

Ignore Intimidation Thieu's Enemies Grow Unchecked

By MICHAEL PUTZEL

SAIGON (AP)—South Vietnam's political opposition is thriving despite the government's undisguised police-state methods of silencing certain of its enemies.

There are said to be more than 80,000 persons accused of political offenses crowding South Vietnamese prisons. Yet, hardly a week goes by without an anti-government demonstration in the streets of Saigon, and local newspapers criticize the government daily for its handling of domestic and foreign affairs.

Instead of being intimidated by President Nguyen Van Thieu's frank warnings of a crackdown, dissident students appear to be gaining strength. And the frequent seizure of newspaper editions critical of the government has served to make the most often-confiscated dailies the country's most widely circulated.

The widespread and articulate dissent is limited, however, both by protests the government will tolerate and by the opposition's fragmented nature.

About 30,000 of South Vietnam's political prisoners are classified as "Communist criminals," meaning they have been convicted of Viet Cong activities not directly associated with war action. Many of these are people rounded up by the U.S.-supported "Phoenix" program, designed to eliminate the leaders and political cadre of the National Liberation Front.

Some claim they were simply near the scene of a battle, picked up by U.S. or government troops and convicted by a military field court of aiding the enemy.

The government insists they be classified as criminals, not political prisoners.

A larger group of prisoners—said by the South Vietnamese Senate to number about 50,000—consists of persons banished from their provinces without trial under the An Tri decree of 1966.

The An Tri law provides that "persons considered dangerous to the national defense and public security may be interned in a prison or designated area or banished from designated areas for a maximum period of two years, which is renewable." Most An Tri detainees are held in government prisons often segregated from other prisoners. They are not entitled to trial.

The mobile military field court that the Thieu government has used several times in the past year to dispose of its political enemies was found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court last May in an unusual display of independence from the executive.

The government, however, has refused to free persons convicted by the military tribunal. National Assembly Deputy Tran Ngoc Chau, a Thieu opponent convicted of treason, had his conviction overturned by the Supreme Court but is still in prison.

Students recently freed from Con Son, the island prison in which two American congressmen discovered evidence of torture and neglect, said many of the prisoners held in tiny "tiger cages" had served out their sentences but were being held indefinitely.

With such broad legal authority and the ability to disregard prescribed procedures seemingly at will, the government appears to have the power to crush its opposition. But so far it has tolerated expression of considerable anti-government sentiment.

That tolerance, however, does not extend to those who would seek peace by dealing with the Communists. That may explain why the peace planks of most opposition parties are vague and undefined.

Truong Dinh Dzu, the peace candidate who ran second to Thieu in the 1967 presidential elections, was jailed three weeks later on corruption charges and still is in prison. Observers at the time said Dzu was jailed because he advocated negotiations with the Viet Cong and formed a sizable coalition of defeated candidates who charged Thieu's election was a fraud.

Any opposition leader who challenges the government's war policy risks prosecution as a pro-Communist neutralist—defined by the law as "a person who commits acts of propaganda for and incitement of neutralism; these acts are assimilated to acts of jeopardizing public security."

VA Orients Viet GIs On Discharge Benefits

WASHINGTON (Special)—The Veterans Administration has provided some 1.35 million servicemen in Vietnam with basic information on government programs available to them both before and after discharge.

In operation "Early Word," the overseas portion of the VA's "outreach" program, VA representatives in Vietnam discuss VA benefits in group sessions and personal interviews.

The story of how America's fighting men get the word is told in "Two Years of Outreach," a booklet recently distributed by the VA.

In its foreword, Administrator of Veterans Affairs Donald E. Johnson notes that a recent amendment to the current G.I. Bill increases veterans' adjustment benefits. Johnson calls for an intensification of VA's "outreach" activities.

"Two Years of Outreach" also reported that in the past two years VA representatives made more than 18,000 visits to 180

military hospitals, and conducted more than 159,000 interviews.

These representatives helped veterans and servicemen file more than 53,000 applications for vocational training, and nearly 78,000 applications for disability compensation.

In addition, as part of its follow-up, the VA sent 1.5 billion letters to Vietnam veterans shortly after they were discharged. About 15.5 per cent of these letters went to veterans who were high school dropouts before military service. The follow-up letters and the booklet reminded the young veterans of the G.I. Bill and urged them to utilize their benefits, especially educational and training programs.

Veterans may visit, write, or phone U.S. Veterans Assistance Centers or the nearest VA office for help or counseling in matters ranging from education to employment and from health to housing.

