

LA ROUTE

DE

L'HORREUR



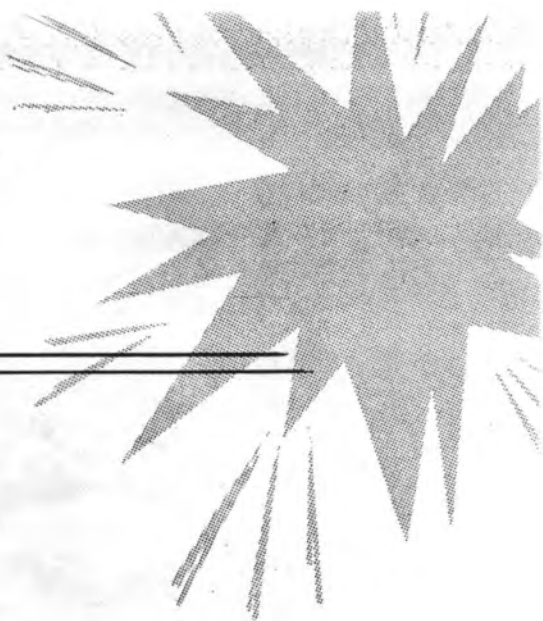
HIGHWAY

OF

HORROR

« Highway of Horror »

(VIETNAM, Easter 1972)



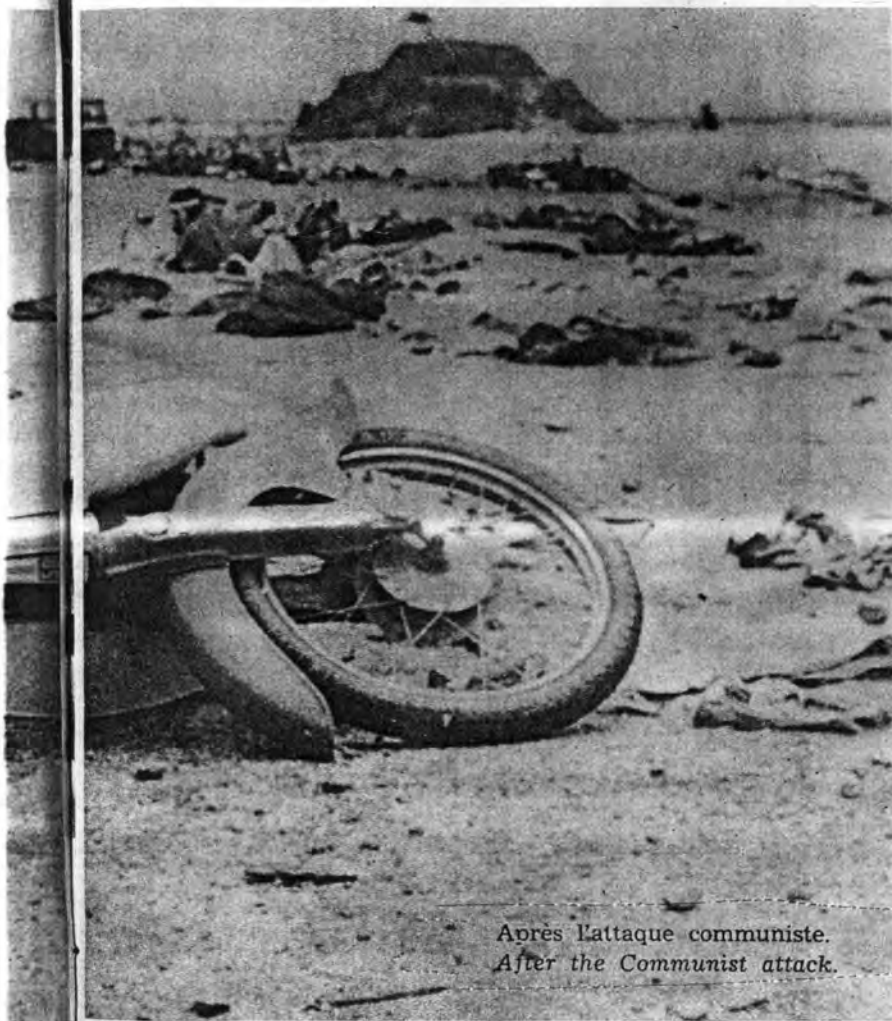
Le pont de My-Chanh, témoin de l'Histoire.
The My-Chanh bridge, witness of History.

