

AMERICAN ATROCITIES IN VIETNAM

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By ERIC NORDEN

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IN THE BITTER controversy over our Vietnamese policies which has raged across the nation since the President's decision last February to bomb North Vietnam, there is only one point which supporters of U.S. policy will concede to the opposition: the sheer, mind-numbing horror of the war. Despite the barrage of official propaganda, reports in the American and European press reveal that the United States is fighting the dirtiest war of its history in Vietnam. The weapons in the American arsenal include torture, systematic bombing of civilian targets, the first use of poison gas since World War One, the shooting of prisoners and the general devastation of the Vietnamese countryside by napalm and white phosphorous. Not since the days of the American Indian wars has the United States waged such unrelenting warfare against an entire people.

Torture of prisoners and "suspects" by Vietnamese troops and their U.S. advisers is a matter of public record. "Anyone who has spent much time with Government units in the field," writes William Tuohy, *Newsweek's* Saigon correspondent, "has seen the heads of prisoners held under water and bayonet blades pressed against their throats. . . . In more extreme cases, victims have had bamboo slivers run under their fingernails or wires from a field telephone connected to arms, nipples or testicles." (New York Times Magazine, November 28, 1965.)

Donald Wise, Chief foreign correspondent for the London *Sunday Mirror*, reports that such torture is condoned and even supervised by U.S. officers. "No American is in a position to tell his 'pupils' to stop torturing," Wise writes from Saigon. "They are in no mood to either. . . ." Some of the standard tortures described by Wise include "dunking men head first into water tanks or slicing them up with knives. . . . Silk stockings full of sand are swung against temples and men are hooked up to the electric generators of military HQ's." (London *Sunday Mirror*, April 4, 1965.)

The "Vietcong" use terror also, of course, but theirs is of a more selective nature, if only to avoid estranging the peasants and villagers on whom they depend for food and shelter. They will kill and mutilate the body of a Government official, but they generally pick an unpopular and corrupt victim whose death is welcomed by the peasants. U.S. and Government troops in the countryside, on the other hand, feel themselves lost in

an enemy sea and tend to strike out indiscriminately at real or imagined guerrillas. Thus, no Vietnamese is exempt from mistreatment and torture. As Wise reports, "Inevitably, innocent peasants are kneed in the groin, drowned in vats of water or die of loss of blood after interrogation. But you cannot identify VC from peasants. . . ." In fact, it is assumed that every peasant is a real or potential Vietcong rebel. "In a VC-controlled area the yardstick is rough: every young man of military age is assumed to be a VC soldier who has thrown away his weapon just before capture. Most areas of Vietnam are now VC-controlled. Therefore, most men in the countryside should be presumed to be VC soldiers or sympathizers." (*Ibid.*)

Many U.S. reporters have witnessed torture first-hand. Beverly Deepe, the New York *Herald Tribune's* correspondent in Saigon, writes:

One of the most infamous methods of torture used by the government forces is partial electrocution—or "frying," as one U.S. adviser called it. This correspondent was present on one occasion when the torture was employed. Two wires were attached to the thumbs of a Viet Cong prisoner. At the other end of the strings was a field generator, cranked by a Vietnamese private. The mechanism produced an electrical current that burned and shocked the prisoner. (New York *Herald Tribune*, April 25, 1965.)

Electrical torture is employed all over Vietnam, even on the battlefield. A small U.S. field generator used to power pack radios is often "modified" for torture purposes and is prized for its high mobility. The device generates sufficient voltage to provide strong and sometimes deadly shocks. According to Malcolm Browne, the A. P. correspondent who won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting of the war, "The 'ding-a-ling' method of interrogation involves connection of electrodes from this generator to the temples of the subject, or other parts of the body. In the case of women prisoners, the electrodes often are attached to the nipples. The results are terrifying and painful. . . ." (*The New Face of War* by Malcolm Browne, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965.)

As the number of U.S. soldiers in the field has swelled, American troops have switched from merely "advising" such interrogation to active participation. A few G.I.'s have been disgusted by their part in the torture. One young American soldier from Chicago wrote the following agonized letter to a friend of his mother who was a member of Women Strike for Peace:

So far everything you wrote in your bulletin is true about Vietnam. . . . A week ago our platoon leader brought in three prisoners—I was part of the group that brought them in. They were taken to a questioning station and someone from Intelligence was doing the questioning. This was the first time I saw anything like this and found out that we use some dirty methods too. This guy from Intelligence had all three lined up. One was a woman. He stripped her down to the waist and stripped the two men all the way. He had a little gadget I thought was a walkie-talkie or something. He struck one end of this wire to the lady's chest and it was a kind of electric shock because she got a real bad burn. From what she was screaming, my buddy and I could figure she didn't know anything. Then they took this same wire and tried it on the lady's husband and brother but on their lower parts. One of the guys from another platoon said he saw this happen before a few times and once the guy was killed by it. . . . Ever since that day I've been sick to my stomach and haven't been out on patrol or anything.

My sergeant tells me I'm suffering from battle fatigue. . . (Published in Chicago "Women for Peace" bulletin, ed. by Lilian Hayward. Reprinted in LIBERATION, June-July 1965.)

Less sophisticated methods than electrical torture are also used. According to Beverly Deepe:

Other techniques, usually designed to force onlooking prisoners to talk, involve cutting off the fingers, ears, fingernails or sexual organs of another prisoner. Sometimes a string of ears decorates the wall of a government military installation. One American installation has a Viet Cong ear preserved in alcohol. (*Op. cit.*)

There is apparently no attempt to disguise such atrocities, even for public relations reasons. Writes Malcolm Browne:

Many a news correspondent has seen the hands whacked off prisoners with machetes. Prisoners are sometimes castrated or blinded. In more than one case a Viet Cong suspect has been towed after interrogation behind an armored personnel carrier across the rice fields. This always results in death in one of its most painful forms. Vietnamese troops also take their share of enemy heads. . . . (*Op. cit.*)



Torture is seldom employed for reasons of pure military intelligence, to learn the disposition of enemy troops or the location of a planned ambush. It has become instead an end in itself, a means to terrorize the population and an outlet for the frustration of U.S. and Government forces surrounded by an enemy that is everywhere and nowhere, that attacks in lightning feints and then fades into the jungle. Writes Malcolm Browne, "Many soldiers enjoy beating up Viet Cong prisoners. The subjects of interrogation so often die under questioning that intelligence seems to be a secondary matter. . . ." (*Ibid.*) In Vietnam torture has become a way of life, or death. And, increasingly, it is an American way of death.

U.S. Army Special Forces men pride themselves on their advanced methods of "interrogation," often patterned after Chinese models. In his first-hand account of the Special Forces in action, *The Green Berets*, Robin Moore gives a graphic description of a torture session presided over by a Special Forces officer of Finnish origin who had served with the Nazi Army on the Russian Front in World War Two. (Because of Moore's embarrassing disclosures, his publishers, who had origi-

nally presented the book as "truthful . . . a factual account," were forced under pressure from Assistant Secretary of Defense Arthur Sylvester to label the material "fictionalized.")

Women fare no better than men in our Vietnamese torture chambers. A young Vietnamese girl employed as a secretary at the British Embassy in Saigon told Malcolm Browne the details of her arrest and interrogation. The woman was a devout Buddhist and in no way sympathetic to Communism, but in late 1963 she had given shelter to a Buddhist monk suspected of anti-government activities. Browne tells her story in his book *The New Face of War*, which has a foreword by U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge, who consistently disavows reports of atrocities by our side.

I waited in a room with some other prisoners, who were led off one at a time for interrogation. Finally my turn came. I was taken to a bare office where there were two desks and a bench. The man interrogating me was seated at one of the desks.

He asked me if I knew anything about the monk. Actually, I did, but of course I denied it. Then two other large men came into the room. They ripped off my dress and forced me to lie down on the bench, tying me tightly to it with pieces of rope. Next to the bench was a bucket of filthy water. Some of this was poured over my face and I choked and vomited. Then a big cloth was placed over my face—tightly—and the water was poured on it. I couldn't breathe. Just as I was about to lose consciousness, the cloth was taken off. Then one of the men beat on the soles of the feet with a heavy club. I screamed terribly from the pain. The other began beating my stomach with his fist. The cloth was put over my face again, and this time I passed out. . . .

The girl was saved from worse treatment when the government that imprisoned her was overthrown in one of Saigon's perennial coups. Others are less lucky. The left-wing Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett, the only Western correspondent to travel behind Vietcong lines in South Vietnam, interviewed a young girl from the village of Dien Hong who had made the mistake of delivering a petition for free elections to the office of the International Control Commission, an international body established to carry out the provisions of the Geneva Pact. She was observed by Government agents and arrested. The girl's name was Tran Thi Nham and when Burchett interviewed her she was in her early twenties. Her account is substantiated by the I.C.C. which took an interest in her case as a result of the circumstances of her arrest, and subsequently worked for her release. Tran Thi Nham, according to Burchett, was "one of the most beautiful young women I have ever seen. A perfect, flawless beauty by any country's standards, classical but warm and feminine. . . . Above all, it was the big, depthless jet-black eyes that held the attention. There was something special there, sad and haunting." The girl bared her right shoulder for Burchett, and:

"I wanted to vomit. The satiny skin ended in small cauliflowerlike eruptions where the flesh had been torn out with red hot pincers. There were half a dozen searing scars on the upper part of the arm. In a quarter of a century of reporting, often in rough enough places, I had never come across any individual act that so shocked

the senses. . . .” According to Burchett’s account, substantiated by the I.C.C. investigative team, the girl was tortured for months after her arrest. She had “soapy water and urine forced down the mouth and nostrils; electricity applied to vagina and breast nipples; flesh torn from the breasts, thighs and shoulders by red hot pincers; a ruler thrust into the vagina. These were interspersed with beatings, starvation and ‘milder’ forms of torture.”

