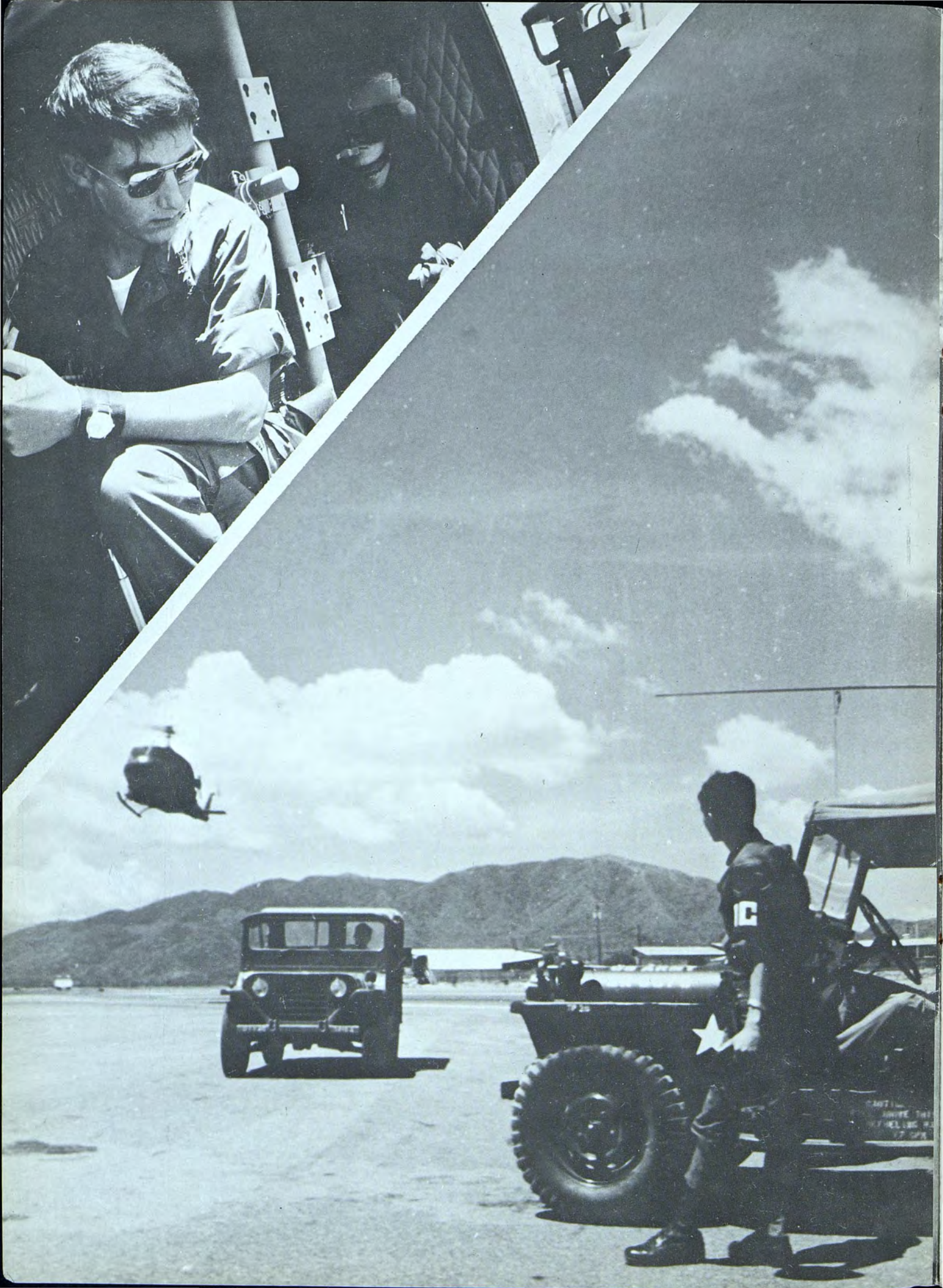
DECEMBER 1970

TYPHOON



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BACK COVER: A Rome plow from the 538th Land Clearing Company topples trees in Binh Dinh Province. During the September operation to eliminate enemy sanctuaries in the area, the engineers cleared over 4800 acres of land (story on page 2). Photo by SP4 Mike Maattala.

OPPOSITE: A new program, the "Air Detection and Identification of Speeders (ADIOS), has introduced a new breed of Military Police sky soldiers to catch speeders and promote safe driving habits in II Military Region. Armed with stop watches and binoculars, the MP's hover above the highway in a helicopter, calculate the speed of vehicles below as they drive over painted markers, and radio the information to an MP vehicle waiting below. With ROK and ARVN MP's also in the program, no vehicles can escape the watchful eye of ADIOS. Photo by SP5 Joe Bradley.

Cover by SP5 Joe Bradley

I FIELD FORCE VIETNAM

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TYPHOON

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PLOW POWER

Story and Photos
By SP4 Mike Maattala

The countryside surrounding the camp had been stripped bare, its rolling surface of trees, brush, and grass peeled like an orange to reveal the red soil beneath. For almost a month, the engineers of the 538th Land Clearing Company had been cutting their way across Tam Quan District, working down the coast from Snipers' Island and then swinging inward near Highway QL-1. By early October they were at their third campsite of the operation--a small hill at the base of Monster Mountain. The name of the camp was the same as the previous ones; it had followed them from site to site like the huge swath of cleared land. They called it LZ Rome Plow.

The 538th was sent into Tam Quan District to help destroy the hold the VC had on the area. The people are isolated; they have almost no contact with the Government of Vietnam. The thick jungle growth in the mountains provided unlimited hiding places for the VC, while the countless hedgerows served as secure avenues of approach and escape. Mines and booby traps took their toll daily on units operating in the area.

The people were safe while they worked in the fields. But when they returned to their homes at night, the VC came after their rice and young men. With this lack of security, the villagers soon came under heavy VC influence. "Our patrols couldn't even go out secretly," said Captain Ralph Bleskan, CO of Alpha Company, 4th Battalion, 503d Infantry. "The kids would run and tell the VC where we were, then Charlie would either ambush us or hide."

Increasing US troop concentration in the area would not solve the problem, because the soldiers could not remain there forever. Something had to be done which would allow the Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces (RFs and PFs) to aggressively patrol the area with minimum US support. The likely solution was to destroy Charlie's hiding places and eliminate his avenues of movement. No unit was better qualified for the job than the 538th.

Proceeding with the operation was not a simple task. The land clearing company could not just set up camp and begin knocking down everything in sight. So before the 538th arrived in Tam Quan District, the 173d Airborne Brigade "prepared" the area by conducting a concerted psychological (PSYOPs) and pacification program.

Thousands of leaflets were dropped in the four-hamlet area, telling the Vietnamese that the 538th was coming. Helicopters flew over the villages, broadcasting messages from their chiefs which explained the forthcoming operation. Some of the villages were spread out too far for good security, so it was decided to relocate the families. Elements of the 173d took their armored personnel carriers (APCs) to each of these villages, then swept through the area with the chief so he could inform his people of the relocation sites which would be provided for them.

Rome plows from the 538th Land Clearing Company worked both the hills and flat-lands during their month-long operation in Binh Dinh Province, stripping the land to deny the enemy his valuable cover.

After three weeks of such preparation, the area was ready for the 538th. With the 173d providing security, the engineers methodically began working down through the district. Just after heading west near QL-1, the soldiers relocated an entire village, houses and all, to an area near a US-ARVN command post. Within three weeks they had almost reached Monster Mountain, located roughly halfway between LZ English and the South China Sea.

For their move to the base of the mountain, the 538th sent four plows ahead to work on the new site, leaving the rest of the company behind to finish the cut and tear down the old camp. "We don't like to move the whole company in until the site is ready," said Captain Ronald Swann, CO of the 538th from Asheville, N.C. "All the plows would just get in the way on the hill and they'd also be sitting ducks."

The first plows at the new site set to work skimming the top of the hill to clear away any mines. Then they pushed up a five-foot berm and plowed the inner surface, levelling spots for the tactical operations center and mess, commo, and maintenance sections. Finally they dug slots in the berm for the tanks and APCs and smoothed out places for the tents. This work took almost the entire day. When the rest of the company arrived the next day, the plows began clearing the slopes outside the berm.

Plans for clearing the area did not call for the 538th to strip Monster Mountain, a known VC sanctuary, though many of the engineers obviously would have enjoyed tackling the steep slopes with their plows. Instead the company split up to work the front and back, each group clearing the smaller hills and hedgerows and cutting a 50-meter strip along the base of the mountain. "Charlie usually stays out of the area when we're around," said Captain Swann. "But after we leave he'll come back to work. Then he'll be detected coming out of the mountain because his cover has been destroyed."

During the operation, the engineers worked closely with the village chiefs and mobile advisory team (MAT team) to determine where and what the plows would actually cut. The men were directed to stay away from the

A brief respite from working in the thick jungle growth. Here an engineer plods downhill, making the first of many cuts which will leave the slopes completely barren.

houses, graves, and crops. If they discovered an abandoned house or weren't sure about an area they consulted the village chief before proceeding, to make sure they wouldn't cause any hard feelings.

The terrain of Tam Quan District was a combination of almost everything the engineers had ever cleared before. Even though the mountain was avoided, there were many steep slopes that forced a driver to ride with his feet braced up against the instrument panel to keep from falling out of the cab. In places the jungle was so dense that only black puffs of diesel smoke were visible as a plow wrestled with the thick growth.

Hedgerows stretched out in endless lines, full of tall trees to be felled with thunderous crashes. And there were rolling hills, lightly covered with brush, where a man could plod up and down, scraping away row after row, until the slope was naked.

Though the name "Rome plow" is generally used when describing land clearing operations, the engineers actually use two different types of blades on their plows: the Rome blade and the bull blade. The latter, which is a normal bulldozer blade, works best in an area where the ground has to be scraped clean because it can dig below the surface. It is also invaluable for constructing campsites and stream crossings.

The Rome blade is better suited for the thick jungle. It has a sharp cutting edge and is canted at a 30-degree angle so debris slides off to the right as the plow moves along. The blade is also equipped with a "stinger," a wedge-like projectile mounted on the leading left edge which allows the operator to split larger trees before felling them with the cutting edge.

Clearing land is a dirty and dangerous job. The work-day is long, beginning with a two-hour standdown every morning while the men perform the necessary maintenance on their plows. After a single-file drive to the cut, each man settles down in his cage-like cab, a private world where even his thoughts are drowned out by the roar of the diesel engine. With flak jacket and steel pot on, he soaks his uniform with sweat when the sun climbs in the sky and shivers miserably when the driving sheets of monsoon rain sweep through the cab. Even when the weather is tolerable, there are enough ants, bees, and tree snakes around to cause the operator concern.

Yet these are mild irritations compared to the real danger these men face daily. They always lead the way into an area, exposing themselves to any mines or booby traps. Even when the land clearing is in process, the APCs and tanks will attempt to follow in the plows' tracks. The engineers have hit explosive devices ranging from claymores and "Bouncing Bettys" to anti-tank mines. The VC like to place them in areas where the plows are almost sure to travel, such as stream crossings and hedgerows. The drivers will tell you that they feel safe in the cab, protected in front and beneath by thick metal. Yet they have seen the harm flying shrapnel can do when a mine is detonated in just the right spot, and you know the fear is there.

Clearing the ground of its vegetation, the plows naturally uncovered Charlie's hiding places. The engineers found over 700 tunnels and bunkers in Tam Quan District during the month of September. But it was

too time-consuming for the plows to stop and fill them all in. They would just call over someone from a nearby tank or APC to check it out and then destroy it.

The 538th was involved in a "selective" type of land clearing, with the plows moving from one spot on the cut to the next under the direction of the ground guides. Only in smooth, relatively light areas can the engineers employ the "fleet" method, where a lead plow cuts a "tracer" and the rest follow on a staggered line. With each plow freelancing, several of them frequently converged on the same spot, magnifying the destructive quality of the operation as they noisily banged away at the trees and ripped into the thick brush.

With most of the 538th involved in the work at the cut, their camp seemed almost deserted. The hill-top site was shaped like an "L," with the TOC, maintenance, commo, and mess facilities all clustered at the north end. The operators' tents were strung out along the opposite end, empty during the day with their sides flapping heavily in the wind. A few tanks and APCs from the 173d sat in their slots along the berm, providing security for the camp. Their crew members were perched under strung-out ponchos, shielding themselves from the high sun. To the east, the South China Sea was barely visible as it blended with the hazy blue sky.

When the plows returned in the early evening, you first heard their low rumbling off in the distance, then saw them as black spots crawling across the landscape. Pulling up inside the berm, the men jumped from the cabs and headed straight for their tents to get a beer or soda. Barechested and sweaty, they plopped onto cots, chairs, and footlockers and let themselves unwind for a moment.

Soon most of the men stripped off the rest of their dirty clothes and walked to the water truck. Dinner could wait; nothing in the world could feel better at the moment than a cold shower. The water was sandy as it gushed from the faucets, but no one really complained. It removed the dirt and sweat of a long day and helped awaken a tired mind. And that was all that mattered.

The hot meal went down fast, then it was back to the tents. The men hooked up the truck headlights which they had hung inside, for it was already getting dark. Mail was brought in, the first in several days, and they settled down to read the long-awaited letters. Those who got none grabbed eagerly for the week-old Stars and Stripes.

One of the men received a large envelope from his sister--a teacher. She had enclosed letters from her entire class of 5th grade students. The engineers gathered around as each was read aloud, bursting into laughter at the wondrous questions a child could think up to ask a soldier in Vietnam. The men seemed to make the most of the moment, enjoying the warmth of friendship. The mood explained a statement which Specialist Four Mike Horowitz, West Lake Village, Calif., had made earlier in the day, "You've only got a few things to return to after a day out on the cut--a shower, a hot meal, and your friends. If you don't enjoy the people here, there's not much left."

The tent lights were off by 9:30, most of the men already asleep while turned-down radios droned on and on. Specialist Horowitz was one of the few still awake, finishing a letter by a flickering lantern. "You know, our job is funny," he said. "Most of the engineer units here spend their time constructing things--bridges, highways, houses. We do just the opposite, stripping the land to help the people."

It was hard to tell if he was defending his job, or trying to determine for himself what he was accomplishing. But one thing was certain. He would have all next day on the cut, and many more after that, to think about it. ■

An old man watches in silence as Rome plows clear the hedgerows around his village. When working near a village, the engineers are careful not to disturb the crops, graves, and houses.

