

cutting into the butter, inasmuch as neither Johnson nor Nixon has seen it politically fit to raise taxes? We have paid for the war, not through cuts in social programs, but through huge budget deficits and, ultimately, inflation—a whopping \$25-billion deficit in 1968, \$23-billion in 1971, \$39-billion in 1972. Thus have the guns—and, it is clear, a good part of the butter, too—been financed. Nixon's deficits, in fact, have been due more to butter than to guns; in 1971 and 1972, after all, the cost of the war dropped to progressively smaller fractions of the deficit—about \$11 billion and \$6.8 billion for these two years, according to the Schultze study.

Still, if social programs have clearly not been cut back to pay for the war, can it not at least be said that they would have grown larger and faster if so many billions of dollars had not been siphoned off to Vietnam, or that our imagination would even have found new forms of social expenditure?

Certainly, this is a strong possibility. Perhaps we would have started a large program for urban mass transporta-

tion (but Congress has up to now refused to accept such a program even when it involves no new sources of funds). Perhaps we would have started earlier and on a larger scale great works to deal with water pollution. Undoubtedly, the \$110 billion or more in direct costs that has gone into the pointless destruction of Vietnam and its people could better have been spent at home. But whether it *would* have been spent publicly or returned to private citizens in the form of tax cuts is another question.

The American people, in their wisdom or lack of it, have, in fact, chosen to reduce their taxes a number of times during the course of the war—and that may be the ultimate contradiction to the proposition that the country's social programs have suffered because of the war, or at least would be further along except for the war. The distinct possibility is that Americans would have put the war money into their own pockets instead of into social programs, if there had been no Vietnam. But, of course, we will never know that for sure. □

The Consequences for South Vietnam

EACH DAY IS A SEPARATE ORDEAL

By Gloria Emerson

“The effects of the war on Vietnam have been so deep and so disruptive,” writes a veteran foreign correspondent, “that it is hard for me to imagine, even with peace, how a healing process could take place in my lifetime.”

“The people of Vietnam do not like the past,” a Chinese scholar wrote centuries ago. These words were written for me in Vietnamese by a fifty-eight-year-old schoolteacher in Cantho. So lightly did he press on his pencil that I cannot now see the tiny accents over the words: *viet nhon bat hieu co*. It was his way of reminding me of how the Vietnamese have loathed and fought foreign domination—one thousand years of Chinese rule, nearly a century under the French, and a decade of American “assistance and advice,” as he put it. The Vietnamese appreciate irony. It is these last years that have sickened the schoolteacher and made him a man of great sadness. He did not speak his mind to the boys in his mathematics

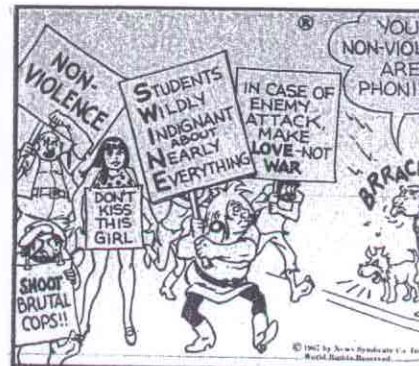
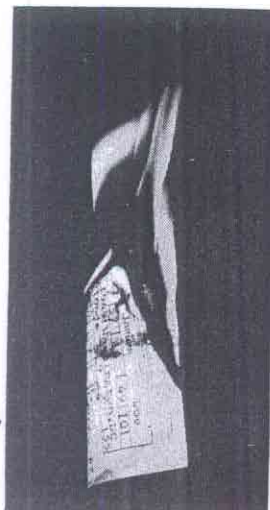
New York Times correspondent Gloria Emerson won the George Polk Award for Outstanding Foreign Reporting in 1971 for her portrayal of the effects of the war on the lives of South Vietnamese people. Currently on leave from the Times, she is a Fellow of the Institute of Politics at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

class because Vietnamese men go to jail for such opinions.

In Cambridge, where I have been living since my return from Vietnam in June, I read the morning newspapers and remember that classroom and wonder how many of those students were drafted and died at Quang-tri or Dongha, on Route 1 or on Route 13, in Binhduong or at Cuchi. The teacher feared for them during the long hours he taught them geometry, as he had feared for ten classes before them.

