

deeps

article # 5 of 15 article series

page 1

Photos to accompany this article were sent to you in July, along with shots of the North Vietnamese "invader" photos. Photo of the woman shows her in front of palm tree; also indoor shots smoking etc...you've already run one shot of her in July.

THE UNHAPPY ELECTION

Phan Thi Thanh was born 25 years ago in the small village of Huynh Lien, 400 miles north of Saigon and 25 miles west of the old imperial capital of Hue. Her mother died when she was 16; her two elder brothers went to North Viet Nam with the Communist guerrillas at the close of the ~~French~~ French Indo-China War, in 1954.

She lived with her deaf, ~~blind~~ blind father, 78-years-old, who complained one day: "My sons have been gone for ten years and their wives are not like daughters any more. We can not give them orders any more. If they come to see us, they come; if they don't come, they don't."

Thanh cultivates 1½ acre of riceland, exchanging labor with the neighbors, and two 2½ acres of gardenland, raising fruits, vegetables, pigs and chickens. "Many men have intended to marry me," she confessed, "But they can't live with my father. He's a burdensome burden."

She said the Communist guerrillas during the French/ Indo-China War taught her to read and write, "but I read the newspapers slowly and my writing is of the popular level," she explained, cupping her fingers around hand-rolled cigarette. She threw the cigarette butt on the floor where it smoldered away into ashes.

(More)

doope

article 5 of 15 article series

page # 2

She told ~~in~~ the story of her unhappy election:

One night, thirty Viet Cong (Communist) guerrillas came to her hamlet with rifles and grenades. They were dressed in black shorts and khaki shorts. They asked the people to assemble. There are about 80 to 90 adults in the hamlet; about 60-70 of these are women. The women are $\frac{2}{3}$ two-thirds of the population because the men are in the army or elsewhere.

The people told the Viet Cong: If you come here the national army will come and kill us.

The Viet Cong replied: Don't be afraid; we have soldiers to protect you.

Then when the people were assembled, they asked us to make demonstrations. We demonstrated for four consecutive nights-- in the daytimes we were busy destroying the government strategic hamlet (the fortified ~~in~~ hamlets established by the government, supposedly the keystone of the pacification effort). We were busy during the day tearing down the bamboo fences and the Viet Cong rolled up the ²barbed wire fences. The people told the Viet Cong: if we destroy this, the national army would come, but they replied that the army would not kill the people.

The strategic hamlet had been set up 2 years ago; I had helped work on it, digging trenches, picking bamboo and making it into poles and plunging it into the ground. The government gave the hamlet

deepe

article 5

page 3

several thousand piastres (US\$30) for this work and I got 40 piastres (6 cents).

But the hamlet is considered an area which had lost its security. There had been a hamlet chief, but two months earlier he was frightened and went to live in the village center and stayed with the village council. Anytime he needed to send papers to the hamlet, he asked the hamlet people to take them. His assistant in charge of security was kidnapped by the Viet Cong and we've heard nothing about him since.

So when the Viet Cong came, there was no hamlet chief or nor any hamlet officials.

We used to have combat youth too, trained by the government for one month and given rifles and a radio to defend the x hamlet. However, a few months before, they were dissolved so they gave their rifles and radio back to the village council. When the Viet Cong came to the hamlet, they asked three combat youth to join them and gave them weapons. These three were later killed in the big battle.

During the meetings, the Viet Cong told us they had come to help the population and to install a new government in South Viet Nam. They said in each hamlet and village the women should be organized to help each other. They said their motto was: we should mutually help each other.

While the Viet Cong stayed in the hamlet for four days, I cooked rice for them twice, but they gave me the rice.

Doops

article 5

page 4

During one meeting, even as the cadre talked, we heard cannon fire in the distance. The people were afraid of the coming of the national army. But the Viet Cong told the people not to be afraid and that they should stay in the meeting. They asked the people to dig trenches--one for each house--and along the roadside.

The meetings were generally held in the open yard under the sky. Only one cadre did the speaking, while two others sat and listened. There was no secretary to take notes on the meeting; the cadre who did the talking was strong, healthy, a little fat, in fact. He spoke fluently and quickly.

Sometimes I understood and sometimes I didn't; but even when the people did not understand, no one dared to ask questions. He asked the population to volunteer for various jobs--like destroying the strategic hamlet.

When the cadre asked who would volunteer, those who wanted to raised their hands--and those who didn't want to raised their hands. Everyone was afraid not to volunteer. The cadre asked: Is there anyone who dares to disagree? No one did.

Then one night, the Viet Cong asked me to round up the women to come to a meeting in one of the family's houses. There are about 60 women in the hamlet, but only 30 came to the meeting--the others were busy with their ~~big~~ children. One Viet Cong soldier with a rifle kept watch outside the house and sometimes he'd look into the meeting.

* deoys

articolo 5

page 5

At the beginning of the meeting, the cadre said that with the revolution the Viet Cong must liberate the women so they have their deserved place. He said they would organize a committee of women in order to guide the women and lead their activities.

He asked who would be elected and suggested two capable cadre; one named huong and the other was me. The women said they didn't know if they could elect me because I had served on the women's committee under the government, too. The women asked, if they were going to have a people's regime, how could I be elected.

The cadre replied that they could elect anyone who was capable and could look after their interests.

However, the women replied they did not know who to elect and suggested the cadre appoint someone. So ~~him~~ he appointed huong as chairman and me as vice-chairman. ~~him~~ He asked the women if they accepted and they said yes.

I was not very happy or proud and I told the cadre that. I said I didn't want to accept. It would be dangerous; the national army could come and beat me. He said I should take ²charge of the ~~me~~ women because I have the past experience.

But again I replied I personally was not happy. If I'm trusted by the people and fairly elected, then I'd be happy. (A government interrogator noted that this view of fair election is shared by both the Communists and the Americans, but it is alien to Vietnamese

itions.)

Then one day the government troops came and I fled to a nearby hamlet. On the first day, cannonshells fell on the hamlet; no one was ~~seriously~~ killed, but everyone was terrified. Four days later I went back to my hamlet, and at 9 in the morning the government troops came to my hamlet.

At first I was scared and stayed in the trench in my house. But when the Viet Cong fled, I asked them to take me ~~with~~ along. They were not very happy to take me, but didn't force me to stay. I told them I wanted to go because I was elected vice-chairman of the Women's Association and if I stayed the government would arrest me and torture me. So I said I was going with them.

The Viet Cong fled towards the river and the national army was coming from the other side. There was a lot of shooting. When it ended, eight Viet Cong were dead. One was the chairman of the women's committee. I was shot in the finger and captured. The government said I was a Viet Cong and was feeding them and acting as a liaison agent for them.

A high-ranking military officer said she would be ~~executed~~ executed.