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Vietnam Revisited

GIs Hooked on Heroin Bring Home Trouble

■ By JON STEINBERG

Last fall, Today published Jon Steinberg's account of how easily GIs in Vietnam could obtain marijuana. Steinberg recently made another trip to Vietnam at the request of the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency. This time he found widespread use of heroin. His follow-up report shows how Philadelphia is affected by this problem.

THE drug-abuse problem in Vietnam is massive, dangerous, unabated and growing. It is not a problem with which the military has yet come to grips, and the result of this lack of responsiveness is that alarming numbers of American servicemen are now dying every week from drug overdoses. For example, for the first seven months of 1970 there was an average of two soldiers a month dying from drug overdoses.

This was an increase of 50 percent over the monthly average for 1969.

However, since late summer of this year a newly packaged, widely distributed, deadly potent form of heroin is being, by U. S. standards, practically given away to our troops. While in Vietnam this past October, I purchased over an ounce of pure heroin for under \$20. That same quantity of heroin would bring about \$40,000 on the streets of Philadelphia.

As a result of this influx of heroin, known drug overdose deaths increased 175 percent in August and September, 1970, and combined with suspected overdose deaths, the body count was 46.

During the first 18 days of October, 1970, there were 35 *known* overdose deaths among American GIs in the war zone. At that rate, instead of the two deaths a month experienced from January through July, our forces were experiencing two deaths a day. I got this information from a confidential memo requested by and sent to Gen. Creighton Abrams, the military commander in Vietnam.

The real results of the drug problem are not found in the hospital wards in Vietnam, however. Conservative estimates by doctors who have lived with the drug problem in Vietnam put the number of drug-addicted or drug-dependent GIs who have returned home at over a quarter of a million men. With their drug problems unknown to civilian authorities or family members, these men have no place to turn for help—they continue their drug-oriented way of life.

Philadelphia has its share of former Vietnam-stationed GIs who have returned here addicted to

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They left here "clean" and returned "hooked"



HEROIN

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drugs. The Philadelphia district attorney's office comes in contact with between a dozen and two dozen men every month who had no record of drug problems before going to Vietnam but who have been arrested any number of times for drug-related offenses since their return to Philadelphia.

They are not bad men. They were sent to Vietnam "clean" and returned to Philadelphia "hooked." Only when they are arrested are their drug problems uncovered. These men cannot afford a drug habit at stateside prices, so they commit crimes, and eventually they are caught.

Clinton Pettigrew and Ronald Chester, two North Philadelphia men, have been arrested many times since their recent separation from the military. Pettigrew served in the Army for five years, spending his last year in Vietnam. Since his discharge, he has been arrested six times for narcotics offenses or for stealing to support his habit. Chester served for three years as a Marine, spending 13 months in Vietnam, as most Marines do. Since his discharge in August, 1970, he has been

arrested seven times for narcotics offenses, all within a month of his separation. Because of their drug habits, neither one was able to work after being honorably discharged by the military. Neither man had anything to live for except the next fix.

I visited Ronald Chester at home. His young, pretty wife was just as concerned as were Ronald and I, not only about her husband's drug problem, but about the conditions in Vietnam that make drug addicts out of so many decent young men.

Ronald explained that the men not doing much fighting are getting drugs whenever they want. Ronald started on opium, first using it after a stint in the field. "You come back and it's waiting there for you (any Vietnamese—and GIs come in contact with them constantly—can get whatever drugs you want for you). Opium, reefers, heroin. I started on opium but later I turned to heroin.

"I knew I'd have to go back in the field, and I didn't want to go back the way I was when I came out of the field before. I wanted to forget it. You just sit around and start thinking. You start thinking about home. You sit in a tent and the Vietnamese bring it around to you. It's all there when you come back from

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He's seen both sides

JON STEINBERG, 26, began his inquiry into marijuana use by GIs when he was serving in the Army. Military authorities at first squelched his story but he later received the Bronze Star for his reportorial courage. Steinberg has seen the Philadelphia side of the GI addiction problem in connection with his work as administrative assistant to District Attorney Arlen Specter.



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the field. Most of the time it's for nothing."

Clinton Pettigrew and Ronald Chester had outstanding records both as civilians and soldiers, before going to Vietnam. But now their lives could be ruined. And these are not isolated cases. And these are not the cases of black men or white men, rich men or poor men, educated men or dropouts. Men in identical situations are being arrested regularly for drug-related offenses.

While on my recent trip to Vietnam, I was told by Col. Thornton E. Ireland, the provost marshal for the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam, who is the top law-enforcement officer there, that as of October, 1970, he had only \$13,000 with which to investigate all crime until July, 1971, including the sources of drugs. Last August, he personally made a special request to an assistant to President Nixon for an additional \$100,000 to find and

Even marijuana can lead a GI to addiction

cut off the sources of heroin. He got no response from the White House.

The drugs which I purchased in Vietnam and brought back to the Senate stand as evidence that any desired drug can be obtained for practically nothing in Vietnam. Even marijuana, which is at least twice as strong as the kind available in the States and, frequently mixed with opium, can lead to addiction when a soldier returns home. Not able to purchase pot as openly or as cheaply here, and what he is able to buy is substantially weaker, military doctors say that an habitual pot smoker in Vietnam will be drawn to the harder drugs at home.

Something has got to be done, not just for the two men who die every day from drug overdoses in Vietnam, but for the tens of thousands who don't kill themselves with drugs, but who return home to Delaware Valleys everywhere and who commit crimes to feed drug habits. The expense in wasted lives, broken homes, the suffering and financial loss to victims of crime, and the added cost of law enforcement, make the case for treatment of GI addicts and elimination of the sources of drugs in Vietnam more than worthwhile. □