

Treatment of Civilian Casualties in Vietnam

I. Casualty Estimates

The nature of the struggle in Vietnam has made civilian casualties inevitable. From the beginning, Viet Cong terrorism against civilians, particularly local officials, has been a major feature of the conflict. As military action intensified, more civilians were murdered by the Viet Cong or inadvertently caught in the crossfire of battle, in spite of precautions taken by the U.S. and Allied forces.

Accurate reports on the total number of civilian casualties cannot be compiled because an unknown number of casualties occur in areas isolated or remote from Government of Vietnam treatment facilities. Reports currently available from the Ministry of Health hospitals on war injury cases receiving hospital treatment are still incomplete and unverified. Efforts are being made, however, to improve the registration and classification of casualties in public hospitals throughout the country. This effort will be extended to district and village clinics. It will never be possible to differentiate accurately between the numbers injured by Viet Cong - North Vietnamese and by Government of Vietnam - Allied military action. Nor can the number of deaths be estimated on the basis of the number of hospital admissions.

II. Expanded Medical Care

The U.S. Government has made every effort both to reduce civilian casualties and to provide medical care to the victims of military action or communist terrorism. Of course, these casualties have strained the already overburdened medical resources of Vietnam. Nearly three-fourths of Vietnam's 1000 physicians are in the army. There are now fewer than 200 doctors for civilian public care services.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) is giving priority to an unprecedented program of providing direct patient care, particularly to the war wounded. AID's usual practice is limited to helping a country expand its own capacity to treat the sick or injured.

Statistics and budgetary items may appear to be a cold way of expressing concern; yet these figures do reveal rather dramatically the magnitude of our medical assistance effort. During the past two years, U.S. aid to the Vietnamese civilian health program has increased from \$5 million annually to nearly \$50 million. Most of the supplies and equipment of provincial hospitals and local clinics and aid stations are provided by AID. Ministry of Health - AID medical supply operations, heavily dependent on airlift, are overcoming very difficult logistic management problems, but spot shortages still occur.

More than 1,200 Free World medical specialists are operating throughout Vietnam, including provincial teams from the United States, Korea, China (Taiwan), the Philippines, New Zealand, Great Britain, Australia, Spain, Iran and Switzerland. Typically, these specialists are organized into teams of four doctors, seven nurses, and three laboratory technicians, working in provincial hospitals, supplied and equipped by AID and the Vietnamese Government. More than 100,000 patients per month are currently being treated in hospitals and clinics by these 40 medical teams and supplementary doctors.

Of these 40 hospital teams, 23 are composed of U.S. military medical personnel (called Military Provincial Health Assistance Program - MILPHAP - teams), serving under the AID Medical Director in Vietnam, two are U.S. Public Health Service teams, and 15 are from other countries. Smaller medical units are provided by two other countries, Japan and Italy, and West Germany is operating a hospital ship in Saigon harbor.

Operating rooms at these hospitals are now serviced on a 24-hour basis, largely as a result of the augmentation of the hospital teams by more than 200 volunteer American physicians who have served for 60-day tours without pay in hazardous conditions. Some of America's outstanding surgeons have volunteered to serve with this program on reconstructive surgery for congenital defects and war-inflicted injuries. Through a contract initially with the People-to-People Health Foundation, and now with the American Medical Association, AID pays travel insurance and \$10 per diem expenses of the volunteer doctors.

With the help of Dr. Howard Rusk, world-renowned for his work on rehabilitation, and AID financial assistance, the Vietnamese National Rehabilitation Center is now fitting prosthetic devices at the rate of 500 per month. Priority is given to war casualties, of whom many are victims of Viet Cong terror tactics. The amputees, once they are mobile again, are returned to their homes by planes accompanied by Americans who volunteer their services.

Especially serious pediatric cases are flown to Children's Hospital in Saigon for treatment by Dr. Philip Evans and his outstanding team of pediatric specialists from England.

The general health effort has been increased through a very large immunization program of some 14 million inoculations against cholera, plague, smallpox and polio.

Twenty-nine U.S. voluntary agencies with over 400 American staff members make a very significant contribution to the total health and welfare effort in Vietnam, particularly in refugee relief and rehabilitation and child health.

Under the auspices of the American Medical Association, there are at present five medical educators working with the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Saigon. Equally important is AID's assistance to the Dental Faculty, and to Vietnam's six schools of nursing and health technology. By 1970 these schools should be graduating more than 1,400 health workers each year.

In addition to the AID efforts in support of the National Medical Program for Vietnam there is substantial support from the U.S. military medical services for the civil assistance efforts.

The Medical Civic Action Program (MEDCAP) provides medical assistance to the civilian population, near U.S. and Vietnamese military units in the field. MEDCAP teams serve directly under the U.S. Military Forces in Vietnam. A standard MEDCAP Team consists of nine to twelve U.S. military medical personnel including one or two physicians and eight to ten enlisted corpsmen. The MEDCAP program is not a duplication of the MILPHAP Program but augments the AID/MILPHAP medical efforts generally in the more remote portions of the provinces of Vietnam.

Additional medical assistance is provided to the civilian population in Vietnam by various medical units attached directly to the U.S. Tactical Forces in Vietnam.