For over a decade, in violation of the Geneva Agreement which they had signed, the North Vietnamese communists had been sending men and vast quantities of weapons into South Vietnam. Under cover of the so-called National Liberation Front, created by and directed from Hanoi, they had waged a guerilla war which, in spite of their mightiest exertions, had failed to bring any nearer the goal which at times had seemed to be within their reach : the annexation of the South by force of arms.

On March 29, 1972, they shifted to a new form of warfare. On that day, the North Vietnamese Army poured its troops across the seventeenth parallel and, in blitzkrieg fashion, invaded the territory of the Republic of Vietnam.

The 304th, 308th and 324th North Vietnamese divisions, supported by the latest model Soviet tanks, artillery and units of SAM missiles, launched massive attacks against government posts in the Southern part of the Demilitarized zone (DMZ). It is estimated that the invading force consisted of no less than 19 regular divisions and 600 tanks.





Après l'attaque communiste.
After the Communist attack.

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) opposed a heroic resistance to the enemy thrust in the northernmost province of Quang-Tri, while the whole population of the frontier zones of Giolinh, Đông-Hà and Cam-Lô, numbering over 22,000 persons, fled southward. Under the increasing pressure of the enemy, Quang-Tri had to be abandoned in late April.

There was panic as the communist troops approached the provincial capital. Whereas the majority of its 317,800 inhabitants poured out in all directions (except Northwards), using whatever means of transportation they could find, including battered old perambulators piled up high with huge mounds of household effects, more than 7,000 persons were trapped within the city. They had no choice but to burrow deep into the ground and entrench themselves in makeshift shelters. In silence, the tense columns of women, children and old people hurried in the direction of Huế, the old imperial capital, along National Highway One, escorted by their dogs, their cows, pigs and buffaloes, leaving behind them Quang-Tri ablaze. Most of the unfortunate refugees were never to reach Hue : they had been moved down en route by communist fire on the 24th and 29th April.



A U.S. soldier, Major Donald Price, who happened to be on the South side of the My-Chanh bridge during that never to be forgotten April 24, 1972, and witnessed the massacre of the innocents, gave the following account.

On that day, the first wave of refugees had left Quang-Tri and, heading South, was making its way toward the bridge, when suddenly the North Vietnamese soldiers, hidden along the sides of the road, raked the highway with fire, while their powerful artillery cut deep bloody swaths in the column, which broke up. Bodies of women, children, infants and old people lay strewn about the road and on the white sand dunes nearby. The burning vehicles generated a thick black screen of smoke which concealed a gruesome sight : Five days later, the same macabre scenario repeated itself along the same section of road, which has since been call « Highway of Horror ».

Le massacre des 29 et 30 Avril a été suivi d'un bout à l'autre par un autre témoin, le Commandant américain Robert Sheridan, de son poste d'observation, situé dans un petit village à 1 km au Nord du pont de My-Chanh.

Avec Sheridan se trouvaient également quelques journalistes étrangers qui filmèrent la sinistre scène. Grâce à leurs témoignages et aux déclarations des autorités locales, on sait que le premier convoi, le plus important et le plus nombreux et s'échelonnant sur plusieurs kilomètres, démarra tôt le matin. Au bout d'une dizaine de kilomètres, il atteignit le district de Hai-Lang sur une route qui fait jonction avec la route nationale No. 1. A ce moment là, les communistes nord-vietnamiens, en embuscade à quelques centaines de mètres à l'Est de la route No. 1, ouvrirent le feu. Les véhicules de tête furent atteints et s'immobilisèrent, bloquant la voie. Ce fut un embouteillage monstre et la panique était générale.