Conditions in the prison where she was incarcerated were almost unimaginable. Tran Thi Nham told Burchett:

Once I recovered consciousness and found I was stark naked, blood oozing from wounds all over my body. There were others in the cell. I heard a woman moaning, and in the half dark saw a woman in a pool of blood. She had been beaten into having a miscarriage. Then I made out an old man. An eye had been gouged out and he was dying. Alongside him was a 13 or 14-year-old boy, also dead; a little further away another dead youth with his head split open. They had thrown me in there hoping the sight of this would break me down. . . .

In the end they thought they had killed me. I had been unconscious for a long time. They threw me outside for the prison coolies to bury. The coolies carried me off, it seems, and were about to bury me when they discovered my heart was still beating. It was their custom in such cases to report burial but smuggle the bodies off to some local inhabitants. This is what happened to me.

Peasant families cared for her and nursed her back to relative health. When found by the coolies “she was bleeding from over 40 wounds, her reproductive organs wrecked for all time.” I.C.C. representatives visited her in hiding, took photographs, and protested to the Government, which denied all knowledge of her. At the conclusion of his interview with the girl, Burchett writes:

She was still bleeding from two of her wounds and . . . under constant medical supervision. . . . Tran Thi Nham asked me about my own family, especially about children. When I talked about them, there was that haunting almost hungry look in her eyes. It was my turn to avert my head. Her torturers had ensured that she could never have a child, the greatest misfortune to any Vietnamese girl. . . . (*The Furtive War* by Wilfred Burchett, International Publishers Co., Inc., 1963.)

Tran Thi Nham is the rule, not the exception in Vietnam. Peasant women are treated as badly as their men, and sometimes worse. Burchett writes in the *National Guardian*, “Just as arrest for anyone at all means immediate torture, arrest of any woman between the ages of 15 and 50 is synonymous with rape and torture of the genitals—to prevent your spawning Viet Cong,” as the torturers express it.”

Although torture of Vietcong suspects antedated the arrival in strength of U.S. forces, American technology has given it some interesting twists. The helicopter, introduced by the United States as a vital element in the air war, is now playing a role in the “interrogation” of prisoners. *Houston Chronicle* reporter Jonathan Kapstein reported the innovation, termed “the long step,” on his return from an assignment in Vietnam.

A helicopter pilot looked up from his Jack Daniels-and-Coke to relate what had happened to a captive he had been flying back from a battle area. A Vietnamese army officer yelled in

the ear of the suspected guerrilla who was tied hand and foot. The man did not respond, so the officer and a Vietnamese soldier heaved him, struggling against his ropes, out of the UH-1B helicopter from 2,900 feet. Then over the roar of the engine, the officer began to interrogate another prisoner who had watched wide-eyed. The answers must have been satisfactory, the flier said, because, though kicked and roughly handled, the guerrilla was alive to be marched off when the helicopter landed. . . . (*Nation*, Dec. 21, 1964.)

A prisoner who “cooperates” after watching the exit of his comrade is not always rewarded. *Herald Tribune* Saigon correspondent Beverly Deepe reports an instance when “Two Viet Cong prisoners were interrogated on an airplane flying toward Saigon. The first refused to answer questions and was thrown out of the airplane at 3,000 feet. The second immediately answered all the questions. But he, too, was thrown out.” (*New York Herald Tribune*, Ap. 11, 25, 1965.) Sometimes there is not even the pretense of “questioning.” Jack Langguth, Saigon correspondent for the *New York Times*, reports a case where “One American helicopter crewman returned to his base in the central highlands last week without a fierce young prisoner entrusted to him. He told friends that he had become infuriated by the youth and had pushed him out of the helicopter at about 1,000 feet.” (*New York Times*, July 7, 1965.)

Even if a prisoner is lucky enough to make the full trip, half the fun isn’t getting there. Jimmy Breslin, in a dispatch to the *New York Herald Tribune* from South Vietnam, wrote:

At 12:00 o’clock, a helicopter came in and the shirtless Marine in the tent said it was going to Da Nang. . . . A young red-headed machine-gunner sat in the doorway, chewing on a chocolate cracker from a Cration tin. He kicked a small spool of wire out of the doorway and made room.

“We just rode Nuongs, you can tell that by the wire here,” he said.

“Why?” he was asked. Nuongs are Chinese mercenaries from Formosa. . . .

“They always want the wire for the prisoners,” the kid said. “Don’t you know that? They get a VC and make him hold his hands against his cheeks. Then they take this wire and run it right through the one hand and right through his cheek and into his mouth. Then they pull the wire out through the other cheek and stick it through the other hand. They knot both ends around sticks. You never seen them with prisoners like that? Oh, you ought to see how quiet them gooks sit in a helicopter when we got them wrapped up like that.” (*New York Herald Tribune*, Sept. 29, 1965.)

As the tempo of the fighting has increased, many Vietcong prisoners are spared the ordeal of torture—they are dropped on the spot by their U.S. or Vietnamese captors. *Newsweek’s* Saigon correspondent, William Tuohy:

Some Vietcong suspects do not survive long enough for the third degree. Earlier this year, in an operation along the central coast, a Government detachment failed to flush VC troops suspected of lurking in the area. However, several villagers were rounded up and one man was brought before the company commander. The Vietnamese officer briefly questioned the suspect, then turned to his adviser . . . and said, “I think I shoot this man. Okay?”

“Go ahead,” said the adviser.

The officer fired a carbine round point-blank, striking the villager below the chest. The man slumped and died. The patrol

moved on. Later, a correspondent asked the adviser, who had seemed a decent enough fellow, why he had given his approval. . . . "These people could have moved to a Government area. In this war they are either on our side or they are not. There is no in-between." (New York Times Magazine, Nov. 28, 1965.)

Houston Chronicle correspondent Jonathan Kapstein reported on his return from Vietnam:

In the pleasantly 'dim officers' club at Vinh Long, South Vietnam, a 25-year-old U.S. Army lieutenant described what he had seen one time when soldiers of the Vietnamese 7th Infantry Division captured prisoners. "They had four, all suspected of being Vietcong—the first prisoners they had taken in a long time. They lined 'em up and shot the first man. Then they questioned the second. His answers were unsatisfactory, I guess, because they shot him too. . . ." (Nation, December 24, 1964.)

As U.S. casualties have mounted even the pretense of preliminary interrogation has been dropped. Captured and wounded Vietcong are now executed summarily. Captain James Morris, a U.S. Army Special Forces man, reports the aftermath of an ambush he sprang on a small enemy contingent:

I moved from one dark shape to the other, making sure they were dead. When I moved up on the last one, he raised up, his arms extended, eyes wide. He had no weapon. Cowboy stitched him up the middle with his AR-15. He didn't even twitch. . . . (Esquire, August, 1965.)

Pulitzer Prize winning correspondent David Halberstam recounts the treatment accorded a group of Vietcong prisoners by Government forces after a "particularly bitter" battle near Bac Lieu:

The enemy were very cocky and started shouting anti-American slogans and Vietnamese curses at their captors. The Marines . . . simply lined up the seventeen guerrillas and shot them down in cold blood. . . . (The Making of a Quagmire by David Halberstam. Random House, 1965.)



The treatment of Vietcong POW's seems to vary with the severity of American losses in the action preceding their capture. After a platoon of the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division was almost wiped out in a battle in the Chu Prong foothills of the Ia Drang valley, Reuters reported:

In one place nearby the Americans found three North Vietnamese wounded. One lay huddled under a tree, a smile on his face. "You won't smile anymore" said one of the American soldiers, pumping bullets into his body. The other two met the same fate. (November 18, 1965.)

Chicago Daily News correspondent Raymond R. Coffey, reporting on the same battle, accompanied U.S. relief forces to a clearing littered with dead from the previous day's fighting. He writes:

It was almost impossible to walk twenty paces without stumbling upon a body. . . . Suddenly a few yards away a wounded enemy soldier lifted one arm weakly and an American sergeant poured a long burst of M-16 rifle bullets into him. "Was he trying to give up, Sarge?" a man asked. "I'd like to find more of those bastards trying to give up," the sergeant said bitterly. No one disagreed with him. . . . (Chicago Daily News, November 19, 1965.)