“It is not the past that haunts me now. It is the future that makes me tremble,” he said. We spoke in French.

In the graveyard called South Vietnam, where officially the population is said to be seventeen million but is surely much less by now, you do not ask a Vietnamese about the future. They do not need to go into an even deeper darkness.



1966 | 1967

The future is not next year for them but tonight at five o'clock when there is enough rice to eat—or not nearly enough. It is tomorrow at 6 a.m. Nothing is taken for granted. Each day is a separate ordeal. Oddly enough, it is not the faces of refugees that I remember but that of a tiny, smiling cook who worked for some Americans in Saigon. One night she suddenly burst into tears after telling me how the price of tinned milk and rice had once more risen.

"We will all die," she said. I think she meant that the Vietnamese would die from worry and exhaustion, from scrambling and scrounging and waiting for the next blow.

Hell for the Vietnamese is not in the North, as many Americans might think, where U.S. bombings and battle deaths and the ghosts of missing men would have made a weaker nation—one less persuaded of its worth and its purpose—hemorrhage to death. They are better off there than in the South. Ellen Hammer, in her classic *Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955*, writes: "No Vietnamese can forget that Ho Chi Minh was the first Vietnamese leader to declare the independence of Vietnam. He declared an independent state in September 1945 and a free state in March 1946. When Ho Chi Minh went to war, he seemed to be the heir to the nationalist tradition of his people."

In the North they have Ho. They had him when he lived, and they have him after his death. Almost nothing will convince them that this war is not a moral crusade, and that can only strengthen them. Long years of bombing by the richest and most powerful nation in the world has shown them that their survival is a triumphant victory. Man has won over the machine. This is their banner.

The Vietnamese hell is in the South. And there it cannot be described by statistics that overwhelm and numb the mind — 400,000 Vietnamese civilians killed and 900,000 wounded between 1965 and 1972; as many as eight million villagers uprooted from their homes. South Vietnam, for me, is not a nation but a territory in which huge numbers of displaced persons live, persons who have been abused and betrayed by their government, its officials, and its allies. To survive in the chaos and rot of South Vietnam, one must not be too poor or too honest; a man must cheat. It is a country not only of the poor but of the bewildered and frightened, who see clearly that there is no one to restore order to their lives and

no one to counsel and defend them. In the cities—the swollen, sickly places where refugees have had dreams—you can see most clearly what has broken down. A man can only hope to get by if he pays and collects small bribes. *Tiền cà phê*, or "coffee money," the Saigonese call it.

Often the most desperate war widows or parents of the dead or wounded must be able to pay coffee money or else risk long delays before receiving legitimate benefits. Just to receive an application form at the Ministry of War Veterans building in Saigon to file for a pension meant, when I was last in Vietnam, giving the clerk 200 piasters—and the price has surely gone up.

"We are very miserable," Mrs. Nguyen Thi Quang, a twenty-six-year-old widow who has five children, said to me last year.

There must be Americans as miserable as Mrs. Quang was, but I have not met them. Her husband, a government soldier, was killed on February 14, 1970, in a thirty-minute fire fight in the Mekong Delta. She came to Saigon with her five children to fill out the papers for her pension, hoping this would speed things up. When I saw her, she had more than sixty required documents in a big, red folder. One corner of it had been bitten off by a rat. It worried Mrs. Quang very much that, if the papers became soiled, they would be invalid. She paid her coffee money and received a lump sum of 60,000 piasters, which was then worth about \$500.

"For days I wept because of the complications," she said. "On the day when I received the money it seemed no tears were left inside me." In addition to the lump sum, she received a war widow's pension of \$41, which, owing to inflation, then had the purchasing power of \$12 a month—in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

We American reporters in Vietnam knew how expensive the city was, but, of course, with our American-scaled salaries and expense accounts, prices did not terrify us. I remember when I discovered, to my horror, that a young Vietnamese named Truong Hong Bac, who did laundry, was often eating the bread and a leftover fried egg on my plate after breakfast so he could save the equivalent of 27 cents a day, which is what he would ordinarily have had to spend for his own breakfast. Bac was ashamed of this. He told me that because of rising prices he thought he soon would not be able to eat even one good meal a day.

