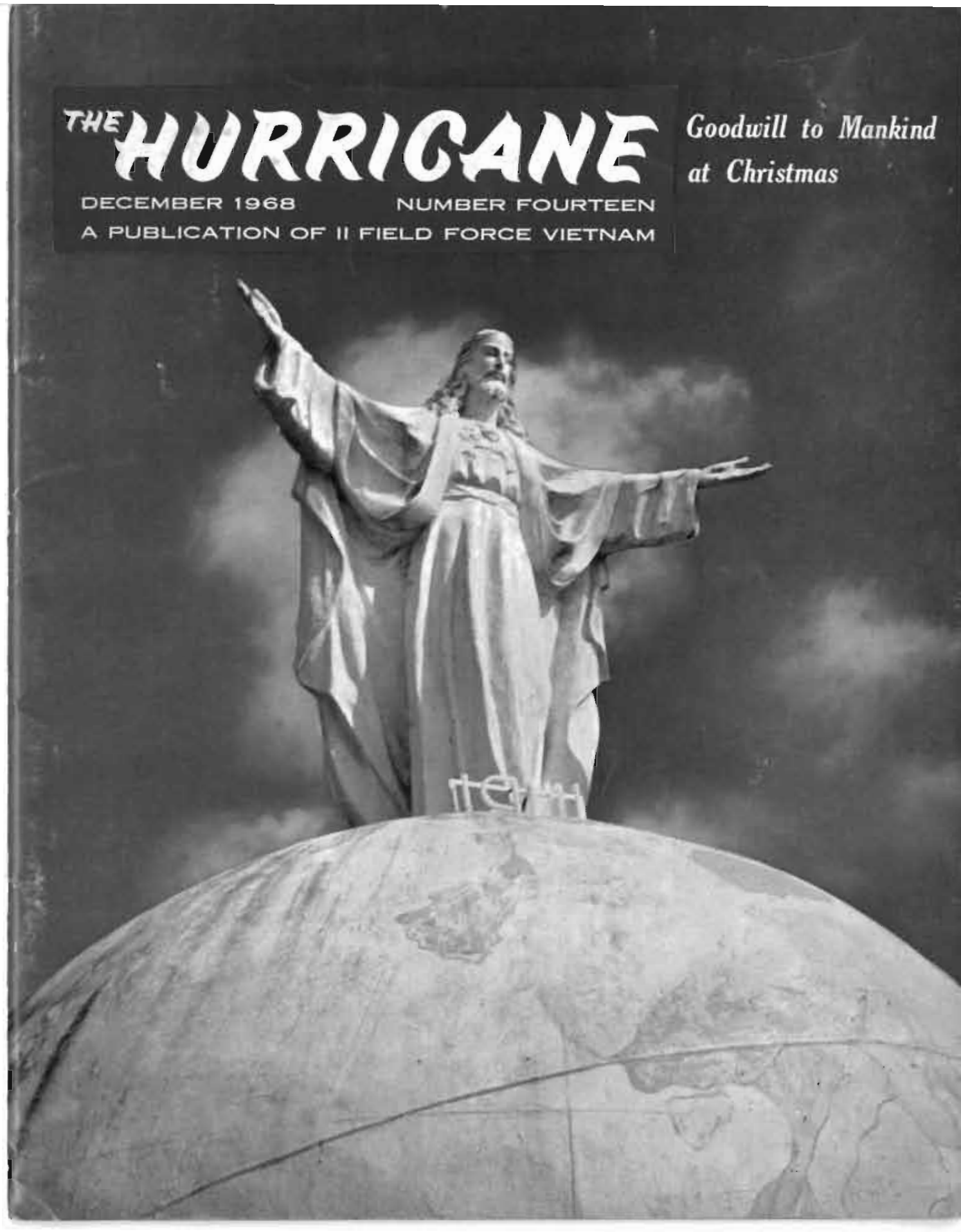
THE HURRICANE

Goodwill to Mankind at Christmas

DECEMBER 1968 NUMBER FOURTEEN
A PUBLICATION OF II FIELD FORCE VIETNAM



FROM THE COMMANDER AT CHRISTMAS

Peace on Earth,

Goodwill Toward Men

Walter T. Kerwin, Jr.

Walter T. Kerwin, Jr.
Lieutenant General, USA
Commanding

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The front cover this month symbolizes the Christmas spirit in Vietnam. To men of all faiths, creeds and beliefs, the HURRICANE wishes a Merry Christmas and a hope for peace in a better world.

On page 16, SP5 Wayne Walker begins a photo essay on the Saigon Zoo. His excellent photographs provide temporary relief from the day-to-day tension of the war.

The HURRICANE Province this month is Binh Duong—a microcosm of Vietnam. Read LT Robert Pfohman's story on page 6.

If you want to send the Hurricane home for free, make it an inclosure to a personal letter and send it in a 5×11 inch envelope. Or, you may send it for 40 cents in an 8½×11 inch envelope.

We welcome comments about the contents and layout of the magazine. Write to: Editor, The HURRICANE, II FFV APO (In Country) 96266.

The Editor

MONTAGNARD P. 2

BINH DUONG P. 6

ZOO P. 16

PORTRAIT P. 28

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53D SIGNAL BATTALION *Photo Support*

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The Airlifted Village

A Necessary Migration is Successful

story and photos by SFC Don Kidd

Sometimes war forces men to give up their homes and their lands. Such times are never good, but sometimes they are necessary. Such was the case recently when more than 700 Montagnard tribesmen were airlifted out of enemy territory in Phuoc Long province.

And it was their idea. Since the beginning of August, more than 2,800 refugees have voluntarily come in to government areas to escape enemy harassment. In mid-August the Duc Phong District Chief, Major Tran Ngoc Hue, received word—via a Special Forces patrol—that the villagers at Bu Lach wanted to escape Viet Cong domination. They were asking the Government of South Vietnam for help, and—in no time—it was on the way.

With the help of American Special Forces and refugee advisors, the detailed plans for the operation were drawn up. On the evening of September 18, two government Special Forces companies and a recon

A Montagnard woman carries a dog to the waiting helicopter (left.) The only villagers left were old people and children (right)

Montagnards Go Airmobile

platoon with their American advisors left the security of district headquarters and moved out on National Highway 14.

Their mission was to travel 12 kilometers to the hamlet of Bu Lach in enemy territory and secure the landing zone for the evacuation of an estimated 1,200 Montagnard people to a government controlled area. By 8:00 pm, they were about an hour away from district headquarters. Then "Charlie" opened up.

The small force of Montagnards, Vietnamese and American advisors lay down a heavy base of fire in the dark, and routed the enemy. Friendly casualties were light. The commander of the force decided to move 400 meters up the road and wait for daybreak before going any farther.

Next morning, the force made a straight, unopposed, run for Bu Lach. By 9:00 am, they had swept the village and surrounding area and radioed that the LZ was secure.

The Montagnards waited patiently at their new homesite while their relatives were flown in from the old village

A platoon of Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) soldiers along with Major Tran and American advisors boarded one of four huge CH-47A Chinook helicopters at Duc Phong airstrip and headed for the landing zone.

Ten minutes later, the Chinook roared down onto the grass-covered, sloping plateau overlooking a cluster of a dozen thatch houses and a brilliant green valley. Gunships, circling low over the landing zone, added to the noise.

Frigbtened by the noise, water buffalo, cows, pigs, goats, dogs, chickens and ducks ran terrified in all directions.

Some 50 meters away a group of 50 Montagnard men, women and children with most of their worldly belongings waited for the signal to scramble into the Chinook.

In less than 10 minutes they were aboard, and the Chinook roared off the ground and headed for the resettlement area at Hoa Dong.

Two thousand meters away in another part of the village, First Lieutenant Byrd Mac Sasser, 21, was guiding the second Chinook in for the extraction of 200 villagers there.

In all, there were four Chinooks involved in the operation. They were from the 205th Assault Support Helicopter Company at Phu Loi.

By 11:30 am, 200 people had been evacuated from one site and an equal number from the other site. Despite a late start, things were moving swiftly. The villagers were well organized, and there was no doubt in anyone's mind that they wanted to leave.

The tremendous wash of twin-rotored Chinooks played havoc with straw hats, baskets, mats and little children on landings and take-off. The children clung tightly to their mothers; some cried, while others just stared wide-eyed at the confusion of wind and noise.