Sometimes our own propaganda apparatus gives us an inadvertent glimpse of the realities of the war. The Saigon Daily News, an English-language daily published for the American community in Saigon, ran a report of a U.S. victory on September 11, 1965. The paper displayed a photograph on its front page showing G.I.'s, guns in hand, standing proudly over a mound of what the caption called "dead Viet Cong." The photographer, however, had been a bit careless. The bodies, heaped face down to the ground, all had their hands bound behind their backs. (New Republic, October 9, 1965.)

Apart from the moral question, U.S. and South Vietnamese torture and execution of prisoners of war is, of course, in clear violation of international law. Both South Vietnam and the United States are signatories to the 1949 Geneva Conventions governing the treatment of prisoners. Article 17 states: "No physical or mental torture, nor any other form of coercion, may be inflicted on prisoners of war to secure from them information of any kind whatever." In a specific provision pertaining to undeclared or civil war, the Conventions prohibit, with respect to prisoners of war, "violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture."

The International Red Cross in Geneva, to which the Conventions assigned the right to visit POW's and insure their proper treatment, has publicly protested U.S. treatment of prisoners in Vietnam. The New York Times declared on December 1, 1965 that "the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva . . . complained again that the United States was violating an international accord on the treatment of prisoners. . . ." An earlier dispatch reported that "The International Red Cross Committee is dissatisfied with the way the United States and South Vietnamese Governments observe their pledge to respect the Geneva Conventions protecting war victims. . . . The Committee's representative in Saigon has been unable to visit prisoners taken by American and South Vietnamese troops despite the affirmative reply of the two governments to its appeal for the observance of the conventions. The Saigon authorities were said to have given repeated assurances that they intended to allow the International Red Cross to visit the prisoners but to date have done nothing more about it." (New York Times, November 26, 1965.)

If the United States is not willing to observe the Geneva Conventions itself, it is quick to point an accusing finger at others. When the North Vietnamese Government threatened to try captured U.S. airmen as war criminals, the United States denounced any such move as a viola-

tion of the Geneva Conventions and appealed to the International Red Cross. Hans Henle, a former executive of the information Service of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, commented:

The Viet Cong fighters are as protected by the Geneva Conventions as the American G.I.s are. Dramatic protests against violations of the Geneva Conventions should have been made when the first Viet Cong prisoners were shot, when they were tortured, when the American Army started to destroy Viet Cong hospitals and to cut off medical supply. . . . It is utterly hypocritical to condone wholesale violations of the Red Cross principles on one side and protest reprisals against them. . . . (New York Times, International Edition only, October 14, 1965.)

Not content with the present level of inhumanity, some agencies of the United States Government are attempting to turn torture from a political liability to an asset. The Associated Press reported on October 16, 1965 that Senator Stephen Young, who had just returned from a fact-finding mission in Vietnam, "says he was told by a member of the Central Intelligence Agency in Vietnam that the C.I.A. committed atrocities there to discredit the Viet Cong. Young said he was told that the C.I.A. disguised some people as Viet Cong and they committed atrocities. . . ." (Philadelphia Inquirer, October 20, 1965.) Young's revelations landed like a bombshell on official Washington. "The C.I.A. and the State Department went into an uproar," the *Herald Tribune* reported. "There was deep distress among State Department officials who feared his reported remarks would have disastrous repercussions abroad." (New York *Herald Tribune*, October 21, 1965.) But Young refused to back down. "The C.I.A. has employed some South Vietnamese," he reiterated, "and they have been instructed to claim they are Viet Cong and to work accordingly . . . several of these executed two village leaders and raped some women. I know such men have been employed, and I question the wisdom of that."

So, as the war escalates, does the human agony in its wake. The prospect is for more, not less, torture and shooting of POW's. "There comes a time in every war," James Reston writes from Saigon, "when men tend to become indifferent to human suffering, even to unnecessary brutality, and we may be reaching that point in Vietnam." (New York Times, September 5, 1965.) Frustrated and bitter, U.S. forces in Vietnam have dehumanized their enemy, and anaesthetized their own consciences. Graham Greene, struck by the ubiquitous photographs of torture in the U.S. press, wrote recently:

The strange new feature about the photographs of torture now appearing is that they have been taken with the approval of the torturers and published over captions that contain no hint of condemnation. They might have come out of a book on insect life. "The white ant takes certain measures against the red ant after a successful foray." But these, after all, are not ants, but men. . . . These photographs are of torturers belonging to an army which could not exist without American aid and counsel. . . . The long, slow slide into barbarism of the Western World seems to have quickened. (The London Daily Telegraph, November 6, 1965.)

Torture is but one level of the Vietnamese hell. As the United States has poured in more airplanes and artii-

lery, the tendency has grown to level any village suspected of harboring guerrillas. Under this scorched earth policy not even staunchly anti-Communist, Roman Catholic hamlets are safe; if Vietcong are identified or rumored in the vicinity, the whole area is blanketed with napalm, fragmentation bombs and heavy artillery. Writes Malcolm Browne, "Accidental civilian casualties are much more often caused by the Government side than the Vietcong, because of artillery and air strikes. The usual justification given for this is that if civilians persist in living in Viet Cong areas they have to be prepared to take the consequences. But the consequences can be ghastly. . . ." (Op. cit.) For every Vietcong guerrilla killed this way, scores of innocent villagers must die. *Newsweek's* Saigon correspondent William Tuohy writes that "Napalm and fragmentation bombs sometimes fall on defenseless peasants; artillery shells are fired at random into the paddy fields. An appalling number of victims are women, children and old men; some are participants but most are non-combatants. . . ." Artillery claims the heaviest toll of human lives; the sound of planes approaching gives villagers time to jump into their home-made air-raid shelters, but artillery shells fall without warning.

U.S. troops, especially Marines, have destroyed hundreds of villages as part of their "pacification" program. The New York *Herald Tribune* reported on May 23, 1965 that "Near the big coastal city of Hue, U.S. Marines set crops on fire and burned or dynamited huts. . . ." In July, 1965, U.S. Marines fought a Vietcong force which had landed in sampans on the island of An Hoa and attacked a Vietnamese navy post there. The two major towns on the island, Longthanh and Xuanmy, had been occupied by the guerrillas. Together the towns had about 1,500 inhabitants. After the Vietcong retreated, "the Marines were ordered to burn Longthanh and Xuanmy to prevent the Viet Cong from reoccupying them. . . ." (New York Times, July 11, 1965.) Few Vietcong had been killed or captured, but two prosperous villages were razed and, according to U.S. sources, about 100 civilians died from U.S. fire. An A. P. dispatch from the island on July 11, 1965 reported that Americans had called An Hoa "Little Hawaii" because "of its rolling surf and happy people. In one day An Hoa became a little hell."

The two nearby villages of Chan Son and Camne in the Mekong Delta felt the brunt of U.S. "pacification" in August, 1965. Marine patrols near the villages had received light sniper fire from Vietcong guerrillas. What happened next was described by U.S. newsmen accompanying the Marines into the villages.

A Marine shouted, "Kill them! I don't want anyone moving!" . . . The Marines burned huts they believed were the sites of sniper fire. A sergeant said orders called for this. . . . [After the firing died down] U.S. Marines found a woman and two children among 25 persons they killed. . . . The woman died of a wound in the side, perhaps from one of the 1,000 artillery shells poured into the area. A wailing child beside her had an arm injury. A grenade hurled by a Marine blasted two children to death in an air-raid shelter. (New York Times, August 3, 1965.)

How the Marines reacted to their "victory" was de-

scribed by a U.P.I. dispatch from Chan Son:

"I got me a VC, man. I got at least two of them bastards."

The exultant cry followed a 10-second burst of automatic weapons fire yesterday, and the dull crump of a grenade exploding underground.

The Marines ordered a Vietnamese corporal to go down into the grenade-blasted hole to pull out their victims.

The victims were three children between 11 and 14—two boys and a girl. Their bodies were riddled with bullets.

Their father was still suffering from shock. A husky Marine lifted him on his shoulder and carried him off.

"Oh, my God," a young Marine exclaimed. "They're all kids."

A moment earlier, six children nearby watched their mother die. Her blood left a dark trail in the "air-raid shelter," where the family fled when the Marines attacked. A wrinkled grandmother had pulled her into a more comfortable position to let her die.

The terrified face of a 60-year-old man looked up from a hole; his wailing mingled with the crying of the village children.

In the village, a little boy displayed his sister who was no more than four. She had been shot through the arm.

The Marines had received a few sniper rounds from Chan Son village. . . .

The sniper fire was enough for the Marines to open up with everything they had: rifle fire, automatic fire and grenades. A number of women and children were caught in the fire. Five of them were killed and five others wounded.

Shortly before the Marines moved in, a helicopter had flown over the area warning the villagers to stay in their homes. (New York *Herald Tribune*, August 3, 1965.)

Chan Son's neighboring village of Camne fared no better. Morley Safer, a CBS television correspondent accompanying the force occupying the town, reported that U.S. Marines had burned 150 houses in the hamlet, ignoring "the pleas of old men and women to delay the burnings so that belongings could be removed." Safer's report, delivered on "Evening News with Walter Cronkite," August 4, 1965, said that:

"After surrounding the village . . . the Marines poured in 3.5 rocket fire, 79 grenade launchers and heavy and light machine-gun fire. The Marines then moved in, proceeding first with cigarette lighters, then with flame throwers, to burn down an estimated 150 dwellings." Safer concluded by revealing that "I subsequently learned that a Marine platoon on the right flank wounded three women and killed one child in a rocket barrage. The day's operations netted about four prisoners—old men."

