

# Nebraska Recruits Vietnamese Doctors

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LOUP CITY, Neb., June 15—

It is not really so unlikely a match-up as it might appear—either for Loup City or for Dr. Pham Van Hoang and Dr. Phung Minh Tri and their families.

The doctors are Vietnamese refugees who have been catapulted from the upper strata of urban society in their home country squarely into the life of this little farming community on the Great Plains.

They are among 27 that have been brought to Nebraska by towns like Loup City, which has had trouble keeping doctors. And although it will probably be a year, and maybe two, before they can practice legally here, this community has prom-

Testimonial to Mimi on our 41st Anniversary For courage, endurance, faith, perseverance and love beyond the call of duty, I herewith publicly express my deepest appreciation.  
George Deutsch—Advt.

ised to sustain them until then. American physicians just do not seem to want to stay long in places like Loup City, a community of 1,400 spread out neatly along Dead Horse Creek and the Loup River in the undulating corn - wheat - and - cattle country.

Manners here are open and casual, the nerve-jangle of urban life is far away, and the air is so clear that the quarter moon stands out as starkly as a paper cutout pasted to the blue-black sky.

Nonetheless, Loup City has

had six doctors in the last six years. The town constantly lives with the danger faced by other Nebraska communities—that it will be left with no physician.

Rural Nebraska has 201 fewer physicians to serve its residents than Federal standards recommend for adequate medical care, the State Health Department says.

But the small town life is all right with 41-year-old Dr. Hoang and Dr. Tri, 40, former classmates at Saigon Medical School.

Last month, after the downfall of the Thieu regime, they and their wives and five young sons were huddled in tents at Camp Pendelton, Calif., freezing at night, standing in line six hours a day for food and

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wondering what lay ahead.

What lay ahead was this offer from Loup City: Come and practice medicine in our town, and we will set you up and support you until you are on your feet. Weary, not knowing anything about Nebraska or its people, the doctors asked for a guarantee in writing and got it.

Now, less than two months after fleeing their home cities of Saigon (the Tris) and Can Tho (the Hoangs), the families are settling into classic white-clapboard houses on quiet side streets here.

They are trying to forget their shattered lives at home. There they were sons and daughters of businessmen and landlords, with active practices and comfortable holdings in



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property and stocks. The Hoangs lived in a large house in Can Tho with three servants, a Toyota, a Citroen and a wine cellar with more than 200 bottles of French vintage.

They feared that because of their wealth and position, and because of Dr. Hoang's many American associations and Dr. Tri's former post as an Army officer, the Communists would force them into hard labor, or perhaps kill them. So they came to Pendleton, bringing little but the chance to make a new life.

#### Difficulties Lie Ahead

But major difficulties lie ahead. After interviewing the first doctors who arrived, state health officials who have been promoting the venture said it would take one to two years for the doctors to qualify for state licenses to practice.

Larry Clark, a 38-year-old gasoline station operator who is also the Mayor of Loup City and the official sponsor of the Hoang and Tri families, said that he and the other town officials had not been aware that there would be a delay.

But he said that the town would have gone ahead anyway, such is its concern about getting medical care. So the

city fathers are willing to wait, and to pay each doctor's family \$500 a month for subsistence, plus housing and hospitalization costs, until the doctors are licensed.

Many residents of this predominantly Polish community ("Polish capital" of Nebraska," says a sign on the outskirts of town) have taken to the Hoangs and Tri delightedly.

#### Welcomed By Most

The epithet "gook" has been heard, and some townspeople say they will not go to the doctors for medical care. But such sentiments appear overshadowed by the enthusiastic response of others. The community has provided houses for both families. Squads of husbands and wives cleaned the houses. The townspeople donated furniture, dishes and clothes.

