

AUG 1 1972

# Vietnamese Tell of Grim Life After Communists Came

NYTimes

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER

Special to The New York Times

BONGSON, South Vietnam, Aug. 6—"When the Communists came a lot of people here were very happy," the bony-jawed old farmer said bitterly. "Only now, people have had their eyes opened. The Communists made nice speeches. But look at what happened."

In the nearly three months that the Communists held unchallenged control of Bongson and the rest of northern Binh Dinh Province on the central coast, this quiet farming region was transformed into a harshly regimented work camp, many of its people say.

In numerous interviews, people who lived through the occupation have told of public executions, groups of people being led away, forced labor, enormously high taxes, stiff controls on everyday travel between hamlets and mandatory nightly political lectures.

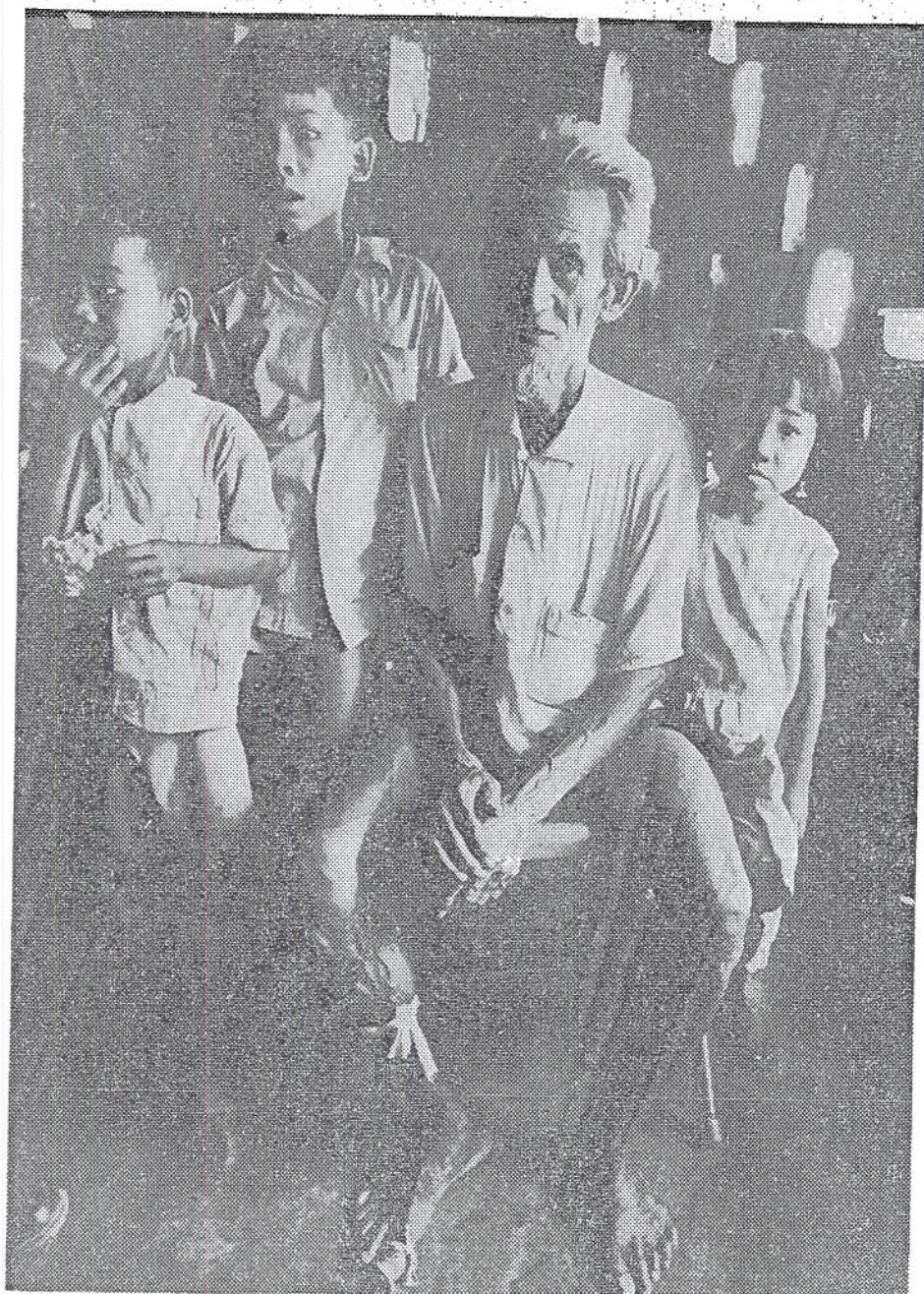
### Time to Shape Area

From the end of April until late July the Communists controlled the northern part of the province without interference from Saigon troops and they were thus able to begin shaping the region in their own mold.

Local Communists replaced the Saigon government, hamlet and village chiefs and immediately began working on plans to defend and finance their communities. They also initiated their system of discipline.

In the view of some American officials, the events in

Continued on Page 2, Column 4



The New York Times/Barbara Gluck/Treaster

Huyn Thanh, 81, and descendants. He said he was told by the Communists to move his house. He dismantled and then rebuilt it. Later, returning Saigon troops bombed it.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO THE CHAMP, David Schorr, we got you last.—Advt.

Peter B. Come back from Pazo Pago. All is forgiven. Emilio A.—Advt.

*Handwritten signature or initials.*

northern Binh Dinh provide a rare picture of how the Communists would probably proceed in the initial stages of a complete take-over in South Vietnam.

In the three months since the Communists moved in, allied intelligence officials say, 250 to 500 Saigon government officials have been killed and about 6,000 are being held in crude prisons in the forbidding An Lao Valley, which for years has been a Communist stronghold. Reports of these killings and arrests were carried in a dispatch in The New York Times last Friday. Among the victims in the executions were several policemen who had worked as counterintelligence agents, trying to kill and capture key political and military figures in the Communist organization.