America Div. Gets Jump On NVA, Kills 53 in I Corps

LZ HAWK HILL, Vietnam (Special)—In a rock-throwing, grenade-tossing battle 23 miles west of Tam Ky, Americal Div. infantry, artillery and helicopter gunships recently combined to kill 53 NVA.

B and C Cos., 1st Bn., 46th Inf., 198th Inf. Brigade, were conducting search and clear operations in the rugged jungle terrain of Hiep Duc Valley.

"We sent one company to clear the high ground to the north and another to clear the valley floor," said Maj. James M. Hallinan, operations officer, 1st Bn., 46th Inf.

B Co moved out to sweep the valley floor in the early morning hours and immediately became involved in what proved to be the biggest firefight of the day.

"We started moving out of our night lair around 5:30 in the morning," said 1st Lt. Drake H. Erby, 2nd Platoon leader. "The 3rd Platoon was point, mine was second, and the 1st Platoon was drag."

As the company moved across a small grassy opening, the point platoon began receiving rifle and machinegun fire from a treeline to the front. At the same time the 1st Platoon, which was still in the night bivouac waiting for the other platoons to move across, began receiving heavy mortar and automatic weapons fire.

"We spotted some NVA in the woodland to the north and opened up on them," said S. Sgt. Charlie Hall, 1st Platoon sergeant. "As we were blasting them, someone also noticed two attempting to sneak up on our perimeter. We threw hand frags and killed them both."

As the 1st Platoon continued its suppressive fire, the 3rd Platoon continued to receive sniper fire and mortar rounds. The 2nd Platoon spotted some communication wires on the ground and cut them. When the mortar rounds temporarily stopped the 2nd Platoon moved up to take point and was ordered to secure

a defensive position from which an assault on the dug-in NVA could be made.

"We dug in faster than I ever imagined it could be done," said Erby. By this time the 3rd Platoon had joined the 2nd and only the 1st Platoon remained to cross the open area.

Gunships from the 71st Assault Helicopter Co. and F Troop, 8th Cav., were called in to work over a ridgeline in hopes of destroying the NVA mortar emplacements. The gunships killed three NVA. Artillery was also pounding the enemy position as the 1st Platoon began to move from the old night camp.

"We moved out by fire and movement and spotted the bunkers," said Hall. "We had no place to go but forward so that's what we did."

The ensuing battle was a grenade-tossing, bunker to bunker battle, as the infantrymen moved in to destroy the NVA.

As the bitter struggle progressed, the 1st Platoon found

they had used all their hand grenades. One squad each from the 2nd and 3rd Platoons collected all the available grenades and moved to aid the 1st Platoon.

With the arrival of reinforcements and more grenades the assault continued.

"It was a bunker to bunker, hole to hole fight," said Erby. "We would toss a grenade into a bunker and it would come flying back out. So we resorted to first throwing in a rock to confuse the enemy and then immediately tossing in a grenade. It worked."

The infantrymen finally knocked out the last bunker. In the search of the area that followed, they found that there had been a total of 14 heavily-fortified bunkers connected by a trenchline, and 29 dead NVA were counted by the Americans.

"Evidently the NVA had planned to ambush us as we moved out," said Erby, "but we moved before they were ready and caught them flatfooted."

Army Lists New Posts For 4 Senior Officers

WASHINGTON (S&S)—The Army has announced the transfers of four senior officers between posts in Europe and Vietnam.

Brig. Gen. Thomas J. McGuire Jr., now with USAFEUR and Seventh Army, is being assigned to U.S. Army Vietnam in mid-October, while Col. Joseph F. H. Cutrona, MACV information officer, is going to USAFEUR in early October. Cutrona, a brigadier general selectee, will become V Corps artillery officer, a Pentagon spokesman said.

Brig. Gen. Stewart C. Meyer, now with the office of the defense secretary, is going to Vietnam in early September and Col. Joseph K. Bratton, a brigadier general selectee, in Vietnam.

dier general selectee, in Vietnam, is going to the chief of staff's holding detachment in mid-September.

1st Brigade CO Gets 1-Star Rank

SAIGON (S&S)—Brig. Gen. John G. Hill Jr., commanding general of the 1st Brigade, 5th Inf. Div. (Mech.), recently was promoted to his present rank in a ceremony conducted by Lt. Gen. James Sutherland Jr., XXIV Corps commander.

Hill recently took command of the brigade when Maj. Gen. William A. Burke left to take over the 4th Inf. Div.



Round's Down, Men Too

A Cambodian army trooper drops a round into an 82mm mortar tube as his unit fires on suspected Viet Cong positions on the edge of Chruy Doen, a village southeast of Phnom Penh. Two other soldiers hold the legs of the mortar during the action. (AP Radiophoto)