Nowhere in the South did life proceed decently, with any degree of dignity. It is true that for centuries the average Vietnamese has never been in a position to control his own environment and that he has traditionally been reluctant to act on his own initiative. Over the centuries he has been taught to accept authority at every stage of his existence, starting with his father. But this comforting framework has collapsed in the South, leaving nothing but greedy men victimizing the most frail.

To many South Vietnamese it must seem surely that the only protection against trouble is money, but even the rich do not totally escape. The war is like a filthy,



uncontrolled river that seeps under every door, making the foundations soft and the walls weaker. We do not know how much the Vietnamese can endure, and perhaps, since they see there are no choices, they will go on enduring until the moment comes for them to speak.

The disorder and unease of South Vietnamese society have bred a selfishness that seems almost inhuman. I remember, with deep disgust, that in 1970 the survivors of the Mylai massacre had to sell the last of their possessions so they could pay the required bribes to the village office just to obtain the necessary papers for refugee resettlement benefits. They were not being compensated for the massacre, only for having been moved from their homes to another site. Indeed, the government of President Nguyen Van Thieu never acknowledged that there had been a massacre of Vietnamese civilians by American soldiers on March 16, 1968.

A sixty-year-old woman, too frightened to give me her name, said she had sold a pair of gold earrings given to her by her "mother's mother" to raise the 1,000 piasters needed for the bribe. She said this without self-pity but with a slight trace of contempt.

The village clerks of Sonmy (where the hamlet of Mylai was located) would have been astonished to have been punished for their merciless behavior. In their eyes they were doing it only to make sure their own families would not suffer. A man, after all, cannot live these days on the wages of a clerk. How often I heard this.

Before I left that cursed village in Quangngai Province, a forty-two-year-old man named Do Cam made a polite request. That was one of the few times when a Vietnamese spoke to me on behalf of others.

"I beg you to carry out your duties cleverly so that, when you leave, nobody in this hamlet will be in trouble with the government," Mr. Cam said. I promised.

The effects of the war have been so deep and so disruptive—I do not speak of bomb craters but of the Vietnamese view of themselves and of their world—that it is hard for me to imagine, even with peace, how a healing process could take place in my lifetime. A member of the Provisional Revolutionary Government's delegation to the Paris peace talks once told an American that the work of rehabilitating and restoring the South and its people would have to be the work of "many generations." The wreckage, seen and unseen, is very great.

It is not, perhaps, the bomb craters that have left the worse scars. A walk through the streets of Saigon can be more disturbing than flying over War Zone C, as the Americans used to call it, looking down at the earth. I am not an ecologist, but maybe it is possible that the good, rich earth of Cochinchina, as it was once called, will heal. I am not so sure the people can.

It was 1956 when I first went to live in Saigon. I loved that gentle, yellowy, tree-lined little city as I have loved no other place in my entire life. The war with the French had been won, and the Vietnamese seemed to stand ten feet tall—even those who planned to send their children to study in Paris. And they were tolerant of vis-

itors like me. There were American military advisers present even then, but I did not really understand why they were there and what they were doing. I loved Vietnam. I was able to drive on the roads at night as I could never do when I returned, and there was never the noise of B-52 strikes or artillery or rifle fire. Saigon had a rich, soothing silence.

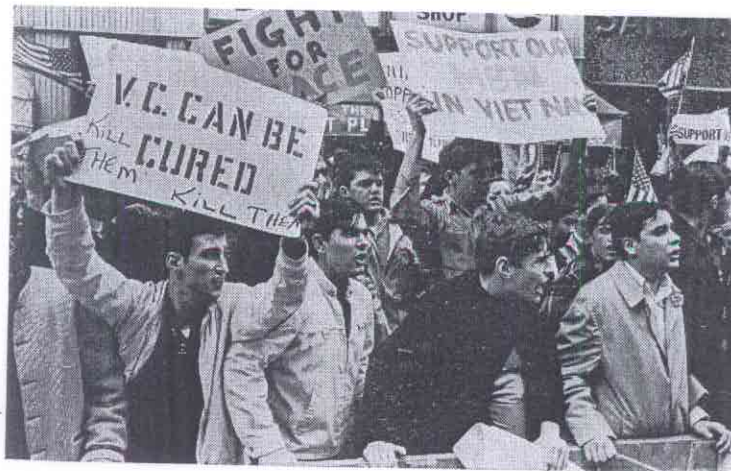
When I returned as a war correspondent fifteen years later, all had changed. Villages I had once known had disappeared. I would walk the streets of Danang, Nha-Trang, and Cantho, looking for the faces of Vietnamese who had been my friends, and I could not find them. Saigon was not itself. There were bands of street children called by the Vietnamese *bui doi*, or "dust of life," a sadly perfect name for these small wanderers who had left their homes or lost them. They live by their wits and what they can steal or beg. Most of them were shoeshine boys, but there are fewer Americans now, and the Vietnamese men do not care about such refinements. It is enough just to have the shoes. Older, tougher Vietnamese boys ride two on a Honda motor bicycle, snatching handbags or wrist watches from pedestrians and taking delight in the rage of their victims. Most cities are not ideal in this decade, but Saigon is the meanest of them all.

