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arch--1

february 5, 1965

HOA LONG (UNIFIED DRAGON), SOUTH VIET NAM--In this small government district headquarters only 33 air miles from Saigon, the ragmuffin Vietnamese children shout "~~come~~ "comrade" instead of "hello."

An elderly Vietnamese man in the traditional long flowing gown drove his motor ~~scooter~~ scooter near an American correspondent and fanged out a one-word curse: Death.

At ~~bone~~ end of this town of 1000% persons, a yellow and red government flag straggles limply from a tree <sup>BRANCH</sup> brach near the market with this sign painted near the roof: We welcome aid from friendly countries.

But at the other end of the village--only half a mile--is a newly erected archway over the road, with ~~signs~~ ~~signs~~ banners reading: Hurrah for the seven-day cease-fire of the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam (the political organization of the Viet Cong guerrillas). and "the people should compete in the fight for many accomplishments during the year 1965."

The archway, made of crude tree branches was bedecked with gay yellow and white paper chrysanthemums, red and green paper Viet Cong flags and white envelopes containing propaganda leaflets addressed to "a soldier."



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Near the archway, a Viet Cong banner dangling above the gate of the government primary school read: Our brother soldiers (of the government side). Oppose the restriction order; insist on being allowed to come home and celebrate the Tet (the Chinese New Year). Viet Cong <sup>Flags</sup> made of celluloid paper, had been pasted onto the gates of individual homes--and even on the government's "turn right" road side.



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In the middle of the village, near the turn of the only dusty road, is two marine companies ~~hauwaimbichuan~~ dug-in behind bull-dosed dirt embankments, like a miniature fort, which they will leave in several days to move their patrolling operations elsewhere. Behind the marine entrenchment is the two-story stucco, newly painted district headquarters building with cheery chocin shocking pink and canary yellow shutters. The only other government flag in the village flutters from a pole in front of the headquarters.

one of the 230-plus  
Officially, and on paper, Hoa Long is a district headquarters town which the government considers it owns. Unofficially, and on the ground ground, Hoa Long illustrates the over-tightening grip the Viet Cong have clenched around the ~~vici~~ citizens and peasants.

The district chief, whom one ~~vikingman~~ citizen said he had never seen, reportedly estimated that 90 per cent of the villagers are Viet Cong sympathizers. ("The district chief has a nice house; why should he leave it," another villager complained.)

"In 1964 the Viet Cong fought for and won the villages in the country," one veteran French colonel, who had ~~witne~~ fought in the French-War French Indo-China War almost a decade ago. "Now the Viet Cong will use the villages to encircle and grab the towns. That's Mao-Tse-Tung, Paragraph E Two."

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We stopped at edge of the village to talk with <sup>Linh</sup> Nguyen ~~Minh~~, who was riding his <sup>toffee-colored</sup> bull ~~and~~ in a small grassy area near the sawed-off trees, foundations of destroyed houses and a modest-sized Buddhist pagoda. <sup>with Voiced Viet Cong Fragments</sup> Mr. Linh said he was actually 43 years old, but when he was born it took so long to get his birth ~~recise~~ registered that he is officially only 40 years old. He was hard-muscled, of dark complexion, with deepset eyes and a tufts of a tobacco-colored ~~h~~ beard ~~protrud~~ protruding from his chin.

"Tet here is very sad this year," he said referring to the Christmas-like festivities of the Chinese New Year. "Tet used to be a happy time for us, but not ~~aw~~ now."

"The crops are very bad this year. We usually have a good rice harvest, but this year the crop was very bad. The government airplanes fly over and make the rice lie down--just like they had pulled a ~~gue~~ huge grass mat over the field and made the rice flat. The rice on the bottom is soggy and is ruined. Of course, the planes fly high but they still flatten the rice--"

By this time he was in a <sup>U.S. BLC</sup> ~~general~~ state of ~~ex~~ <sup>And</sup> rked excitement, had jumped off his bull and ~~die~~ tied it to <sup>H.S.</sup> the ~~rope of~~ a white bull.

