

'Total, Bloody Mayhem'

The war in Viet Nam, more than most, is a dirty war where civilians are cold-bloodedly butchered for psychological effect and prisoners are tortured brutally for information. In the grim struggle, as the following report makes clear, neither side has a monopoly on atrocities.

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Every day the "Fishnet Report," classified as confidential, is collected from the provinces of Viet Nam, typed and filed at the American military headquarters here. It lists atrocities of this war in which Vietnamese kill and torture Vietnamese.

Extracts from the report for just one day in the northern province of Thua Thien, containing the old imperial capital of Hue, read as follows:

¶An unknown number of Communist Viet Cong guerrillas infiltrated a "New Life" hamlet and murdered two civilians.

¶An unknown number of Viet Cong entered a hamlet and assassinated a 14-year-old boy.

¶An unknown number of Viet Cong entered Ke Sung hamlet and Thanh Duong hamlet, murdering two residents and seriously wounding another.

¶One Viet Cong squad entered Tho Son hamlet and kidnaped one resident.

In the neighboring province of Quang Tri, the report indicated, three Viet Cong entered Thanh Luong hamlet and kidnaped two youths. In the adjoining mountain province of Pleiku, the report said, an unknown number of Viet Cong detonated a mine against a civilian bus, killing one civilian and wounding three others.

'TOTAL MAYHEM'

"This is the story of total, bloody mayhem which daily takes place in the Vietnamese villages," one concerned American official said. "It's been going on for years."

The atrocities are not committed only by the Communist forces. Vietnamese government troops, while seldom torturing non-suspect civilians, are known to torture Viet Cong prisoners and suspects. One Vietnamese army captain explained that government troops try to get intelligence information from Viet Cong prisoners in the heat of battle.

American advisers and intelligence officers have urged the Vietnamese forces to be more lenient with Viet Cong prisoners and to keep them alive for additional intelligence.

In one known case, two Viet Cong prisoners were interrogated on an airplane flying toward Saigon. The first

refused to answer questions and was thrown out of the airplane at 3,000 feet. The second immediately answered all the questions. But he, too, was thrown out.

One of the most infamous methods of torture used by the government forces is partial electrocution—or "frying," as one U. S. adviser called it.

This correspondent was present on one occasion when the torture was employed. Two wires were attached to the thumbs of a Viet Cong prisoner. At the other end of the strings was a field generator, cranked by a Vietnamese private. The mechanism produced an electrical current that burned and shocked the prisoner.

Vietnamese officers report that sometimes the wires are attached to the male genital organs, or to the breasts of a Viet Cong woman prisoner.

The water torture, also used by government forces, is painful but seldom fatal. One person forces the prisoner to gulp water, while another applies pressure on his stomach. This forces the water out and creates a feeling similar to drowning.

Other techniques, usually designed to force onlooking prisoners to talk, involve cutting off the fingers, ears, fingernails or sexual organs of another prisoner. Sometimes a string of ears decorates the wall of a government military installation. One American installation has a Viet Cong ear preserved in alcohol.

In dealing with government prisoners, the Viet Cong have two tactics. One is to treat the government troops well, indoctrinate them and send them back to their units in the hope of getting their co-operation in the future. The second is to destroy them.

At a Western cocktail party last month, one European counter-guerrilla expert said, "I've just read the goriest report ever—from Binh Dinh province.

"The Viet Cong sneaked into the government hamlet, grabbed the village chief and his family. They forced the chief to watch as they cut off the legs of his five children, then bayoneted out the abdomen of his wife. And then they emasculated him, leaving them all to die as slowly as possible."

He continued: "The Viet Cong are very selective with this terror-torture technique. They do it for deliberate political purposes. That story will spread like wildfire through Binh Dinh province. Every government village chief knows if he takes an active stand against the Communists the same thing will happen to him and his family."

The effect of this terror is to destroy the most anti-Communist elements in the village.

Earlier this month, American officials in Saigon and Washington vigorously protested the killing of an American civilian employee working for the U. S. Agency for International Development.

Officially, this was one of the first atrocity killings of an American in Viet Nam. American advisers in the provinces, however, have reported atrocity killings of U. S. military prisoners.

One of these involved four U. S. advisers captured by the Viet Cong when their district headquarters in Phuoc Long province was overrun last December. "Their bodies had been tortured and hacked," one American adviser said. "And then they were shot in the back of their head."