

deepe

militia--1

feb. 5, 1965

OUTPOST ON THE GRAND RAPIDS RIVER, SOUTH VIET NAM--Twenty militiamen clad in black pajamas nightly play a cops-and-robbers game with the Viet Cong guerrillas--at life-or-death stakes--as they exist in this outpost partially demolished by Communist mortar fire.

"It's a hard, tough life, here, but it's thrilling," explained a 19-year-old private, a Catholic who had come to South Vietnam from the North after the 1954 Geneva Agreements dividing the country.

"But we're a long way from the top brass, so we can be independent and be our own boss without having other people meddle in our affairs. We like it that way. We don't have to bow and scrape to the big shots all the time," he explained.

He wore shorts, a fatigue shirt and a straw pith helmet with a plasticized cover on which a fellow-militiaman had ~~sketchily~~ drawn, for fun, a Viet Cong star with a black crayon. He slightly leaned against a pole of the barbed wire fence which surrounded the former French outpost, that only two weeks ago had been besieged by Viet Cong mortar fire.

Charred pits surrounded the post where the mortars had bounced near the steep, one-lane bridge across small Grand Rapids river.

Red-and-white road signs near the bridge were pockmarked with Viet Cong small arms fire.



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militiamen--2

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"The Viet Cong fired seven mortar rounds at us," he explained.

"Two of them hit inside the post. But that's all right--we had already dug individual bunkers with dirt roofs so none of us were ~~an~~ injured. Every night ten of us stay inside the post and another ten take up positions around the perimeter to secure this two-kilometer (about one mile) stretch of road and to defend the bridge. We've been trained to take care of ourselves under these conditions and we do alright."

He recalled that two months, the outpost then manned by seven different militiamen, had been overrun by several hundred Viet Cong guerrillas who swooped down in successive human waves. Three of the defenders were killed while the other four deserted.

"But just give us a chance at them," he sniffed confidently. "We have good weapons (US-supplied carbines) and good equipment to keep our weapons in shape and we know how to use them."

He gazed towards clumps of trees half a mile away--the probable direction of a Viet Cong attack.

"But ~~the~~ life here is pretty miserable," he said as turning to the dilapidated, roofless ~~bamboo~~ brick outpost. "During the daytime, it's hot inside there and during the nighttime cold winds whip through it. And when it rains, everything is flooded and the equipment gets soaked and things capable of getting soggy get soggy."



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militiamen--3

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"The army issued us hammocks, but we don't need them and furthermore we don't have a place to sling them on. We make our own beds out of dried grass that we gather up, but they get ~~pretty~~ wet when it rains too."

The private explained that he was given 1700 piastres a month in base pay plus 200 additional for living away from his station, which totalled the equivalent of US\$26. He ~~was~~ happily reported that he had been given a "g" "big" pay increase of 30 per cent several months ago.

"That's about enough to get along for my family," he said.

~~Significant information~~ "I'm not married because I want to be free to do as I want. But my mother and father are old and ~~but~~ they raise a couple of pigs for their own consumption. And I have two sisters--you know how women are--they like to dress in pretty clothes and that kind of thing. Once in awhile one of my sisters works as a housemaid, but not very often."

"Our headquarters takes 450 piastres (about US\$6) out of our paycheck each month for our food, but that's just enough for my rice. The rest of my food--like vegetables and fish--has to come out of my own pocket."

The jolly jovial private said that five of the twenty men were on duty this week; five others were given leave for the lunar new year holidays and ten others ~~rank~~ "made a parachute jump", which means they skipped out to see their families. He said he did not know how

(More)  
long his unit would be in the post--"Maybe several days, maybe several months and maybe several years--until someone replaces us."



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militiamen—4

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The 33-year-old sergeant, in command of the militiamen, jumped off a bus traveling the highway and joined the conversation. He explained he belonged to the Miao Nung tribe (part Chinese and part tribal ~~an~~ in racial stock) and had left North Vietnam in 1954 when the Communists took over.

"I joined the South Vietnamese national army thinking ~~i~~ that in a few months later we go back as part of a force to liberate the North from Communist control," he said, but ~~it was a long time~~ then he dropped the question as though it were a dead subject.

We asked if he was married.

"You're not kidding I'm married," he laughed. "I have one wife with five children and another wife with two."

A third defender asked us questions about life in the United States.

"Life in American must be fairly easy and enjoyable," he ventured. "You must have alot of fun there."

Then the three-some rushed across the highway to throw clods at three brown bulls grazing dangerously close to a ~~mine~~ minefield rimming the ~~A~~ bridge near the grand Rapids River.



February 4, 1965

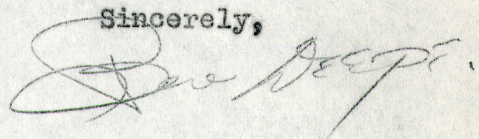
Dear Mr. Rosenfeld:

I'm enclosing a three-part series on rice-root interviewing which I did during the Viet Cong truce over the Chinese New Year. There's a roll of film to accompany each article--the first roll of the Viet Cong propaganda arches should be particularly good.

Maybe you can run the series as "Les Miserables a la Viet Nam"--or some such--plus an italic prelude saying as Bundy visits Viet Nam for secret conferences--the Vietnamese people are the rice roots level say this...

Anyway, I hope this is of some use to you.

Sincerely,



PS. Article one is a Viet Cong sympathizer in a Viet Cong controlled area.  
Article two is about Catholic and Buddhist priests in a no-man's land.  
Article three is 20 militiamen in an isolated fort.



TO: MR. HARRY ROSENFELD  
FROM: BEV DEEPE, SAIGON  
RE: PHOTO CAPTIONS

ROLL 1 TO ACCOMPANY ARTICLE ONE OF SERIES: SHOWS THE VIRTUALLY VIET CONG VILLAGE OF HOA LONG, IN WHICH VIET CONG ARCHWAY HAS NATIONAL LIBERATION FLAG (RED AND BLUE WITH GOLD STAR) PLUS A BANNER WHICH READS: CHEERS FOR THE SEVEN-DAY CEASE-FIRE OF THE FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIETNAM." AND "WE WISH THE PEOPLE A NEW YEAR OF SUCCESSFUL STRUGGLE." AND "THE PEOPLE SHOULD COMPETE IN THE FIGHT FOR MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING THE YEAR 1965."

roll 2 to accompany article two of series: photos show the village of chu hai, largely composed of ~~as this~~ catholic refugees from north vietnam in 1954. article 2 of series deals with the ~~as~~ views of the catholic priests there.

Photos show the church in the background, villagers and children and the barbed wire fences of the villa-ge.

Roll 3 shows the outpost guarding the Bridge of the Grand Rapids River and the young private that lives there. Some of the photos shows the black star on the back of his straw hat, which the troopers sketch on each other's hats for fun.