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TWO MONTHS WITH GUERRILLA FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

by Madeleine Riffaud

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TWO MONTHS WITH GUERRILLA FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

[Following is a translation of a series of articles by Madeleine Riffaud in the French-language French Communist Party daily organ, L'Humanité (Humanity), Paris, 14, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25 and 26 February and 2, 3, 4 March 1965.]

[14 February 1965, page 4]

Not so long ago -- it was only last month -- the Australism journalist, W. Burchett, and I were crawling, one moonlit night, between two enemy posts. Accompanying a small unit of National Liberation Front [VIET CONG] fighters, all of them born in the area, intimately familiar with each tree and each rice paddy, we were not running much of a risk from the demoralized adversary, hemmed in by the people in his post. The danger was that our silhouettes, appearing in the moonlight, would bring down on us the converging fire from their guns.

"They shoot off their guns," said one of our companions, "all the time, at everything, at nothing, the way people shoot off firecrackers to chase away evil spirits."

The most grotesque thriller

For two months we lived this way, in the midst of the South Vietnamese people and their fighters, carrying on our backs in cloth bags notebooks, cameras and tape recorders, the way the guerrillas carry their weapons. And never leaving them. This was indispensable. In fact, the popular forces have succeeded in retaking with their own forces three-quarters of the land of South Vietnam from the American aggressor. We traveled through immense areas, where it is impossible for the enemy to penetrate, either by land or by waterway, in spite of his modern and powerful military means. But it is precisely in these areas, liberated by the Front, that the Americans try to demoralize the populace and inhibit troop movements, by bombing systematically and, for the

most part, blindly, everything that lives...

This means that, under these conditions, the travels of two war correspondents determined to see with their own eyes as much as possible of the reality of South Vietnam were bound to be dangerous undertakings, and more fertile in grotesque ups and downs than the most action-packed thriller.

Termites in the camera

The film for the photographs you see in this paper went down into the shelters as often as we did. One of my cameras was buried, along with Burchett's tape recorder, by a bomb explosion, and smashed. Moreover, living mostly in the jungle that covers almost two-thirds of South Vietnam, we also had to protect our equipment from the humidity, which eats into film like acid. The peasants have a trick to deal with this inconvenience -- all you have to do is put papers and photographs in a bag containing fried rice. It was also necessary to repulse the invasions by yellow ants and termites, which stubbornly selected the tape recorders and cameras for their nests (but, after all, in the forest we were on their ground)...

Night bombardment

As soon as we arrived in the zones controlled by the patriots, we adopted for our news-gathering mission the black cotton suit and the kerchief with black-and-white checks of the South Vietnamese peasants. Not, by any means, that dressing like a South Vietnamese is enough to ward off all danger from a correspondent. Quite the contrary, since (and we saw this throughout our stay) the people of the country, including the children, are targets for the bombs and machine guns of an occupying power who is everywhere repulsed... But, disguised as Vietnamese, we passed unperceived by the informers, and thus avoided bringing down on the people helping us do our job still more disasters.

For the American "special forces" are prepared for anything, when they have located a European journalist on the side of the patriots, to prevent the truth from coming to light. We were to learn this at our expense four separate times.

One day, on our trip, the American Air Force managed to locate us with our little group, after circling several hours above the trail we were to take. At nightfall, we had set up our hammocks in a salient of the jungle. We had to start off again at dawn. Nevertheless, the unit chief, in conformity with army discipline, had not failed to have the regulation shelters dug under each hammock. A good thing, too.

The little victim of Christmas Eve

At four a.m., while we were still sound asleep, three B-26's dove

on to our corner of the forest, without circling beforehand, as bombers usually do to seek their target, and dropped sticks of bombs on us with precision, since the nearest crater was only 200 meters away. Still asleep, we had rolled out of the hammocks into the holes, and Burchett had even taken the time to start his tape recorder, so that nobody in our group was wounded, and, thanks to the kind assistance of the American Air Force, we got some excellent sound effects, which were used by the Front's cameramen when they put together the film you saw last week on television.

This bombing attack, which was aimed only at us, nevertheless, by an atrocious chance, found a victim in this deserted corner of the jungle, where a little hamlet, which was once on the plain, where it was destroyed by bombs, had been rebuilt. At that hour before dawn, they lead the buffalo to pasture in fields rather far from the new villages. Two hundred meters from us, a little boy tending a buffalo was lying on the ground, killed on the spot, beside the animal, which had been eviscerated by a bomb burst.

In South Vietnam, which has been fighting for its independence for twenty years, the populace knows perfectly well how to protect itself against bombing, and there are very few victims, inspite of the tons of explosive and napalm poured down from overhead on the liberated areas. But this time, the little buffalo tender, hearing the planes, had had neither the time nor the thought to seek protection. All that was left intact of him was his little face, his eyes full of dismay, and the bamboo sling which almost all the kids wear around their necks. It was Christmas Eve. A little later, getting a broadcast by the American Forces stationed in South Vietnam on our transistor, we had to listen to some leader of the Pentagon (Taylor himself, I think) proclaiming that the American Air Force is in South Vietnam to protect the people against communism, and in accordance with the Christian ideal.

Our pursuers pursued

Some time later, whether by precision bombing or pure chance, a bomb blew into splinters the table where we had just eaten our rice with a few soldiers. Another time, when I was trying to enter the outskirts of Saigon with a group of guerrillas on a motor sampan, we almost fell into an ambush designed to capture us by two "special forces" sections commanded by four Americans. Unfortunately for them, those who were hunting us were themselves hunted by the guerrillas who were insuring our protection. Thanks to our light reconnaissance group, we were able to double back just in time, and escape the rocket-firing helicopters, as well as the usual converging fire from the guns of the nearby posts into the open space which we would have had to cross. Only our cameraman, who had gone ahead on the trail, fell into the ambush, and owed his life only to the chance that a fragile hedge of bamboos was growing there...

I could go on telling you stories of this kind for pages, as a

preface to the complete account, which you can read in L'Humanité starting 17 February. But no matter how extraordinary may have been the adventures of two correspondents in the ranks of the fighters of South Vietnam, sharing with them the night marches in the jungle, the meals of porcupine and monkey, the stings of scorpions, as well as the enemy's stupid and cruel bombings, all that is nothing in comparison with the prodigies silently carried out day after day -- since the violations of the 1954 Geneva agreements -- by the South Vietnamese people in victorious self-defense, using the means of the people themselves against the enormous military power of the United States.

Adventures of an interview

Moreover, if we ourselves were able to survive and finish our reporting job, if we were even able to publish in L'Humanité a few articles carried directly from the underground to the mailboxes of the occupied cities, it was thanks to the men and women who are fighting there. Certainly, not all the articles sent that way have reached you. For example, you read the second one before the first, but the first got here anyway, one month later. The girl who was carrying it, seriously wounded, passed the message on as soon as she could... As for the interview granted us by National Liberation Front President Nguyen Huu Tho on 20 December, having been sent by two different routes, it got lost somewhere between the South Vietnamese jungle and Boulevard Poissonnière... Cabled more than five weeks later by me before my departure from Southeast Asia, it finally got published with the errors due to the long-range transmissions, for which I beg forgiveness from the President of the Front and from my readers. In this important text, the word "case" became "cadre," "raking" turned into "ravage," "forest" became "frontier," etc. And besides all that, on the day this interview took place, deep in the jungle, the American Air Force made a blooper which consoles me for my journalistic misadventures... In fact, bombing the forest haphazard on that Sunday, 20 December, while his wife was, no doubt, in church, the American aviator dropped his stick of bombs less than 500 meters away from us. And flew off.

And yet, on that day there were in that forest not only the President of the NLF, but also several hundred cadres who had come even from Saigon to celebrate the anniversary of their movement, and the members of the Central Committee representing all parties and the national minorities belonging to the Front. One indiscretion would have been enough to annihilate all the leaders of the South Vietnamese resistance! Such is the power of the Front that there was no indiscretion, there could not have been one. And the American aviator wasted his Sunday...

As for us, that evening we witnessed, in lamplight, on a bamboo stage, the best show it is possible to see in South Vietnam, since the greatest actors and directors in Saigon prefer the harsh life of the jungle to the atmosphere of the capital.

With a training regiment

The most exciting part of our reporting was in January 1965, when the great victory of Binh Gia, a battle fought on the same area by the same unit of the regular army of the NLF, over an entire month, made it clear for everyone in the world that the South Vietnamese war had passed a turning point. If the year 1964 was that of the check to the defense plan devised by McNamara, aiming only at "pacifying" seven provinces considered by him as vital for the defense of Saigon, 1965 will certainly be the year of military victories for the NLF army, which, supported by all strata of the population, is leaving guerrilla warfare behind, being now capable of putting to use the modern weapons captured from the aggressor.

During our trip, we lived in the midst of this army, in the intimacy of a regiment in training. We were able, therefore, to freely study their combat methods, the soldiers' behavior and morale, and see why and how they fight. The officers who directed the attacks on the Bien Hoa airfield, and those who led at the battle of Binh Gia, gave us the whole story, and I shall pass it on to you in L'Humanité. But I should like to specify immediately that those who led these actions were all peasants a few years ago, born in the villages where these engagements took place. All had suffered cruel losses in their families. After the Geneva agreements, the followers of Diem and their American masters had taken away from them the land which the agrarian reform had given them after the victories against the French colonialists... You must never, in any country in the world, take the land away from the peasants... Nor snatch them from their homes or their orchards and park them in prisons called "strategic hamlets." For then the peasant explodes, he needs no "outside agitator"... And when he has no weapons, as was the case with the South Vietnamese peasants in 1959, for example, when Diem's regime was "hell on earth," he makes them, especially when he has to help him his memories of the last war.

Who are the victors of Binh Gia?

This was the start of the units which in recent months have been carrying out the lightning attacks which have been the talk of the whole world. With those rudimentary weapons forged in the forest out of irrigation pipes, and called "praying mantises," and with false weapons, even, made to frighten the enemy taken by surprise, and which were nothing else but trunks of bamboo trees carved with a knife. But with those wooden weapons they captured real weapons. With the real weapons, they ended up by capturing heavy weapons from the enemy...

Throughout the two months we lived down there, in every unit we were with, we never saw the soldiers with anything but American weapons in their hands. The improvised antiaircraft batteries were made of heavy machine guns or mortars "made in USA," and they told how and

where they had captured these weapons. Unexploded bombs, gathered up and cut open, were used to make very effective mines.

So I advise the Pentagon, if it wants to destroy the real supply bases of the "Viet Cong," to stop its pointless bombing of North Vietnam and Laos (which will end by raising up against it thirty million Vietnamese, instead of fourteen million South Vietnamese), but rather to bomb its own armament factories, wherever they may be, in Texas or the suburbs of New York.

In spite of their victories, the South Vietnamese by no means expect that the war will end soon. They are absolutely certain of victory, whatever may happen, and their entire past justifies this certitude, as does their determination and their unity. They know that, in spite of the conscription of the young men, their enemies can no longer fill the gaps among their troops, some phantom regiments, decimated by massive desertions, having been reduced by half or even two-thirds. Now that three-quarters of the countryside has been liberated, the main manpower reservoir is no longer available to the Americans. Now, it is on the peasants that they counted to keep their "special warfare" going, which was designed to set Vietnamese against Vietnamese.

However, although almost all the roads are controlled by the patriots, the cities are still to be taken. In the earlier Indochina war, the cities were encircled by the people's army, but the Geneva agreements intervened before it was necessary to capture them.

"Get the Americans out of South Vietnam!"

In South Vietnam at the present time, many patriots think that, in spite of the overwhelming forces concentrated by the occupier in the cities, it will be indispensable and possible, even against American tanks, ships and planes, to intensify the political struggle in the very heart of the enemy's dispositions. There is already a certain coordination between the struggles in the cities and those in the countryside. Aware of strategic importance of the masses in Saigon, where high school and university students are "the wick of the patriotic movement," the occupiers are seeking to intimidate and frighten by public firing squads, by promising further executions, and by torturing to death in the Chi Hoa prison girls and boys, who are often nomore than sixteen or seventeen years old. But those are crimes of the defeated, whose effect is merely to increase the hatred of all the strata of the South Vietnamese population against the Americans. To such an extent that there is not a demonstration where you won't hear the cry "Get the Americans out of South Vietnam!"

The most humble peasant woman from a village destroyed twenty times, like the women workers of Saigon or Hué, or the professor who has just joined the guerrillas, are all preparing for a long struggle, which

will become harder the closer they get to victory.

No one would agree to lay down his arms before being assured that the four goals of the NLF -- "independence, peace, democracy, neutrality" -- have become a reality, so long as the last American has not left their national soil.

Faced with their military defeat, the American authorities sometimes talk "negotiations." But the President of the Front was right when he told us that so far such talk is mere maneuvering, designed to lull the vigilance of the populace while the Pentagon seeks to excape defeat by carrying the war to other independent countries of Southeast Asia: Laos, Cambodia, and, of course, North Vietnam, all of which are periodically accused, at each new American defeat, of "aggression" against South Vietnam. Which entails great risks to world peace.

I have just come back from South Vietnam. And I can assure you that there I saw no other foreign intervention than that by the Americans, who, at the controls of their planes, took revenge for their defeats on the ground by bombarding such military targets as the farmers reaping at Bentré, or the schoolboys of Long An.