One thing, however, was strikingly obvious. There were few young men and women present.

The VC had taken care of that a few days before by kidnapping the young men and women for laborers. At the extraction site were the old and the very young—primitive people leaving their homes forever and taking their first flight. Old women and men carried precious belongings in huge baskets overloaded with rice, crockery, pots, chickens, ducks and even puppies.

A CIDG soldier guides his own family to the landing zone

A little boy carrying a huge stalk of bananas, staggered down a path toward the landing zone. He fell with them, and a Vietnamese soldier helped him carry them to the marshaling area.

A little girl of, perhaps, eight years huddled with her family and jealously guarded four, week-old puppies in a basket.

Noontime—and still they came. Things were moving more swiftly than had been expected and there was time to take more personal belongings and livestock. Everyone from Major Tran and his American advisors to the Vietnamese Special Forces and the CIDG's (all Montagnards themselves) assisted in the evacuation.

The scene was a kaleidoscope of tragedy, pathos, comedy, fright, happiness, confusion, anticipation and—somehow—efficient organization as the Chinooks flew sortie after sortie.

Midafternoon at the resettlement area was the same thing—but in reverse. Several hundred people watched and waited in an open grassy field as the Chinooks brought relatives and friends in from Bu Lach. Adjacent to the field was the refugee village of neatly layed out thatch houses and a mobile registration team provided by the government. By 4 pm, all the people of Bu Lach and nearby areas were safely at Hoa Dong with all their rice and belongings.

The unofficial count of people was put at more than 700. For them there would be no more VC terror or harassment. They now would have a new life in a new village with government protection, medical care and food.

Back at Bu Lach, Lt. Sasser, the executive officer of Detachment A-343 of Company A, 5th Special Forces Group, and his Vietnamese counterpart watched the last Chinook leave.

The company-sized Special Forces unit had one last job to do—deny the VC the houses and domestic animals left behind by the fleeing Montagnards.

The simple, thatched Montagnard huts were not much of a problem; they burned to the ground in seconds. The water buffalo and cattle required a different solution. Lt. Sasser and his men organized a cattle drive and drove their charges the 12 miles from Bu Lach to Hoa Dong—quite a feat when one considers that the entire "cattle drive" was made through enemy-held territory.

HURRICANE PROVINCE

Binh Duong

Microcosm of South Vietnam

by Lieutenant Robert Pfohman

photos by SP5 Joel Whitsell

Binh Duong province is a microcosm of South Vietnam. Nearly all of Vietnam's distinguishing characteristics are mirrored in this tiny land.

The vast majority of the people live in the southern part of the province. The southern districts are well developed and have a sophisticated, educated, functioning society. Government of Vietnam (GVN) control extends into the night in some areas in the south. North and west, however, the countryside turns to primitive, VC-infested jungle. The enemy controls all of this area except for district capitals. As a miniature of its fatherland, Binh Duong features everything from a well-developed city to a triple-canopy jungle. The province has the same problems and successes as the nation does.

Early Vietnamese settlers called the area "Binh Duong," which means "peaceful west." But with the highest number of enemy-initiated actions in III Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ) last year, Binh Duong province

hardly lives up to its name. Instead, it should be called the "unpeaceful west."

With 1,170 square miles of territory, this microcosm is slightly larger than the state of Rhode Island. Approximately 70 percent of Binh Duong's 274,000 residents live in the southern quarter of the province. This densely populated area has great quantities of rice and fruit growing in the flat plains land. Saigon military officials have declared it a national priority area because of its strategic location and population concentration. Despite this, the enemy has long made the province a base for attacks on the national capital. With War Zone C in the west and War Zone D in the east, the enemy has been able to gather his forces for the final thrusts at the national capital—and the province capital of Phu Cuong is a scant 20 miles from Saigon.

Bordering Binh Duong on the north are Binh Long and Phuoc Long provinces; on the south is Gia Dinh; and on the east are Long Khanh and Bien Hoa provinces. Tay Ninh and Hau Nghia provinces form the western boundary. The microcosm is geographically in the heart of III CTZ.

Like Vietnam as a whole, Binh Duong has existed as a political entity for only a short time. It was created in 1956 from the south and central districts of Thu Dau Mot province. But the area has a long history of conflict. The Cham Indian tribe, which used to live in what is now Binh Duong, was among the earliest and most powerful nations in that part of Vietnam. A civil war broke out among the Chams and neighboring Vietnamese warlords saw an opportunity to get more territory for themselves. This eventually led to the ousting of the Chams and a complete takeover by the Vietnamese.

In the late 17th century, the villages and hamlets in the southern part of what is now the province were governed by Vietnamese mandarins and the dense jungles in the northern part of the province were uninhabited. Vietnamese expansion lasted until 1861, when a French military expedition arrived to explore the area. Phu Cuong was founded and rubber trees were planted by the new colonial rulers.

Because of the province's agricultural potential, French colonial officials carefully guided the region's economic development. The Michelin Rubber Company cleared away the jungle in the northwestern part of the province and started cultivating rubber in 1923. The French instituted many projects designed to improve the region, just as they did throughout what is now North and South Vietnam. Besides large-scale irrigation projects, an inter-district and inter-province roadbuilding project was begun. By 1937, the province was considered by the French to be a highly developed cultural center. The production of rubber, lumber, fruit, pottery, lacquerware and porcelain increased steadily until the outbreak of World War II.

The province has the highest number of enemy-initiated incidents in III Corps Tactical Zone

Binh Duong province has a tremendous agricultural potential

During the Japanese occupation of Vietnam, the present airfield at Phu Loi was used by the Japanese to attack allied shipping, but Japanese forces generally limited their influence to the economic side of things. Agricultural production was increased, since the economic development of this region was given a high priority in the Japanese occupation plan.

The 1954 Geneva Accords gave independence to South Vietnam. However, stability for Binh Duong, like Vietnam, did not come with freedom. For example, there were five province chiefs during an 18-month period ending in 1965. At that time, the nation also was in a period of political upheaval following the overthrow of the Diem government in 1963. Finally, in October of 1965, Lieutenant Colonel Ly Ton Ba was given the post. His administration provided the badly needed stabilization. Both Vietnamese and American officials hold Colonel Ba in high regard. "Colonel Ba is a courageous soldier as well as a good administrator. He would go out on operations with the RF (Regional Forces) and PF (Popular Forces) as well as stay overnight with the villagers in hamlets," said Colonel Alfred Kitts, former province senior advisor.

Colonel Ba was replaced in September by Lieutenant Colonel Tran Van Nguyen.

As the fighting picked up in the early 1960's, enemy units had freedom of movement in Binh Duong province. There were no large military actions initiated to curb their influence until 1966. The First Infantry Division (Big Red One) conducted several operations designed to support the pacification program. Operation Cedar Falls was set in motion. The objective of this operation was to relocate the villagers from the enemy-controlled hamlets of Ben Suc, Bung Cong and Rach Bap and to destroy a long-time enemy base camp area. Operations such as this began to take effect on the enemy and his ability to accommodate large numbers of troops

Binh Duong

Microcosm of the Nation

in the southern part of the province. By early 1967, the enemy reverted to Phase Two of what military officials feel to be his plan. He now emphasizes unit actions, including harassment and sabotage.

By June, 1967, with the main force units finally driven into the jungles of the northern part of the province, Colonel Ba was free to carry on the province pacification plan on a more solid footing. According to Colonel Kitts, credit for much of the progress of the pacification program belongs to Colonel Ba.

The Tet Truce Violations came at a time when the pacification prog am was gaining momentum in the province. Though many areas were still contested, especially in the sparsely populated north, important strides were being taken.

There were elements of two enemy divisions in the province, each moving south to attack Saigon and the province capital. American and Vietnamese officials were aware of the enemy's intentions before the attack actually started, thanks to a tip from a local farmer. Once the information was verified, artillery fire and tactical air support were rained in on the enemy positions. This massed firepower was an important factor in breaking the backs of the subsequent attacks on the province capital.

After Tet, provincial officials were faced with the backbreaking job of reconstruction. The Vietnamese staff responded by organizing emergency recovery teams even before ordered to by Saigon. Responsible citizens in the province were organized to maintain control over the all-important rice stockpiles. The food for refugees was housed in temporary shelters until it was safe for the people to return to their hamlets.

