The approximately 12,000 communist-related detainees were, until recently, divided into 'communist criminals' and 'An Tri detainees.' Communist criminals are those who have been convicted by military courts of specific criminal acts, such as terrorism, assassination, extortion of 'taxes,' etc., committed as a part of their participation in the NLF's struggle to overthrow the GVN. There were 4,088 "communist criminals" on the GVN rolls as of December 31, 1972. "An Tri detainees" are persons detained because they are "considered dangerous to national defense, national security and public order." (Decree Law 004 1966 and Decree Law 020 1972). An Tri detainees are incarcerated on the order of the Prime Minister after passing through a non-judicial administrative process wherein both the burden of proof and the procedural safeguards are somewhat less than those which obtain in the military courts. On the other hand, the penalties imposed are generally less severe. An Tri detainees need not be accused of committing a specific criminal act, evidence of participation in the Viet Cong Infrastructure, or of actively supporting the Viet Cong being sufficient.

Before and since the cease-fire, the GVN has been converting A and B category "An Tri" detainees to common criminal status by the expedient of convicting them of ID card violations or draft-dodging. Categories A and B are those detainees whom, according to the GVN, held important positions in the Viet Cong Infrastructure down to hamlet level. All the C level detainees, who are considered "low level supporters" have been released since Tet. These numbered around 5,000. The number of A and B level detainees as of December 31, 1972 was 9,316.

During the long course of the Vietnam conflict, people from every area of the country have been arrested. The ratio of persons detained from any particular province to that province's population varies with the average level of NLF political-terrorist activity and the vigor of the GVN local government's security activities. Neither we nor the GVN have kept records that would allow such a ratio to be computed. According to the latest complete figures (December 72) available to the Embassy, 18,106 persons were being held at Provincial Correction Centers, and 20,501 at the five National Correction Centers at Con Son, Chl Hao (Saigon), Tan Hiep, Thu Duc and Dalat (juveniles). These figures include 5,777 military prisoners, 5,877 unsentenced communist suspects, and 7,915 unsentenced common criminal suspects. This reflects the situation prior to the release of 5,690 "convicts" at Tet, and the release of 1,193 prisoners on Farmer's Day, March 26.

The physical condition of prisoners varies, of course, from individual to individual. As you can see from the attached memo from USAID, much of our assistance to the correctional system has gone into improvements in medical and sanitation facilities. According to the final reports submitted to the Public Safety Division by its provincial safety advisors before it was disbanded, the medical and sanitation situation in all the GVN's correctional institutions is now adequate to preserve the health of the inmates.

You may be particularly interested in the question of deliberate mistreatment of inmates, especially in light of recent press accounts concerning the crippled prisoners who were recently released by the GVN. We cannot disprove that mistreatment of inmates has occurred; some with little doubt has.
However, our coverage of the correctional system over the past several years has been comprehensive enough to enable us to say with some certainty that there is no widespread or systematic mistreatment of inmates. The simultaneous existence of a very low ratio of guards to inmates, comparatively insecure prisons, and the low escape rate would seem to indicate this. With regard to the crippled prisoners, we have a very detailed report on their history compiled by Dr. Brown who formerly served as medical advisor to the GVN Corrections Directorate.

We will be happy to forward a copy to you if you feel it would be of use to the Committee.

I hope this information provided by this letter, and the attached memo, will be of use to you. If you have any further questions, or want us to expand upon or to clarify any of the points included, please write me directly, I shall do all I can to be of service.

Sincerely,

RAY A. MEYER, Second Secretary.

DATE: 22 MAR. 73.

To: Mr. Ray Meyer, Embassy POL/MIL.

Thru: Mr. H. E. Kosters, USAID/ADCCA.

From: Robert B. Brigham, SA/ADCCA.

Subject: Enquiry on USAID/CORDS Support of GVN Civilian Prison System.

As requested in a paper on page two of Mr. Tinker's letter of 15 Mar. to Ambassador Bunker, there follows a brief summary of that support which USAID and MACV/CORDS have provided to the Directorate of Corrections. Inasmuch as it appears that Mr. Tinker was after specifics of the involvement in construction of facilities, details of AAC and AIK funding have been listed. If additional information is required, please let me know.

BACKGROUND

The Directorate General of Corrections was first organized on January 13, 1960, and then changed to the Directorate of Corrections (DOC) on July 25, 1966. U.S. advisory assistance to DOC began in 1961 with the part time services of one Public Safety advisor from USAID. From this time until early 1967 when the function became a part of Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS), MACV, as a result of a general reorganization of the US effort, support to the DOC was minimal. The present Corrections Centers Project was established in fiscal year 1967. The project was introduced not only to assist the DOC to develop an effective corrections system but because of USG interest with respect to prisoners of war captured by US forces and turned over to the GVN for confinement.

U.S. ADVISORS

In fiscal year 1967 one full time advisor was provided under this new project. In fiscal year 1968 the advisory staff was increased to two advisors, which level was maintained through fiscal year 1972. In fiscal year 1973, one full time advisor was present up to the signing of the cease-fire agreement in January 1973. The Corrections Center direct hire staff was augmented by Public Safety Detentions Advisors on detail from the National Police Support Project. Advisory duties performed by this staff included those associated with regular prison operation as well as such specifications as fishing, agronomy, animal husbandry and medical welfare. Programs of vocational training, recreation and industries also were developed.

The last direct hire advisor, a medical doctor who for the past two years had served as medical advisor to the DOC in matters of health, sanitation, humanitarian care and welfare of prisoners, discontinued his visits to the prisons to observe conditions at the time of cease-fire agreements when advisory services were halted.

In fiscal year 1972 a six-man team from the US Bureau of Prisons was brought aboard under a PASA to assist in all aspects of penology and rehabili-
Participant training for DOC personnel was provided as follows: one in fiscal 1968, six in fiscal 1970, twenty in fiscal year 1971, and twelve in fiscal year 1972.

COMMODITY SUPPORT

Dollar funding was provided through the Corrections Centers Project for commodities as follows:

- Fiscal year 1967 $62,000; fiscal year 1968 $676,000; fiscal year 1969 $900,000; fiscal year 1970 $41,000; fiscal year 1971 $17,000; and fiscal year 1972 $107,000.

Additionally, excess equipment was transferred from RMK-BRJ plant at Con Son Island to the Con Son Correctional Center. This was generally heavy duty equipment (crawlers, dump trucks, etc.). The value of this equipment was $882,550 (original acquisition value).

American Aid Chapter (AAC) Plaster Budget Support

A substantial amount of plaster funding has been provided as supplemental support to the DOC through the AAC of the national budget. Principally these funds were used in maintenance, repair, renovation, and construction of facilities as well as certain operating supplies and services. A summary of the funding for each year and identification of the major items which it provided is listed below.

**CY 67 VN $30,000,000 (revised)**
- Construction vocational training shop, Tan Hiep: 500,000
- Construction kitchen and vocational shop, Thu Duc: 2,500,000
- Construction Phan Thiet Prison: 7,000,000
- Construction Dalat Prison: 10,000,000
- Construction Dalat Thang Prison: 1,000,000
- Construction Hospital, Chi Hoa: 3,000,000
- Locally manufactured vocational training equipment: 4,800,000

**CY 68: VN $116,000,000 (Revised)**
- Operating supplies and services: 1,754,000
- Construct replacement kitchens at:
  - Chi Hoa: 5,000,000
  - Phong Dinh: 4,000,000
- Replace hospital/dispensary/patient wards at:
  - Chi Hoa: 9,120,000
  - Quang Tin: 1,500,000
  - Quang Tri: 1,250,000
  - Phong Dinh: 1,500,000
  - Ninh Thuan: 500,000
  - Phong Dinh: 1,730,000
  - Bac Lieu: 1,500,000
  - An Xuyen: 1,017,000
  - Quang Nam: 270,000
  - Kontum: 336,000
  - Darlac: 400,000
  - Dalat: 4,000,000
- Renovate prison centers at:
  - DOC Headquarters: 226,000
  - Chi Hoa: 2,000,000
  - Con Son: 360,000
  - Quang Tin: 360,000
  - Binh Thuan: 490,000
  - Pidkru: 485,000
  - Phu Yen: 323,500
  - Ba Xuyen: 318,000
  - Bao Lieu: 318,000
  - Chau Doc: 350,000
Kien Giang
Quang Ngai (kitchen, housing quarters, vocational shop, defense
system, general repairs) ........................................ 476,000
Gia Dinh (Adm. Office, repair housing quarters) ................ 6,300,000
Construct re-education center, Binh Thuan .................... 3,750,000
Construct nursery Thu Duc ..................................... 5,500,000
Construct housing quarters at:
Tan Hiep .......................................................... 1,000,000
Quang Trie ......................................................... 4,400,000
Thua Thien ........................................................ 1,721,000
Quang Nam ......................................................... 3,850,000
Quang Tin .......................................................... 3,819,000
Binh Tuy ............................................................ 2,248,000
Long An (housing quarters, patient wards, dispensary) ....... 2,600,000
Kien Hoa ............................................................ 1,800,000
Thu Duc (cell B) ................................................... 3,217,000
Kien Giang ........................................................ 390,000
Thu Duc ............................................................. 4,000,000

Construct work shops at:
Thu Duc ............................................................. 1,949,000
Quang Tin ........................................................... 500,000
Binh Dinh ........................................................... 650,000
Binh Dinh ........................................................... 500,000
Ninh Thuan .......................................................... 646,000
Tay Ninh ............................................................. 444,000
Binh Long ............................................................ 483,000
Binh Tuy ............................................................. 417,000
An Xuyen ............................................................. 580,000
Bac Lieu ............................................................. 497,300
Vinh Long ........................................................... 494,300
Chau Doc ............................................................ 543,000
Kien Giang .......................................................... 498,000
An Giang ............................................................. 486,000
Dalat Reformatory ................................................... 426,000
Kien Giang .......................................................... 550,000

Miscellaneous construction:
Walls at DOC Headquarters ....................................... 557,000
Watchtowers at Con Son .......................................... 247,000
Defence system at Ninh Thuan ................................... 135,000
Defence system at Kien Tuong (phase I, II) ...................... 665,000
Guard house at An Xuyen .......................................... 188,000
Defence system at Bac Lieu ....................................... 197,000
Defence system at Chau Doc ..................................... 200,000
L intrinsic at Khanh Hoa ......................................... 500,000
L intrinsic at Ben Hai ............................................. 300,000
Plow center at Dalat .............................................. 400,000
Additional construction costs, Dinh Tuong Prison ............. 35,000
Additional construction costs, Phan Thiet Prison .............. 1,273,000
Equipment for vocational training and industrial arts ....... 1,265,000

FY 69: VND40,000,000 (revised):
Operations and supplies .......................................... 2,200,000
Construct kitchen and renovation, Long An .................... 1,100,000
Construct kitchen and renovation, Tay Ninh ................... 1,738,000
Construct kitchen and wall, renovation, An Giang ............ 3,319,000
Construct dispensary and renovation, Ba Xuyen ............... 2,500,000
Construct prisoner quarter, bathroom, kitchen and sewerage
system, and renovation, Bac Lieu ................................ 4,830,000
Construct dispensary and renovation, Go Gong ................. 1,500,000
Renovation Vinh Long ............................................. 479,000
Construct dispensary Vinh Long ................................ 979,000
Construct kitchen, Bien Hoa ..................................... 2,200,000
Construct kitchen, Kien Giang ................................ 973,000
Construct warehouse, Quang Nam ................................ 246,000
Renovate defense system, Quang Nam ........................... 376,000
Construct compound walls, Kien Giang ........................ 357,000
Renovate blockhouses, Vinh Long ................................ 357,000

Tools for carpenter shop, tailors shop, nursery, and metal shop
at provincial correction centers ................................ 6,105,000
Continued

Generators
Blankets and mats for national and provincial centers
Beds, mosquito nets, and mattresses for dispensaries at Ninh Du, Hau Lieu and Phong Dinh
Medical chests at national and provincial centers

CY 69: VN $40,000 (revised)

Generators
Blankets and mats for national and provincial centers
Beds, mosquito nets, and mattresses for dispensaries at Ninh Du, Hau Lieu and Phong Dinh
Medical chests at national and provincial centers

CY 70: VN $27,000,000 (programed)

Operating supplies and services
Handicraft supplies and materials
Vehicle accessories for automotive vocational shops
Paint
Equipment and material for Dalat Juvenile Reformatory (cool weather uniforms, sneakers, books, toys, and sporting equipment)
Vocational hand tools
Kerosene stoves for 41 centers
Beds, mattresses and mosquito nets for 20 dispensaries
Equipment for prisoner motivation research and development
PA system, protections equipment, cameras, and film

CY 71: VN $25,000,000 (programed)

Educational materials for national and provincial centers
Handicraft training materials for national and provincial centers
Clothing for detainees at Dalat Juvenile Reformatory
Clothing for detainees at Tan Hiep Special Center
Blankets, sleeping mats and raincoats at:
Dalat
Tan Hiep
Pains

Contract services for maintaining electrical systems, water pumps, generators, and vehicles
Books, magazines, and leaflets for the increased correctional effectiveness program (ICE)
Playground equipment, Dalat
Materials for musical program development for ICE
Training aids, other support requirements
Materials for educational/vocational training, Tan Hiep
Equipment for vocational training at national and provincial centers
Equipment for vocational training, Tan Hiep
Dental equipment, national centers

Instruments for musical program development for civil education program
Generators, Dalat
Projectors/screens, Dalat and Tan Hiep
Recruitment equipment, Dalat and Tan Hiep
TV set, amplifiers, and wire broadcasting systems at:
Dalat
Tan Hiep
National and provincial centers

Construction materials/equipment for waiting house, Chi Hoa

CY 72: VN $69,000,000 (programed)

Recreational/educational aids/materials for vocational training
Blankets, mats, raincoats for inmates
Repair and maintenance, POL and transportation
Materials to increase the correctional effect program
Animal husbandry program
Training
Construction materials, Saigon Correction Center Hospital
Repair materials (cement, rebar, tile, etc.)
Support materials for psywar battalion programs, Con Son
Water system, Con Son
Purchase seeds for agronomy program at centers
Tools, handicrafts projects
Tools, Bang Son program
TV sets and broadcasting system
Tools, automotive shops.......................................... 500,000
Electric fans for prisoners........................................ 500,000
Tools for support of psywar battalion program................... 2,000,000
Boats, engines for Con Son....................................... 1,200,000
Tools for agronomy program..................................... 700,000

CY 73: VN$50,000,000 (programmed):
These funds were obligated February 21, 1973, and are committed to be expended for the purposes outlined in the GVN national budget for CY 1973, title 34, chapter 511, project No. 710-353.

