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**Quinhon: Site of 'Intolerable Cruelty'**

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As prisoners, guards and International Red Cross inspectors watched in amazement, Maj. Phan Huu Hau of the South Vietnamese army stepped up to a female inmate at the prison of war camp he commanded in Quinhon and kicked her in the face.

With his boot in her face and "holding the prisoners in his furious stare," a Red Cross inspector wrote later, the major screamed threats at his subordinates.

"A long silence followed, broken suddenly by the commandant, who rapidly got into his jeep and left the area." The other Vietnamese officers "were dumbfounded. Their attitude showed unutterable embarrassment in the presence of the Red Cross representatives, who in turn left in dismay."

That episode, which occurred on Jan. 13, 1972, was the climax of three years of mounting tensions at the Quinhon camp. Repeated protests by the Red Cross inspectors against "intolerable cruelty" and "inhuman treatment," resentment of those protests by Maj. Hau, and continuing brutality by guards whom the Red Cross found "completely free to do as they wish" made this one of the most nightmarish of the facilities inspected by the Red Cross during the war.

According to some 3,500 pages of International Red Cross reports recently declassified by the State Department, the great majority of jails and prisons in South Vietnam during the war complied with the requirements of the Geneva convention, and their inmates—whether or not their incarceration was justified—were responsibly treated.

But at a few, including Quinhon, conditions brought strongly worded protests from the normally dispassionate Red Cross inspectors.

Quinhon, South Vietnam's third largest city, is the capital of Binh Dinh Province, on the central coast, which throughout the war remained a strong hold of the Vietcong. The prisoner-of-war camp there was opened July 1, 1967. At that time its listed capacity was 500, but later it was expanded to hold more than 1,200 inmates.

The Red Cross reports reveal no particular difficulties at this camp until the spring of 1969, after the camp had been rearranged so that it held only women, with the male inmates moved to tents outside the compound.

On an inspection at that time, Red Cross delegates found that the women had been divided into three groups: docile, undecided and intransigent, and that disciplinary measures against the last

group included confinement in barbed wire cages measuring less than 4 feet in any direction.

They also found some prisoners who bore clear physical evidence of beatings and one group of women who suffered regular fits of hysterics.

On their next visit, Oct. 1, 1969, they found that the camp's population had grown to 1,023, of whom 824 were women inside the main compound. Hysterical outbreaks were still a problem, the medical staff was insufficient, and there was some evidence that guards had taken reprisals against women who had talked to the inspectors the time before.

The Red Cross delegates said they thought conditions at the camp would improve, because a new commander had taken over. This was Maj. Hau, whose activities they later came to deplore.

In May, 1969, the inspectors went back to Quinhon to deal specially with the 7 per cent of the female inmates who were subject to outbreaks of hysteria. They took with them a shipment of the tranquilizer Valium that had been contributed by a Swiss pharmaceutical concern.

Maj. Hau told them that "almost all the hysterical women had suffered rape, torture and other physical abuse of all kinds when they were captured and at inter-

rogation centers" before they came to the camp.

The inspectors, including doctors, interviewed several of these women. All "declared that they had suffered brutal treatment from Vietnamese or American troops. Either they had been raped repeatedly or they had been tortured by the application of electric shock to their genitals."

In the opinion of the Red Cross delegates, the complaints were true, and the women could be treated only by Vietnamese psychiatrists because the mere sight of caucasian men sent them into hysterics.

American military officers accompanied the Red Cross delegates on these tours, but their reaction to these findings is not recorded in the reports.

After that visit, according to the Red Cross reports, conditions at Quinhon deteriorated steadily, and so did relations between the inspectors and the camp commander.

In June, 1970, the inspectors complained of a "distressing atmosphere," of prisoners who "appeared to be suffering" and of "inhuman" disciplinary measures, such as confinement in steel boxes where the temperatures were over 100 degrees.

A year later, they found that conditions had not im-

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proved, brutal treatment was being meted out by the same guards over and over, and that the prisoners were being kept ignorant of their rights under the Geneva convention.

They also said that the camp authorities were "belittling" the Red Cross and were systematically "harassing" the inmates.

Maj. Hau frequently complained to them in response that the prisoners were intransigent troublemakers who brought difficulties on themselves.

Many of the prisoners' complaints he dismissed as lies. The inspectors said, according to their reports, that they understood the prisoners were hard to deal with, but that brutality was "neither effective nor honorable, and least of all permissible."

Still, the guards continued to use clubs and tear gas to control the inmates.

In addition to their complaints of mistreatment, the Red Cross inspectors were also expressing concern all that time about sanitary conditions in the camp, where by September, 1971, "hygiene and toilet articles except for soap are lacking: that is to say toothpaste, toothbrushes, bath towels and sanitary napkins."

By the end of 1971, when the inspectors again complained that the guards were "acting with complete freedom" and took the unusual step of reading specific articles of the Geneva convention to the commander, the camp held 1,482 inmates. Of those, 604 originally had been captured by American troops, who turned them over to the Vietnamese.

The incident in which

Maj. Hau kicked the prisoner ended a three-day inspection in January, 1972. As was common, the members of the team had changed since the previous visit. But the outcome was no different. They found that some prisoners had been beaten for refusing to celebrate President Nguyen Van Thieu's second inauguration, others for declining to accept identity cards.

There was still no adequate treatment for the hysterics, and prisoners who had chosen to come over to the government side were being allowed to terrorize those who had not.

In one incident, guards had opened fire on inmates, which the Red Cross inspectors said was a violation of Geneva convention article stipulating that "the use of arms against prisoners of war shall be invoked only in extreme cases and will al-

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ways be preceded by warnings appropriate to the circumstances."

Maj. Hau "stated that if the women prisoners complain, they are not justified. They are lying."

The inspectors' conclusion was that "the conditions of treatment of POWs in Quinhon camp, to their deep regret, are not improving."

The kicking incident followed a dispute over the distribution over relief packages that the Red Cross team wanted to donate to the prisoners.

Maj. Hau, resentful of the inspectors, told the assembled inmates that the packages had actually been donated by the Americans. Other guards said, "These white foreigners with red pointed noses and blue eyes can do nothing for you . . . You ask the Red Cross to have the commandant and his staff transferred, but

you can see that we are still in this camp. The foreigners can do nothing against us," according to the Red Cross report.

When military photographers appeared to take pictures of the packages being received by the prisoners, the inmates refused to accept them because they believed the photos would be used to make propaganda for their American donors, the Red Cross reports said.

Negotiations followed, with the Americans accompanying the visitors staying out of sight to avoid reinforcing the belief that they were the donors.

A spokesman for the prisoners, when distribution had finally begun, stepped forward to talk to the Red Cross delegates and ask that "the Geneva convention be respected in their regard."

At that Maj. Hau "took

hold of the prisoner by her clothes and, shaking her, said, 'Who gives you all this?' . . . The prisoner, who, as soon as the commandant had released her, crouched down, said in a low voice, 'I didn't do anything. I just wanted to thank the International Red Cross.'

"The commandant, who, in all probability, had lost control of himself, gave her a kick in the face, shouting at her, 'I'll shut your filthy mouth.'"

That ended the distribution of the relief packages, and the inspection tour.

A few months afterward, the travails of the Quinhon inmates were alleviated when they were transferred to another camp hundreds of miles south, at Cantho in the Mekong Delta. This camp later received a favorable report when a Red Cross team went to inspect it.