Figures later revealed that a total of 4,000 homes had been destroyed, creating more than 31,000 refugees. Large rural areas were threatened, driving refugees into the security of the cities and overburdening the already

Miss Jackie Heggemann, the "Chicken Lady of South Vietnam," advises villagers about scientific methods of chicken raising. She has created an industry

crowded towns. Refugees are still a problem in Binh Duong, as they are in South Vietnam in general.

The province advisory staff is organized for maximum efficiency. Approximately 200 people make up the staff. According to Colonel Kitts, they are a diverse group with representatives from the State Department, USAID, PHILCAGV, JUSPAO, Army, Navy and Air Force.

Staff responsibility for Revolutionary Development (RD) belongs to Army Captain Bob Antonuic, acting province advisor for Revolutionary Development. The RD program is progressing, despite the fighting going on in the province. Even though Tet and the subsequent fighting will prevent the completion of the 1968 program as scheduled, officials are nevertheless optimistic.

Agriculture is one of the more successful programs in the province. The IR-8 rice program is progressing well according to Walt Begley, CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) agricultural advisor. So successful has IR-8 production been that Binh Duong was selected as a "must" visit for Orville Freeman, Secretary of Agriculture, on his recent trip to Vietnam. If present production rates continue, Binh Duong will be self-sufficient in rice production within two years.

Another who has done much to promote agriculture is Jackie Heggemann, the famed "chicken lady" of South Vietnam. This former Peace Corps women has proven to be a valuable asset to the province. She helps the chicken raising program in the refugee villages. In this program, refugees borrow enough money from the Agriculture Development Bank to buy 200 chickens. After eight weeks, the chickens bring a 20,000 piaster profit. The demand for chickens far outstrips the supply.

A civil affairs platoon is kept busy coordinating civic action projects with local military units. Under the supervision of Captain Cecil Woolums, the platoon has done much to help the villagers help themselves.

When the war is over on a national scale, this microcosm of Vietnam will once again be the land of the peaceful west. Then progress will accelerate with peace and turn both the province and the nation into a developing country, rather than a struggling one.

Lacquerware and pottery industries are impartant in Binh Duong. Thanh Le lacquerware won a gold metal at an international exhibition in Germany in 1964

The Scouts Are Coming

Scouting in Vietnam is Healthy, Moral . . . And Fun

by SSG Gary Livengood

photos by SP5 Joel Whitsell

"Raise up the Boy Scout flag, heroic and bright—together we go to build a new life," sing the uniformed youngsters, signaling the start of another Boy Scout meeting in South Vietnam.

The scouts are members of the 6,000-strong Vietnamese Scout Association (VSA) that is laying a basis for strong moral leadership of the nation in the future and is also giving the youngsters a good dose of fun—in a land where fun is too often shoved into the background.

The singing of the VSA song was especially joyful for the scouts on this occasion. They were participating in a two-day campout (rare, due to lack of security throughout the country) in Vung Tau.

As they gleefully chanted the songs and clasped hands in a circular formation, the scouts, wearing their rustic brown hats, awaited the signal to begin the hike. It came, and they moved out along the sandy beaches of the South China Sea, shouting their happiness at the tops of their voices.

Scouting is taken with as much seriousness in Vietnam as in America, and the emphasis on the moral aspects of a clean and good life are the same. But outward forms of scouting are somewhat different, and more difficult than the American.

When new members are to join a Cub Scout pack, for example, the pack assembles in a circle facing outwards with hands linked. The hopeful candidates signal with a hoot of an owl and the first member of the pack calls for them to try and enter the circle. The candidates try to forcibly break the circle at various points and are repelled. They are then challenged by other scouts to perform various scoutcraft tasks. If they fail any of the tests, they are not admitted that day but must return and repeat the same procedure the following week. This shows the candidates the importance of scoutcraft knowledge and the close bonds of scouting. It also shows the Cubs who are members of the pack the difficulty of the barriers they have already passed.

When a Cub is to graduate to Boy Scouting, the pack of Cubs and the troop of Boy Scouts hold a joint meeting. A gateway is set up between the two and after the meetings of both groups are opened, the Cubmaster takes

Cub Scouts answer woodcraft questions during a meeting in Saigon (above.) Boy Scouts make a bamboo tent frame as an elementary exercise in scoutcraft (below)

Boy Scouts from the Cuu Long (Nine Dragons) District in Saigon enjoy games during a weekly meeting at the Saigon Zoo

Boy Scouts

the boy to be graduated to the gate. The Scoutmaster meets the two there and a discussion, which may last for half-hour, ensues. The gateway represents the boundary between the city, where the majority of Cub activities are conducted, and the countryside where the Boy Scouts usually meet.

The Vietnamese scouts place a great deal of importance on their ceremonies, making careful preparations, enforcing discipline to a high degree and quite often showing a great deal of emotion. They also feel that the ceremonies are an important part of the communication process within the group. The unity of the entire movement is reinforced by the fact that the ceremonies are the same in all areas.

The ceremonies are constructed so that they meet the ideals of all scouts and leaders in South Vietnam. These ideals —duty to God, patriotism, character, competence, democracy, leadership and means of encouragement—are essential in molding the youth of the country.

Phan Than Hy, president of the Boy Scouts of Vietnam, says, "our country is at war—therefore we need to instill unity and loyalty—more importantly we try and mold sound moral character."

A system of doing and recording at least one good deed each day is also used to build better citizens. Each scout has a log book of his good deeds and the book is checked weekly.

In addition to good deeds, the scouts help in their districts on flood, fire and war relief programs, anti-illiteracy campaigns, fund drives for disaster victims, social development, improved public hygiene and refugee camp construction.

For example, during the Tet Truce Violations and the "Second Wave" attacks in May, the scouts of the 16 districts in Saigon handed together to help evacuate refugees, care for the wounded and help resettle refugees. During the fighting, a few scouts were wounded and one was killed, according to Mr. Hy.

The 48-year-old president, an attorney, has been active in the Boy Scouts for 25 years and has been president for the past eight years. His family is actively engaged in scouting because his three sons are scouts. His oldest, 16-year-old Phan Than Huy, is a patrol leader in the Boy Scouts in Tan Binh district in Saigon.

Cubs, Boy Scouts and Rovers are the three branches of scouting. The Cubs (Au or Soi) are usually from seven to 12 years old. Eight Cubs form a den (dan) which is led by a "head of den." The leader is himself a Cub Scout. Two to four dens make up a Cub Scout pack.

Boy Scouts (Thieu Sinh) range from 11 to 18 years old and four to eight scouts form a patrol. One of the Scouts is patrol leader. Two to four patrols make a troop.

Members of the eldest group, Rovers (Thong Sinh), range in age from 17 to 25. A patrol is made of five to 10 Rovers. A troop consists of two to four patrols.

The organization of Vietnamese Boy Scouts is simple. The Cub pack, Scout troop and Rover units together make up a "group," with their own leaders and assistants. Upon graduation from a pack, a Cub usually joins the troop in the same group but, if he prefers, he can join another. The same holds true for Scouts who move into the Rover programs.

Mr. Nguyen Dang Lap, district commissioner of the Tan Binh District in Saigon, supervises a group of Cubs.

Boy Scouts from near Phu Cuong in Binh Duong province are on a two-day campout. The campouts are welcomed as a nice change from routine

Several groups form a district, supervised by a district chief. The chief, helped by one or more assistants and one branch commissioner for each of the three phases of scouting, is responsible for the operation of the district program, for all the unit programs and for the selection and replacement of leaders. The 28 districts in South Vietnam are administered directly by the national committee and the national commissioner's staff.

On the local level, districts (dao) are established in areas where scouting is strong, and separate associations (Lion Doan) are in areas where the movement is weaker.

Using the traditions established by Baden Powell and the British and French movements, the Boy Scouts of Vietnam Program (Huong Dao) has made substantial gains since it was organized in 1926.

The first troops were organized in what is now North Vietnam. Other units were organized throughout the country and joined together in an organization called "Boy Scouts of Central Vietnam." Because of poor leadership, most of the troops organized in this period were short lived.

In 1937, the formation of the Indochinese Scout Association gave some backbone to the Vietnamese scouting effort. A permanent committee was established in Hanoi and training courses were organized for leaders. During this period the scouts were able to conduct Jamborees and Rover meets. Scouting guidelines and magazines were also published.