It was unusual for U.S. "pacification" teams to be accompanied by U.S. reporters, and Washington was evidently embarrassed by the widespread publicity given the Chan Son and Camne incidents. Charles Mohr reported from Saigon on subsequent "attempts by public information officers to de-emphasize the importance of civilian deaths and the burning of village huts at the hands of U.S. Marines." (New York *Times*, August 9, 1965.) And Secretary of the Navy Paul Nitze publicly supported the burning of villages as a "natural and inevitable adjunct" to defense of U.S. bases in their vicin-



ity. Nitze declared that "Where neither United States nor Vietnamese forces can maintain continuous occupancy, it is necessary to destroy those facilities." (New York Times, August 15, 1965.) The final word was had by a U.S. military spokesman in Saigon who told reporters that "Marines do not burn houses or villages unless those houses or villages are fortified." When a U.S. correspondent commented that the great majority of Vietnamese villages were fortified in one way or another, the spokesman said simply: "I know it."

The Vietnamese peasant is caught in a vicious vise by U.S. "pacification" tactics. If he stays in his village he may die under U.S. fire; if he flees before the advancing troops he may still be rounded up, and shot on the spot as an "escaping Vietcong." The fate of a Vietnamese farmer described by Malcolm Browne is typical. The man, unarmed, had fled in terror at the approach of U.S. and Vietnamese troops. Writes Browne:

Suddenly a man leapt up about fifty yards away and began to run. Every machine gun, Tommy gun, rifle and pistol in our sector poured fire at that man, and I was amazed at how long he continued to run. But finally he went down, silently, without a scream. . . .

The group was detailed to go into the field to look for the man we had seen go down, and I went with them. We found him on his back in the mud, four bullet holes stitched across the top of his naked chest. He was wearing only black shorts. He was alive and conscious, moving his legs and arms, his head lolling back and forth. There was blood on his lips. The squad . . . looked down at the man and laughed. . . .

Perhaps as an act of mercy, perhaps as sheer cruelty, one of the men picked up a heavy stake lying in the mud and rammed one end of it into the ground next to the wounded man's throat. Then he forced the stake down over the throat, trying to throttle the man. The man continued to move. Someone stamped on the free end of the stake to break the wounded man's neck, but the stake broke instead. Then another man tried stamping on the man's throat, but somehow the spark of life still was too strong. Finally, the whole group laughed, and walked back to the path. . . .

Two women, both dressed in baggy trousers and blouses, ran up from one of the huts. One of them put a hand to her mouth as she saw the wounded man, whom she recognized as her husband. She dashed back to her hut and returned in a moment carrying a bucket, which she filled with black water from the rice field. Sitting down with her husband's head cradled in her lap, she poured paddy water over his wounds to clean off the clotting blood. Occasionally she would stroke his forehead, muttering something. He died about ten minutes later. The woman remained seated, one hand over her husband's eyes. Slowly, she looked around at the troops, and then she spotted me. Her eyes fixed on me in an expression that still haunts me sometimes. . . . (op. cit.)

Murders of such terrified peasants are a daily occurrence in Vietnam, and American G.I.'s are bagging their share of the game. A typical instance was reported by the A.P. from the town of Hoi Vuc, scene of a Marine "search-and-destroy" operation:

"The sweat-soaked young Leatherneck stood over the torn body of a Viet Cong guerrilla with mixed emotions flitting over his face. For Cpl. Pleas David of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, it was a day he would never forget. David had just killed his first man. 'I felt kind of sorry for him as I stood there,' said David, a lanky 17-year-old. 'And he didn't even have a weapon'. . . ." The unarmed "Vietcong" was walking along a paddy dike when the four Marines approached him with levelled guns. The fright-

ened Vietnamese saw the guns and threw himself on the ground. As the Marines ran towards him he jumped up and tried to escape. "I let him get 250 yards away and then dropped him with two shots from my M-1," the A.P. quotes the young Marine, adding "The man had been hit squarely in the back. No weapons were found with him. . . ." The Marine was congratulated by his buddies. "Maybe the Viet Cong will learn some respect for marksmanship. When we see them we hit them," one boasted. Another declared that "David is a good example. . . . Don't think we are killers. We are Marines." (New York Post, April 30, 1965.)

It is official U.S. military policy to shoot and ask questions later. Thus, in an operation thirty-five miles outside of Saigon, U.S. troops rushed a peasant shack believed to harbor Vietcong. One U.S. Lieutenant hurled a grenade through the door but the inhabitants tossed it back out. According to the A.P., "Another American soldier charged the shack, pulled the pin on a grenade and gave the fuse a few seconds count-down before pitching it in. Following the explosion the G.I. leaped into the shack with his M-14 rifle blazing. Three men and a baby died. Two women were wounded. Shrapnel took off the lower half of one woman's leg." (November 16, 1965.)

Not all G.I.'s enjoy making war on women and children. Some have written agonized letters home. Marine Cpl. Ronnie Wilson, 20, of Wichita, Kansas wrote the following letter to his mother:

Mom, I had to kill a woman and a baby. . . . We were searching the dead Cong when the wife of the one I was checking ran out of a cave. . . . I shot her and my rifle is automatic so before I knew it I had shot about six rounds. Four of them



hit her and the others went into the cave and must have bounced off the rock wall and hit the baby. Mom, for the first time I felt really sick to my stomach. The baby was about two months old. I swear to God this place is worse than hell. Why must I kill women and kids? Who knows who's right? They think they are and we think we are. Both sides are losing men. I wish to God this was over.

But those American G.I.'s who react with shock and horror to their bloody mission are a distinct minority. Most American soldiers in Vietnam do not question the orders that lead them to raze villages and wipe out men, women and children for the "crime" of living in Vietcong-controlled or infiltrated areas. Extermination of the (non-white) enemy is to them a dirty but necessary job, and few grumble about it. Some have even come to enjoy it. Warren Rogers, Chief Correspondent in Vietnam for the Hearst syndicate, reports that:

There is a new breed of Americans that most of us don't know about and it is time we got used to it. The 18 and 19-year-olds, fashionably referred to as high-school dropouts, have steel in their backbones and maybe too much of what prize fighters call the killer instinct. These kids seem to enjoy killing Viet Cong. . . . (New York Journal-American, September 16, 1965.)

To many critics of the war this "new breed of Americans" bears a disquieting resemblance to an old breed of Germans.

As the United States build-up has grown, there has been an increasing reliance on air attack. Any village in "VC territory" (which now comprises most of the country outside of the big cities) is considered a "free strike" area. U.S. planes rain death over vast areas of the countryside, killing Vietcong guerrillas and innocent peas-

ants alike. No attempt is made to discriminate between military and civilian targets. American pilots, the *Washington Post* reported recently, "are given a square marked on a map and told to hit every hamlet within the area. The pilots know they sometimes are bombing women and children." (March 13, 1965.) Supersonic jets and B-52 bombers blanket vast areas of the countryside with 1,000-pound bombs, napalm and white phosphorous. According to *New York Times*' Saigon Correspondent, Charles Mohr,

This is strategic bombing in a friendly, allied country. Since the Viet Cong doctrine is to insulate themselves among the population and the population is largely powerless to prevent their presence, no one here seriously doubts that significant numbers of innocent civilians are dying every day in South Vietnam. (New York Times, September 5, 1965.)

What this kind of unrestrained air war means in human terms was revealed by Stephen G. Cary, associate executive secretary of the American Friends Service Committee. On this return from a three-month mission in South Vietnam to study the refugee situation, Cary wrote:

The "no sanctuary" policy that is now being followed by United States and ARVN (South Vietnamese Government) forces means that air support can be called in instantly to destroy any village or hamlet from which sniper fire is reported or which is suspected of harboring Viet Cong troops. This policy is complemented by another which designates certain large enemy-held regions as "open target areas" where an aircraft unable to dispose of its explosives on the planned target may drop them at will on village, rice paddy, man or beast, wherever it suits the pilot's fancy.

While touring the countryside, Cary spoke with a U.S. official who had been the first to enter a village after an American air strike.

"I could take everything but the dead kids," he said. "As a matter of fact I found only two persons alive—a boy of ten and his eight-year-old sister. They were sitting quietly on the ruins of their house, surrounded by the bodies of their mother and father and several other children." (*Progressive*, October, 1965.)

The victims of such raids are always reported in the official U.S. enemy casualty lists as "dead Viet Cong." The accuracy of such reports was revealed by Jack Languth in a dispatch from Saigon:

As the Communists withdrew from Quangnai last Monday, U.S. jet bombers pounded the hills into which they were headed. Many Vietnamese—one estimate was as high as 500—were killed by the strikes. The American contention is that they were Viet Cong soldiers. But three out of four patients seeking treatment in a Vietnamese hospital afterward for burns from napalm or jellied gasoline, were village women. (New York Times, June 6, 1965.)