Les communistes pointèrent sur cette foule sans défense leurs armes automatiques et leurs canons 130. Ils tirèrent et tirèrent sans répit durant toute la journée. Pour massacrer plus efficacement, ils utilisaient des obus à retardement qui éclataient entre 30 et 50 mètres des réfugiés et fauchaient les malheureux par grappes. Ceux qui survivaient grimpèrent sur ceux qui gisaient pour fuir.



The massacre on 29th and 30th April was witnessed from beginning to end by Maj. Robert Sheridan from his look-out post in a small village about 3/4 mile North of the bridge.

With Major Price were some foreign correspondents who filmed the scene. From their reports and the statements made by the local authorities, it appears that the first convoy of refugees, the largest of all, strung along several miles, had covered some seven miles before they reached the Hai-Lang district. At a road intersection, the North Vietnamese soldiers, who had been lying in wait a few hundred yards east of the Highway, opened fire. The first cars in the convoy were hit and stopped, blocking the way. A mammoth traffic jam ensued, provoking general panic.

On this defenceless, frightened crowd the communists trained their automatic weapons and their 130mm cannon. The firing never stopped. To ensure that the slaughter would be 100 % effective, they used time-bombs which exploded about 30 or 50 yards from the people and played havoc among them. To escape, the survivors clambered over the dead.



Lê-Xuân-Thuy s'est rallié à la cause nationale.
Lê-Xuân-Thuy joins the governmental side.



It has been asserted by some observers that the attack had occurred because of the presence of military trucks in the refugee convoy. Such an error, however, would have been impossible, since vehicles packed with women and children could never have been mistaken, in broad daylight, for Army lorries carrying soldiers.

The few military vehicles in the convoy were flying Red Cross flags, with large red crosses painted over the sides and at the back: they were transporting wounded soldiers on stretchers.

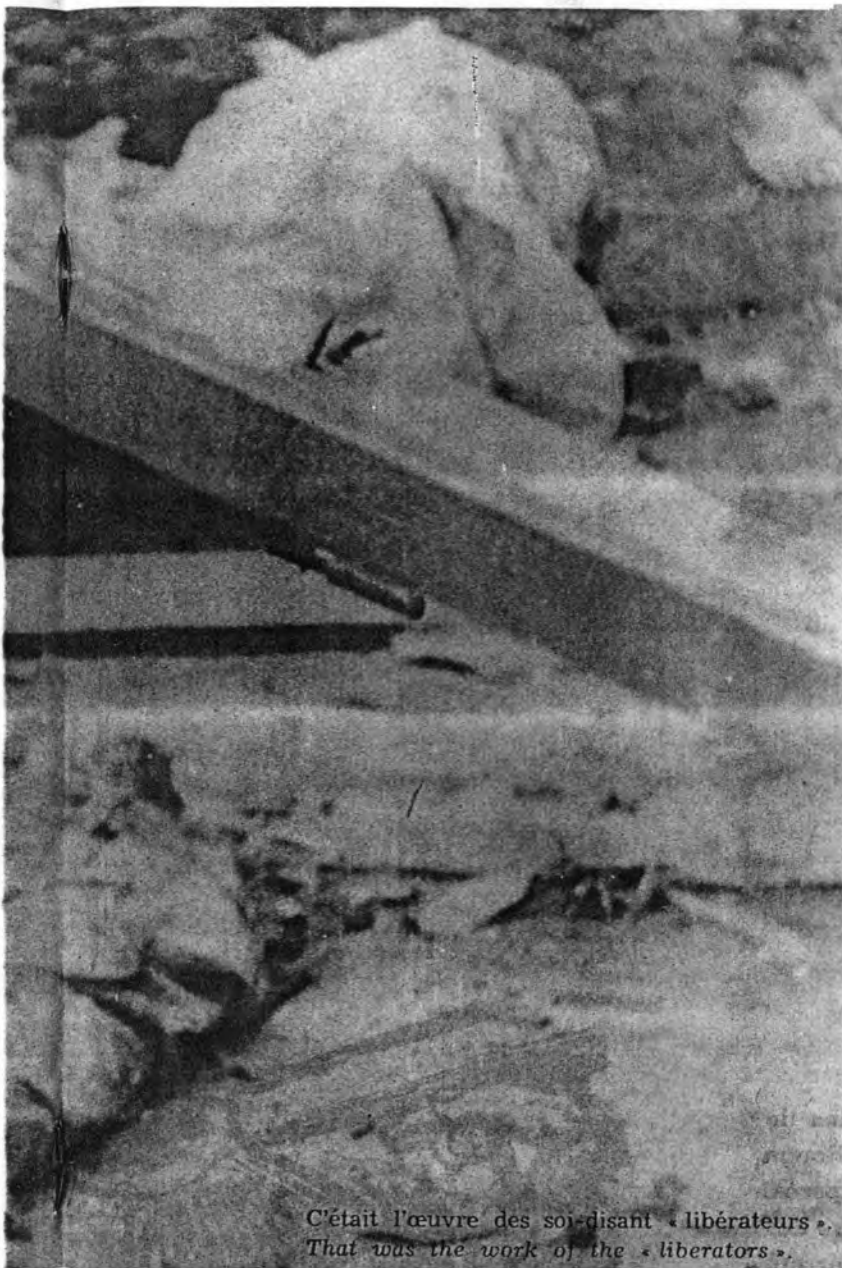
A former North Vietnamese communist soldier who recently rallied round to the national cause, Lê Xuân Thuy, one time corporal of the 4th Signal Battalion, 2nd Regiment of the North Vietnamese 324th Division, confirmed at a press conference held on September 8, 1972, that the massacre of civilians had been deliberate. According to Thuy, who had infiltrated into South Vietnam in October, 1971, and had taken part in that massacre at Hai-Lang between 29 April and 3 May, communist troops had orders to fire at all those fleeing South, as they were held to be enemies of Communism.