During World War II and the following war against French domination, Scouting in Vietnam received short shrift. In 1957, however, the Vietnamese Association was accepted by the World Bureau and rapid progress has been made in South Vietnam since then.

The organization has been strengthened with the establishment of a central office in Saigon and the improvement of the leaders' training centers located at Dalat and Vung Tau. Many handbooks and manuals have been reprinted and distributed.

The VSA has participated in the international movement, sending representatives to World Jamborees in 1958 and 1963 and to regional and worldwide Congresses of Leaders in 1955 through 1962. Vietnamese leaders attended the Asia Conference in Seoul in October.

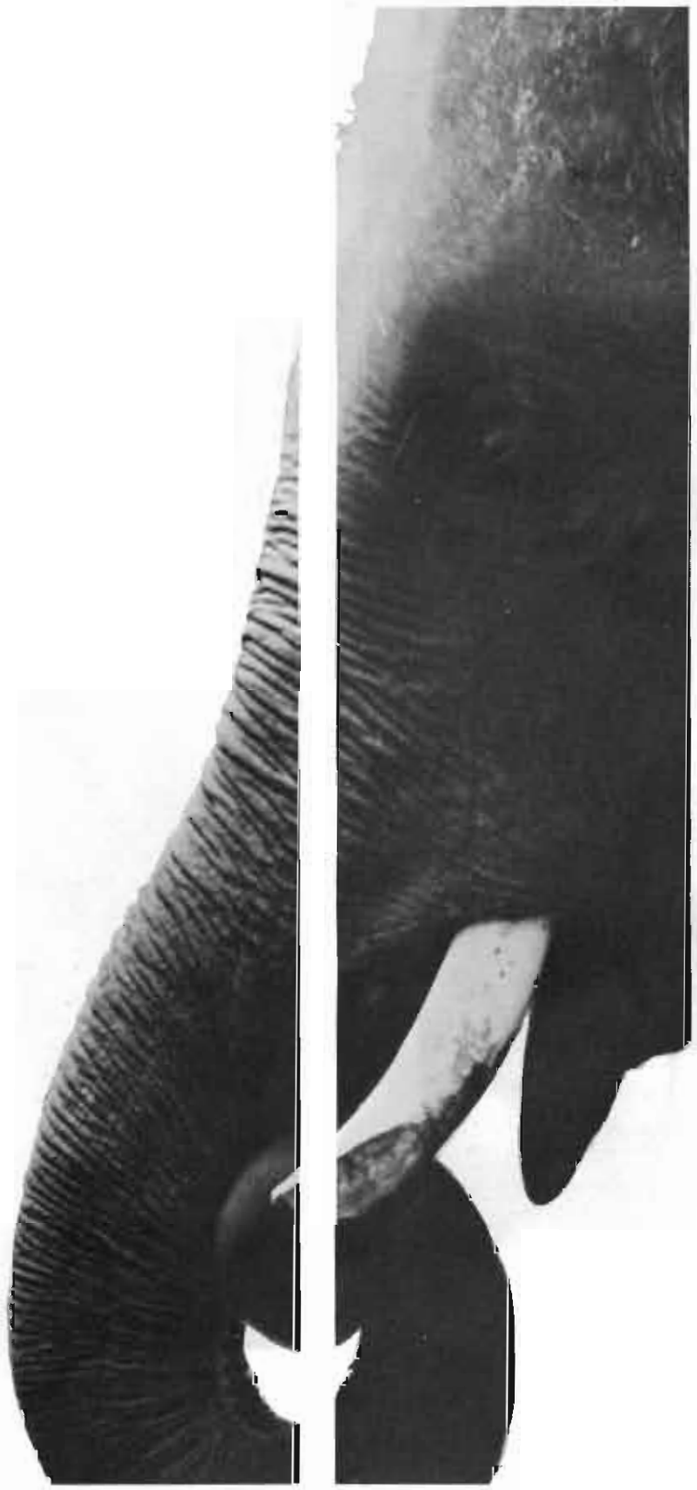
The war in Vietnam has taken its toll and reduced the number of trained men available to fill the positions of responsibility at district and area level.

"We need more leaders to realize the goals of the Boy Scouts, stated Mr. Hy. "We only have approximately 850 leaders for the more than 6,000 scouts," he said.

The lack of leaders is partly caused by the draft, but even soldiers help the program. Nguyen Dang Lap, commissioner of Tan Binh district in Saigon, is a master sergeant with a social services company in Saigon. Convinced of the importance of scouting, the 35-year-old commissioner gives all of his spare time to the movement. He feels his efforts are worthwhile—his district now has more than 300 scouts.

His contributions were rewarded recently as a new district headquarters was dedicated for Tan Binh district. He and his scouts completely remodeled a building, and now have a comfortable place to hold their weekly meetings in.

"This is a step forward," says Mr. Lap. "When the conflict has ended I anticipate great strides forward for the scouting movement," he said.



The Saigon Zoo

photo essay

by SP5 Wayne Walker

The Saigon Zoo, found in 1864 by a Frenchman named J.B. Louis Pierre, occupies 80 acres in the northeast of Saigon.

The zoo has more than 5,000 plants and 500 animals from all over the world. In addi-

Let's Go to the Zoo

tion, it is used as a testing center for foreign plants to see if they can adapt to Vietnam's climate and soil.

The main gate of the zoo faces the Independence Palace, which houses the office of the President of Vietnam. The zoo is covered with grass and colorful flowers and has a quiet atmosphere.

It's the Same Everywhere

ARVN Basic Training

Makes Combat-Ready Soldiers

story and photos by SP5 Ronald Pejsa

Basic training is much the same all over the world. A stern-looking drill sergeant barking "drop;" seemingly endless miles of double-timing up and down rolling hills; daily inspections; a clock that seems to defiantly stand still. In Vietnam, another horror is embedded in the minds of all trainees—an elusive and deadly enemy is lurking everywhere.

It is the mission of the isolated 18th ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Division training center at Gia Ray, Long Khanh province, to prepare newly drafted Vietnamese soldiers to combat this enemy. The ARVN basic and advanced individual training (AIT) lasts a total of nine weeks, opposed to a usual eight weeks of basic and another eight weeks of AIT in the States.

The first five weeks at Gia Ray are devoted to basic military subjects. Emphasis is placed on weaponry, first aid, military discipline and physical training. The final four weeks, devoted to advanced individual training, teach infantry tactics. More than 90 percent of all the ARVN soldiers receive advanced infantry

ARVN Basic Training

training. The others learn about artillery, administrative procedures or other specialized tasks in ARVN.

Vietnam has no national guard or reserve units, so all the men who report to the Gia Ray training center are draftees. "This creates a morale problem even before we begin. They are like men everywhere. They do not want to leave their wives, girl friends or families, particularly with the uncertainty before them. We try to instill a pride in them, make them not only feel a part of a company but make them feel they want to be a part. This is done largely through singing patriotic and military songs and by having each platoon wear its own colorful scarf," according to Lieutenant Colonel Tran Van Nhut, commanding officer of the training center.

Another morale booster is the fact that the trainees are allowed to have

Like their American counterparts, soldiers in Vietnam's basic training courses practice camouflage. The art of concealment may save the trainee's life while he is still in basic

their families visit them on weekends. "More often than not the families follow the trainees around until they are assigned to regular units. This makes them better soldiers. They feel better and fight better with their loved ones near. And, they know if they train well during the week, they can look forward to seeing them on the weekend," according to Colonel Nhut.

A trainee's morning begins with a familiar reveille formation at 5 am. First item on the schedule is a half-hour of physical training—pushups, situps, knee bends, squat thrusts and more pushups, topped off with a two-mile run around the camp just before breakfast. After breakfast, the men return to their ageing wooden billets for clean-up details. There are no tile or concrete floors to scrub but there are wooden floors to be swept, wooden bunks to be made and dusted, and areas to police up cigarette butts, papers and tin cans.

Classroom training begins at 8 am and continues until noon. After a lunch of fish, rice and soup the troops are given until two o'clock to prepare themselves for afternoon training. Classes are completed about 6:30 p.m. Mornings are usually devoted to lectures on military courtesy, military discipline and initial exposure to weaponry. Application of lessons learned in the morning is taught in the afternoon.