Quang Ngai province has been the scene of some of the heaviest fighting of the war. When U.S. and Vietnamese troops could not dislodge the Vietcong from their positions it was decided to destroy all villages in the province which were not garrisoned by U.S. or Vietnamese forces. The fate of Duchai, a complex of five fishing villages on the coast, is typical. Neil Sheehan told the story of Duchai in a dispatch to the *New York Times*:

In mid-August United States and Vietnamese military officials





decided the Communists were using Duchai as a base for their operations in the area and that it should be destroyed. For the next two months . . . it was periodically and ferociously bombed by Vietnamese and American planes. . . . At least 184 civilians died during Duchai's two months of agony. Some reasonable estimates run as high as 600. . . . When an American visits Duchai these days, villagers . . . tell him horror stories of how many of the 15,000 former inhabitants were killed by bombs and shells. "There," said a fisherman pointing to a bomb crater beside a ruined house, "a woman and her six children were killed in a bomb shelter when it got a direct hit." Duchai's solid brick and stucco houses, the product of generations of hard-earned savings by its fishermen, were reduced to rubble or blasted into skeletons. Five-inch naval shells tore gaping holes in walls, and bombs of 750 to 1,000 pounds plunged through roofs, shattering interiors and scattering red rooftiles over the landscape. . . . Here and there napalm blackened the ruins. (November 30, 1965.)

Sheehan reported that at least ten other villages in the province had "been destroyed as thoroughly as the five in Duchai" and another twenty-five nearly as badly damaged. Four hundred and fifty other villages have been under intermittent attack by U.S. and Vietnamese planes. "Each month," Sheehan writes, "600 to 1,000 civilians wounded by bombs, shells, bullets and napalm are brought to the provincial hospital in Quangngai town. Officials say that about thirty per cent of these cases require major surgery. A recent visitor to the hospital found several children lying on cots, their bodies horribly burned by napalm." (*Ibid.*)

An American doctor in the Quang Ngai hospital, J. David Kinzie, was moved to protest the horrors of the war in a letter to a U.S. magazine:

I have been in Quang Ngai for six months in general practice at a provincial hospital, and I can remain silent no longer.

There comes a time in a doctor's life, no matter how hardened he has become, and perhaps in every man's life, no matter how cynical he may be, when he must protest as effectively as he can about the suffering of his fellow man. When one's own country is involved in the inhumanity, the responsibility becomes greater. Thus I add my belated voice.

The civilian hospital in our province in central Vietnam is good by Vietnamese standards. The patients, already diseased by tuberculosis, anemia, and malnutrition in many cases, are now entering more frequently from direct effects of the war. For example, a pregnant woman demonstrator with a bullet hole in her abdomen, whose fetus died later; a twelve-year-old boy brought in unconscious by relatives who described how artillery blasted their village the night before; a fifty-year-old woman, accused of being Vietcong who had been beaten, electrically shocked, and had her hands punctured for three days to extort information; three other civilians also accused of supporting the Vietcong were released to the hospital after severe beatings and their innocence determined. Many of the victims' "crimes" consisted merely in living in an area the Vietcong had overrun the night before. . . .

Of course, war has always been described as evil, but does this mean that America must add to it? Our military advisers teach Vietnamese modern techniques of killing each other. Our weapons aid in more thorough destruction of themselves. Rather than liberating a people, it seems that these techniques and weapons result in innocent civilians, women, and children being beaten, burned and murdered. . . .

Is America to survive on the blood of Vietnamese civilians? Does this make us great? (*Progressive*, March 1965.)

Thousands of children are dying as a result of United States air strikes. Charles Mohr writes in the *New York Times*:

In [a] delta province there is a woman who has both arms burned off by napalm and her eyelids so badly burned that she cannot close them. When it is time for her to sleep her family puts a blanket over her head. The woman had two of her children killed in the air strike which maimed her last April and she saw five other children die. She was quite dispassionate when she told an American "more children were killed because the children do not have so much experience and do not know how to lie down behind the paddy dikes." (September 5, 1965.)

The Associated Press reported the aftermath of an air raid in the town of Ankhe: "When the stunned survivors collected their wits they found two dead children, another critically wounded, two others and the mother cut badly. The father and two more children were unhurt. The family was the victim of a U.S. B-52 bomb strike, aimed at Viet Cong targets." (*Boston Globe*, October 14, 1965.)

In March, 1965, Vietcong were reported in the vicinity of the village of Manquang, near the big U.S. base at Danang. An air strike was quickly ordered by U.S. Sky-raider fighter-bombers. The results were reported in a brief Reuters dispatch from Danang, carried in practically no American papers: "Planes bombed a nearby village yesterday, killing about 45 villagers, including 37 school children, military sources said today. . . . Villagers carrying coffins marched to Danang after the raid but were turned back by Vietnamese troops." (Reuters, March 18, 1965.) It was learned subsequently that all forty-five victims were school children, pupils at the Hoa Thuan school, which had been totally destroyed by napalm and fragmentation bombs.

Not even strongly pro-Government villages are exempt from U.S. bombing. John T. Wheeler of the Associated Press reported the fate of Ba Gia, most of whose inhabitants were anti-Communist refugees from the North. Under the leader "U.S. Fire Kills Innocents," Wheeler writes:

The wailing of women and the stench of burned bodies greeted the column of troops as they marched wearily into Ba Gia. They were searching for a Vietcong force which earlier had overrun a nearby government strong point. It turned out the search was fruitless.

Four men carrying a pallet with a wounded man stared hatefully at American advisers accompanying the Vietnamese Marines, seeming to accuse the Americans of the death and destruction.

Sitting in the middle of a dirt road was a woman cradling a baby and flanked by two other small children. Her cries of anguish caused some of the Vietnamese troops to turn aside. Surveying the shattered stucco and bamboo homes and the machinegunned Catholic church, one U.S. adviser said: "That's why we are going to lose this stupid damn war. Senseless, it's just senseless."

Ba Gia, with a high percentage of Catholics, was considered a pro-Government village. It was hit three days running with bomb, rockets, and cannon fire from American and Vietnamese fighter bombers.

. . . as the troops bedded down for the night villagers carried one body on a candlelit bamboo bed to the cemetery for burial. Asked how many had been killed and wounded, villagers shrugged and replied, "Many."

The next morning, a Vietnamese captain walked into the still smouldering ruins of one house. Hanging from a doorway that had survived were scorched flags and decorations. The captain fingered them pensively and said they were wedding decora-

tions.

On the floor of the home was a can of cottonseed cooking oil with the clasped-hands emblem of the United States Aid Program. The can was blackened by fire but the words, "Donated by the People of the United States of America," were still visible.

Nearby was a destroyed school house which villagers said had been only recently built, presumably with American aid money. "The Americans have given and the Americans have taken away," one U.S. Army adviser said later in describing the situation. (Published in the *Washington Star*, reprinted in the *Progressive*, September, 1965.)

United States strategy is not only to hit villages, but everything that moves in "VC-controlled" areas. Malcolm Browne writes:

In the last week of September, 1964, an intelligence report reached a province headquarters in the Mekong Delta that thirty sampans loaded with Viet Cong troops were moving down a nearby canal. . . . A flight of A-1H fighters found the thirty sampans with no difficulty, and the whole run was duck soup. Within fifteen minutes, every sampan had been blown to matchwood. It wasn't for several days the sector chief found out who had been in the sampans. A trigger-happy field intelligence agent had seen and correctly counted the sampans, but his guess as to what was in them was not correct. They were all civilians, most of them women and children. Twenty-seven were killed and thirty seriously injured. The Air Force announced blandly that it would take steps to avoid a recurrence of such accidents. But similar announcements have been made after many of the hundreds or thousands of such incidents in the past, and basically nothing changes. . . . (op. cit.)

Not even churches and Buddhist monasteries are spared in the U.S. blitzkrieg. Charles Mohr reports that:

In Kien Hoa province south of Saigon, on August 16th, U.S. aircraft . . . bombed a Buddhist pagoda and a Catholic church. The Buddhists could not have been surprised, although two of them were terribly burned by napalm, because it was the third time their pagoda had been bombed in 1965. A temple of the Cao Dai religious sect in the same area has been bombed twice this year. (*N.Y. Times*, September 5, 1965.)



Vietnamese villagers, driven to desperation, have occasionally descended *en masse* on U.S. bases to protest the bombings of their villages. Such demonstrations have been violently repressed. In early September a group of villagers marched on the U.S. air base at Danang demanding an end to air attacks on their villages. The demonstration was dispersed and five participants, selected at random, were arrested. Their punishment was swift. The *Chicago Daily News* reported from Saigon, "At Danang, three persons were executed by a South

Vietnamese firing squad. The execution, held in a soccer stadium was postponed at the last minute until midnight . . . because news photographers refused to obey an order that no pictures be taken until the final shot had been fired. The three were among five persons arrested Monday during a demonstration by about 200 persons in downtown Da Nang. They were protesting crop damage from artillery fire and air attacks by U.S. forces." (*Chicago Daily News*, September 23, 1965.) The fate of the other two arrested demonstrators was described in a U.P.I. dispatch from Saigon. ". . . the fourth man would be executed later, but at the moment . . . he was described as a 'singing bird.' The fifth demonstrator, a woman, was sentenced to life in prison although the demonstration had been so small that few were even aware of it." (*Washington Daily News*, October 4, 1965.)