ASSISTANCE-IN-KIND (AIK) FUNDS

In addition to the AAC funds detailed above, AIK funds have been used in the corrections centers project. Most significant use of these funds was in 1971 for the following:

Construction of three 96-cell isolation units, Con Son......................... 47,200,000
Goats for animal husbandry program, Con Son.............................. 2,900,000
Renovation and construction of isolation cells, Thu Duc.......................... 687,000

Total since 1967: $6.5 million just for prisons.

EXHIBIT B: REPORTS AND LETTERS FROM THE QUAKER TEAM IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE, VIETNAM, 1972

Since 1968 the Quaker Service Team in Quang Ngai Province of South Vietnam has paid frequent visits to the local prison and the prison ward of the province hospital. Besides attending urgent medical needs, they have distributed medicines regularly to patients with long term problems and provided an infant feeding program (canned milk, soap, vitamins) for children jailed with their mothers. In July, 1970 Dr. Marjorie Nelson gave testimony to the House Sub-Committee on Government Operations of the evidence of maltreatment and torture she and other members of the Team had observed. In July, 1972 Marjorie Nelson is remembered by a 35-year old woman in the hospital ward, a Team member observes: “Marge goes home and testifies before Congress about the torturing she witnessed at the prison, but the same woman who was tortured four years ago is still in prison and still being tortured and no one has done a damned thing about it.” For years the Team has witnessed first-hand the effects of torture, and more recently, an increase in its use. In August, 1972, one member of the Team wrote to the home office of the AFSC in Philadelphia, “the police repression due to the new martial law and the mass numbers of people being arrested and tortured is at an all time high in Vietnam” and urged, “We should report truthfully and in detail what we know about this situation in the same manner we report civilian war casualties.”

The main job of the Quaker Team has been to operate since 1967 a Rehabilitation Center, which is supported by the American Friends Service Committee. Free medical and nursing care, physical therapy and artificial limbs are provided each year to over 800 people, without regard to religion, political views or income, though the Center accepts only civilians for treatment. Soldiers and veterans are given priority at other rehabilitation centers. About 80% of the patients treated at the Center are old men, and women and children. Two themes especially have filled the letters from the Quaker Team in Quang Ngai to the Philadelphia office: anguish at the U. S. government’s insistence in pursing the war and prolonging the suffering, and admiration for the courage, spirit and ingenuity of the patients and staff at the Center. About three-quarters of the patients have war-caused injuries. In 1971 the Team issued a statistical summary which reported, “Of those patients willing to state clearly which party in the war caused their injury 60% placed responsibility with the Allied forces (U.S. and ARVN) and 31% indicated that the NLF caused their injuries.”

With similar care the Team has recorded their experiences with the prison: To report truthfully. Following are excerpts of the Quaker Team of their recent (1972) knowledge of treatment of prisoners. Some of the letters discuss the difficulties the Team have encountered in their dealings with prison authorities, both Vietnamese and American. In April Team visits to the province prison
The first document was prepared in October, 1972 by Jane and David Barton, Field Directors, Quaker Service; Quang Ngai, and is "an overall impression" from the AFSC staff and medical personnel who have examined prisoners. Following this summary, reports and quotes from letters are presented in chronological order. To protect people who might suffer retaliation from the authorities patient/prisoner names are changed.

For the past five years the American Friends Service Committee doctors and team members in Quang Ngai have made medical visits to the Quang Ngai Prison. There has also been a diet-supplement program for women being detained with their young children. Medical visits have also been carried out at the prison ward of the Quang Ngai Province Hospital. At the same time many prisoners requiring surgery, prostheses, and physical therapy have been referred to our Rehabilitation Center for treatment. Due to this involvement with the prison situation in Quang Ngai, American Friends Service Committee team members have been able to gather many first-hand accounts from Vietnamese people who have been confined, interrogated, and tortured. American Friends Service Committee doctors and medical personnel have examined many patient/prisoners whose injuries appear to be directly related to the tortures they describe.

The following information was gathered from first-hand reports of prisoners and from observations made by AFSC staff in Quang Ngai concerning conditions of confinement, interrogation, and torture at the Province Interrogation Center, the Quang Ngai Prison, and the prison ward of the Quang Ngai Province Hospital:

1. Prisoners explained that during interrogation they were forced to drink large amounts of water mixed with whitewash (lime), soap, or salty fish sauce. When their stomachs became bloated, the interrogator jumped on their stomachs. One AFSC doctor examined several patients who had "pettial" seizures and memory lapses. He felt this was due to brain damage caused by the drinking of such toxic material.

2. Prisoners also told an AFSC doctor that they were forced to lie on a table and if a prisoner didn't respond to questioning properly, the interrogator would reach underneath his rib-cage and crack or break the prisoner's ribs. This same doctor examined and had X-ray evidence of several prisoner/patients with cracked or broken ribs.

3. AFSC doctors have examined many prisoners who have complained of internal aches and pains. These prisoners often had black and blue marks, open wounds, and raw skin showing on their bodies. The prisoners claimed the injuries were caused by general beatings to their bodies—especially to the back of their necks, bottoms of their feet, and chest—with club-like sticks. For instance, on two occasions an AFSC doctor examined prisoners with chest injuries. The prison officials claimed these two prisoners had fallen down a well, but the prisoners told our doctor that they had in fact been beaten.

4. AFSC doctors have witnessed prisoners, as many as fifteen women, having emotional fits or seizures. The prisoners convulse violently, froth at the mouth, and have muscle spasms. Other prisoners try to tie their arms and legs to some stable object and hold the convulsing prisoners down so that they won't hurt themselves. One doctor witnessed as many as five prisoners convulsing, thrashing, and yelling at the same time. These fits or seizures greatly puzzled AFSC doctors who had never seen similar seizures in the United States. AFSC doctors suspected that these prisoners had experienced "emotional trauma" and that these seizures were either an emotional release or a subconscious attempt to avoid further interrogation and torture. Two AFSC doctors have witnessed prisoners having hysterical reactions when electric lights were turned on in the room where they were allowed to examine the prisoners. Later it was reported that these prisoners had been tortured with electricity.

5. Prisoners have claimed that during interrogation police have molested them and hit them when they would not respond to questioning. One such case...
is that of Nguyen thi Lang* who was interrogated for nine hours before losing consciousness. When she regained consciousness her vagina was bleeding and continued to do so for several days. Afterwards, our medical staff treated her for hysterical fits. Then she was taken from the prison ward at the hospital back to the Interrogation Center where she says the interrogators banged her head repeatedly against a wall. Examination later on her x-ray by our medical staff showed a skull fracture and brain hemorrhage. As a result, John Talmadge diagnosed that this prisoner "suffers from persistent right-sided hemiplegia."

In addition, she manifests symptoms of a complex neurological disorder." He requested that this prisoner be transferred from the prison to the hospital for treatment but no action has been taken by the prison authorities.

6. As a result of confinement, many prisoners have contracted tuberculosis. These prisoners are rarely given any medical care. In fact, our doctors have seen many cases which they were not allowed to treat. The doctors have also noted that these prisoners were not isolated from the others, so that there was and still is much communication of TB among the prisoners.

7. The medical care given to prisoners at the Quang Ngai Interrogation Center, Quang Ngai Prison, and prison ward of the Quang Ngai Provincial Hospital is almost non-existent. No Vietnamese doctor or trained medical person sees any of the prisoners and there are few medicines stronger than aspirin available. In the past, the AFSC doctor was allowed to make weekly visits to the Quang Ngai Prison but could examine only those patients the prison officials wished the doctor to see. The AFSC has never been allowed to visit any prisoners at the Province Interrogation Center but patients/prisoners from the Interrogation Center have been treated when they come to the prison ward of the hospital. Our doctors have had no control over the patient/prisoner's length of stay in the prison ward and many of them have been returned for further interrogation even though they were still diagnosed as seriously ill and under treatment. One example is that of Pham thi Toi whom our medical staff discovered had a "definite and unmistakable irregularity in the rhythm of her heart" which was symptomatic of a cardiovascular problem of potentially serious consequences. In addition the patient had a three-month old fractured femur due to a bullet wound and thus was unable to walk. Our medical staff wanted to remove the bullet from this prisoner's leg and to evaluate properly the cause of her serious heart condition, but the prisoner was returned to the prison and he was unable to treat her. In efforts to treat patients at the Province Interrogation Center, Quang Ngai Prison, and the prison ward of the hospital, the AFSC staff has continually been thwarted by a lack of cooperation and humanitarian concern on the part of the Saigon government and the American advisors.

8. Prisoners who are at the Quang Ngai Provincial Hospital for treatment are chained to their beds by prison guards regardless of their injury. In the prison ward of the hospital, patients are chained two together as well as to the bed. There they are released twice daily to hobble together to the bathroom. Three patients receiving treatment at the AFSC's Rehabilitation Center—a paraplegic, an above-knee amputee, and a fractured femur case—were all handcuffed to their beds for periods of a year and a half to two years without knowing why nor by whom they were being held captive. They had never been to the Province Interrogation Center nor to the Quang Ngai Prison. The history of their arrivals at the hospital followed a similar pattern. They were all injured in "insecure" areas, taken to the American military hospital at ChuLai for emergency treatment, then moved to the Quang Ngai Provincial Hospital at which time they were immediately chained or handcuffed to their beds and never questioned by police or government personnel. Proper medical care, physical therapy, and prosthetic care for these prisoner/patients were severely hindered and their recovery prolonged by this practice of handcuffing and chaining them to their beds.

The Province Interrogation Center is located in Quang Ngai city but is a separate facility from the Quang Ngai Prison. There are always several hundred men and women prisoners at the Interrogation Center and well over a thousand at the Quang Ngai Prison. A safe estimate is that 90% of the prisoners in Quang Ngai are being held for political reasons. The severe interrogating and torturing takes place at the Interrogation Center. Most prisoners do not know the charges against them; they haven't had a trial; and they have no knowledge of the length of their jail sentence. CIA personnel in Quang
Ngai have been observed frequently visiting the Interrogation Center and it is believed that they provide support and assistance to the Interrogation Center. From numerous accounts one can conclude that the conditions of confinement, interrogation, and torture in Quang Ngai are repressive and harsh. Whereas much attention and concern has been focused on American Prisoners of War being held in North and South Vietnam, there has been relatively no interest in alleviating the suffering of the many thousands of political prisoners being held by the Saigon government. The United States must assume the major responsibility for these conditions since for many years now the United States has been financing and advising the Vietnamese institutions and personnel running the prison system for the Saigon government.

DAVID AND JANE BARTON.

LETTER FROM THE FIELD CO-DIRECTOR, QUAKER SERVICE, QUANG NGAI TO THE COMMANDER OF NATIONAL POLICE, QUANG NGAI, MARCH 21, 1972

To: Commander of National Police, Quang Ngai.
Copies to: Senior Province Advisor, National Police Advisor.
From: Field Director, Quaker Service Rehabilitation Center, Quang Ngai.

DEAR SIR: This letter is written to inform you of a problem which makes our work at the Quaker Rehabilitation Center difficult. The American Friends Service Committee has a Rehabilitation Center in Quang Ngai in order to provide medical care, physical therapy, and artificial limbs to war-injured civilians regardless of their race, religion, or political views. Currently at our Center we are treating three patients who are handcuffed to their beds. The fact that these three patients are handcuffed to their beds and only released for short periods of time complicates our medical treatment of these patients, prolongs their recovery, and makes their living conditions disagreeable.

The most critical case concerns Tran, a paraplegic, who has been handcuffed to his bed on the Orthopaedic Ward of the Quang Ngai Hospital for 15 months. Because Tran is paralyzed from the waist down he has no control over his urinary and bowel functions. This incontinent problem is obviously complicated by his being handcuffed to his bed. Also as a paraplegic patient Tran has been trained to continually change his body position while lying in bed otherwise he is likely to develop bed sores which are quite susceptible to serious infections. Such bed sores are a common cause of death among paraplegic patients. Being handcuffed to his hospital bed severely inhibits his ability to continually change positions thus increasing the likelihood of bed sores. A paraplegic patient should also exercise several times daily with his braces in our Physical Therapy Department if there is to be any progress in increasing the patient's chances for a longer, healthier life. Currently, he is only released for one or two short periods of time a day during the week to come to our Center for physical therapy. This is insufficient. Because of his paralysis Tran faces a daily struggle to survive and improve his chances for a longer, healthier life. For medical reasons and for reasons of human concern this man should not be handcuffed to his bed. Ever since arriving at the hospital, 15 months ago, he has been handcuffed to his bed; not knowing why nor by whom he was being held captive.

This is the same case as with the other two patients who have also been handcuffed to their beds ever since arriving at the Quang Ngai Hospital. Both Le and PCT do not know why nor by whom they are being held. Le has had his left leg amputated above the knee and half his right foot amputated. He has been handcuffed to his bed for 11 months. He is staying at the Quaker Hostel. At the Rehabilitation Center he has been fitted for his artificial leg and he is now gaining training before the leg is finished. PCT has been handcuffed to his bed on Ward C of the Quang Ngai Hospital for 15 months. He is currently receiving physical therapy at our Center because of the severe fractures to his leg and the resulting fixed knee. These two patients, Le and PCT, are also not released frequently enough to allow for proper medical, physical therapy, and prosthetic care. Because they are handcuffed to their beds except for the one or two brief periods they are released daily during the week their living conditions are uncomfortable and difficult.
As I think you can realize from these brief descriptions, the practice of handcuffing or chaining patients to their beds for long periods of time without their knowing why nor by whom they are being held causes many serious problems. I would like to respectfully request that this practice be discontinued immediately. I am most willing to be consulted and questioned further as to possible solutions to this problem.

DAVID PAUL BARTON.