Many of the more than 200,000 people of Northern Binh Dinh were shocked by the harshness of the Communists when they took over, those interviewed indicated. The area had a long history of Communist activity and many of the people had known members of the Communist organization for years. Some even had relatives fighting with the guerrillas. Memories of mistreatment at the hands of the Communists had been few and blurred by time.

#### Earlier Sorties Recalled

On the other hand, everyone could vividly remember the destructive sorties through the villages by American and South Vietnamese troops with their bombs and artillery.

Otherwise, though, to the peasants here as in some other parts of rural South Vietnam, the Government in Saigon was more a name than a reality.

The local officials representing Saigon provided very few services and many of those, the residents say, could be obtained only by a bribe. Sometimes there were nasty scenes with petty officials throwing their weight around. But the officials did not bother to enforce most of the laws and they rarely tried to collect the small taxes on income and property. The high levies imposed by Saigon on importers and manufacturers reached the peasants in the form of higher prices for fertilizer and canned milk. So they complained about higher prices, not taxes.



The New York Times

**Le Thi Hong, wife of the chief of the hamlet of Thailai, told of seeing her husband and others prominent in the area led away by Communists. She also saw two local people in the South Vietnamese area shot to death after being called criminals.**

Residents were supposed to tell officials when they were traveling from one village to another, but often they did not and nothing happened. Once in a while there would be a political lecture. Attendance was a matter of choice.

Men between the ages of 18 and 39 were eligible for the draft, but bribes and false identification papers kept some in their rice fields.

#### Sweeps in Villages

Sometimes there were sweeps through the villages by Saigon troops or policemen, and people who were suspected of having something to do with the Communists were taken away. But, like almost everything done by the Saigon Government this happened much less in the countryside than in the cities.

Under the Communists there were no bribes and no short cuts around regulations. The Communists meant business and they used death to bring home the point dramatically.

Le Thi Hong, a thin, delicate-boned woman with al-

mond eyes, tells how one evening in May she and her neighbors in Hoaixuan village were called to the village administrative office by the Communist cadre. A militia platoon leader and a deputy hamlet chief were brought before the group, denounced as "criminals" and, as the frightened villagers watched, shot dead.