La mort sévit partout.
Death stalks the land.



Nicholas Ruggieri, an American journalist who visited the scene after the carnage, reported that some colleagues of his nicknamed that 3/4 mile of road « Highway of Horror », but that in his estimation, the « Highway of Horror » was over seven miles long, for he had seen with his own eyes burnt-out vehicles and decomposed bodies littering the road from as far away as Lavang.



C'était l'œuvre des soi-disant « libérateurs ».
That was the work of the « liberators ».



It was not, however, until the end of June, when the Government troops counter-attacked in an effort to recapture Quang-Tri, that the full dimension of the tragedy along Highway One came to light.

It was an infernal, satanic vision beyond the scope of human imagination. Thousands of corpses lay pell-mell along the wide road and in the adjoining fields. They had become unrecognizable, torn and mangled as they had been by enemy artillery, and the tropical sun had completed the work of decay and destruction.

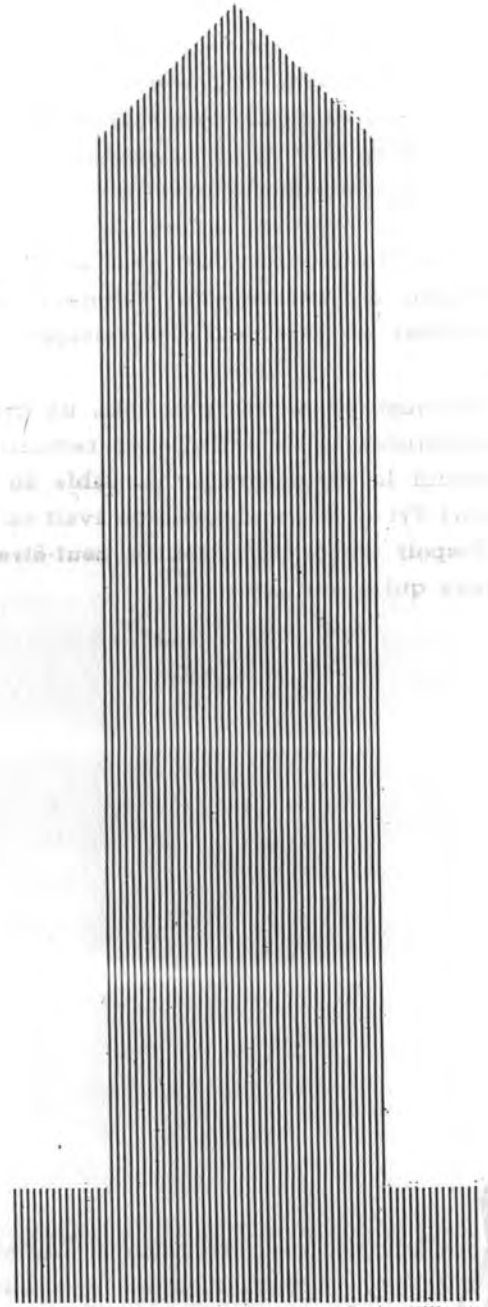
Shapeless, dismembered bodies scattered among the broken furniture, the burst-open suitcases, the twisted motorbikes, the overturned and charred vehicles of all kinds.