Rifle practice is one of the most popular exercises. "Before we began using the M-16 it was one of the most unpopular. We were using the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) or the M-1 and the soldiers were afraid of the recoil. It was heavy for them and hard to handle. The M-16 is much lighter and more their size. They take excellent care of it and are becoming exceptional shots," according to Colonel Nhut. The soldiers also continue to practice with the BAR and M-1.

Colonel Nhut notices distinct differences in the attitudes and abilities of his trainees from the farmlands and those from the villages. "The farmers are excellent in jungle and field training while the city boys are much more afraid of the jungle and its uncertainties. On the other hand, the farm boys are very slow in technical classes such as map reading while the city boys zip right through," the colonel said.

The farm boys also are particularly adept at finding edible food in the jungle. "It is easy for them to differentiate between normal-looking bushes, weeds and plants which have a food content and those that don't. Greens you and I would overlook could very well be the food that might save your life if we were ever lost or stranded," according to the colonel.

The Tet Truce Violations quickly made another phase of training mandatory in the curriculum—city fighting. Before Tet the soldiers were taught only jungle warfare. "Tet showed us the necessity and importance of understanding building-to-building fighting. We quickly adjusted our program and now simulate house-to-house searches as well as building ambushes," Colonel Nhut said.

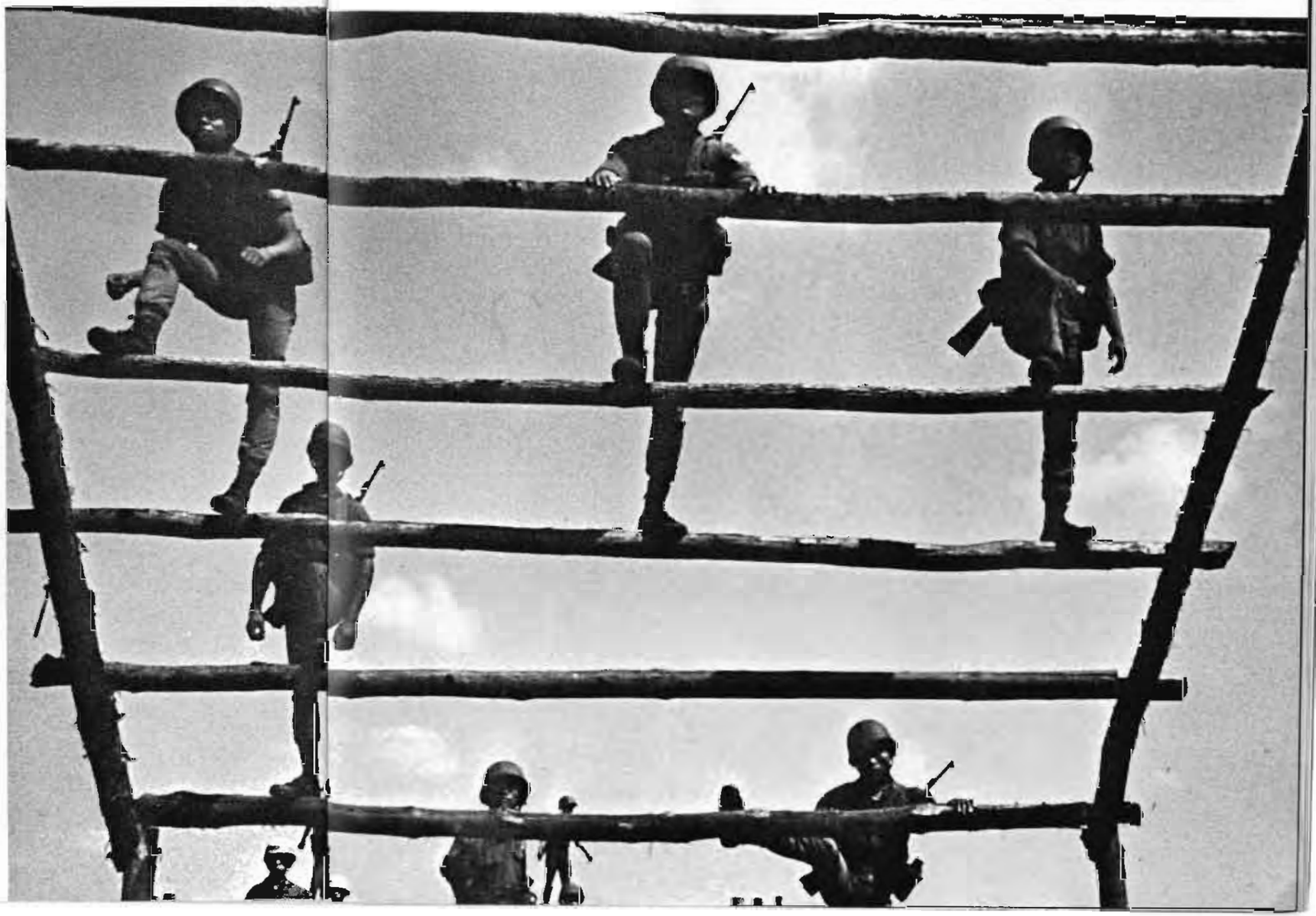
Although training officially ends at 6:30 pm, military responsibilities do not. The trainees pull guard duty and serve as a reaction force for the village of Gia Ray. To be certain no one falls asleep on guard duty a special alert system has been installed on each sandbagged bunker. A beer can dangles from the front of the bunker on a securely fastened rope. Once each hour a designated guard strikes the can. It is then the responsibility of the man in each successive bunker to hit his can, until the clanking completely circles the compound and comes back to where it began. If a clank is missed, the sergeant of the guard quickly checks the reason.

As training nears completion, the men must complete two requirements: they must go through a difficult obstacle course, and they must conduct a three-day operation in a nearby jungle. They do not have to successfully complete a physical training test as do U.S. soldiers.

The obstacle course—crawling through barbed wire under automatic weapons fire, around and through water-filled holes, and near simulated artillery explosions—has been livened up occasionally by local Viet Cong who drop in real mortar rounds. The mortars haven't caused any injuries, but they have given the men an early taste of a frightening combat experience.

The three-day operation is the culmination of the training. During the reconnaissance-in-force operation the men try to make contact with an enemy element. If they do, they are given first-hand experience in calling in artillery fire and air strikes. Even if contact isn't made, the trainees are directed to adjust artillery fire and air support. "Perhaps this, more than anything, makes a new soldier aware of how powerful his capabilities truly are. It certainly is an impressive, confidence-building sight," concluded the colonel.

After being drilled as soldiers and trained as fighters, the new graduates from Gia Ray are assigned to elements of the 18th ARVN Division, ready to take a professional position in the South Vietnamese Army.



ARVN basic trainees clamber over a high horizontal ladder on a confidence course, similar to U.S. ones

THE BLACK DEATH

PLAGUE

by Lieutenant Robert Pfohman

When the Black Death trudged across Europe in the 14th Century, 43 million people died. The effect on civilization was as great as a nuclear war would have today.

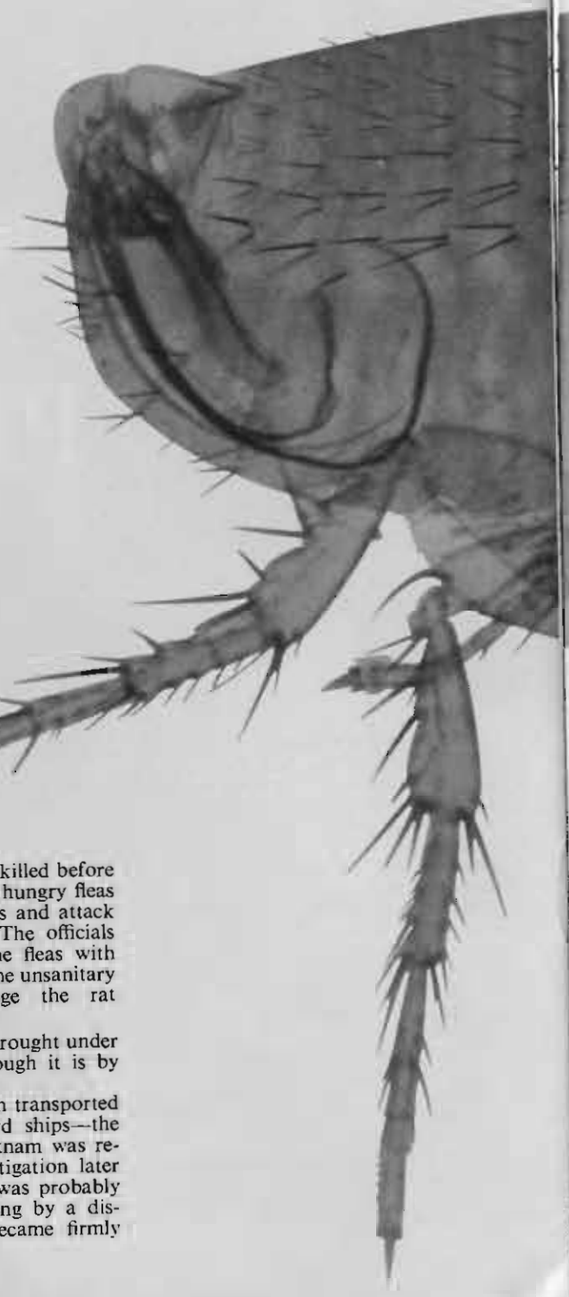
The same "Black Death," or bubonic plague, killed hundreds of Vietnamese last year and hospitalized more than 5,000. Public health officials estimate that many victims died without treatment. (American servicemen are protected by shots before they come to Southeast Asia. There were no recorded cases of Americans contracting the disease.)