REPORT FROM THE FIELD CO-DIRECTOR, QUAKER SERVICE, QUANG NGAI, JULY 30, 1972

WOMEN IN PRISON, QUANG NGAI, VIETNAM

Recently I have been making daily visits to the prison ward at the Quang Ngai Province Hospital with AFSC medical staff. The ward is a small room where prisoners are brought from the prison or interrogation center. The selection of those prisoners who are allowed to go to the hospital seems to be entirely arbitrary. Some prisoners are gravely ill while others have minor complaints. "Important" or "dangerous" prisoners can never go to the hospital no matter how serious their illness or injury. There are over two thousand political prisoners currently being held in Quang Ngai but there are only eight beds in the prison ward. At two bodies a bed, that means only sixteen of these prisoners can be in the hospital at the same time. Even then they don't get treated. No doctor is assigned to or visits the ward. The nurse does change their bandages every few days, but the only medicine the prisoners are ever given is aspirin.

Many people who visit our rehabilitation center empathize with the leg-less children, but I identify most with women of my own age. I've felt particularly troubled at seeing the many young women prisoners at the hospital. These women are chained to their beds and chained together in pairs. Twice a day they are unlocked and released in order to go to the bathroom, but their ankle chains are not undone, so two of them must hobble and awkwardly drag their chains around together. Since I act as the doctor's interpreter, I talk with all the patients as we treat them. Some of the youngest women seem so sweet and naive; they even giggle and laugh a bit. Others are quiet and strong and a few look at me with hostility and hate. One young girl is now on the ward at the hospital because she rejected an ARVN officer. This ex-boyfriend had police friends and, in revenge, told the police that the girl was a VC. She was taken to the prison where they beat her and repeatedly banged her head against the wall. Later she was given electric shocks under her fingernails. She often blanked out and once when she awoke, she found blood coming from her vagina. Sometimes during the torturing, she received nerve damage and she is now a hemiplegic; meaning that half of her body, the left half, is completely paralyzed from the neck down. Also, she has repeated seizures or fits during which she thrashes and convulses, foams at the mouth, and yells the things she must have told the police while she was tortured, such as "I'm innocent. Ask my villagers, I'm not a VC." I've witnessed several of these seizures. The other prisoners seem to know when they are beginning and tie her leg and arms to the bed with soft bandages. The person who is chained to her tries to move away and someone else keeps the girl from swallowing her tongue. No one says anything. Nor is there a change in anyone's expression in the room. It seems as if the prisoners look on dispassionately, but I'm sure every scene like this increases the other prisoners' bitterness and resolve to struggle. It's well known that the best revolutionaries are made in prison.

Another woman on the ward can't lift her head. She was beaten all over her back and neck. The entire area is exposed raw skin and muscles and in some places the lacerations were so deep, they had to be stitched. Whenever I saw her, she was in a seated position with her head hung down. It wasn't until I saw her lying down that I noticed she was very pregnant; six and a half months she says, I wonder if the baby is alive.

An older woman on the ward called me over to look at herself and a fifteen year old girl. The young girl was totally vacant. She didn't hear or say anything. I kept looking at a necklace she was wearing made of round white stones. It's rare to see Vietnamese women in Quang Ngai with jewelry and it seemed...
particular irony that the police would beat this girl into a coma-like state without stealing or ripping off her necklace. She was a delicate girl in her white blouse and necklace and her hair tied back with a length of hospital gauze. The hot, soapy water the girl had been forced to drink was a toxic which has probably caused brain damage and memory lapses.

The thirty-five year old woman chained to this younger girl had also been beaten and tortured, but she was an oldtimer. She even knew Mac Si Mni (Marge Nelson, former team member/doctor) when Marge used to visit the prison. I thought, my god, Marge goes home and testifies before congress about the torturing she witnessed at the prison, but the same woman who was tortured four years ago is still in prison and still being tortured and no one has done a damned thing about it. I thought, too, about the years this woman has been in jail. Marge has returned to the US, married, finished a master's degree in public health, practiced medicine, had a baby, and talked and travelled in many countries. This woman hasn't gone anywhere or done anything. She says she has been a political prisoner for six years.

Somehow these women persevere, but I wonder if they can do it indefinitely. A Quang Ngai police official told a reporter friend of mine that the police are beginning a special campaign to pick up more women. They suspect that more women than ever are indirectly or directly working to oppose the Thieu government. I imagine that the torture and suffering we've seen at the prison and the prison hospital ward over the last five years is just a glimpse of a new era of struggle for the women of Vietnam.

JANE LEIDA G. BARTON

LETTER FROM THE QUAKER TEAM IN QUANG NGAI TO PHILADELPHIA AFSC,
AUGUST 3, 1972

John, Phan and I have been visiting the prison ward at the hospital as a temporary alternative to our visiting the prison itself. There is no doubt that many of the prisoners have received cruel and inhumane treatments: Severe beatings or the forced drinking of soapy or white-wash water are the most frequent tortures. Presently we are treating a number of patients such as those I described in the article. Plus there are patients such as a woman who was shot through the chest and now has a lung abscess. Another girl had her leg set so badly, one leg is several inches shorter than the other. She now can't move the leg and thus could really benefit from physical therapy. The bullet which caused her injury is, of course, still in her leg. But worse, the young woman, has a severe cardiac problem and without treatment may not have a long time to live. Because returning to prison or another beating might be fatal, we are trying to get her released though our hopes aren't high. Today we saw a new patient—a chained, female prisoner who was crazy, reduced to nonsensical, bizarre behavior. The policeman-guard at the ward sidelonged and laughed at her, sarcastically asking us if we could help her. I suggested to him that she might be better if she had her freedom.

I think our visits to the ward have been "successful." The prisoners are interested in us and pleased we come. The most frustrating and sad aspect is that the prisoners come and go so quickly. One day we will see someone (such as a guy with pneumonia or bad case of TB) and arrive the next day with medicine, but the patient will be gone. Several of the women we got about have already been returned to the interrogation center. I felt torn of hope and anticipated seeing them, but suddenly they disappear—their beds empty or replaced with a new prisoner.

LETTER FROM THE QUAKER TEAM IN QUANG NGAI TO PHILADELPHIA AFSC,
AUGUST 27, 1972

Prison Program Quang Ngai. A little history. In April we received a letter from the head of the prison saying we were not allowed to visit the prison anymore for 'special reasons' which we assumed, and were informed, was the result of general tightening of security. Then in June when we returned to Quang Ngai we inquired about the reasons for not continuing our work.
at the prison and wrote an official letter to the Province Chief. In the meantime John Talmadge and I began making visits to the prison ward at the hospital. As I've already written, we treated a lot of mighty sick people, none of whom were being seen by a doctor.

Torturing: While examining prisoners, John and I were convinced that we saw what were the results of torturing. (1) John could not determine some of this through physical examination... (2) On occasion John was able to get x-rays to confirm certain injuries such as skull fractures, cracked ribs, etc. (3) This was corroborated with direct information from the prisoners who seemed very free to tell us about the treatment of the police, especially since there wasn't a policeman/guard around a lot of the time. Naturally, the team was most disturbed and angry over the entire situation—being kicked out of the prison, the total lack of medical treatment available to the prisoners, but most of all the torture we felt the prisoners had suffered. We decided as a team to take whatever cautious steps we could in Quang Ngai to try to correct the situation.

August 1: John, David, Paul and I made a visit to see McBride, the Deputy Province Senior Advisor. We stated that the purpose of our visit was to inform him that in our work at the hospital we were seeing prisoners who we felt had been inhumanely treated and wished to bring these facts to his attention. We explained that in our work we prefer to work through Vietnamese channels and planned to see the Province Chief, but wanted the Americans to be aware of our dissatisfaction and intentions. In addition, we made sure that McBride understood the delicacy of our situation since we want to return to the prison and continue to work at the hospital. We told him not to speak to anyone on our behalf. McBride didn't have much of a response except to talk about the cruelty of Orientals. He said torturing "comes to them naturally. They're just not my kind of people." McBride assured us he would relay our conversation to Colonel Boman, the PSA.

August 9: The nurse and I were on our way to visit the prison ward when we were met by two policemen—one from the prison, the other from the interrogation center. They told us that the Quakers were not allowed to visit the prison ward at the hospital anymore. The reason was that since we no longer could see prisoners at the prison, the authorities felt we shouldn't be allowed to treat prisoners at the hospital either. One policeman said that the police and prison officials don't have "confidence" in the Quakers. He also mumbled something about not wanting the prisoners to talk to us. I didn't say much to the policemen at the time since I wanted to talk to the team first and felt, too, that the police were only conveying orders from "higher" up.

August 10: John and Paul went to the Public Health Headquarters to try again to make an appointment with the Province Chief. They met in the hall and David said that we wanted to talk to him, Colonel Lot, about the prison situation. In essence, Colonel Lot's response was, that he'd already written a letter saying the Quakers could not continue to work at the prison "forever". Although David was polite and tried to get Colonel Lot to give him the reasons for his actions, Lot was gruff and curt with David, Lot also refused to meet us to discuss the matter personally.

That afternoon, after checking with the police-guards, John, David and I went to the prison ward at the hospital and spoke publicly to all the prisoners telling them that we were told we could no longer visit the prison ward. We said we were sorry we had to interrupt our medical treatments since we knew many of them were badly in need of medicine, but that we would try our hardest to persuade the authorities to let us continue their work. We were cautious and non-acusatory in what we said, but felt we owed an explanation to the prisoners as to why we'd suddenly terminated our daily medical visits.

August 11: Meeting with Boman: John, David and I met with Colonel Boman, the new PSA, to discuss three problems: (1) our desire to resume our medical visits to the prison, (2) our interest in continuing to work at the prison ward at the hospital, (3) the results of torturing we'd felt we'd witnessed. Colonel Boman spent a lot of time running down all the reasons why the Americans are ignorant of what is going on at the detention center and prison and why they can't change the Vietnamese system very much since the Americans are only advisors and must stay on good terms with their counterparts. Among our rebuttals was the comment that we felt that any country which could wage
a war of the magnitude America has in Vietnam surely has the power and resources to change a local prison system. When we didn't seem to be getting anywhere with Colonel Boman, David Paul said that we were trying to work through the Americans and Vietnamese in Quang Ngai, but that if that didn't produce any results, we knew that the press would be interested in the problem and that we would also inform members of Congress. Colonel Boman winced a little and asked David if we were trying to scare him. David replied that we weren't. Quakers worked in the open and we did not want to do anything behind his back. We therefore were informing both the Americans and the Vietnamese about our observations about the treatment of prisoners, but that we were very disturbed over the situation so that if the Americans and Vietnamese couldn't do anything, we would act in ways we felt necessary to correct the situation as we saw it.

Letter from the Province Chief: We received the promised letter from Colonel Loi which thanked us for our past work “in this savage time of war which the communists have brought upon us.” The letter went on to say, “We admire your concern for serving the people of Vietnam regardless of their color, race, religion, or politics” (a quote from our letter to him), “but those evil people who kill innocent people yesterday and today, who are treated by your organization, do not change their cruel attitude. I cannot grant your request to return to work in the prison.” The translation sounds a bit awkward, but even Vietnamese who read the letter were surprised at the bigness of the implication made in the letter that by giving medical help to prisoners we were helping the communists.

Response from Colonel Boman: Late in the afternoon David Paul spoke to Boman again. Boman said (1) the Quaker prison program was definitely terminated (2) we would be allowed to make visits to the prison ward at the hospital (3) there would be an investigation by the Americans and the Vietnamese about our accusations that some prisoners are being tortured (4) that a Vietnamese doctor would begin making visits to the prison (the same way they do at the hospital, we thought). Colonel Boman elaborated on what Colonel Loi had given as reasons for our not continuing our work at the prison which basically focused on Loi’s not liking the Quaker philosophy/politics. Boman quoted Loi as saying we spoke against the Saigon government, Colonel Loi also told Boman that he didn’t understand why we wanted to visit the prison when our purpose for being in Vietnam was to do “orthopedic work.” The only specific incident Loi mentioned to Boman was that once a Quaker worker told a prisoner that the VC had taken control of areas south of town and cut the highway so the hospital truck with medicines for the prisoners couldn’t get through. David responded tactfully and fully to these accusations. For the second time, David explained to Boman the purposes of our work in Quang Ngai and the work of AFSC and Quakers in general. Colonel Boman listened and seemed somewhat understanding, though not in agreement, with our ideas. He had also done a little research of his own and mentioned reading a file on Marge [Dr. Nelson] and some of her testimony. “She really questioned Quang Ngai up one side and down the other, but of course, when the Americans checked into her accusations, they were all found to be untrue.”

August 12: John and I visited the prison ward at the hospital to find that at least a third of the patients had been removed, especially the most seriously sick patients. In fact, only one prisoner who was really in need of treatment was left on the ward. The other prisoners all had minor ailments—“winds in their chests, heat in the stomach, etc.” We were especially concerned to discover the two most seriously ill prisoners were no longer there—a woman with a serious heart problem and bullet in her leg and a young hemiplegic woman with a fractured skull. The police said that both these women, along with the other sick prisoners, were taken back for “further interrogation.” Ironically, we had just written letters with John’s signature, to the province Chief and head of the Interrogation Center asking for these two women to be released for medical treatment and that “further imprisonment will constitute a definite threat to their life and health.” It seemed obvious that now that the Quakers were working so hard in the prison ward, both the police had removed all the very sick patients, particularly those whom we might suspect had been tortured. We wondered if in the future the police would “screen”
(more than they do already) those prisoners who would be allowed to go to the hospital and prevent many of those who needed medical help from seeing us.

August 14: David Paul and I confronted Colonel Boman once again to say that we'd felt "double-crossed." Once the Quakers were let back onto the prison ward at the hospital, all of the seriously ill prisoners were removed. We gave him copies in English of the two letters we'd written about the two women prisoners who we felt were currently in danger by being back in the detention center due to their medical conditions. Boman did not make any promises to ensure that the police would not prohibit prisoners who need medical help from coming to the prison, but he did, say he would check to see what the Vietnamese were doing about our requests of release of the two prisoners.

Presently: Colonel Boman is currently on vacation, so we've not had further word from him nor have we gotten a response to the letters about the women prisoners from the Americans or Vietnamese. Caroline or I have continued to visit the prison ward with the nurse since John's departure, but the prisoners allowed on the ward continue to only be those with minor complaints.