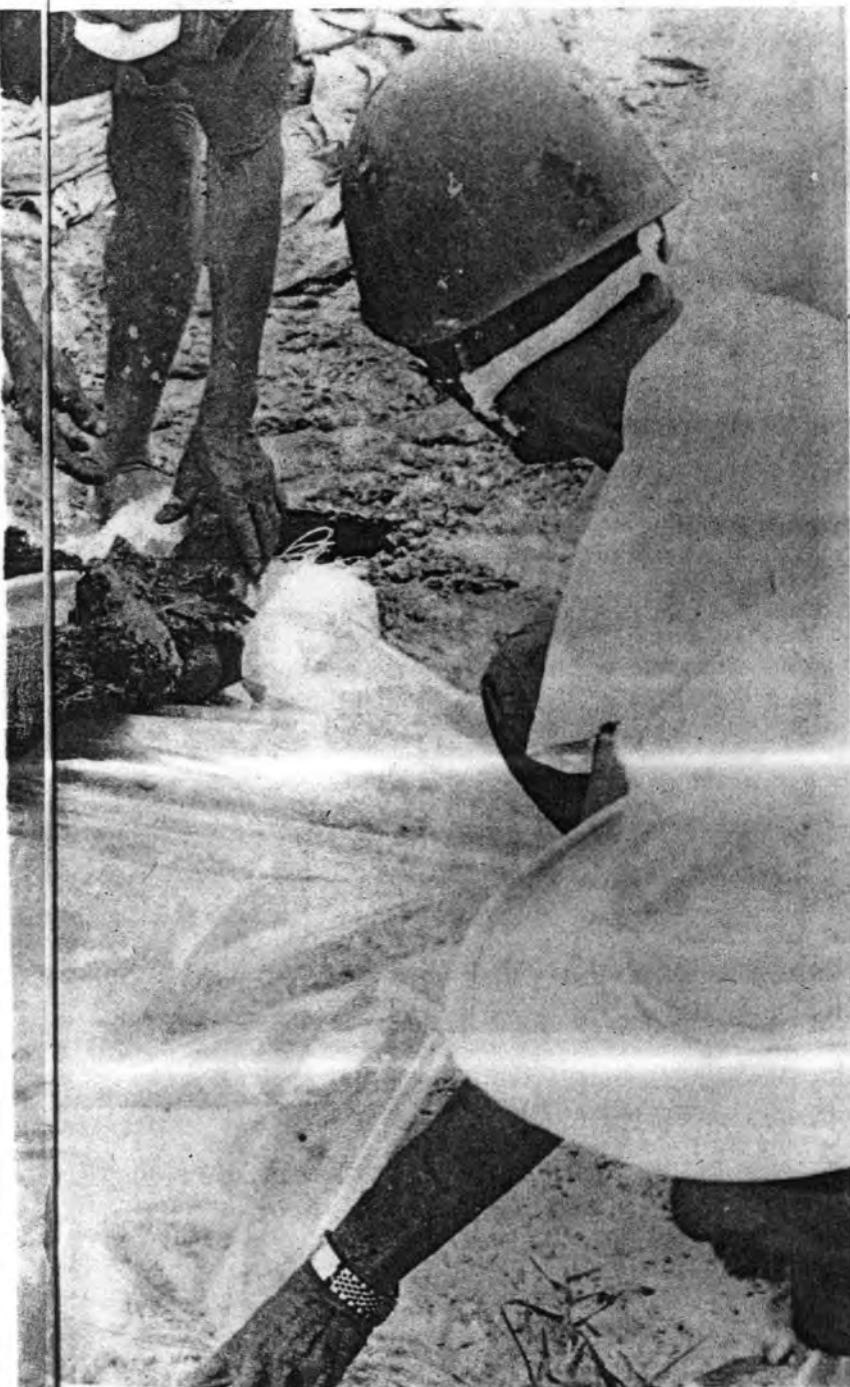


*Ces morts demandent vengeance
These dead ask for revenge!*



The lowest estimate of the number of the people killed was over 2000 ; this figure was advanced by the Red Cross Society on the basic of the number of bodies found. In the judgment of the local authorities, however, the number of those missing is no doubt higher, as people could have been killed while fleeing, or they might have been hold up in the communist-controlled areas, or forced to go North, or again just buried under the sand dunes by the roadside.





Le soleil parachève l'œuvre de destruction
des communistes.

The tropical sun completes the work
of destruction.



The task of collecting the dead, and the ensuing puzzle of trying to identify them, proved most arduous and dangerous. Volunteers came forward to gather the disintegrating remains and place them in nylon bags, then carry them to mass graves, silently watched by the nervous relatives of those missing, who feared that in these bags perhaps were to be found some of their beloved.

A few miles away, a group of Buddhists as well as Roman Catholics were feverishly moving the vast expanse of sand situated South of Quang-Tri where the great tragedy had taken place, in the tenacious hope of finding the missing.



Des volontaires ramassent les restes des cadavres.
Volunteers gather the decaying remains.



Newsman *Nguyễn Linh Chau*, of a large circulation Saigon paper, who had been with the paratroopers one of the first people to land on this road after the flight of the communists, gave a grisly report. In the Lavang district, on lifting a strawmat, he saw the body of a woman still clutching in her arms the skeleton of her infant.

In the same district, he saw the bodies of nine members of one family lying on the strawmat, with a trunk in the middle of them all containing the bodies of two small children.



Mr. Ranli Wirtanen who recently visited the Republic of Vietnam, has described in the daily newspaper UUSI SUOMI published at Helsinki (Finland) on September 20, 1972, how were being enacted the collective burials of these victims : « The memorial service and burial took place in two parts, one in August and the another in September.

« The Service began at 10:00 in the morning. The inhabitants of the Phong Nguyen village gathered quietly at a barrack on the outskirts of the village.

« The nuns lit white candles and sticks of incense at the ends of the coffins. Priests spoke. Someone read the benediction...