Even conservative Vietnamese military officers have rebelled against the annihilation of their people. Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, a former member of the ruling Government Advisory Council, attacked the government of General Nguyen Khanh for supporting mass bombing of the countryside. The colonel was opposed to the bombing not only on moral grounds but because it drove the survivors into the arms of the Vietcong. In a letter of June 4th to the Pentagon correspondent for *Newsweek* in Washington, Lloyd H. Norman, Colonel Thao protested the bombing policies of Defense Secretary McNamara, calling him "a very bad adviser for President Johnson" because he had no understanding of Vietnam. The more bombs dropped by the United States on his country, Colonel Thao wrote, the more quickly will America "lose the confidence of South Vietnam and Southeast Asia." Colonel Thao also called for "a profound social reform, beginning with agrarian reform" to win the hearts of the people instead of slaughtering them. Such blunt criticism from a well-known army officer of incontestably anti-Communist credentials must have been alarming to the U.S. mission in Saigon. Shortly afterwards a warrant was issued for Colonel Thao's arrest. The colonel went into hiding, but was apprehended by the Vietnamese Secret Police on July 17, 1965. The arresting officer shot the colonel to death on the spot. The informants who had revealed his hiding place were each given a hundred thousand piastres reward.

If death is the fate of a Vietnamese officer who protests the U.S. blitzkrieg, some U.S. military men have gotten off easier. Lt. Col. John Paul Van, a senior American adviser in the Mekong Delta, resigned his commission in 1963 in protest against the bombing of Vietnamese villages. Although Van held the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Purple Heart, and had been recommended for the Legion of Merit during his Vietnam tour, he barely escaped court martial because of his outspoken opposition to U.S. policy. Van felt that not only was the indiscriminate bombing of the countryside wrong morally, it was disastrous politically, and in fact was turning the U.S. Air Force into a super recruiting agent for the Vietcong. Declared Van: "Since the enemy is so hard to identify anyhow—since it is a war which requires the utmost discrimination and the most discriminating weapon other than a knife is a rifle in the hands of a qualified infantryman, we are killing a lot of innocent

people. . .” Van told how U.S. advisers must “walk into these hamlets and see the dead women and children and the wounded children. And they realize—the Americans do—that this isn’t helping the war effort.” (*Nation*, October 19, 1963.)

Few U.S. airmen, however, share Colonel Van’s qualms about air war. “Certainly some civilians get killed,” a U.S. pilot was quoted by New York *Times* correspondent Jack Langguth. “Civilians get killed in every war.” (*New York Times Magazine*, September 19, 1965.) “If you’re going to worry about killing women and kids you’d go crazy in a week,” one American pilot told a London *Daily Mail* correspondent. “This is a bomber and you shouldn’t feel like that.” According to the British correspondent, his interviews with U.S. airmen indicated that they were bombing “with more hatred than they ever had in months of service here.” As villages went up in flames, the airmen would shout, “Beautiful bombing, beautiful!” (*London Daily Mail*, June 28, 1965.) One pilot told a New York *Times* correspondent how he rationalized his actions. “I don’t like to hit a village. You know you are hitting women and children, too. But you’ve got to decide your work is noble and that the work has to be done.” (*New York Times*, July 6, 1965.)

Not all pilots need the justification of a noble cause. “Pilots know they are hitting civilian villages,” Jack Langguth reported from Saigon. “Some of them fret over it and brood. Others don’t care. . . .” (*New York Times Magazine*, September 19, 1965.) Georges Chafard, the Saigon correspondent for *L’Express* in Paris, recently asked about the thousands of bombs rained by the United States on tiny villages. “American aviators explained laughingly that orders are to get rid of old stock which date as far back as the war against Japan, and to hurry up before they become unusable.” (*L’Express*, September 25, 1965.) The essence of U.S. bombing policy was expressed with unusual frankness by a U.S. officer serving with a helicopter unit in the Mekong Delta. Jack Langguth asked the officer what the answer was to Vietcong activity. “‘Terror,’ he said pleasantly. ‘The Viet Cong have terrorized the peasants to get their cooperation, or at least to stop their opposition. We must terrorize the villagers even more, so they see that their real self-interest lies with us. . . . Terror is what it takes.’” (*New York Times Magazine*, September 19, 1965.)

But in the long run, the bombing only helps the National Liberation Front. According to Senator George McGovern: “To bomb [the Vietcong] is to bomb the women and children, the villages and the peasants with whom they are intermingled. Our bombing attacks turn the people against us and feed the fires of rebellion.” (*Congressional Record*, June 17, 1965.) Robert Taber, an authority on guerrilla warfare, writes in his new book *The War of the Flea**: “The indiscriminate use of air power against presumed Viet Cong targets does much to explain the alienation of the rural population from the Saigon Government. Country people whose only contact with the government comes in the form of napalm and rocket attacks can scarcely be expected to

feel sympathetic to the government cause, whatever it may be. On the other hand, they have every reason to feel solidarity with the guerrillas, usually recruited from their own villages, who share their peril and their hardships.”

More than any other single factor, our air war in Vietnam is turning the rest of the world against the United States. India’s most respected financial journal, *The Economic Weekly* (Bombay), declared recently that “What is happening in Vietnam is sickening, and is bound to make the U.S.A. a deeply hated nation in Asia for decades to come.” And the respected English weekly, *The New Statesman*, comments that “The United States has now forfeited all right to British sympathy over Vietnam. . . . All the instruments of modern barbarism are being employed. The last fragment of America’s moral authority in Vietnam has gone whistling through the bomb bays.” (*New Statesman*, March 26, 1965.)

In addition to unrestricted air warfare, the United States has been using poison gas in South Vietnam since 1963. When news of our gas warfare was officially confirmed on March 22, 1965 a storm of international protest broke over Washington. The United States confirmation of the use of gas was prompted by a dispatch from A.P. photographer Horst Faas, who had accompanied a U.S. contingent engaging in gas warfare. Faas’s disclosures were confirmed by a U.S. spokesman in Saigon who told the A.P. that United States and Vietnamese forces “are now using non-lethal gases in certain tactical situations.” (*New York Post*, March 22, 1965.) According to the A.P. report, “The spokesman here and the Pentagon in Washington issued statements after highly reliable Saigon sources reported U.S. and Vietnamese forces were experimenting with this kind of warfare. The Pentagon said the United States was supplying the gas.” (*Ibid.*) The U.S. spokesman was obviously worried about public reaction to the first use of gas in war since 1918. “Even if it does work over here, there are real problems of getting it accepted,” he said. “The difficulty is in getting the American public used to the idea.”

The gas, spread from the air over enemy territory by U.S. helicopters and fighter-bombers, was of three types.

Defense Secretary Robert McNamara gave detailed descriptions of the different gases at a press conference in Washington:

DM (diphenylaminochloroarsine) is a pepper-like irritant which causes irritation of the eyes and mucous membrane, mucous discharge from the nose which is similar to that caused by a cold—sneezing, coughing, headache, tightness in the chest and nausea and vomiting. . . .

CM (chloroacetophenone) is a lacrimatory or tearing agent, which is also an irritant to the upper respiratory passages and it may also cause irritations to the skin. . . .

CS (O-chlorobenzalmononitrile) is a more recently developed lacrimatory agent which causes more severe irritation to the eyes, nose and respiratory tract and its use is usually accompanied by pains in the chest, choking and violent coughing. Concentration of the agent leads to nausea and vomiting. . . . (*New York Times*, March 28, 1965.)

McNamara and other U.S. officials attempted to play

*Published by Lyle Stuart, 1965.

down the harmful effects of such gases, indicating that they were only temporarily incapacitating. (One U.S. spokesman in Saigon termed them 'benign incapacitators.') But even if the only gases used were the three described by McNamara (North Vietnam and Red China have charged that far more deadly agents are regularly used) their effects are hardly "benign." A New York Times editorial, commenting on the three types of gas the United States has admitted using, said "Even this kind of gas can be fatal to the very young, the very old, and those ill with heart and lung ailments." (New York Times, March 24, 1965.) And David Hilding, M.D., a professor at Yale University School of Medicine, asks:

Can anyone imagine any greater bitterness than that of the parents of little children choking away their last few moments of life after being poisoned by 'Humane nauseating' gas spread by our military leaders?

The weakest, young and old, will be the ones unable to withstand the shock of this supposedly humane weapon. They will writhe in horrible cramps until their babies' strength is unequal to the stress and they turn blue and black and die. . . . Horrible drugs such as these that we are turning over to the Vietnamese Air Force to spray from helicopters who ever they decide probably produce the designed effect in a few persons of the proper weight, height and general physical condition; but the dosage for others will be wrong. Those of us with experience with these dangerous substances know that lethal consequences result from haphazard administration.

There is absolutely no possibility that everyone sprayed with the poison gas in the civilian villages of Vietnam escaped permanent harm. (New York Times, March 26, 1965.)

