

DEEPE

SANTA--1

dec. 23, 1964

SAIGON--For a hundred Vietnamese orphans, Santa came in a helicopter this year.

The arrival of the red-flannel suited Santa in the torrid tropical temperature brought gasps from the ~~oncl~~ onlooking orphans of "Ah! Ong Gia Noel--Old Man Christmas!" as he ~~step~~ stepped out of a U. S. Army "Huey" ~~helo~~ helicopter with sleigh-like runners.

For Christmas, the pilots, crews and mechanics of the 145th Aviation Battalion in Saigon--who normally spend their days fighting Communist Viet Cong guerrillas--personally adopted for the day 90 orphans from an "orphanage without a name" in the suburbs of Saigon.

(More)

deepe

santa--2

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"I think the GI's had more fun than the kids," ~~Mr~~ Battl
Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Robert K. Cunningham of Montgomery
Ala. laughed.

The youngsters arrived at the ~~camp~~ white bungalow
compound of the helicopter companies singing ~~in~~ "Jingle Bells"
in English, although none of them could understand the language.
They were promptly given ~~hand~~ haircuts and showers.

"It's the first shower some of them had ever taken," one
American crew chief laughed. "They stayed in their for 30 minutes and
didn't want to leave. I got as wet as ~~Emm~~ they did."

Then their ~~rag~~ tattered ragmuffin clothes were changed.
The little girls were transformed into Cinderellas with fluffy crispy
dresses of pinks and yellows--which the ~~g~~ GI's had arranged to have
personally custom-made by a Saigon tailor for each.

Cartoons of Pluto and Mickey Mouse were followed by a Christmas
dinner of hamburgers a la American, chocolate ice cream and frosted
cakes.

Then they were taken to Tan Son Nhut airport whdr where for
the first time in their lives they saw ~~jet~~ commercial jet airliners and
American helicopters take off and land.

(More)

deeps

santa--3

"It doesn't seem much like Christmas in this kind of weather," one young American crew chief said, wiping the sweat from his brow.

"Oh, ~~my kids~~ I've been stationed in Georgia and Alabama for three years," another chimed in. "My kids have never seen snow so it isn't much different than here."

A third laughed, "I m "My kids would kill me if I didn't make them a snowman every year," a ~~the~~ 'copter pilot from New Hampshire laughed.

Suddenly, over the rooftop flew a brown metallic dragonfly of a helicopter with a red-suited Santa with a jolly laugh and unpadding ~~stomach~~ tummy.

Followed like a Pied Piper by ~~hundreds~~ tens of the children, he quickly distributed from his toy sack (Army laundry bag) candy, dolls for the little girls and tanks, guns--and even Air Force jetliners for the little boys.

"At Christmastime we are even nice to the Air Force," one helicopter pilot ~~launche~~ laughed, alluding to the Air-Force-Army ~~competition~~ competition between airplanes and fast-moving Army armed helicopters.

"Man, is it hot in here," said Santa (Sp/4 Marvin Spidle, ~~signature~~ a crew chief of 213 pounds from Hagerstown, Maryland). "I think I'm going to faint. This suit (custom-made in Saigon) is hotter than fatigues."

deeps

Santa--4

But even as the ~~garrison~~ Santa ~~is~~ handed out the gifts, a few high-ranking helicopter pilots slipped away for a briefing on tomorrow's secret mission against the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas.