

A GLIMPSE OF AMERICAN CRIMES IN VIETNAM



by Ralph Schoenman

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WAR CRIMES IN VIETNAM: AN EYE-WITNESS REPORT

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Over many years, Bertrand Russell has sought to alert people in the West to the nature of the war waged by the United States in Vietnam. He has established international committees of support for the people of Vietnam and is, at the moment, preparing a War Crimes Tribunal in which eminent people have been asked to participate. One American among many who have taken up resistance to the war in Vietnam is David Mitchell, who is on trial for his refusal to participate in the U.S. Army in Vietnam. Mitchell is neither a pacifist nor a conscientious objector. His contention is that the United States is guilty of crimes against peace and crimes against humanity, in the precise sense laid down at Nuremburg, and he cites as evidence the Geneva Convention, the Geneva Accords of 1954, the Kellogg-Briand Treaty, the London Agreements of Nuremburg and the United Nations Charter. All but one of these agreements were formally ratified by the United States Senate and signed by American Presidents. As such, they are fully binding within the terms of the American Constitution upon all officials of the U.S. Government and upon citizens of the United States. Thus, says Mitchell, the use by the United States of poison gas, poison chemicals, napalm, experimental fragmentation bombs, nerve gases and the vast bombardment of hospitals, schools, tuberculosis sanatoria and leprosia are not merely in violation of legally binding treaties, but are war crimes for which Germans were hanged. Indeed, ordinary citizens of Germany who failed to refuse orders by the government of the day were executed at Nuremburg for complicity in crimes against humanity and crimes against the peace. American Supreme Justice Robert Jackson stated at Nuremburg that the justification for the War Crimes Tribunal lay in the fact that it mattered not whether the perpetrators of war crimes were Germans or Americans. He stated that if the day should come when the United States Government were guilty of such crimes, it would be the duty of its citizens both to refuse to carry them out and to oppose those who issued such orders. David Mitchell is on trial for insisting that day has arrived.

Bertrand Russell sent me to Vietnam to gather first hand evidence concerning such war crimes, evidence which was to be used not only in defence of David Mitchell, but in the international War Crimes Tribunal which Lord Russell was in the process of establishing. I arrived in Hanoi on February 21 and travelled in five provinces under heavy bombardment. South of Thanh Hoa, in Ha Tay, Nam Ha, Ninh Binh and the surrounds of Hanoi I saw the result of 650 sorties per week, bombs of 1,000 pounds, napalm, phosphorous and a fiendish weapon known as "the lazy dog".

Meeting Ho Chi Minh

Seven o'clock on the morning after my arrival in Hanoi I was received by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and President Ho Chi Minh. Ho Chi Minh moves with agility and dresses in simple baggy trousers, a long, open shirt and open sandals. His manner is direct, and his humour immediate. The warmth and the comradeship which were shown moved me. I retained the terrible feeling that I was an American, moving amongst the victims of the crimes of my Government and obliging them to repeat for me their everyday experience so I might write it down. Although an American citizen, I have lived in England for eight years. I return frequently to the United States, and went there immediately after my trip to North Vietnam to give evidence in the trial of David Mitchell in Hartford, Connecticut.

The Blitz and Vietnam

Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong know the West well, our culture and our history. Ho Chi Minh is familiar with the streets of London, Paris, and New York. They are lifelong revolutionary leaders, internationalists, literally men of the world. Both recall clearly and personally the Nazi invasion of Europe. They discussed the requests made to them so frequently by westerners to accept negotiations with the United States. How, they had been asked, could they expect the war to end unless there were negotiations? The Vietnamese leaders are reminded of England in 1940, when the Luftwaffe was bombing London, Coventry, Bristol, Manchester, and Glasgow. To the British, this was their finest hour, because, after a few months of bombing of a few cities the expectation on the part of others that the great power of Germany would intimidate them was not fulfilled. The British were proud, and indignant at the thought that they would yield. What is it that makes such resistance and such sentiments permissible for Britons after a few months of bombing, but impermissible for an agrarian people withstanding the invasion and atrocity of the United States of America? The people and leaders of Vietnam view this very simply: racism. I feel it passionately since my return to the West: the racism of imperialism, which is in the air we breathe, the same racism displayed by Johnson when he said, "Unless the United States has unchallengeable air power, we shall be hostage to every yellow dwarf with a pocket knife."

Negotiations or Surrender?

Just as a peace mission from Mussolini would have been absurd to any Englishman in 1940, and just as negotiations with Hitler while the bombs fell on London and Coventry would have been treated as an insult to the self-respect and intelligence of every Englishman, so to the Vietnamese the suggestion that they must negotiate with the United States, while American troops are in occupation of their country, is but another expression of Western arrogance and racism.

It does not matter whether the Communist Party U.S.A., the Soviet Union or President Johnson request them to betray their struggle, the response will be much the same. They have negotiated once in 1954 when they abandoned half of their country, having liberated it, for the sake of international considerations which proved to be illusory and which led to twelve years of horror. When Ho Chi Minh says: "We will go on another five, ten, fifteen or twenty years, if necessary," he is not indulging in rhetoric. The Vietnamese resistance will not be ended. The Vietnamese war will be ended when the resistance within America has made it impossible for it to go on.

Travel by Night

We travelled by night, a team of eight, including doctors and photographers. We were without light and we stopped often during alerts. The road was pitted, though passable, and the extra-ordinarily beautiful countryside showed the effects of unrelenting bombardment. The radio carried the poems continually recited by Vietnamese in a living oral tradition, applying recitative to the experience of recent days: the poetry of Vietnam and its people.

What is a war crime? That question has been put to me many times over recent years by fellow Americans and, I might say, by fellow Englishmen, amongst whom I have lived for eight years. "Propaganda" is the instinctive response of those in the West confronted with the facts of the war waged by the United States against the Vietnamese revolution. It is a curious response.

Village Evidence

In village after village I listened to the accounts of the survivors and surveyed the results of napalm. One afternoon, rummaging in the rubble of a school, I picked out stained pages from the lesson book of a twelve year old Vietnamese child:

- Page 2: "*The Little Korean Child* —
a poem composed by a Vietnamese poet at the time of the Korean War:
'Where is your mother?
There is nobody around to ask. Everywhere there are but fire and smoke.'"
- Page 9: "*Memories*
'I am losing my father. I am losing my mother.' (Excerpts from the story of a young girl.)"
- Page 15: "The last days of Huang Van Thu (executed by the French in the early forties)."
- Page 1: "Our hands can do everything."
- Page 5: "*Land Reclamation Song*."
- Page 24: "How he faced the firing squad."
- Page 19: "Grammar: subordinate clauses, auxiliary verbs."
- Page 10: "Human efforts can turn arid soil into rice."

The "Lazy Dog"

On this village and school were dropped 1,000 pound bombs and lazy dogs. At another part of the village I picked up a lazy dog bomb. This was Van Dinh hamlet, Van Hon Village, Thieu Hon district, February 26, 1966. A lazy dog is a grenade-like bomb containing 250 slivers of razor-sharp steel. There are 40 such bombs in a cylinder: 10,000 pieces of steel in a sudden storm of hail, lacerating anyone exposed or seeking shelter from the half ton bombs. The lazy dog has been dropped continuously on the most heavily populated areas of North Vietnam. 10,000 cylinders of lazy dog bombs have fallen on Thanh Hoa province since April 1965. 1,281 rockets have been used. Thirty-seven guided missiles have been launched against villages in Thanh Hoa province. 3,000 bombs alone were dropped on Ham Rong bridge, which still stands. Roads, means of communication, schools, hospitals, the tuberculosis clinic, sanatoria and old age rest houses have been bombed in Thanh Hoa province. I visited all. I picked a lazy dog out of the ruins of a school where it had fallen after the 1,000 pound bomb had made great craters, destroying the shelters and exposing the inhabitants.

We Like to Sing

"Usually, my friends go to school every day. We like to sing 'Ha Tinh Quang Binh'. My friends are Nhung, Ky, Chau, Nguyen. They are thirteen, twelve, fourteen, twelve. They are all girls. I have a friend who is a boy, named Liem. He was thirteen. My friend Ky liked to play. She would say: 'You go first. You go quickly, or I will step on your heel.'"

(Rhymes in Vietnamese.)

When the bombs fell I saw Ky's bowel and intestine come out of her body. Her head blew away. Her arm and leg blew away. Nhung was buried alive and was dug out dead. Chau's teeth were broken by stones which shattered them. Nguyen was buried alive. Liem was beheaded. My friend Phuong laughs sometimes; cries; speaks without knowing what she says; she screams; she is twelve. I was buried completely. Teacher Minh dug me out. I have pains in my spine. Canh and Khoa had their chests crushed.

When I become a grown-up I would like to be a teacher. I would like to ask you, uncle, to convey my best wishes of good health to my American small friends."

Children Protruding from the Earth

Nguyen Thai Mao was recently twelve. She has been strafed frequently on the way to school. She spoke of a bombing attack on her village on February 9 of this year. Her teacher, a young man of 24 named Thai Van Nham:

"Fragments of clothing, books and furniture flew so high that all in the vicinity knew the school was bombed. Students were blasted.

Many were buried in the earth. I was among those buried alive. I was dug out later and was brought to consciousness. There was nothing left but a bomb crater, 55 feet wide and 21 feet deep. Everything was levelled. Parts of the children were protruding from the earth. We found their heads 20 yards away. Their bowels and intestines were scattered everywhere. Two of my children were spattered on a palm tree and hung from it. Children were pressed to the trench walls. Blood filled the trenches. Children clutched their books tightly to their chests. The books were smeared in blood and ink. Some of them could speak a little when dug out. Then blood shot from their mouths, due to their crushed organs and they died. One little girl, Hoang Thai Nha, twelve, could only be recognised and identified by her rubber shoes. Six of the children were too mutilated to be recognisable to the parents. One dug out became conscious and asked how many of her friends died before haemorrhaging. Little Hung's body was found on top of unfinished poems he had written, along with a notebook of paintings. He had aspired to be a poet, painter and composer. His poems, paintings and songs are all signed: 'Composer, Dinh Hung'. He was thirteen."

The bombing of Huong Phuc school on February 9 is one event: a daily event for the past fourteen months in Vietnam. For Vietnam, enduring 650 sorties per week with tonnages in excess of those used during the Second World War, with napalm and fragmentation bombs, the targets and the victims are the population at large. There are no other targets. The population knows that the United States wishes to impose so ghastly a price in national suffering that the will to resist will be broken.

The Will to Resist

The will to resist is like ozone after a bombing storm in Vietnam. In every village, production teams work round the clock to increase food output. Militia units, under the command of nineteen year old girls, mount the most exposed positions to fire at diving jets with rifles and what amount to little more than muskets. Old machine guns are mounted on the very bridges subject to attack. The militia do not take shelter. When American planes are at the climax of their dive, bullets fly from thousands of rifles and machine guns and the whole population is in arms. Everyone who can hold a rifle is firing one.

The old age and invalid home in Thanh Hoa was levelled. It is a scene of vast craters, filled with water, and the shells of buildings. Mosaics litter the ground — lovely pieces of the floor and walls in soft watercolour design. Out of one crater I picked the tattered pages of books which had once been part of the old age home library. Here, those Vietnamese who had lived through three generations of struggle against the Japanese, the French and the Americans had retired in the ill health of old age to rest. Many of them were feeble through years of brutal labour before the victory of Dien Bien Phu released them

from feudalism. Even in their old age, the fruits of their struggle were denied them and, like the children of the schools, their soft bodies were smashed and splattered. One very famous hero of the resistance to France, recuperating from severe wounds, went insane in this final attack.

A Study in Horror

The destruction of Thanh Hoa tuberculosis sanatorium is a study in horror. On Sunday, February 27, the Director gave me the following account :

"This is the second most important sanatorium in our country. It was set up by our own efforts. We had no help from abroad. We cherish it all the more because of this. The third floor of the tuberculosis sanatorium had very large Red Cross flags hanging outside. There are large Red Cross crosses on the entrance, clear to any aircraft. At 8.00 a.m., four groups of four aircraft came. Among the sixteen were five F-105D jets. The rest were F-101 and F-102. The planes circled several times and attacked. They dove at the clinic. Five F-105D jets dove together. Each dive released ten bombs per plane, totalling 50. The others dropped two each, totalling 22. Many patients were got to the trenches with difficulty. After the first attack, they circled, and each plane dove repeatedly, strafing everything standing with rockets. There was 30 minutes of uninterrupted bombing, with 1,000 ton bombs, accompanied by rocket strafing of all who ran out of the buildings. Five doctors were hit and killed instantly. Two of them were women. Physicians and specialists and nurses were killed. Fifty-eight patients were killed almost immediately by strafing. All through the bombing, the shrapnel fragments, lazy dogs and the rockets, doctors and personnel carried patients to trenches. Patients and the sick carried others, while vomiting blood and haemorrhaging. It was only this heroism which kept casualties down.

If we had been dependent upon only the ability of doctors and nurses to rescue patients, the number of deaths would have been infinitely higher. Some of the patients, though weak and ill, tried to save medical equipment : X-ray machines, medicines, implements, files. Throughout these efforts they were strafed. In the surrounding area, people whose own houses were bombed and burning abandoned them, and also the shelters, to help rescue patients and equipment of the clinic.

Rocket Strafing

After the first bombing, the personnel tried to evacuate surviving patients from the ruins. Five days later, the survivors were removed to new hospitals and sanatoria. A few days later, two jets came again and bombed the ruins of the sanatorium. They strafed everywhere in the vicinity. They bombed and strafed the clinic and all

buildings of the sanatorium for 30 minutes. Two planes were F-105 jets. Each dropped ten half-ton bombs at a time. Other planes came and fired rockets. Two planes dispersed and returned again to fire rockets. There were three total bombings and strafings. Thus, of the sanatorium and clinic, nothing is left."

As the doctor spoke, I moved amidst the rubble, the great craters, the twisted ruins of X-ray machines and the broken glass of medicines and photo-electric lamps. Occasionally, there were bloodstains. It was difficult to imagine the vast sanatorium, with its many operating rooms and quarters for patients.

They Speak of Civilisation

The Director continued :

"All of our people understand now that the sanatorium was a clearly intended target of the attack. There was no error. We were hit in three separate and prolonged waves from diving planes. This was a hospital. There were large Red Cross flags flying. Our patients and doctors were strafed, seeking shelter. We realise that the enemy will do anything. The U.S. maintains that the treatment of tuberculosis and leprosy is one of our most urgent and difficult tasks, so they destroy. It is entirely in keeping with their bacteriological warfare. The bombing of our sanatorium has affected us profoundly. Every effort has been made by the population to assist in the lodging and treatment of the surviving patients.

They talk about civilisation. It is unimaginable. Our hatred is great. The more we confront this bombing of our leprosia, hospitals, clinics, sanatoria, schools and villages, the more we struggle."

The K71 tuberculosis sanatorium covered two and a half hectares. There were 30 large buildings and 560 resident patients. There were 425 visiting patients per week and 350 doctors and nurses."

The equipment destroyed included X-ray machines, sterilisation equipment, refrigeration facilities, circulatory and respiratory machines, oxygen equipment, distilling and purification equipment, electronic machinery, modern operation rooms and facilities, antibiotics and drugs. I inspected the remnants and ruins of the following stores of drugs: INH (produced in Vietnam); Streptomycin; Rimifon; Subtilis; Filatov; vitamin compounds; vitamin oils; cod liver oil; sulphur; iodine and various medicines and serums. Medical supplies for the surrounding population were destroyed. Tonics, food supplements, enriching additives for special regimens and diets were all lost in the bombing. Plasma, the blood bank, ambulances, first aid units, the medical library, monographs and notebooks of doctors, microscopes, bacterial cultures, all operating equipment and chambers, tables, electronic devices, lamps and infra-red equipment were all devastated. This was not an isolated event. Wherever I went I saw comparable destruction.

Blinded by Toxic Chemicals

I returned to Hanoi, after some time, and met with Dr. Nguyen, a young man who had recently arrived in North Vietnam from liberated areas of the South. The doctor had been blinded by poison chemicals and was under treatment. He was planning to return soon to the South. I spoke to him from 8.00 in the morning until 11.30 at night. He described to me the nature of the chemicals, their properties, their medical peculiarities, the villages where they had been used and the curious effects they had on human beings. He gave me parts of his medical diary, dating back to 1961 :

" I am a victim blinded by toxic chemicals. I have recovered part of the vision of one eye. I have treated countless victims of chemicals. I married after 1954, but the terror of the Saigon Government forced me to leave. Had I stayed, I should have been conscripted by force into the puppet army. Since that time I have devoted myself entirely to the treatment of victims of torture and of chemical and gas warfare. My family is in the same situation as so many others in South Vietnam. The Government forced my wife to divorce me and to marry an officer in the puppet army. I had no children, thank God. I was born in Binh Dinh province. My father was a doctor of herbal medicine. I am 36.

Because of the vast bombing and terror of the U.S., I had to keep moving in the jungle and in the mountainous area of South Vietnam. I have always been on the move and have been in other provinces in the South. The general situation was impossible to imagine. The atrocities by U.S. officers and soldiers have never ceased. The crimes of the U.S. army have resulted in vast numbers of cases, in indescribable suffering, which I have encountered daily for almost twelve years. I have cared personally for the victims of U.S. governmental crimes and for the victims of Saigon puppet soldiers, almost all of whom have acted with American advisers or officers present. I know this from my first hand experience. The victims, when surviving, are invalids for life. The most common diseases are those of the nervous system and digestive tract. After this, tuberculosis ensues, induced by the general condition of the victim.

Policy of Extermination

I must say to you that the policy I have observed is one of extermination of our people, of extermination and of experimentation. They have used various kinds of poisons which I have analysed. The poisons are chemicals, gases, bombs or phosphorus and napalm bombs. I understand that the U.S. authorities state that these chemicals are intended to clear trees and grass. The truth is that these chemicals combine heavy toxic concentrations, which affect fatally both human and animal life. Among the chemicals I have encountered and analysed are :

1. DNP (Dinitrophenol)
2. DNOC (Dinitricorto)
3. 2;4D (Acid Diclophenocyncetic)
4. 2;4;5T (Acid 2,4,5 Triclophenocyacetic)

These chemicals have been sprayed by various means. Usually, they are employed in a powdered form, or spread as a liquid over vast areas by aeroplane. Areas sprayed cover ten or fifteen square miles. These toxic chemicals poison water, food, vegetation and animal and human life. The poisoning of the water and vegetation spreads the chemicals in larger areas. Toxic chemicals are also mixed with rice, which is then sold or distributed to the people. I encountered this in 1962, throughout the provinces of Kon Tum and Gia Lai. These poisons have also been mixed in sugar, which was distributed to people. I examined victims of this and analysed the poisoned sugar in Long My village and in Kan Tho province in 1964. Chemicals have been put into the wells and the springs supplying water in Tra Bong, Ba To and Son Ha districts of Quang Ngai province. In these three districts, there have been 450 buffaloes killed, and I have personally examined 41 people killed, who died as a result of drinking this poisoned water. They died in great pain. I examined eleven children who were critically ill as a result of having swum in a stream which had been poisoned in this way. Three of these children were blinded. This chemical warfare has been carried out continuously. I have been in all provinces and have encountered it everywhere I have been. I have studied and treated its effects everywhere I have gone in the South, since 1961.

Poison Gas

Since June 1964 I have encountered frequently the following two poison gases:

1. $C_6H_5 - CO - CH_2 - Cl$
(Chloroacetophenon)
2. $C_6H_5 - CU - BR - CH$
(Bromborzylcyanure)

Since 1965 these chemicals and poison gases have been employed on a vastly increased scale. The gases I have encountered have been used in different forms. Some have been contained in hand grenades, others in bombs and in bottle-containers. In certain dosage, the Americans have designated these as 'tear gases', but this is very misleading for in any degree of concentration these gases cause perforation of the lungs, asphyxiation and beri-beri. They are fatal in any confined area and kill through lack of oxygen, as well. A fatal dosage of the so-called 'tear gas' is 0.3 milligrammes per cubic metre — a small dose.

A Chemical Attack

In the beginning of November 1964 four Skyraiders bombed and strafed the area where I lived in Lam Dong province. Raids and

bombing lasted about two hours. Then came one helicopter and two Dakotas. The smell of the chemical was unbearable. It was very sharp and burned the nostrils. It had characteristics of chloroform. After five minutes, leaves of sweet potatoes, rice plants and trees became completely desiccated. Domestic animals would not eat and almost all died. People in the area experienced very severe headache. They then displayed a racking cough. They vomited on the spot.

I was operating on a bombing victim at the time and had no chance to cover myself with a nylon cloth. I was heavily affected. My first impression was one of suffocation and asphyxiation. I felt great, burning heat on my eyes. The suffocation was extreme and I vomited violently, excreting considerable blood.

Only fifteen minutes later the Dakota planes returned and sprayed chemicals a second time. By now, my nose was infected, and I had no sensation. I could not smell, nor taste anything. But I observed the leaves, which had a shiny coat, like the shimmering of a film of petrol. I was less acute in observing and noting the effects of the second chemical, because I had suffered the first chemical attack very shortly before the second one. I now experienced, however, great cold and even more severe headache. Others around me had the same symptoms.

When they spray chemicals, our people run to try to save their crops. They try to save the tubercles of the manioc from rotting. The people cut off the leaves and stems of the trees. To prevent us from saving our crops, the attacking U.S. planes used time bombs of chemicals and napalm, which burned everything and completely destroyed the crops.