[17 February 1965, page 2]

I. Why the peasants of Bien Hoa destroyed 37 American bombers and helicopters

I want you to believe what I say. Believe me because I have done it. Anybody can, without knowing how to swim, cross a river with three empty cocoanut shells around the waist as a lifebelt. Anybody, if he really wants to, can cross an abyss by walking across on a tree trunk felled for the purpose, with a fragile vine as his sole support to hang onto in order not to lose his balance. Anyone can very quickly, like the fighters of the National Liberation Front, accuston himself to consider the jungle, in spite of its scorpions, its poisonous thorns, its snakes, its leeches which cling to your ankles on the long marches, and the green eyes of wild animals at night, as his "home," to which you come back after a dangerous mission in the open during which you play hide-and-seek with the bombers. "Home" without walls, to which you come back to wkr, happy to be alive...

Everybody can live with everything he owns handing from his belt, and still feel very rich, provided he has an ideal and is constantly backed up by the team...

That is why the two months that W. Burchett and I spent with the fighters of South Vietnam, sharing with them strange meals of tiger, of monkey, the secret hiding places and the ceaseless air raids, are extraordinary only for those who are lucky enough to live in countries "where

people dream in the warmth of their beds." For those people who have been fighting twenty years for their liberation, such things "are as ordinary as eating rice."

As for the difficulties we surmounted, how many Saigon intellectuals, as ill-prepared as we were for living in the bush, had to undergo them from 1955 to 1959 and 1960, the blackest years, when the old resistance fighters, pursued by Diem's police and their American masters, had found refuge in the High Plateaus, and only managed to survive thanks to the tribes of the national minorities, dressed in loincloths, still in the bamboo age, but so much more humane than the so-called "civilized" specialists in "special warfare."

The curious tiger hunter

In one of the units that took me in, there was a strange little man, as dry as a rattan switch, our team's great specialist of the hunt (to some extent the quartermaster). Every evening, he went out with a flashlight attached to his head like a miner, his precision carbine (American) in his hand.

The lamp was to dazzle the animals he encountered, which would be hypnotized by that cyclops eye. He recognized by the distance between the eyes, shining in the dark, and by their color, whether he was dealing with this or that horned beast, or with a tiger.

The latter's eyes are very wide apart, as if suffering from divergent strabismus. It makes a sort of very soft sound, almost feminine, or a hoarse short bark. Usually, he is preceded by a bird, hoping to eat the scraps, a bird that goes, "bong bong," and of whom eht guerrillas lost in the forest with poor rifles were very afraid in the early days of the second Resistance.

"The tiger does not attack man," the hunter told me, "unless it has tasted his flesh, and in our corner of the jungle this is indeed the case. Some of the wounded had been devoured. There was an old tiger who loved to eat what fighters he could carry off. One day, to save the rest, and with his family's consent, we mined the half-eaten corpse of a pal with some dynamite. When the tiger came back to finish eating his prey, he got blown up... The other tigers stopped attacking us. But for hunting game, the people of the 'Jarai' or 'Radé' tribes are more experienced than we are. They taught me all I know."

And indeed, when, lying in our hammocks at night, we hear a shot, a single shot, we know that next day's meal will include meat. Our hunter never needs to shoot twice. And he can read the spoor of the beast in the forest like the Last of the Mohicans. Which does not keep him from speaking impeccable French, obviously learned out of books and larded with quotations drawn from the classics...

On the day when I was trying my first pair of "Viet Cong" sandals made out of old automobile tires, he asked me "Do they suit you?"; the night when he was stung by a black scorpion and shaking with fever, he took the opportunity, like a good South Vietnamese, to make a joke of it by paraphrasing Voltaire: "What do you think happened? It was the scorpion that died," I was confirmed in my belief that the hunder of wild beasts had at the outset been as ill-equipped as I was for life in the woods.

He got along perfectly with the poor peasants who made up most of the troops of the army. National union against a cruel and execrated occupier brings about these daily miracles. Subsequently, I was to get used to rubbing elbows with men and women even more extraordinary than the erudite hunter, and I never learned their stories except by chance, for it is the rule in the Jungle never to ask pointless questions...

"On the crest of the wave"

Since I have been back, I sometimes think I'll go crazy listening to or reading the learned and ridiculous theories of certain colleagues, who, with their behinds firmly in their armchairs, call every patriot of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam a "Viet Cong," that is, a communist, and find it credible that the NLF army could, on outside orders and within a few hours, launch a large-scale operation like the one which took place recently against the Pleiku airport, and unthinkingly take over for their own use the American line about "massive North Vietnamese infiltration" into the south.

On the subject of love of country, the other day one of the Catholic leaders, a member of the NLF Central Committee, M. Joseph-Marie Ho Hné Ba, was quoting to me this phrase from the New Testament: "For he who would save his life shall lose it, but he who will lose it for my sake shall save it." And I realized once again that in South Vietnam American aggression has succeeded only in unifying patriots who were once enemies, and that the old priest's thought processes were scarcely different from those of the veterans of the Communist Party whom I met in the ranks of the NLF, where they strive to be the most determined of the front line fighters...

As for the large-scale victorious military operations which have been taking place, we realized in the army that they are launched only after months of study and preparation, and in agreement with the populace of the sector involved. Were those who thoughtlessly echo the lies used to justify the attacks against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam so far removed at the time from the French Resistance that they do not know how an underground force prepared an operation? Any worker in this country can understand from French experience that months of patient work are necessary to carry off a stunningly successful operation against the occupying power.

As for the aid they claim is sent from North Vietnam, it would certainly be more justified than the presence in South Vietnam of 25,000 American "specialists" in genocide, of the tons of weapons of all kinds, and of the innumerable bombs they have brought in in violation of the Geneva agreements.

However, it is a fact that by reason of these very agreements the seventeenth parallel cuts this country so completely in two that only birds and fish can cross the Ben Hai River. No one has ever been able to prove -- and for good reason -- that there is a trail leading into South Vietnam through Laos. But if the "specialists" in the matter would study the map, they would realize that the best athlete would need four and a half months to make the trip at the best time of the year...

Only the South Vietnamese people themselves could liberate their country, responding with its own means to the new type neocolonialist aggression committed against them.

Unfortunately for them, the Americans made a very bad choice in their first training ground for a neocolonial war. For twenty-four years, South Vietnam has been "at the crest of the wave, at the crest of the winds." Without underestimating the heroism of the victors of Dienbienphu, it must not be forgotten that the first peasant uprising against the French colonialists took place in the south, in the Mekong Delta, on 23 November 1940, and that it was also in the Mekong that in September 1945 the first fighting started against the French colonialists' war of reconquest, one year before it started in the north. These regions, with their lofty revolutionary and patriotic tradition, consequently needed directions from no one to be among the first to shake off the American yoke. It is also to be noted that those who accuse the Republic of North Vietnam of intervention "forget" to explain why the first areas liberated by the NLF were precisely those farthest from the seventeenth parallel -- Samau, the Mekong Delta...

Why the occupier's airports are attacked

In the forest, in the army encampments, you run into people. One day W. Burchett and I were lucky enough to meet with a unit which had captured an enemy position just the night before. One of its officers had led the 21 October lightning attack against the Bien Hoa airport, an attack which allowed a glimpse of the turning point in the war, which became obvious last January, at the time of the great victory of Binh Gia.

"To attack this base, which the Americans considered invaluable, one of their most important airbases in the south, was a big job," M. Huynh Minh told us. "But we were all the more determined to succeed, since it was from there that most of the ills of the region came. It was from there that planes took off which had spread toxic products over

the recalcitrant villages, causing seventy dead and burning 700 hectares. It was from there that the B-26's had taken off which, some weeks before, at Ong Keo, had massacred four hundred people at the market of the junks at the crossing point of the water courses. And, above all, we knew that this ultramodern airport was the base for the B-57's which bombed the northern part of our country last August -- for the good reason that just before this American provocation we had shot down a B-57, and had found in it documents referring to these plans of the occupiers, in spite of their efforts to get back the wreck and obliterate its very existence.

"We also knew that forty new B-57's had been brought to the base in utmost secrecy. For what new crimes?

"After months of painstaking preparation, the operation was launched at night against the airport, surrounded by radar, strategic hamlets, seventy posts, three lines of defense, eighteen towers, twelve pillboxes, five rows of barbed wire separated by minefields, and protected by the guns of the neighboring posts, by motorized batallions... I am forgetting some of it. In our unit, even the sick had begged to be allowed to come. While firing his mortar, one of them, hiding in the hevea, shouted, as the first target was hit, 'You won't massacre any more people -- I'll get you tonight!' In a quarter of an hour, thanks to the precision of our artillery and of our intelligence, we had destroyed on the ground twenty-one B-57's, one U-2, fifteen "Sky Raiders" and helicopters. Two hundred ninety-three men and officers had been killed and wounded, with no chance to reply, because of their panic at this night attack. We had not a single casualty...

"The people of the strategic hamlets, banished from their lands when the enemy had enlarged the airport, were very pleased... It was good land, you know," added M. Kuynh Minh, with much nostalgia in his voice. "I was a peasant too, in this very area. I was born in Bien Hoa. All my soldiers are from around here. They know every tree, every person, even every dog, which explains a lot. And, like me, all of them have lost members of their families from the American Air Force..."

And the peasant-officer, who lead the greatest battle against aircraft with a unit without an aircraft, without a truck, which had arrived on foot, armed with mortars taken from the enemy, spoke these words which La Fontaine would not have disdained: "The Americans have bombers, they have jeeps, they drive and they fly very fast. But we shall always be faster than they are, because, in South Vietnam, we are here already!"

[18 February 1965, page 2]

II. "Silent bombs," poisoned beans, and angry bees -- "dissuasive forces" of the South Vietnamese peasants

When the National Liberation Front army succeeded in destroying

dozens of bombers on the ground at Bien Hoa, in the midst of a controlled area, there was one thing that stupefied the American specialists -- the precision firing of the people's youthful artillery. The fact is, the theoreticians of "special warfare" underestimated from the beginning the decisive factor: the South Vietnamese man, against whom they are waging their war...

"In 1962," said M. Huynh Minh, the peasant officer of Bien Hoa, "when we captured our first mortars from the enemy, we were still a small guerrilla unit, and knew how to handle only wight weapons. Of course we noticed that there were sights on the mortars, but how were they supposed to be used? Our peasants are patient, they thought about it, they talked it over among themselves. Seeing that various distances, from 1 to 200 meters, were marked on the weapons, one of them got the idea of attaching a long nylon cord to the base of the mortar. One of our men, crawling to the target at night, measured the distance. Coming back, all they had to do was count the meters of cord and regulate the fire... Thus, by feeling our way, we trained splendid marksmen. The proof of this is that the other day the shells did not go astray..."

No one could live in peace

Who will ever be able to tell the extraordinary ingeniousness, patience and trust which the South Vietnamese people needed to make the transition from the terror years of 1954 to 1959, with bamboo defensive weapons, to the powerful NLF army, now, in 1965, capable of using the modern weapons captured from the enemy, and of fighting victorious battles by regiments directly against the American bases on their soil...

This was the business of each man, and, above all, of each women, of each old man and of each young one. For, in accordance with the Geneva agreements, most of the men between thirty and forty had gathered in the northern part of the country with the army, pending the general elections which were to be held in Vietnam as a whole in 1956.

In those first terrible years, no one could live in peace. The Diem followers, with their American advisers, had undertaken to drown the patriotic movement in blood; it was enough to support the Geneva agreements to be designated a communist.

There was prison and torture to extract public disavowals. The wives of resistance fighters who had gone north were harrassed by the police, who during "divorce campaigns" tried to force them to denounce their husbands. Thousands of them are still in prison for the simple reason that they refused to... Wherever I went in South Vietnam, I saw traces of the crimes of those years of hell, when the mercenaries carried along with them , in their punitive expeditions, portable guillotines for the public execution of patriots, hoping in this way to frighten the populace... Out of one hundred soldiers in a NLF regular

army unit with whom we went through training, 69 percent had had close relatives killed during this period.

Among these soldiers, aged between eighteen and twenty, how many had gone without news of their parents since the "dirty war," and how many since 1956, and sometimes 1955, had been orphaned wanderers of the roads because their mothers had been arrested in those famous "campaigns," and sent to the Poulo Condor prison, to which not even the French colonialists had ever dared to send women? At that time, no one dared feed those lost children except in utmost secrecy, knowing that such help would be termed "aid to the families of communists" and would be punishable by imprisonment... It might be said in passing that it is easy to see that the soldiers who are striking so hard today against the formidable American military power after such a childhood should be determined not to lay down their arms until the last American troops, the last "American advisers," the architects of the disasters their families suffered, have left South Vietnam.

The explosion

For no people more than those of Vietnam more scrupulously respected agreements subscribed to, merely suffering from 1954 to 1959 its vast sorrows, merely demonstrating with their hands for respect for international conventions, their bodies offered to the machine guns which were there not only to frighten, but to shoot.

In 1959 took place the spontaneous explosion of the peasants. The political struggle was to be linked a little more closely every day with the armed struggle, the one being supported by the other, creating a method of combat typically South Vietnamese, and particularly well adapted to the type of warfare which the neocolonialists have undertaken. Thus was born the "chignon army," now capable of sending from the liberated zones to the cities, to the puppet administrative centers and American barracks thousands of women protesting, for example, against the air raids, and demanding the departure of the occupiers. It frequently happens that puppet units make common cause with these demonstrators, and "lose their way" as they go over to the NLF troops...

As for the beginnings of the armed struggle, for a long time they were defensive in nature, again so that no one could accuse the South Vietnamese of contributing to breaking the agreements. I confess I was dumbfounded when I was told about the interminable discussions by the patriots in 1959 to distinguish their rudimentary defensive weapons from those which might have been considered offensive.