Mr. and Mrs. Clark, who live across the street from the Hoangs, have clearly been captivated by the slight, intense Dr. Tri and the affable Dr. Hoang; by the shy Mrs. Tri, a pharmacist; the outgoing Mrs. Hoang—an economics teacher and the most fluent English-speaker of the group thanks to four years at Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio—and by the Tri children, Man, 8, and

Puong, 6; and the Hoang children, Hung 5, and his 4-year-old twin brothers, Hai and Ha. To Mr. Clark, the children's lilting voices are "almost like a song."

The Nebraska Public Power District, an electric utility, is credited with the idea of recruiting the doctors. Uneasy at the prospect of having no physicians in another small town where the utility planned to build a power plant, officials of the company approached state health planners in April with the idea for a statewide recruiting program.

In mid-May, spurred by reports that Australian and Canadian delegations were also interested in recruiting refugee doctors, the state planners made hurried calls to Nebraska communities asking them if they would sponsor some of the 100 or so physicians understood to be at Pendleton.

#### A 30-Minute Decision

It took the Loup City Council less than half an hour to decide. W. M. Roberts, a City Councilman, flew to Pendleton immediately to interview prospects, along with state senators and others. Mr. Roberts wanted to be sure that the doctors who came would stay. Doctors Hoang and Tri satisfied him.

Both have had long experience as general practitioners. In addition, Dr. Tri is a pathologist who taught medical students in Saigon, and who in 1963 studied at Tripler Hospital in Honolulu. Dr. Hoang is a specialist in physical rehabilitation who in 1972 studied at New York University and Bellevue Hospital.

"We can do anything—surgery, anesthesia, general practice," Dr. Tri said.

Such skills would be practiced at Loup City's 29-bed hospital and its small clinic.

There are differences between medical training in the United States and the French-based system under which Dr. Hoang and Dr. Tri were trained. Also, although both doctors can make themselves understood in English and read English well and rapidly, there are still language difficulties to be overcome.

#### 2 'Must' Examinations

The doctors face two examinations that must be passed for a state license. One tests competency in both English and medical basics; it is administered to foreign physicians wishing to practice in the United States by the Educational Commission on Foreign Medical Graduates.

The other is a standard test





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Dr. Pham Von Hoang with his sons and sons of Mayor Larry Clark of Loup City, Neb. From the left: Mitch Clark, 10, Phil Clark, 13, Pham Hoang Ha and Pham Hoang Hai, 4-year-old twins, and Pham Hoang Hung, 5, in the driver's seat of the tractor.

of medical competence used in 48 states in licensing all physicians.

The 27 doctors will begin classes this week at Creighton University, Omaha, in English and United States culture, particularly the culture of the small town. (Loup City, says one resident, is the kind of place where men sit in Janda's Cafe and "discuss everything and everybody, and what they don't know they make up.")

Later, the doctors will take courses at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha in preparation for their examinations. The state has provided \$50,000 for this, but officials say they need another \$50,000. They are looking to the Federal Government for help, but have been unsuccessful so far.

Loup City and other towns hope that Federal funds for the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees will ultimately ease their burden of supporting the families.

On their first trip to Omaha, Dr. Hoang and Dr. Tri bought \$274.39 worth of medical books, paid for by the Sherman County Bank in Loup City. The doctors spent last week poring over "Principles of Internal Medicine."

#### Acculturation

The families are going about becoming members of the community. They have been to receptions, parties and coffees. The children play with their neighbors. Dr. Tri (the Tris are Catholics and the Hoangs Buddhists) has insisted that his boys be called by their Chris-

tian nicknames—Chris and Jerry.

Dr. Hoang says he is so impressed by the friendliness, generosity and sincerity of the townspeople that he now believes the written agreement was unnecessary. And although the agreement calls for the doctors to stay here for a minimum of two years upon being licensed, they now say that they would like to stay indefinitely.

Still, they say, it is difficult to try to forget about what has happened and not to wonder what is happening in Vietnam, where mothers, brothers and cousins chose to stay behind.

"If you think about it," Dr. Tri says, "you get sorrowful, and we can't do anything about it."