Sharp Burning in my Eyes

No-one was able to eat that day, because of the effects. Everyone (including myself) was unable to sleep. The effects on the nervous system were very unusual. I had the sensation of flying in the air. I could not feel my weight. I felt hot, sharp burning in my eyes, which was extremely painful. It was as if my eyes were filled with acid, or chili pepper. The next day, all our poultry were dead. The fish in streams and lakes were floating on the surface of the water, discoloured. The buffaloes were dead. The grass was poisoned. All crops were without leaves and burned and the unburned vegetation was rotting.

Pregnant Women Miscarry

All the women who were pregnant and all pregnant animals had miscarried on the spot. I felt the symptoms of the first day increase — all of them. I could no longer see clearly. I continued to vomit blood, which weakened me and was painful. Everyone was ailing gravely. Ten days later, a squadron of U.S. aircraft came and spread

chemicals a third time, destroying all the crops which the ailing people had planted with great difficulty. This spraying was accompanied by bombing and strafing. I saw 19 people killed and 600 gravely injured. Three were blinded by the chemicals. My eyes were so affected that my sight was gone. I have remained blind until only very recently, when part of the sight in my left eye returned. All the crops were completely destroyed and burned out. The people were driven to eat contaminated roots and fruit, for they were starving.

Vomited all the Time

People were unable to work or do anything, for weeks and months. I was unable to move. I vomited all the time. My throat, mouth, stomach and bowels were inflamed. Fifteen days later, I could not read. One month later I could no longer see. In three months I could eat only soup. During that entire three months I was unable to sleep. The effect on my nervous system made it impossible to gain unconsciousness. Throughout the time that I was awake I had headaches which lasted day and night. My eyes had been burned. I had recurring sensations of flying in the air. My hair fell out.

After three months my weight had fallen to 107 pounds. There was great famine. The people had food for the first time three months later, when the sweet potatoes they had planted after the third attack began to sprout tubercles. Many of those plants were infected. The care which has been given me by my people has enabled me to begin a recovery. My right eye is permanently blinded and you can observe the crystalline, which is pitted with small holes. I am a physician and I know my right eye is beyond cure. My nervous system is so affected that I can sleep only rarely. My ability to operate has gone, but I shall return, nonetheless, to treat people as best I can.

Completely Blinded

As I mentioned, many people were completely blinded and have no hope of cure. After I had moved out of that area, to try to treat other victims, I learned that again the planes came and sprayed new chemicals. Whenever they see green on the soil they come to kill the crops, to cut off the source of life of the people and to cause famine and epidemic, in addition to the painful disease and death resulting from the chemicals.

Every time they spray chemicals they threaten us with loudspeakers, broadcasting from the aeroplanes, telling people to go to areas controlled by Saigon, or they will suffer death. Our people cling to the land, no matter how it is affected. The people of other areas have come to assist them to survive. It is also true that national capitalists have come with rice, which they sell us at exorbitant prices. This is hard. When survivors regain strength they clear forests

in order to have unaffected land. We have organised watches for aircraft.

I have treated victims now since 1961. Most of the time our people are left to their own cure, for there are not enough medical officers to treat them. After long periods of struggle our people have devised masks which they have made to give them some protection, but as the chemicals affect the food and water it is almost impossible to escape their effects. Our people are victims in their villages and fields continuously and indiscriminately.

Wellbeing of People

I have always thought that scientific achievement should aim at serving the wellbeing of people and to help their lives. The U.S. rulers are using scientific knowledge to torment and massacre our people. They are doing this throughout South Vietnam. This is the behaviour of the so-called most civilised nation in the free world. This is what is being done to my country. I want to tell you that I personally am moved and deeply impressed by the protests of American intellectuals and students. These protests have made a profound impression on my people. I hope you will convey my sincere thanks. We feel that we are struggling, not for Vietnam alone, but for the people of the world. I hope I can welcome American intellectuals to an independent Vietnam. Please accept my warmest greetings and wishes for the longevity of Bertrand Russell. I wish his activity for mankind every success. I am grateful to you.

Not to be Intimidated

Let me tell you this, as well. Even when our people are so ill, they establish anti-aircraft units to resist the planes. They are determined not to be intimidated or defeated, and that determination sustains them, through everything. I can tell you that these people are not 'Vietcong'. They are common people, who have escaped from strategic hamlets. All the chemicals I specified have been used in a compound mixture to gain multiple effect on both vegetation and animal life. As far as poison gas is concerned, this is carried in bottles and spread in shelters, where local women and children seek protection. I was present in Phu Lac during a U.S. attack, in which the American troops used poison gas. I examined 80 people killed by the gas. Those affected by what the Americans call 'tear gas' could only be saved if treated immediately. The other gases killed and were impossible to remedy. This tear gas is used against people in shelters and it removes oxygen, killing those inside. The effect is the same as that of the more deadly gases. The United States Government and Robert McNamara have declared that poison gas is a 'basic weapon' of their forces in Vietnam, and so in every raid and in every district attacked they use poison gas; from planes, from

helicopters and in ground raids. When they see green on the ground they spray toxic chemicals and gas. Thus it is that my life since 1961 has been one steady stream of encountering victims and treating them. Let me show you my medical diary. Some of my notes are in French :

Medical Diary

MARCH 3, 4, 5, 1965 :

'Air spray of chemicals in Long Phung village, Binh Dai district, Ben Tre province. Thirty people examined, dead. Two hundred critically ill. Ninety per cent of domestic animals dead. All crops and vegetables destroyed. Famine and epidemic inevitable. Once again, nothing to be done.

MARCH 23, 1965 :

'Phanh Thoc village. Chemicals dropped in rubber balloons; beriberi. Boi Loi region. Napalm over a vast area, everything burned. Unextinguishable. Whole forest afire. Have to abandon all victims. No hope. Little boy, Ho Van Bot, burned all over, deep burns, napalm eating.

'Phosphorus : victims of phosphorus rotting after exposure. No hope for Nguyen Van Ba.' "

But the Vietnamese have endured more, for they have fought from the forests since 1940, and the Resistance was unable to enter the villages until the French were driven out. The population is locked together with that bond of profound self-esteem and mutual regard which a child of the West has never had, and cannot understand without encountering it. Their self-respect is based upon the dedication they see around them. All struggle, all sacrifice and what we understand by heroism comprise the minutiae of everyday existence.

Colonel Ha Van Lau

On February 22 I met with Colonel Ha Van Lau in Hanoi. Among other things he spoke to me about new developments in the military struggle :

"Formerly, the U.S. used puppets as their mainstay. Now they must add the expeditionary corps. Therefore, now a true full-scale war operation of U.S. aggression against Vietnam and the occupation of South Vietnam have made the South into a U.S. neo-colony.

The U.S. has not succeeded in using 'special war' to achieve its objective. At first they thought that 'special war' could accomplish the end, but the defeat (by August 1964) forced them against their will to use their own troops. They have suffered a complete political defeat. Now the use of U.S. troops exposes to our people the true nature of the aggressive war and this spurs our resistance. This use of more troops by the U.S. has made ALL in the South, even in the puppet administration and army, see the aggressive nature of U.S. imperialism.

The U.S. rulers want to strengthen the morale of the puppets BUT the more they introduce U.S. troops the more this morale falters. In 1964, apart from defeats, there were 80,000 desertions. By 1965 100,000 desertions occurred, including over 40,000 regulars. These vast desertions took such proportions that many divisions can no longer fight for lack of men. So, by introducing more troops the U.S. has, against its will, lost the initiative on the military field; and on the political level it exposes its true face to world opinion. At the same time the presence of U.S. troops aggravates contradictions both between the U.S. government and world opinion and also between the U.S. government and its puppets.

U.S. Morale

There are also such contradictions between the U.S. government and its allies AND within the U.S. government. This is the fundamental weakness of the policy of introducing more troops into Vietnam. The fighting morale of U.S. troops must become lower and lower. As they meet harsh reality in the South and confront the lies of their own government these will become more and more clear to them. After one year of sending increased numbers of troops to Vietnam, the U.S. government is further than ever from its aims. The Mansfield delegation report confirms this. It says, in effect, that the situation has not changed in a year. The U.S. has lost real initiative. Militarily it has certain strong points, but due to internal contradictions in policy, arising from the intensification of the war and the introduction of more troops, the U.S. cannot make the most of its strength. On the contrary. For example, the U.S. is waging a war but hasn't proclaimed war. It dares not. So how can it win the support of its people? The U.S. military strength is large, but its impact is enormously diminished by its very introduction into Vietnam.

Inapplicable Power

Secondly, while U.S. troops and equipment are powerful, this power cannot be applied to Vietnam. It is not the same as in Korea. Two hundred thousand troops at the 38th parallel could block it, but 200,000 to cover all South Vietnam are not remotely enough. So they must settle in strong points like Chu Loi and Da Nang. Then those points are encircled like islands by our people. When the U.S. troops engage in a 'mopping up' operation they must fragment themselves. The First Cavalry Division must break up into company groups; but in Plei Mei each company parachuted separately into the jungle and was immediately decimated, group by group. So the U.S. cannot make the best use of its manpower and artillery. It is limited both tactically and strategically.

Even when planes and troop activity are co-ordinated, the men are bombed by their own planes. This is simply because there is no

front. Every battle is inter-related and entangled. There are no distinct and separated fronts.

Moreover, U.S. equipment is very heavy and cumbersome. In jungle battles, its forces fragmented into small groups, the U.S. is quite unable to use its equipment, which then becomes a burden and hindrance rather than an advantage. This makes more certain the troops' confusion and heavy losses. When they are defeated they flee in helicopters, abandoning this heavy equipment to the N.L.F. who use it against U.S. strongpoints. There it is effective! In short, U.S. troops have been organised, educated and equipped for modern warfare. But South Vietnam is a peoples' war, a guerilla war. Every contact with the National Liberation Front results in defeat. This can be demonstrated for battles throughout 1965.

Contradiction

The contradiction between the concentration of troops and simultaneous dispersal of troops is basic. By now the N.L.F. controls four-fifths of South Vietnam. If U.S. troops want to occupy South Vietnam, they must disperse; but then *how* can they administer heavy blows to the N.L.F.? This is the plague of all imperialist operations in Vietnam. Thus, with over 200,000 troops, Westmoreland appeals for more. And all U.S. troops sent here are crack troops! On February 19, 1966, the N.L.F. attacked Anh Khe. U.S. sources revealed that only U.S. troops were used in maintaining this base. All these crack troops have been sent here to be used as custodians. The first cavalry, the marines, the paratroopers, all serve only to occupy the strong points as guards! They can't trust the puppet troops to do this. So, militarily speaking, the U.S. is not making good use of its crack troops. What use is this? The U.S. cannot use its puppet troops at all any more. Even operations by U.S. troops are no longer told to the puppet high command out of fear of leakage — this enormously heightens the conflicts between them. The contradiction between invading troops and the people, tactically and strategically, and between the people and government, is very serious.