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"--and look here--right here where we are standing," he continued getting more animated and twisting his beard into a wispy cone. "The government soldiers came in here and bulldozed our houses ~~down~~ away. They came and told everyone living in this area that they would have to move someplace else, because it was insecure here. Those that could afford it rebuilt themselves houses nearer the district headquarters. Then, a few weeks later--just a month ago--the soldiers came back and said that everyone had to move immediately. And they did not offer to help us transport our goods or to pay us money for our land. And a few days <sup>LATER</sup> they came and started bulldozing the houses ~~and the trees~~ down--just like a big flatiron--and they bulldozed down <sup>our</sup> breadfruit and sabotje trees. People used to make money on those trees. The <sup>ones too</sup> ~~one took~~ big to bulldoze, they had other soldiers <sup>we</sup> saw off. And it was private land, but the government just took it. I <sup>HEARD</sup> ~~heard~~ that American aid was going to give the people 500 piastres (U.S\$7) for their <sup>patch</sup> ~~wooden~~ houses and 1000 piastres (US\$14) for their cement block houses.

"Several days ago government troops went to a village six kilometers from here and told the people they would have to move. The people were allowed to take nothing except what they had on their backs. They all wanted to take something, because everyone must have something new to put on the first days of Tet, but the soldiers wouldn't let them. Then yesterday noon the people came back to their homes--but their homes had been looted--everything worthwhile gone. I don't know who did it--both the government troops and the Viet Cong are capable of doing something like that. If you have any influence get the government to give us security so we can do our work and make a living without being terrified all the time. We are truly miserable."



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Rather elated at the way he had verbally explained the misery of the townspeople, he then enante enacted a one-man pantomime of a battle, in which with stiff, stylized stylized gestures of a Chinese opera he became in one moment a guerrilla sneaking through the forest and the next moment a bayonet-wielding marine.

We asked him if he had had a chance for much education, to which he replied "Oh yes," and immediately blurted out a countdown of from one to twenty in French.

"I can count further than that, but it takes me longer," he added.

He again hopped back on his bull and we walked down the road to the marine encampment around a large house strewn with army cots and mosquito nets. When we asked about the troops looting the houses in the neighboring village, a Vietnamese American marine advisor tugged at his sweaty t-shirt and yelled--"They should have burned those houses. That's a Viet Cong village--they have trenches 13 feet deep all along the village perimeter perimeter. The Viet Cong have tunnels leading from the houses out fifty yards into the forest. The Special Forces moved the people out so they could wait for the Viet Cong to return. What do the people have to complain about? We lost one of our best Vietnamese troopers there just a couple of days ago."



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We commented to the Vietnamese marine captain that Hao Long wasn't a very cheery place to spend his Tet. He just looked dejected and refused to confirm or deny the comment.

We then walked fifty feet down the dusty road and met Mr. Vo Huu Ba, a sixty-three yearold farmer, also with a wispy grey beard but leading a ~~pl~~ pony from his house. He said he had never been married and then assured us he knew nothing about politics, including even American aid. A younger-looking man in an old, white, but clean shirt and shorts explained that "American aid" is "those goods which American gives to Viet Nam."

He then took it upon himself to explain the situation in his own terms, which were very much the terms that Viet Cong propaganda<sup>CS</sup> and cadre use consistently.

"We have never received any american aid here," he said specifically, though he stood only fifty feet away from the cement ~~blackhouse~~ <sup>blackhouse</sup> ~~blackhouse~~ built with American funds and used as an information center. Government posters, printed by the United States Information Service, had been either ripped or rained off.

"And we've never seen a representative of American aid or the Vietnamese government giving aid. The province and district officials get all the aid. We don't see it at the village level. Besides we don't want any American aid. If you want to help us, ~~see to it~~ try to find a way so there no more fighting. We just want to have quiet so we can make a living."



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He also accused the government forces of not allowing the people ~~to~~ to build trenches in their homes "because government troops know that the Viet Cong will not fire on innocent civilians so the government armies can use the people as shield against the Viet Cong gunfire."

An anti-Communist villager in a neighboring town, upon hearing of these pro-Communist charges, ~~again~~ laughed them off and said that the conduct of government troops in general was very decent and the arrogance of them was a rarity.

"It just proves how bad the government's propaganda is," he explained and "and that there's no one in these villages who <sup>is</sup> pro-government enough to counter the Viet Cong's gossip accusations."

But even a 20-year-old student in a government high school explained "the Viet Cong are the people, but they think differently than the people."

Then he took another drink of his Coca-Cola.