Something More than Ceremony

Story and Photos by SP5 John Wilcox

The ceremony was to be brief and formal, a proper military performance. At one end of the asphalt parking lot an open-sided reviewing stand had been constructed with two ranks of chairs for Vietnamese and American dignitaries. Vivid letters across the edge of the roof declared in English and Vietnamese: "TRANSFER CEREMONY 8th FIELD HOSPITAL TO ARVN," and the date, "8 September 70." The Vietnamese flag and the American flag hung at the base of miniature flag poles waiting to be raised. To the left the Vietnamese brass band stood restlessly in formation, their polished instruments glaring hotly in the midday sun. Beside them an honor guard in steel pots and white gloves waited, while across the expanse of hot pavement Vietnamese and American color guards stood side by side looking over the space between them. The only intruder on this serenely empty central area was a small table covered with white cloth tacked down against the wind. Here the signing of the transfer documents would take place. The setting was complete.

The actual process of transfer had begun months before. USARV had been gradually reducing the mission of 8th Field Hospital and shifting the bulk of combat casualties and serious medical problems to facilities at Cam Ranh Bay. During that time the Army of the Republic of Vietnam had indicated that it would be willing to accept the 8th Field Hospital facilities and incorporate them with the Nguyen-Hue Hospital in Nha Trang. On June 26 the negotiating parties had reached a preliminary agreement, and work on the details of transfer had begun.

"We had no precedent to follow, no guidelines at all," said Major Meyer W. Cohen, project officer for the transfer. He was watching the dignitaries. At 2:15 p.m. they began to arrive in a train of OD sedans and polished jeeps, each pulling up to discharge its passenger before the ornate guard post at the entrance to the hospital. The atmosphere was tranquil despite the heat. The gusts of hot wind impressed on the scene a certain informality as the guests held onto their hats and programs. The dignitaries trooped casually in clusters to the reviewing stand where they stood or sat, shook hands, smiled, nodded and read their programs in anticipation of the ceremony. The band and guards stood at attention. The flags flapped primly. The table stood in expectation, two black ink stands peering from the white surface.

"Our original philosophy was simple," said Major Cohen. "We thought we could just hand over the hospital to the ARVNs, move out and leave it lock, stock and barrel for them to take up operations where we left off. But it turned out to be nowhere near that simple."

The ceremony at 8th Field Hospital opens with the raising of the American and Vietnamese flags accompanied by the two national anthems.

There were two basic problems. First, the Vietnamese were not prepared to maintain some of the complicated medical equipment. Parts for some of the machinery would be impossible to replace except through official channels in the United States. It would take months to train Vietnamese to operate the equipment, and there was time for only OJT briefings. Secondly, some of the equipment could not be justified for Vietnamese medical treatment. In the case of a serious compound fracture, for example, it is standard practice for the Vietnamese to amputate rather than attempt to repair the break. They have neither the manpower nor the equipment for lengthy and complex surgery and treatment, which frequently requires several operations over an extended period of time. For this reason they could have no use for physical therapy equipment. Since they could not use this type of equipment, it had to be removed before they would accept the hospital.

Thus began an elaborate process of itemizing supplies, analyzing and sorting equipment, planning alterations, and negotiating the details of the exchange. After more than two months, the ARVNs had accepted $1,227,000 worth of real property, buildings, medical and non-medical equipment and supplies. As broken down by the engineers, the exchange involved 121 separate facilities, including a water purification plant, a sewage disposal plant, a 250-kilowatt generator and a large central air conditioning system. All of the wards were signed over complete with air conditioners and sufficient supplies to begin operation. "We are transferring a hospital which will be fully operational as soon as they staff it," said Major Cohen. "And we have given them some help there, too. We conducted extensive on-the-job training, briefings and courses in maintenance of the equipment they wanted, such as the X-ray machine and the operating rooms."

The ceremony closes with the final lowering of the American flag—symbolizing the departing American presence.

Since the standdown on July 10, when the hospital stopped operation, a skeleton staff of about 60 officers and men had stayed behind to help with the transfer, pull guard duty and keep up basic maintenance of the facilities. These men were playing a quiet but symbolic role in the transfer ceremony. As soon as the documents were signed and the transfer effective, their places as guards would immediately be taken over by ARVN soldiers. Even now several of the buildings, signed for and locked up, were under guard by the Vietnamese.

At precisely 2:30 p.m., as if by an invisible signal, the participants in the ceremony drew silent and the band, following commands in Vietnamese and a salute to the hospital colors, struck up the United States national anthem and then the Vietnamese national anthem. The dignitaries, all in uniform, stood at present arms while the two national flags slowly mounted their poles. Off to the right the colors of the 8th Field Hospital, maroon with white medical crest, lettering and fringe, seemed to dominate the scene.

Those colors were leaving Nha Trang after eight and one half years.

Eighth Field Hospital had been the first hospital to arrive in Vietnam, now it was the first to turn over its facilities to ARVN. There was a symmetry in these two "firsts," and everyone concerned in the transfer seemed to sense historic significance.

For a year after its arrival in March 1962, the hospital had operated as the only unit of its kind in Vietnam. It grew to become a sophisticated "final destination" hospital, occupying a strategic position at the edge of the Nha Trang air base where it could accommodate dustoffs and med-evacs with all possible speed. It carried a full range of teatment and served as the Neuropsychiatric Evaluation Center for all of I and II Military Regions. At its peak capacity, 8th Field Hospital accommodated 365 beds with a staff of 249 officers and men, 62 Vietnamese civilians and 50 engineering and maintenance employees.

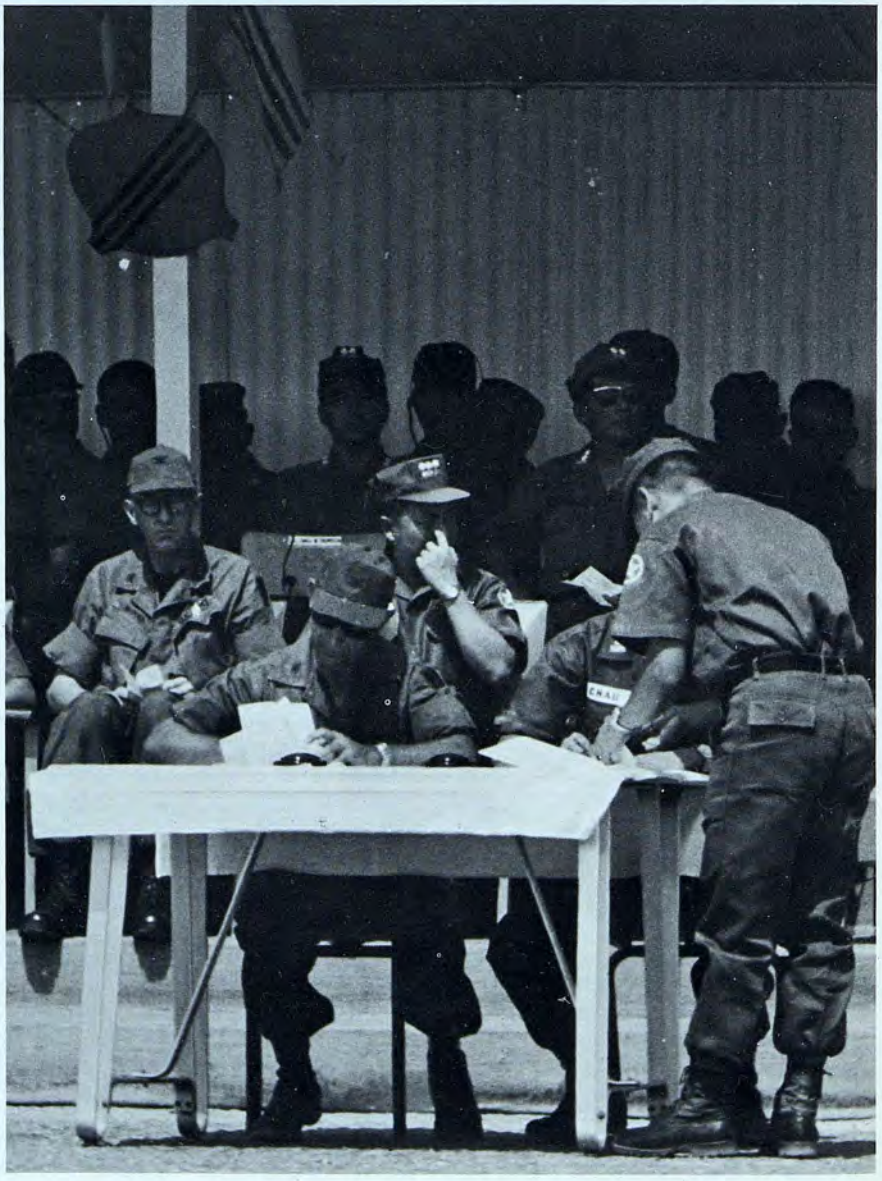
Now the hospital had been reduced to $1.2 million worth of equipment, part of which had been redistributed to other medical commands, part of which by this ceremony would be transferred off the US property books and subtracted from the US foreign aid to Vietnam for one fiscal year.

For reasons of protocol, which required perfect balance in precedence of the two represented nations, both the US and ARVN troops followed commands together. The Americans had been drilled to recognize the Vietnamese commands, and now the two honor guards side by side executed their maneuvers in unison. In this way, there could be no time lag to disparage either group. Similarly, the document was read in both Vietnamese and English. Then the two colonels, Colonel Falck and Colonel Chau, honored representatives of their respective commands, armed forces, and countries, stepped forward together down the two steps to the little table, seated themselves side by side on the chairs provided and took up their pens in unison. It was a hushed moment only slightly ruffled by the wind which whipped at the documents and tugged the table cover. Two military aides hovered solicitously to prevent any sudden inconvenience. There were, of course, two copies of the transfer document, one for each signatory. The colonels signed and passed, signed and passed back. Then, as the troops stood at attention, the colonels rose together, shook hands and then returned to their positions on the reviewing stand. These buildings and equipment, this bit of land were now all a part of the Nguyen-Hue Hospital.

The American flag, which at the beginning of the ceremony had been raised at the right edge of the reviewing stand, was now symbolically lowered--a last gesture of the departing American presence. The band played the Star Spangled Banner as the stars and stripes rode brightly down the small flagpole while the Vietnamese flag fluttered overhead. Like the flag, the Vietnamese national anthem closed the ceremony, and the dignitaries, satisfied with this fitting conclusion to a complicated transaction, left the reviewing stand.

With the ceremony completed, the honor guards broke ranks and dispersed, curling and sheathing their colors. People moved across the parking lot, indecisive now that the performance was over, and milled around in that area which moments before had been the scene of something more than a ritual, something more than a band playing, flags dipping, men sitting, rising, saluting, signing a paper. It had been a moment when vague and intangible policy had become briefly visible.

This quiet ceremony on the grounds of the Nguyen-Hue Hospital offered a moment to point to as evidence that the American policy of Vietnamization is being carried out and that "progress" is actually being made. In a practical sense, the months of preparation, negotiation and work which went into effecting the transfer were far more important than the ceremony. But in a larger sense, symbolically, it was the ceremony which gave the measure of our progress in Vietnam. ■



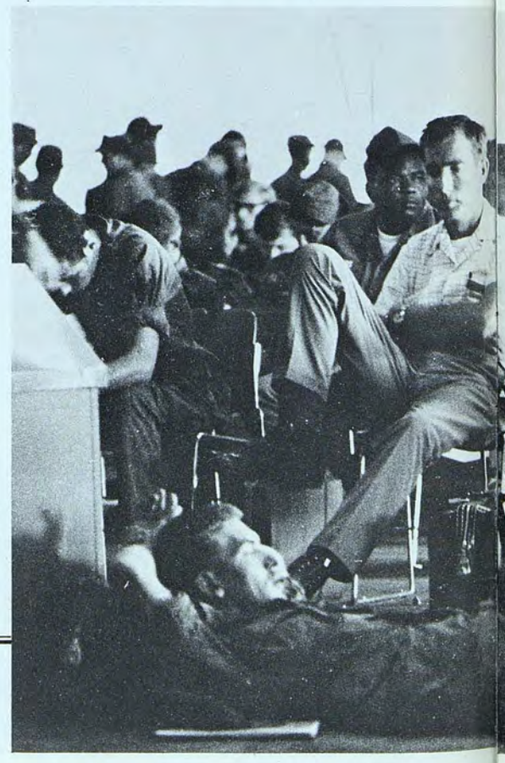
The moment of actual transfer occurs when representatives of United States and Vietnam sign the transfer documents. At this point the hospital facilities become a part of the ARVN Nguyen-Hue Hospital.

Through a doorway as I pass
I recognize a momentary face.
She lightens darkness, as the day,
And burns in shadow, as the moon.
I feel her eyes
Open to the visitor
The locked chamber.
I see her smile
Fill to the waiting guest
The empty vessel.
I do not stop
Nor wait
Nor glance again
Nor even pause to smile, to raise,
As she has done,
The murmur of an aching pulse.

How long is a year--when it's over and you're waiting to go home? Waiting for the flight that signifies the end and the beginning. During those hours spent at the air terminal, killing time on benches, tables, and concrete floor, you are in limbo. Your mind jumps around, from a past just ended to the future, and back again to the past.

The passing of a year may be charted in many ways: by rows of x's on a short-timer's calender, each square diligently crossed off until none remain, or by worn out boots and faded fatigues, discolored by 12 months of sun, rain, and sweat. But more than a calendar or physical appearance, you, yourself, are a chart of the year just finished. You have experienced an entire spectrum of emotions and are different because of them. You have been hardened by the ferocity of battle, yet softened by the compassion of fellow soldiers, frightened by the threat of death, yet strengthened by the desire to live, discouraged by the futility and injustice of war, yet buoyed by the glimpse of an envisioned peace.

FINIS



Photos by SP5 Joe Bradley

You know all of these feelings when you're sitting and waiting to go home. When a year that had evolved into one gigantic blur breaks suddenly into distinct memories of moments shared. How long is a year--when it's over? ■

HERB FAC?

By 2LT William Marsik

FAC (Forward Air Controller), that's understandable. But what is a HERB FAC? I was in Qui Nhon, in Binh Dinh Province, Military Region II, when the phone rang. It was one of the HERB FACs. We arranged a meeting, and a few minutes later I was approached by Lieutenant Colonel Jim Hyland, Air Liaison Officer (ALO) for the 22d ARVN Division. He was a young-looking man wearing an Air Force flight suit and sun-glasses. With him also was Major Larry Wood, the Sector ALO, who said, "My HERB FACs are the best FACs in Vietnam and I'll stack them up against anyone else's." Cheers followed from all the HERB FACs who had joined us, then everyone simultaneously related just what a FAC does, how he operates, calls in air strikes, and so forth, in the fastest briefing ever given.