The Logistical Problem

Added to this is the great contradiction of their logistics! Warehouses, harbours, ships — all means of transport — are needed for the vast army, and the U.S. press knows this. The U.S. tries to solve this but cannot. If its best attempts to solve logistic problems with 200,000 troops bring no results, how can the U.S. solve it with even more troops? These problems are all the more intensified by the guerillas' destruction of the means of communications. The U.S. has to resort to airplanes even for internal transportation, even for drinking water and rice. And this is true not only for the needs of the army but for the needs of the civilian population in the occupied

areas. Even Saigon suffers greatly from the lack of meat, vegetables, rice and other kinds of foodstuffs, as well as coal — in fact all supplies. All communications around Saigon have been cut. But the U.S. troops use houses, electricity, cars, taxis and buy all the things they like, so the very people of Saigon now suffer directly from the presence of U.S. troops in Saigon. The logistical problem is quite insoluble and will be made worse by the sending in of more troops. Recently, reports have appeared about the introduction of more troops — up to 300- or 400,000. Insofar as manpower is concerned, this may be possible, but logistically it will be VERY difficult. Even if the U.S. solves the logistical problems, it will have to face political crises.

North and South, our people have long experience in guerilla struggle. We fight from weakness against strength and have built up our strength from nothing. Our struggle is a just one, so with each passing day it draws more support from the peoples in the world including the American people which will more and more support us. We are firmly confident in our final victory. But on the other hand, the U.S. imperialists are die-hards. Before submitting to reason they will still frantically try to create difficulties and calamities. But peoples' warfare is invincible and peoples' struggle is unconquerable. By the peoples' strength we mean the strength of our own people, that of the American people and of the peoples of the world. We are co-operating in our efforts against U.S. imperialism; we are solidarising with each other in one common effort."

Pham Van Dong had offered to make all facilities available for the gathering of evidence. Our requests that victims should be able to give evidence at the trial of David Mitchell and during the proceedings of the international War Crimes Tribunal under preparation were willingly accepted by the Prime Minister, and by President Ho Chi Minh. One of the requests made was to meet captured U.S. pilots, in order to learn from them the nature of their targets in Vietnam, and their feelings about what they had been doing. This request was also met, and a meeting was established with the then most recently captured pilot, Lieutenant-Commander Gerald L. Coffee.

A Captured Pilot

When I met Coffee, I introduced myself and told him I was an American. I did not inform him of the purpose of my visit. I had decided beforehand that I should keep this information to myself until after our discussion had concluded, so as not to influence his words with knowledge of what information I was seeking. After our discussion had concluded, I sent him a letter, informing him of all aspects of my mission.

Lieutenant-Commander Coffee is a professional who was based on the U.S. aircraft carrier *Kittyhawk*. He was evidently in sound health, alert and showed no signs whatever of maltreatment. He had been shot

down on February 3, 30 miles north of Vinh city. I asked him what happened to him, after that. He said :

"I received a broken arm from the ejection point. I got medical attention quickly. I was down in a remote area and taken to a village, to a hut where I was treated. I got the best attention possible. They made it as comfortable as they could. They bandaged me. Within a couple of hours I was given a meal of hot rice.

When I had regained consciousness in the water, I found everything necessary had been done for me. My parachute was removed. My flotation gear was inflated. We were about half a mile from the beach. The two small boats which had rescued me were full of people. When the boats arrived, the cover jets came and strafed the boats carrying me. The people in the boats were armed with rifles, pistols and machine guns. The American jets made six strafing passes before I was able to get to the beach.

Amazed

No mistreatment occurred at any time. The strafing of our planes had no effect on their attitude to me. I was amazed. I couldn't understand it. I had expected the worst. I stayed at a village until sundown on February 3. There were six windows in the house. People came from the whole vicinity. My belongings were taken from me. I was utterly astonished at the treatment I was getting. It became apparent to me, after a time, that this was their policy. They took me to another village. People were curious and gathered around to see me. I was offered hot tea. The children followed me and tried to touch me. That night, I was taken to another place, where I was also treated well. I was fed; my bandages were changed; they gave me all I could eat. The man in charge said that the people were deeply angry, as the bombings were still going on, and they took me to another area because of the aroused feelings of the people, but I encountered no hostility, anywhere.

No Hostility

We came to Route 1, which is the main north-south highway. The military car took me toward Vinh. We stopped at the driver's house and spent a long time with his family. I was offered rice in tea leaves, with much meat and fish. It was extremely good. They told me to go into the house. I was told to lie down on the driver's bed. I slept on the bed next to his small son. The next morning, I arrived at the new place, which appeared to be the centre of provincial administration. I began to realise that this area has been bombed continually and without stop since the beginning. That is over a year. For more than one year, they have known nothing but bombing by us. And yet, they showed no hostility to me. I was disturbed. They questioned me firmly, but always treated me well. I had to admit that my government had not declared war against Vietnam

and that legally I had no right to be considered as a prisoner of war. I was told that I was a criminal and that the crimes which I had committed against ordinary villagers were such that would entitle them to try me and shoot me. I was kept in a home with a family. There was an old couple, a young woman and her three year old child. They gave me a soft, warm straw bed. Everybody treated me so well; constant hot tea, more food than I could eat, stew, rice. They picked limes off the tree for me, as many as I wanted. I thought I would need the citrus, so I ate as many as I could.

Could Have Shot Me

During the questioning, I came to realise that they could just as well have shot me. They had it non-stop, the bombing, for over a year. Everything was under attack. I wholeheartedly accept their designation of criminal. I was kept at the second place for three days. My wounds were treated. I was fed. Anybody who could speak English or French asked me: 'Why are you here? Why have you come to Vietnam?' I couldn't answer them.

What impressed me more than anything was the overall gentleness of the people to me. Gentleness is the right word. I can hold nothing against them. The civilian casualties they suffer are not ordinary ones. They are the result, in my opinion, of unilateral, criminal aggression. I have to say that I played a definite part in this. The word 'criminal' is exact. It is true. I can't deny it. I have observed the gentleness of these people, not only in the way they treated me. While I was in their homes, they talked together. They joked. They took tea. The atmosphere was gentle, in a family way. What I like and prefer. They made me feel at ease. They were simple people, tillers of the soil, farmers, peasants and they treated me kindly. Two things became very apparent. One was their real love for Ho Chi Minh. Whenever his name would come up their eyes would light up. They obviously revere him. The second was this fantastic and unanimous determination of theirs not to be intimidated by the bombing. I could see that each new bombing raid, with its death and destruction, brought more and more hate to their hearts for Americans.

Diagnosis and Treatment

I was brought north slowly. My interpreter was from Thanh Hoa. We stopped at his home. We visited his family and he took me in to them. I was offered hot tea. We stayed and talked. When we arrived in Hanoi, my arm and dislocated elbow were bad. They were swollen and beginning to be infected. That was February 7. By the 11th, I had seen practically a corps of doctors, who visited me at the prison. They diagnosed me and then they operated on my hand. On the 11th I was taken to a hospital and my arm was X-rayed. They gave me an anaesthetic and returned my elbow to its socket. They

put my arm in a cast, which I kept on for two weeks. Throughout this time, I was given medication. They gave me four injections in four days. On February 26 they took more X-rays and they put a new cast on, which I will keep on until the end of March.

In prison they have questioned me and they have tried to explain their view of the true issues of the Vietnamese war and the feelings of the Vietnamese people. The living conditions are simple, but always adequate. The sanitation is fine. I am given enough clothing and more than sufficient food each day. I am able to wash when I wish. They have given me a tooth brush and toothpaste, along with soap and towel. I can't get over the fact that the guards are so sympathetic. They help me to dress and do small things for me, ungrudgingly. They button me, because I have trouble with my broken arm.

The Logic of the Whole Story

Apart from the discussions which I have, they have given me a great amount of literature. I received this with complete scepticism and suspiciousness. It all deals with South Vietnam and the origins of the war and the involvement of the United States. I have to say that I am unable to refute the logic of the whole story. It is unanswerable. I believe now I know, for the first time, who we are really fighting in South Vietnam.

I know the pretences under which I was willing to fight. The pathetic thing is that you can't call it political indoctrination. I could have found out the same damn things at home, in the library, on my own. If I had only taken the time, it would have been just as easy for me to find this out at home. I was willing to take part in this war for the usual, rather vague reasons of protecting our democratic way of life, honouring our agreements with our allies and resisting communism. I have been here a short time, but I have seen enough to know that none of this applies here. My contemporaries and I are all guilty of the same thing: of not making the effort to really find out what it is all about. Unfortunately, that is really the way the majority of the American people are. Right up to February 2 I considered the anti-war demonstrations intolerable. I couldn't understand what they were stirred up about. It seemed to me outrageous. I never thought about what they were doing. I never took the time to find out. Now I feel very strongly, because of the very deep love and affection I have for my country. I feel very strongly. We have no business here. We are involved in a situation in which we have no right. I think I understand how we became involved. I have thought a lot.

Their Resistance

When the Vietnamese were fighting their resistance against the French, we aided the French. We gave them arms and officers and

paid for most of it. Mainly for two reasons. Under the French, we could still get the tin, rubber and tungsten the United States wanted from the Indo-Chinese area. They showed me a statement of Eisenhower's. Also, under the French, we were assured of a military hold in Indo-China, which we thought was necessary. But in spite of our aid and our willingness to get involved, the Vietnamese revolution defeated the French. As far as I can make out, Ho Chi Minh was able to unite a number of different revolutionary fronts and, therefore, to lead the defeat of the French. The Geneva Agreements were made and stipulated that there **should be no** foreign military personnel or military goods in Vietnam. The Agreements clearly guarantee the territorial integrity and independence of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

I Can't Deny

These are the things I have been reading, and they correspond to what I remember vaguely, from talks we used to have. The division of the Seventeenth Parallel was provisional. There was supposed to be demilitarisation and neither Government was supposed to enter in military alliances or permit any foreign military intervention. There was supposed to be an election after two years to reunify the country, but two months after the Agreements we formed S.E.A.T.O. and included Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos as areas under our military protection. It was obvious that we still wanted a military hold on Indo-China. So the French left, and we put Diem in power and made Bao Dai the Emperor. Then he was made Premier, after a referendum which we ran. Then we started putting in massive aid to keep control and built up the army, police and militia. We set up the Military Advisory Aid Group and sent U.S. troops. I can't deny that this violates the Geneva Agreements. Those Agreements were supposed to unify Vietnam.

The Diem Government was obviously unpopular. He persecuted people and he persecuted non-Catholics and established a dictatorship. He put his family in office. He could never have lasted without our military backing. As the elections approached he refused offers from North Vietnam for elections and ignored the provisions of the Geneva Conference, and this was done with the insistence of our Government. It is perfectly clear, and even Eisenhower said it, that elections would have put Ho Chi Minh in as President. I tell you, I think rightly so. What is the difference between him and Washington? He is their revolutionary hero. He brought land reform and economic stability. I could see that myself. That is why we did not let Diem hold elections. These people want reunification. They want to see the labour of their revolution bear fruit. They don't want their victory over the French to be made meaningless and they dream of reunification, and we shattered that dream. Only a revolution was left to them. The revolution was based on their

bitterness at the betrayal. It seems to me that the National Liberation Front was trying to free them and was called 'communist' because it tried to defeat our plan to stay. Maybe it has communist inclinations, but it seems to be a national body. We are fighting the people of Vietnam. We are refusing to deal with the people of Vietnam. I thought I was stopping the spread of communism, but I have seen the life here. They are fed. They are productive. They seem to be happy, despite what we are doing. How can it be worse than the South?