It was in this period that the peasants began to dig those mantraps around the villages, their bottoms bristling with stakes, which were once used for hunting wild animals. Unless the enemy comes to raid the village, he risks nothing. If he attacks, it is he who brings

himself closer to his death. How many times did Burchett and I just miss getting stuck in these traps, which were not meant for us, merely by stepping back a pace to take a photograph... Fortunately, there was always a freindly hand ready to grab us in time...

It is absolutely impossible, unless you are in on the secret, to escape the traps of every description which the peasants have invented -- different ones for each village, and constantly perfected over the years ...

It only costs the people a little work and a few bamboos to create from the High Plateaus to the Mekong Delta a veritable force of dissuasion which terrorizes the "special warfare" theoreticians as well as the puppets. For, after all, what ultramodern weapon can protect you from these traps, in which you are pierced by the bamboo, or from those "silent bombs" bristling with spikes which fall from the treetops onto the trail, triggered by the simple act of walking on one creeper among the rest?

Mantraps and poisoned arrows

Who can protect the enemy from the bent bows pointing at the only passageway, which go off automatically, shooting a dozen arrows at once, poisoned with certain plants which never relent, the village elder being the only one who knows the antidote... So much for the tribes of the national minorities.

In the plains, they are no less inventive. The peasant has created his own "air army," setting up around the villages swarms of fighting bees, wild drones as big as your thumb, a few stings of which can kill a man. A very simple device using string and a stick allows you to strike the nest and excite the insects without being seen by them. The bees come out in a rage, and then go back to the hive. The peasant renews his attack until he makes them ferocious, and ends up by sacrificing a pig to them, which he takes out of his sty.

Thus trained, these drones are capable, if there is a raid, upon hearing the stick hit their nests once more, of hurling themselves upon the soldiers and police, whom they believe to be their assailants. This is an unexpected attack which frightens the puppets. They fling themselves off the trails, fall into the traps, forget about answering the fire of the guerrillas, who, well camouflaged, take advantage of the situation... "When you have been made to suffer a great deal," I was told by a peasant from one of those villages which has now been liberated, "When you are really determined to fight, you find the way. They can shoot the people, but they can't shoot the bees."

"I had lots of time..."

But the most extraordinary story I heard about these early days

of the defensive struggle, when the South Vietnamese people had to fight bare-handed, is perhaps the following:

"All you have to do is think a little bit," the old man with the sparse white beard explained to me.

"It was in 1959. From the nearby military post came constant pillage and persecution of all kinds. I had plenty of time to think, with my daughter in prison and my son-in-law up north. My land had been taken away from me.

"Observing the habits of the puppets, I saw that in order to move around more comfortably in their compound they walked barefoot, taking off their boots. I took some beans, which I soaked in water. When they were soft, I stuck needles in them, so that they stuck out on all sides: they made a sort of hedgehog, with points sticking out no matter which way it fell. I let them harden in the sun...

"On the first opportunity, with the excuse of gaining the approval of the officer, I took some fruit over to the encampment...and I sowed my beans. The next day, quite a few of the enemy were limping. Then I wanted to do better. In the jungle, I looked for one of the most poisonous snakes (there are plenty of them), and shut it up in a bottle which I left in the hot sun with some salt. I shook the bottle. I left the creature inside until it began to rot. But I forgot to say that with the poisonous snake I had put some of my needles into the bottle...

"Well, I started my experiment again. But this time the beans had poisoned needles in them... The result, a few days later -- a third of the enemy had been carted off to hospital in the capital...

"When I learned that, I notified the guerrilla unit, which was neither large nor well equipped at the time. They made a surprise attack on the disorganized position... And I think that this was their first victory... With the machine guns they captured that day, they ended up by taking heavy weapons from the enemy."

From this little kernel of underground fighters, this year a regiment was formed...

Stories like that are not the kind you can invent. I heard others like them in almost all the villages I visited.

They are enough to explain why the formidable American war machine was not, and never will be, able to overcome the tenacious, ferocious, patient resistance of the people, which has made every house a blockhouse, every human being a fighter, with or withour weapons.

The grain of sand which has worn down the mechanism of "special

warfare" is the man with the fighting bees, the old character with the beans -- two anonymous fighters among the fourteen million South Vietnamese.

[18 February 1965, page 2]

III. They wear red dresses, the color of spilled blood

Last Wednesday, in the Danang area, a patriot who had taken part in a peaceful demonstration against the bombings of the villages in the liberated zones was shot in the public square. The day before, the troops had fired into the mass of peasants protesting against the burning of their villages... And even into the wives of the puppet soldiers who were in the crowd shouting, "Give us back our husbands"!...

Stuck in their military and political impasse, the occupiers have come to this point. But their idiotic cruelty will not bring them any luck, for (and we know, from having witnessed this many times) every crime against the South Vietnamese people, far from frightening them, increases their fighting spirit further.

The fact is, there exists in South Vietnam a strange army without rifles, which is everywhere, in the cities and in the countryside, which the wire service stories practically never mention, but which was playing a tremendous role even before the first guerrillas took up their weapons in the struggle of the South Vietnamese people against the aggressor. This is the "chignon army," which includes millions of fighting women.

"Don't listen to the Americans!"

I had the good fortune to spend some time with that army, and to study its forms of political struggle, extremely complex, brave and effective, all designed to protect the populace against the crimes of the occupier, to raise the standard of living in spite of the war, and, above all, to weaken the morale, to disorganize, and to paralyze the enemy, all by legal and semi-legal means.

Having business with this feminine army without uniforms, in order to go about incognito, sometimes only a few hundred meters from enemy positions, I was able to judge of the efficiency of those who had baptized me, so that my name would never be pronounced in the hearing of indiscrete ears, with the nickname, common among South Vietnamese families, which generally have lots of children, "Chitam." That means "Eighth Sister."

If enemy reinforcements are announced by the NLF intelligence service, hundreds of villagers suddenly feel the need to fill the roads with their carts. A crowd gathering from all theneighboring hamlets

by its mere passive presence blocks all traffic.

If a quick raid takes place, the women, the oldest in front, press forward the rifles, shouting to the puppets, "What are you going to do? Why do you shoot at a peaceful village? We are like your own mothers, this village is like your own! Don't listen to the Americans, who want us Vietnamese to fight one another..." The soldiers, disturbed and troubled, sometimes don't shoot, or else shoot into the air, since they know already that the primary targets of the guerrillas are the officers and the Americans who are directing operations, and not the enlisted man. It is only after this action by the women that the guerrilla forces of the village will open fire, if the raid takes place in spite of the political demonstration, which in the worst cases was very useful for the purpose of gaining time during the difficult beginnings of the armed struggle...

What the old grandfather says...

If Taylor decides, as he did in 1964, to try to "pacify" at least seven key provinces surrounding Saigon, and heavy reinforcements are sent to them, so many that the puppets have to lodge with the village people, that is a situation in which political action by the old men and by the women will play a decisive role.

"My son," says an old grandfather to one of the puppets, "I am happy for you. You are making a good living right now. But I shall give you a piece of advice, as if I were your father. Remember what happened at such-and-such a place. Accidents happen quickly. Put a little money aside for your coffin. It is good to have a fine funeral."

One of the peasants explained to me in this way a theory of this typically South Vietnamese form of struggle: "At night, with the women, I dig traps around the military position, so that the enemy will, little by little, be surrounded by us, and won't dare go out for fear of becoming impaled. Now, that is armed struggle... The enemy goes out and gets wounded. I look after the enlisted men, I explain to them subtly the goals of the NLF. That is political struggle... These two forms of struggle provide mutual support for each other all the time, like two sisters. Well, we shall surely be victorious, even if the Americans send us two or three times as many soldiers and bombs!"

It is impossible here to distinguish between all the forms of the political struggle carried on by the entire South Vietnamese population over the past ten years, both in the cities, with, for example, Buddhist demonstrations which contributed to Diem's overthrow, and in the countryside, where the peasants during the same period were getting back their lands stolen after the Geneva agreements by Diem's agents. And redistribute them among themselves...

For special warfare, special means

For special warfare, there must be special means of struggle for the people. Attacked on two fronts, political and military, by the Americans who pull the puppets' strings, the South Vietnamese people respond by a combined political and military offensive.

Politically, the adversary is very weak (the proverbial instability of the Saigon "governments" is sufficient proof of this). The puppet soldiers, frequently impressed into service by force, except for the war criminals in their ranks, may be responsive to an educational campaign by the patriotic movement.

This is why, after each terrorist bombing raid against the liberated areas, you can see this extraordinary spectacle: thousands of women, old men and children (the men are in the army of the NLF) walking toward the nearest city, carrying the victims on bamboo stretchers or in hammocks at the head of the column. Sometimes the American Air Force, sighting the demonstration, comes down to machine-gun it. When the guerrillas go into action, concentrating their fire on the planes, which then don't dare to come down too far to take aim. If, in spite of this, there are victims, they too are placed at the head of the column and the march continues. Among the crowd you can see the robes of the Buddhist priests.

The girls of the khmer minority, as at Tra Vinh, are accustomed on such occasions to wear red, in order to express their readiness to march even if they are fired upon, even if their blood flows...

Having arrived at the district capital, the crowd, facing the puppet officers and civilian authorities, demands damages for the families of the victims who are present, dressed in white, the color of mourning. The crowd also demands the removal of the officer who ordered the artillery fire, when appropriate, and almost always the resignation of the puppet government.

More and more frequently toward the close of our tour, we noticed that the demonstrations were directed directly against the Americans, whose departure, pure and simple, is demanded. This is normal, for more and more it is the Americans themselves who are physically fighting the war against the South Vietnamese people, piloting themselves the planes and helicopters and bombing the civilian population, guilty of having liberated its own soil... Everybody takes part in these huge demonstrations, in which the people of the liberated areas of the countryside walk unarmed toward the cities, as if in pursuit of the enemy, who finds himself surrounded, thus helping the urban population to shake off the yoke...

Lying down under the wheels

Bursting out everywhere all over the territory of South Vietnam,

these multifarious political actions are very troublesome for the occupier, already overwhelmed by the ever more severe military attacks of the NLF army, for the occupier cannot be everywhere at once...

In order to try to fill the gaps in its ranks, with mass desertions proliferating, the Americans have the young men seized to be drafted. But how many times has not the chignon army stopped the convoys by lying down under the wheels, parleying with the puppet officers, who are imprisoned and disarmed by the crowd clinging to them, while the leaders of the "Women's Union for the Liberation of South Vietnam" go to parley with the officers: "If you don't set our sons free, we are going to keep your soldiers, for we need somebody for the harvest to bring a little money home..." Actions like this can last for hours. Sometimes, it is a crowd of young women with babies in their arms invading the office of the post commander: "Give us back our brothers or our husbands. What are we going to do without them at home? Who will feed our children?"

And the puppet chief, overwhelmed by these women, who threaten to leave their kids in his care in the military post itself unless he sets the conscripts free, has to give in, while the babies too play their demoralizing role, howling and wetting the desk and the files of the district chief...

The language of the scarf

The chignon army, consisting solely of volunteers, is always available, every "soldier" living in a home taking part like everyone else in production, study, and the campaigns of hygiene and sanitation organized everywhere in the areas liberated by the NLF. But, at a signal from their elected officer, they go into action, actions which are sometimes coordinated area-wide or district-wide, organized exactly like armed actions, except that the rifles are missing, with shock troops, who are volunteers in the front line, reserves, reconnaissance units, etc.

And this does not take into account the women whose role is to stay in the village to look after the children of the fighting women, do the cooking for them, etc. In these peaceful combats, the traditional black-and-white scarf, which all the peasant women wear, may play a large role. Knotted in different ways, it serves to transmit signals to the crowd concerning the hour of the demonstration, the route to follow, the enemy forces.

These human tides, flooding in after the crimes toward the offices of those responsible, have often forced the enemy to give way on a point, impotent in spite of his crushing superiority in weapons. At Bentré, for example, in 1963, when the occupier, facing an indomitable populace which had practically liberated its territory, used massive

napalm bombing attacks and chemical products, 45,000 people marched on the city on 20 December 1963. Thousands of others demonstrated at the same time in the villages. These demonstrations, with even journalists from Saigon present, managed to gain the sympathy of the puppets, who also drew up petitions against the toxic sprays, and took up a collection for the injured... The American authorities had to order compensation for the victims... All that without a shot being fired. Nevertheless, of course, as in any heroic battle in South Vietnam, the political struggle has its martyrs, its prisoners, its tortured, its wounded, and its dead.

Every woman who has fallen in the struggle for her country and her village, whether she be Buddhist, or communist worker, or peasant, immediately causes dozens of new fighters to rise up for peace, independence, democracy and neutrality for South Vietnam.

It takes a great deal of courage to stand up this way, without weapons, in the face of enemy machine guns, perhaps even more than to attack a convoy of M-113's with grenades. The men of South Vietnam know this well, and have it in mind when, with a smile full of tenderness and pride, they call "my company commander" their wives, so fragile, so sweet, so strong in front of the enemy positions...

[23 February 1965, page 2]

IV. Over this "lost continent" floats the smell of fresh ink

In the green labyrinth of the jungle, in which for days and nights we have been following our companions, I begin to make out, after a few missions, an Ariadne's thread. Under the cover -- impenetrable for enemy planes -- of the tall silk cotton trees with their tormented roots, the creepers, the palms, where thousands of trails crisscross, a branch across a path, a line of grains of rice, two palm trees crisscrossed, are so many signs for us to read from the soldiers in charge of reconnaissance. This is a whole language of so many Tom Thumbs, thanks to which we will not wander in the direction of the enemy positions (which are hemmed in by the people, but can kill from afar by artillery fire against us)...