Next, Mrs. Hong said, the Communists pointed to 20 people in the crowd—hamlet chiefs, members of the village council and policemen — and said they had committed crimes, too. These people, she said, were told they would be punished with 20 to 30 years in prison and were led away. Mrs. Hong said her husband, the chief of Thailai hamlet, had been taken away earlier.

#### Many Such Stories

As Saigon Government troops disrupt the Communist occupation, many stories like Mrs. Hong's are being told in refugee camps, along the roadsides and in the hamlets abandoned by the Communists.

Under the Saigon Government, the people had paid scarcely any taxes. But Phan Ty, a 45-year-old farmer with dark, wrinkled half-moons under his weary eyes, said the Communists demanded half his annual crop of about 400 pounds of rice. Nguyen Thanh Buong said he was taxed more than one-third of his crop. Some wives of soldiers and government officials said they had had to sell their jewelry and other belongings to get enough rice to meet the Communists' demands.

In addition to the heavy tax, each family was ordered to set aside a pot of "rice for the combatants." Whenever the women prepared to cook rice they were supposed to set aside a handful from their sacks in this pot. Every two weeks someone would come around to collect it.

The strongest men and women were forced to carry rice and ammunition long distances. Phan Ty, for example, said he was given two 20-pound sacks of rice and marched for 15 days—into Laos, he thinks.

Mr. Buong was assigned to dig trenches. The Communist plan, as he understands it, was to connect every hamlet and subhamlet with trenches so that the "liberation" soldiers could move great distances, undetected and safe from bombs a

artillery. The trenches also formed a part of the hamlet defense system. In some instances the people were also ordered to string American-made wire along the roadways.

After long, backbreaking days of work without pay, the villagers had to sit through evening political meetings. The people of Binh Dinh are no more politically minded than other Vietnamese peasants and those interviewed indicated they found the long meetings boring and tiresome. Sometimes, after the meetings, the people were told to go out and dig more trenches.

The political lectures were described as unsophisticated and rambling, more an opportunity for cadres to pour out their enthusiasm than an indoctrination into Communist political thought. In some cases the sessions amounted to a Communist-hamlet version of an evening news report.

#### Cooperation Asked

"They informed us of their victories in liberating the country and asked us to cooperate with them so that the country could be totally liberated," one man recalled.

"They said the country had been liberated from the domination of the Americans," he went on. "They said, 'Now you are a citizen in a liberated area. You have to cooperate with the liberation forces to liberate the rest of the country.'"

At one meeting, a young mother recalled, the people were told they could cooperate by "sending your sons to join the revolutionary forces."

There apparently were some volunteers, but many people said they knew of youths who had been given no choice but to serve in Communist military units.

#### Girls Taken Away

Pham Thi Doa, a lively 19-year-old girl with a broad, open face and sad eyes said that she and five girl friends who had worked on bases of the American First Cavalry Division (Airmobile) were among those forced to join the Communist soldiers.

She gave this account in broken English:

"In April VC come to my house and take me away. They make me go spend 20 days for indoctrination. They teach me how to use weapon—M-16—how to lean weapon, how to crawl on ground and shoot. Also how to throw hand gre-

nade. They also show us how to plant mines."

Miss Doa, who said she escaped after two and a half months with the Communists, is now being held with the other young women in a government camp for defectors in Quinhon. After being screened by intelligence officers, they will probably be released. But one said that she did not know where her family was now and that she was not eager to leave the camp.

#### Some Are Favored

While relatives of the Communists were given preferential treatment and sometimes asked to participate in the administration of the hamlets and villages, relatives of Saigon Government soldiers and officials were regarded with suspicion and sometimes were required to attend special indoctrination sessions.

Le Thi Lieu, another girl in the Quinhon camp, said that she and some of the others who were forced into Communist military units were also required to attend extra political classes.

Half way through a five-day political course in Bongson, she said, the Communists asked for volunteers to attend a higher-level class. Then, instead of taking the volunteers, they took those who had not volunteered.

One of the first things the Communists did was to collect the identification cards issued by the Saigon Government. This was part of their program of population control, American officials say, and may have been an indication that they planned to issue their own identification papers.

#### Change in Currency

The Communists also told some people that beginning on Aug. 1, currency of the Saigon Government would be worthless and that new money would be issued.