REPORT FROM THE FIELD COORDINATOR, QUAKER SERVICE, QUANG NGAI

Notes on some prisoners treated in the prison ward, Quang Ngai province hospital during August, 1972

Pham Thi Tho: (See following statement) 18 year old woman. Wounded in Mo Duc. Shot in the thigh and the bullet still lodged in her leg. Her leg was set at the prison. A cast was on the leg for three months, but there was a malunion so that one leg is two inches shorter than the other. While examining the patient, John Talmadge, the AFSC medical staff there, discovered that she had a very irregular heart beat, in John's words "a cardiovascular problem of potentially serious consequence." This patient was in the prison ward with a temperature for six days, also suffered from nausea, stomach ache, and back pains. She went back to the Province Interrogation Center once for three days but returned with fever and nausea. John Talmadge felt that some of these symptoms might be related to a mild heart attack. This prisoner had also lost muscle control of her foot and leg thus finding it difficult to walk. The AFSC physical therapist, Caroline Elliot, did exercises with the patient on the prison ward. A brace maker measured her foot and made her special surgical shoes, but they have never been able to deliver them because the prisoner was removed from the ward. A Doctor An signed the hospital release form for this patient/prisoner but to our knowledge this doctor never visited the prison ward and never examined the patient. On the day our surgical nurse went to prepare this patient for an operation to remove the bullet from her leg, we were told we could no longer visit the prison ward at the hospital. Three days later after we lodged a protest, we were allowed back on the prison ward of the hospital but this particular prisoner had been sent back to the Interrogation Center in spite of John Talmadge's letter fully explaining his evaluation of this patient's medical condition. Copies of this letter were sent to Colonel Boman, the Senior Province Advisor, and Ken Burns, advisor to the National Police and Vietnamese officials. Thus, they are aware of this prisoner's weakened medical condition. The guards at the prison ward told us that this patient was a "prisoner-of-war" and had to go back to the Interrogation Center for further questioning.

Nguyen thi Lang: (See following statement) John Talmadge first saw this woman prisoner before visiting the prison ward. A physical therapist found out about the prisoner and brought her to the Center since the prisoner was continually having "fits." One of her complaints was of bleeding from her vagina. A vaginal examination was performed. Then the patient was returned to the prison. Later she was seen again on the prison ward and she was still continuing to have "fits," as many as ten during the day and night. She was unable to move the right side of her body. Examination showed swelling on the top of her head because, she said, the police had bashed her head against a wall. An x-ray was taken and confirmed that she had suffered a skull fracture with resulting paralysis to the right side of her body.
Young boy, 17 years old: Arrived at the prison ward from the Interrogation Center during the time we were not allowed to visit the ward. The boy's father came to the Rehabilitation Center to ask us to help because he had heard the Quakers were "kind." We went to the ward and the police guards were so afraid that the young boy was going to die that they let us in the ward. The boy had not gone to the bathroom for four days (urinated) and was in extreme pain. John Talmadge thought it was a block in the urinary tract, but he waited someone else's assistance on the problem, so Dr. Khai came and assisted in administering medication. Later, we were told that the young boy prisoner had been tortured with electricity attached to his penis.

Two young boys in same bed: One with a mine injury to his foot, one with a lower leg wound. Both were treated with penicillin and given crutches.

Woman six months pregnant, 34 years old: Neck and back injuries attributed to beatings received at Interrogation Center. Also said she was forced to drink soapy (lime) water solution. On the prison ward for three days then returned to the Interrogation Center.

Woman, 32 years old: Bullet wound piercing her chest and lung. X-ray showed abscess on her lung from bullet wound. We treated with penicillin but the patient was returned to the Interrogation Center before recovery.

Old, wrinkled, skinny man: Extremely swollen neck. John Talmadge diagnosed it as a glandular infection/fever. Forced to return to the Interrogation Center because the police did not have enough handcuffs to lock him to a bed on the ward. We were able to give him a shot of Bicillin, a long-acting penicillin, ordered by John Ferguson. We requested that this old man be returned to the hospital for treatment. We never saw him again.

Another old man with a strange paralysis: Unable to raise or move his arms; his legs were also partially paralyzed. Prisoner kept trying to move. Other prisoners on the ward fed and cared for him. Doctor and Physical Therapist puzzled by this paralysis and its cause. In about three days this man was able to stand and he gradually improved.

Man with TB: Deep cough, spitting up blood—tuberculosis. Suggested that this man go to the public health TB clinic for tests and treatment. He remained on prison ward for six days with the above patients before being taken for tests; then he was returned to the prison.

Young man, age 23: High fever and sweating. Doctor listened to him breathe and thought this prisoner had either TB or pneumonia. The doctor saw the patient at 5:00 PM but the next morning when the doctor returned to see the patient and give some medication the prisoner had been returned to the Interrogation Center. We requested that the prisoner return for treatment to the hospital but there was no response and the prisoner was never seen again.

Young girl with white stone necklace: She had "petit mal" seizures and stared into space. She exhibited symptoms of loss of memory. She said she had been forced to drink a white-wash, soapy solution many times while being interrogated.

Young boy, age 19: He had been shot thru the palm of his hand which had become very infected and swollen. The prison guard brought this prisoner to the Rehabilitation Center three times for cleansing and treatment of the wound. Bicillin was injected and the infection cleared up thus saving his hand which otherwise would have had to be amputated because of the worsening infection.

Young girl with grey blouse: This prisoner said she had been forced to drink water mixed with a lime/whitewash solution after which the guards jumped on her bloated stomach. She said she had also been beaten with a heavy club. She complained of pain in her chest and stomach. On three occasions this prisoner was observed having fits.

Two young girls: General complaints of aches and chest pains. They had bruises. Both had several fits.

Strong, large woman, age 45: Also complained of chest pains. Among other tortures she specifically mentioned electricity. This woman had the most dramatic "fits" or "seizures" of all the prisoners. She would thrash violently, rolling and crying. Her entire body would rise in the air, her back arched. She would then come crashing down on her bed, sometimes causing the bed to move several feet with each violent jolt. This woman's seizures would last approximately fifteen minutes.
Another older woman: This woman was chained to the above mentioned woman. This woman said she had been beaten with a club on her chest, neck, and face. Upon examination, the doctor observed that her face was severely swollen, her chest and neck were bruised, and her chest x-ray showed cracked ribs. She also related that she had been forced to drink water with lime. This prisoner was unable to walk and had to be helped by other prisoners in order to go to the bathroom. This prisoner also related that she had known Doctor Marge Nelson when Doctor Nelson visited the Quang Ngai prison some four years ago.

Man who never said anything: This prisoner's expressionless, apathetic behavior was explained by other prisoners who said that he had been tortured and beaten so long and so many times that now he didn't know anything and was always in this semiconscious state.

Crazy woman: A fairly young woman with close cropped hair. Totally nonsensical behavior, unaware of her surroundings. She moaned, moved her body rhythmically, chanted, smiled, and talked to no one. Other prisoners said she hadn't been crazy before she was put in prison. Upon examination she seemed to have nothing medically wrong with her.

Jane Leida G. Barton.
"our hearts that you will do everything possible at this time to help us. As for the future, shall we be still at Chi Hoa, able to write to you occasionally? Or shall we lie in the tiger cages of Con Son listening to the howling of the waves and seeing only four walls of the prison, imagining that they are the walls of our Faculty lecture rooms?

Dear Father, accept our warmest wishes for your good health.

(Name and signature omitted).

[From the New York Times, March 8, 1973]

FOUR SOUTH VIETNAMESE DESCRIBE TORTURE IN PRISON TIGER CAGE

(By Sylvan Fox)

SAIGON, SOUTH VIETNAM, MARCH 2.—A group of recently released political prisoners, reportedly spirited into Saigon secretly, described today how they were beaten, tortured and ultimately crippled during years of confinement at the Government island prison on Con Son.

One of them, a young man, in describing his year-long detention in the tiny cells that have come to be known as "tiger cages," said:

"During that time not a single day passed that we were not beaten at least once. They would open the cages and they would use wooden sticks to beat us from above. They would drag us out and beat us until we lost consciousness."

The prisoners' stories, told in a hospital room to which they had been brought by friends and relatives, reflected the plight of thousands of political prisoners held by the Saigon Government who have become the forgotten people of the Vietnam cease-fire agreement.

While the accord provides for the exchange of a small number of political prisoners identifiable as belonging to one side or the other, no provision is made for the thousands of non-Communist, anti-Government prisoners held by Saigon because it considers them politically dangerous.

No one is certain how many the Government holds. Some estimates put the figure at 20,000 to 30,000; other go as high as 200,000.

Saigon say it holds only about 5,000 "political prisoners," who, as captured Communist civil servants, come under the provisions of the Paris agreement on the return of civilian detainees. The Communists say they hold only 200 such prisoners. Each side disputes the other's contention.

No provision of the accord appears to cover those held by Saigon who are non-Communist and anti-Government and who do not want to be "handed" to the other side but merely want their freedom.

The four former prisoners interviewed today said they were members of a group of 124 released on Feb. 16 from Con Son, which is about 80 miles off the southern coast.

CENTER OF CONTROVERSY

The island became a center of controversy in 1970 when two American Congressmen revealed the existence of the tiger cages, small concrete trenches with bars on top in which five to seven prisoners were cramped in a space about five feet wide, six feet long and six feet deep.

The former prisoners said they were down to Bien Hoa, about 15 miles northwest of Saigon, and held in a police station there until Feb. 21; when they were released with orders not to go to Saigon. However, at least 11 were brought here by friends and family and deposited in the relative—if temporary—safety of a Saigon hospital.

Those interviewed assumed they had been released because they were disabled and sick; all said they were convinced they would soon be rearrested. A Government spokesman, told of the interviews, said he could not comment without knowing the identities of those involved. He said he did not know of any recently released political prisoners.

According to the former prisoners, they had each been in custody about five years in custody without being tried or granted a hearing.

They denied they were Communists, although two said they were supporters of the Communist-led National Liberation Front.
One who said he was neither a Communist nor a supporter of the front was a slightly built, round-faced man, aged 23, who described himself as a Buddhist activist. He said he was a student at the Hung Dao high school in Saigon at the time of his arrest in December, 1967.

He said he was picked up by the police along with friends who, like him, had been active in what he called the anti-Government “Buddhist struggle movement.”

Asserting that he was unable to walk as a result of his treatment while in custody, he related that after his arrest he was taken to the national police headquarters in Saigon and “beaten and tortured on and off for a whole year.”

He described the torture as being beaten with sticks “until I vomited blood or until the blood came out of my eyes or ears,” having soapy water forced into his nose and mouth and being subjected to electric shock.

His torturers accused him of participating in anti-Government activities, he added, and “said they tortured us to punish us.”

MANACLED AND SUSPENDED

Another form of torture—employed by the police, the young man said, was to manacle prisoners’ hands behind their backs, then hang them from the ceiling by the manacles until they lost consciousness.

After a year in custody in Saigon, he said, he was taken to the Chi Hoa Prison in Saigon and installed in what was known as “the movie house” because it was “like a big box and it was dark like a movie theater.”

“There they chained our feet and attached the chains to a pole,” he continued. “There were between 80 and 100 prisoners. We had nothing to lie on, and it was filthy and dirty and cold. Every day they would open the door and send in a bunch of common criminals who would beat us with sticks and kick us.”

Describing life in the tiger cages, the young man said that several prisoners died but he could identify only one by name.

A week after the Congressmen went to Con Son, he said, the inmates were put in what he called the stables—a row of structures that had housed water buffalo.

“During the time we were kept in the stables they continued to beat us viciously,” he said. “One of my friends, Tran Van Tu, suffered a broken arm. Another man, Nguyen Ngo Thong, was ferociously beaten on the head.”

In December, 1970, the former prisoner related, he and about 80 other sick and disabled prisoners were flown back to Chi Hoa. “I guess I was going crazy at that time,” he added, saying that he was also paralyzed.

He remained in Chi Hoa until June, 1971. The treatment there was better at that time, he said, though “once in a while they would beat us just a little.”

In June, 1971, he and others at Chi Hoa were informed that they were being returned to Con Son.

“We tried to resist,” he said, “saying we were still sick and needed more time to recover. We told them many of us still could not walk and many were still very sick.”

But, according to his account, the jailers responded by bringing in the policemen and common criminals who threw teargas grenades into the cells. “We all choked and lost consciousness,” he said.

They were put on a ship to Con Son; by then the old tiger cages had been replaced by new ones built by an American contractor and paid for by the United States.

The former prisoner said that while the cages were about the same size as the old ones, each cage housed only one person. As a result, he added, “the jailers would not beat us from above but would open the steel bars, jump in and beat us.”

DIET: RICE, AND WATER

Throughout 1972 and in the first two months of this year, he said, his daily food rations consisted of “a few spoonfuls of rice and a little water.”

The most recent beating took place last Jan. 8 in Row A and B of the tiger cages,” he said. “About 70 prisoners were seriously injured then.” He explained that the beating occurred “because we asked for more food and more water.” According to the former prisoner, a man named Le Van An was beaten to
death in one of the mass beatings last May. He also asserted that in the beating Jan. 6 a Buddhist monk named Thich Hanh Tue was beaten almost to death.

"The prisoners asked that the monk be given treatment," he said, "but they ignored the request and a few days later he died."

When he and the others were released, the young man related, most were transported to various parts of the country, but 25, including him, were kept at Bien Hoa.

Other prisoners at the Saigon hospital corroborated the account with only minor personal differences. All told of torture, beatings and malnutrition.

"Each of us went through a similar ordeal," a 38-year-old former prisoner commented.

[From the Washington Post, Jan. 18, 1973]

**POLITICAL ARRESTS EXPECTED**

(By Peter Osnos)

Saigon, January 17.—President Thieu has given his province chiefs wide latitude to make political arrests after the coming cease-fire and has also empowered them to "shoot troublemakers" on the spot, reliable South Vietnamese sources said today.

Wherever possible, American sources added, those arrested are to be charged with common crimes, instead of political ones because, it is acknowledged, the prisoners are easier to deal with that way. The Communist demand for release of all political prisoners has been a sticking point in the Paris negotiations and the government's intention, sources said, is to keep the number of prisoners down, at least on paper.

Thieu's hard line is in keeping with his conviction that, after the cease-fire, his government will remain at war with the Communists by all means short of large-unit firepower. "The Communists are preparing to destroy the cease-fire," a Thieu aide warned a gathering of Kien Tuong Province yesterday.

Government officials in the province say they have been told the Communists will violate the cease-fire with terrorism and assassinations, and they must be ready to protect themselves.

Thieu's response to this danger is evidently to harass and intimidate known and suspected Communist sympathizers, as they have been for years.

The province chiefs have been instructed, South Vietnam sources said, that the only condition of the arrests is that local prosecutors be informed within 24 hours. Once that is done, the sources said, the suspects can be detained for as much as six months.