When I finally got to ask a question it was naturally, "What does HERB mean?" The answer was simple: HERB is their particular call sign. All the FACs in Colonel Hyland's command use the HERB call sign and a corresponding number. Even Colonel Hyland has a number; he is HERB 01.

First Lieutenant Floyd Batchelder took me aside and added some background information. He explained that Colonel Hyland is the ALO for the entire 22d ARVN Division, which the HERB FACs support exclusively. This area of responsibility is divided into five sectors, each with a sector ALO and five FACs. Each FAC spends about 75 hours a month flying missions. His job is to call in, coordinate, and direct all tactical air strikes within his sector.

There are two basic types of air strikes. One is a preplanned strike. Intelligence information is gathered and the strikes are prearranged accordingly. Suspected enemy locations and caches of enemy logistical supplies are examples of the kinds of information compiled to determine the location for preplanned air strikes. The second type of air strike is an immediate strike. This occurs when friendly troops are in contact with the enemy and request tactical air support. In both instances the FAC must be airborne over the location of the air strikes to direct and control the fighters.

Because friendly troops may make

Lieutenant Floyd Batchelder spends about 75 hours per month flying missions, during which he calls in, coordinates and directs tactical air strikes within his sector.

Responding to instructions from HERB 14, a VNAF A-37 maneuvers for an attack on a suspected enemy location near the Soui Ca mountains.

contact at any time and request an immediate air strike, the FACs are on call 24 hours a day. The night I met the HERB FACs, Lieutenant Batchelder had been called out on an immediate air request. Hearing a plane drone overhead while we were talking, Colonel Hyland listened attentively for a moment and remarked, "Not bad, it took him 15 minutes to get from his quarters to the aircraft and into the air." If the request receives a clearance, the FAC can be airborne and the fighter planes on station to any part of Major Wood's sector in about 35 minutes.

The tough part, which sometimes results in a delay, is getting clearance for the fighters to be dispatched. The location of any friendly troops in the area of the proposed air strike must be checked. Confirmation is made that all friendly elements are out of the danger area and then all data is re-checked for possible error. All of this work is performed by the DASC (Direct Air Support Center). At the DASC, ARVN and US controllers must coordinate their action in obtaining a clearance.

The HERB FACs work closely with the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF). In the tactical Air Command Post, where HERB Control is located, Vietnamese radio operators are being trained in the radio procedures and aircraft deployment for US FACs and fighters. Major Wood is an instructor-pilot, which qualifies him to instruct pilots in FAC methods and the conduct of air strikes. During the period from December 1969 to March 1970 he personally trained six VNAF pilots. The HERB FACs feel that the VNAF FACs are highly competent and they point with pride to their work with the Vietnamese.

Lieutenant Batchelder explained how an actual air strike is conducted. The request, either immediate or preplanned, must first go through the clearing procedure. Then the fighters are given the FAC's call sign and radio frequency and dispatched on the mission. Similarly, the FAC is given the fighter's call sign and frequency. These procedures are coordinated by the DASC. As the fighter comes on station he contacts the FAC, who gives him the target description. The fighters describe the exact ordnance they are carrying. After determining how this ordnance can be used to maximum advantage, the FAC gives the fighters a target briefing, including target elevation and elevation of the highest surrounding terrain.

A weather briefing follows and the FAC relays the location of friendly troops, the attack heading and break direction, and whether or not hostile fire may be expected. The break direction indicates whether the fighters should veer off target to the left or right. Finally, the last information supplied by the FAC is the location of safe bailout areas. The FAC then proceeds to mark the target with one of the 14 white phosphorous rockets attached to his aircraft. All that remains is to call in the fighters. If necessary, the FAC will continue to re-mark the target with additional rockets.

The FACs fly a two-seat Cessna 02-A, a two-engine plane with tandem-mounted engines. One engine in the front pulls the aircraft, while another directly behind the cockpit pushes the plane. Cruising speed is 135 knots and cruising altitude is normally 1500 feet. Above that altitude the pilot cannot see much, and below that his vision may be restricted.

Offered a chance to accompany a routine mission, I readily accepted, and later that afternoon I was helping Lieutenant Batchelder pick up survival vests, parachutes, flight helmets, and other gear for the trip. We were accompanied by the plane's crew chief. Lieutenant Batchelder explained that the HERB FACs have three 02-A's, with a crew chief charged with the maintenance of each one. Since the HERB FACs are on a 24-hour standby, someone must always be available to get the aircraft ready to fly. This is the job of the crew chiefs,

who take pride in servicing the aircraft and maintaining them in top condition.

In a few minutes we were airborne and flying north toward the Suoi Ca mountain area, a site of suspected heavy enemy activity. On the way, Lieutenant Batchelder pointed out some destroyed enemy 51mm anti-aircraft emplacements. From the air they looked like large brown doughnuts.

Reaching the Suoi Ca mountains and circling around briefly, Lieutenant Batchelder decided to check on clearance for a preplanned air strike. Banking the aircraft sharply, he pointed out a heavily used trail and the suspected location of the enemy. He called HERB Control requesting the strike. HERB Control replied that they would check on the clearance and contact us when they had the information. After about 15 minutes the radio cracked, "HERB 14, this is HERB Control, fighters will arrive on station in 30 minutes." Lieutenant Batchelder "rogered" the transmission and received the rendezvous location and time to meet the fighters. The radio operator at HERB Control was one of the Vietnamese being cross-trained in US procedures. He knew his job well. In a few minutes we headed north again, reconning more terrain. Returning to the location of the strike, we received a call from one of the fighters. Lieutenant Batchelder explained that the two fighters were A-37s, piloted by Vietnamese.

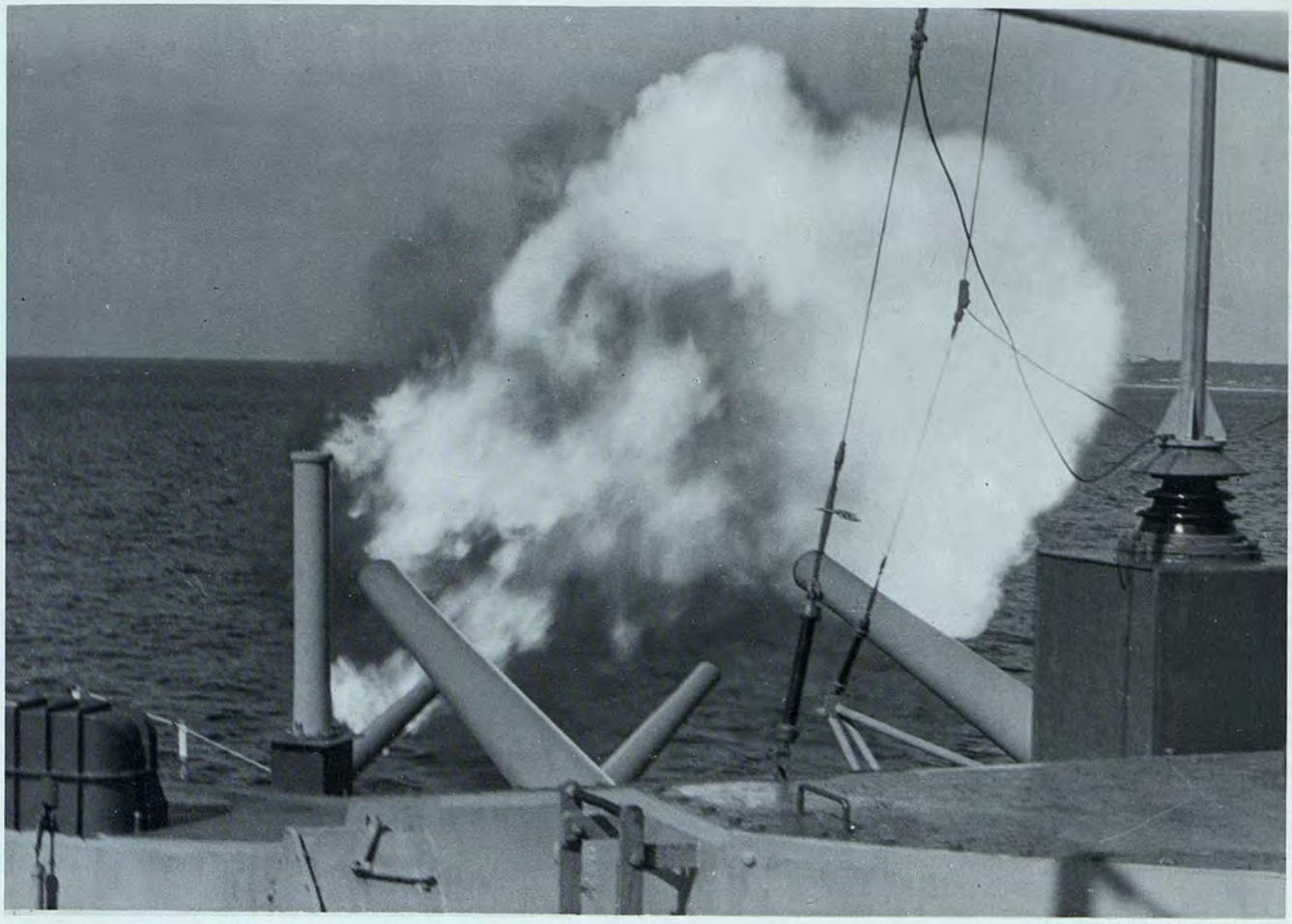
"A FAC can be airborne and the fighter planes on station to any part of the sector within 35 minutes."

At this point HERB 14 became business-like as he located the fighters and exchanged the necessary information for the airstrike. The VNAF pilot's English was perfect. Lieutenant Batchelder said, "OK, I'm going to mark the target, watch for my smoke." He put the small aircraft into a dive and discharged one of the white phosphorous rockets. It was all up to the fighters now, or so I thought. It was HERB 14, however, who guided them in, one at a time toward the target, while keeping his own aircraft flying tight circles in order to see the fighters and the target.

As each fighter dove steeply and dropped its bombs, Lieutenant Batchelder adjusted the next fighter's ordnance. HERB 14 re-marked a new target for the fighters, who this time would be firing high explosive rockets. Deftly guiding them in again, Lieutenant Batchelder kept adjusting and circling until suddenly we were flying a smooth, straight course again. The strike had lasted only nine minutes; we were on our way home.

Back at the operations center, Captain Larry Peppel demonstrated another facet of the HERB FAC's routine. We went out to the Save the Children Center, a Vietnamese orphanage. On this particular visit Captain Peppel took packages of gum and candy for the children. He explained that all the HERB FACs had sent home for children's clothes, and to date 30 cartons of clothes have been donated by the HERB FACs and friends in the United States. Each Friday the children are bussed to the beach where they swim under the watchful eye of Captain Peppel and other volunteers. This is a favorite project with the HERB FACs, and they pursue it with the determination and enthusiasm which make them live up to Major Wood's claim that his are "the best FACs in Vietnam." ■

A crew chief is responsible for maintenance of each of the HERB FAC's Cessna 02-A's. These planes are ready to conduct air strikes 24 hours a day.



Photos by SP5 Lonnie Voyles

Two Guns—Four Salvos

By 1LT Richard Brasher

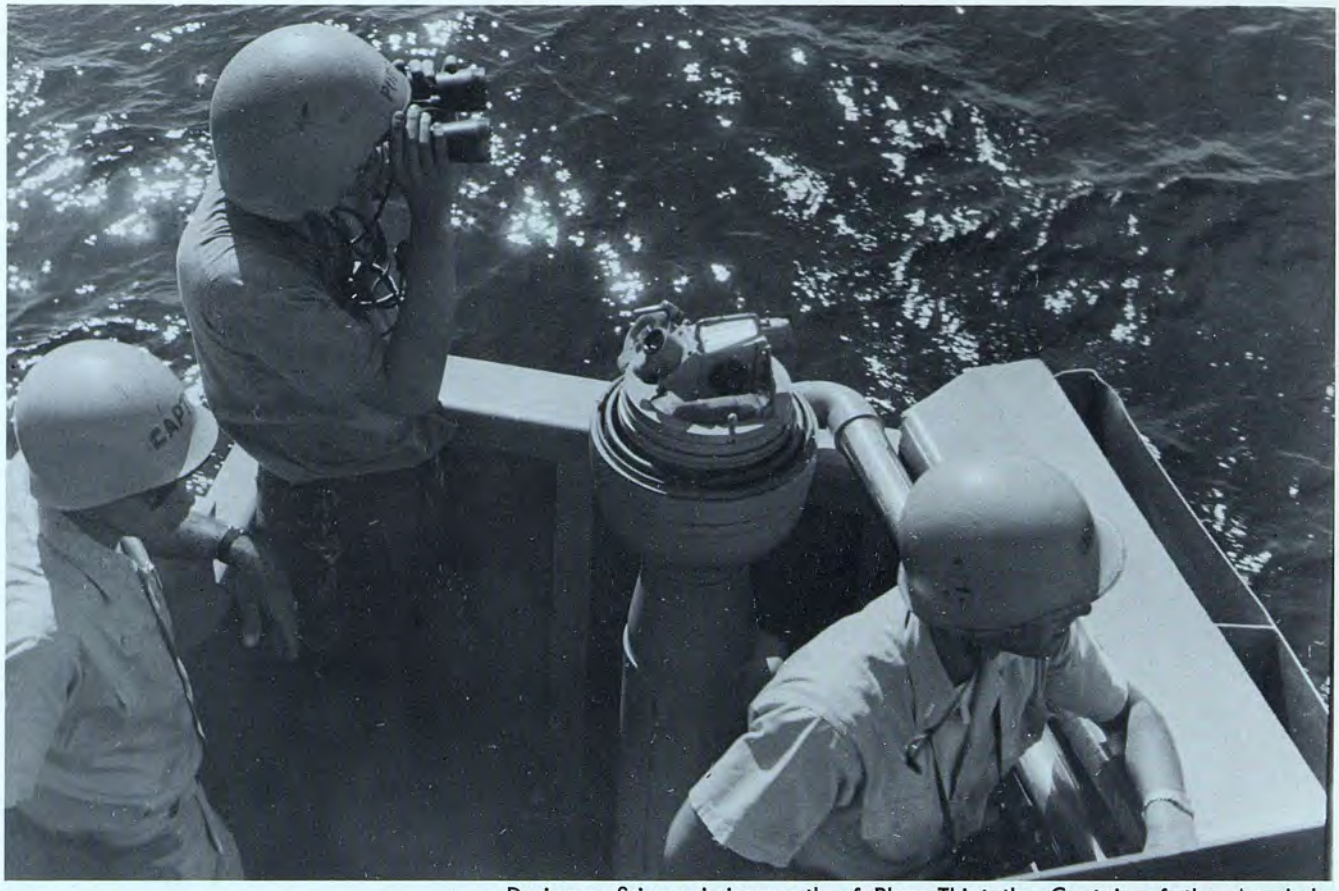
The men called it a silent raid. At midnight the soldiers of Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 50th Infantry were boarding Vietnamese yabutta junks to begin an operation in the Le Hong Phong Forest north of Phan Thiet. Their mission was to deny the VC access to the important twin lakes area of the forest. The lakes were the only water source available to the VC.