Shortly after the South Vietnamese recaptured Bongson, Lieut. Col. Don Stovall, an American adviser, showed a sheaf of crisp green and purple bills that he said Government troops had recovered. The bills bore this legend, "The Central Bank of China promises to pay the bearer on demand at its offices here 50 custom gold units. American Bank Note Co. Shanghai, 1930."

In many hamlets people who wanted to visit another hamlet or village had to get a pass from the local Communist security office. On the pass was written the person's name and description and a comment on his connection and apparent attitude toward the Communists and the Saigon Government. The pass also included the time and date of departure and the expected time of return. One woman said that the passes she saw in Dinhbinh hamlet were signed and stamped by village, district and province level officials. Some people said they regarded the passes as "too much trouble," and simply stayed at home.

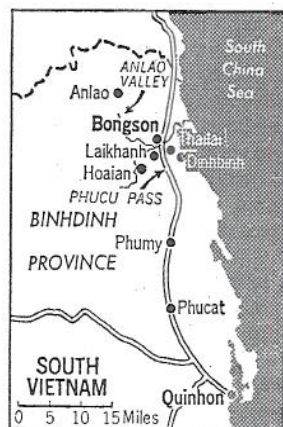
#### Movements Blocked

The Communist security force maintained checkpoints between the hamlets and some troops were assigned to the Phucu Pass south of Bongson to prevent people from leaving the occupied area.

"Many people tried to leave Bongson, but as soon as they reached the Phucu Pass they were told by the liberation forces to go back," one man said. "We were not punished. We were just told to go back."

As another element in their population-control program the Communists told some people they had to return to their native hamlets. Huynh Thanh, a gnarled man of 81 with a shock of white hair, said that even though he had lived in Bongson for seven years he was ordered to move two miles away to Dinhbinh, where he was born. He ripped down his house and had just finished rebuilding it in Dinhbinh when Government troops returned and flattened it with bombs.

While the Communists were



strict and harsh, they impressed many people with their discipline. One man in his thirties said he knew of no random looting. He said that when he returned to his home after hiding in a field during the initial fighting, "All our belongings were there. There was not a chicken lost, not a cucumber."

#### Household Confiscated

In a number of reported instances, however, the Communists confiscated entire households of Saigon government officials. They went a step farther with Do Dam, the chief of Laikhanh hamlet, according to his neighbor, Nguyen Thanh Buong.

Mr. Buong said that after Mr. Dam had been taken away, all his belongings, including a four-horsepower pump and his motorcycle, were carted off. The Communists told his wife that they understood Mr. Dam had received 50,000 piasters from the Saigon Government in payment for his crops that had been damaged by defoliation. The Communists said they believed the claim had been false and demanded that Mrs. Dam turn over the money to them. She did.

In Hoaiduc village the Communists insisted that the people show proof of ownership of their bicycles. "No one could prove anything," one man said, "so we just lost the bicycles."

In the nearly four weeks since Saigon troops started a counteroffensive to recapture north Binh Dinh, roughly 130,000 people have broken away from the Communists.

#### Many Unable to Leave

Allied officials believe there are still more who have been unable to get away. But they feel that several thousand have chosen to stay with the Communists.

"I believe many fled to the mountains and most of them were relatives of the liberation forces," said one man in Phumy. He added that in trying to convince people to go with them, the Communists had said, "Maybe the troops who come back here will not be South Vietnamese but South Korean. They are very tough and bloodthirsty and if they come they will kill everybody, young and old."

Some American officials believe that the experience with the Communists will swing many people behind the Saigon Government. But some of the most astute South Vietnamese in Saigon say that the people may show less of a commitment than ever, pushed to the safe center path by two armies, neither of which can they depend upon for security.

A man in Phumy refugee center explained the peasants' situation this way:

"When the 'nationalists' come they claim they are the government and when the 'liberation' forces come they claim they are also the government. So both sides are our government. Both sides have guns."

"To answer your question, 'Who is to blame for all the suffering?' We don't know. You have a better position to know than us."

Finally, the question, "Which government do you prefer?"

And the simple answer, "Our presence here shows our choice."