Because of the vagueness of the way it is worded and the uncertainty of how the situation after the cease-fire will develop, South Vietnamese officials have no clear idea of how the authority to "shoot troublemakers" will be interpreted.

During his one-man presidential campaign in 1971, Thieu gave police officials permission to shoot anyone causing a "disturbance," but the threat was never carried out. Recently, Thieu authorized police to shoot thieves caught in the act, but that, too, has never been done, as far as is known.

The broad arrest powers given to province chiefs apparently differ from past practice in that there is to be no direct coordination from Saigon, as was the case, for example, with the campaign of arrests after last spring's Communist offensive. Top-level American officials, who say they are informed even on the most sensitive aspects of Thieu's preparations for the period after the post cease-fire, insist that there is no similar national plan for widespread political arrests.

They did acknowledge, however, the existence of a plan called F-6 that went into effect after the start of North Vietnam's Easter offensive and was again carried out when a cease-fire appeared imminent in October. They said the plan finally expired just before Christmas.

The number of civilians arrested in organized, military-style sweeps was 28,000, according to one senior U.S. intelligence source, of whom 14,000 have been released.
ADDENDUM: RECENT PRESS REPORTS ON PERSONS AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

[From the Washington Post, July 27, 1978]

CLANDESTINE DOCUMENT ASSAILS SOUTH VIETNAM ON PRISONERS

(By Thomas M. Lippman)

Saigon, July 26—South Vietnam’s political prisoner debate was sharply intensified today with the clandestine publication of a 363-page document accusing the government of “shameless violations” of the Paris cease-fire agreement’s provisions on the subject.

Most of the allegations in the “testimonial document” entitled “Political Prisoners in South Vietnam after the Paris Agreement” have been heard before. It says that Saigon holds approximately 202,000 political prisoners, imprisoned them arbitrarily and without any legal safeguards, and subjected them to “unbearable” physical conditions and torture. It also calls on the United States to cut its assistance to the South Vietnamese police.

What is more surprising, perhaps, is that the document has appeared at all. It uses the kind of strong critical language seldom heard in this country of martial law, muzzled press and omnipresent police, and, although it was prepared in secret and printed on a clandestine press, no real attempt is being made to conceal the identity of those responsible for it.

It was prepared by a group called the Committee Campaigning for the Improvement of Prison Conditions in South Vietnam, a small but widely known organization of dissidents, students and clergy that has become the prisoners’ most important link to the outside world. Its chairman is a Catholic priest, the Rev. Chau Tin, who himself faces a five-year prison sentence imposed by the military courts last October for articles in his monthly magazine.

The report was released to a small group of foreign correspondents at a time when representatives of the Saigon government and the National Liberation Front were locked in a dispute over the exchange of their civilian prisoners. It is the fourth major statement on the issue this month.

Earlier the government, which is more sensitive on this subject than any other, had issued a communiqué and a long “White Paper” saying that all prisoners are treated humanely and denying that any persons other than Communists are held for political reasons.

The London-based organization, Amnesty International, had prompted the government statements with its report calling for world pressure on Saigon to release the 100,000 civilian prisoners it said were being held.

Today’s clandestine document, addressed to “Vietnamese compatriots, peace and justice-loving people in the world,” said that “prisoners continue to be hellish places for patriots. Brutal tortures are still going on. When arrests, incarcera-
tions and tortures are still the lot of the people just because they ask for the right to live, to self-determination, then peace has not yet come to this country."

"It is time," Father Tho's report said, "to make the situation known to all who have the interests of the Vietnamese people at heart."

The report, which features a chained dove of peace on the covers of its two volumes, is said to be based on letters from prisoners, conversations with former prisoners, interview with relatives, and "official documents."

Its statistics, as members of the committee readily admitted, are estimates and extrapolations—the figure of 68,000 persons held in district and village jails, for example, is based on an average of 50 individual per district and 20 per village, not on any actual count.

"We do not pretend that our assessment is entirely exact," it says, "but we have, no doubt, that the total number of political prisoners is about 262,000 as of June 1, 1973, and the breakdown is not too far from reality."

In addition to accusing the government of arbitrary arrests and torture of its political enemies, the report says that Saigon has gone to great lengths to conceal the truth about those it is holding.

Among the alleged acts are:

Changing the status of political prisoners to common law criminals so they will not be subject to negotiated release under the Paris cease-fire agreement.

Forcing political prisoners to join the Army.

Moving political prisoners from one place to another "so that their relatives and friends lose track of them."

Maintaining relentless pressure" on newly released prisoners by confiscating their identity cards, forcing them to report to the police and so on.

Referring to South Vietnam's jails as "hells on earth," the report says that "the number of prisoners is increasing, but the prison budget is decreasing while prices go up. Furthermore, corruption of jail officials and the exploitation by contractors for prison food have made the daily food ration for each prisoner equivalent to the value of one egg."

The entire second volume of the report consist of the purported documentation for its charges, mostly letters from prison inmates. A typical entry quotes a letter from fourteen inmates of Tanh Le jail, near Bienhoa, as saying: "We were beaten, tortured brutally as in the Middle Ages. We were beaten with truncheons on our heads; on the whole body. We were tortured with electrodes, with lamps directed into our eyes, with pins into the fingers and toes."

There is little doubt that South Vietnam holds thousands of persons in its jails who, by American definitions, would be classified as political prisoners, and that some of them at least have been physically mistreated. Whether the situation is as serious as that portrayed by the committee is an open question, with the debaters usually divided along ideological lines. Most experienced foreign diplomats believe that any figure in excess of 50,000 is exaggerated, but because there are no available records there is no way to tell for sure.

[From the Washington Post, July 24, 1973]

537 VC Political POW's FREE

Saigon, July 23—The Saigon government Monday turned several hundred civilian prisoners over to the Vietcong. They included some hobbling on crutches and women cradling crying babies.

The Vietcong issued a series of statements saying that 537 civilian prisoners had been turned over to them including 20 neutrals who were against their will.

At Phnom Penh, Cambodian Prime Minister Lon Nol said the military situation in that nation is daily growing "from bad to worse." Fighting on Monday, however, was reported relatively light.

The release of prisoners in South Vietnam was part of a swap in which Saigon is to free 4,381 civilians and 85 military men in exchange for 292 civilians and 410 Saigon government soldiers held by the Vietcong.
A South Vietnamese military spokesman said 30 prisoners chose to stay in South Vietnamese hands.

The government had announced that Tran Ngoc Chau, one of Saigon's most prominent politicians in the late 1960s, and other well known civilian foes of President Nguyen Van Thieu would be released Monday. But later, a spokesman said they would be turned over to the Communists until later this week.

The Vietcong delegation charged that the delivery to them of neutralists and other non-Communist opponents of Thieu was an attempt by the government to deny the role of the neutralists, or third force, in South Vietnam's politics, as provided by the Paris peace agreement.

The agreement stipulates that a National Council of Reconciliation and Concord is to be formed with equal representation for the South Vietnamese government, the Vietcong and the third force.

The Vietcong spokesman said Chau and others like him who oppose Thieu would be accepted "provisionally," "If they wish to go anywhere, they will be free to go. If they wish to stay with us, they can," said Col. Vo Dong Giang, deputy chief of the Vietcong delegation.

A pro-Thieu Saigon newspaper, Dan Chu, reported that President Thieu has declared his government will place an economic blockade on areas controlled by the Vietcong. The details of the threatened blockade were not disclosed, however.

In Cambodia, meanwhile, Prime Minister In Tam said an American bombing halt would not mean the fall of the Phnom Penh government and that he did not believe there would be fighting in the streets of the capital.

"I do not think there will be a mass attack on the city, fighting in the streets, no I do not think so," In Tam said, but cautioned the city's people to be on the watch for infiltrating commando teams.

Monday, a U.S. Air Force light observation plane crashed on landing at Phnom Penh airport. The pilot escaped without injury. It was the second mishap involving an OV-10 Bronco at the airport in two days.

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[From the New York Times, August 12, 1973]

VIETCONG SAY 71 PROTEST TRANSFER TO COMMUNIST SIDE

(By James M. Markham)

Saigon, South Vietnam, Aug. 11—The Vietcong charged today that 71 former South Vietnamese soldiers and Government officials who had been in jail were "snagged in" among civilian prisoners turned over to the Communists last month.

At the weekly press briefing of the Vietcong military delegation at Tan Son Nhat air base, Col. Vo Dong Giang distributed copies of a petition that he said had been signed by the 71 men, protesting their "absurd" release to the Communists.

The document, written In jargon, gave the names, ages, ranks, home provinces and signatures of the men—all but eight of them, low-ranking soldiers or militiamen. Photographs were also displayed.

The petition stated that the men had been imprisoned by the Saigon Government on Con Son island before their "forced" release to the Vietcong at Loc Ninh, 75 miles northwest of Saigon on the Cambodian border, on July 24. Colonel Giang asserted, that they had been arrested for desertion, for criticizing the Government or for failing to pay bribes.

ALL COMMUNISTS, SAIGON SAYS

A military spokesman for the Saigon Government, Lieut. Col. Do Viet, said that all prisoners released at Loc Ninh July 23-24 were "Communist civilians." The procedure for the release of civilian prisoners—one of the provisions of the January peace agreement—broke down on July 24 when, according to the South Vietnamese, Communists rushed a tent holding prisoners about to be freed and attempted to intimidate those who had been thinking of rallying to the Saigon side.
The Saigon Government, which had stated that it was holding 5,061 "Communist civilians," freed 753 people at Loc Ninh. The Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Vietcong had said it was holding 637 civilians and released 271 of them at several sites in the country.

Colonel Gruen maintained that the 71 men, who he said are being detained in Loc Ninh, want to return to their homes in territory controlled by the Saigon Government. But he said they want guarantees against reprisals before they return.

**VIETCONG DRIVE IS SEEN**

Saigon, Aug. 11 (UPI)—Heavy fighting was reported today in the central coast area between South Vietnamese Government defenders and Communist forces believed to be trying to open a corridor to the South China Sea.

Government military spokesmen said that, although the central coast fighting had resumed after a brief respite, cease-fire violations decreased by 35 per cent throughout the country in the 24 hours ended at noon today.

Lieut. Col. Do Viet, the South Vietnamese military spokesman, reported that there had been 68 truce violations in that period, 38 fewer than in the previous reporting period and the lowest total since Aug. 2, when there were 68.

**BATTLE INTO MORNING**

However, he said, heavy fighting broke out yesterday along the border between Binh Dinh and Quang Ngai Provinces and continued into this morning.

In a 10-hour fight yesterday, 27 Communists and 4 Government soldiers died, he said, and 9 Government soldiers were wounded. Early today, Colonel Viet said, a Government military unit was shelled and attacked in the same area, and 6 Communists and 2 militiamen were slain and 11 militiamen wounded.

South Vietnamese military spokesmen had said earlier that the Communists were attempting to cut Route 1 and open a corridor for the Vietcong to the South China Sea. The fighting is centered within 10 miles of the scene of a three-week battle last February for the fishing village of Sa Huynh.

(From (Baltimore) The Sun, January 17, 1973)

**Saigon's Political Prisoners**

'A reasonable guess is that a new Vietnam accord, if indeed one does come, will amount in most of its essentials to the agreement that went bad in October. Among these, it is 'conjectured, may well be 'the provision of a Council of National Conciliation and Concord, consisting of representatives from the South Vietnamese government, the Viet Cong, and neutralists, who jointly would organize free, internationally supervised elections, and oversee the implementation of the agreements.

Whatever the details, the central issue, as James S. Keat notes in a dispatch to The Sun from Washington, is likely to remain in one form or another the issue of 'who will retain how much political authority' in South Vietnam. Bearing importantly on this point, and to be watched for sharply in any agreement, is the question of the civilians held as political prisoners by Saigon.

'Mr. Keat says they number "uncounted thousands." Some estimates put them at 50,000, others at 200,000. Some are held as suspected Viet Cong agents, and many undoubtedly are. But others, themselves in the uncounted thousands, are detained under laws-by-decree by which is declared unlawful the practice of "communism or pro-Communist neutralism." Since the government of Saigon equates neutralism per se with communism, this means that a great many people whose scientists are neutral, or who have spoken in favor of neutralism for Vietnam, are confined in prison, along with others merely suspected, by someone, of harboring such sentiments.

A few of the names are well known, belonging to men without whose participation a tripartite council would have, little meaning. Most by far are obscure, from hamlets and villages; but if these people also are to be held in prison the chance of a neutral Vietnam, which may be the best of the decent, honorable chances, will have been severely vitiated.
SAIGON SAYS NO POLITICAL CAPTIVES HELD
(By Thomas W. Lippman)

Saigon, July 2—Stung by international criticism and journalistic commentary, South Vietnam today denied in a long formal statement that it holds any political prisoners, and defended conditions in its prisons as humane and fair.

An official communiqué from the Foreign Ministry said charges that the government holds thousands of political prisoners and tortures its inmates result from a "campaign of intoxication orchestrated by international communism." The statement followed the release Sunday of a report by the London-based organization, Amnesty International, calling for concerted world pressure for the release of some 100,000 civilians it said were held by South Vietnam.

CORRESPONDENT EXPELLED

The government is probably more sensitive to criticism about political prisoners than any other matter. Foreign journalists, politicians, and religious figures have found that they could criticize the government about almost anything else without reprisal, but statements about political prisoners bring prompt response. Even a bishop of the Catholic Church was officially denounced as "a liar" not long ago for joining the critical chorus.

Today's communiqué was accompanied by the announcement that the Saigon correspondent of the huge Japanese daily Asahi Shimbum was to be expelled because the report recently said in an editorial that Saigon holds 300,000 political prisoners—the highest estimate yet published.

A spokesman for the newspaper said the figure was a mistake in translation and that it had actually estimated that 100,000 to 200,000 prisoners were being held.

It is true that the most virulent criticism of Saigon on this issue comes from North Vietnam and the Vietcong, who fill their radio broadcasts with lurid tales of beaten, maimed victims. But most foreigners who have been here any length of time can attest that the government's hands are not entirely clean, by U.S. standards.

SAIGON'S RATIONALE

Everyone who has inquired knows of some Vietnamese who have simply disappeared after midnight arrests, or been killed or imprisoned for years without benefit of indictment or trial. The most trivial offense, such as possession of the sheet music of antiwar songs, can result in prolonged incarceration.

The government, however, denies that persons arrested in such cases are "political prisoners."