A Coup Every Day

I know the literature I read was printed in Hanoi and, as I told you, I was completely sceptical. But I remember the reports of what Diem was like, and we always joked about how there was a coup every day, and we were setting up another bunch. At the time I thought it was the thing to do. I don't know if anyone had the foresight to realise what it meant. We make so much of the supposed aid from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, as if they were a disinterested party, horning in on something none of their business. But what they want is the reunification of their country, and they are the same people. Reunification is part of their national purpose. It's practically in the Constitution. I think, logically, they have every right in the world to assist as best they can. They have the same goal — reunification and independence of the country. If we escalate further it will result in drawing in other countries, including China. The devastation and the sacrifice of life will be appalling. Everything I have read and everything I am telling you is compounded by the fact that our cause simply isn't just. We are sacrificing whatever honour and respect we might have. We could honour these Geneva Agreements, say we were wrong, accept the four-point plan of Ho Chi Minh, because all that it is is the implementation of the Geneva Agreements. We should leave Vietnam.

A Unique Point of View

I am 31 years old and I am from Modesto, California. My parents are in Hanford, California. I have a wife and three children in Sanford, Florida. My wife is expecting our fourth child and I am really worried about her. She doesn't know whether I am dead or alive. I want to write an open letter to the American people. My feelings are what I have told you. I am neither a journalist, a political scientist or a crusader. But I have a unique point of view because of my experience here and maybe people will listen to me. Don't rely on what I say. Find out for yourself and, when you see, take any step you can to stop this war. I want to write to *Time*, *Newsweek* and the *U.S. News and World Report*. I may be naive, but maybe they will give me space.

Respected Naval Officer

To attest to my integrity, I want to tell you that I have been a respected naval officer for eight years. I hold the Distinguished Flying Cross. I have taken part in reconnaissance flights over Cuba. I have a personal letter of commendation from the Director of the Marine Corps, General Shoup, for my reconnaissance flights over Cuba during the missile crisis in October 1962. I have been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Commander a year earlier than my peers. By writing these letters I am going to be laying my military career on the line. I have always been loyal to my profession and I love my country deeply. But the time has come when the two are not compatible. I must do what I think is right for my country.

They will say: 'He is a prisoner. It is the way he will get home.' There are over 100 pilots captured, but it is not that with me. It will save lives and also our country's honour. Please point out the bit about political indoctrination. With the exception of my contact with the Vietnamese people, everything I have learned and everything I have told you I could have found out at home, if I had taken the time. Believe me. Nothing I have said to you is rehearsed. It reflects the thought I have given the whole thing after what I have seen and experienced. I speak to you and I want to ask you how can I best reach the American people? I want to write to *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*, and I chose them because they seem to me to be the best way to reach the people I want to reach. But I have had no favours here, no special treatment, no offers. I want people to know, I really do. I am laying it on the line."

Lieutenant-Commander Coffee is a professional. It was apparent to me that he believed what he had been told by his officers and, because he believed this, he was all the more shaken and disturbed by the realities he encountered. The first shock was the disparity between what he had been told about communists and the medical attention he was given by them after his capture. The second fact was the horror of the bombing in which he had so recently participated. These things become clear in the letter to his wife:

"From: Gerald L. Coffee
To: Mrs. Gerald L. Coffee
306 Tucker Drive
Sanford, Florida, U.S.A.

March 1, 1966.

My Dearest Family,

I pray to God this letter reaches you very soon. My desire to let you know that I am alive and well has been almost overwhelming as I have wanted to spare you the grief of thinking the worst and the worry of just not knowing. I had written and submitted an earlier letter but I was very much afraid it wouldn't reach you by

mid-April. Last night I had the opportunity to talk with an American visitor to North Vietnam and he assured me he would carry this back to the States and then mail it on from there, so I am confident that this will reach you on time.

I am in good basic health both physically and mentally and, darling, I pray this finds you the same way. I do have a problem with my right arm and hand, however, hence the left handwriting. When I ejected from the aircraft my right forearm was broken and my elbow dislocated. I also received many cuts and burns on both arms and was knocked unconscious. Right after my capture the people who held me did what they could for my wounds and made my arm as comfortable as possible. I was amazed at how gently they treated me in spite of their obvious hate for us for what our bombings have done to their homeland. I was soon to find out, however, that this kind of treatment was the rule and not the exception. After arriving at my present location, I was taken to a hospital where my hand was operated on and my arm X-rayed and set. My elbow is healing well. There is still some offset of the bones in my forearm but I think they may come around some. I have since been back to the hospital for more X-rays and a new cast. This one, palm to shoulder, won't come off until the end of March. You can see that I am very grateful to the people and the doctors of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (D.R.V.) for all the medical care I am receiving.

In God's Hands

Our immediate future is truly in God's hands now, darling. I pray to Him every day to watch over all of you and to take good care of you. I'm sure He's doing a better job of it than I could.

Kimmie, Steve and Dave, Daddy thinks of your bright little faces every day. I'm sure your all keeping busy in school or in helping Mommie every day in as many ways as you can.

Kim, have you started preparing for your first communion yet? It's a big job and if you do go this time I'm sure you will do very well. I know some Grandma will see that you have the prettiest white dress there. Of course, it's the little girl in the dress that will make it the prettiest. I know you must be getting very anxious for the new baby to arrive and I hope it's a baby sister for you.

Steve, Daddy has been counting on you to be the Daddy while he's gone. Take good care of your Mommie and your sister and brother. Be sure and pass that football around with Grandpa and also keep hitting those tennis balls over the fence. I'll bet you sure got a lot of Valentines at school on Valentine's day, didn't you?

Dave my boy, I'm sure you have learned many new tricks on the new swing set by now. Have you been behaving like a good boy in church? Have you been helping Mommie get ready for the new baby? She will sure be needing a good helper like you. Pretty soon

you and Tippie won't be the littlest ones in the family any more, will you? Start watching out for the Easter bunny now and don't forget to say your prayers each night at bed time.

Honey, I have had some time to think of names and I hope my thoughts will be of some help. For a girl I like Chris, Mary and Susan in that order, and specifically, Chris Marie. For a boy, Matt, Tim, or Jay or any combination; possibly Timothy Jay. Don't worry yourself over this at all. I'll be perfectly pleased with whatever you decide, Babe.

I dearly hope that all has been going smoothly there for you sweetheart, and that John has been taking good care of you. Just don't ever forget that my thoughts and prayers are with you constantly and will continue to be especially around mid-April. Only by explaining the significance of April to the authorities here have I been allowed to write this letter so soon. Normally I believe I would have had to wait much longer to contact you.

New Insight

My experiences with these people this past month have certainly given me new insight into this war and situation here. You know I could never understand or even tolerate the motives of the anti-Vietnam war demonstrators but, honey, now I know they are right. It is the bulk of the American people, like us, who think we know why we're involved here but really don't understand the true issues or nature of the war at all. I haven't been brainwashed or politically indoctrinated. I'm still the same man I was when I left home except now I'm a little wiser. This comes from reading which I had started aboard ship and from observing and talking with these people here. I feel I must pass at least some of this on to you so you will understand. Very briefly, it goes like this:

After W.W. II the Vietnamese people, under the leadership of the present president of the D.R.V., Ho Chi Minh, revolted against French colonial rule. Because we, the U.S., were interested in the natural resources and the militarily strategic foothold in Indo-China, we supported the French with substantial military aid and advisory personnel. In spite of this, the Vietnamese people defeated the French in 1954 at the famous battle of Dien Bien Phu. It had taken nine years but they had won their freedom and independence. The 1953 Geneva Convention, convened for this specific purpose, stipulated that the independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam be recognised and that participants in the conference refrain from internal interference in her affairs. The agreements called for a provisional military demarcation zone or line dividing the country to facilitate its demilitarisation and that in two years free, national elections would be held to reunify the entire country. Finally, the agreements prohibited foreign troops or military personnel in either zone nor could either zone enter into any

military alliance. So the intent of the agreement was quite clear: To clear all foreign troops from Vietnam as expeditiously as possible and to guarantee the Vietnamese people the rights for which they struggled so hard i.e., self determination in a united country with no foreign intervention whatsoever. Still with our eye now on South Vietnam, President Eisenhower said: 'The U.S. has not been party to or bound by the decisions of the Conference.' Two months later the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (S.E.A.T.O.) was formed with the U.S. as the major power. In spite of the clear intentions of the Geneva agreements, S.E.A.T.O. included South Vietnam in its 'protection area'.

Next Step: Diem

As the French evacuated S. Vietnam, our next step was to ease Ngo Dinh Diem, a western educated and completely U.S. controlled puppet into the government. We supported his regime with massive aid both economic and military. We established the Military Advisory Aid Group to train his troops. His government was never popular with the people and couldn't have lasted without our continued support. In 1956 when it came time for the national elections, he rebuffed all overtures and pleas from the north to arrange the elections. Naturally we backed him up for now we had our foothold in South-East Asia.

The people were furious. They protested but, of course, to no avail. It was well known that had the election taken place Ho Chi Minh would have been elected President of all Vietnam, and rightly so. He was the revolutionary hero of the people, just as Washington was ours. He had made good progress in the north with land reform and economic stabilisation. With Diem's refusal to allow reunification, the people were seeing their victory over the French become meaningless. Their only recourse was to revolt against Diem, our man. Because they were revolting against a government which supposedly represents our democratic way of life and because they were for unification with the now socialist north, they were labelled Viet Cong; Communist. They have since called themselves the National Front for Liberation. So this people's revolution, founded on their bitterness at their betrayal, is the war we are fighting here now. And yet, these are the people we have refused to negotiate with. I don't understand why on either count.

Worse yet, we have been bombing N. Vietnam because they are supporting the revolution in the south. We have inferred that they are intervening and that this is none of their business. The D.R.V. has every right to support their countrymen in the south. They are one and the same people. Reunification of their country is a part of the national purpose of the people of N. Vietnam.

Strictly Self-Imposed

All this time I have been content to fight for those old standby

and often vague reasons such as 'to protect our American way of life' or 'to honor our commitments and agreements with our allies' or 'to stop the spread of communism'. Well these things just don't apply here at all. The Saigon Government certainly doesn't represent our way of life and the people have never really known our way of life. All commitments and agreements in this case are strictly self-imposed for our own convenience to have 'reasons' to be in South Vietnam. The S. Vietnamese 'government' wants us there but the people certainly don't. Why should we now be so anxious to help the people whom we were aiding the French to put down? It is true that if Vietnam were unified she would probably fall under the same socialist government as that of the D.R.V. However I have observed these people in their homes and in their dealing with one another. The simple and contented lives which these people lead is far better than the lives of war and terror led by their countrymen in the south. I'm not really sure but what a socialist government was the only answer to N. Vietnam's social, economic and agricultural problems at the end of the revolution. Furthermore, we barely lifted our finger to stop the spread of communism 90 miles off our own coast so why this almost fanatical commitment of lives and resources 9,000 miles from home?

