

Danang Boys, Beggars, Live by Wits

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER

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DANANG, South Vietnam, Feb. 29—He is 9 years old and he hobbles around this bedraggled port on two wooden stumps and a tiny crutch. His name is Bay.

Almost everywhere Bay goes, his friend Lanh, who is 10, is with him. Lanh balances on his right leg and a battered crutch. His left leg, from just below the knee, is gone.

Bay and Lanh are partners in a begging business. They take in several hundred piasters a day.

Now their best contributors, the Americans, are leaving. But the boys do not think about the future.

They are part of an army of South Vietnamese civilians whose lives and bodies have been mangled by the war.

Many have sought refuge in the cities. Often, they have no one to turn to. Their farm skills are of no use in Danang or Saigon or Quinhon and the able-bodied are the first choice for most jobs.

Living by Their Wits

The Government and a handful of private groups have worked at rehabilitation programs but so far their efforts have been far outpaced by the flow of casualties. Often the maimed are left, like Bay and Lanh, to live by their wits.

Early each morning, Bay, wearing his torn black baseball cap, and Lanh, with his faded Marine fatigue cap, take the ferry across the Han River to downtown Danang.

Their favorite posts are a restaurant and a hotel that cater to foreigners. At the sight of an American or well-dressed Vietnamese, the boys bound up with flashing smiles and outstretched hands.

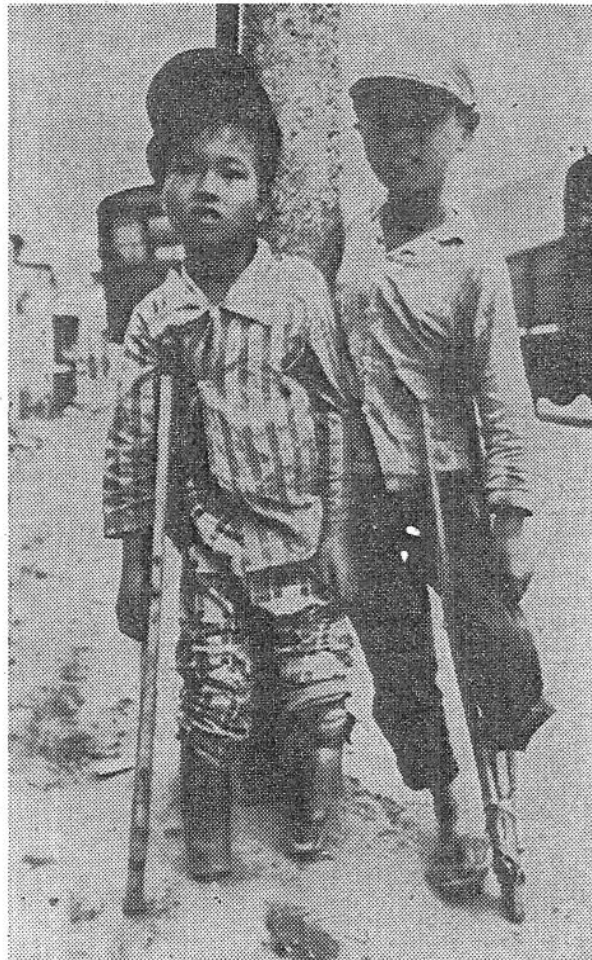
Even though Americans are the most generous with their money, Lanh said he fears and hates them. A few times, Lanh told an interpreter in the fragmented sentences of a peasant boy, annoyed Americans have slapped and punched him, and he cannot forgive them.

They Cling for Warmth

When business is too good, the boys are robbed sometimes by other boys and all they can do is cry.

Sometimes they miss the last ferry home at night and that means spending the night in the chill, damp, deserted marketplace. There are usually a couple of otherurchins there. They hug each other for warmth.

Bay, who lived in a ham-



The New York Times/Barbara Gluck Treaster

Bay, on left, 9 years old, and Lanh, 10, are partners

let about 30 miles southwest of here, lost his mother and father in a shelling, as well as both of his legs below the knee.

Lanh pulled through his searing experience in his hamlet just north of Danang with his mother and one leg intact.

Now Lanh lives with his aged mother, who sells vegetables when she can, and Bay lives with a cousin. The boys met about two years ago on the waterfront and became instant friends.

At first Lanh had two crutches and Bay had one. Then one day Bay's crutch broke and they shared what was left.

At first, the boys said, they thought they might want to go on begging when they grew up.

After a while, though Lanh said, he wanted to learn to be a tailor. Bay cut in sharply: "How can you be a tailor with one leg?"

Lanh just shook his head. "Yes," he said, "can do it. Can do it."