

Vietcong Boy, 12, Says He Was Tortured

By GLORIA EMERSON

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DANANG, South Vietnam, June 16—"I am so frightened," the 12-year-old boy who had worked for the Vietcong whispered over and over.

He and an 11-year-old girl who had also worked for the Vietcong were interviewed separately here this week in the presence of two men of the Special Police Branch, in charge of intelligence and interrogations. Both children managed to whisper to a private Vietnamese interpreter that they had suffered physical abuse during long periods of interrogation.

The interviews, which lasted an hour and a half, were arranged by the police chief of Danang, Nguyen An Vinh, because he wanted to show how the local Communists recruit the very young and expose them to risks.

Both children were unusually pallid and had deep circles under their eyes. Both showed signs of almost uncontrollable nervousness. They constantly clasped and unclasped their hands or plucked or rubbed the material of their pajama-type clothing.

'I Was Tortured'

Supervising the interviews was Dang Von Song, who heads the Special Police Branch here. At one point, when Mr. Song and another policeman in the room were distracted by a messenger bringing in papers for them to look at, the boy, whose



Nguyen Dinh Chinh, 12-year-old who said he was tortured during interrogation by Danang police.

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name is Nguyen Dinh Chinh, whispered:

"After my capture I was tortured on the first night. They poured water up my nose. They used electricity on me, too. Very painful. No sleep that night."

There was no time for him to give additional details.

When asked if the children had been beaten or maltreated, Mr. Song said in Vietnamese: "No, no. There are no marks on their bodies."

The two men did not try to interrupt or intimidate the 12-year-old as he spoke, often in a low little croak, leaning close to the interpreter on a couch. Twice he smoked cigarettes offered to him.

Carried Explosives

He said he was arrested on March 28 in Danang, where he was living. A port city in the northern part of South Vietnam, Danang has a major American Air Force base on its outskirts.

When he was arrested, the boy was carrying nearly 12 pounds of explosives, two detonators and two M-26 grenades on a mission for the Vietcong.

He was to meet an older Vietcong agent. The two were to blow up one of the headquarters of an American bombing squad in downtown Danang.

The boy has been at the Danang Provincial Interrogation Center since the end of

March. Officials would not say when he would be tried.

The interrogation of the boy has not been "satisfactory," according to Mr. Song, who did not elaborate. The children were interrogated to help the police find out who and where their leaders are.

"We use little fish to catch big fish," Mr. Song said.

There are 17 young people at the Provincial Interrogation Center or at the Detention Center, according to Mr. Song, who said they were all under 20 years of age.

In the Provincial Interrogation Center, Nguyen Dinh Chinh is kept in a small cell alone.

There are three tiny windows in the cell, but the boy said they were too high for him to look out. The boy is given water once a day—in the evening if he asks for it. He said he left the cell only once a week—on Saturday to wash.

Sleeps in Daytime

"I am alone, I am frightened," the boy said. "I want to be with others. At night I cannot sleep because of the mosquitoes, so I sleep in the daytime."

No visitors are allowed. He has no books or paper and pencil.

The boy said he once woke up crying after having dreamed he was dead. "The guard came inside the cell to curse me and to beat me," he added.

Twice, in a whisper, the 12-year-old asked the private interpreter for help in getting out of the cell. He also pleaded for money so he could somehow buy a can of fish.

Complains of Food

The boy complained of the quality of the meager food in the Provincial Interrogation Center. Mr. Song confirmed the complaint, explaining that only 27.4 piasters, or about 10 cents, is allotted to feed each prisoner for each day.

The boy's father was killed two years ago by American troops in a village in Quangnam Province, he said. While living with relatives in the village of Thanhtrung in Quangnam, the boy met members of the National Liberation Front.

"The Brothers there taught me about explosives and how to make detonators work by using my teeth," he said. He said that the Vietcong often gave him sums of money and that once he received a watch.

Girl 'Very Stubborn'

As he was led away, Nguyen Dinh Chinh saw the next prisoner coming in, but he did not show that he recognized her. She is 11-year-old Pham Thi Hoa, who once lived near him.

Described by Mr. Song as

"very stubborn," the girl said her mother "gave me away when I was very small." The policemen said she had lived with a succession of important Vietcong members, who treated her like a daughter. The girl's home was a bunker under a bamboo bush.

She calls these men her uncles, in Vietnamese style.

"Uncle Hien and the other uncles love me," she said to the interpreter. "My mother does not love me."

When she was arrested five months ago at a Danang bus station, Pham Thi Hoa was carrying a letter to a Vietcong agent.

She whispered that she had been beaten when first put in the Provincial Interrogation

Center. She is now in the Detention Center.

Her manner—despite the fearfulness seen in her face and the compulsive fidgeting of her hands—was defiant.

"That girl is very stubborn, but we have discovered her weak point—she is very afraid of having her hair cut off," Mr. Song said.

The second policeman said he had offered to adopt her. He repeated the offer. The girl gave him her same answer:

"I prefer to be in prison." As the girl was led away for the noon meal, Mr. Song said good-by to the visitors and said:

"Now don't write an antiwar story, write how the Vietcong exploit children."