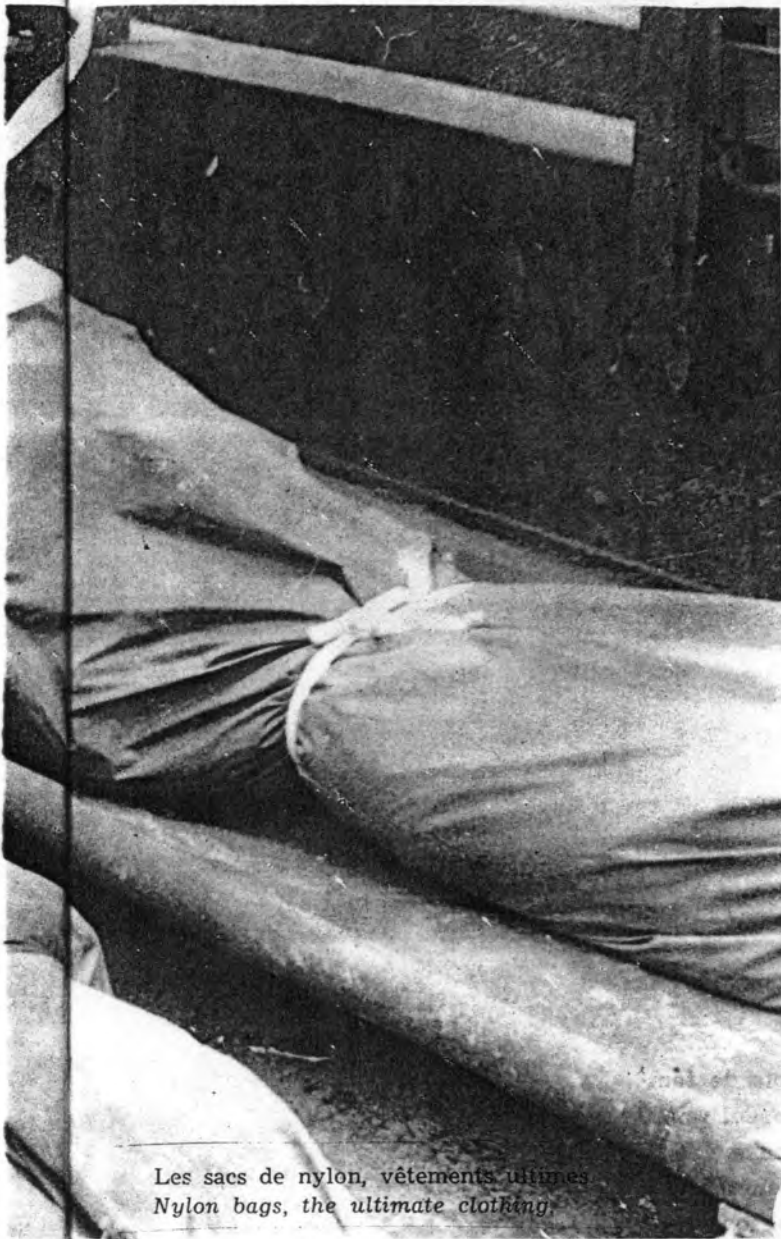
« Six big trucks loaded with coffins drove to the high ground.

Nuns, relatives and last remaining men in the village had dug the graves.

« The Governor of the province helped lower the first coffin into the grave. He threw a fistfull of sand on the boards. He was followed by nuns and some of the funeral guests. The same thing was repeated 50 times ».



Vision cauchemaresque.
A grisly vision.

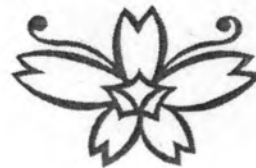


Les sacs de nylon, vêtements ultimes
Nylon bags, the ultimate clothing



The communists have launched further offensives in other regions of South Vietnam. Wherever they attack, the tragedy of Highway One is repeated.

Is this the glorious war of liberation they have proclaimed with so much fanfare ?



Is this not rather plain murder, cold-blooded assassination of innocent people, women, children and old folk whose only crime is that they were fleeing communist rule? World public opinion is shocked. The fresh graves, whether collective or individual of thousands of refugees bear testimony to the fact that indiscriminate slaughtering of civilians is part of a plan to subjugate South Vietnam by force of arms and through terror.

Sir Robert Thompson, the British expert on Vietnam, commented in the September 8 issue of the « London Daily Telegraph » : « Those massacres were not the result of bombing errors, but had been carefully planned. The 130mm cannon supplied by the Russians and which were used on the Quang-Tri refugees during their May exodus, killed and maimed more than 20,000 people. »

Brigadier Thompson added that such massacres are by no means isolated acts committed by undisciplined soldiers. They are, on the contrary, part and parcel of a vast policy of terror which has been carried out for the last twelve years to eliminate those who refuse to comply with their orders, to terrorize the population and weaken its resistance ».

Over 36,000 persons have been the victims of this policy.



Les derniers rites.
The last rites.





Quang-Tri, souvenir inoubliable.
Quang-Tri, an unforgettable memory.



It is time that this barbarous policy be stopped.

The Government of the Republic of Vietnam appeals to world public opinion to condemn and reprove such methods, whose barbarity shows clearly enough how hollow are the high-sounding principles and the patriotic claims of those who resort to them to achieve their fanatical ends.