

NEWS PERSPECTIVE

Viet WACs: Too Many Volunteer

By Beverly Deepe

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SAIGON.

Vietnamese women have swarmed to join the Women's Armed Forces Corps (WAFC—pronounced wafsee)—a job paying the equivalent of \$10 a month.

"The first day of recruiting 1,000 women applied," said Maj. Kathleen Wilkes of Cobbtown, Ga., adviser to the Vietnamese commander.

"There was a constant stream of women coming in *ao dais* (the flowing Vietnamese dress). Recruiting is no problem. We have 10 volunteers to one position. We had to cut off recruiting after two or three weeks, we were swamped," she said.

Maj. Tran Cam Huong (Huong means perfume), a cherub-faced widow and mother of four, is director of the WAFCs and commandant of the Women's Training Center. The Center is an austere row of buildings where 120 recruits are trained in military regulations, weapons familiarization and first aid.

Maj. Huong who attended psychological warfare school in Fort Bragg, N. C., in 1963, said that from 1952 to 1965 some 650 Vietnamese women had joined the Women's Auxiliary Corps, largely as medics and social workers. But, at the beginning of 1965, the program was enlarged to bring in women as interpreters and clerk typists who could replace male non-commissioned officers.

Some recruits, for example, will serve as interpreters and security control guards to supplement Vietnamese police around Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Airport.

1,103 WOMEN

"We now have 1,103 WAFCs," she said in a recent interview, held in English. "We would have 2,000 by now if we had the training facilities, but at this time we have the capabilities of training only 120 women in one cycle. By January, 1966, we will be training 200 women every five weeks."

The WAFCs receive the same pay and have the same promotion and allowances scale as men in the Vietnamese armed forces.

A private makes a basic pay

THE WOMEN'S WAR in Viet Nam can begin with self-conscious smiles as salutes are practiced but soon becomes deadly serious for members of the Women's Armed Forces Corps. Herald Tribune Special Correspondent Beverly Deepe describes the corps in this third of five articles on South Viet Nam's women in war.



Herald Tribune photo by BEVERLY DEEPE

of 1,100 piastres a month—\$10; a captain receives a basic pay of 5569 piastres (\$55). WAFCs in all ranks are also eligible for allowances—family allowance, technical supplement allowance, cost of living allowance, personal soap allowance—in which the monthly take-home pay can be almost doubled.

Educational requirements to join the WAFCs are high by Vietnamese standards—a minimum of junior high school study, plus some skill such as typing. An officer's candidate course for the WAFCs is planned in which the equivalent of a high school diploma would be required. Priority to enlist is given to widows or daughters of soldiers. Beginning next year married women will not be accepted.

"The whole Vietnamese economy is geared for war and this is an honorable profession for educated women from good families," Maj. Wilkes explained. "There's not that much money in salary to attract them."

Following the five-week basic training the recruits receive specialized instruction. Then they are funneled out to the provinces.

Besides typing, security and interpreter roles, WAFCs offer

guidance and professional orientation for the families of the war dead and wounded, visit wounded Vietnamese soldiers, help organize dependents' quarters, kindergartens, maternity clinics and primary schools for irregular soldiers' families; assist wounded children and orphans, and distribute food and clothing to the needy.

First sergeant of the training center is Vo Thi Vui, a 27-year-old paratrooper medic, and mother of a small daughter. The sergeant is a qualified senior jump instructor and frequently has parachuted with the highest ranking Vietnamese and American generals. Her American adviser-counterpart is M/Sgt. Betty L. Adams of Woodside, New York—one of two American WAC advisers to the WAFCs.

Reliable sources have reported that in isolated government towns Vietnamese peasant women are trained to fight to defend their villages, but this is not a nation-wide program.

In addition, several hundred Saigon housewives, including some of the best educated professional women in the city, have formed the Vietnamese Women's Association of Good Will. They already have

established a "shelter" for war-torn families coming into Saigon.

OPERATION

"One family that came into the center this morning was brought here by the U. S. Marines from Da Nang," said Mrs. Phung Ngoc Duy, a professional pharmacist and president of the group. "The small baby in the family has a harelip and the Marines brought him to Saigon to have the harelip operated on at the American hospital. The mother and the rest of the small children will stay here until they can go back to Da Nang."

"In another case, a soldier was killed in the battle of Dong Xoai (scene of a bloody Viet Cong attack in June) and his wife with her five children came here after they were released from the hospital," Mrs. Duy continued.

"In one hospital, after that battle, I saw a 6-year-old boy crying. He told me, 'My mother left this morning to bury my father and two sisters and she didn't take me with her.' The next day I saw his mother and she was crying and told me her home was destroyed, her husband was killed and she didn't know what to do when she left the hospital. So she came here with her three children."

"Later, we try to find the mothers some kind of work so they can support themselves and their families."

Six women and 79 children now live in the shelter, which also serves as a kindergarten for the children.

The Women's Association was the first—and only—major women's organization to form after the overthrow in November, 1963, of the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem, his sister-in-law Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu and her one-million-strong Woman's Solidarity Movement. That movement reached from Saigon into the lower class villages.

Since the 1963 coup the organization of the poorer, peasant-class women has been initiated by the Catholics or the Buddhists—or by the Communists.

TOMORROW: The different worlds of the rich and the poor.