"Even within a democracy in time of peace," today's statement said, "attempts against internal and external security of the state, such as vandalism, robbery, rebellion, spying, cooperation with the enemy, and high treason should be punished with extreme vigor, regardless of being labelled by the Communists as political offenses."

To the government's critics, the problem is that such offenses as "high treason" and "rebellion" are used to cover a wide range of alleged offenses—and some suspects are never formally accused at all.

"If by political prisoners one means people detained only because of their opposition to the policies of the government," the statement issued to the press today said, "then there are no political prisoners in South Vietnam. Nobody has been arrested merely for having expressed his views against the government."

But "if one means those people who belong to organizations whose main aim is to overthrow the elected government of South Vietnam, such as the National Liberation Front, and who performed subversive activities on behalf of these organizations," their fate is to be determined according to the Paris peace agreement.
TWO CLASSIFICATIONS

That is another way of saying that the government holds only two kinds of civilian prisoners—communists and common criminals. The former, whose number is given by the government as 5,081, are to be turned over to North Vietnam. The latter, about whom the Paris agreement says nothing, are to be kept in prison according to the country's laws.

The effect of this argument is to remove the possibility that vocal, confirmed, pacifist opponents of the government, even if they are not communists, will be turned loose in the streets and rice fields of South Vietnam. By classifying them as common criminals, the government can keep them out of the purview of the Paris agreement.

According to several informed sources, this is one of the principal disputes delaying an agreement between Saigon and the Vietcong on a prisoner exchange. The Communists are said to be most anxious that prisoners who oppose the Thieu government, but do not want to go to North Vietnam, be granted liberty within the south.

REJECTS CLAIM

Today's communiqué contained nothing new in the way of statistics. It rejected the Communists' claim of 200,000 political prisoners as "a product of their imagination," and reiterated the claim that the Vietcong and North Vietnam hold some 68,000 South Vietnamese civilians.

"Whereas the Communist side is unable to substantiate the existence of the two hundred thousand so-called political prisoners with facts, the government of the Republic of Vietnam is ready at any time to expose to anyone the list of 16,798 government civilian personnel and 51,823 South Vietnam civilians captured and detained by the Communists since 1954, with their names, addresses, professions, date, and place of abduction, etc.," the communiqué said.
APPENDIX III

SELECTED PRESS REPORTS AND COMMENTARIES ON THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(Note: The following selection of press reports and commentaries on the current situation in South Vietnam, are roughly divided between the following categories and pages:

1. The General Situation .................................................. 99
2. U.S. Assistance .......................................................... 129
3. Continuing Refugee Problems ......................................... 142
4. Refugee Resettlement Plans ............................................ 155
5. Orphans, Health and Social Welfare Problems ................... 161
6. Reports on PRG Areas .................................................... 180

1. THE GENERAL SITUATION


IN NEW PHASE OF STRUGGLE IN SOUTH VIETNAM, BOTH SIDES HAVE ASSETS

(By Charles Mohr)

Saigon, South Vietnam, March 20—The long struggle for control of the South Vietnam people is entering a new and important phase, full of uncertainties and difficulties for both the Vietcong and the Government.

There has been a tragic amount of bloodshed since the cease-fire was signed Jan. 27, and, as a seasoned American official remarked, most of it has been pointless. "Neither side has really gained anything significant out of the deaths and skirmishing—and they know it," he said.

The emphasis is already turning to politics, psychological warfare and the often-covert struggle for actual control of populations.

Several important factors that seem to stand out will shape the struggle though they may not decide it:

A large majority of the people live under at least nominal Government control, and many of them under strong Government control. Many chose to do so; many others fled persistent bombing and shelling.

As a result, the Vietcong hold areas of land that, though vast, are almost unpopulated, so they have relatively few people under their direct control.

The great national mobilization that the Government finally undertook in 1968 has seriously impeded Vietcong recruiting by soaking up manpower.

The sheer weight and pervasive presence of armed men, no matter how ill-trained, in Government villages has made it difficult for the Vietcong to come and go, to proselytize, to cajole or coerce.

Those factors are real Government assets. As has always been the case in Vietnam, however, the situation is never as simple as it seems.

One symbol of this is the hazy smoke that can be seen rising all across the vital populous Mekong River Delta at this time of year. The smoke comes from small work parties of peasants who have gone from villages under Government control to burn the stubble in harvested rice fields—a first step in preparation for the new crop.

Soon large numbers of men, women and children will move to the fields before the monsoon rains of May. Because the war has distorted living patterns, many fields are miles from secure villages, so the peasants will set up temporary shelters in the flat, desolate terrain.

"The Vietcong will be waiting for them—In fact, they are already working on the small groups burning the fields," said an American pacification official in the middle delta.

(99)
Despite the Government's assets, the environment for Vietcong political action may be better than it has been for years. How will the Communists use their opportunity? Hints can be found in reports from many areas where guerrillas have already slipped through security nets and conducted political meetings with peasants.

**VIETCONG VICTORY CLAIMED**

"In the first place," a well-informed official related, "they tell the people the Vietcong have won. They explain the cease-fire and point out the demands they got—American withdrawal, an end to the bombing of North Vietnam, etc."

Other reports say Communist political officers also vaguely promise that further gains are certain, hinting that negotiations between the South Vietnamese Government and the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government will result in fundamental changes.

The value of such activities is bound to be uneven. In many areas governmental administration is effective and fairly popular, and hatred of the Vietcong may run deep. In other areas the Vietcong have considerable strength on the ground and have retained old followers.

Other Vietcong techniques—old ones, used in the new atmosphere of the cease-fire period—are evident.

One is assassination of village and hamlet officials. Several score such killings have apparently taken place; inquiry shows, although Government spokesmen have reported only a few cases.

As in the past, the Vietcong seem to concentrate not so much on "villains" as on "good men"—the more effective humane and just officials—because their absence disrupts administration most.

"**SOMEONE CARED ABOUT THEM**"

"We just lost the best village chief we had," an American in the central delta reported, "and it is a real setback. At long last he had convinced the villagers that someone cared about them, and I don't know how we can replace him."

Through infiltration of long-absent guerrillas back into their native territories is thought to be difficult, the Saigon Government's decision last week to hold new elections to village councils was motivated in part it was said, by the belief that it would be safer to hold them quickly.

On the Vietcong side an unquestionable asset, the so-called legal cadres, is by its nature difficult to evaluate. Secret Vietcong sympathizers living in Government-held areas, in many cases they hold governmental, or military positions.

Some intelligence specialists believe there once were a good many. From 1963 through at least 1965 the American military forces learned to be wary of sharing operational plans even with high-level South Vietnamese officials because the information was sometimes compromised.

The existence of the legal cadres was again confirmed during the Tet offensive of 1968, when, especially in Saigon and Hue, new political "alliances" of civilians emerged briefly, only to flee to shelter with the Communists. Some of the members lead Communist execution squads to Government employees.

**DEBATE ON ROLE SEEN**

Only small numbers of the legal cadres revealed themselves; some were fairly prominent and previously unblended.

"The Communists have had so many setbacks since then that it's hard to know how many reliable legal cadres are left," an official said. "We think there is a debate going on now between them and the Vietcong in the 'boundaries' as to how they should be used and how many chances they should take."

While the Vietcong almost certainly hope to achieve influence in rural areas where the Government seems strong, they are also trying to repopulate areas under their unquestioned control.

"An example is the northern part of Tay Ninh Province, a region northwest of Saigon along the Cambodian border that has long been known as "West Zone" C. Because of repeated American "search and destroy" operations there in the late nineteen-sixties, almost all the civilian residents moved across the border.
Now persistent intelligence reports say that the Communists are urging them to return, and northern Tay Ninh, may soon be ordered to "appear" as if "demobilized" and take up residence in about a thousand virtually deserted hamlets far beyond zones of Government control. The elections envisioned in the peace agreement may never take place, but if they do these people would presumably attempt to vote. The elections, the nature of which is not specified in the agreement, to be arranged by a national council for reconciliation and concord to be appointed by both South Vietnamese parties, but the council has not been formed. To many people the whole array of Vietcong effort seems feeble. Indeed, it is said the guerrillas are far weaker than much of the world seems to think.

As for the Government, it has realized some important political benefits. Its "land to the tiller" reform program is nearing completion. One of the most imaginative and positive aspects is that the plan did not attempt to overturn or disrupt the Vietcong's land redistribution. Furthermore, repeated surveys, formal and informal, indicate that the Government, having done a good job of identifying popular aspirations, is directing uneven but often effective efforts toward meeting them.

Examples are construction and repair of roads and canals. Even simple footbridges that can save a peasant miles of walking can have an important political effect. Experienced Americans believe that it was partly the refusal of President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime to meet such modest aspirations that helped the Vietcong grow stronger more than a decade ago.

Discussing the general situation, a diplomat from the Communist bloc said recently in private conversation that he was convinced the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong had relatively modest goals in the South for the present—some secure populated areas of their own and a voice for themselves and other anti-Thieu forces in the central Government.

"I hope you Americans realize that this thing could work and what will happen if it doesn't," he added. He nodded when asked if he meant, that there would be another major Communist offensive if the peace agreement broke down.

The Vietnam war has never been a popular contest; control has always been a much more important factor than popularity. Many men who have lived among the peasants for years think that the idea that they could decide their own future is somewhat unreal to them.

Many American advisers say briskly that the peasants would overwhelmingly choose the Government side. Perhaps they are right. But a man in a heavily contested area pondered the question and said: "I don't think they would want to vote at all if they had a choice. They would be committing themselves before they knew what was going to happen."

(From the Washington Star-News, August 1, 1968)

FROM WAR TO SKIRMISHING: VIETNAM RIVALS UNRECONCILED

(By Henry S. Bradsher)

Saigon—Half a year after the Vietnam cease-fire agreement, the big war has faded but skirmishing over territory continues. Officially, the acceptance spirit of national reconciliation is publicly lacking, and the North Vietnamese are building up for a continuing effort to win control of the South. Both the timetable and the form of that effort, whether a return to open warfare or guerilla campaigns or political-economic pressures, or some combination of these, is a mystery.

But there is no debate here about Hanoi's basic attitude. The present situation is seen as only a pause in the struggle for South Vietnam, a shifting of Communist goals.
President Nixon agrees, "We do not assume Hanoi will give up its long range goals," Nixon told Congress in May.

The President went on that "We do expect (Hanoi) to pursue those goals without using force." For the moment, perhaps several years, depending upon what happens inside South Vietnam, that seems to be a reasonable expectation.

Across the countryside South Vietnam appears to be peacefully pursuing the always difficult job of earning a living.

The question which hangs over this scene is whether South Vietnam has the internal political or economic strength to resist the continuing Communist pressure—and maybe military strength, too, if it comes to that.

In the U.S. fiscal year which began July 1 Washington has budgeted $1.68 billion dollars for military aid to Saigon and about $650 million economic aid.

Both figures are subject to change. Economic aid has already been trimmed in preliminary congressional votes. But officials here assure that the principle of continuing help is basically unchallenged so far. This contrasts with challenges to and uncertain state of American promises to help rebuild North Vietnam. While the last American troops left Vietnam in March and known prisoners of war were recovered, U.S. firepower remains nearby in Thailand.

And in Vietnam itself there some 5,500 American government personnel. These include 1,000 people who are ostensibly civilians working for the U.S. Embassy's defense attache office, which is staffed by 50 openly military men. There are also thousands of civilian contractors, many doing military support jobs.

The official figure on contractors was recently given as 6,000, but somebody realized this was embarrassingly large.

The figure now is given as 3,500 but the actual number might be different.

Fighting which has gone on since the American-arranged cease-fire has at times been of intensity of "normal" periods of war between Communist offensives. But it has been declining.

One of the best informed observers of the military situation since January explains the sporadic fighting as a trial and error process as each side sees who holds what—and where there might be opportunities for reducing the side's area.

In general, the South Vietnamese army is cleaning up isolated pockets of Communist strength inside the army's areas and the Communists are trying to do the same about Saigon's outposts within Red territory.

The International Commission of Control and Supervision has proven ineffective in preventing or even fixing the blame for this.

Some sources report that President Thieu has been in secret contact with "third force" people, the neutralists who are supposed to join the government and Viet Cong representatives on the Reconciliation Council to work out Vietnam's political future.

Publicly, Thieu's propagandists denounce the third force people but privately Thieu might work with some of them, sources say.

Some top Americans here say flatly that Thieu will never have anything to do with the Neutralists. "But that is something of a self fulfilling prophecy," one informed source observed, "because if the Americans decide it won't happen and don't use their influence to get it to happen then it probably won't."

The Communists are reported to be looking around at village level for outstanding citizens whom they could accept as third force representatives on lower level reconciliation councils.

In addition to the Hanoi and Saigon governments, the Communists seem to be trying to establish the territorial population and economic basis for the Viet Cong's People's Revolutionary Government to claim more than its shadowy existence in some unspecified jungle.

Up to 30,000 civilians have come down from North Vietnam to populate communist held territory. Some of them are reported to be wives and children of political workers and military officers among the estimated 150,000 to 145,000 North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. Others are teachers, engineers and persons with other skills for converting military camp areas into partially self-sustaining economies. "It looks like they want a revolutionary base inside the South," one analyst said.
The Communists now have more artillery and tanks positioned closer to a number of major South Vietnamese cities than they ever did during the war, according to some sources.

An indication that there is no intention to put them into action for the time being is the decline of troop infiltration in recent months. A more valuable longer term indication is that inductions into military service in North Vietnam have been low recently, meaning Hanoi does not expect to need many soldiers at least as far ahead as next spring.

China has sent word through third countries to the United States that it has no intention of arming North Vietnam for another war.

The Soviet Union's public statements are also cool toward continuing warfare. Sources report that the recent Moscow visit by top leaders from Hanoi produced some signs of disagreement. But the possibility of return to open combat is not the main danger in South Vietnam six months after the cease-fire date.

The question is the internal strength of Thieu's regime and whether it can somehow be rooted out from the inside. Problems of public apathy, of economic difficulties and of corruption are the most crucial ones.

[From the Wall Street Journal, February 28, 1973]

A MONTH OF "PEACE": OLD VIETNAM CONFLICTS NEVER DIE; THEY JUST FADE—BUT VERY SLOWLY

"TOLERABLE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE" STILL ELUDES THE 2 SIDES; POW ISSUE CLOUDS PICTURE—RIGGING VOTES FOR THE FOE?