The plague is on the rise again, assisted by wartime conditions. Vietnamese and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) health officials are licking the problem before it reaches epidemic proportions, however.

Primary weapon against the plague is information. The Ministry of Health

photo by SP4 Charles Holmes

The Villain is a Flea



has recently held a series of three-day courses for public health officials from every province in Vietnam. The courses prepare officials to teach in turn and to conduct effective plague control programs.

In the courses, the students were taught that plague is a disease commonly associated with rats—but that the fleas on the rats are the real culprits. The fleas transmit the disease from rat to rat, as long as there are enough rats to go around. But the disease is as dangerous to rats as it is to humans. When the rats die, the fleas must find other hosts—humans do nicely.

Any conditions that encourage rat population increase the chance of plague. In Vietnam, with overcrowded refugee camps, lack of sanitation and in some cases extreme ignorance about the mechanics of plague control, rats grow freely. (Even without the conditions produced by war, rats are prolific. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there is one rat for every human being on the earth.)

The public health officials were taught that the obvious way to end the threat of plague is to kill all rats. But the problem isn't that simple, the students learned—the fleas must be killed before the rats are or millions of hungry fleas will desert their dead hosts and attack the humans in the area. The officials have learned to attack the fleas with DDT and then to remove the unsanitary conditions that encourage the rat population to expand.

The problem has been brought under control in Vietnam, although it is by no means solved.

Bubonic plague has been transported all over the world aboard ships—the first recorded case in Vietnam was reported in 1906. An investigation later revealed that the disease was probably imported from Hong Kong by a diseased rat. The plague became firmly entrenched in the Saigon market area and soon spread to other seaports. Thousands of victims were treated and more than 2,000 deaths were reported in 1908. The French colonial administration was faced with a growing epidemic. They responded by instituting a vigorous cleanup program. By early 1909, the disease was finally eliminated as a serious health menace. There have been several outbreaks since.

There are two forms of plague, corresponding to the ways in which the germ enters the body.

Bubonic plague, most commonly found in the early stages of an epidemic, is caused by a flea bite. The symptoms of this type of plague are swelling of the lymph glands into hard tumors called buboes. The swelling usually takes place in the neck, armpit or groin.

Pneumonic plague, the second type, is highly communicable. One victim can spread it to dozens of people by coughing the germs into the air. This form is ordinarily found in the advanced phase of an epidemic.

The septicemic form of the plague, an advanced stage of the other two forms, gives the name of "Black Death" to the disease. Dark purple blotches of stagnant blood caused by hemorrhaging appear under the skin. The blotches led to the name.

Treatment of the black plague is by antibiotics, but the disease, in addition to being highly contagious, is often fatal.

Information has led to the control of plague in Vietnam. But as long as there is war there will be unsanitary conditions and the rats that go with them. Fleas go with the rats and plague with the fleas. Only peace will conquer the disease.

PORTRAIT OF

AN OLD MAN

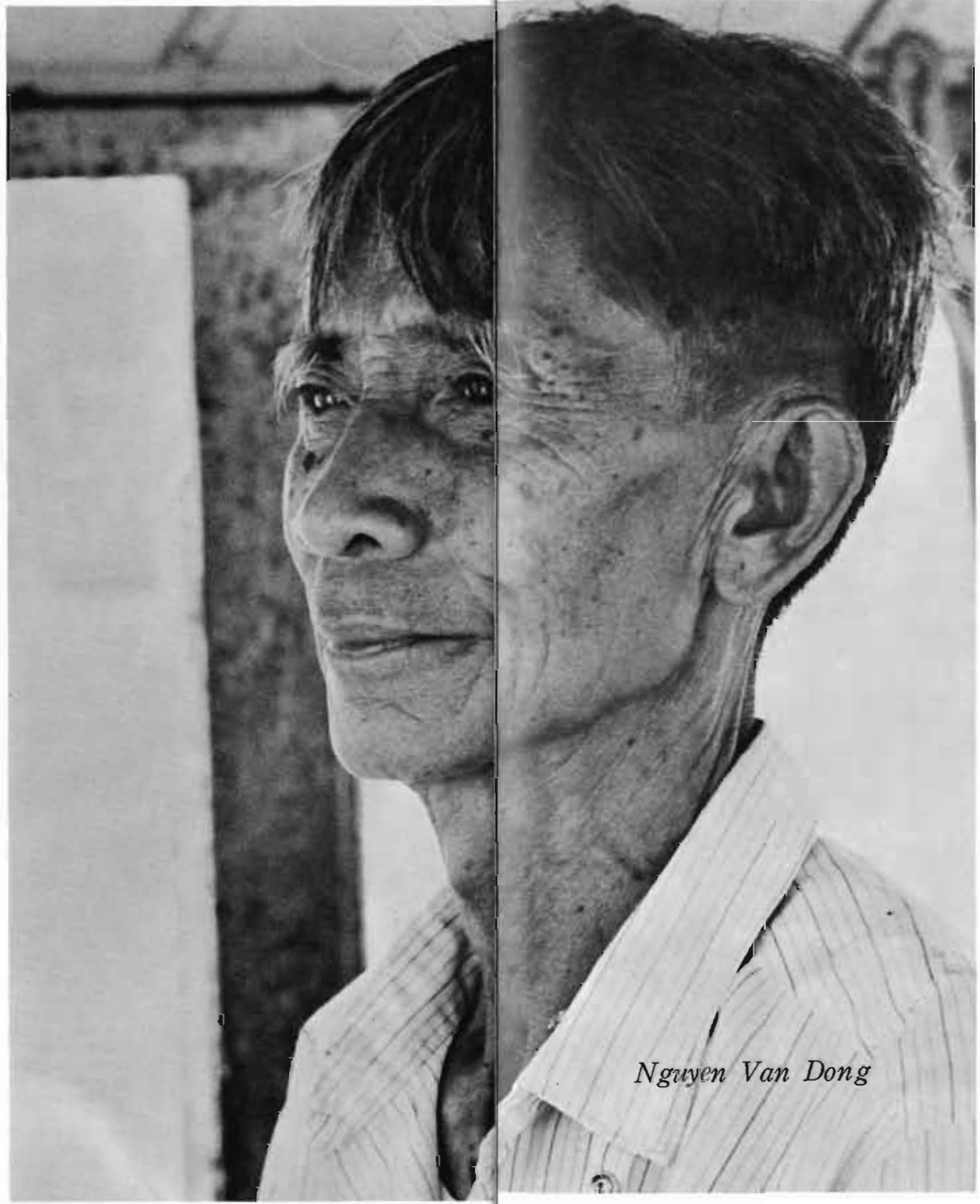
Editors Note: SP5 Michael Marcellino has etched a portrait of an old Vietnamese man. Nguyen won't change the world anymore—he's not 'news' in any sense. But he's part of the human background of this war; he's a thread in the woven cloth of Vietnamese culture.

by SP5 Michael Marcellino

photos by SP5 Jerry Cleveland

The Vietnamese man at the helm of ferryboat Number Four, an ageing, sideloading craft, has piloted the ship on its short seesaw trip for the past 10 years. The color of Nguyen Van Dong's wrinkling, weather-burnt skin matches the rusted bald spots where the white paint has flaked off the ferry's wooden hull. Both pilot and ship have seen more than their share of wear, but there is a certainty in both the pilot's eyes and in the ship's glide through the brown, murky water of the Saigon River.

