

Youthful Enemy P.O.W.'s Show Confusion on War

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HUE, South Vietnam, April 18—When Pvt. Tran Van Lam of the North Vietnamese Army got orders to march to South Vietnam two weeks ago, he told himself that he would never see his home again. None of his friends or relatives who had been sent south to the war had ever returned.

"Some of us talked about de-

serting," said Private Lam, a slight 17-year-old who was captured in the fighting near Dongha. "I personally could not see much point to the war. All we have gotten is a lot of hardships. But when you live under a regime, I guess you must do what it says."

Private Lam's youth, his short period of military training—he was drafted in November—and his lack of any deep personal

or ideological commitment to the war are typical of the North Vietnamese prisoners captured in the Quangtri fighting, American and South Vietnamese officers here report.

Open, Frank Responses

These officers, who have interrogated prisoners for many years, expressed surprise at the open, frank responses to their questions from the new captives. The officers contrast these prisoners with the older, tougher, more professional North Vietnamese who were sent south in the earlier years of the war, and also with the local Vietcong, who the interrogators say are usually highly motivated.

From all accounts, however, the North Vietnamese troops on the Quangtri front have fought with the courage and aggressiveness for which they have been noted in the past.

Private Lam, whose arms and legs were covered with scratches and sores, the sign of a combat soldier in the Vietnam jungles, said he could not explain the bravery of the North Vietnamese soldiers.

"It is a matter of individuals and it depends on the officers," he said today through an interpreter as he sat in the courtyard of the military prison inside the ancient Hue citadel. "In our unit," he said, "actually, the officers ran away first when we saw enemy tanks. I looked around and all the officers and cadre were gone."

Troops Are Told Little

Private Lam recalled that he had no idea of where he was at the time. "The officers did not tell us anything except that we were to help liberate the people in the South. We did not know there was a big offensive or what our objectives were," he remarked. "After all, we are just soldiers."

What he had wanted to do, Private Lam said, was stay at home in Habac Province and continue his schooling. "We were told that it is glorious to fight for Vietnam. But now that I have seen killing, I do not like it."

Lieut. Nguyen Khac Soan was the cadre or political com-

missar for a company of the 25th Battalion, a demolition group. His responsibilities were the political education and morale of his company of 60 men and to see that his men were paid. A small man with a high-pitched voice, he was captured after his men were all killed by Government artillery on the south bank of the Cua Viet.

"I had explained to the men that our purpose was to help overthrow the corrupt Government in the South," he said. "They always appeared enthusiastic in political training sessions, but I know that many people at home are tired of the war. We just do not know when it will end," he sighed.

In half a dozen interviews, none of the prisoners evinced much interest in or knowledge of North Vietnamese politics.

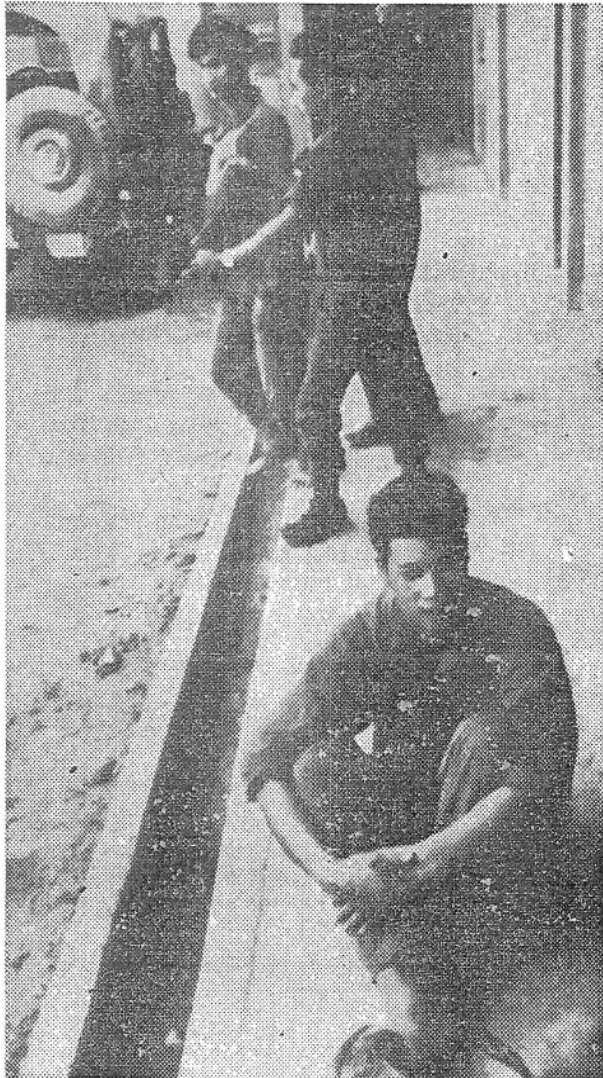
"We do not know about such things," said Cpl. Hoang Van Nhi, a 32-year-old veteran of six years in the North Vietnamese Army.

Worried by Air Strikes

He said the thing that worried him most was air strikes. When he was in Laos last year his unit was bombed and he was slightly wounded.

"It was a terrible thing," he recalled, running his left hand over his muscular right arm where he had been burned. "We never heard or saw anything, except suddenly the earth began to explode. Since then, whenever I see a plane, I feel death very near. There is nothing you can do about it. You either live or die."

"When I talk with my friends in the army," he said, "they often say they are fed up with the war. I am fed up with it, too, but I am only a soldier who must follow orders. I have no choice."



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UNINFORMED ABOUT POLITICS: Corp. Hoang Van Nhi, 32 years old, during an interview in Hue. The captured North Vietnamese is a veteran of six years in army. Of politics, he said: "We do not know about such things."