(By Peter R. Kann and Barry Kramer)

Saigon—Among all the pundits and prophets analyzing the situation in Vietnam one month after the cease-fire officially ended the war, it is humorist Art Buchwald who probably sums it up best. He invented a new word to do it: "Warce."

The current situation is some strange, very Vietnamese mixture of war and peace. If the first 30 days of cease-fire are any guide, the transition from war to peace will be excruciatingly slow. The fighting is tapering off almost imperceptively. Peace is just a few straws in the wind.

"The war will fade down, not out, down to a tolerable level of violence; there is a diminish trend," one senior U.S. official says. Many would agree with him. But, if that is the way the war is headed, it is moving that way far more slowly than most Americans had hoped a month ago. What's more, the definition of a tolerable level of violence is different in different minds.

Still, this much can be said with certainty: The cease-fire has disengaged America from the shooting war, and there is, at least a framework within which the contending Vietnamese can try to work out their differences—if they choose to. So far, it isn't clear that either side has chosen to. Neither yet seems sure enough of its own strength—or of its opponent's weakness—to silence its guns.

Until yesterday those portions of the treaty dealing with prisoners of war (which are what America seems to care most about) were being implemented relatively smoothly. Now, however, Hanoi has chosen to delay the next planned release in order to raise issues unrelated to the prisoners. How serious a breakdown this is remains to be seen. But it is complicating the Paris peace talks (see story on page 4). And it certainly indicates the tenuous nature of the cease-fire here.

Military "incidents"—one of the many imprecise measurements of this war—are still running over 100 a day by both Saigon's and the Communists' count. This is considerably higher than during most periods of war. It is much lower, of course, than the level of fighting during major military offensives. But then a cease-fire certainly ought to be less bloody than an offensive.

Yet, the intensity, if not the number, of incidents seems to be gradually lessening. With a few notable exceptions, like Sa Huynh, a town along the central coast that the Communists hoped to turn into what is euphemistically called an "empty port," most incidents appear to be small-scale engagements, involving...
local forces rather than main-force regiments of either South or North Vietnam. U.S. intelligence sources say fewer Communist troops and supplies are coming down the trails from North Vietnam than at any other time since at least 1968. And, of course, there is somewhat less destruction if only because America's massive air power has been removed.

WHAT IS A "TOLERABLE" LEVEL OF VIOLENCE?

There are also some scattered signs of accommodation at the local level—local South Vietnamese, militia men and local Viet Cong agreeing, at least tacitly, to respect each other's turf. Indeed, there has always been a degree of local accommodation in Vietnam.

But if the war is less intense than it might be, the South Vietnamese army's reported dead are still several hundred a week. The body count since the Jan. 28 cease-fire—another highly suspect measurement—adds up to a total of nearly 10,000 Vietnamese military men on both sides, according to Saigon figures.

Whatever a "tolerable level of violence" is, this clearly isn't it.

To make a cease-fire worthy of the word, it would seem to have to include at the minimum: suspension of large-scale, main-unit warfare; an end to mortar and artillery duels and to bombings by the South Vietnamese air force; and a marked reduction in the efforts of both sides to expand their territorial control by overt military means. This would mean that the Communists would curtail attempts to expand their existing leopard spots by toppling Saigon-controlled outposts in adjacent hamlets and that Saigon would curtail attacks on those hamlets controlled by the Viet Cong. Obviously, much of the current fighting is over "contested" hamlets and stretches of road over which neither side has ever had unchallenged sway but over which each claims "control."

A "TOLERABLE" POLITICAL STRUGGLE

What would seem to be "tolerable" is a political struggle, far less visible, including low-level and largely covert violence, for control of "contested" hamlets. (There are more than 12,000 hamlets in Vietnam, and Saigon's army and administration currently hold the balance of power in most of them.) Such a "tolerable level" would thus bring the war back to its state in the early 1960s, though at that time, of course, the Communists were dominant in the countryside.

On a larger scale, yet closely tied to the situation here, are developments in Laos and Cambodia. In Laos, a cease-fire accord was signed last Thursday, but the intensity of the war there has since increased, with Communist units attacking what, for Laos, are important Mekong Valley towns and with the Americans resuming B-52 bombing for one day. In Cambodia, no agreement has been signed, and none seems in sight. There the Communists continue to chip away at what little is left of Phnom Penh's control of the countryside. Laos and Cambodia are essential to the Communists because they contain the supply routes, sanctuaries and staging areas with which the Communists keep their South Vietnamese options open.

The one-day renewal of bombing in Laos by the U.S. may well be meant to signal Hanoi that America retains its options in Vietnam should the war escalate here. Still, the South Vietnamese fear (and some U.S. officials here would agree) that America desperately wants to forget about Indochina, that the last thing the U.S. wants is to be called back into an inconclusive game that already has gone into far too many overtimes. To America, a "tolerable level of violence" might simply mean one that doesn't constantly remind it that a war is still going on and certainly one that doesn't require it to return.

Already largely in place is the institutional framework that permits America's "honor"—or at least a face-saving—exit and that offers the Vietnamese a chance of working out their differences with much less violence. This consists of various commissions that are to implement and supervise the cease-fire and turn it into peace. But the complex machinery so far has amounted to little more than institutionalized buck-passing between commissions.

There are all kinds of "catch-22s" to the arrangement: for instance, the supervisory teams—called the International Commission of Control and Supervision—say that it cannot yet fulfill its responsibilities because it is here to "supervise a cease-fire, not a war," according to one of its senior officials. (Of
course, if there were a real cease-fire, then there wouldn't be any need for a supervisory commission.) Thus, the supervisors have decided to ignore the thousands of alleged cease-fire violations brought to their attention so far by both sides because the complainants are also the belligerents and their continued fighting prevents the supervisors from investigating complaints.

Some here now are hoping that the 32-nation conference on Vietnam, which began meeting Monday in Paris, can bring some order out of all the confusion and can pressure the Vietnamese parties to implement the cease-fire. These observers also are hoping that the complications caused by the prisoner-of-war issue will be temporary.

Others, however, noting how unresponsive the Vietnamese "puppets" have often been to big-power string pulling in the past, tend to see the Paris conference as just another lot of heads through which the buck can pass. Perhaps the best that the big powers—the U.S., Russia and China—can do is agree to cooperate in cutting off, or cutting down, arms to their Vietnamese allies. But that's a long-term proposition. In the view of many observers here, the only ones who can ensure that violence turns to a tolerable level—and that the cease-fire leads to real political accommodation—are the Vietnamese themselves.

There are those who believe the Communists won't—or can't afford to—turn from military to political confrontation unless Saigon convinces them that they have a fair chance to compete for political power. It's far from clear, however, that Saigon wants to give them that chance.

So far there are only a number of straws in the wind to indicate that the Vietnamese might want to turn from conflict to accommodation. To tea-leaf readers it may be of some small significance that Saigon, North Vietnamese and Vietcong officers on the Joint Military Commission are said to be engaging in small-talk during tea breaks. Slightly more significant, perhaps, is the fact that Madame Nguyen Th3 Minh, foreign minister of the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government, accepted an invitation and turned up last Saturday night at a Paris cocktail reception whose host was Saigon's Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam.

Most importantly, there are at least some tentative indications that South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu is taking a more conciliatory political stance—dropping his most militant rhetoric proposing elections to include the Vietcong and suggesting the possibility of normalizing relations with Hanoi.

But the perponderant atmosphere surrounding relations between the two Vietnamese sides remains one of extreme dislike. For example, while the government may not have encouraged mobs in several cities to attack North Vietnamese and Vietcong delegates to the Joint Military Commission, it certainly hasn't discouraged them. In fact, Saigon radio warned that the Communists could expect repeated attacks on their delegates "if they continued to provoke the people."

For its part, Washington is actively seeking to normalize its relations with Hanoi, where, U.S. analysts seem to believe, a less militant, more pragmatic and domestically-oriented policy is being pursued. With its still-vague promise of substantial reconstruction aid, the U.S. seems to be trying to encourage Hanoi to concentrate on rebuilding at home and thus lessen its support of liberation war in the South.

But it remains highly questionable, in the view of many observers here, whether Hanoi has really switched its long-term strategy or only its tactics and timetable. Hanoi's 130,000 or so main-force troops remain in the South, the Paris accord not requiring that they leave; if those troops now are largely disengaged from active combat, it doesn't mean they will remain so if military action by Saigon threatens to blot out Vietcong holdings.

One senior U.S. official here talks optimistically of the Vietcong's being reduced to nothing more than a nuisance factor. But this would imply what amounts to defeat for the Vietcong, and that is something that Hanoi, having fought for most of a quarter-century, would seem unlikely to allow. Henry Kissinger recently described U.S. relations with Hanoi as comparable to U.S. relations with China one year ago. This may be true, but it's also true that North Vietnam isn't China.

For the moment, the safest statement is that Hanoi is holding its options open: keeping secure the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex in Laos, expanding its sanctuaries in both Laos and Cambodia and retaining its divisions in South
Vietnam as something of a shield for local Communist units and local landholdings. After the cease-fire began, the Communists first tried to demonstrate their control over as much populated territory as possible by playing flag-planting games with the Saigon government in contested hamlets. This became a losing, or at least too lethal, game for the Communists. Saigon applied its generally superior military force, particularly its firepower, and blasted away many of the flags—and some of the hamlets. Of some 150 hamlets taken by the Vietcong in the several days just before and just after the cease-fire, all but about a dozen have since been retaken by Saigon. Similarly, most of the roads cut by the Communists during those days have since been reopened. The Communists’ lack of initial success seems to have led them to a switch in tactics. They apparently have largely given up on the flag game in contested areas and are concentrating on traditional, more covert guerrilla activity—subversion, propaganda and, presumably, selective terror tactics. They would thus be assuming, or anyway hoping, that flags don’t really represent reality and that the countryside will gradually slip to them, whatever the facade. Meanwhile, they are said to be consolidating their own overt control over long-time Vietcong holdings, mostly in less populated mountainous or border regions that are shielded by main-force Hanoi units.

It is still unclear what the North Vietnamese intend to do with an airstrip they are reportedly refurbishing at Khe Sanh, in the northern part of the country near the Laotian border. It is obviously important to their plans because, as allied reconnaissance photographs purport to show, they have built SA-2 antiaircraft missile sites in the area.

If the Communists feel they can make progress with these tactics, then the outlook might well be for several years of low-level political-military activity. But if they don’t succeed, as some here predict, then North Vietnam might feel obliged to step up the conflict, turning the main-force war back on again. For what it’s worth, President Thieu, for foreign consumption at least, has said the North Vietnamese might reescalate within three months.

If Communist intentions aren’t yet clear (perhaps not yet decided), neither are Saigon’s. “South Vietnam is at the crossroads,” one official says, meaning that Saigon still must make the basic decision of how it wants to deal with the other side. Can Saigon afford to pursue peaceful coexistence with the Communists? Can it afford not to? Can the fighting cease unless Saigon convinces the Vietcong that they can truly participate in the political process without having to resort to violence? President Thieu, who seems to have emerged from the first month of the cease-fire more confident about the staying power of his army and government, might be ready to risk some political accommodation. But Saigon, for all its administrative predominance, has always had something of an inferiority complex toward the Communists.

The other side of the coin, of course, is whether the Vietcong—even given reasonable assurances of a share of political power—would risk turning to nonviolent competition. The Vietcong, whom all observers view as weaker than they once were, may fear a political contest in which that weakness could be exposed.

In other words, one official says; “both sides are still afraid to deal with the people without guns.”

The process of accommodation could be helped along by pressures from Washington and Hanoi. Hanoi effectively controls the Vietcong militarily, North Vietnamese soldiers indeed outnumbering Southerners even in many local Vietcong units. Politically, however, the Vietcong—or their Provisional Revolutionary Government—are considered to have some degree of independence. The U.S., of course, has enormous economic leverage on Saigon, if it is willing to use it.

The Paris accord calls for “genuinely free and democratic general elections under international supervision.” A National Council of National Reconciliation and Conciliation is to have equal numbers of Saigon and Vietcong representatives—i.e., supposed to decide “procedures and modalities,” including timing of the elections. Saigon and Vietcong officials have begun meeting in Paris to talk about establishing that council.

President Thieu, meanwhile, has called publicly for immediate elections. He hasn’t insisted that they be presidential ones, which would put the Vietcong
at a disadvantage. Of course, an obvious roadblock to any election is the fact that the Saigon constitution and election law prohibit Communists from running for political office. "Can you imagine some local Communist going down to the police station to register? He'd be putting his head on the chopping block," one senior American official says. Obviously, the basic contradictions between the election provisions of the Paris accord and those of the Saigon government's law would have to be ironed out.

President Thieu presumably is pressing for quick elections to take advantage of his government's present position of having predominant control of the nation's people. He presumably worries that people may slip from Saigon's control as time goes by.

The Communists, in the view of most observers here, will seek to put off elections as long as possible, hoping to make gains in the countryside that would be reflected later at the polls. If the Communists choose to participate in elections at all, they would probably want legislative ones, which would reflect their local strength, rather than an all-or-nothing presidential contest.

No one, of course, expects Vietnamese elections to be "genuinely free and democratic" in the Western sense. Results from each polling place would very largely reflect which side controls that area. And, for the moment at least, Saigon has its troops, policemen and civil servants in most of the hamlets.

"Saigon must make people afraid of its authority," says Pham Van Don, the Saigon government's village chief in An Thanh, in the eastern Mekong Delta. "If the people are afraid of the Vietcong; they would follow them. But here they are more afraid of Saigon's authority. People here don't want any trouble with Saigon," he explains.

An Thanh, in My Canh district of Kien Hoa Province, is said to be the home village of the Vietcong's foreign minister, Madame Binh. Saigon's flag does fly there for the time being. Saigon's troops are stationed in the village. It is under Saigon "control" and would thus vote for Saigon's candidates in an election, whether or not some international supervisors were standing by. This isn't to say that the villagers would be voting at gunpoint, simply that their votes would reflect the local balance of power. The same would apply in those villages where the Vietcong are in "control."

There are even some who believe Saigon to be so preponderant at present that it would have to manipulate any election results in the Vietcong's favor to make the results acceptable to the Vietcong and respectable internationally.

"If the Communists get less than 10% of the vote, they would be compelled to call the election a fraud and to pursue the military struggle. If they got about 30%, they would probably be satisfied," one European diplomat says. He figures that 80% is about twice what the Communists really control.