It is only a 10-minute ride by ferryboat across the Saigon River to the Tran Hung Dao monument in Saigon. (General Tran Hung Dao, who led the Vietnamese to their defeat of the invading Mongol armies of Kublai Kban in 1287 is one of the most celebrated heros in Vietnam). You can make the round trip for about three cents (or six cents if you've brought your motorscooter.) To the more than 1,500 Vietnamese who daily commute from the 9th District village of Thu Thiem to the Ben Do dock, near the heart of Saigon, the ride is like crossing the street.



Nguyen Van Dong

On a swing from dock to dock, Number Four bucked the wake of the huge U.S. Navy LST 905, the old troopship "Madera County." Seeing the big ship as she headed up river, Dong's eyes sparkled and he remembered guiding a 700-ton French cargo ship on her 36-hour voyage from Saigon to Cambodia's ports of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

The slight-framed Nguyen has been a pilot of ships for the past 38 years, ever since the day he met Captain Louis Charpain. Dong had been a schoolboy until he turned 18 and had worked for the French as a houseboy and watchman. With help from the French merchant ship captain, Dong passed his examination and earned a second class pilot's licence from the French government in 1930. For the next four years he worked for Captain Louis, piloting the French cargo steamship "Jueff." Food, cement, iron and other metals ladened the hold of the "Jueff" enroute to Cambodia, where she was filled with a cargo of cattle, buffalo and Chinese and French foodstuffs for delivery to Saigon.

The young helmsman soon became expert at charting the course for ships in their trek to Cambodia and back. He came to know the river bottoms well; this was especially handy during high winds and storms. Dong, two other pilots and 12 sailors manned the "Jueff" and the ship never ran aground.

Thirty-four years later, Dong, who says he has never been late for work or missed a day, remembered the Frenchman who was his teacher. "Captain Louis had a full red mustache. He was first a good man but with sickness he became a hard man. Because of the pains in his stomach he never ate greasy or oily foods and he died at 45." Were Dong and Louis good friends? "No, not too much. I worked for him because it was my living," said Dong.

During the following years the pilot found a higher paying job charting courses for Chinese ships. The "Jueff" aged and was scrapped. In the years that Nguyen worked for the French shipping company and the French Army he earned 30 to 45 francs a month.

Traditionally, sailors through the centuries have been drawn magnetically to the sea by dream, lust and adventure. More practically, Nguyen came to the water's edge in Saigon for real things—family, work and religion. Dong was born in Thu Thiem as were his Vietnamese parents before him. Except to load and take on goods in Cambodia he has never been out of his country. Dong bas one son who is married and has nine children. His society is his family and the families of his fellow workers on ferryboat Number Four.

The 63-year-old Vietnamese pilot of ships has but one regret—he knows that soon he will be too old to run the course across the river. One day he must retire and make way for the young pilots. Dong says that his one dream—to pass the examination and achieve his first class pilot's licence—is impossible because only

PORTRAIT

the young, school-trained pilots can achieve this rating.

On Number Four, Dong, his hair greying and thin, looked down from his little pilot house at the 7:00 am traffic jam of Saigon commuters. During the morning, noon and late afternoon rush hours about 100 travelers jam the boat each trip. Business and factory workers, Catholic nuns, schoolgirls draped in their white cotten "Ao Dai" dresses, Buddhist monks and a small tanned boy covered with a wide-brimmed purple cloth hat rushed in Number Four. Aboard, some took a quick drink of "suong sam"—ice water tinted with the juices of a green fruit. And the people's everyday hurry-scurry movements ran in tune with the Hondas' VAROOM . . . . VAROOOM and the weak shriek of Number Four's fog horn.

"It is a very easy job to steer this small ship and there are only passengers; but I must live, so I work," summed up Dong as the automobile tires that ringed the boat were squeezed between the hull and the dock for the "ump-teenth" time.

The thirds that make the whole of Dong's life—ship's pilot, family man, Buddha's worshipper—are inseparable. In a quiet moment on the roof of Number Four, Dong held two sticks of burning incense between his palms. He prayed for the safety of ferryboat Number Four, her pilots, crew and passengers and placed the sticks of smoldering fragrance onto his dinner plate. Two roasted ducks from the ovens of his home in Thu Thiem rested there. This twice-monthly ceremony was Dong's solemn expression of present thanksgiving and hope for the future.

Dong's hope for the future is the same as the hope of his countrymen. His world does not include much more than Number Four, his family and his faith. But Dong represents his people in their struggle to keep hold of life in a troubled land.

The ferry is an important link for many commuters in the busy capital of Saigon. Hundreds of civilians cross each day on the ferry on their way to and from work

Women carry blocks of ice aboard Number Four as the ferry waits at the dock (left.) Nguyen makes a sacrifice by burning two ducks during a break (below)

View from the Top

Observation Towers Spot Rocket Flashes, Bring in Artillery—Fast

The binoculars are used to extend the spotter's range and accuracy

story and photos by PFC Ken Smith

It's the dead of night. Most of Saigon, Tan Son Nhut Air Base and the surrounding area is innocently sleeping. Suddenly—out of the darkness—a volley of rockets. PHOOM—one two three. There are several loud explosions. Soldiers and civilians frantically scramble under their beds or into nearby bunkers, and there helplessly await the next barrage.

Those people must often think . . . "if only we could shoot back or do something to stop the onslaught of rockets coming from who knows where."

Someone is.

A team of men, perched in towers surrounding the Saigon area, is detecting, charting and in turn calling artillery strikes on the rocket launching sites. The speed of their operation is amazing, their accuracy even better.

When a rocket or mortar is fired toward Saigon, the team sights it either on a radar screen or by naked eye from an observation tower. The shot's grid coordinates are plotted and called into headquarters. From there, the nearest artillery battery is notified, gets clearance and immediately rounds begin blasting the launching site.

The entire process takes all of a minute. The artillery shots rarely fall more than a few meters from the target.

There are two types of tower—radar and observation. The radar towers are 30 feet high and have an enclosed bunker resting on top. Inside, two men are on duty 24 hours a day, taking half hour shifts watching the tiny radar screen.

The observation towers are 160 feet high, with a cement framework. A three-man crew operates around the clock, first spotting enemy fire with their eyes, then charting it with a calibrated high-powered periscope.

The towers are controlled by the Capital Military Assistance Command (CMAC)—Army—and the Joint Defense Operation Center (JDOC)—Air Force. Each has a headquarters from which artillery is notified.

What does a mortar or rocket look like as it takes off? On the radar screen, both appear as white dots—the rocket's image is somewhat larger. If a round detonates within the scope of the radar beam a splash of white light is seen.

From an observation tower both mortars and rockets give off a quick white flash. The rocket maintains a white "tail" for three or four seconds after takeoff so it is more readily pinpointed than the mortar. However, radar towers can quickly plot even a mortar's whereabouts.

The men in the towers differ from the people below. When they spot a rocket or mortar, taking cover doesn't enter their minds. That's when their job really begins. But what's it like to spot an enemy missile zooming in your direction?

A soldier climbs the ladder to the top of a spotting tower, where he will spend hours watching for a mortar or rocket

Charlie Can Shoot Only Once

Army Staff Sergeant Don Shepard, NCOIC of a radar tower at Tan Son Nhut, says, "You get a little tense when you see them, but if you take a direct hit—no matter where you are—you might as well hang it up. Our main concern is getting artillery back out there."

Air Force Sergeant Thomas E. Lawless has been working the night shift in an observation tower since January, 1968. He described the feeling he gets at the sight of a rocket.

"It just suddenly hits you when you see the flash. You think, 'there they are —rockets' and you get fairly worried. But you know you've got a job to do and you just concentrate on that."

Has he ever had any close calls?

"We've had several rockets hit 30 feet from the base of our tower and have had dirt and shrapnel fly up to the top," said Sergeant Lawless.