Hours before, at 1500, a Vietnamese RF platoon had combat assaulted into the area. They had established a night defensive position and set up ambushes at 2200. In the total darkness just before dawn, six junks quietly slipped onto the beach and deposited Alpha Company and a Vietnamese Reconnaissance Platoon. As the infantrymen quickly disappeared into the forest the coastal group sailors slipped their yabutta junks back into the water and moved out to sea.

Two miles out at sea, another type of vessel, a U.S. Navy destroyer the USS John Paul Jones, was also supporting the raid. Alpha Company was operating in what would have otherwise been a very dangerous situation. Totally out of range of any 105mm batteries and at the maximum range of 175mm batteries in Phan Rang and Phan Thiet, they depended almost exclusively on the John Paul Jones. Through constant radio contact with the naval gunfire observers there was close-in fire support immediately available. Although unable to see the ship, the men of Alpha Company felt more secure in the knowledge of her vigil. As the mission progressed she supplied heavy concentrations of fire on known and suspected enemy positions.

Navy destroyers like the John Paul Jones are playing a key role in missions all along the coast of the four military regions of Vietnam. They provide a moving platform that can bring fast, accurate, and effective fire support. The ultimate in mobile artillery, they can move quickly to cover an area that would otherwise require the comparably slow and difficult job of displacing a field artillery battery. Capable of firing over eight miles inland, they add new dimensions to fire support.

To effectively utilize this additional fire support it is necessary to have naval personnel specifically trained to support infantry units. The Marine Corps' Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Companies (ANGLICO) have accepted that mission and provide liaison



During a firing mission north of Phan Thiet the Captain of the Agerholm evaluates the performance of his crew, checking their speed and accuracy. Firing day or night the Captain can always be found on the bridge.

between the ships and units in the field. As qualified naval gunfire observers, these men know how best to use the fire support. They understand the needs and requirements of the units on the ground and the problems peculiar to naval gunfire.

To increase their effectiveness and usefulness to the infantry in the field, the naval gunfire observer is also trained and fully capable of calling for and accurately adjusting field artillery and air strikes. When not employed with an infantry operation these observers are further used as aerial observers. In 0-1 Bird Dogs they can move along the coast quickly with the destroyer to bring fire support to any unit that needs it.

Unlike the men of the ANGLICO team, who spend much of their time in the jungle with the infantry and at close quarters with the enemy, the men aboard the destroyer live an entirely different life. Aboard the destroyer USS Agerholm the men are almost detached from the war. An old ship which saw action throughout the Pacific in her twenty-five years, she recently arrived in Vietnam with a new crew. Cruising continuously two to three miles off shore, the men of the Agerholm wonder what it is like on shore. They can watch the flares go up at night, hear the thunder of artillery, watch the helicopters speeding along to stop suddenly and fire into the jungle and they imagine what is happening. The Agerholm moves slowly along the coast and except for these occasional reminders she could be off the coast of any one of a hundred shores. For the crew, duty in a combat zone means almost routine sea duty.

This detached feeling is evident in all aspects of the crew's lives. The food isn't any different, the daily routine is always the same; and even the firing missions are the same. For the crew, firing in combat is no different than firing in practice. Since they never see the results of a firing mission and rely solely on the reports of the observer, the mission could have been for practice and the results imaginary. There is no constant threat of mortars and rockets or a ground attack to bring the realization of combat into sharp focus.

But duty aboard ship is not ideal. Crew comforts aboard war ships have always been minimal. In recent years the Navy has attempted to improve the living conditions and decrease the discomforts of weeks at sea. Failure in the water purification system can still mean the rationing of water for weeks. The chance to go ashore, even in Vietnam, is a welcome change after being confined to a 290-foot vessel. The time spent aboard ship makes an occasional liberty a highlight. All ships on duty in the Far East manage liberties in at least a few of the exciting and exotic ports such as Bangkok, Taiwan, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and a dozen others.

A sudden warning to prepare for a mission can pull the men away from dreams of the next liberty and debates over which port they will see next. The aerial observer has spotted a target and the Agerholm begins moving on station. As she moves on station, immediately off shore from the target,

the information is taken directly by the Combat Information Center.

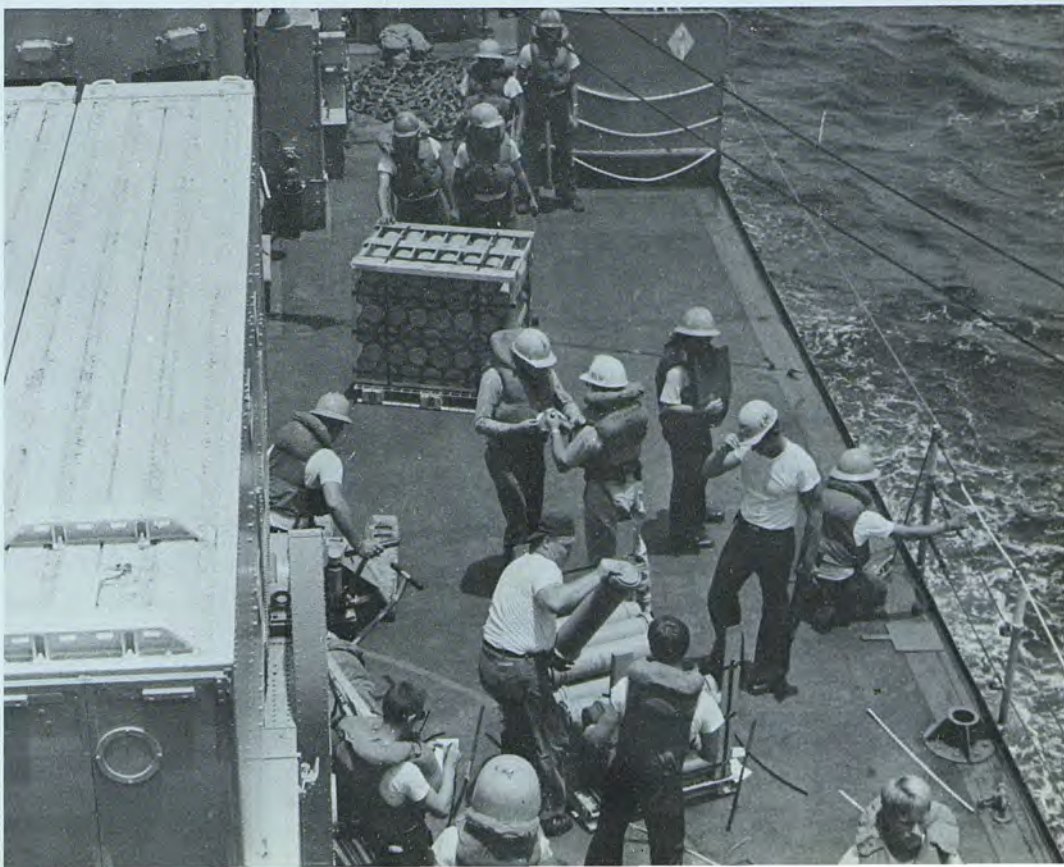
"Combat", is normally used in an anti-submarine and anti-aircraft role and is only partially employed in its mission of controlling gunfire on land-based targets. In controlling the fire mission, "Combat" maintains constant contact with both the spotter and "Battery Plot." The spotter provides information on targets, target position, type of rounds desired, and adjusts fire during a mission. "Combat" in return keeps the aerial observer informed of the gun target line. In addition, "Combat" is reponsible for determining the ship's position, and, since the ship is moving, for a "running plot" in relation to the target. The navigator must determine the ship's exact position and course using radar, navigational beacons and sonar. Constantly recomputing to update this information, he notifies "Battery Plot" of the ships "track" or position, course and speed at 15 second intervals.

"Battery Plot" has the responsibility of placing all information concerning the ship and target positions into the computer controlling the guns. Other information is added to correct for wind velocity, other variables of atmospheric conditions, type of rounds and fuse setting. Having been fed all data affecting the firing of the guns, the mechanical computer computes and continuously recomputes the direction and angle of the guns and compensates for the movement of the ship. The actual firing of the guns takes place here once the order to fire has been cleared by the captain.

Below deck the preparations for firing occur in the efficient but quiet atmosphere of an air-conditioned room filled with crewmen watching scopes, bending over navigational charts and checking dials on a computer. Above deck and in the gun turrets is another scene. Although the guns are aimed by computer and fired from below deck, they must be loaded manually. The Agerholm has two twin five-inch gun mounts, both mounted foward. Roughly the size of a 105mm howitzer, it has 60 percent more range. Once the guns begin firing, the temperature may exceed 120 degrees in the mounts. Hampered by working in a confined area and in the oppressive heat, a well-trained crew of four men like those of the Agerholm is still able to maintain a rate of one round every 4 seconds. With four guns firing there is the capability of 60 rounds a minute. This tremendous capability is used only in the rarest instances. Normal missions call for the expenditure of only 50 to 60 rounds or approximately 150 rounds average each day the ship is firing on the gunline.

Constantly moving, expending large amounts of ordnance, and maintaining 276 officers and men aboard ship necessitates an efficient and timely means of resupply. The Agerholm must refuel every four days and take on ammo and stores approximately every two weeks. It is to the U.S. Navy's credit that it is the only navy in the world that can accomplish resupply at sea by means of a system called UNREP, Underway Replenishment. By rendezvousing with a cargo ship as she moves along the coast of Vietnam, it is possible to take on supplies while moving. When fuel, stores, or ammo are required the Agerholm moves alongside the cargo ship as both ships maintain a speed of 12 to 15 knots. While separated by only 60 yards, telephone and cargo lines are passed to the destroyer followed by crates of ammo or two huge fuel lines. Although requiring both skill in navigation and an efficient crew to handle cargo, the entire process can be completed in less than an hour. UNREP enables a ship to remain at sea over extended periods of time. The time and fuel consuming process of returning to port is eliminated and a ship's ability to remain on station in fire support is extended almost indefinitely.

The extended time at sea can increase the detached feelings of the crew. They continue to watch the shore and wonder as the destroyer silently maintains her lone watch...waiting for a call from shore. ■



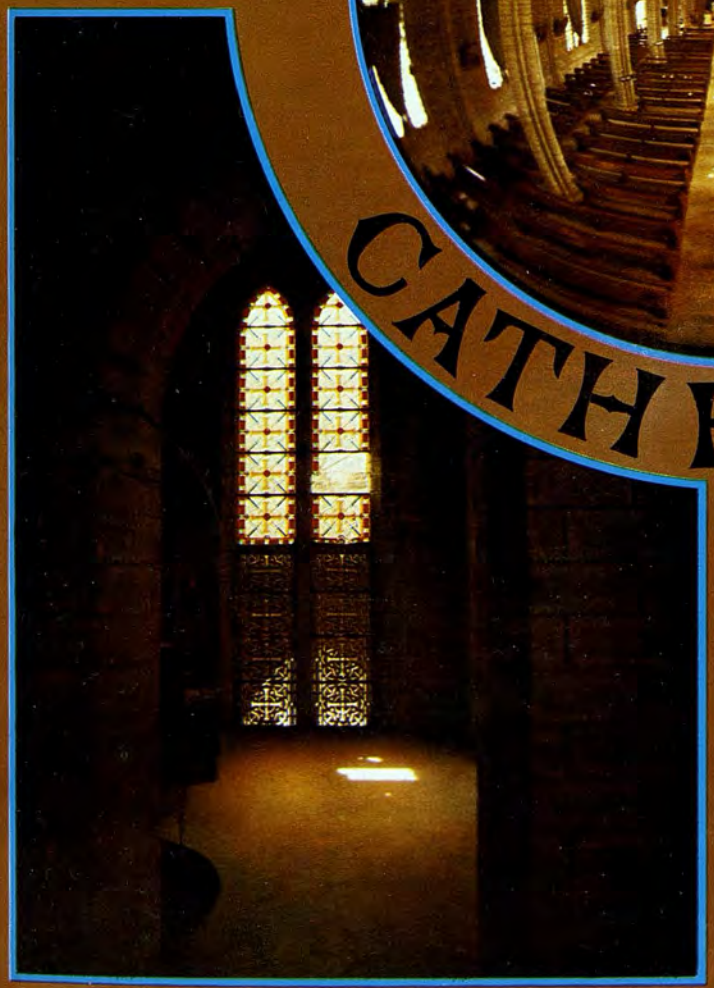
All hands are needed to move the powder charges from the crates to the magazine below deck. Underway Replenishment (UNREP) demands an efficient crew to handle the tremendous amounts of supplies received from freighters twice each month.

NHA TRANG CATHEDRAL

The Nha Trang Cathedral stands remote on a hilltop, watching the city through stained-glass eyes. On a drowsy morning, it is empty save for the small Vietnamese altar boy. The boy, no older than ten, sweeps silently down an aisle and sends the dust floating upward to dance in beams of sunlight.

Built by French missionaries, the gray, stone structure lives as a solitary survivor of the colonial era in Vietnam. Long strands of cobweb hang from the ceiling, too high and too stately to be whisked away. Here and there, a broken window frames an outside reality. Spiral staircases curve gently to the organ loft, their railings worn smooth from a thousand hands.

Climbing to the loft, the boy strains at the thick ropes and sets the cathedral bells in motion. Their pealing reaches out to the city below--a welcome and reassuring sound. ■



How Do You Describe An Orange?

Story and Photos
By SP4 Mike Maattala

Sitting attentively in front of their instructor, the students responded individually as he asked, "What do you want?" The instructor received a variety of answers as he moved about the classroom: a pen, book, motorcycle, a pair of shoes. The last student to answer declared in perfect English, "I want a break." The class erupted in laughter and the instructor, quickly checking his watch, called a halt to the period and sent them outside. The student had made his point.