Since politics in Vietnam has always had an Alice-in-Wonderland quality, one could even conceive—as some here do—of a face-saving percentage of votes being secretly negotiated by Saigon and the Vietcong in advance of an election. But, whether even, say, a 20% parliamentary representation and a couple of cabinet posts would turn the Vietcong from revolutionaries into a "loyal opposition" remains questionable. And all this would be further complicated by the question of whether "third-force" political elements—and anti-Thieu—would be permitted to participate as political parties.

[From the Wall Street Journal, February 21, 1978]

VIETNAM TOWN CEASES TO EXIST NOW—THANKS TO THE 'CEASE-FIRE'

MEANWHILE, THE VIETCONG TAKE TAX COLLECTORS OFF ROUTE 20; WHAT MAKES THE FLAGS FLY?

(By Barry Kramer)

Saigon—Much as Route One ties together the cities on the East coast of the United States, Vietnam's Route One plunges out of Cambodia and into Saigon and then up the South China Sea coast all the way to Hanoi, in North Vietnam, and China beyond. Other main roads, such as Route 20, link Saigon with the rubber, tea and coffee plantations of the Central Highlands and the large vegetable farms of Dalat.
Traveling by roads in Vietnam has been haphazard, however, as they have often been cut by the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese.

Two Americans took advantage of the relative security offered by the cease-fire to drive from Saigon, up Route 20 to Dalat, then east to Nha Trang on the central coast, and finally down Route One back to Saigon—a total of about 550 miles in four days.

Here are some of the things they saw.

Not two hours north of Saigon, just before Route 20 reaches the hills and mountains of the Central Highlands, lies the village of Ap Loi Tan, home for several hundred Nungs, an ethnic minority of Chinese extraction, who are known for their fierce fighting ability and who settled here in 1954 from North Vietnam. The village had been secure, sitting just up the road from the district capital of Dinh Quan, where the South Vietnamese government has stationed troops among the strange-looking huge black boulders that make the area look like a Chinese landscape painting.

All that changed with the cease-fire last month. Ap Loi Tan doesn’t exist anymore. It’s nothing more than several acres of charred real estate, burned trees and gardens, and a few dozen haggard survivors who are angry at both sides for what happened to their village.

Hung, a 41-year-old farmer wearing black pajamas, appears especially eager to vent his anger to two travelers who stop to ask what happened to the village.

“At midnight before the day of the cease-fire, about 10 Vietcong came to the village and started tearing down the government flags,” and ordered the villagers not to leave, he says. As soon as word of the Vietcong incursion reached the district capital down the road, Hung continues, the district chief ordered his soldiers to fire artillery into the village. When the firing stopped, the village had been destroyed, and Hung says 60 villagers were killed and many more wounded.

“They left. None of them were hurt,” the thin farmer adds. “I am angry at them, and I am angry at the district chief. There weren’t many Vietcong, and they could have been beaten with a platoon of marines or rangers.”

He looks again at the burned-out homes and says, “The district chief should have told us to get out before he started firing artillery. He should have warned us.”

Ap Loi Tan is one of several villages and hamlets that can be seen burned out along the highway. One wonders how many other civilians have been killed since the cease-fire as the warring Vietnamese factions fight the battles to see who can tear down more of the other side’s flags so as to impress the international peace-keeping teams with how much land they control.

Route 20 has always been a favorite road for Vietcong tax collectors, because its high volume of truck traffic and buses made rich pickings. The road is clogged with trucks carrying vegetables from Dalat and giant pinewood logs destined for the lumber mills in the Central Highlands. It’s a favorite route for buses and limousines, too, as Dalat is also a much-visited resort area of the Vietnamese.

Phui Sin, a 47-year-old truck driver of Cambodian extraction, has been driving this road for many years; he makes 12 trips a month carrying logs from Saigon to lumber mills in the Highlands, then taking cut lumber to Cam Ranh on the coast for shipment to Japan. Three of his 10 children are in the South Vietnamese army; one was killed at An Loc during the spring offensive last year.

He claims not to have seen a Vietcong tax collector on the road for two years. “They used to set up a post guarded by five armed men and collect 3,000 piasters (about $6 at current rates—but more two years ago),” Mr. Sin says. The guerrillas would give the drivers a mimeographed receipt, and the drivers would be repaid by their employers, Mr. Sin adds.

The main highway has been relatively secure except for the 10 days after the cease-fire, when fighting along the road closed it to all traffic, he says.

According to intelligence sources in the Central Highlands, Mr. Sin hasn’t seen a Vietcong tax collector because many big companies whose trucks regularly ply the road make lump payments to the guerrillas, “at the Paris level,” as one source put it. It’s also thought that lumber trucks returning to the forest to pick up logs carry in drugs and food for the guerrillas in the hills. Because of this, the government once banned logging in many areas but apparently has
made an accommodation of sorts with the enemy because it needs to export the wood to gain desperately needed foreign currency.

Americans have a liking for ghost towns, and they have created one of the world's biggest at Cam Ranh, a long peninsula jutting south from the central coast that, except for a small neck of land connecting it to the mainland, would be an island. It was the fact that Cam Ranh was almost entirely surrounded, by water—and therefore easier to defend—that the desolate sand dunes were chosen for a large U.S. logistics base; a deepwater port was dredged, and many concrete runways were built to accommodate many of the men and much of the supplies needed to wage the Vietnam War.

It sits today dusty and rusting, having been turned over last June to the Vietnamese, who have no need for such a sprawling base and will use only small parts of it.

On the day two newsmen visited this vast cemetery of unused runways, abandoned and often-listing barracks, mess halls, service clubs and movie-theaters—not to mention hangars, bridges, and warehouses—long lines of South Korean trucks were bringing in equipment to be shipped back home. The last of the Koreans will be out of Vietnam soon, too.

South Vietnamese trucks were leaving the base loaded with supplies, some of which were being unpacked and distributed among soldiers not far from the Cam Ranh gates. It would be unfair to speculate on whether the supplies were being distributed or stolen.

It's strange, almost unseemly, how quickly much of the base has fallen into disrepair. It's only eight months since the American soldiers, seamen, Marines, airmen and Coast Guardsmen left, but many of the buildings have caved-in walls, and men and women all their windows and screens missing. The sand dunes have begun to retake small portions of the airport runways. A 'shuttle bus stop' sign swings aimlessly from a telephone pole, but there are no buses—only a bus graveyard near the base, that also holds the rusting hulks of trucks and jeeps and tons of other useless supplies dumped by the departing Americans.

Other things left behind include the graffiti engraved in a cement sidewalk:


"Except for its size, there's nothing special about Cam Ranh. There are dozens of other bases similarly abandoned. The Vietnamese will use a few for military purposes and have plans to use parts of others for such diverse projects as domestic airports and seaports, industrial parks and even a refinery."

"There's nothing bureaucratic hater more than confusion, and that's what we have now." The speaker was an American Foreign Service officer newly arrived in Nha Trang, a seaside resort town 80 miles north of Cam Ranh on Route One.

Nha Trang is one of four places in South Vietnam where U.S. consuls general will be stationed as part of the remaining American nonmilitary presence. The consulate general will take over many of the civilian advisory functions formerly carried out by CORDS (Civilian Operations and Rural Development Support), that queer creature of the Vietnam war that combined both military and U.S. embassy functions. Once predominantly staffed by military men, the operation now will be a civilian operation, since U.S. military men must leave the country by the end of March.

At the former CORDS compound, Vietnamese workers were busily painting and plastering offices and halls. The details of how the new operation will work are still up in the air. One thing known for sure is that, the title CORDS is out, gone the way of hundreds of Vietnam war acronyms. (CORDS itself once meant Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, but someone objected to use of the word "revolutionary," and it was changed to "rural development").

"Also eliminated in the new operations are the police-advisory duties of CORDS, a function ruled out by the cease-fire agreement, and the pacification program, especially the Phoenix program, under which thousands of Vietcong and alleged Vietcong were assassinated.

What will probably continue are advisory programs to aid refugees, land reform, community development and other such projects, officials here say.

In most provinces, instead of the large numbers of CORDS advisers—most of them military men in civilian clothes—there will be five-man civilian teams, plus a few specialists in areas such as agriculture, who will go where and when they are needed.
One Foreign Service officer who will report to the consul general on Vietcong activities and other political happenings will also be affiliated with each provincial advisory team. The officers were sent to Vietnam by the State Department on temporary duty, but nobody really knows how long they will be needed here—longer, it is supposed, if there are major problems with the cease-fire and shorter if there aren't.

Will they ever be able to recapture the glamor of those quixotic civilian-military men of CORDS, a rifle always handy, who set out in the early days of the war to pacify the Vietnamese countryside? Probably not, even though the ever-pessimistic are speculating that many of the military men formerly associated with CORDS will suddenly reappear with civilian identities to work for the consuls general.

All along the major highways of Vietnam, government flags fly from almost every man-made structure, as well as from trees, stands of bamboo, and the tops of hills. But nowhere are the flags more numerous than on the crude wood and tin huts that make up the numerous refugee resettlement towns for Vietnamese who once lived in areas under Communist control.

Despite the poverty of many of the new villages, almost without exception each house has a large flagpole in the front yard flying the orange flag with three red horizontal stripes of the Saigon government.

One wonders if the flags were flying because the refugees are grateful to be in government-controlled areas or because they are recipients of government food and rebuilding supplies and thus subject to pressure.

Closer to Saigon are former refugee towns like Ho Nai, settled by Catholics who left North Vietnam at the time of the Geneva settlement in 1954. They are among South Vietnam's most vehement anti-Communists, and their village, by Vietnamese standards, is wealthy.

There are new Japanese cars parked outside many of the houses, the shops are filled with consumer goods, and a few of the residents have large American-made tractors—a sure sign of prosperity in Vietnam, where most farmers still rely on the water buffalo to pull their plows.

The Ho Nai refugees probably started life here in 1954 with as little as the refugees in the present resettlement villages have. Yet the contrast between the old refugees and the newly displaced Vietnamese is startling. If the 1954 refugees did well in times of war, how well will the 1973 refugees do in times of peace?

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[From the Wall Street Journal, June 14, 1973]

INSCRUTABLE VIETNAM: THE MORE THAT THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY REMAIN JUST THE SAME

OPTIMISM EQUALS PESSIMISM, STRENGTH EQUALS WEAKNESS, AND PEACE IS EQUAL TO WAR—"WE ARE IN A FUZZY-FUSION" (By Peter R. Kann)

Saigon—An international architectural firm is displaying a scale model of a Saigon Hilton. Saigonese teenagers are all wrapped up in the latest local fad—roller skating. The city's newspapers are full of stories about local scandals called Thurgate, Laborgate, Antigate and Bankgate. Two Cabinet ministers are unveiling a new economic plan that calls for a major campaign to attract tourists. Dancing has once again been legalized, and the horses are running again at Phu Tho Racetrack.

Altogether, it's hard to tell whether this is the beginning of a generation of peace or just the height of the pre-monsoon silly season in the capital.

South of Saigon, in the steaming rice paddies of the Mekong Delta, 200-plus South Vietnamese soldiers are still dying every week. Three times that number are being wounded. And the Vietcong are taking comparable, though for once not higher, casualties. The Saigon government is building new outposts in Vietcong-claimed areas of Dinh Tuong Province, and the Vietcong are knocking off long-established South Vietnamese outposts in Chuong Thien Province.
The sporadic boom of South Vietnamese artillery fire can still be heard by day, and the Vietcong are still assassinating village officials by night. In the Delta, as elsewhere, both sides are unabashedly violating the four-month-old cease-fire.

Overall, it is difficult to know whether the war is seeking some sort of final equilibrium before it fades away or whether nothing in Vietnam has changed.

A visitor returning to Vietnam four months after the war officially ended finds the situation more contradictory and more confusing than ever. For every sign, there is a counter-sign: for every trend, there is a countertrend; and for every theory, there are a handful of countertheories. "We are in a rather fuzzy period," a U.S. official says in an epic understatement.

One cannot even talk in standard terms of optimism and pessimism any more. For, to be an optimist about the present position and short-term prospects of President Nguyen Van Thieu's government (as many observers here are) probably is to be a pessimist about the prospects of the cease-fire's working and of the war's fading away. If the war is finding an equilibrium, as some here suggest, then it wouldn't seem to be an equilibrium acceptable to the Communists.

THE SAFETY OF CYNICISM

As usual, the cynical view is probably the safest one: The killing will continue. "Continued fighting is the only way of resolving the anomalies of who controls what where," one U.S. analyst says. But the problem is that fighting has never resolved much of anything in Vietnam before.

The cease-fire, which officially went into effect Jan. 27, may still be said, in the words of Canada's Foreign Minister Mitchell Sharp, "to provide as sound and honorable a basis for peace as was negotiable." And those who search for hopeful straws in the wind can find some.

In certain areas the war has wound down and even ground to a near-halt. This is particularly true in northern Quang Tri Province, which is the closest thing to a conventional military front that the Vietnam war ever produced. In general, regular North Vietnamese divisions aren't launching large attacks, and in general, regular South Vietnamese divisions are in defensive positions. North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam has dropped sharply from the level of two months ago. South Vietnamese air strikes and artillery expenditure have been considerably curtailed, if only because of U.S. warnings about limitations of ordnance resupply.

MORE "NORMALITY"?

The Saigon government's new economic plan, which includes some goals more realistic than the one on tourism, can be viewed as a sign that the government is turning its attention toward reconstruction and economic development and is thus counting on a greater degree of peace and "normality." The government also has a confidential plan for demobilizing 100,000 soldiers a year, partly to reduce military costs.

The Communists are said to be devoting much of their energy to building and rebuilding in certain secure "zones" that they control. This may be viewed as a sign that the Communists are counting on more peace and "normality" or, at least, that they aren't planning a major offensive that would risk renewal of U.S. bombing and destruction of what is being built now.

The current fighting, for all its casualties, doesn't seem to be winning either side much new territory or population. Perhaps a kind of military stalemate, or equilibrium, is in the making, and this could cause both sides to further reduce the seemingly senseless combat.

Yesterday Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese Politburo member Le Duc Tho completed their talks aimed at finding ways of "strict respect and scrupulous implementation" of the agreement reached in January. (For details, see story on page 2.)

Those are the hopeful signs, but there are plenty of countersigns.

One can call the current combat "localized" or "sporadic" or "political-military," and yet the rate of killing is higher than at many other periods of the