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The desolate post of Mang Buc rpt Mang Buc snuggles in a valley encircled by 7000-foot jungled peaks midway between Viet Nam's coast on the South China Sea and the Laotian border. Across these mountains 300 miles north of Saigon filter Communist Viet Cong propaganda agents, soldiers, supplies and equipment through an important infiltration route known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail—a series of paths, animal tracks and jungle clearings. Not far from Mang Buc lies a Communist guerrilla stronghold known as the Viet Cong's Fifth Inter-Regional Headquarters. From this center of Viet Cong activity around Mang Buc, U. S. Marine helicopters have been fired at eight times in the past month; ambushes and raids occur weekly.

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A dozen dirt-floored, rice-straw shacks roofed with corrugated tin, Mang Buc is a five-day walk--or half-hour helicopter ride--to civilization. Scattered down the valley outside the bamboo fence of the camp ~~xxx~~ are the dismal shacks of the trainees' dependents--known as "brown buggers"--and an open shed for the bartering of rice, salt and ducks. During the current season of almost continuous rains and thick clouds, the small outpost is "souped in" for weeks at a time, making impossible the "Stink-o Special"--flights for airdropping or helicoptering in live pigs, ducks, ~~skinks~~ and chickens caged in wicker baskets.

Living in this "hellhole on a high plateau" to train and equip the primitive montagnards--the France word for mountaineers--is a 12-man team of U. S. Army Special Forces--a detachment of highly-trained, green-bereted specialists in light and heavy weapons, operations, intelligence work, demolitions, communications and two medics.

Intelligence sergeant for Mang Buc's team is 36-year-old SFC Lawrence (correct) H. Allen, a red-haired, mustached native of Tacoma, Washington, known throughout the area as "Oriental Al."

Stationed four times in the Far East, including four years of World War II combat from the Solomn Islands ~~s~~ to Iwo Jima, the six-foot "rice paddy daddy" has learned to adjust quickly to the Oriental way of life. His normal breakfast is rice and hot coffee if pancake flour and bacon run out. He joins the montagnards for lunch of rice, dried fish and their delicacies of stewed grubs, termites or toasted rats. Like the tribesmen, his ~~xxx~~ "laundromat and shower room" is a lashing cold stream near the camp. Last week, he was presented a red and blue beaded necklace--a Special Forces status symbol--making him a "warrior" in a nearby village. (More)

Through a Vietnamese interpreter, "Oriental Al" helps teach the cadre of the Katang tribe ambush and surprise tactics, ^{AND} how to use carbines instead of ~~xxx~~ crossbows. The dozen Katang cadre then instruct 200 ~~xxx~~ tribesmen in weapons use and maintenance, ^{tactics} ~~tacts~~ and operations.

The most influential members of the Special Forces team are the two medics. At Mang Buc, 22-year-old baby-faced Sgt. Tom Duffy of Chicago treats 30 to 50 montagnards a day and gives medical training to two native cadre. The health program at one Special Forces camp included passing out thousands of iron pills, vitamin capsules and bars of soap to cleanse the montagnards scaly, infected skin. The Special Forces team cut the death rate in neighboring villages from four a day to four in ten weeks.

"The Special Forces medics are the key to the whole damn team," one high ranking American officer explained. "They go into a strange area to meet strange people to whom a pill for pain is a miracle."

An estimated 700,000 montagnards live semi-nomadically throughout the high plateau region blanketing the northern two-thirds of South Viet Nam. Described as being similar to the American Indian 300 or 400 years ago, the montagnards have never used electricity, are terrified to ride on a helicopter, brush their gleaming white teeth with their fingers and mud, and are just now learning to eat with spoons instead of their fingers. Few have ever seen "the magic lantern"—a movie. In the 1800's the French regarded the montagnards as animals and commonly believed they had tails. One Frenchman even organized an expedition to try to capture one of them for a Paris zoo.

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"We are trying to get a polaroid camera up here," green-bereted M/Sgt. William S. Burke, of Baltimore, Mang Buc's team sergeant, said. "Photos of themselves would throw these people in a tizzy. They are fascinated ~~enough~~ enough with a mirror."

"We tried passing out bubble gum to the kids," he continued. "But that didn't work too well. They swallowed it."

Yet these uneducated people in the critical plateau are industriously intelligent. "In our camp, they learn English and Vietnamese on their own, striking matches or using our lighter fluid at night," Burke explained. "One of them has learned to speak in unaccented GI-ese 'Give me a cigarette, Burke'." Once they learn something, they never forget it. They rely on memory like we rely on pencil and paper.

"Some of them can count from one to one hundred in English," he concluded. "This is important for accurate information. Before when we asked them how deep a stream was, they'd answer 'two elephants deep'."

"Oriental Al" added that the montagnards are "dead shots with a carbine and could hear a tree leap snap before I'd even see anything. If I don't hesitate a minute to go out of this compound with them. They can handle any trouble we get into."

"This is the major hope for Viet Nam," one high-ranking officer explained. "We're trying to rob the guerrilla of his food, intelligence network and his security. We are trying to jeopardize him by reclaiming the montagnards who could be our friends but who have been terrorized into being our foes."

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A year ago only a handful of Special Forces teams were in the country. In June, 1962, they began mobilizing 100,000 montagnards in the critical high plateau area. After a joint Vietnamese-American survey team selects a location for a detachment--President Ngo Dinh Diem approves each location--local security is established in the area and the medics begin treating the tribesmen and training village medics. Other team members persuade village men to volunteer for combat training. Soon nearby villages begin volunteering for the program. "We've been so successful we have to set high standards for which villages to admit," one high official explained.

The first village ~~that~~ a Special Forces team worked with in the high plateau plateau has expanded in ten months into a 179-village complex under government control. Now a number of teams are scattered throughout the plateau region to form a human-wall defense against Laotian infiltration and Viet Cong raids.

~~Some of the villages ~~are~~ where Special Forces teams are working are ~~no~~~~

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 In some areas Special Forces train and equip some of the 130,000 montagnards montagnards ~~regi~~ refugees who have left Viet Cong-controlled villages to enter government secured areas. "These people have voted with their feet--their barefeet--to be free," one American official explained. In lowland areas, the teams mobilize such loyal civilian elements as Catholic youth groups or villages commanded by Catholic priests.

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Other phases of Special Forces work, upon coordination ~~arranging~~ with the Central Intelligence Agency, are so highly classified the teams have been called "sneaky petes" or "~~sp~~" "spooks."

This week a 76-man Special Forces headquarters company arrived in Viet Nam to establish ~~and~~ even tighter organization and better supply and communications ^{channels} ~~channels~~ for training and equipping the primitive montagnards--until now ~~known~~ "people who were born, died--and nobody knew or cared."

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Note to Editors: The headquarters company is scheduled to arrive the first week in November, but if it should be delayed I'll notify you by cable.