"But we were much more worried one night last May. We could see rockets falling way out beyond us with each one getting closer and closer. Then suddenly we could hear one coming right at us. It made a loud terrifying whistling sound, and got louder and louder like a train. All three of us crouched down and just looked at each other, thinking 'well, here it comes.' Then the rocket arrived, but somehow missed our tower and whistled by, only a couple feet away."

Despite the danger involved, the men in the observation towers make the job seem routine. When a rocket or mortar is fired, the three-man crew springs into action. One man operates the periscope to plot a straight line to the flash. Another man stands ready with a phone to headquarters. The third man handles a large set of high-powered binoculars. The direction to the flash is reported.

Simultaneously, two other such teams are performing the same operation. Headquarters receives and plots the three lines and triangulates them (finds the point where they intersect.) The "grid" on that point is sent to the nearest artillery unit, and soon rounds are pounding within a few meters of the spot.

"They're extremely fast and accurate," says Captain Donald Larson, officer in charge at the CMAC tower headquarters. "They do an outstanding job."

The tower's powerful binoculars are used for close observation, especially during ground attacks. They provide good vision up to 15 miles away.

"During Tet one night we could see a battalion of VC sweep past our perimeter," said Sergeant Lawless. "We put the binoculars on them and every time they moved we saw it. We notified JDOC and seconds later a quick reaction team ran out to cut them off."

Also during Tet, the men in the towers witnessed a terrifying succession of mortar and ground attacks through the binoculars.

"We could see tracers and mortars first hitting Bien Hoa, then Saigon and suddenly here at Tan Son Nhut," said Sergeant Lawless. "When the mortars started flying in—I honestly wondered if they'd ever stop. We must have taken a hundred of them before we saw a massive spray of our own tracers go out in all directions. That was a welcome sight."

Charlie's well aware of the observation and radar towers' effectiveness, and tries to cross them up.

"He'll either whistle or talk into a radio similar to the one we use," said Captain Larson. "It comes through and makes hearing a little difficult, but it never really slows up communication."

Charlie also devises tricks to avoid the "fast" artillery rounds that keep him on the run.

"He uses bamboo A-frames to fire rockets so he can fire, run and not have to worry about the launcher," said Captain Larson. "And he never fires more than one or two rockets from any one position.

"With mortars he'll sometimes fire them in volleys, where several take off before the first hits ground. Of course, our radar picks them up before he can fire all of them."

As a rule, radar towers stand on a plot of flat, open ground. There is one, however, on Tan Son Nhut that has the surroundings of a King Arthur-type castle.

The bunker housing the radar equipment is built, not on top of a tower, but rather on an old French fort. A 20-foot high hill surrounds the fort, leveling off at its roof, which has enough surface area for billets and a shower. The hill is surrounded at its base by a steel fence which in turn is surrounded by a moat.

The men who operate the radar equipment live on top of the hill, coming down only for meals. They must feel like "Knights of the Round Table" as they take in the panoramic view from their "castle on the hill."

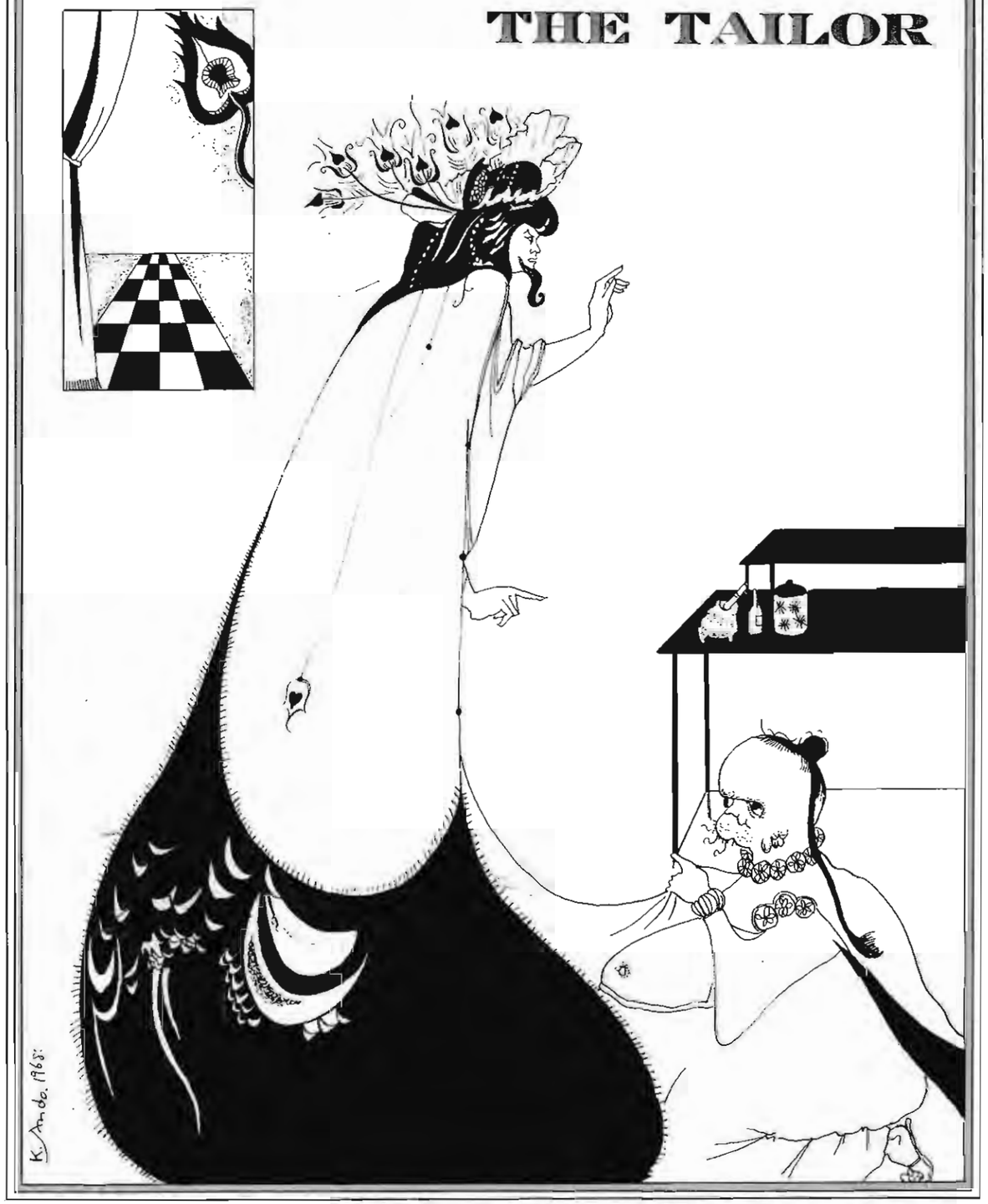
"It's really a great setup," says Staff Sergeant Don Shepherd.

That sums up the entire network of radar and observation towers protecting the Saigon-Tan Son Nhut area. How many lives it's saved can never be calculated, but whatever the number, the network stands as a essing to the people it protects.

Charlie wishes it would all blow away.

This high radar tower dominates the landscape. When rocket or mortar flashes are spotted quickly, artillery can prevent a second volley

THE TAILOR AND THE MANDARIN



A Vietnamese Legend

Known throughout the country of Vietnam was a tailor who was widely praised for his skills. The tailor had a small shop in Saigon, and any mandarin or person of any importance would consider no one but this particular tailor to make his ceremonial robes.

One day a high mandarin sent for the tailor and ordered a ceremonial robe. The tailor took a long time to fit the mandarin. After the fitting was completed, the tailor asked the mandarin how long he had held his present office. The mandarin asked what that had to do with the fitting of his robe.

The tailor said that it was very important. He explained that recently appointed young mandarins were usually impressed with their office and held their heads high and their chests in. This is all taken into consideration and the rear lappet is cut shorter than the front on the ceremonial robe.

As the mandarin's years in service increase, he begins to stoop and the rear is lengthened. When the mandarin reaches the half-way point in his career, the front and back lappets are cut the same length.

However, when the mandarin becomes weary and bent over from his long years in service, the robe must be made longer in the back than in the front.

The tailor explained that to know the seniority of the mandarin's position is the only way a tailor can properly make a ceremonial robe that will fit and add distinction to the mandarin.

as told to SP5 Phil Stuart

Binh Duong Province - - -
Microcosm
see page 6