There are little groups of lepers and the badly burned begging on Tudu Street, knowing they are despised and feared. The whores and the pimps know hard times now, for the Japanese have not come to replace the departing Americans. If I were Vietnamese, I would prefer to live in Hanoi, where there is a calm and a unity that Saigon does not know.

Bands of mutilated Vietnamese veterans, still wearing their army uniforms, move through the streets of Saigon. They frighten others because there is something in their faces that civilians do not like to see. Many of the veterans are amputees, and what is left of their poor limbs will wither and shrink because the National Institute of Rehabilitation in Saigon cannot possibly cope with the numbers of former soldiers who need new arms and legs.

In 1970 a group of Vietnamese veterans tried to demonstrate, to show the others how they felt they were being crushed in civilian life by an indifferent, ineffectual government. They spoke harshly and lifted banners, complaining of their pitiful benefits, unemployment, and inflation. It was all for nothing.

Terrence Smith, the *New York Times's* Indochina bu-



reau chief, and I stood on Tudu Street as it grew dark, watching the veterans prepare to spend the night on the steps of the National Assembly. In the dusk their mutilated bodies and their faces made me think of a Goya sketch. Terry, a kindly man who could bear the battlefields but not this, turned away. The veterans did not demonstrate again while I was there. They did not want to add prison to their experiences.

It was their helplessness that the veterans could not endure. It shames and maddens these men. So deep is their anger and disgust with the world that they returned to that small groups of them go into expensive Saigon restaurants to eat a meal they cannot possibly pay for. Therefore, the owners of Ramuntcho, Castel, Guillaume Tell, and Aterbea would lock the doors of their restaurants, even at noon, to keep them out. No one could enter who was not white or recognized by the staff.

Last February I was having lunch in Ramuntcho with Cyrus L. Sulzberger, a columnist for the *New York Times*, when three Vietnamese airborne officers came in. Two were on crutches. The owner, a Corsican who has lived in Saigon for many years, told them to get out. For a minute or so they stood there. After looking slowly around the room, one officer cursed us. The police came. We could only stare at our plates. I could not finish the lunch.

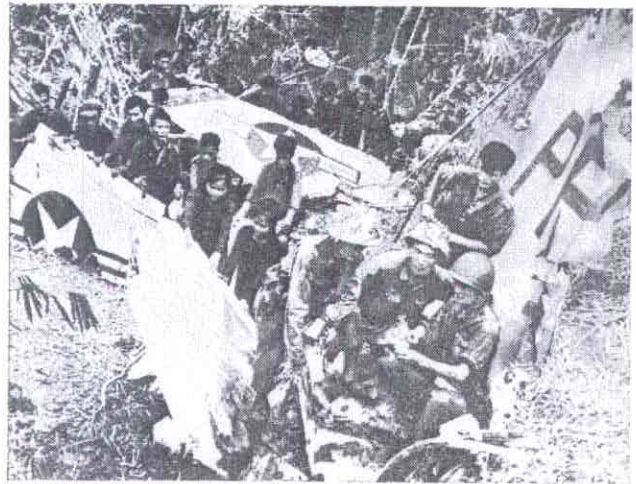
It is these veterans who dare to act out some of the

emotions felt by so many Vietnamese in the South. The people feel that no one sees, no one cares, no one helps. Peasants must go to the cities when they are forced from their lands. Nothing is as it should be, and the war has seemed to be without an end. Perhaps what South Vietnam suffers from most—aside from grief for the wounded and the dead—is an emotional starvation. There is no sense of belonging to a history or even a country. And while all people eventually come to terms with a long war—they can hardly ignore it—whoever tries to cure and rebuild the South will have to understand the isolation and the decay of the people. They have no sense of national esteem, no feeling of their own worth.

