

# When the Viet Cong Snafus Saigon's Snob Set

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DALAT, South Viet Nam.

This snobbish resort — and No. 1 spy center — virtually has been isolated by Viet Cong guerrillas in the mountains north of Saigon.

Until May, Dalat, a quiet and cool city of 60,000 people, was the resort area of Saigon's jet set — or more accurately Dakota set — when the clammy monsoons invaded the delta regions. In the temperate year-round weather of Dalat, important military and political meetings have been held to cool off the hot heads in government or the hot tempers of military brass and extremist opposition leaders.

## SIGNS

Rich upper-class businessmen entertain their families and influential friends in private chalet-style villas there. The Communists rarely harassed or sabotaged the 250-mile long road linking Saigon

and Dalat. The Reds need Dalat as a center for gathering intelligence.

But on May 15, the Communists took over about 15 miles of the route. They cut the road with a government bulldozer while a white Communist cameraman and Viet Cong movie cameraman photographed an armed, khaki-clad Communist guerrilla supervising the digging up of the roadbed, eyewitnesses said.

At the road blocks, people who walked through the 15-mile sabotaged strip — to catch a bus or hire a car on the other side of the trenches — could see Communist signs reading:

"The Liberation Forces (Communist) invite the people to stay where they are. We are attacking all road communications leading to Saigon. Please, wait until the capital is liberated, and we will have more fun going there together."

But realizing the sudden difficulty faced by the people, the Red saboteurs explained, traffic would be resumed

again for five days — May 25 to 30 — so that the people could attend to their affairs. However, they added that the sabotage would be resumed without notice.

The Saigon-Dalat highway is one of the most vital trade links in South Viet Nam. Roads leading from Dalat northward and eastward to the South China Sea have been severed by the Reds since last year.

The only safe line of supplies and transportation to Dalat is the air line. The national air line Air Viet Nam has added a number of flights but still lacks the flights to serve all who want to go to Dalat this summer.

Owners of luxury cars have left their cars in Saigon because they fear sabotage.

## HOARDING

Dalat commercial speculators are hoarding foodstuffs in a bid to push up prices. The city is the main supply center of Saigon's vegetables.

When the Communists sabotaged the road for ten days,

vegetables and especially carrots began rotting in Dalat and a shortage of vegetables was felt in Saigon.

Oddly enough, instead of turning their wrath on the Reds, the upper-class people stranded in Dalat, and the farmers who were worrying about their crops complained that the anti-Communist government and the half-million-man Vietnamese armed forces had not adequately fought off the guerrillas or repaired the roads.

The more sophisticated wondered about the usefulness of New Zealand and Korean engineering corps troops recently sent to Viet Nam to help them.

According to military sources, the guerrillas attacked the Saigon-Dalat highway last month to provide security for the movement of hard-core units from the coastal provinces northeast of Saigon to the mountainous areas and high plateaus for their main offensives which are going on now.

Even though the Commu-

nist troop movement is over, the Communists continue occasionally to dig up the road, build mud obstacles or fell trees across the road to stop cars, buses and trucks.

According to security sources, the Communists' purpose is to raise taxes and to remind the people of their presence. They have charged from 500 to 2,000 piastres (\$5 to \$20) on each French-made car, over 2,000 piastres on each American-made car and higher rates for trucks transporting food stuffs and vegetables.

The tax is aimed primarily at the farmers. So far, these have been staunchly anti-Communist. Many of them fled Communist north Viet Nam at the end of the Indochina war. By sabotaging the roads, the farmers are forced indirectly to pay the tax. If the farmers refused the Communists would carry out a long period of sabotage and the vegetables would rot.

According to intelligence sources, the Communists do not consider Dalat City a military target. But they do

regard Dalat as one of the most important places to obtain intelligence.

This was discovered at the beginning of this year when an important Red spy was captured by chance. At a checkpoint of the Belle Vue Pass, a policeman tried out a new system of detecting fabricated identity cards issued by the Communists to their infiltrated cadres. He detained one suspect named Nguyen Van Doan who had in his possession a large sum of Vietnamese piastres.

Interrogated by Dalat security forces, he admitted he was a Communist agent. The deputy chief of the Vietnamese Central Intelligence Organization immediately flew to Dalat. Doan confessed he was a political captain of the North Viet Nam Army.

He was born in South Viet Nam and was parachuted from North Viet Nam into Pleiku last year. He made his way to Saigon where he rented a house and hired a housekeeper. Then he renewed contacts with a num-

ber of high ranking military officers and government officials in Saigon before moving to Dalat to set up an intelligence network.

## EVASION

According to one spy hunter, Dalat is the most wonderful and secure place to obtain information. It is difficult to follow a spy there and if suspected, the spy can escape easily into the Communist controlled areas outside the city. For this reason the Communists in early 1963 dissolved fifteen military camps created in Tuyen-Duc Province, in which Dalat is situated.

However, to show their military presence, the Communists keep three companies of regional forces, each in one of three districts of Tuyen-Duc Province. In addition, the Communists have 15 networks of sympathizers and spies working for them in Dalat. Five of them were cracked by the government recently after the Americans agreed to earmark additional funds to re-



cruit and organize better spy hunters.

The Americans agreed to this because they are building a \$4 million high-frequency communication system near Dalat and reportedly considering bringing in nearly one battalion of U. S. Marines to protect this installation.

The Americans also are reportedly planning to build there a convalescence hospital for wounded and sick GI's.