The instructor was a US airman, a member of Air Force Advisory Team 7. The students were warrant officers in the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF). Together they comprised a class at the English Language School (ELS), one of eight schools which make up the VNAF Air Training Center in Nha Trang.

The ELS was created out of necessity in 1959. The Vietnamese air program depends on US Air Force technical manuals; all instruction at the training center, from pilot to maintenance training, is in Vietnamese but most manuals are printed in English. Therefore, a means was needed to provide the students with the fundamentals of English before they could move on to their technical training.

Growth at the ELS has been tremendous in the past few years, with the number of incountry graduates increasing from 250 in 1968 to 1,130 in 1970. There are currently 99 USAF and 20 VNAF instructors, providing a student-teacher ratio of 10-1. Future plans call for the entire teaching staff, and all other positions, to be eventually manned by the Vietnamese. In September, 22 VNAF personnel were already participating in a six-month instructor training program in the United States to facilitate this changeover.

The ELS is run by a Vietnamese director, Lieutenant Colonel Le Ba Toan. He is assisted by two advisors: Major Gordon O'Brien, USAF, and Mr. Joe Killough, Defense Language Institute (DLI). The presence of these advisors and instructors is similar to the American pilot who flies missions while his Vietnamese counterpart learns how to fly. Those who will be language instructors learn English at the school, then go to the States for further training. The advisors work with each man who will assume an administrative position at the school, teaching him his job. When he becomes capable they let him take over. "And he will do the job well," said Mr. Killough, "maybe better than we did because he knows his people."

Facilities at the ELS include six air-conditioned language laboratories, built in April. With "position" for 225 students, the labs are the showplace of the school. Major O'Brien calls them "the best lab facilities in Southeast Asia." Using the tape recorder, headset, and microphone provided at

Airman First Class Ed Stevens draws a particulary hard pronunciation from students at the English Language School. The school is one of eight which make up the VNAF Air Training Center in Nha Trang.

his position, each student is able to listen to English tapes, repeat what he hears, and then play back his tape to check his pronunciation.

But impressive as the language labs are, the real work goes on in the 46 classrooms, simply furnished with blackboards, lecterns, and chairs. Here the instructor and students engage in the learning process on a man-to-man basis. One merely has to wander by a classroom and listen to understand the type of instruction that goes on. There is no instructor lecturing dryly to a group of bored students. There is noise--the controlled noise of an instructor speaking and students repeating or answering--over and over with no let-up.

To teach English the school employs what is known as the "aural-oral" approach. This is the reverse of the traditional approach, which emphasizes reading, writing, and translation. With oral proficiency as its main goal, the ELS discourages direct translation, trying to train the student to think directly in English without recourse to his own language. He is taught to recognize aurally (by ear) the significant sound patterns of the new language. Reading and writing are secondary objectives, the term "oral" referring to the emphasis of the spoken word over the written.

In this approach, speech naturally becomes the medium of instruction in the class and lab. Writing, whether on the board or in a text, is used mainly as a guide or reinforcement to oral performance. "We put a lot of pressure on the student," said Airman First Class Dan Doerr, instructor from Keeseville, N.Y., "On the first day of class we jump right into English. The students aren't allowed to use their native language at all."

Learning by the aural-oral approach, the student becomes familiar with the language in quite the same way that a child begins to associate certain sounds with objects or responses. But whereas a child is exposed to words in a random manner, the students at the ELS progress within a definite pattern.

From the beginning the instructor serves as a model of pronunciation. The students repeat the words, both chorally and individually, until the instructor is satisfied with their performance. This type of drill is tedious and time-consuming, but it is the foundation upon which the learning process is built.

When teaching words during these drills, it is actually a handicap for the instructor to be able to speak Vietnamese because he will have a tendency to translate a word the students have trouble with. "We use a direct approach because we are seeking automatic responses," said Major O'Brien. "If an instructor begins to translate, he is talking about a language instead of with it." Added Airman First Class Ed Stevens, Hackensack, N.J., "This is where visual aids really come in handy. I mean, how do you describe an orange?"

From drill the students progress to conversation. When learning interrogative sentences they move again from group to individual responses. First a pair of students sitting next to each other will go through a question and answer dialogue, called "seated role playing." After letting them gain familiarity with the dialogue, the instructor will switch to a stand-up form of the

exercise, calling on different pairs of students to perform in front of the class. A little more confident now, they are urged to put some gestures and facial expressions behind the words.

Eventually the students will progress to the technical aspect of the language, learning words and phrases related to their particular field. They also become more involved with the writing and reading of English, skills they will need to understand the training manuals and take notes in class.

Most of the students attending the ELS are officers and air cadets, with some senior NCOs there for refresher training. The school uses a three-track system, grouping the students according to their ability. But though assigned to a track after one week of classes, a student may be switched to a faster or slower track as dictated by his progress. The average student takes approximately six months to complete the course.

The DLI provided material for the course--16 different text books and 300 taped lessons. With four hours of class and two hours of lab daily, five days a week, the students must spend much of their time studying to keep up with their lessons. If a student fails a book twice he is automatically removed from the school.

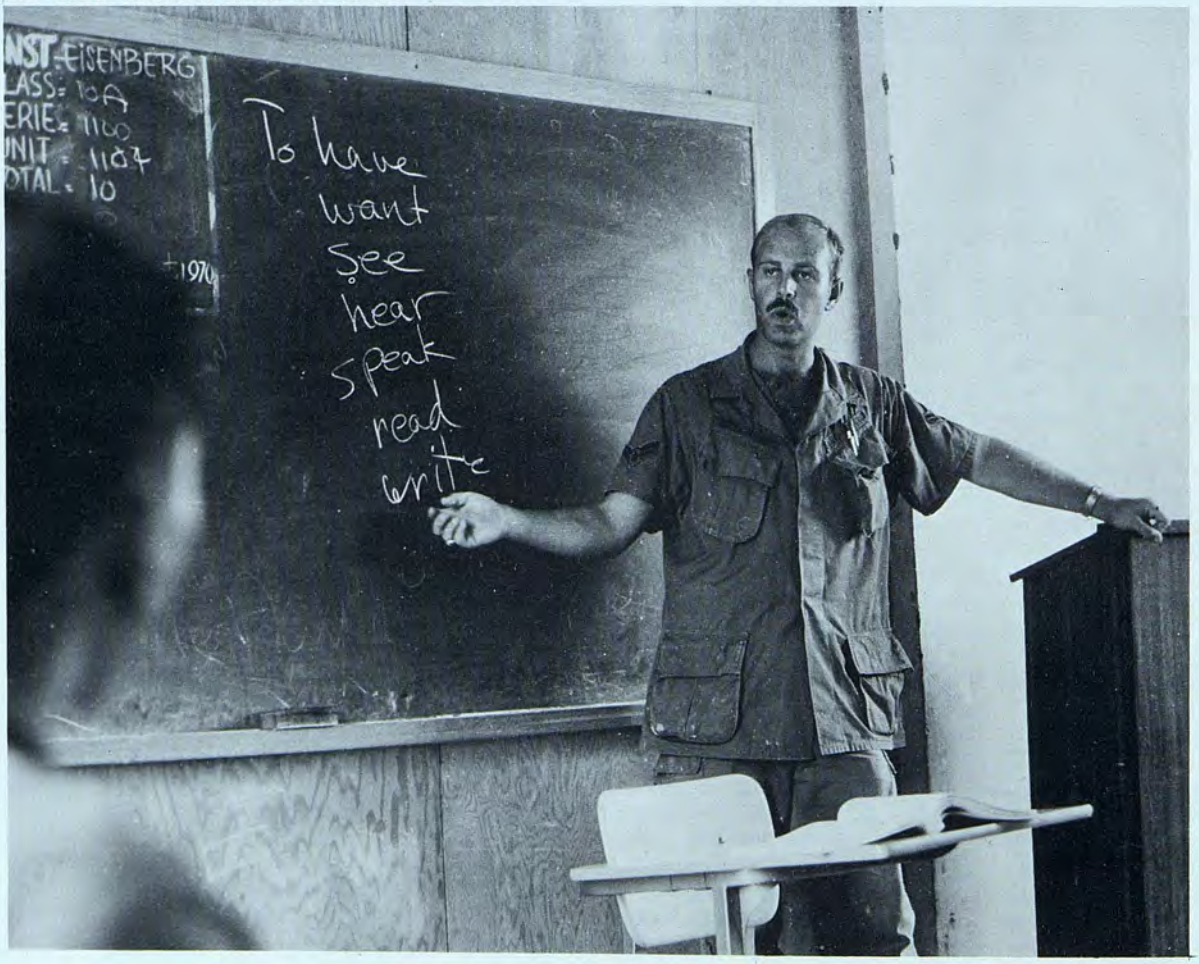
There is great incentive for the students to complete the course. Many will be helicopter or jet pilots and will have to go to the states for further training. Fixed-wing instruction is available in both Vietnam and the US, so there is more competition because only the best of these pilots go "off-shore." If a Vietnamese fails his pilot training but has a high English Comprehension Level (ECL), there is a good chance he will be made an English instructor, which also involves training in the US.

The ELS does more than provide the student with a tool to help him in his future training. Said Major O'Brien, "Every graduate we turn out is more interested in the US. He does more reading and makes contact with people because he can finally communicate with them." The students are aggressive and eager for guidance. Several of the instructors hold extra classes and lab sessions at night to help those who want to learn more or who need assistance.

The instructors at the ELS are well qualified for their job. Most are college graduates; many had teaching experience before entering the Air Force. After expressing interest in the program, they attended the DLI English Language School at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Tex. There they received two weeks of classes on methodology and four weeks of practice teaching before coming to Vietnam.

The instructors realize that they are participating in a special mission. When their tour is over, most will return to the States and attend a technical school to learn another skill. Even though their work at the ELS is a relatively short-lived experience, they pursue it with diligence. "They have to be a cross between a Baptist preacher and drill sergeant," said Mr. Killough. "They get students who may know only a few words of English and by the time they finish with them they are able to communicate in a new language. The instructors realize that

Running through a series of verbs, Airman First Class Donald Eisenberg says each word slowly and then lets the VNAF students mimic his sound.



Under the guidance of a US Air Force instructor, Vietnamese students listen to English tapes in one of the six language laboratories at the English Language School.

the careers of the students lie in their hands. If a student fails here he will never get to technical school."

To help keep their performance at a satisfactory level, the instructors are constantly being evaluated. Major O'Brien finds time to sit in at least three classes a day, dropping in unexpectedly to watch the instructors work. They are also evaluated each month by their team chiefs, DLI advisors, and the Vietnamese, who discuss their teaching methods and study the progress of their students.

Many of the students have studied English for a couple of years, but it was mostly grammar--and taught by Vietnamese instructors. "We really have to work with them on pronunciation," said Airman First Class Donald S. Eisenberg, Los Angeles. "They speak a closed-mouth language; it's mono-syllabic. And they have just never made some of our sounds, like sh, ch, and final s."

Working with his class of beginners late one afternoon, Eisenberg showed little sign of having been through a full schedule of teaching that day. As soon as he walked in the door, he began passing out their quiz results, chiding or congratulating each student on his score. His voice was loud and gravelly--and not to be ignored. "Some of the other instructors question my being so noisy," he said later, "But no one will ever fall asleep in my class."

After finishing with the quizzes Eisenberg began the first drill: the final "s." He said the word, "reads," made the whole class respond for several minutes, then moved to each student to hear him individually. Try as they might, some could not drag out the last sound. Eisenberg worked with them for half an hour, pleading patiently. Yet occasionally he was forced to throw his arms up in disgust.

Without a break, the class started a drill involving the "P" sound, another pronunciation which causes the Vietnamese much trouble. Eisenberg moved around the classroom, holding a piece of paper in front of each student's mouth until he bent the paper by saying "plane."

Then Eisenberg picked up the pace. Standing in the center of the semi-circle of students, he called for the mimicking of each sentence he said. Soon he was yelling the sentences and the students, perking up, began to shout right back at him. He looked like a cop directing traffic at a busy intersection as he gestured quickly with his right arm, then his left, to draw forth responses. When the drill was completed, he dismissed the class and plopped down in his chair. The session, though full of many errors by the new students, had been a satisfying one.

Using this approach to language teaching, the instructors at the ELS help the students achieve what they need most--oral proficiency. There is no attempt to explain the complex and sometimes confusing rules of the language. They are taught how to use it, not why.

The instructor, with this goal in mind, has only one way to find out if he is getting through to the students in class. "You can never ask, 'Do you understand?'" said Stevens. "If you want to find out whether he knows what 'dog' means, you ask him, 'Are you a dog?' And if he grins and says, 'Yes, I am a dog' you know." ■

Don't It Make You Wanna Go Home?

Story and Photos
By SP5 Joe Farmer

Vietnam gets terribly boring at times. Doing the same things every day with no break in the routine can have a man climbing the walls in a matter of a few short weeks.

The American soldier in Vietnam is constantly searching for release. He is accustomed to living where there is something new to do every night. The American society is almost manic in its search for new means of recreation.

The soldier in Vietnam finds himself away from these activities. He can't go to a football game or dance after his day is finished. His flimsy bond with this society is a song. The sound of American Forces Vietnam Network radio with its "Voice of Home" and top hits from stateside, and the occasional bands at the club.

A song can make him forget the war or remember it vividly. It can be reminiscent of a happy day past or bring startling revelations of things to come.

Specialist Five Jim Parker and Specialist Four Bob Hardwick were hard at work at the motor pool. They had been working all morning on the electrical system of a deuce and a half. "Say, what you going to do tonight?" asked Jim. "Going to the movie?"

"No, man. There's a band at the club tonight."

"Any round-eyes in it?"

"Don't know," replied Bob, as he hooked up the batteries to give the truck a final check.

"Man, I hope there is. We haven't had a round-eye band in a long time. Are you going to get off early and save a table?"

"Yeah, I guess I can. I hate to sit there two or three hours waiting, though."

"Get one right in the center."

The afternoon seemed to drag by, as the two men worked on jeep after jeep. Finally it was 4 p.m. and Bob headed for the club. Others were already there, but it was still early enough that he found a table front row center. He sat down to wait and ordered a beer.

While Bob sat waiting in the club, "The Happenings," that evening's band, were preparing their equipment in a downtown Nha Trang Hotel. The four men and three women were from the Philippines. They didn't know where they would be playing that evening, only that a truck would pick them up at 5 p.m.

Bob nursed his beer while he watched television. Finally, at a little after 5, the band came in and began to set up. By this time someone was sitting at almost all the tables, saving places for their friends. All the men turned to watch the band and see if they had played the club before.