And then, all of a sudden, here is the jungle, with apparently no trails at all, like a steep green wall, where you have to cut your way with a machete. Two or three hours of march, the mouth of a tunnel, we climb down deep underground, and we are in the studios of Radio Liberation, which broadcasts nine times a day, giving news about the struggle and spreading the slogans of the South Vietnamese Liberation Front. The South Vietnamese talk to the Vietnamese, but from the very heart of their country.

The transmitters were assembled on the spot, in the heart of the

jungle, and the first broadcasts took place in January 1962. Everything is underground, including the recording studio and modulation, etc. "Miss Free South Vietnam," the first announcer, is a very young girl named Xuem Viet, with two braids framing large eyes, which malaria, in this jungle full of anopheles mosquitoes, makes a little too brilliant. She comes from Saigon. She has broken with her family in order to join the guerrillas. In the forest she found her true family. For millions of Vietnamese, she is the voice of heroic South Vietnam. She told me she "never dreamed of such a marvelous destiny."

They have us visit the installations, the machines being put together with a number of parts picked up or bought in Saigon, on which you can see French and American trademarks (Burlington, Iowa, USA, for example).

The war of the airwaves

The generating equipment, which weighs more than a ton, was brought in this far by one of those daily miracles of South Vietnam. Hundreds of kilometers from the capital, through the enemy lines, avoiding the patrolled roads, carried on men's backs or on a sort of sledge. Well, during the operation, when the enormous machine was still on a sampan, its weight tipped the fragile boat, and the whole thing sank in ten meters of water! They had to get the local peasants into the act; it was they who retrieved the machinery, who carried that ton of metal by night through the rice paddies...as far as here, where it has tigers for company, and where the enemy, in spite of all his efforts, has not been able to trace the transmitter.

Faced with the immense popularity of the NLF broadcasts, which are certainly listened to more than the puppet radio, the American advisers have only been able to think of one solution -- the war of the airwaves. They make pirate broadcasts, using the signal of Radio Liberation and broadcasting false slogans, as if coming from the NLF. But the people are not taken in, they only see in these radio provocations one more sign of the immense audience of the NLF in South Vietnam, which gets such recognition from the enemy himself.

In fact, one very quickly sees that in 1965 there are practically only two forces left facing each other (the various Saigon "governments" entirely taken up with coups d'état, mutual destruction, and filling their pocketbooks, and their army, whose troops evaporate a little more each day, count for nothing). These two forces are, on the one hand, the American aggressors in their defensive positions, and playing a more and more direct role in the war; on the other hand, the NLF, representing the patriotic parties, the religions, the various social strata, and the national minorities of the country, all closely united. The Front already practically constitutes the real government of South Vietnam, with its various commissions, in which all shades of opinion in the movement play their role, completely democratically, and act just like real

government departments. In my articles transmitted directly from the liberated zones, I have already spoken about the National Education Commission, which this year has unified school programs for all of South Vietnam, the books being printed in the jungle by the presses of the NLF and the schoolchildren from the occupied zones being admitted to the schools in the free villages.

It will perhaps interest you to know how, and at what price, these schoolbooks and newspapers are published in the jungle.

The jungle books

I spent a few days at the base where they publish the official NLF newspaper, in two colors, the weekly of the "Women's Union for Liberation," and publications in French and English for information purposes abroad.

Just like the printing press workers, I was assigned a little straw shack to hang my hammock, a bamboo table for my typewriter, and the usual little kerosene lamp.

In the jungle, it is hard to know what day of the month it is. For one day is very like another, in spite of the frequent descents into the air raid shelters, and there is no Sunday in South Vietnam in war time... But the printers, unlike their colleagues on the Parisian dailies, had no need to put up placards in their offices reading, "The hour has come," for the hour is always roughly known. The jungle has its rites.

At about four o'clock in the morning, the dawn is given over to the birds and to the gibbons, which, with their long, modulated whistles, salute the return of the sun... At precisely three o'clock in the afternoon, the cicadas appear on the scene, as strident as the electric buzzers in the movies announcing the beginning of the show. They remind us to hurry, for in the forest the night falls fast. At sunset, the pretty jade-green snake which lives in the roof of my straw shack starts hunting mice...

But over this universe of the "lost continent" floats, quite unexpectedly, the odor which a journalist recognizes among all others, and which made my heart beat faster when I reached here after several days of hide-and-go-seek with the planes: the odor of fresh ink.

The sows and the boars

The printing plant is surrounded by the most highly perfected traps, and we had to walk carefully in the footsteps of our guides on the evening of our arrival, in order to avoid them. All the workers living there are self-sufficient by growing manioc, vegetables, and hunting. They also raise chickens, which you can see pecking at the ants among

the machines, and a few pigs of a wierd variety. At my astonishment that the chickens, free to roam in the forest, did not get lost, a young printer of twenty (the average age of the Front's workers, as it is of the soldiers) explained to me, "They won't risk abandoning our company, because they are afraid of the savage beasts which they hear lurking around. They are reassured by the presence of men. They cost us nothing, since they feed very well on termites, for example.

"As for these strange pigs, they are a cross between our sows and the wild boars which come courting in the evening..."

I can, consequently, "reassure" the American news services, who claim that "in the secret bases of the Viet Cong, people are reduced to eating berries to survive." Even if the hunting has been bad, there is never any lack of meat or eggs in the factories, print shops, hospitals, laboratories and universities of the bush.

As for what is essential to the patriots, that is to say the machines, they have managed to improvise them with such ingeniousness as the people have used to create rudimentary weapons from the bamboo or the bees.

"A printing press, what a weapon!..." said the director, M. Nguyen Nam, twenty-nine years old, but who had been in the business since the age of twelve, during the struggle against the French colonialists, when the only clandestine printing press was somewhere in the Plain of Reeds ...

"At that time," he told me, "we had neither mosquito nets nor hammocks nor medicines, we had to work in the water... You see that now we are in very luxurious surroundings" (and yet, you can hear the artillery of the enemy position, which, surrounded, must get bored, supplied as it is by helicopter, and is shooting at the shadows it sees. Perhaps someone bringing newsprint...).

For paper, of course, is not manufactured here, and it is the fighters who bring it from far away, fifty kilometers at a time along these implausible trails, and even during the six terrible months of the rainy season, when the water is up to your belly... And yet, the printing press never stops turning.

A letter at a time

Each machine has its own history, and has sometimes cost a patriot's life. They have been assembled, forged from bars of iron snatched from the strategic hamlets. Pieces of metal obtained by dismantling the reinforced concrete of the bridges sabotaged by the partisans have also had a role to play. Sawn to the length desired, they make up the forms of the print shop containing the "Roman" letters.

With these improvised means, they manage to print and put out from these hand presses 5,000 newspapers a day. And there is a strong and ever stronger demand, particularly in Saigon, for them.

The rotary press, worked by hand by young seventeen- to nineteen-year-old peasants, produces 800 pages an hour. On the bamboo wall is a slogan: "We are determined to earn the title of Nguyen Van Troi group."

For here, as in the army, the shadow of the young hero who was executed is everywhere present. From these forest presses also come the portrait against a red background of Troi, and when I came to make my farewells to the crew, a young girl worker gave me a copy of this portrait for the editorial staff and the typographical workers of our newspaper, a gift which I managed, through a thousand ups and downs, to bring back intact to Paris.

And almost all the photographs I took during this phase of my reporting assignment were buried in a bomb explosion.

At the forge, I saw old women and children bringing raw materials to the workers to enlarge the print shop. They were bits of bombs, debris from airplanes or helicopters shot down by the guerrillas. With a piece of duralumin, they were making a paper trimmer to cut the pages of the foreign language pamphlets.

"What they have thrown down on our people to destroy it," the director told me, "we pick up in order to turn it against them. What we are printing here will serve to tell the truth about our struggle throughout the entire world."

On a "monkey bridge"

But perhaps the thing that moved me most in this strange printing plant, where rifles always ready for use leaned against the machinery, and there was always a guitar hanging in the locker room of the young fighters, always ready for a dance in the evening after work, was the proofreading of the foreign language papers... There they were, bent over their little lamp, two boys, one from Gia Dinh, the Saigon suburb, the other from heroic Bentré, two young peasants who had only learned to read through the schools of the Front. Of course they did not know either English or French. And so, with what concentration they verified those unknown words, a letter at a time! Believe me or not, they nevertheless left practically no mistakes behind them...

The next day, after I had said farewell to this corner of the forest, I passed going the other way, on a very difficult path crossing a little watercourse in unstable balance over a "monkey bridge," a group of fighters bent in two and covered with sweat under the weight of rolls of newsprint. Nevertheless, they gave a greeting and a smile, and we

left them behind.

"Did you recognize him?" one of my companions asked me. "It was the son of the President of the Front, M. Nguyen Huu Tho..."

That is the way life goes in South Vietnam, where each one, in equality, has a share in the patriotic work, whether ambushing an enemy or publishing a newspaper and schoolbooks in the depths of the worst of jungles. That is the way victory is brought closer.

[24 February 1965, page 2]

V. White coats in a setting for Tarzan

Vinh is twenty years old, yet I find myself surprised that I consider him as somewhat older than I am. This young peasant, who is assigned as my bodyguard to visit the headquarters in the forest of the NLF Central Medical Commission, is admirably well acquainted with the guerrilla region through which we have to go. He effaces our tracks carefully, burns the empty cigarette packages I leave behind, and the film boxes. He knows when I must cover my face with a scarf near a village, he has an eye for everything, even for this scorpion, on which, without him, I would have stepped...

There has been a typhoon somewhere which has disturbed the blue sky of the dry season. All the beasts of the jungle are coming out of their holes, and if we have less to hear from the airplanes today, we are instead delayed by slippery trails in which you can get stuck up to your waist in mud full of leeches. And there is malaria, too...

The lotus in the swamp

Dr. Thuy Ba, chief doctor of the Front hospital, has come to meet us. It is a young woman, dressed like the peasant women, in black cotton with a white scarf around her neck, for she is in mourning for her husband, who has been killed at the front... She wears this costume with the elegance, grace and dignity of a queen. Accustomed to long marches to bring her care, under any circumstances, to fighters and civilians, she has not a trace of mud on her... She is truly, as the Vietnamese say, "the lotus," the spotless flower resting on the swamp...

Her hammock and her medical bag hanging from her shoulder, her revolver at her waist, she smiles.

Confronted with the occupier, who does everything to kill, starve, torture and bomb the South Vietnamese populace, the "Ministry of Health," which this commission is, has a crushing job, one that seems impossible at first glance, especially when you know that in Saigon there is a blockade of medicine, of absorbent cotton, and even a ban on druggists'

selling the most ordinary products without a prescription, in order to keep them away from the liberated zones and the NLF soldiers.

And yet, I was struck everywhere I went, in the army as well as in the villages, by the good health of the people, much better, certainly, by a long way, than after the war against the French colonialists. This is the result of the work of the patriotic doctors, who by their devotion and often at the sacrifice of life or liberty have managed, in spite of the war, to bring progress to their country.

I only saw the jungle

It must have been ten o'clock at night when, at the end of a grueling march, Thuy Ba turned to me and said, "We are home." I only saw the jungle, dimly lit by our little lamps. But suddenly, quite close, at a turning of the trail, dozens of little flames were trembling, lined up one after the other, along the edge of what seemed to be a long bamboo desk, and each lamp, as I now saw, was shining on a book or a notebook.

"This is our medical school," said our guide. "Not far from here we also have a school for nurses and medical aides. The students we train were almost all peasants. We get them from everywhere, even from the high plateaus."

Seventy percent seof-sufficient, the central commission produces its own medicines. In the first very difficult years of the struggle, with the help of the observations made by the peasants of the tribes, the patriotic doctors manufactured many medicines out of jungle plants. Against malaria, for example, they have an excellent remedy, brown pills made out of seeds, which I used myself that night, with profit.

Some medical discoveries had already been made during the first war by Dr. Phan Ngoc Tach, today Minister of Health of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. They have been perfected during this second war. For example, serious tubercular lesions are cared for in the jungle sanitariums, where I visited the survivors of the prison of Poulo Condor, with bacillus subtilis, which is also very effective in promoting the formation of scar tissue over napalm burns. This product, which replaces, and is even better, I am told, than antibiotics, is produced in the forest itself by the laboratories of the Front.

In the liberated zones, in the villages, there are now infirmaries everywhere, with a stock of medicines bought by means of contributions from the peasants -- an extraordinary innovation for a country which heretofore was plunged into colonial and feudal darkness!

In the night schools, the populace has learned that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." "Thanks to our courses," Dr. Nguyen Tanh tells me, "there is not a single soldier or peasant woman

left who would dream of drinking a drop of unboiled water." (And, in fact, I had noticed that soldiers and guerrillas always have on their belts a canteen of boiled water.) It is thanks to such simple measures of sanitation, now collectively applied, that amoebiasis and the various epidemics which ravaged Vietnam when it was a colony have receded, in spite of the war. Thanks also to vaccinations, which are done even in the occupied zones, where the people have confidence only in the NLF doctors, clandestine militants who are protected by the people.

They bomb blindly

We wanted to film the manufacture of these vaccines (televiewers saw it on the program, "Five Columns at One O'clock), and it almost cost us our life -- Vinh Thuy Ba, Burchett, and our whole little group... As it happened, quite close to the laboratory we found ourselves under a bombing and aerial machine gun attack, which decapitated some trees not far from us.

