

# Viet Cong Wedding in the Jungle

By Beverley Deepe

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BINH DUONG, Viet Nam.

The bride wore the black pajamas of a peasant; the bridegroom looked resplendent in his khaki uniform decorated with the insignia of commander of the village guerrillas.

The 22-year-old bride received only a few handkerchiefs from her fellow Viet Cong nurses; the 27-year-old bridegroom received "best wishes" from his Viet Cong subordinates and superiors. The bride and bridegroom exchanged photographs of each other, "but we had no money and only gave each other souvenirs."

The godmothers of the Liberation Army fighters served sweet cakes, candy and tea during the dusk-to-midnight celebration; the bridegroom's Viet Cong commander—a political cadre—talked with the bride's commander—a doctor—and they agreed the marriage was on, the bride's mother and the bridegroom's 54-year-old father also agreed and the celebration rolled on until midnight.

The two Viet Cong superiors of the bride and bridegroom verbally pronounced them married and "it was generally accepted we were married."

## RETURN

At midnight, the bride returned to treat the Viet Cong wounded and the bridegroom returned to his village to command his guerrilla units. It was one week before the young people could see each other and spend the night together—and then only with permission of their commanders.

The eyes of Mrs. Nguyen Van Long twinkled as she recalled her wedding in the jungle village of Phu My Hung, only 20 miles northwest of Saigon and two miles from a large government training center. Her husband explained that "it was love at first sight," but the marriage in the fall of 1963 was arranged in traditional Vietnamese fashion through an elder mediator. Mr. Long, sitting in a Vietnamese government re-education center, explained:

"My father introduced me to the Viet Minh (the pro-Communists fighting the French during the French Indo-China War) in 1947 and when I was nine years old I became one of their liaison boys; I stayed with them until 1954 when the war ended. After that, I remained in the Ho Bo jungle (a renowned Communist stronghold for decades) until 1960, when we started to fight the American

*THE WAR-TORN FABRIC of Vietnamese life forces peasant women, like this one fleeing her home in Bau Bang village with her children, to change their entire lives. In this second of five articles, Herald Tribune Special Correspondent Beverly Deepe interviews a former Viet Cong nurse, who tells how her initiation into the guerrilla forces changed her life.*

to liberate the country and so on. I was so happy. I wasn't afraid. There were so many people like me—it was fun.

"In 1960, the Viet Cong village executive committeeman asked me to 'struggle'—this involved seven or eight villages and if everyone from all these villages converged at one time there would be 7,000 to 8,000 people. I was flattered by the Viet Cong. They had demonstration banners—'down with' . . . and 'long live' . . . I didn't make any banners, but one man who did was arrested; the executive committee told me and another girl to go to the government district center compound to ask for the release of the man. We got in; the one girl was badly beaten, but I wasn't.

"The man was released. After the success of this, many thousand people came to a big meeting—there weren't enough seats for them all to sit on—I and the other girl got the seats of honor and they gave us a big ovation because the man was released. The crowd was in the thousands. This was in 1960—when the military struggle against the Saigon government began.

## MARRIAGE

In the autumn of 1963, she married the village guerrilla commander. Based in separate villages, they received permission from their Viet Cong superiors to see each other three times during the following 18 months.

"If we wanted to see each other, we would put in requests for seven days leave every three months," her husband explained. "Generally we got only two or three days' leave instead of seven. The first time I got leave to see my wife was for our honeymoon. The second time was almost a year later when our baby was five days old.

"Then we talked of defecting, from the Viet Cong, but we didn't have the means." (Significantly, an American B-52 raid in the Ho Bo jungle killed three of Mrs. Long's medical associates, including her doctor-superior.)

"The third time I saw her our baby Thao (Herb) was five months old; I told my wife, 'we have a family now, we can't go on like this. We had better give ourselves up to the government. We have no future with the Viet Cong.'"

On July 21, this year, the young married couple walked two kilometers to a district town and caught a bus to this Vietnamese government provincial capital.

"One day I was on a mission with two of my men; afterwards we dropped in to see the 12 girl nurses at the hospital and I saw this one nurse and I told my two guerrilla-comrades she's a very nice girl. The others said, 'If you love her why don't you push on and get her?' I replied: 'All right, I shall try.'

"My comrades advised me to see an elder villager and ask for his help to arrange the marriage. I took a 10-piastre (ten cents) tea package when I went to the elder's home and told him the problem. The elder found out about nurse's background and told her, 'You know that young man—he's in love with you. What about you—do you love him?' She told the elder 'yes.'

"So both of us put in duly typed our requests to our Viet Cong commanders. Then I was sent on a two-week mission and she was also on another mission. When we both returned, her commander and my commander got together with the village elder . . . and a private meeting of the girl I loved and myself was arranged. We talked about

background of each other and then we decided firmly to get married. We both got approval from our commanders. We set a date; I typed out 10 invitation cards and she typed out 25 invitation cards, but I also verbally asked 15 others to come to the wedding—so about 50 people came.

Mrs. Long, brighter and more politically conscious than her husband, explained why she joined the Viet Cong and what she did for them:

"In 1961, when I was 18, I was recruited and sent to a medical training school for three months; I did so well the Viet Cong sent me to Ho Bo jungle base for six months' training under a surgical unit. That's where I met my husband.

Asked why she joined the Viet Cong, she talked excitedly, her eyes sparkled as though she had spun into a new exciting world:

"The Viet Cong from the village executive committee gave me the propaganda line that this is a feudal society—that we had to stand up and have a new society. We had