"Humm. A new group," thought Bob. "I've never seen these guys before. Maybe they'll be pretty good."

The members of the band set their equipment up just like they had done a thousand times before, looking out at the audience as they worked. They weren't really worried about how the crowd would like them. They'd been on the circuit in Vietnam twice before, and the men always liked them. They knew, of course, that the men liked any band as long as they were reasonably good.

About five minutes before time for the band to start playing, Bill came wandering into the club. "Well," he asked, "how do they look?"

"We've never seen them before," replied Bob, "maybe they're pretty good."

"I hope so, I'm really up for a good band."

"Did you get that jeep finished?"

"Yea, the radiator had a hole in it, so I deadlined it."

"You might as well have buried it; we'll never get a new radiator."

"I know it. You ready for another beer?"

"Yea, I guess I might as well."

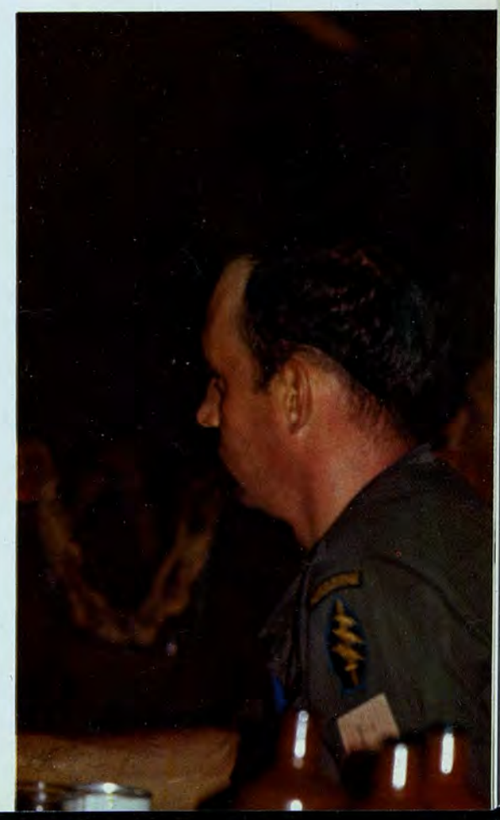
The two sat in silence for a few minutes waiting for their order to arrive. Just as the waitress brought their beer, the band came out on stage and picked up their instruments.

The band began slowly. They played a quick instrumental, then launched into some of the old Beatles recordings. Bob and Bill sat silently, watching intently. They listened to three or four songs before they passed judgment.

"They're pretty good, aren't they?" asked Bob.

"Yea, they're a lot better than that band we had last week," replied Bill. The band last week had been pretty good, too. They had been better than the band the week before that. As a matter of fact, by the time the band last week had finished, they had been the best band Bob and Bill had ever heard.

The band played the same songs they had heard every week since they arrived in Vietnam, from every other



band they had heard. The songs never changed, but Bob and Bill never tired of hearing them. They listened to the men in the band tell them how "You Just Keep Me Hanging On," and how there had to be a "Revolution." They listened as the band told them their girlfriends' love was like a "funeral fire" and they should "light their fires."

The girls in the band told them what it would be like to be "Together Again," and to touch the "Green, Green Grass of Home." They watched while the band laughed at them singing "They're going to put me in the Army." They drank beer and they forgot about the jeep with the broken radiator and about a war that was going on someplace.

Bob was beginning to feel pretty good. His head nodded with the beat and his hand drummed on his knee. "Say, these guys are good," he said to Bill.

"Yea, they're the greatest, man. I bet they would make a smash back stateside. Wonder why they don't go to the States."

"I don't know. They'd really be a hit, though. These guys are the best band I've heard in Vietnam."

Meanwhile the band was singing about how one was the loneliest number, but that two could be twice as bad. Some guy was standing up doing the Funky Chicken until the Master-at-Arms put a restraining hand on his shoulder. The guy didn't like the idea of being told to sit down. He wasn't hurting anyone, was he? Why couldn't they just let him have a good time? Why did everybody keep pushing him? Why did they have to keep reminding him where he was? He decided he just wouldn't sit down. The MA talked to him.

"Look son. You're blocking everybody's view. Have a good time, but do it sitting down."

Bob saw the altercation. "Hey, look at that guy over there. Why doesn't he just leave the kid alone? He wasn't bothering anyone." The kid sat down, and the MA went back to stand by the door. Bob returned to his drink and continued to watch the band, forgetting the incident.

The members of the band had seen the man dancing, too. They had seen the MA tell him to sit down. They had seen it a hundred times, every time they played. It didn't mean a thing. All they were worried about was the time. It was almost time to quit playing. They were tired and wanted to go to bed.

The men in the club were beginning to feel good. They didn't want to go to bed, and they didn't want the band to stop playing. They wanted them to play forever. They knew that when the band quit the night was over. All that was left was sleep, and, after sleep, another day.

Finally it happened. Everyone knew it would. They had been expecting it, half in anticipation and half in dread. The band began to play "We Gotta Get Out of This Place." That signalled the end. Every band ended with that song. For months Bob and Bill had listened to it in despair. While others sang out "short, short, short" and held their fingers up to show just how short, Bob and Bill had sat in silence, hoping no one would look their way and laugh. Tonight was different. They realized that they too were now short. All those months hadn't been for nothing. It was almost over. The year of their lives that they had wished away by days was almost over. They sang at the top of their lungs and held their thumb and forefinger into the air, as close together as they could get them, to let everyone know that Bob and Bill were short. They looked around at the guys in the new green fatigues and laughed.

"If I was a new replacement I'd die," said Bill.

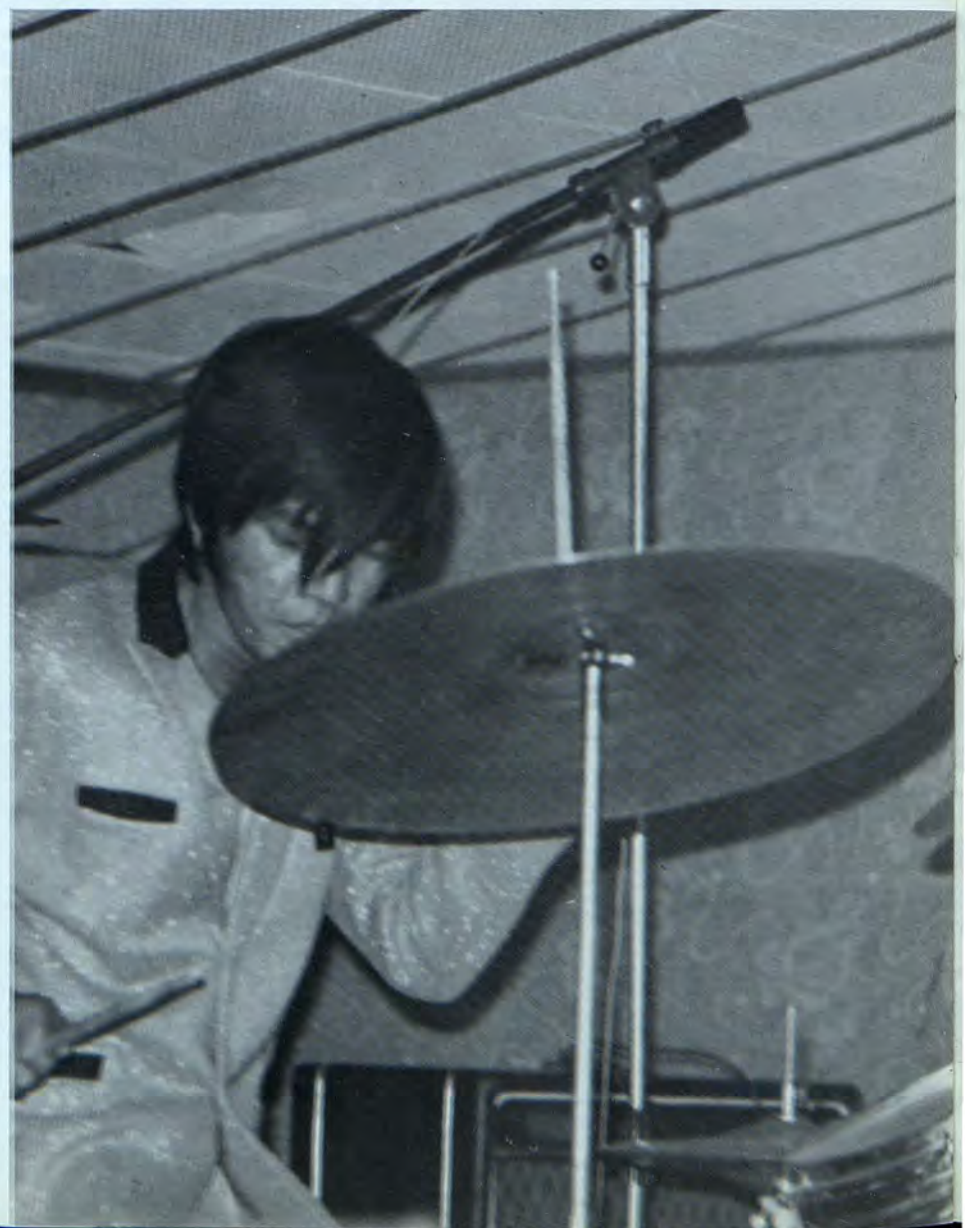
"Yea. I really feel sorry for those poor guys."

The band had stopped. In a few short hours it had traced a day, a week, a month, or a year of the men's lives. It had recalled bands heard before and suggested those still to be heard.

Bob and Bill finished their drinks and got up. They walked out of the club and headed toward their barracks.

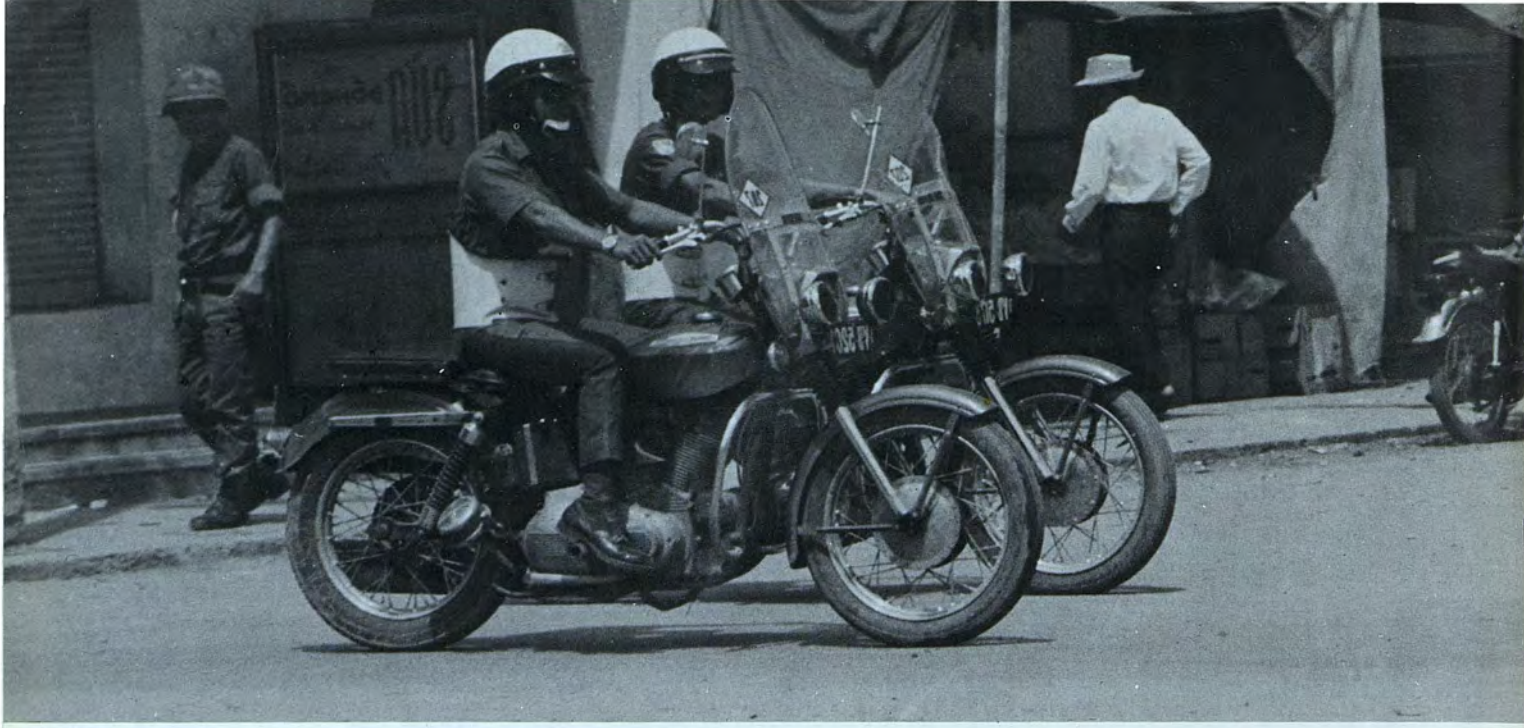
"See ya in the mornin'."