It is there that I feel that I really got to know Thuy Ba. When with no panic, she said, "It is a nuisance, there are no foxholes or shelters here! But all you have to do is crouch down on this side of the trees -- look, the planes are coming from over there..." And while the forest was shaking under the bombs, she went on to explain, just as calmly, "It is not so very dangerous. For example, I was under a napalm drop the other day, when I was going to treat a caodai dignitary who was gravely ill... You just have to run fast, you can see quite well where the forest is burning. Generally, they bomb blindly."

In the laboratory, two doctors and a few students had not interrupted their work for such a slight disturbance: "We realized quite well that the air raid was at least a kilometer away. And then, this season of the year is very favorable for the propagation of epidemics. So, never mind about the planes!"

They had finished putting into ampoules one million doses of anti-smallpox vaccine in six months, ten thousand anticholera doses in two months, and at the same time they were starting to manufacture TAB, an associated vaccine. Thanks to these vaccines, the cholera epidemic from the typhoons was to be jugulated in November...

These doctors, most of whom used to have a prosperous practice in Saigon, a comfortable apartment, everything to make life pleasant, have, nevertheless, chosen the jungle, where they have built with their own hands the shacks where they work and live, when they find the time cultivating their bit of ground, and also raising poultry themselves to meet their needs, having nothing superfluous, linked to the rest of the world by their transistor radios, whose batteries quickly go down in this humid jungle... And ceaselessly continuing their research with those bombers overhead, on the alert to crush any sign of life.

One of them built a portable anesthesia apparatus, which works without oxygen, another a pneumothorax device using empty bottles, which is extremely ingenious.

The third invented a mask permitting soldiers to pass unharmed through zones through which the Americans spread toxic substances before an operation. The populace, too, can very easily make these masks after a few hours of instruction by medical aides. The poisons spread from the upper air "in the name of civilization, in the anticommunist struggle," as the Voice of America would say, have thus been checked by the research workers in the tiger forest.

As for the equipment for making these vaccines, which the Institut Pasteur would not disdain, the patriot doctors put them together themselves, helped by their colleagues who had worked in similar conditions during the first war. The bicycle pump has a role to play; an anthill sawn in two is the boiler of the autoclave. For the termites, as you may not know, produce refractory earth, which can stand very high temperatures! With empty bottles and tin pans they have reconstructed the apparatus they need. "In Europe," a doctor told me, "they dilute antismallpox vaccine with glycerine. We do not have any. But we have discovered that honey serves just as well." These vaccines are distributed gratis to all the populace of South Vietnam by the Central Commission of the NLF.

Plastic surgery

During my trip, I was able to visit several hospitals and specialized centers. One of them, also in the jungle, not far from an occupied city, was devoted to operations on the face. "Here, last May," a woman student from Saigon told me, "this was still jungle, without a soul around. We built everything."

Straw huts with graceful roofs, wooden floors to facilitate asepsis, an operating block, a waiting room -- everything in bamboo. All surgical instruments, which are rare and precious in the jungle, are hidden in secret hiding places between operations. Here too are highly perfected traps and alarm signals. But the best protection is the people, who recently, after an enemy machine gun attack, were cared for here. Serious face wounds, people blinded by napalm, a man with his jaw half shot away, were operated on at this center, where I even saw plastic surgery performed! A girl afflicted with a hare lip, who, a few years ago, as a poor peasant, would not have had the slightest chance of being operated on...

At just about that same time, F. Taylor, in Saigon, was proclaiming, when he learned of the disasters caused by the typhoons, that "there is always something good to be gotten out of these misfortunes."

Human brotherhood

Unlike their aggressors, the patriots of South Vietnam, after twenty years of very hard struggle, have also developed their respect for life to a higher point. And so, after the great victory of Binh Gia last January, in the trenches very close to the battlefield, we saw NLF doctors caring not only for their own wounded, but also, to the extent possible, for the puppets whose masters had abandoned them with no care, since they were no good to them any longer.

I often thought, during my trip, in times of danger and difficulties, about these extraordinary bush intellectuals with their white coats in a setting suitable for Tarzan. I thought of Dr. Thuy Ba, walking quite alone in the jungle, medical case under her arm, coming out of the rice paddies as clean as a doll in its box, and never letting her sorrow dim her eyes.

And I thought of the old surgeon, who, under these conditions, imparted what he knows to dozens of combat surgeons. And who had told me, over a glass of rice alcohol, made by the medical students in our honor and baptized by them "medicine," "Don't worry about me. Nowadays in South Vietnam the real jungle is not here, but in Saigon. Here in the forest, I have a luxury which no one will ever be able to buy, even with dollars -- human brotherhood."

[25 February 1965, page 2]

VI. In the liberated zones, where harvesting goes on in spite of the bombs, even the buffalo become resistance fighters

A bicycle-borne intelligence operation, under the dangerously blue sky of the dry season, the season when they harvest the paddy, and when the enemy drops tons of napalm and phosphorus bombs on the ripe rice... With planes against harvesters, the battle for life, as it does every year, takes place at the end of December.

I wanted to see this, not only in one village, in a single region, but in several, and here we are on our journey, far from the jungle, on our bicycles, which are Asia's aotomobiles. For this operation, Vinh remained in his guerrilla zone. For my bodyguard, I have a forty-year-old peasant, Nghé, a specialist in hunting "flying eagles," and as a "press driver" I have eighteen-year-old Maï. By this, I mean that every day I shall travel some seventy kilometers seated on his baggage rack, which is the most frequent mode of travel of women in the South Vietnamese resistance.

Bikes against helicopters, we are preceded by a soldier who warns us by a short blast on his whistle of any suspicious movement in the sky, for we might hear too late to protect ourselves against the "may bay"

(flying machines). This is the Vietnamese word I heard most often during my stay.

They are everywhere

At night, to save time, we sometimes travel by motor sampan, which is not recommended by day, for the noise of the boat prevents your hearing that of the bombers.

Extraordinary nights, when we sometimes pass very close to occupied suburbs or enemy military posts. In the labyrinth of creeks or on the broad, calm streams, among the palms and creepers of the bank, the night speaks to us in signals: wood fires burning for us and showing that all goes well, lights lit and extinguished several times, responding to the code of our electric lamp. The night is full of friends, full of resistance fighters who are protecting our march. They are everywhere.

One day, near a village which had been hit by phosphorus bombs the week before, we met teams rebuilding the road. "Oh, sure," these people told us, "we are the ones who destroyed this road, to protect ourselves against the raids! But now we are free, and we know perfectly well that the Americans will never dare attack us here, and so we are fixing up the roads. For ourselves..."

That is the truth, we had had to cross a stream by ferry, the bridge being under constant bombing attack by the American planes, after having been sabotaged a few years ago by the partisans, and then rebuilt by the people when the balance of forces had changed in its favor. Now it is the enemy who is afraid that this bridge will be used by the NLF regular army to attack the nearby puppet military posts.

Thus, every detail of the road shows to what extent, in 1965, the occupiers are fighting in a defensive position. It is precisely for that reason that they are multiplying their air attacks, the only route which the guerrillas have not completely cut.

Traps for helicopters

In the clearings and in the fields, I was surprised, at the beginning of my trip, to see stakes three or four meters long planted close together, and often surrounded by metal wire or nylon cord. "These are helicopter traps," Nghé explained to me. "If they land, they are bothered by the stakes, and their rotors get caught in the wires. It is simple, and yet, this system has very often allowed us to knock down the 'flying eagles.' At the outset, the Americans were sure that they were going to beat us with their famous helicopters. But they are very vulnerable, even to mere rifle bullets. Our peasants shoot at them like birds, and now you even have to take great pains if you want to shoot one down. As soon as they hear a shot, they fly away. The best thing to do

is to be patient enough to let them land before shooting at them. We got one like that just the other day..."

The peasants talked about hunting helicopters the way they talk about hunting partridge, and it is not uncommon to see villages pursuing with old rifles the "bananas" coming to spread toxic products over their harvests.

As soon as a "may bay" has been knocked down, everyone goes to get a trophy from the fusilage, and, a day or two after capture, there is nothing left of the proud "flying eagle" which had come to kill and terrify except a picked carcass...

Mr. Taylor, I have seen what the South Vietnamese peasants do with your helicopters, spoons, knives, cups. Duralumin is easily worked.

Against helicopter operations, the South Vietnamese have proved that they had an overwhelming superiority over the enemy: their courage and nerves of steel...

And so the occupier has chosen not to withdraw his troops (the reasonable solution), but the last card he held, according to his strategists: to crush under his bombs these people aligned against him.

Craters in the rice fields

My profession of special correspondent has, alas, given me an opportunity to visit many bombed villages in the last twenty years, in Algeria, in Tunisia, and, last October, on the frontiers with Cambodia... The sufferings of the South Vietnamese peasants, obliged to harvest hastily and with their rifles on their backs the ripe rice in their own fields, before the planes come and set fire to it, are, therefore, no novelty for me.

But, on the other hand, no other country in the world had ever seen before the calm and discipline of the South Vietnamese under the bombs, and this unprecedented experience which brings it about that, with very simple means, the populace manages to protect itself to the maximum, and even to carry on its work, in spite of this apocalypse of steel and fire which is rained down upon it.

When I arrived at this village, twenty-five kilometers from Saigon, in a zone which has taken a pounding all the heavier with the Americans desperately trying to keep it to protect the capital, come what may, I did not think that we would be greeted with a banquet... And yet, that is what happened. Everywhere in the golden expanse of the ripe rice were bomb craters. Everywhere in the orchards were torn banana trees, decapitated cocoanut palms... But already, only a week after the last heavy bombardment, the straw huts had been rebuilt. The whole village had gone

to work on them with that admirable solidarity through which in South Vietnam no one is left hungry, no one is abandoned, in the liberated zones. Everything is shared...

"These ruined houses you see -- we rebuilt them elsewhere, in less exposed places under the branches... But go ahead, eat, we have everything. The land is rich here where we live, after twenty years of war it is still feeding us. There is plenty for everyone, now that the land is ours, now that we don't have to pay exorbitant sharecropper charges to the landowners, as we used to..."

And, just as everywhere else we have been, the peasant woman who was going to put me up immediately showed me the essential thing: "Here is the beautiful underground shelter we have dug for you. If the planes come back, you will be perfectly all right there." Such is the politeness of the South Vietnamese: there they dig a shelter for you, the way in this country we keep the prettiest bedroom as a guest room for friends passing through...

Until they leave

No land in the world is tunnelled so much or so well as that of South Vietnam. Before cultivating the fields, they began by digging a trench around them for shelter against aerial machine gunning. For big operations against napalm, they also have secret tunnels leading from the village and coming up far away in the forest, sometimes as far as twenty kilometers.

It is the business of the whole village to dig these shelters, for which the experience of the first was is very useful. As soon as the B-26's arrive, everyone knows where to go, there is no shouting, no panic ... Even we have grown accustomed to feel reassured under a meter of earth...

Such are the "fortified self-defense villages." There is no medieval fortress, nothing visible on the surface, but a whole network of tunnels where life can go on, and, of course, those ingenious traps against possible attacks by land...

Furthermore, the peasants do not merely defend themselves passively against the bombs. At the start of an aerial attack, the guerrillas concentrate on the planes the fire of all the weapons they possess. The precision of the enemy fire suffers from this, for the American mercenaries at the controls do not have the same patriotic reasons as the South Vietnamese for risking their lives...

In this martyred village, the only one wounded after a terrible raid had been an old gentleman who had not been able to get into shelter fast enough. Two children had been killed the same day. With the

impatience of seven or eight years, they had left the shelter too soon.

"The last phosphorus bomb fell," the mother of one of these children told me. "My son started to smoke like a torch. He cried out for help, he ran through the village street smoking everywhere... We could do nothing for him, or for his friend..."

Thus, that day's American "victory" consisted of killing two children and setting fire to a few rice fields... Hollow victories, which can be of no use in winning back last ground, and which raise up a little more hatred against them in the hearts of the South Vietnamese peasants.

In this bombed zone, it was dangerous to attrace the enemy's attention by too great a concentration of people in the village. An attempt had been made to hide my arrival. Nevertheless, news travels fast down there, and I had scarcely finished my visit to the victims when Nghé forced me to get quickly back on the bike, cutting short the farewells...

It was only that evening that he explained to me that several hundred women of the area, learning of the arrival of a certain "Eighth Sister" coming from a distant country to visit South Vietnam, had immediately set off, abandoning the harvest... They wanted to tell me what all of them have told me, the bonzes, the Catholics, the communists, the mother of the child killed by the phosphorus bomb, the old man burned by napalm: "The Americans will not make us give in by dropping bombs on us or by bombing the northern part of our country. We go on fighting until they leave..."

"The buffalos of the resistence"

In spite of the Americans' "operation harvest," I was able to see that at Long An, at Thaï Ninh, Binh Duong, Bien Hoa, the rice, winnowed on the spot and carried immediately to subterranean hiding places, was gotten in again this year, most of the time, moreover, with the help of the NLF army. The patriots will not go short of rice. During this harbest, some peasants have fallen, pursued by helicopters and planes, at Bentré, Gia Dinh... But if such terror bombings had taken place in a country less inured to war, there would be hundreds of dead to be mourned, for here again the American attempts at genocide are foiled by the twenty years' experience of the South Vietnamese guerrillas, who are by long odds the most experienced and the calmest in the world.

"For our peasants, after all the misfortunes they have overcome already," said Nghé, "these air raids are like playing a guitar to a buffalo..."

"Speaking of buffalos, many villages, you know, even dig shelters for their cattle. Well, they don't have to lead the buffalos to them. They understand... As soon as they hear the planes, they go and hide.

