued a certificate of surrender. Somewhat reassured, An turned himself in, mainly in fear of being punished if the enemy caught him hiding. Like the others, he returned home unharmed.

For the following eight days, the enemy did not visit the Duc home. Heavy battles were fought in the city, particularly in the imperial palace grounds, and no one ventured out of the house. Then one morning, two Viet Cong soldiers appeared and told An to pack enough food for five days of indoctrination training. They ordered him to leave immediately. So Mr. Duc took a bag, poured in 15 litres of rice, some dry food, a few garments, a blanket and a mosquito net along with 800 piasters (US\$ 6.75). The family bade An good luck and a speedy return.

That was the last anyone saw of him. For a year and a half the family waited for word and searched for some clue to his whereabouts. Mr.

Duc, An's wife and the children clung to the hope and belief that he was alive. They were convinced that no one would kill a man for no reason whatever. An was a teacher. He was not a member of the armed forces nor did he work for a political party. He taught young children and earned a modest living.

Then the city of Hue was rocked by the discovery of the first mass grave and reports that thousands of civilians had been murdered after being forced to carry weapons, ammunition and food supplies for the enemy on their withdrawal from Hue. When yet another mass grave was discovered Mr. Duc, despite his conviction, went, as did thousands of others, to check for some possible trace of his son. About half a dozen times he elbowed his way through the crowds whenever another mass grave was found. He found nothing and his hope were strengthened that maybe, after all, An was still alive, still in enemy hands but

sooner or later would be released.

Mr. Duc's search ended at the mass grave of Da Mai Brook, some ten kilometers from Hue. There he found the ragged remains of a shirt An wore when he left the house with the two Viet Cong soldiers. Mr. Duc remembered the shirt well for it was one of three sportshirts An's wife had given him for his 28th birthday. He also discovered An's string of beads with a small medallion of the Buddha.

This year's Tet was no joyous occasion for the family. Nor was it for the families of more than three thousand other victims in Hue who met An's fate.

Mr. Duc has grown older, weaker and sadder. To him Tet is a memorial to his beloved son and recalls the heart-rending sight of his young daughter-in-law lying prostrate before the family altar and her barely audible moan of «Why, oh why, did they have to kill him?»

AT THE LATEST COUNT

According to the judicious calculations of an authority, Mr. Douglas Pike in his recently published book The Viet-Cong Strategy of Terror, the findings of mass graves in Hue and surrounding areas have borne out the worst fears entertained by the Vietnamese with regard to the "humanity" of the Communist enemy. Most of these victims were led away under the pretext of going to attend "education sessions," little did they realize that the Communists meant these "sessions" to be their last in this world. Recapitulation of the dead and missing:

After the battle, the GVN's total estimated civilian casualties resulting from the battle of Hue	7600
Wounded (hospitalized or outpatients) with injuries attributable to warfare	<u>-1900</u>
Subtotal	5700
Estimated civilian deaths due to accident of battle	<u>-944</u>
Subtotal	4756
First Finds--Bodies discovered immediately post-battle, 1968	<u>-1173</u>
Subtotal	3583
Second Finds, including Sand Dune Finds, March - July, 1969 (est.)	<u>-809</u>
Subtotal	2774
Third Find, Da Mai Creek Find (Nam Hoa district), September, 1969	<u>-428</u>
Subtotal	2346
Fourth Finds--Phu Thu Salt Flat Find, November, 1969 (est.)	<u>-300</u>
Subtotal	2046
Miscellaneous finds during 1969 (approximate)	<u>-100</u>
TOTAL YET UNACCOUNTED FOR	1946

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