"Yea. That was the best band I've ever heard." ■

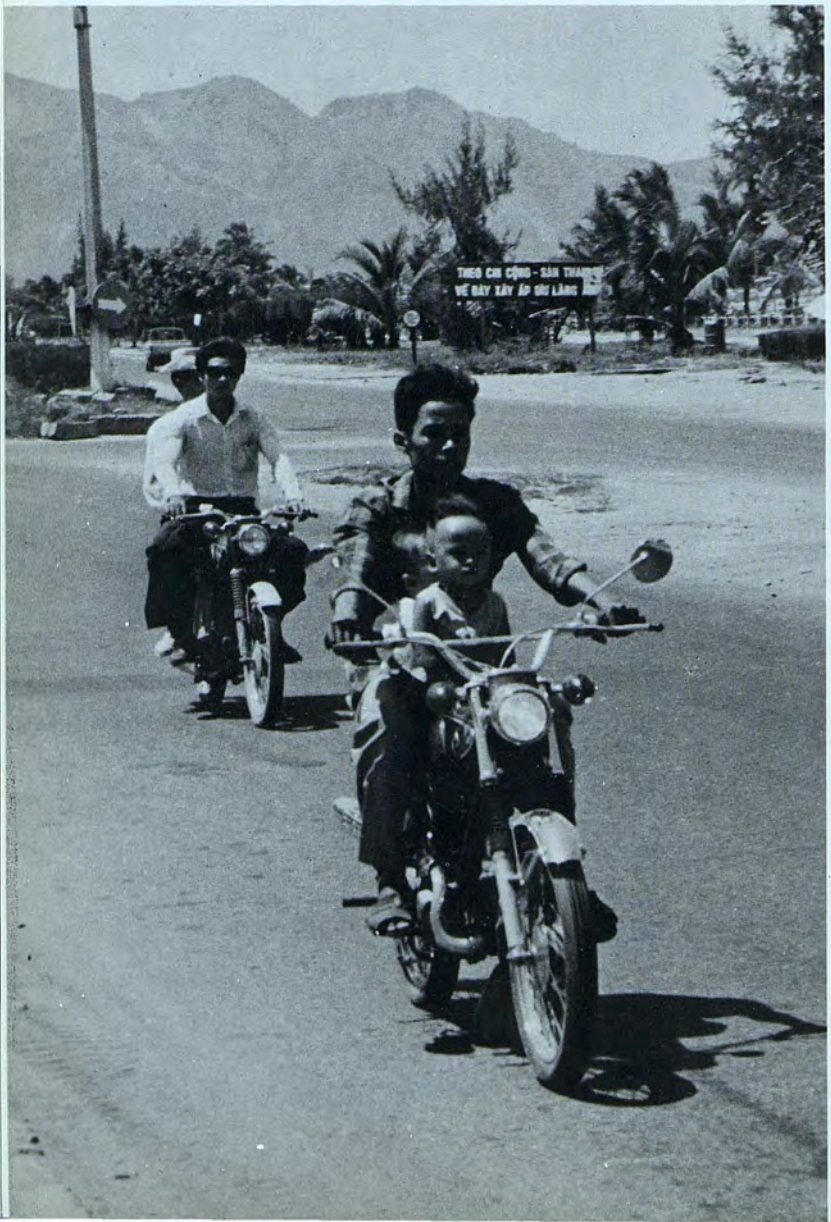


Bands under the supervision of Special Services travel across Vietnam entertaining the soldiers. Here a member of "The Happenings," a Filipino band, performs at the 5th Special Forces Group NCO Club in Nha Trang.

When oh when did we pass
Down from the narrow path,
Leaving behind, above us
All we longed to be known for?
Was not right on our side?
Did not we seek all for them,
Take nothing for ourselves?
Yet must we turn to climb,
Hoping to reach through our labor
One comfort war can give.



Photos by SP5 Joe Farmer



Getting around

Getting from place to place in Vietnam is an interesting, and sometimes harrowing experience. Especially for someone accustomed to the orderly hustle of America's highways.

The means of transportation in Vietnam and America are vastly different. Undoubtedly the most prevalent vehicle in Vietnam is the motorcycle. It's not unusual to see four to six people jammed on the short frame of one cycle. They can be seen rain or shine, anywhere your travels take you in the country.

Running close second are Vespas and Lambros. The little three-wheeled scooters serve as the country's taxis. Watching one unload is like watching the endless stream of cats pile out of a car in a Saturday morning Mighty Mouse episode.

An almost inexhaustable line of pedicabs, horse-drawn carts, bicycles, and people just walking also clog the highways. To the American driver, unaccustomed to the volume of two and three-wheeled vehicles, a major traffic problem is posed.

Many of the Vietnamese operating the vehicles are unaware of traffic hazards. Their senses of speed and distance have not been developed through years of driving and riding in automobiles. The American driver should always be alert to the possibility of a sudden stop or swerve which can be fatal.

Drive slow, watch the guy ahead of you, and remember, there's no highway in the world like a Vietnamese highway. ■

The Commander's Role in Military Justice

by SP5 John Wilcox

Polonius: ***My Lord, I will use them according to their desert.***
Hamlet: ***God's bodkin, man, much better! Use every man after his desert, and who shall scape whipping? Use them after your own honor and dignity. The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.***

A recently published critique of military justice condemned the entire system with a pointed analogy: "military justice is to justice as military music is to music." In one narrow sense the comparison is apt, for it recognizes that military law, like military music, has a unique function. Just as there are practical reasons why military music differs from other forms of music (troops need a structured simple cadence for marching and drill), there are reasons why military law differs from civilian law. Frequently in civilian life we recognize these reasons when we accept "martial law" in times of public emergency. The military, with its mission of national security maintained through strict discipline and rank structure, requires a more martial law than that which governs the relatively loose structure of peacetime civilian society.

In its wider implication -- that military justice does not measure up to the ideal of justice -- the music analogy states nothing more than a truism. Military and civilian law both fall short of ideal standards. No legal system yet conceived comes close to achieving perfect justice. We accept the shortcomings of law and the weaknesses of our social systems as we accept the fallibility of human beings, and we try to correct our mistakes as we discover them. Blanket condemnation merely obscures whatever hope we have of improving our society and its laws.

Criticism of the system of military justice is most frequently aimed directly at the unit commander, for he is the figurehead of military justice. In the administration of company punishment, in the preliminary investigation and charging of the accused, then in posttrial review, the commander bears first responsibility for the process of military justice. It is he who works at the level where military law touches the individual soldier. The commander thus becomes the natural target for complaints against the system as a whole.

Colonel William C. Vinet Jr., Staff Judge Advocate for I Field Force Vietnam, feels that many critics of military justice fail to appreciate some of the basic principles on which the system was founded. "Our system of military justice is vastly underrated," he claims, "as are all legal systems when evaluated by laymen. Critics of our system choose to ignore or deliberately refuse to recognize that its peculiarly 'military' qualities are based on the Constitutional exception of 'cases arising in the land or naval forces' found in the 5th Amendment. Furthermore, Congress has made clear that military justice is governed by standards different from those that apply under civilian law. This is implicit in a separate code of laws (the Uniform Code of Military Justice) enacted by Congress and applying solely to the military. Unless and until the Constitution is rewritten and the law is changed, we must accept this separate standard."

Colonel Vinet thinks of military service, like law, as one of the few absolutes in our free society. Inductees are obliged to serve by law -- by civilian law. Volunteers serve under a contract which they are legally bound to fulfill. All servicemen serve under oath. There are fundamental differences between holding a civilian job and serving in the military, and these differences are codified, made into law, in the UCMJ. The basic military rules say that we cannot walk off the job, we cannot disobey a lawful order, we cannot show disrespect to our superiors, and these strictures are legally enforceable. There is nothing comparable in civilian

life. The military cannot be democratic in its processes; it cannot follow the principles of self-government which regulate a democratic society.

"No one should expect military service to be easy," says Colonel Vinet. "It involves sacrifice and enforced deprivation. Those who serve must accept the temporary loss of certain rights just as they accept the monastic life of a soldier."

Even with a solid basis in history, military justice is today caught dead center in a period of transition. Up through World War II justice was administered under the Articles of War which were not too concerned with the guarantees of the Bill of Rights. Then in 1950, in response to criticisms of wartime justice, Congress enacted the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The UCMJ extended to soldiers nearly all of the rights and privileges guaranteed to non-military citizens by the Constitution. It created a blend of civilian-military law designed to meet the special requirements for discipline in the military without sacrificing individual rights. In some respects, particularly in procedural safeguards, the Code surpasses state and federal law in protecting the rights of the accused.

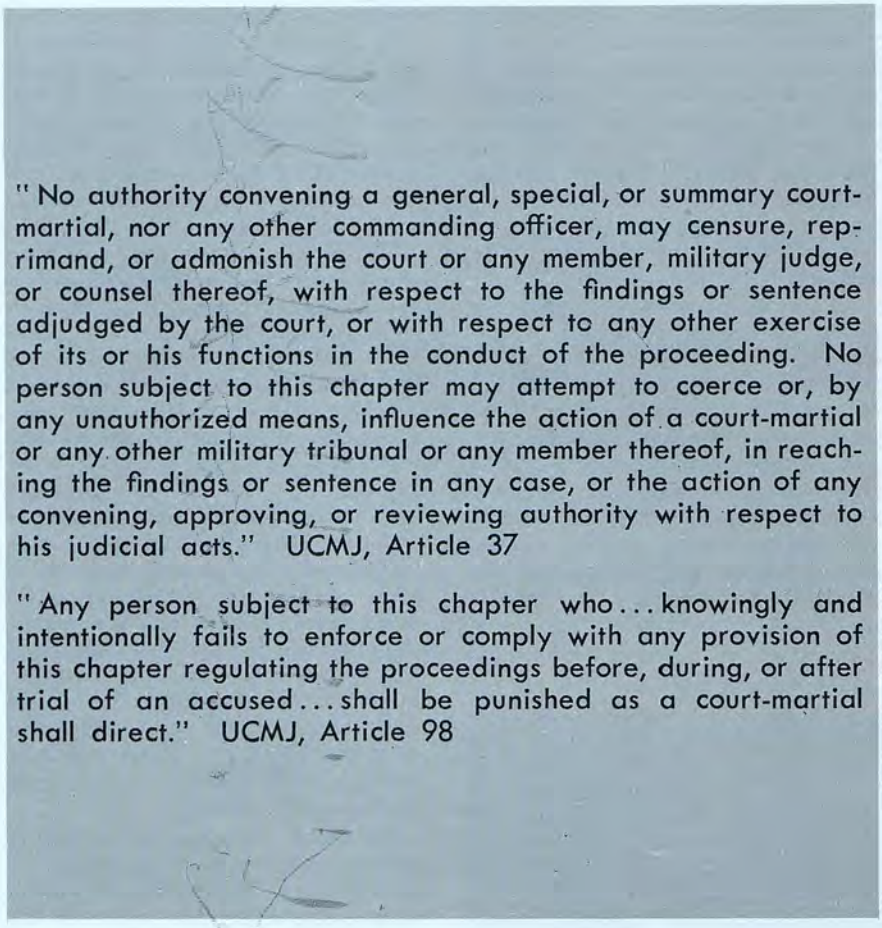
In 1968 Congress amended the UCMJ, extending the accused's right to legal counsel at the special court-martial level and establishing an independent military judiciary. These alterations, enhancing individual rights and further separating military justice from command authority, followed naturally from the 1950 Code's policy of guaranteeing to a military defendant as many of the constitutional safeguards enjoyed by a civilian defendant as are consistent with the structured society found in any military establishment. A notable "right" not extended to servicemen is that to trial by a jury of one's peers. According to Colonel Vinet, "Trial by a court all of whose members outrank the accused is undoubtedly in the accused's best interest."

There is, however, a basic compromise in Congressional policy toward military justice. It attempts to serve two standards -- the traditional strict code of military discipline and the liberal safeguards of individual freedom. Under civilian law two standards of social regulation and protection of the individual work together only because the executive and judicial functions are strictly separated. Policemen do not act as judges, and judges do not prosecute. In the military, however, the commanding officer assumes partial responsibility for the two roles. He is both prosecutor and judge, investigator and arbiter. From this dual role arises the most visible and openly criticized "flaw" of the military justice system -- the presence of command influence.

Command influence is a built-in problem which arises from Congress's attempt to maintain military discipline while safeguarding the rights of the accused. The lawmakers may originally have felt that by giving the commander judicial power they would ensure that military justice functioned as a tool of military discipline. The 1968 amendments suggest that there has been a rethinking of this position and that Congress now feels that there should be a wider separation, as there is in civilian law, between enforcement and judgment in military law. To date, however, Congress has gone only part way in implementing this change in policy.

SP4 Donald P. Meenachan

Colonel William C. Vinet Jr., Staff Judge Advocate for I Field Force Vietnam, discusses the working of military justice and its differences from civilian law.



"No authority convening a general, special, or summary court-martial, nor any other commanding officer, may censure, reprimand, or admonish the court or any member, military judge, or counsel thereof, with respect to the findings or sentence adjudged by the court, or with respect to any other exercise of its or his functions in the conduct of the proceeding. No person subject to this chapter may attempt to coerce or, by any unauthorized means, influence the action of a court-martial or any other military tribunal or any member thereof, in reaching the findings or sentence in any case, or the action of any convening, approving, or reviewing authority with respect to his judicial acts." UCMJ, Article 37

"Any person subject to this chapter who... knowingly and intentionally fails to enforce or comply with any provision of this chapter regulating the proceedings before, during, or after trial of an accused... shall be punished as a court-martial shall direct." UCMJ, Article 98

According to Colonel Vinet, "The law places the commander in a difficult situation. He has to fulfill two roles. We want him to administer discipline in the unit, and at the same time we require him to protect the individual rights of the accused and to judge each offender objectively. We hold the commander strictly responsible for both tasks, but often we do not realize how much these responsibilities may conflict."

The role of convening authority has no counterpart in civilian law. The UCMJ, bestowing this judicial power on the commander, gives military justice an intimate connection with the maintenance of discipline. By contrast, in civilian life legal processes are remote and rarely touch the lives of most citizens except in minor ways. The possibility of a federal conviction for disciplinary infractions is a constant threat to servicemen, for they see the processes of prosecution and judgment personified in one man -- their commanding officer.

The commander's first role in the system of military justice involves the preliminary investigation of a case and the charging of the accused. As convening authority, the commander assumes the judicial role of deciding what course of action -- administrative reprimand, non-judicial punishment, or court-martial -- is appropriate for the case before him. His first consideration is the nature of the offense -- what did the accused do and what were the actual and potential consequences of his act? He reviews the evidence closely and examines the testimony of witnesses. This is his most basic consideration, for in classifying the offense as "serious" or "minor" he will immediately determine whether it is a crime (suggesting a court-martial) or a disciplinary problem (perhaps requiring no punishment at all).

The commander's second consideration during his preliminary investigation is the accused. He examines the accused's basic credentials -- his past record and length of service. Then he looks deeper and attempts to discover any special contributing factors involved in the offense. There may be obvious factors of extenuation and mitigation which alter the nature of the offense. The accused's state of mind, unusual circumstances (financial problems, bad news from home, difficulties in the unit) are subjects which the convening authority should examine, preferably through discussions with the accused. During this pretrial assessment the commander must keep in mind the injunction that no commander should resort unnecessarily to punitive action when administrative corrective measures are appropriate.

The commander's third pretrial consideration is the state of discipline in the command. When a commander is concerned that a particular offense is widespread in his unit and is causing serious problems of morale and discipline, he is justified in treating it as a more "serious" offense. He cannot, however, permit this concern to interfere with his judicial objectivity in "calling them as he sees them." The commander alone must decide what, if any, punishment is adequate to maintain the desired state of discipline, for even superior authority looks to the commander to maintain discipline in his own unit.