During the first Resistance, and at the beginning of this one, when there were raids by land, you should have seen some of the buffalo take charge of the village herd by themselves, and plunge into the jungle, horns first... It is thanks to that that they escaped being stolen. They hid in the forest, and knew how to find their way home, to go back to the stable, when the enemy had left. We call them 'the buffalo of the resistance'..."

So many bombs have been dropped on the South Vietnamese people that it is easy to find some unexploded ones. Fair game for the guerrillas, who, with minimum precautions, find in themselves enough hatred against those who dropped them to have the courage to go and dig them up and defuse them. They will then be transported to the rudimentary munitions plants and sawed in two.

With the American explosives contained in these bombs, which were designed to burn up their villages, I have seen the soldiers of the Front build very effective mines to attack the military bases which the Pentagon has set up in South Vietnam.

[26 February 1965, page 2]

VII. When the helicopters attack the nursery schools

The young soldier of the NLF army, between two training sessions, was reading a love letter as he swung in his hammock. The letter was six months old, the love two years. The soldier's name is Minh Thu, his fiancée, Thanh Van (which means, I believe, Blue Cloud). She is a teacher in the Camau region, at the extreme southern tip, a region of blue sky and water palms... To be precise, at Long An.

"Since you were here last, the school has been rebuilt in a sheltered spot, well hidden this time. Don't be afraid, I'm not afraid of anything any more. For the children, we have dug shelters under every desk," said the letter. This is how, when Thu told me the story of his love, I began to learn the truth about what the American psychological warfare experts call "operation schools."

Here are the facts: January 1963, 25 helicopters machine gun the Long Dien school at ground level, and then pursue the children and their teacher to the swamps where they had fled. Why? This is a liberated zone. This terror operation aims to punish and demoralize the populace by striking what it holds most dear: its children.

I might still have believed that this was an isolated barbarious act by the occupier. However, a month later, while I was visiting a nursing school in the jungle, the girls improvised a little celebration in our honor. After some dances, one of the pupils sang a lament which she herself had composed. Seeing tears streaming down the faces of her listeners, I asked for a translation. The song told of the bombing of a

school at Cauxé by the occupier, and even gave the date of the crime -- 18 March 1963. The young singer came from Cauxé.

Napalm against little school children

But it was last July that these actions, hitherto isolated, against the schools of the invincible regions began to be, it seems, truly systematic. A leader of the National Liberation Front of Bentré, the province of the Mekong Delta famous for its revolutionary traditions, provided the key to the puzzle. Forced everywhere to go on the defensive, beginning in 1964 the American "specialists" used every means of pressure against the population of strategically interesting regions. Since the operation, which consists of spreading toxic substances from airplanes, resulted merely in uniting a little more closely all strata of the populace within the ranks of the NLF, and the bombing of the pagodas having had the same effect, the chief of Bentré province received, one day in 1964, an order from his advisers (an order which he passed on to his subordinates in writing, and which fell into the hands of the patriots) "to determine which school, by its position and the numbers attending, would best lend itself to a terror raid."

And from 3 to 13 July, there followed napalm raids on the school children of Linh Phung and Mo Cay, this latter school having been built with gifts from families of the Caodai religion, very close to their pagoda. In both cases, there were very heavy losses among the children, and also among their parents, who had run to their assistance, and whom the fire of the nearby military posts, acting in perfect corrdination with the planes, decimated.

Enormous protest demonstrations then took place, and the Caodai bonzes, who had themselves built the little coffins of the victims, marched in front with banners, demanding the Americans' departure and the punishment of the criminals. So true is it that in South Vietnam there is no need to be a "red" or a "Viet Cong" to be against American imperialism and fight in the ranks of the Front...

But, you will say, you didn't see that with your own eyes? That is quite true, but, on the other hand (and without ever having been looking for such cases) W. Burchett and I went separately (and, consequently, without having any prearrangement) to An Tanh and to An Hoa, in the province of Long An. This province was the one which had been chosen by McNamara in 1964 to be the guinea pig for the seven pilot provinces which were to be "pacified" within the year, in order to protect Saigon. These provinces, on the contrary, in spite of the efforts of the occupier, enlarged their liberated zones.

A sleepless night in the ruins

An Tanh, An Hoa: a landscape of rice paddies almost ready for

harvest, with few trees, except some clumps of bamboo around the houses ... In the first village, near a road, as night was falling, I saw broken wooden tables, the remains of a blackboard and the debris -- mud bricks and tiles -- of what had been the school that had been bombed on 3 October. The same day, the Americans had launched the same kind of raid against the schools of An Minh and An Hoa, neighboring villages, and in that same area, on 28 October, it was the turn for the schoolchildren of Duc Hoa. Four schools in flames in less than a month in the same region!...

I was not able to go as far as Duc Hoa, which is in a sector still partly in the hands of the occupier, in a very disputed area. But at An Hoa, where I spent a sleepless night with the inhabitants of the village, I saw the ruins of the school, blackened by napalm, and the bamboo trunks which had held up the thatched roof, standing up against the sky like the columns of a temple, where the moon that night was a motionless lamp. And the people showed me the sad remains: arithmetic notebooks stained with blood, hats with bullet holes in them, small half-burned garments of the children who had been killed or were still being cared for at the hospital. Since I cannot report all the testimony of the same kind that I gathered, I shall limit myself to An Hoa. All the testimony, moreover, is just as heartrending:

"It was at a time when all the children were in school. The day before, the propaganda helicopters had flown over, throwing out leaflets and with their loud speakers had threatened the populace with reprisals if it continued to refuse to enter the strategic hamlets. (They no longer dare come except by air, even to harangue us.) They were 'HUIA' helicopters, which can remain motionless in the air and be used as gun platforms. But, the next day, they came back... As you have seen, we had built this school on open ground. We had put a big sign on the facade reading 'community school.' We were still too trusting, in spite of all the harm they had done us. We thought that in this way the planes would not make any mistake and bomb the school... They made no mistake. First of all, their reconnaissance planes dropped smoke bombs to mark the target, right in the courtyard of the school.

"There were two classes. The one for the older pupils, led by their teacher, gained the shelter in a disciplined way. Then there was the kindergarten, sixty kids between five and seven years old, who took fright, clinging to the teacher, who sought to calm them, hiding under the desks and refusing to be dislodged... The teacher, twenty years old, already knew from experience that the helicopters were going to launch their rockets right into the school. Having no time to get the children out and into the protection of the trenches, he tried to get them into

the corners of the room. But the bombing had already started. The first explosions took place in front of the door, which was barred by an iron shutter.

"Then the teacher started to evacuate the children, three at a time, through the window, one on his shoulders and one under each arm. More then ten times, under the bullets and rockets, he repeated the same maneuver. However, several children had already been killed or wounded in the classroom itself, and the children's panic was at its height.

"Tam, the teacher, had managed to evacuate forty-five children when it was his turn to be hit. Wounded in the leg, he managed to make the trip once more, but in the courtyard he was hit again, seriously, this time. Feeling his life departing, he shouted to the last two living children, who were still in the school, 'Go out through the window. Don't be afraid! I am here, but I am wounded.' 'Big brother,' answered the children, 'we cannot go through the window, we are too small...' (I know all this, exactly as it happened, for Tam, the young teacher, survived).

"At that moment, the planes dropped the napalm canisters on what was left of the school. And there were no more cries from the children.

"Outside, the children whom Tam had evacuated with such difficulty had left the underground shelters in their panic, and had escaped toward their homes. On the way, they were machine gunned by low-flying helicopters, which shot at them as if it were a rabbit-hunt. They flew so low the people say that you could clearly distinguish the American uniforms." (The SS have found recruits in Goldwater's country.)

"Napalm," a peasant told me, "sets on fire whatever it touches. When one of the children, smoking all over, threw himself into his father's arms, he set the latter's clothing on fire."

More than one hundred lost

There too, as is always the case, parents going to the aid of the pupils were fired on by the nearby military posts. Fourteen were killed in that way, for they thought not at all about protecting themselves... A woman told me her little girl, whom she had gone to visit at the hospital, was blind, because her eyes were so swollen closed over the yellow pus which accumulates, the day after, under skin burned by napalm. The child asked her, "Open my eyes for me, mama, so I can see you."

After this raid against their school, the people of these Long An villages, which are very close together, united their guerrilla forces and on 7 October, to avenge their children, attacked an enemy post ten kilometers from Duc Hoa. The post having fallen, they laid an ambush to intercept the reinforcements whom the Americans would not fail to send

and called upon the NLF army for assitance. During the engagement that followed, aircraft came into action, and in all the confusion bombed the puppet reinforcements which had taken shelter in the ditches beside the road. "Liberation forces, come to our aid!" cried the puppet troops, many of whom had already been killed. Then could be seen a rather unusual spectacle -- puppets and guerrillas together training their fire against the American planes.

More than one hundred puppets surrendered that day -- "got lost," as the American news agencies would say. The enemy lost more than one hundred killed, wounded, and deserters.

A puppet officer, made prisoner, was let by an eighteen-year-old soldier to the camp of the NLF army. This young man had been wounded, and had bandaged the wound with his handkerchief. "Does it hurt?" asked the officer. "It's nothing." "You fight very well. How much do you make a month?" "Your question proves that you are still very backward. We eat well in the NLF army, and we have weapons -- that is more than enough. And we fight well because we want to avenge the school children." The puppet officer hung his head.

General strike

In South Vietnam, no crime goes unpunished for long, and the greater the crime the greater the people's pain, the harder is the blow they manage to strike against the Americans.

At Duc Hoa itself, after the raid of 28 October which killed the teacher and many pupils, there was a general strike of the market, thousands of people demonstrated, joined along the way by the passengers from the buses going to Saigon. At the burial of the victims, thousands of school children had come from the capital itself. In the presence of the puppet authorities, the orators demanded the departure of the Americans from South Vietnam. During the days that followed, the people built "defense villages" and stopped a convoy of M-113's "to avenge the schoolchildren."

No, Mr. Taylor, it is not by "operation School" that you will "pacify" South Vietnam. When I went to Long An, the schools had been rebuilt and carefully hidden. The surviving children danced and sang to greet our arrival. In front of the new school, the starred red-and-blue flag of the NLF was waving. Life continued, in spite of grief. The fight went on.

The countryside was still vibrating with the echo of the crimes of October, which for us French reawaken and rekindle the flames too many have forgotten: those of Oradour...

[2 March 1965, page 2]

VIII. Near Saigon with guerrillas in blue jeans

In the still occupied cities, the only rear area the American occupier in South Vietnam has, are fighting the men and women whose photographs I cannot show you and whose names I may not tell.

Who are they?... This is found out sometimes only when they fall into the hands of the enemy. When, one day, the television shows them to millions of people, head erect, under the bullets of the execution squad. As was the case with Nguyen Van Troi, and then with Kiem...

I met some of Troi's companions, and my trip to meet them, in those buffer-suburbs of Saigon which the occupier tries in vain to guard by every possible means, was in itself, for me, a great adventure... Having myself fallen into a small search-raid, it was my turn to get to know those famous secret subterranean hiding places which were already famous in the first Resistance, access to which is known only to a militant in the village.

A very narrow hole, cleverly concealed, where you can just barely slide in, from which you can hear above your head the puppets marching and the noises of feet, sometimes breathing only the air filtered in through a slender bamboo for a ventilating shaft... There were two of us in there, and at one moment I thought my journalistic career would end right there... But many South Vietnamese patriots stayed hidden as long as four or five years in these burrows during Diem's time, coming out only at night to inspire confidence in the village people. And they were effective...

The besiegers besieged

On my part, I didn't have to wait so long, for after exchanging shots with the guerrillas, the puppets withdrew, signalling, as they usually do, "Strong Viet Cong concentration " (which was not true!), calling for aircraft... But that is another story.

"They only rely on the bombers now," I was told by the NLF representative to the nearby village where we arrived later, under cover of night.

"They brought quite a few reinforcements into the area, in order to try to get us to relax our grip around the capital. But some time later, victims of the people's strategy, which changes besiegers into besieged, their troops were shut up in their positions, not daring to come out of them.

"Even in Saigon, the Americans have not felt safe for a long time.

It is in vain that they change puppets, in order to try to get the upper hand again. They would need twenty prime ministers, dozens of ministerial portfolios, in order to satisfy their lackeys, who are rapacious for profit. And even so, they would not have any more stability, since they are lacking any popular base."

On the other hand, the people of Saigon take advantage of every change of government to get rid of the most cruel officials and policemen, by denouncing them to the new masters, who, out of demagoguery (and also to find jobs for their friends) agree to throw this largesse to the crowd. This is why the situation of the patriots has improved a great deal in the occupied zone since Diem's time, thanks to the many coups d'état. More and more the police are seeking out our militants to get from them "patriotism certificates," which will be quite useful after the people have won. (This will remind French resistance fighters of several similar good stories when they were in Paris in 1944...)

The police become "prudent"

In Saigon, where the unarmed struggle of the "chignon army" is, of course, very powerful, it often happens, if a patriot is arrested, that someone in the crowd gives the alarm by shouting, "Come and see, it is policeman So-and-so who has captured a Viet Cong!" Hearing his name shouted several times this way, in a tone of false admiration, the prudent policeman becomes aware of his own best interests, and releases his victim at the next corner.

Little by little, even in the midst of the enemy's most powerful concentration, the struggle of the man and woman in the street manages to lessen the vise, to begin to put in another government, or, in any event, to weaken the repressive apparatus of the occupier, whose lackeys no longer dare to pillage, or even to require identity cards, looking the other way when the officer is not there...