What it all means is this. We just don't belong here. This is not our war. We knowingly undermined the Geneva Agreements all along and kept the Vietnamese people from realising the fruits of their own revolution. Our country loses more honor with each new involvement. We have got to leave Vietnam strictly to the Vietnamese. Our country must live up to its greatness and say: 'we were wrong'. Further escalation will be catastrophic because the N. Vietnamese are prepared and determined to fight for ever.

I Love My Country

God knows and you know, honey, that I love my country dearly and that I am loyal to my profession. These are the very reasons I feel so strongly about it. Aside from my actual contact with the peasants and the authorities here, I could have found all this out at the station or city library if I'd just taken the time.

People might think: 'Sure he's advocating an early end to the war. That's the only way he'll get home.' Of course an end to the war would hasten the repatriation of scores of American pilots and crewmen but it would also save thousands and thousands of lives, millions and millions of dollars in resources, and a measure of honor for our country in initiating an end to the fighting and withdrawing our troops. We are fighting an illegal, dishonorable and unjust war here.

Show This Letter

Please show this letter to our family and friends. They have got

to know the truth. Use the letter to its fullest extent to show our people what's going on here. Once our people know the truth they must make it plain to our legislators that they will tolerate this situation no longer. Yes, this is really me talking, sweet, and, believe me, I'm speaking right from my heart. But enough of this for now.

These people have been generous so as to allow me to receive one letter per month. It may contain letters from any of my immediate family and may contain photos. The envelope may not weigh over 20 grams and must be sent by regular air mail. The address must be :

Gerald L. Coffee,
Detention Camp for Captured American Pilots,
Democratic Republic of Vietnam,
and, of course, your regular return address.

Please give my love to all our dear family and friends whom I know are taking good care of you and the children. Tell each of our precious children how very much their Daddy loves them and give them a kiss for me. You must know that my thoughts of you sustain me from day to day. I'll be right there with you when that time comes in April so just think of me holding your hand. Also, happy birthday, honey. You can be sure we'll make this one up. My love for you gives me the strength and courage I need each day, darling, and I dearly hope it works the same way for you.

I love you,
Jerry."

Coffee is a Catholic and a very religious man. It is plain to me that his views are prompted by no ideological commitment other than the sentiments induced by the direct contact with the situation and population of Vietnam. When I returned to the United States within a few days of my leaving Vietnam, I telephoned Mrs. Coffee to tell her of my meeting with her husband. I said: "Mrs. Coffee, I have just come from Vietnam where I have seen your husband and I want to tell you that he is in perfectly good health." Her reply was rather disturbing: "Anything you have to say to me you can tell to Captain Fowler of the U.S. Air Force." I said: "Mrs. Coffee, I have a letter for you from your husband. Would you like me to read it to you?" Her reply was: "What is your name?" I told her: "That is not important. Do you wish me to tell you of my meeting with your husband?" She said: "Anything you have to say you should tell to Captain Fowler of the U.S. Air Force." I posted the letter of her husband to her and retained a photostatic copy, which I released to the Press after she had had time to receive the original. Those who are concerned about brain-washing might consider who it is who is so victimised, Mrs. Coffee or the Lieutenant-Commander?

My meeting with the Lieutenant-Commander lasted almost four hours. He spoke with earnestness and listened with great attentiveness

to all that I might say. He seemed eager to be reassured that his new-found thoughts and sentiments were worthy. I resisted the strong temptation to tell him precisely what I felt, but conveyed these feelings in my letter to him subsequently. When I asked him if there were anything I could do for him, he asked me if I would make known as widely as possible what he had told me and if he could give me a letter to his wife, and would I make known to the American people the feelings he expressed in this letter about the war?

The Blood Pounded

My thoughts during the time I was with the Lieutenant-Commander turned again and again to my experience of the previous week, to the moments when the blood pounded my head as I fought down cries and sought to retain composure in my conversations with children and parents, doctors, teachers, poor peasants, militia girls. Faces flashed before me. I think of Le Van Lac, whose eight year old daughter was killed on September 15, all of whose neighbours were killed, including a mother and four children, a wife and husband and two children. Le Van Lac's eye, ear, shoulder and right arm were lacerated. He has been rendered deaf and impotent — unable any longer to work. As we spoke to one another, I tried to convey something of my feelings. I told him of my determination to translate his suffering into effective action against my Government and, as we said "Goodbye", he suddenly embraced me, yelling very loudly in Vietnamese: "I am very painful. Please recognise my pain."

Ngoc

A poor peasant, wizened and old at 41, told me of the simple heroism of her 13 year old son, Ngoc:

"It was Sunday, April 4, 1965. Ngoc was at home. Suddenly, the jets came and bombed. There is nothing in my village but huts, no buildings. I do not know why they attacked us. Ngoc was writing a lesson for his little brother, Hoa, who is seven. We tried to get to a shelter, but the children of the neighbours, who were having their meal, were injured and could not reach the shelter. One of them had been killed immediately. Ngoc leaped from the shelter and, although the bombs were exploding, he was able to bring back one of the injured children. The second child he brought back had a broken leg, with the bone protruding. Blood was everywhere. The third time he was hit by a lazy dog. His left side was sliced open and, although he was so wounded, he crawled into the shelter with the small child. He told me: 'I may die, Mummy, but don't cry. You and Daddy must work to have enough food for my brothers and sisters. If I die, I have done as best I could.'

That was eight in the morning. He remained in that shelter with me until eleven. He was taken to a provincial hospital to be operated on. They tried to remove the slivers of steel, but the tiny darts had

pierced his liver and pancreas. I followed him to the hospital, but he asked me to go back to his younger brothers and sisters, who were so small. He said: 'Don't worry. I shall come back to help you with the farming.' So I stayed in the house and the next day I learned he had died at 7 a.m.

I have no place to house my children. On that day, four of Ngoc's friends in the fifth grade were killed. The first air raids made me afraid. But now I am used to the bombing. We produce and farm and that is our resistance. I am utterly defiant. I will never forget that Ngoc sacrificed his life. I will revenge him. I will work to produce rice, so we can defeat the people who bomb us. Everyone loves their children. I love my children. So you can know my pain. I believe if the U.S. pilots saw their children die like I saw Ngoc die, I believe they would not drop these steel bombs on my village.

Hatred In My Heart

I have learned that you are an American. I want to tell you I have not done anything harmful to the Americans. Neither did my boy. U.S. bombs killed him. I bear deep anger and hatred in my heart. I wish you American boys could help stop these bloody killers who are killing our children.

Before the revolution I was a servant with a landlord. I cannot read or write. I cannot speak well or use nice words. I just tell you about what has happened in my village and to my family and to my son. I hope you will bring the truth to your people. My boy died and so I have this opportunity to tell you of his sacrifice. I am more determined than ever to do anything I can to defeat the attackers. I request you to make them know this."

Madame Nguyen Thi Tho

But, above all, the woman who is fixed in my mind, whose small figure, round, brown, sober face and quiet, patient eyes haunt me is Madame Nguyen Thi Tho, with whom I spoke for 15 hours one day, from early morning to late at night. It was Thursday, February 24, and she came in wearing a shawl and a light brown dress. She had a solemnity which was communicative, and I sensed that she had lived through something that could not be formulated easily or completely.

"I am a woman living in the province of Thu Dan Mot, north of Saigon, near the rubber plantations on the east coast of South Vietnam. I am 40 years old. I live by farming. I work gardens and the rice fields. My husband is dead and I live with my mother and have one son, who is 14. I should like to tell you something of my experience.

I was arrested in a bus when I spoke to passengers. In 1956 people were held under the point of gun everywhere in the South. To terrorise people in my province, Saigon opened the Truong Tan Buu, or mopping-up operation. Regiments of troops came against

the people. The elections of 1956 were not to take place. When I was put in gaol, I found it full of people. They arrested as many as 700 in a raid. There were members of all groups and organisations — social organisations, women's organisations. Many were arrested because they had tried to spread the Vietnamese script, others for teaching people to read and write. There were many religious believers and there were intellectuals. Terrorism was carried out everywhere against the people. Anyone who had been in the former resistance was hunted. Even people who spoke about an election were arrested. People who tried to meet the International Control Commission to tell them about violations were immediately arrested. Tens of thousands of people were being gaoled. Prisoners did not have enough room to sit down or lie down. They had to stand through the night. The 'anti-communist' campaign was started, and the wives of anyone who had been regrouped to the North, under the Geneva Agreements, were made to divorce their husbands. People were gaoled for six years without trial. I was gaoled for many years, without ever being brought to trial.

Sometimes, the Press published the release of a person like Mrs. Nguyen Thi Tu, who was supposed to have been released after years imprisonment, because she had committed no crime, but, in fact, she was never released and had been sent to a new prison in Paulo-Condore island.

Snakes in the Vaginas

Poisonous snakes were put in the vaginas of the women. Women died agonisingly. The authorities used broken bottles, which they forced into the vaginas of the women. The women fell unconscious and usually died. The guards used iron nails, which they drove under the finger nails of all fingers of the prisoners. They, then, bandaged the fingers, soaked them in gasoline and set them alight. They pumped water into our mouths and noses. The water was mixed with fish sauce, which was extremely spicy. It burned the membrane. They also used soap. They used 'Crezil', which is a very powerful sewer disinfectant, used in lavatories and toilets to kill germs.

How can I tell you? There are so many people to mention. They failed to arrest Mr. Kiem, so they arrested his wife and small daughter. She was tortured for long hours, but did not reveal anything about her husband's whereabouts. They brought a petrol drum, full of water. They put her small daughter, whose name was Nga and who was five years old, into the drum. She was completely immersed. They then beat the outside of the drum. The pressure of water caused the child's eyes, ears, nose and mouth to issue blood. I saw this with my own eyes. Madame Thi was forced to witness it.

150 In the same Room

There were 150 women in the same room. The room was 12 feet by 21 feet. We had no toilet. They put a container in the room. The stench was overwhelming in that small place. Almost all those who survived and were eventually released are now invalids, incapable of walking. They suffer from nervous diseases and from periodic loss of consciousness.