What our chemical warfare does to its victims was graphically described by Wilfred Burchett, who on one of his reporting missions in South Vietnam interviewed a peasant woman from Bien Hoa province whose village, Phuoc Tan, had recently come under attack. The woman told Burchett:

Planes came over on several mornings between January 12 and 18. Not only over our village but the nearby ones of Tam Phuoc, An Loi, and Tam An. I saw them the first time on the 12th. I was on my way to market when a plane came down quite low with what looked like whitish smoke coming out of its tail. There was another one about the same height half a kilometre away. When the "smoke" drifted over me, I thought at first I was going to choke. My chest started to burn. All the way to market I had difficulty in breathing. I had to keep stopping to sit down. After a while my nose started bleeding.

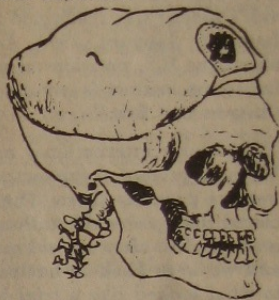
When I got to the market I found some other women suffered the same thing. Two of them were bleeding from the mouth as well. Others had burning pains in the chest. . . .

When I got back to the village, I found that one of my neighbors, a woman of my age, was paralyzed. She had also had severe nose bleeding and vomiting. She was paralyzed for several hours. By evening she was able to move about alright, but had severe pains in the chest and difficulty in breathing. She had been hoeing in the fields and started to run when the plane came right over her head. . . .

From the other villages we heard that several other people had been temporarily paralyzed and many others had chest pains. . . . (*The Furtive War*.)

Public opinion throughout the world was outraged by the use of gas in Vietnam. Six British Members of Parliament, including Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Philip Noel-Baker, chairman of the ruling Labor party's foreign affairs group and Tom Driberg, a member of the party's national executive, sent a telegram to British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, then in Washington.

The message urged Stewart "to convey to the United States Government the horror and indignation aroused in Parliament by use by United States forces in Vietnam of gas. . . ." (London Times, March 23, 1965.) Forty other M.P.'s subsequently associated themselves with the appeal. Stewart responded quickly. In a speech at the National Press Club in Washington he said that he had informed Secretary of State Dean Rusk of "the very grave concern" felt in Britain about the use of gas in Vietnam. He added, "I am in fact, asking your Government—to quote your own Declaration of Independence—to display a decent respect for the opinions of mankind." (London Times, March 24, 1965.)



Many Americans who had previously acquiesced in U.S. handling of the war were momentarily shaken out of their torpor by the poison gas disclosures. Sixteen Democratic Congressmen signed a letter of protest to President Johnson, which read in part: "The actions of our military in South Vietnam in providing riot-control type gases appear to have violated our long-standing policy against the first use of gas in warfare. . . . The first use of gas, however innocuous its variety or effective its results, subjects the using country to the censure of the civilized world. . . ." (Signed by Brown, Burton, Edwards, Hawkins and Wilson of California; Congers and Diggs of Michigan; Green of Oregon; Kastenmeier and Race of Wisconsin; Mink of Hawaii; Nix of Pennsylvania; and Ottinger, Resnick, Rosenthal and Ryan of New York.) Five House Republicans also wrote the President strongly protesting the use of gas in Vietnam. (Lindsay and Horton, New York; Mathias of New Jersey; Morse of Massachusetts; and Tupper of Maine.) And in the Senate, Wayne Morse, a long-time critic of U.S. Vietnamese policies, said that "It is interesting to see how easy it is, once we depart from the principles of international law, to violate more and more of them." (New York Times, March 23, 1965.)

There is no question that the U.S. employment of gas warfare in Vietnam is in clear violation of international law. The Geneva Protocol of 1925 banning the use of gas in warfare states explicitly: "Whereas the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices, has been justly condemned by the general opinion of the civilized world . . . the high contracting parties . . . accept this prohibition." In addition, the U.S.-German Peace Treaty of August 25, 1921 (which we signed rather than associate ourselves with the Versailles Agreements) accepts and

incorporates Article 171 of the Treaty of Versailles which prohibits "asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and all analogous liquids, materials or devices." A number of U.S. Presidents have also pledged never to initiate gas warfare. On June 9, 1943 President Roosevelt, reportedly under military pressure to use gas in the Pacific, declared "Use of such weapons has been outlawed by the general opinion of mankind. This country has not used them and I hope that we never will be compelled to use them. I state categorically that we shall under no circumstances resort to the use of such weapons unless they are first used by our enemies." Roosevelt's pledge was reaffirmed by President Dwight Eisenhower in January, 1960. Asked at a press conference about the U.S. position on gas warfare, he replied, "So far as my instinct is concerned, it is not to start such a thing as that first."

The adverse international reaction to the use of gas in Vietnam prompted the temporary suspension of our gas warfare program there. The U.S. mission in Saigon declared that gas would no longer be used in military operations. But after several months the outcry died down and we were back in business again. On September 7, in what looked like a trial balloon floated by the military command to test public opinion, Colonel L. N. Utter, a Marine Corps battalion commander of the Second Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, used 48 canisters of CN gas in an operation against Vietcong guerrillas in Quinhon. (The North Vietnam Red Cross later charged that 25 villagers died from the gas.) Military spokesmen leaked the news to the press and declared that they had placed Utter under investigation for violating standing orders against the use of gas. There was little outcry back home, and a month later Utter was cleared. On October 8, 1965 our gas warfare policy got back into full swing when General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, officially authorized the use of gas in a massive "search and destroy" operation in Zone D, a Vietcong stronghold. The New York *Herald Tribune* reported that Westmoreland's action marked "a shift in U.S. policy, for it was the first time authorization had been given since a worldwide outcry last March. . . ." (October 9, 1965.) Since then gas warfare has resumed its normal place in the U.S. Vietnamese arsenal, and has in fact been stepped up. A mobile research institute for chemical and bacteriological warfare, the 406 Medical Laboratory, has been shifted from Japan to Vietnam. There are persistent reports that nerve gas may be used in Vietnam. The type most likely to be employed was described in a recent article in *Missiles & Rockets*:

. . . A class of nerve gases . . . known as V-agents. A tiny drop-let of one of these on a man's skin can be absorbed without pain or other notice, and cause death. V-agents can be disseminated in aerosols or mists, and even though troops may be masked and protected by clothes, minute amounts of the agent may be transferred to the skin when they unmask or change clothes. Because V-agents are not very volatile, they can be used on the foliage of forested trails, in barracks, or any place where the presence of troops is to be discouraged. . . . (April 19, 1965.)

Perhaps in preparation for the use of nerve gas, *Avia-*

tion Daily reported that

The Army is issuing improved new gas masks to its helicopter pilots. A hood to protect the head and neck against mustard and "V"-type nerve gases is also being developed. . . . Left unsaid in reports on the new equipment is that it protects the helicopter crewman from gas he might be distributing, as well as from enemy chemicals. (July 12, 1965.)

As with our massive bombing of the countryside, our use of gas against the peasants of Vietnam will inevitably backfire. As the New York *Times* commented editorially upon the first disclosure of its use, "In Vietnam gas was supplied and sanctioned by white men against Asians. This is something that no Asian, Communist or not, will forget. No other country has employed such a weapon in recent warfare." (March 24, 1965.) Whatever short-run military advantage the use of gas may give us, it will be outweighed in the long run by the shadow its use casts over our reputation as a civilized people. In the words of nuclear physicist, Dr. Tom Stonier, author of the widely acclaimed book *Nuclear Disaster*:

As a scientist and a father of five children I deplore the pervasion of technology which permits the military to use a relatively defenseless people as a laboratory for developing counter-insurgency weapons. In principle this act is not very different from that of the Nazi doctors experimenting on their hapless concentration camp victims. If we persist we will not only lose our own soul, but the world as well, for we cannot defend principles if we do not have any. (New York *Times*, March 25, 1965.)

The U.S. Government has, of course, attempted to suppress the truth about our atrocities in Vietnam. To keep the story from the public the Department of Defense has imposed rigid censorship restrictions on U.S. correspondents in Vietnam. Carl Rowan, while head of the United States Information Service, justified our censorship policies in Vietnam, referring to the public's "right not to know in a period of undeclared war." Wes Gallagher, general manager of the Associated Press, declared recently, "Barring correspondents from free access to air bases and other military installations and providing an 'escort' for every correspondent is clearly aimed not at security matters but at controlling what American fighting men say. Such control exceeds anything done in the darkest days of World War Two. News restrictions imposed by the Pentagon raise serious questions as to whether the American people will be able to get a true picture of the war in Vietnam." (New York *Journal American*, April 15, 1965.) George Beebe, president of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association, seconded Gallagher's remarks and declared that the U.S. public was not getting "either the full story or the true story" on Vietnam. It was against such a background of official censorship and misrepresentation that U.N. Secretary-General U Thant, whose own peace overtures had been lied about by high U.S. officials, declared in February, 1965 that "the great American people, if only they knew the true facts and the background to the developments in South Vietnam, will agree with me that further bloodshed is unnecessary. . . . As you know, in times of war and hostilities the first casualty is truth."