"The other day," a young man from the capital told me, "I had quite a fright... I was right in the street, carrying a bundle of Front newspapers, which had to be divided up among the clandestine distributors. The string broke, the newspapers spread all over the sidewalk. I tried to pick them up, but there were a lot of people, and the police were nearby. Well, a few days later, a stranger managed to get in touch with one of our militants: 'We are not giving back the newspapers, because we want to read and study them,' he said, 'but here are the documents that were in the package. We took them before the police had time to get close...'

"The man in the street guesses who we are, and when we are in difficulties helps us without giving anything away."

Their underground -- the streets of Saigon

We are familiar with Saigon's powerful political demonstrations, those by the Buddhists which precipitated the fall of Diem, those of the schoolchildren and university students, facing the police armed with medieval shields to protect themselves against the stones. We know that the first patriotic general strike, last September, paralysed Saigon, revealing all at once to the occupier, deprived of water, gasoline, electricity, sweating and puffing without his airconditioner, the strategic importance of the struggle in the cities, carried on in ever closer coordination with the countryside.

This is why I should like to emphasize one aspect of the struggle, the patriots who are never talked about, whose madly audacious exploits, carried out in the heart of the enemy camp against the occupier himself, are passed over in silence, or barely mentioned by the American press -- the "groups of three" in blue jeans who are the brothers of the black-uniformed guerrillas in the countryside.

Workers like Troi, or students, boys and girls, their underground is the streets of Saigon, their jungle the crowd...

They strike only when they know the blow will be effective.

Do you remember the explosion of the "Brink" on 24 December? Dozens of officers, of American pilots, vaporized in a seven-storey building in the heart of Saigon... Their servants had been selected after investigations going back three generations, to be sure that even their great-grandfathers could not be suspected of being revolutionaries. Exceptional measures had been taken to make this headquarters an impregnable stronghold. It so happened that patriots managed to mine the building at a time when only Americans were in it...with an unexploded bomb from a B-26 -- 250 kilograms of explosives returned to sender. I am also able to announce that those responsible for this action returned safe and sound to their base...

But, scarcely a week passes without an attack by these groups of three in Saigon itself, where the U.S. Embassy, transformed into a blockhouse, tells by its very aspect how aware the Americans are of being beloved by these people "whom they have come to liberate from communism."

News of this kind is not published by the Saigon newspapers, which are heavily censored every day.

Down the chimney

The armed struggle in Saigon is, for example, the attack in broad daylight, in an area reserved for CIA personnel, on a car carrying Americans.

The partisan, from the roof of a five-storey house, had been watching the vehicle for hours, clinging to the gutter. When he threw the plastic right into the open car, nobody had an idea that the explosion could have been caused from above, especially since it seemed impossible that a patriot could have managed to get into this reserved area. And the roofs were not searched.

When, much later, the boy was able to get down a chimney into the kitchen of a woman, she was, at first, very frightened, since he had left in the gutter his shirt, the color of which stood out against the roof, and who was almost naked. But the unknown woman quickly calmed down. She had guessed. And she dressed the resistance fighter in her son's clothes, and even forced him to accept a little money to take a taxi.

Upon returning to the patriots in his group, the young man told of his successful mission, but also that he had left on the roof his clothes and the box that had contained the plastic. Well, after talking thigs over with his comrades, he himself decided that he had to get back to the scene of his exploit, get through the barbed wire again, climb up to the gutter, and get back all those objects which might one day be discovered, endanger the woman who had helped him, and provide a variety of information to the enemy. He did so... And he came back.

The girl with the grenade

All these young fighters have the highest sense of responsibility, they are all volunteers for these carefully thoughout out missions, and they know that each may be the last.

"But," they say, "we all have many loved ones to avenge, and we are ready to give our lives, provided we kill at least ten of the occupiers in so doing."

Fabien and his comrades thought just that way in 1941, 1942, 1944, when it was a question of liberating Paris...

"The girls," I was told by one of these people whom I may not describe, "are the most ingenious and the most courageous, when, for example, we have to transport weapons and explosives in buses, in spite of the controls. For some time I was a member of a team with a girl student. She was the one who carried the mine, in a basket. In the bus, there was a police check. She whispered to me, 'Don't worry, transporting the mine is my work, not yours! You have nothing to do with it. Anyway, I won't say anything.' They didn't see the basket, which she had placed at some distance from her,, but they arrested her and made her get down into the road with other suspects, one kilometer from the place where we were to explode the mine. When we got there, I told the comrade who was waiting for me, 'We can accomplish our mission just the

same. I saw how the girl behaved in the bus, she won't talk.' She didn't talk. At the Chi Hoa prison, she died under torture."

I heard many anecdotes that day. That is how I learned that it was a girl who directed the operation of setting up, right in the military camp where Nguyen Van Troi was shot, a plywood monument which the students had made to commemorate the young worker Hero...

They told me how a single man managed to plant a mine inside the Quang Trung training camp near the Tan Son Nhut airport, through the strategic hamlets and the minefields. How, once inside the enemy position, he had to spend twenty-four hours hidden in a drain, how at a certain moment he had to steal civilian clothes for a disguise. But later took them back, at the risk of his life and his liberty, "because he did not want people to think that the liberation soldiers are thieves..." And how, his mission accomplished, when all the police were on the alert, he managed to leave, thanks to a bus driver who, although not knowing what it was all about, had guessed "he is one of ours," and had signalled to his unknown passengers, who spontaneously protected the fugitive without a word being exchanged with him. It is true, as even the special correspondent of Match [Paris Match, weekly picture-news magazine] says, that "The only feeling with which the crowd is imbued is one of ferocious anti-Americanism..."

Most of these groups of three live at home. They are not necessarily clandestine fighters. Masons, taxi drivers, workers, students, sometimes a whole family helps them, and by itself forms a nucleus of resistance in the city.

To bring to South Vietnam more troops, more jet bombers, will do nothing to change the fact that the cities, like the countryside, in every possible aspect, say "no" to American aggression, "no" to the war being waged against the Vietnamese people in both South and North.

The people are aware of the fact that the closer their liberation approaches the more barbarous acts they will have to endure on the part of the occupier, and the more tricks and lies they will have to foil, before the Americans consent to withdraw their troops. This prospect does not frighten them. They are morally prepared for it by twenty years of struggle and hardly won success.

At the present time, in Saigon, the Americans are so afraid of the rising tide of the patriotic movement that, as during Diem's time, it is enough to be for South Vietnamese neutrality, against attacking the north, or merely for peace, to be arrested. This is called "To play, consciously or unconsciously, the communist game..."

But we are no longer back in Diem's time. Three-quarters of South Vietnam has been restored to the South Vietnamese by the NLF army. And

in this regular army, as in the streets of Saigon, the boys and girls of Nguyen Van Troi's generation, who were born during the war against their people, and who, throughout their childhood and their youth, have known nothing but war, keep the initiative, and know how to aim their guns...

[3 March 1965, page 2]

IX. Secrets of the people's army in training

"Out of our love is born our hatred for the American invaders."

This is the poem of a soldier who is expressing himself thus, one of these hand-written poems, with careful caligraphy, which each day are covered over by others on the wall-newspaper of the encampment. Today, several soldiers also composed poems in honor of the visit to their regiment of two foreign journalists, W. Burchett and myself, the only friends from far away who have, to date, shared the life in training of a regiment of the regular army of the NLF. In them, they wrote the words which they were not bold enough to say to us, for these veterans, whose average is between eighteen and twenty-eight, are shy... "Like alcohol poured on fire," wrote one, "the solidarity of our distant brothers makes the flame which will drive out the invader burn higher."

His name is Liem. He is the son of a poor peasant. He is scarcely more than twenty years old. At eighteen, he was wounded in the eye by a bullet, during an attack on a military post near Soc-Trang. He did not give in to it until after he had accomplished his mission. He was one of the eleven guerrillas, the nucleus around which the regiment, over a period of months, was formed. In 1960, the fighters were armed only with billhooks and old rifles. Now, in 1965, the regiment has its own support company of heavy weapons, and the former partisans have, through patience and many efforts, studied and assimilated the modern techniques of war.

This process has been furthered, since, in order to wage their "special warfare," the Americans have trained quite a few technicians among the South Vietnamese. They had not foreseen that some of them would go over into the ranks of the patriots, and would transmit the knowledge which was to have allowed them to fight their own people.

During those days, when, at our request, we were integrated into a unit, we had plenty of time between training exercises to meet with the soldiers and their very young officers, and thus to gain an understanding of the inner <u>why</u> of their fight, and <u>how</u> they win these great military victories, which in June 1965, at Binh Gia, brought the war to a new turning point...

The reign of nylon and the transistor

What struck me first was the youth of this army. Upon reflection, it cannot be made up of older men. Indeed, the soldiers of the first Vietnam war have been gathered, since 1954, pursuant to the Geneva agreements, in the north of the country. It is those fighters' sons who are in the line today, and this simple fact suffices to dumbfound the Pentagon, which attributes its defeats to an "invasion" of the south by North Vietnam.

The training area was the jungle, in which there had previously been dug all possible shelters, and this allows the regiment to work in spite of very severe air raids without anyone being hit.

Within these "barrack rooms" improvised among the trees, there are perfect order and cleanliness. This is the reign of nylon and of the transistor. Opaque nylon to make screens around the washstands, to protect the hammocks against the dew of dawn. Transistors for collective listening to news, and for foreign language courses picked up from Hanoi or the BBC. For all these young men have a passion for studying. Furthermore, they spend more time studying then fighting. For the Front is confident, and looks to the future. In the army, there are courses in geography, mathematics, and hygiene. There are also many dance and choral groups, a theater and newspapers edited and printed by the soldiers themselves. They adore volleyball and improvisations on the guitar. In the NLF army, there is no difference between the food and the work of an enlisted man and an officer. The latter works and lives exactly like the rest of the unit, receiving the same care as the soldiers if he is wounded, and taking his share of all tasks, whatever they may be. And they call him "big brother," or "comrade." Cadres and soldiers all volunteered for the fight, they are all peasants who help each other in everything, and are united by the hatred they share for the American occupier, by shared misfortunes, which causes La Hong Ngo, our twenty-four-year-old unit chief, to say, "It is the Americans who formed our regiment."

Almost all of them have lost a father or a mother, and in any case for years their families have been divided by the Seventeenth Parallel or the barbed wire of the strategic hamlets, and they have found in the collective life of the army another family, to which there are all ready to devote themselves, if necessary, to the death.

Letters in the jungle

After a few days of living together, after a thousand questions about the French people, about the affairs of the world's peoples, they have begun to feel sufficiently at ease with us to show us spontaneously the letters they get from their dear ones:

"We are separated, and it is the Americans' fault," says one of these letters, which seems to me to be typical. "It is only when we shall have driven them out that we shall at last be able to be reunited ... Here is some news of your sister. She was suspected by the police, so I sent her to a liberated village. I am still working here on the same job you know about. When I think of you, little brother, it gives me even more courage, and also when I think of father, whom they killed two years ago now. Your cousin has just been arrested near Saigon. It seems that Huong's husband sacrificed his life to the army. If you are able to find out where he is buried, let me know. Our family has suffered a great deal, but no more than all the others. Little brother, those who are in prison are waiting for us. So it is right to fight. The dead also are waiting for our hands to avenge them."

The poem of the wall-newspaper is right, it is out of their love for their dear ones and for their country that is born the hatred among these able young men, once the battle is joined, to be able to fight without ever retreating. But it is a hatred which is directed only against the occupier responsible for the way of aggression, and which leaves room for friendship, the maximum degree of proletarian internationalism, and also the most wholesome gaiety. For the South Vietnamese man has always loved to joke, and he can be gay and optimistic under the worst conditions...

Eyes and ears

We saw the weapons of the support companies. They were 81 caliber mortars, D-57 recoilless rifles, and heavy American Maxim or Browning machine guns. Each weapon had its story, which they gladly told us. "This one has taken part in sixty engagements on our side. We got it away from the enemy on such-and-such day in such-and-such a battle, and thanks to it we later got hold of this artillery piece." And so, as the soliders told us, "one weapon is the 'daughter' of another..." They look after these captured mortars with touching care.

We were also able to observe how they prepare an attack on a post. "Our reconnaissance units cannot know everything. But the populace is the eyes and ears of the army. We know," said Ngo, "quite precisely even the number of steps between the rows of barbed wire, between one blockhouse and another. Everything is measured precisely. We are familiar with all the habits of the enemy we are going to attack. The other day, it was a peasant woman and her two daughters who led the two wings of our unit during an attack on a strategic hamlet... We must be worthy of this help from our people. Our army is at their service, and we dig shelters for them at the same time as we do for ourselves, and civilians have priority rights to our shelters if necessary during an engagement.

"We also help them to save their property. For their part, the

people of the villages spontaneously supply us with food during the fights, which can go on for days. Recently, an old woman followed us under fire with baskets of food hanging from a pole on her shoulder, so that, as she said, 'her sons would not be hungry.' A peasant was strenuously urging on us a young buffalo which he wanted to slaughter for us. We wouldn't take it."

Several plans in their pocket

Facing a clay model of the triangular military post which they were destined to capture a few days later, the group of soldiers had been discussing it for hours after hearing the officer's report. Each group of three was making its suggestions in the light of previous experiences. Total democracy reigns in this army. Every plan is established jointly, and is discussed until all are in agreement.

It is only then that the different tasks are divided up. They are never imposed. The soldiers themselves volunteer to be in the first group, which will lay the mine, for example, resolved to accomplish their mission even if it involves the supreme sacrifice, when necessary...

The officers of the NLF army, moreover, have several plans in their pockets, which permit them to modify an action as it develops, as this or that eventuality arises, all of them having been studied and provided for in advance.