In referring charges to trial, a convening authority must remember that the charges themselves are not evidence but merely allegations against the accused. The commander must avoid any form of prejudice or prejudgment before he knows all the facts of a case. American justice, both civilian and military, is built on the presumption of innocence which demands a moral certainty of the guilt of an accused before he can be convicted. Any form of prejudgment undermines the entire system and may lead to embarrassing consequences if the accused, as he has a right to do, elects not to say anything about the charges until his case is tried.

The presumption of innocence is even more crucial during the commander's posttrial review. Article 64 of the UCMJ requires that the commander be certain in his mind that all of the allegations are proven before he approves the sentence. He can examine the facts, the credibility of witnesses, the strengths and weaknesses of legal argument. Even though the court showed by its findings that it was convinced of the accused's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, if the commander is not also convinced of the accused's guilt, he has a duty to set aside the conviction and the sentence, or any part thereof related to the conviction. He may also disapprove or suspend all or part of the sentence for any reason, but he can never increase the punishment adjudged.

In determining appropriate punishment for any offense the commander should never rely on a fixed standard. He should tailor the punishment to the offense. The Table of Maximum Punishments in the

Manual for Courts-Martial serves as a guide, but in the hands of a conscientious commander it will be used flexibly. He will think in terms of the three principal functions of punishment: correction, rehabilitation and deterrence. The purpose of military justice is to help commanders develop soldiers, not prisoners.

Colonel Vinet emphasizes that no commander can lead with the Manual for Courts-Martial in his hand, for discipline cannot be maintained through fear and the threat of harsh punishment. Military justice is an instrument for promoting discipline, not a weapon. Thus while the commander retains his judicial role as a decision-maker in matters of military justice, he is expected to turn to the Staff Judge Advocate for advice on questions of law and procedure. The commander's authority as a judge stems from his status as a commander because Congress gave this authority to commanders only -- and then only to certain levels of command. For example, division and higher commanders alone have authority to exercise general court-martial jurisdiction.

Despite the guidelines for controlling the power of the convening authority, unlawful command influence has long been recognized as a potential "flaw" in the military justice system. Article 37 of the UCMJ expressly prohibits all forms of "unauthorized" influence, by the convening authority or by anyone else, on a judge or member of a military court or reviewing authority. Article 98 strengthens the prohibition, making it punishable by court-martial. With these explicit rules, there have been few cases where a convening authority has attempted unlawfully to use courts-martial to enforce command policy. Such cases have been reversed by the US Court of Military Appeals, if not by a lower reviewing authority.

Critics of military justice allege that command influence takes more subtle forms. They charge that a convening authority may appoint to the court subordinates who will bring verdicts of conviction in furtherance of command policy. They charge that court members assume, with or without prompting from their commander, that a conviction is expected and that their military career will be affected by their verdict. There is only one answer to such charges of corruption and dishonesty. In Colonel Vinet's words: "If this system is to work at all, it must be administered by honest men. It is expected that members of a court will fulfill their legal and moral responsibility to render fair and impartial judgments. There is no way we can be certain that a verdict in a military court is just, anymore than we can say what prompted a 12-man jury to reach its verdict in a civilian court."

There is no way that a convening authority can be sure that court members will be impartial. He can, however, state openly that in matters of military justice he has no "policy," that each case must be decided individually, that each court member must reach his decision on the merits in accordance with the law and his own conscience.

The UCMJ's prohibition of "unauthorized" command influence leaves room for lawful command influence in order to regulate the disposition of certain serious offenses. When, for example, a particular discipline problem takes on serious proportions in a unit, the convening authority may stipulate that violations will be treated as a "serious" offense by reserving the Article 15 power over such cases to himself or to high level commanders, thus elevating the punishment authority from company to battalion or brigade level. The possible heavier penalty does not mean that the process of justice has been interfered with. There has been no change in the procedures of pretrial investigation or charging. The offense is simply regarded more seriously. The potential punishment is heavier, but the case is still processed impartially. There should be no problem of unauthorized command influence in such a case so long as subordinate commanders do not misinterpret policy and attempt to coerce convictions.

Colonel Vinet sees the commander in a father's role. "The commander should never be reluctant to encourage his men," he submits. "It is important not to condemn a man lightly or cause him to become discouraged and negative. No commander should be guilty of indifference. The great complaint of youth in modern society, and particularly in the Army, is their feeling of anonymity. This lack of identity, this feeling that no one knows them or respects them often serves as an excuse and a cover for irresponsible behavior. Direct discussion between the commander and his men can often be more effective than punishment and may avoid demoralizing the individual or ruining his attitude and his chances for becoming a good soldier. No father would permit his children to be disciplined by another man; in this sense no commander should permit his discipline policy to be dictated by his superiors."

Colonel Vinet sees the problems of law and discipline as human problems. "No standard is too high for some men; they accept and meet any challenge, make any sacrifice demanded of them. For others even the slightest obstacle is difficult to overcome. We cannot explain why people are different, but we should try not to condemn them. Condemn their misconduct but not them as individuals, for 'The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.'" ■

Commanders should restrain any tendency in subordinate commanders to resort unnecessarily to punitive action when administrative corrective measures are appropriate. The most effective disciplinary tool may often be a direct confrontation with the individual by his commander. Likewise, a written reprimand for minor offenses may serve to correct an individual without marring his record. When punitive action becomes necessary, the case will be disposed of under Article 15, Uniform Code of Military Justice, if adequate punishment can be imposed by nonjudicial measures. If trial by court-martial is deemed necessary, it will be referred to the lowest court having jurisdiction to adjudge an adequate and appropriate sentence. USARV Supplement to AR 27–10

Montagnards near the Duc My Pass give birth to

A Modern Day Legend

By SP4 Paul Kuhl

There is a budding legend in Vietnam, built up around the mysterious powers of a large, white rock. The legend is easily traced, since it began only recently in a Montagnard village near the Duc My Pass.

The villagers are followers of animism, a belief which attributes good and evil spirits to objects. Each human, the highest creature on the scale, has one or more spirits to help or hinder him. These spirits, the people believe, abide not only in living creatures, but in rocks, trees and the earth itself.

Not long ago, when babies began to die in the Montagnard village for no apparent reason, the villagers became exceedingly distraught. For a while they could find no explanation for the deaths. Then one day a small boy wandering in the jungle nearby happened upon a large white rock with red streaks running through it.

The boy ran back to the village and summoned the chief. Upon close inspection, the chief discerned evil in the rock. He announced that the rock was responsible for the deaths of the babies, and as proof, he pointed to the red streaks which were caused by the blood of the victims. The chief declared that the rock must be moved immediately, but in such a manner as not to disturb the spirits contained therein.

The villagers lost no time in contacting Americans nearby and pointing out the dilemma--either the rock had to be removed or the villagers must move. The Americans contacted the commander of the 610th Engineer Company (Construction Support), and he agreed to help.

Shortly thereafter, a five-ton wrecker and a dump truck rolled up. The engineers fastened chains about the rock, stepped back and signaled "all's ready." The big wrecker pulled and strained, but the rock would not budge. In the process the chain slipped, cracking off a large piece and sending chips flying. In addition to the rock's staying firmly in place there was another strange happening. "Everytime I touched that rock," said the wrecker operator, "it seemed like it cut me."

The village chief became increasingly alarmed at the state of things. He reasoned that when the rock was chipped evil spirits were allowed to escape. In order to mollify the chief, the broken piece was placed in a dump truck and hauled away. Everyone breathed easier when this part of the operation went off smoothly. But, when the chips were gathered up and placed in a jeep to be likewise hauled away, the jeep would not start. Furthermore, all efforts to start the vehicle failed and it remained in place for three days. Now some of the engineers explained that this particular jeep had been giving them trouble for a long time, so they weren't surprised. But the chief was not so easily convinced.

The determined engineers brought in a bulldozer and plowed into the obstinate rock. This time the rock went along, literally, and it was soon deposited at a safe spot away from the afflicted village. The chief was elated and the village celebrated.

The elation was short lived, for another village near the 610th's compound was hit by a rash of unexplainable deaths. The second village's chief came to the engineers and said, "The rock is evil. It is causing my people to die."

This time a two-pronged attack was mounted. A forklift was brought in to move the rock to the engineer compound and a doctor entered the case to determine the cause of the deaths. The driver of the forklift narrowly avoided serious injury when the steering mechanism locked while he was moving the rock, but he successfully deposited the object within the compound. Meanwhile, the doctor found that the deaths had been caused not by evil spirits but by a respiratory ailment. He administered medicine to the villagers and the deaths stopped. The wary villagers pointed out however, that the rock had been removed at the same time.

Back within the engineers' compound, soldiers took pictures of the rock and some even tempted fate by chipping off souvenirs. Visitors were presented these souvenirs and warned "to be careful." All in fun, of course, but a civilian visitor from Dong Ba Thin took a chip of the rock back to his office and "things just didn't seem to go right after that." An Army colonel thought his problems increased coincident with his being presented a piece of the rock to be used as a paperweight.

Someone noticed that the rock actually did put forth an ominous glow after dark. Some even said the mass of white and rose quartz seemed to blink on and off and the red lines appeared dark as blood. On the day following the rock's arrival within the compound, the 610th Engineer Company recorded its first death in more than a year. True, the deceased had a history of heart trouble, but why then?

The engineers were not superstitious, but some felt a bit uneasy when the commander decided that the rock should be demolished and more than the usual number of onlookers were on hand at the appointed time. There were a few jests about evil spirits, but there were nervous glances, too, as explosives were packed about the rock and the fuze was lit. The explosion shattered the silence and blasted the rock into thousands of pieces.

The engineers policed up the fragments and fed them into the rock crusher, but the quartz wouldn't crush; it fuzed in the same manner as cotton candy. At this point the rock crusher broke down and it took two days to repair it. But again the engineers persisted and the remnants of the rock went into a batch of asphalt being used to pave a road running north from the compound to Ban Me Thuot. One of the first trucks down the newly paved road broke an axle. Other drivers say they "just don't feel right driving that stretch of road."

The villagers, too, are uneasy. They report a panther has been seen roaming the area in the dark of night. Some say the panther's eyes shine with an ominous glow. Other say the eyes seem to blink on and off and that there are red lines, too, as dark as blood. ■

Dear Dad, The drug theme is a sad song...

I'm sorry I have to write this letter, because I really messed up this time. We were in from the field for a three-day standdown and we had a shakedown inspection. Well, our company commander found some marijuana I had in my footlocker. Nothing official has happened yet, but I'm worried. The punishment for something like this can be pretty stiff.

I wish I could be talking to you now. This isn't easy to explain in a letter. I hope you're not saying, "I told you so," but after warning me about drugs all through college I guess you've got the right to lecture now. I knew a few guys who got busted back then but I figured it just couldn't happen to me.

The drug scene in Vietnam is somewhat different than in the States. First of all, drugs, especially marijuana, are so available it's hard to believe. The grass is a lot stronger and cheaper too. But you can never be sure what you're buying. A couple of guys got some pills a month ago and there was more in them than they bargained for. They really had a bad trip.

Soldiers use drugs over here for different reasons. Some, with jobs in rear areas, are bored from sitting behind a desk all day. After doing tons of paperwork, they have so few places to go at night. It gets old after a while. So they get high at night to forget about it. For some of the soldiers out in the field humping 75 pounds of gear every day, it's a form of release--to just sit back, listen to some music and groove. For a while at least, they forget about the dirt, heat, and danger they have to face. That's how I felt, especially after getting 11-Bravo with a college degree. I just kept thinking, "Why me?"

I wonder now, though, what would have happened if I had become a clerk? Would I have still smoked grass, saying, "Yes, I've got it easy--but I'm bored." I imagine if you really needed "excuses" you could probably find things wrong with any job here (and anyplace else in the world, for that matter).

I'll tell you one thing though, Dad. None of the guys in our unit smoked grass or took pills while on a mission in the field. It was sort of an unwritten rule among us; we didn't want anyone high when we were out looking for Charlie. He's tough enough to battle under "normal" conditions.

I just thought of some of the "discussions" you and I used to have over drugs. We both had read all the latest literature on the subject, picking out the "facts" we needed to defend our viewpoints. That's the trouble with the whole drug scene, if you're trying to figure out where you stand. There is a lot written on the subject--and by prominent people--but so much of it conflicts. Take marijuana, for example. Some say that it is harmless and that it can actually be beneficial in the treatment of certain maladies. Others swear that it will completely ruin your life. I'm sure that the answer lies somewhere in between, but where?

Something that's interesting, though. A lot of rock groups have been pretty big on drugs, and that has had a great effect on the people who dug their music. Now, as you might have heard, a few of these big stars have died from an overdose. You can bet that set a lot of people thinking.

The Army has what it calls an Amnesty Program over here. I'm beginning to wonder if I didn't goof by not looking into it. If you haven't heard of it, I'll explain it to you. If a GI has a drug problem and wants help, he can go see his company commander, chaplain, surgeon, or provost marshal. They will see that he receives treatment, both medical and psychiatric, if necessary. Nothing is entered on his record, but he can't be under investigation at the time for drug abuse. A lot of times they have group sessions, where a guy can talk to other soldiers who have participated in the program.

I feel sort of silly explaining this program now. I guess I figured I didn't have a drug problem. I thought it was nothing I couldn't handle by myself if I ever had to. Well, I've got a problem now, but of a different kind. What's going to happen to me? I was told a soldier can get a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and confinement at hard labor for five years. That could definitely be a bummer! (For hard drugs, like heroin and opium, the sentence can be up to ten years).

I hope you can explain to Mom and Gary what happened. I hate to think how upset Mom will be. And Gary, since he's just starting college, has probably messed around with drugs by now. Maybe finding out about me will have some effect on him. It looks like I might have to postpone the plans I had for a while. I was getting pretty short--43 days to be exact. The writing work I had planned seems pretty far off now.

The last couple of days, I've been doing quite a lot of thinking, as you can probably tell. Last night I tried to put my feelings into words. Here it is:

"Life can be a series of sweet songs, but the life of a soldier in Vietnam is often filled with off-chords. The notes of a war song can make the keys of your mind feel like they're falling apart. There are ways to handle the disharmony of war, but turning to drugs is not one of them. Sure, the song of Vietnam may sound like a harsh melody; however, compared to the cacophony of a drugged dream, you're living in a minor symphony. The drug theme is a sad song, especially when you're trying to sing a song of life."

Maybe you should let Gary read this part. He always liked my writing. I'll write you again in a few days. ■

Peace,
Bob

From: _____

To: _____

THREE
AIR MAIL
STAMPS

A Rome plow on the "cut"
Story on page 2