But despite Government censorship a steady trickle of news about American atrocities in Vietnam has appeared in the press. The very publication of such mate-

rial poses a severe moral problem for the American people. If our government's actions in Vietnam are analogous to Nazi crimes in occupied Europe, is not the general silence of the majority of Americans as damning as the acquiescence of the German public under Hitler? Yale History professor Staughton Lynd, troubled by the analogy, writes:

Americans often ask: why didn't the German people do something about it? Only in the last few weeks have I begun to wonder: What exactly did we expect them to do? Their situation was different from ours, but not that different. They too watched helplessly while their government incinerated men, women and children. They too were represented by a legislature which handed over its constitutional authority for war and peace to the executive. They like ourselves were lied to by their government, not once or twice, but over and over again in a sustained course of deception. . . .

The general silence of the American public also disturbs Washington journalist I. F. Stone. He writes:

Our own men, and the forces we arm, have long been burning up villages with napalm; we have begun to use phosphorous shells, also intended to burn alive; we have been trying out "anti-personnel" bombs which scatter sharp razor-like fragments in a wide area and a new type of bullet which "somer-saults" on entering the flesh in a way which makes ordinary minor wounds fatal. Our military have speculated about the use of nuclear weapons and—to test public response—indicated that at some stage as we raise the ante of escalation they may be used. This has created only a minor ripple of momentary revulsion, on the way from the headlines to the more engrossing sports or women's pages. . . . If our spirits were not so dulled by our own propaganda, we would realize how shamefully our country is acting. . . . When will Americans awaken to bring an end to the crimes against humanity we are committing in Vietnam? (*I. F. Stone's Weekly*, March 29, 1965.)

All war, of course, is hell. There is no such thing as a "clean war," in Vietnam or anywhere else. But even in warfare there are certain observable norms of decency which cannot be disregarded. These were laid down after World War Two in the Charter of the International Military Tribunal, under which the Nuremberg Trials of top Nazi civilian and military leaders were held. Our actions in Vietnam fall within the prohibited classifications of warfare set down at Nuremberg under

Article Six, which reads:

. . . The following acts, or any of them, are crimes coming within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal for which there shall be individual responsibility:

a) Crimes against peace: namely, planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances, or participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the foregoing.

b) War crimes: namely, violations of the laws or customs of war . . . plunder of public property, wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity.

c) Crimes against humanity: namely, murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before, or during the war. . . .

Under the provisions of Article 6 the United States is clearly guilty of "War Crimes," "Crimes against Peace" and "Crimes against Humanity," crimes for which the top German leaders were either imprisoned or executed. If we agree with Hermann Goering's defense at Nuremberg that "In a life and death struggle there is no legality," then no action can or should be taken against the government leaders responsible for the war in Vietnam. But if Americans still believe that there is a higher law than that of the jungle, we should call our leaders to account. Otherwise we shall have proved Albert Schweitzer correct when he wrote:

It is clear now to everyone that the suicide of civilization is in progress. . . . Wherever there is lost the consciousness that every man is an object of concern for us just because he is a man, civilization and morals are shaken, and the advance to fully developed inhumanity is only a question of time. . . . We have talked for decades with ever increasing light-mindedness about war and conquest, as if these were merely operations on a chessboard; how was this possible save as the result of a tone of mind which no longer pictured to itself the fate of individuals, but thought of them only as figures or objects belonging to the material world? (*The Philosophy of Civilization*.)

The issue at stake in Vietnam is not, as President Johnson constantly claims, what will happen if we leave. It is what will happen to us as a people, and to our judgment in history, if we stay. □□□



Norman Morrison, a 31-year-old Quaker, burned himself to death in front of the Pentagon as a protest against the war in Vietnam. He came to his decision after reading the article about a French priest in Vietnam that is reprinted below.

The article appeared in Paris-Match, the French equivalent of Life Magazine. The author, Jean Larteguy, is an anti-Communist novelist.

Near Duc Co, 17,000 refugees, for the most part Catholics from Tonkin, had been settled in some ten villages. Father Currien was their curé. He is a stocky, robust native of the Vosges. He won the Military Medal for going out among the Vietminh in 1944 to find the wounded French. I found him stretched out on a bed in the St. Paul Clinic in Saigon. He had been caught for several hours under the beams of his wrecked church and his spine felt the effects. In his hand he held a small pyx, a small round metal vessel in which the Blessed Sacrament is carried, which had been pierced by two bullets. He showed it to me.

"This was the consecrated host. In this war they even shoot God himself. It all began one Monday at 9 a.m. The Viet Cong were in the vicinity, but not as many as reported—many less.... No one was in the village except for some women, children and old people whom neither the Viet Cong nor the regular troops thought to pick up to serve as coolies.

"I heard some planes. The first bomb fell at 6:05 on my church. There was nothing left of it. I ran for shelter to the presbytery, a wooden house adjoining the church. A second bomb crushed it and I was pinned under the beams. Children cried, women shrieked and the wounded moaned. They were near me but I could not budge. Finally, some of the faithful who had been looking for me everywhere, dragged me out. I made the women and children lie down under the flooring of the house. There we passed the entire night while those accursed planes hammered with rockets and bombs at my village.

"There were no longer any Viet Cong around. They had fled into the forest long before. Next morning my back hurt badly, but I gathered 42 women and children and took the Host in its bullet-pierced pyx and started off for Pleiku.

The bombing could start again at any moment. On the way I buried as best I could the bodies of my faithful. Yes, I remember now I buried seven of them completely torn to bits. I had to abandon some wounded and dying. I gave them absolution. I tried to keep alive those who were still alive. The children were exhausted, the women wept; they dragged themselves along. It was a real way of the cross....

"The march continued. The children lay down along the road; they no longer wanted to move. Finally we arrived at a French tea plantation where they gave us to eat and drink, and a place to lie down."

The Padre tried to turn himself on his bed but made a grimace. He showed his fist: "Today nothing remains of all that region. All is razed. As for the poor mountain people whose villages and rice granaries have been destroyed, they can live only as wild boars in the forest. Before the bombardment, the loud speakers, in the planes above them, told them not to go into the fields and to stay in their huts. They stayed in their huts and the huts were bombarded anyway. Or again the Viet Cong obliged them to come out and machine-gunned them in the fields. Some villages were warned, others not. I have seen my faithful burned up in napalm. I have seen the bodies of women and children blown to bits. I have seen all my villages razed. By God, it's not possible! (*C'est pas Dieu possible*)."

Suddenly the priest burst into tears. His nerves had given way. He cursed the war and its attendant horrors and absurdities. He railed at the Americans in English, as if they were there to hear him. He finally calmed down:

"They must settle their accounts with God. When I arrived in Saigon, I could barely drag myself along. Two Americans wanted to give me a lift to the hospital in their automobile. I couldn't stand it. Always before my eyes were those burned up women and children. I told them to get the H— out ("... le camp") because I didn't like murderers. They were probably nice guys who wanted to help me. In Saigon they probably pound away at typewriters in an air-conditioned office and know nothing of this war. They couldn't understand what was the matter with me."

This is a letter to Karolyn Kwiecien (not her real name) of Detroit, from her brother, a 20-year-old paratrooper in Vietnam. The letter was originally printed in the New Statesman (London) and has since been reprinted in The Nation—2 Guardian and elsewhere.

"Dear Sister,

I just received your letter up here at Ben Cat in War Zone C.... I haven't much time but can give you a situation report, and that is there's plenty of VC for everybody. I'll tell you what happened today: A recon platoon went out on a road clearing mission this morning and while they were doing that they spotted five VC. The platoon chased them to a village (which the VC ran right through). When they came upon the village they figured the five VC had held up in there so they began to clear the area of all civilians (poor rubber plantation

peasants). They did this by making a lot of noise shouting, shooting their AR15s off and crashing in doors. Of course most of the adults understood (by the way there were only old women, old men, and women with babies and children). Now these people dug bomb shelters, but I can't see why what with all the B-52s dropping 1,000 pound bombs every night, so automatically this made them people VC. A 173rd paratrooper comes by a grass hut and he yells down into one of these bomb shelters and says 'I'm gonna give you 10 seconds till I blow that goddam place up.' Then he looks at his watch and in 10 seconds he throws a hand grenade in the hole, it blows up and he sets the hut afire. And here's where I come in, I and my captain are walking by the burning hut and he turns to me and says 'Kwiecien, there's somebody still living, can you hear the

groans?' I hear them so we stop and take a look. 4 DEAD CHILDREN 3-4 YEARS OLD. We pulled one little girl out who had a hole in her head the size of a quarter and as I carried her away from the fire I could see the life in her fleeing, and she was about 3. She died in about 15 minutes. And I got those—asses—these sons of bitches I could kill, they are the dumbest in the world—and I told them. Anyway we had 1 VC, 8 wounded kids, 2 of them still sucking their mother's tit, 3 old men, 43 old women—4 were wounded—18 kids, 8 wounded, 3 wounded mothers and 5 dead children under 5 years old. And you know what these—reported? Twenty suspected VC. I doubt if you will read this in the news but don't let this letter get away from you. They might court-martial me for the truth.

Love.—"