On the first day I was called to the security officer. I was not asked anything. I was simply beaten continuously for eight hours. One would beat me and then others would take their turn to beat me. They used various kinds of torture. At first, I was beaten with rectangular sticks with four, sharp, angled edges. I was beaten on the breasts and on the back. After some time, I lost consciousness and collapsed. After recovering consciousness, I was tied up. They used sliced strips of cane, which were very strong and sharp. They had tied my two feet together and suspended me from a hook in the ceiling, upside down. Each blow made me think my limbs would be torn from my body. The pain and the nervous reaction caused sharp and severe pangs in my heart. The first session lasted over an hour. When I regained consciousness, they began to beat me again. When I was finally lowered down, I could not stand. They stripped off all my clothes and tied me, naked, to a table. They covered my mouth and nose with a piece of thin cloth. They forced a rubber pipe into my mouth and nose and poured water into my mouth and nose. I could not breathe and was forced to swallow. My stomach was extended larger and larger. First, it was only water. Then they mixed fish sauce, then soap, then very powerful disinfectant, which burned. They tortured me like this for 40 minutes. Then I felt a black screen fall over my face. I lost consciousness. When I recovered consciousness, they were pressing my belly and shaking my head violently. Water came out of my mouth and nose. It spread over the floor of the room. There was a period when I felt as if I were immersed in the water coming out of me. I heard, very faintly, the voices of the security agents. One was saying: 'Look at you, a security agent for years and you still don't know how to tie them. She can move her head.'

My Brain Numb and Paralysed

They tied me, naked, to the table. My head was fixed tightly. They began drops of icy water on the centre of my forehead. It went on, hour after hour. I felt as if my whole face and head were being constantly attacked. At first, it had seemed nothing. After some time, it was unbearable. Drop after drop. I endured it, at first, for four hours. Then my brain became numb and paralysed."

(There was a doctor in the room, who broke in: "The cold contracted the arteries and veins, preventing blood from feeding the brain. This method of torture is very dangerous, because the brain

is under constant excitement and must resist. Full recovery from this torture is very difficult.”)

“When I was about to lose consciousness, I heard them saying to me: ‘We will make you a lifelong invalid’. In fact, since my release, and to this moment, I have heart ailments, attacks and a disease of the nervous system which affects my brain periodically. After attacks, I suffer from bleeding of the rectum, which is one effect of the torture I endured.

In the gaol they put my mouth in a lock made of wood and shaped like a bit. It was forced into my mouth and it was impossible for me to close my mouth, which was kept open all through the night in this way. The lock was fixed round my head. Breathing was extremely difficult.

Odious and Barbarous

I had been arrested together with a man. I was tied up with him for one month. One night, we were taken to a small room from the early evening until 2 a.m. They listened to us from outside. They wanted us to have sexual intercourse. They wanted to humiliate us. At last, they removed us and we were told: ‘You know what we want you to do.’ I replied: ‘You, who are odious and barbarous, are of such character. We will never lose our dignity.’

After endless torture I was put in the Gia Dinh gaol. This gaol was the most densely populated, as it is the gaol from which they despatch prisoners to the others. It is the central gaol. During the daytime, people can only sit by being on top of each other. At night, people slept on each other. If one wished to turn, let alone move, all had to turn. We had to sleep on our sides. The gaol was so hot that every prisoner tried to fan himself. Each night, there would be 20 or more people who would become unconscious because of the lack of oxygen. They were removed.

After one month in these conditions, everyone had rashes, pimples, blisters and swellings.”

(The doctor commented: “Each person had a space of less than one foot — 20 centimetres — and had one cubic meter of air.”)

“During the first month of gaol in Gia Dinh, I watched seven men die from asphyxiation. I could not understand how the women survived or endured it. The ration of food was so poor that in every meal one person received a tiny cup of rice with almost no vegetables or sauce. I lived there seven weeks and was sent finally to Paulo-Condore Island prison. In Paulo-Condore gaol every possible device for killing people slowly was employed. People died before our eyes every day. The means used ensured very slow but certain death. I was detained one year in Paulo-Condore Island. Out of twelve months, I was kept in a cell for ten months. The cell was a small shelter on the surface of the ground. It was three feet by six feet in area. The walls were made of stone, 18 inches thick. The

ceiling was made of concrete. The walls were painted black. The ceiling was under six feet in height.

Unbearable to have Hair

The bed was made of stone. It was a cell for one prisoner, but I was kept in this cell, six feet by three feet, with four people. One slept on the 'bed'. One slept in each corner. There was a can of excrement, changed once a week. It held four gallons. The room connected with the sewers and a sewer hole was open inside the cell, causing a constant stench. The door was made of petrified wood, 18 inches thick. This wood is harder than steel and nails cannot be driven into it. It is known in Vietnam as 'iron-wood'. The window of the room was eight inches by six inches and covered with an iron net of bars. We were without any clothing in the cells, as the heat was so unbearable that we removed our clothing. Through the window, a ray of light collected our drops of sweat and showed them evaporating from our bodies and condensing again on the walls and ceiling. After only one day in the cell we all cut off our hair. It was too unbearable to have hair, such was the stifling heat.

Rain drove us to Frenzy

In 24 hours we received a small cup of water, each about three mouthfuls. We were sweating constantly. In over four months we had no water with which to wash. During our monthly periods, blood dropped on ourselves and on the floor. We tried to clean the floor with our rags of clothing and with our hands. We slept on the floor. We were so thirsty that the noise of rain drove us to frenzy. We yearned for a drop to come into the cell to touch our parched faces or soothe our raw throats. We were starved for air to such an extent that we looked at the opening of the door as a famished child looks at her mother's breast.

The rice was mixed with paddy husks. The flies were inside the rice and covered it like a black veil. The flies clustered everywhere. Due to the sewer-hole and the can of excrement in the cell, it was perpetually filled with odours so powerful that it was a torment to breathe. They often put eight and even twelve people in this cell, six feet by three feet! When we were four, it was possible to sleep lying down. When we were eight, it was possible to sit; when we were twelve, we stood. When there were twelve people, if there was no help from a few of the guards, we should have died in 48 hours. Some guards would secretly open the door for ten minutes every six hours. This enabled us to survive. This form of detention is an ingenious method of slow death, slow murder; we died of shortage of water, of air, of food, of disease and of exhaustion.

As the guards helped us in their meagre way, we barely survived. But in the cells in which the men were kept, they died constantly

from vitamin and protein deficiency — slow, torturous death.”
(The doctor broke in, once more: “Vitamin deficiency caused flesh-dehydration.”)

“When we saw a prisoner with toes and feet black, we knew that the process of slow, painful death had begun. The body would die before the eyes of the victim. We needed only four vitamin pills, but we got nothing. The guards used Oreomycin and Theramycin to prevent disease of their chickens. All of us suffered from dysentery and worms — all the prisoners.

Reduced to a Skeleton

After ten months of detention, I was reduced to a skeleton. Just bones. Very few people could walk. If we could survive, it was because we tried to appeal to the humanity of some of the puppet soldiers. Some few who observed our suffering helped us a little, enough to enable some of us to survive. The men, alone, in Paulo-Condore died 300 at a time from atrocities in the prison. They were left dead for days in the cells. Thousands upon thousands were attacked by disease in epidemics. There were mass burials. In the midst of this death and suffering, the Chief of the Island, Bach Van Bon, clapped his hands and laughed at us on inspections.

On Christmas Eve, the Catholic prisoners could not go to church. So they organised a Mass, in gaol. They were beaten for this from midnight, Christmas Eve, until 1 p.m. the following Christmas Day. Although the prisoners surviving were weak from disease, we were compelled to do forced labour.

One strong man can produce one cubic metre of firewood per day. We were forced to produce three cubic metres per day from the jungle. At the end of each day we were beaten and bled profusely because of insufficient amounts of firewood. There was a time when we went on hunger strike to protest the meagre ration of rice. We were forced to be exposed to the boiling sun all day. Hundreds died. I was in Paulo-Condore during one year when there was a strong protest movement in Saigon demanding the release of women from Paulo-Condore. The strength of the movement against detention of women in Paulo-Condore, which took place in Saigon, led to our removal to another gaol on the mainland.

We were too weak and almost unable to walk to the ship going to the mainland. We had to assist each other. Nineteen hours on board ship was terrible. We were all vomiting. On arrival in Saigon, we could not walk off it. The ship did not actually pick us up at Paulo-Condore. They used small boats to bring us to the main ship. When we were on board, 41 fell unconscious from exhaustion. This ship, called *Phu-Ong Khanh*, was a cargo ship. There was no air. We were crowded in the hold. It was utterly exhausting. After we had been suffocating in the hold, the sailors who observed this argued and protested fiercely with the security men. They knew we would

die in the hold and demanded that we should be allowed on the deck. The sailors helped us much. They intervened with the ship's captain for medicine to give us strength to survive until we reached the mainland.

Massacre and Mass Poisoning

From the ship we were led to Phu Loi concentration camp. It was vast, holding 8,000 people. At Phu Loi camp they forced us to salute their colonel and to shout slogans of support for the Diem regime. We refused to do so. We were beaten and sent to another prison, called Thu-Duc gaol.

After we left Phu Loi, they carried out an enormous massacre in the camp. They effected a mass poisoning, which killed over 1,000 and made 6,000 gravely ill. When I was in Thu Duc I met a friend who told me, first hand, of the mass poisoning in the Phu Loi concentration camp: 'The Phu Loi concentration camp was situated in the midst of a plain; it was intolerably hot and exposed. There was almost no water in the camp. The concentration camp was built by forced labour. The labourers had to work in broiling sun to build the barbed-wire fences, shelters and huts. The prisoner had to perform brutal work, but only received a tiny portion of rice. Any resistance or disaffection led to our being placed in cells underground, without air and which were broiling hot. Many became unconscious. Because of the solidarity of the prisoners, the authorities were forced to make certain provisions. Then, they began systematic reprisals. One day, they gave us a good meal of beef, other meat and bread. People were starved and ate eagerly. After the meal, there was violent pain, bloody vomiting and bloody evacuation. Then death. Furious, survivors captured the loud-speakers and broadcast the crimes and appealed for first aid. Troops and police came and slaughtered us in the course of repression. Many more were beaten to death.'

Torture

There was a woman named Phung who was beaten and then tortured, as follows: The security agent used his baton and rubber truncheon to penetrate deeply and with brutal force into her vagina. To this day, she bleeds when she feels weak or sick. She was a nurse who had saved many people in the camp. She still lives in a Saigon-occupied area of South Vietnam. After some time, I was returned to Phu Loi concentration camp. Blood was visible on all the walls. The second time I was there, they started all the same torture again. Everything I endured in Paulo-Condore and before was repeated. I was hung from the ceiling for hours; they beat me endlessly; they forced water with soap into my lungs and stomach, causing lesions and perforation. It went on for periods of two to two and a half months at one time, for one entire year. I was almost

insane. The first session lasted two and a half months. I was with an 18 year old girl who was stripped, hung from the ceiling and tortured. In winter it was bitterly cold. All the women were subjected to the same, without exception. After torture, we had to lie, naked, on the floor. Cold water was flooded upon us. The torture was started all over again.

My Life a Great Victory

Each campaign of torture lasted, without stop, for two months. I was treated this way continuously, until six days before my release. Until that moment I was tortured almost constantly. If I am still alive it is thanks to the care given me afterwards by my fellow countrymen. I consider my life a great victory. I live. Tens of thousands, when set free, have become both invalids and sterile.