Those little numbered pieces of paper, covered with that fine, close, space-saving writing, which I have noticed among all the resistance fighters, allow the people's army to act with extreme mobility, to have great variety in its counterthrusts, which often disconcerts the enemy, bogged down in terrain it does not know. With heavy materiel which launches great roundhouse punches at the jungle, which hit only the monkeys.

The attack on the post which was being planned by La Hong Ngo and his soldiers was designed to capture some shells of a caliber corresponding to the American heavy weapons in the possession of the unit...

"This is what we always do for our supplies. Our intelligence operations tell us the location of the munitions we need. There is no point in burdening ourselves with them in advance... Our source of supply is always close to us. Even if we were able to get weapons from foreign countries, as American propaganda claims in order to justify its acts of aggression against North Vietnam, such weapons would not be as convenient for us as those of the Americans themselves."

Deserters

The National Liberation Front army, unlike the puppet army, which suffers massive desertions every day, has no shortage of manpower. Not

only can it draw from the guerrilla units experienced fighters with very high morale, should the need arise, but also there come floods of young volunteers from the vast liberated areas, and even from Saigon, where the round-ups of young men have an effect contrary to the one intended by tye occupier, who thus throws into the NLF army hundreds of young men who won't put on the puppet uniform at any price. Just as with us, those who did not wish to take their compulsory military training fled to the maquis.

When those young men who have been enrolled by force surrender or are made prisoner, they frequently ask to enter the liberation army. Then they take the same courses as the other recruits. Next, if their determination has hardened, they are sworn in. If, on the other hand, they do not feel thay have enough courage to fight, the NLF wisely feels that it is preferable to send these young peasants back to their fields, and they are given enough rice to make the trip.

Farewell banquet

The evening came to say farewell to this regiment, which was moving on to take part in one of the great battles of 1965.

In the afternoon, after crossing streams, crawling through tunnels, crossing a jungle which I would have thought to be impenetrable, they had us visit some of the telecommunications posts of the army, which now has a central general staff to direct coordinated actions all over South Vietnam.

Under meters of earth, some very young fighters were transmitting ceaselessly on their sending sets, in relays, so that the signals would never stop even under air raids. One of these posts had been baptized "Cuba," the other "Vengeance for Nguyen Van Troi."

Back at an encampment, they surprised us with a farewell banquet on the table which had been build in our absence by Liem and his comrades. On the menu: gibbon and a delicious animal which has hooves like a deer, but which is no larger than a fine hare, and which is called "chéo."

The table was later destroyed by a bomb during that memorable night, without any of us getting hit, thanks again to the shelters.

That evening was an extraordinary celebration of friendship with the peoples of the world, and particularly with the people of France. In front of the entire regiment, which had assembled in the night, the red flags bearing the slogan "Determined to Conquer" stood out alone in the light of the yellow bamboos used as torches... One could guess at the hundreds of soldiers squatting on their heels, listening to the orators, who all spoke of fraternity among peoples...

Several soldiers, so young that they had children's faces, representing their comrades, came to give their promise to fight with ever more courage until the last American occupier is driven from South Vietnam.

Our hearts were heavy, for we knew that many of these young men would not see peace and independence for their country. But their determination is the only true road, and it is the one which we too, in similar circumstances, had to take in the face of the invader, long ago.

The people are indestructable, and, thanks to fighters like Liem and La Hong Ngo, the people of South Vietnam will see liberty.

[4 March 1965, page 2]

X. This was the battle of Binh Gia...

On 4 January 1965, not far from Binh Gia, under the shelter of a hevea plantation, an officer of the army of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam gave a press conference, at which W. Burchett and I were the only foreign war correspondents. The battle of Binh Gia had ended the day before. It had lasted one month, and the same unit of the army of the Front had fought it successfully some days under the fire of 20 Sky Raiders and 80 helicopters engaged simultaneously. The Americans had to admit that they had just suffered their greatest defeat since the beginning of their war of aggression in South Vietnam.

The way this battle unfolded is a good illustration of the tactics of the people's army, and is enough to demonstrate the broad support of the people for its army. The first engagement took place on 5 December, with the attack in broad daylight (by guerrillas who had infiltrated into it) on the strategic hamlet of Binh Gia. This region, 65 kilometers from Saigon, was considered absolutely secure by the occupier and his puppets, who went through it every weekend to go to Cap Saint-Jacques. These strategic hamlets are, in the great majority, peopled by Catholics who had emigrated from North Vietnam in 1954, out of "fear of communism."

When the trumpet sounds

To attack a hamlet often means for the people's army to attract to a place they have chosen enemy reinforcements, which is what happened again this time. "We do not have the Americans' means: jeeps, trucks, amphibious vehicles," the officer told me, "but we make use of their vehicles by forcing them to come to the place we have prepared for the fight..."

Thus it was that, coming from Baria, on road No. 2, a convoy of 14 M-113 amphibious armored vehicles fell into the net of the soldiers

of the NLF on 9 December. But let us let a soldier describe this engagement:

"We were advancing toward the road. Planes were preparing the way for the M-113's, raining rockets down onto the forest. We had no time to dig trenches. We were like walking bushes with our camouflage of leaves. Finally, we reach the road, and are told that the armored vehicles are about to arrive. The whole forest is silent. And then the trumpet sounds. The tufts of leaves spring toward the M-113's. Comrade T leaps onto a tank, waving the flag on which our motto is written: 'Determined to Conquer!' Some aim at the drivers of the tanks, forcing them to lower their heads to protect themselves, others spring onto the M-113's, throwing grenades into them. There are two brothers in our unit. Between the two of them, they put one tank out of action... The essential thing is to act very quickly, to get so close to the enemy that the very deadly guns of the M-113's cannot be turned to shoot you; you have to let the enemy get very close, and then mingle with him so closely that you interfere with his efforts to defend himself. Planes came, but were afraid of hitting their own soldiers. Moreover, our buddies, who had taken over the American tanks, were turning their guns into the sky knocking down four planes. The 14 M-113's were captured by us, and nine Americans killed. It is all a question of morale," the soldier concluded... The morale of the people's army is at a peak... Obviously, all the heavy armament of the tanks was captured. On their return laden with booty, the soldiers were greeted with joy by the people, who, as usual, moreover, had helped them, since the girls of the nearby village had wished to supply the fighters with ammunition furing the engagement. The wounded were treated at field hospitals, which we later visited. They were provided with blood donors chosen in advance.

A harvest of weapons

One of the results of the battle of Binh Gia was the annihilation of some of the enemy's elite reserve troops. Indeed, on several occasions, the liberation soldiers have ignored the puppet units, whose morale is so low that they can be ignored, in order to attract and strike the shock troops.

It was thanks to such tactics as these that they annihilated, on 29 December, the 33rd Rangers Batallion, which had been parachuted in to regain control over this region of such great strategic importance. This was a surprise action carried out after a number of diversionary offsneives, during which ten planes were shot down in one hour, and two American captains captured.

Throughout the night that followed, the enemy left the wounded puppets on the ground without care, for fear of being attacked, so that the guerrillas of the area had all the time they needed to gather an abundant harvest of weapons. The next day, tozens of helicopters brought

reinforcements to the strategic hamlet, but the government troops "were so cool" to the idea of emerging from it, after having vainly tried to persuade the people to go and bring in the wounded, that the American advisers had the brilliant ides, in order to put an end to the problem, of having their planes bomb the battlefield, in order to destroy any possible "Viet Cong." In any event, the bombs had the result of doing away with a good number of wounded puppets...

It was only after this bombing that helicopters came, throughout the day of the thirtieth, to take away the survivors. At the same time, by their converging fire, the guerrillas had managed, as they say, to capture a helicopter "alive"... This means that they prevented it from taking off and flying away. Inside were the corpses of two Americans, and the heavy weapons were intact.

Experience had taught the general staff that in order to bet back these two corpses of the "superior race" the Americans would, if necessary, sacrifice another elite unit (which they had not done for the Vietnamese wounded). And so the army and the populace prepared for battle, digging combat positions around the helicopter, which had become the bait. "Just like hunters tethering a goat to a stake to get the tiger to come," a peasant told me... In the engagement that followed, the 14th Marine Batallion was annihilated.

Once again, the Americans abandoned on the ground the wounded puppets with no care. Once again, the doctors of the NLF brought them such help as they could.

On 3 January, the NLF attacked along road No. 2, reinforcements were again parachuted in, but this time the ambush had been laid in agreement with the populace inside the strategic hamlet of Binh Bo, which the road runs through!... Formerly, McNamara's plan had been to seal up the peasants in these concentration camps, to separate them from the patriots... But by so doing, they made into patriots the peasants who had not been so. Now the Front can lay ambushes even among Catholics, who were once fooled by Diem's propaganda. This successful ambush is further proof of this.

There were 2,000 enemy casualties, including 28 Americans, 24 planes were shot down, 13 others damaged, 37 vehicles destroyed, including 14 M-113's, and two elite companies annihilated at Binh Gia. Thus, the South Vietnamese people have shown that they can now subject the American aggressor to so many small Dienbienphus, and the American aggressor is physically taking an ever greater part in operations, as his ever growing losses show.

Nights and dreams

You can see that these reverses are not very pleasant for a power

such as the United States, which is placed in check by the South Vietnamese peasant on his own ground, as the French colonialists had been earlier...

The experiment in special warfare in South Vietnam has come to a lamentable and final end. There remains but one solution for imperialism -- total retreat from this territory over which it has not the shadow of a right. By intensifying the war, it is advancing toward even more disastrous defeats. "Let them go away, if the Americans no longer wish to be harrassed by us," these people say. "Our peasants are not going to come and attack them in New York."

As for American air raids on the cities of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to force the South Vietnamese to stop their patriotic fight, these are a Nazi type of blackmail. They remind us of the Germans who shot hostages in order to stop attacks on them by the French resistance fighters.

The Americans know perfectly well that many South Vietnamese families have been divided between north and south, the wife not having seen her husband, who has been north of the Seventeenth Parallel, since 1954...

They are exploiting the grief of these couples cut in two, like their country, which ought to have been reunified since 1956, in accordance with international agreements...

By thus extending the war to an independent country which has always scrupulously respected international agreements, the Americans are creating a terrible risk to world peace. But you do not force a blackmailer to withdraw by retreating from him. Quite the contrary...

I can say that everywhere I went in South Vietnam, even among those women who listen to Radio Hanoi on their transistors twice a day, and dream: "There is a mass meeting tonight, I suppose my husband will be there," trying to imagine the face they have not seen for ten years... even with that old man whose son is at Hanoi, everywhere people told me, "Here we live our days in the south; our nights in the north, in dreams ... But we will not give in. If they carry the war to the north, there will be 31 million of us Vietnamese to defeat the Americans all the sooner, and here we shall redouble our zeal."

Why they fight

"To fight against barbarity in 1959 we only had our empty hands," I was told by M. Nguyen Van Ngoi, a Cao Dai dignitary and a member of the Central Committee of the NLF, "and yet we were not afraid. We are ready to fight for a generation, if necessary, for our independence."

M. Tich Hung Tu, a senior bonze, a member of the Front leadership, reaffirmed to me the determination of his co-religionists to contribute by their demonstrations to the victory of the NLF, whose watchwords of "peace, neutrality, independence, democracy," "are perfectly in conformity with Buddhist doctrine, as they are to Catholic morality."

For it is important to emphasize that if the South Vietnamese patriots fight with so much determination, "whether or not they believe in heaven," against the American aggressor, it is in order to achieve very moderate goals, which do not even go as far as the clauses of the Geneva agreements.

They will certainly not consent to lay down their arms for a peace without genuine independence, for, as they rightly say, "this would not be peace." "Our goals are modest, but we will fight fiercely for them to be recognized, for they are in conformity with the realities peculiar to South Vietnam. They are in the interests of all the patriotic strata of our country."

The watchword "neutrality," in particular, reflects very well the aspirations of a people ready to fight bravely as long as necessary to drive out the aggressor, but deeply devoted to genuine peace. This is a price which the South Vietnamese communists who take part, like the other patriots, in the battles of the NLF, are, for their part, sincerely ready to pay, in order to insure their country's independence, drive out the Americans, and put an end to the risk of general way in this part of the world.

This neutrality might be similar to that of Switzerland, that is, South Vietnam would contract no military alliance with anyone, and would accept economic aid from wherever it might come, provided it did not compromise its independence. All foreign investments would be welcome.

Obviously, South Vietnam, no more than Switzerland or Austria, would be able to tolerate another power dictating from outside its social system. This might be formed in the image of the Front, in which all tendencies are represented at all levels, and take part in full democracy in the leadership of the patriotic struggle. But this is a matter for the South Vietnamese themselves.

When I left the fighters of South Vietnam, they were in the midst of military victories. Nevertheless, they were digging in even deeper Radio Liberation and the presses of their newspapers; the organs of leadership were ceaselessly shifting their bases; the peasants of the villages were ceaselessly digging new traps and new tunnels.

Everything showed that everyone was preparing for a long war, whose difficulties were calmly faced, in the certainty that victory is at the end of the road.

We shall have many future occasions to talk of South Vietnam again in this newspaper during the months to come, for it is also the fate of the world and of each one of us which is at stake there...

If today I write "The End" after this article, it is because one has to know how to terminate a series of articles, even if the subject is far from being exhausted.

But the fight for the truth about American aggression in Vietnam goes on more than ever. For this truth, which we went to seek on the spot, among the resistance fighters themselves, in the depths of the bombed jungle, where each night lamps are lit to proclaim the presence and the confidence of men...

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