I was released in 1960. In 1962, I was again arrested and herded into a strategic hamlet. Let me tell you how they organised the strategic hamlet and what it meant. First, they sent aeroplanes to bomb the villages. Then troops to attack the villages. Finally, bulldozers to destroy completely all the people's houses. The homeless were then forced into these strategic hamlets, built through their own forced labour. In my province there were 200,000 people. All 200,000 were herded into strategic hamlets. The herding of people directly violated the whole fabric of life of the people. The people resisted in any way they could. There were many women whose houses were being destroyed by puppet troops. The women set fire to their own houses to trap the puppet troops destroying their homes. Many old men burned incense in the houses of their ancestors and pledged to their ancestors to die protecting their houses and sacred places. Then, with knives in hand, they sat at the door of their house and waited for the puppet troops to come to destroy the house: 'Please, fellow countrymen, if you wish to take tea with me you are welcome in my house; if you come to destroy my house, take care. I shall defend it with my life.'

"Strategic Hamlets"

As our people live on their own piece of land and on their rice fields, and they live in scattered spots, they are against these concentration camps. They resist the strategic hamlet, encircled by five barbed wire fences, watched by patrolling puppet troops with machine-guns, dogs and look-out towers. In the hamlet, people were forced to pay high taxes and conform to forced labour, unpaid, at any time. People are forced to join Government organisations and youth are forcefully conscripted into the puppet army. They are forced, at gun point, to take weapons against other villagers, their brothers and sisters. Let me give you the example of Tan Cu village; 59 were herded into strategic hamlets. Three months later, 30 of them were dead. In Hoa Trung, of 400 people herded, 200

died. In Ben-Tuong hamlet, organised and directed personally by U.S. officers, the people demonstrated during the visit of McNamara, for food, rice and freedom to return to their villages. People in the hamlets are forced to inform the secret police if anyone has a relative in the North, anyone had participated in the resistance against the French, or anyone who has spoken about peace or neutrality, about elections or democracy; or if anyone has criticised the Saigon puppet Government or U.S. officers or the U.S. Government.

Most of the girls were raped by troops in the hamlets. Strategic hamlets were not only organised in the countryside, but also applied to the cities. The girls in the cities were forced into teams of prostitutes for U.S. troops. The Saigon Government forced, at pain of death, literally tens of thousands of young girls into camps to be used as perpetual instruments of official recreation for U.S. troops.

In order to force the labourers of the cities into the strategic hamlets, agents and troops burn down the people's houses. They send fire engines to the fire and spray not water but gasoline! To destroy everything! Due to the poverty suffered, many thousands of girls, and students as well, had to sell their bodies for food to the U.S. soldiers. This is in addition to the force applied by the Government in organising girls as forced-prostitutes. Poor and starving children rummage like rats amidst the garbage dumps for food. That is the life imposed in our cities of the South.

As the organisation of strategic hamlets was against the interests of our whole people, everywhere, in countryside or in the city, all resist — men, women, children, old people — resist bitterly as a matter of life and survival. As I have told you, they succeeded, at first, in herding us by brute force into the concentration camps of forced labour — their so-called strategic hamlets — but finally the people united together to fight against it. They have overthrown many strategic hamlets and turned them into fighting villages of the resistance. When people do not allow children to take part in the struggle against the strategic hamlets, our children reply: 'When U.S. soldiers kill us they do not distinguish children from parents.' The 'strategic hamlet' now has been changed by McNamara into 'new-settlement camps'. In these camps terrorism is far worse and far more atrocious. The struggle against being forced into them grows ever more fierce. People struggle to get out and the Government tries to force them in.

Once they came to Binh Dinh province and shot dead a pregnant woman and a bed-ridden woman, who had given birth two days ago, was shot dead at point-blank range. This is ordinary practice when herding our people, in order to terrorise them. I was told this by eye-witnesses. Twenty-two women, 22 children and six old men were shot down in cold blood to intimidate the people of the area.

They took babies of two years and tore them into pieces, literally, and threw the pieces into the bushes. They broke the heads of infants with poles of wood and threw the infants on a fire. A little boy I knew, named Zung, had his leg broken by a bullet at point-blank range and was then buried alive by U.S. soldiers. Troops were committing other horrible atrocities. This was on December 22, 1965, in Tai Quang village. In this same raid a family of seven was killed by U.S. soldiers; another of nine was completely annihilated by raiding U.S. troops. I know of so many such atrocities I could go on for hours. These are absolutely typical, everyday examples. The people are stirred to such hatred and outrage that all of them, every last one, resist U.S. atrocities against them.

I was herded again and again into these hamlets, after my release from the concentration camp. I have witnessed these crimes repeatedly in the hamlets. A man named Dong saw the families and he survived. Now he has been hospitalised, after his escape. This is a part of the story of what I have seen, what I have endured and what I have lived through.

There are so many things I want to tell you, that I cannot because the people and the witnesses are still living in occupied areas. I would tell you of the bombardments, the fragmentation bombs, the gas, the chemicals, the napalm, and phosphorus, the poisons — the daily events of which these barbarous atrocities are a part — week after week in the South. I have seen it, I have endured it and struggled against it. I know people who have carried the victims to the local U.S. officers responsible, to confront them."

Madame Tho is under treatment. I was told later that she insists upon returning to the South, as soon as possible. No-one considered this unusual.

More Vietnamese died between 1954 and 1959, the years of "peace", than in the years 1960 to 1966, the years of popular resistance in the South and American bombardments in the North. But the Vietnamese, from the President and Prime Minister to the villagers who spoke to me of their sufferings, are patient and exceedingly gentle. Nothing was so harrowing as their gentleness. They know that our people have been corrupted. Americans and Europeans have been the beneficiaries of the exploitation against which the people of Vietnam struggle.

During my talk with Premier Pham Van Dong we dwelt on the level of consciousness in the United States and the possibilities of serious resistance. There were moments in the conversation when the weight of American responsibility and my feelings of shame and humiliation pained me too deeply, and I was silent. Pham Van Dong took my hand and said:

"My dear brother, the struggle is long and our people endure much. We are comrades in arms: you, Americans, who work to

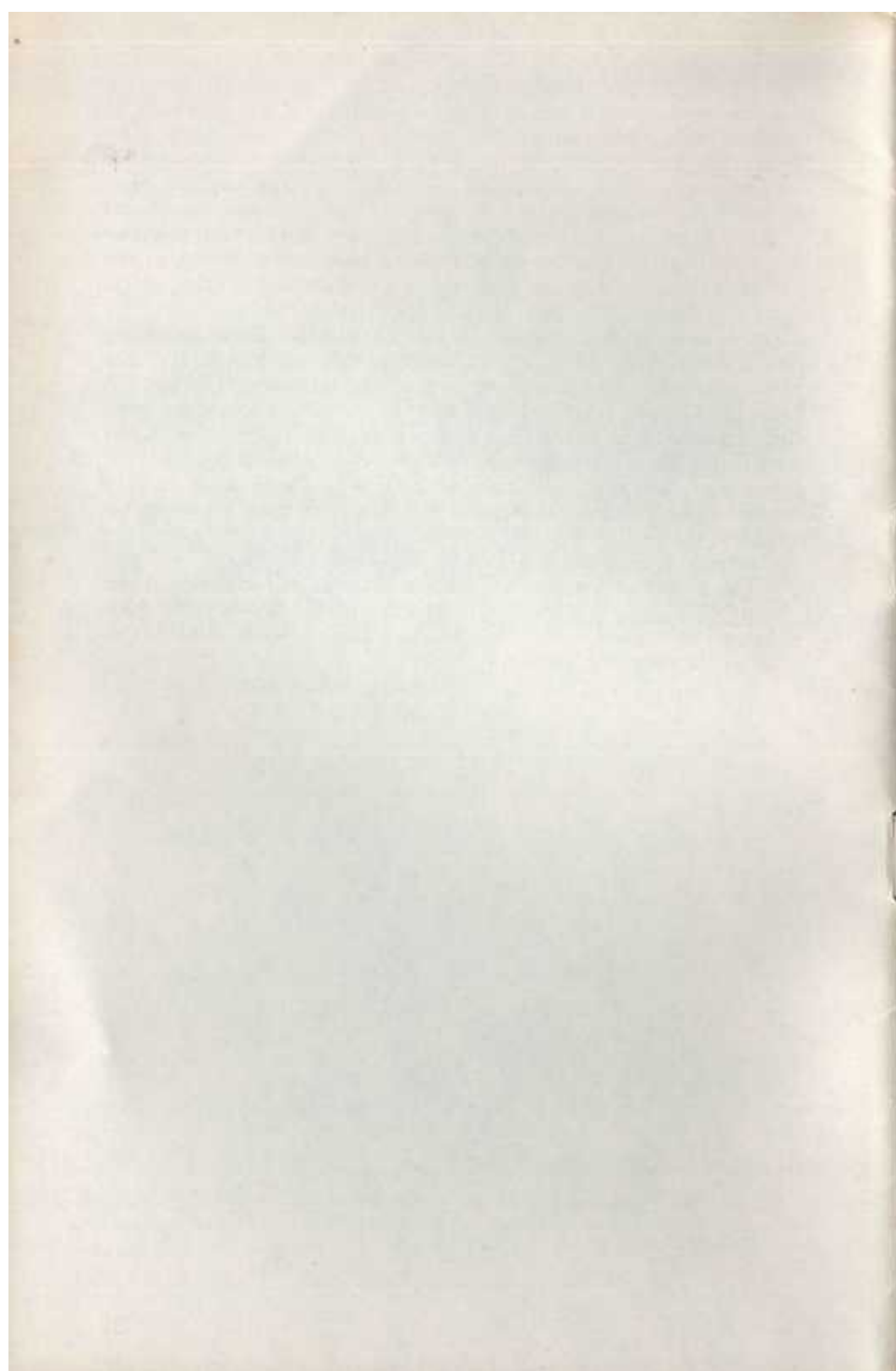
awaken your people and to resist your rulers, and we, who struggle in the field. It is the same fight."

Even while they expect little from us, they are moved and grateful for the little they receive, for they see the birth of an American resistance as one of the rewards for their sacrifice. An American emergence and an American consciousness of our place in the world and our relationship to our rulers will be the gift of the people of Vietnam to the people of the United States. It would be a mistake to think that we do them any favour. The pity of the horror which has been borne by Vietnam is not a pity deserved by the Vietnamese. There is nothing pitiful about them. In their very suffering they are heroic. It is not passivity which marks them, but sacrifice and resistance. The pity lies in the cruel historic reality which renders the American people apathetic and acquiescent as this horror is perpetrated in their name. I feel certain that the American emergence of the next generation, and the generation after that, will trace its origins to the quarter century revolution in Vietnam: that great and liberating event to which we owe more than solidarity.

Bertrand Russell has said:

"The people of Vietnam are the world's soldiers for justice. Their struggle is epic, a permanent reminder of the heroism of which human beings are capable when dedicated to a noble ideal. Let us salute the people of Vietnam."

Ralph Schoenman
April 11, 1966



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