There is fear of everything. The people, for example, fear their own soldiers, and the South Vietnamese Army fears itself.

Shortly before the North Vietnamese offensive last spring I visited, with an interpreter, the northernmost village in South Vietnam. Lactan, the smallest of six hamlets in the village of Giole, was three miles below the Demilitarized Zone. Giole is gone now, for Quangtri Province has been smashed and almost pounded to death in the recent fighting. What the people of Lactan were most anxious to tell me was how much they despised the Vietnamese marines based in the area. Perhaps they were hopeful a woman could help them, someone who was clearly not with any army at all.

"They are really unbearable. So now I must speak up," a fifty-eight-year-old farmer named Tran Van Con said. "They pass by in the night, shouting, 'Stay still in your



houses! Anyone moving out will be shot! And then they steal my chickens and ducks."

It was the poorest of places, that little hamlet. The farmers, having no rice fields, grew vegetables. In recent years defoliation by the Americans had caused their vegetables, especially lettuces, to come up smaller and shriveled-looking. The Vietcong were always so close that the hamlet chief did not dare sleep there at night. Yet what enraged the people the most was the behavior of their own marines, who taunted and robbed them.

After the war it is not likely that the peasants will forget what their own troops have done to them. It is a strange, unhappy army and not one to cause the populace much pride. While all armies—except for the National Liberation Front, which needs the people and wants to win them over—are indifferent to civilians, the Saigon army sometimes shows an almost insane disregard for them.

In Ducduc, a tiny district seat of huts and paths in northern Quangnam Province, villagers despised the ARVN soldiers stationed there and did not hide it.

Ducduc had been attacked by North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops in March 1971. When I was there the following summer, there was still a debate as to which side had done the most damage.

"Every time I think of the security situation here I cannot help being angered," Nguyen Tanh, a farmer, said. "The Nationalist soldiers are all cowards, and their officers have no initiative. When we were attacked, they only stuck to each other and a lot of houses were destroyed by their artillery fired point-blank, not by Communist fire."

Mr. Tanh was not sympathetic to the Vietcong, or the North Vietnamese Army. He spits on them. He spits on his own side, too. When I quoted what a Vietnamese named Nguyen Trai had written in the fifteenth century, he did not comment.

*Although we have been at times strong,
at times weak,
we have at no time lacked for heroes.*

There are no heroes for him in Ducduc, and Ducduc is all he knows.



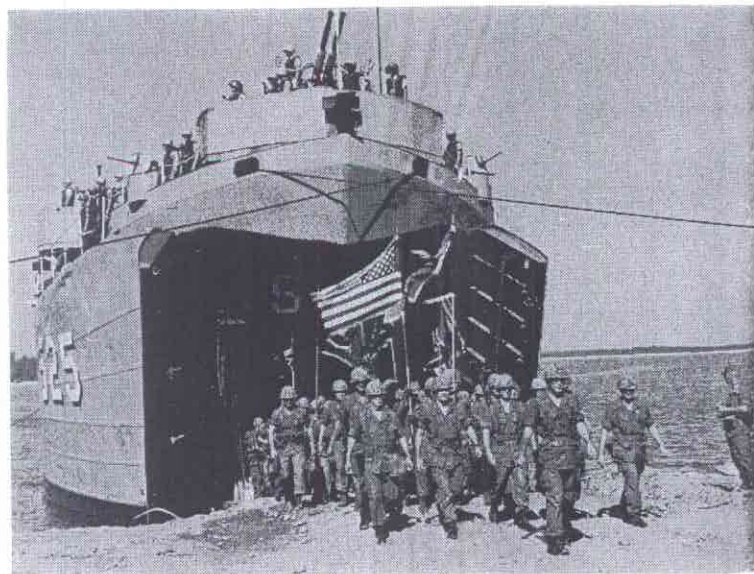
When Mrs. Julie Nixon Eisenhower earlier this year said she would "be willing to die" for the government of President Nguyen Van Thieu, while her mother, Mrs. Richard Nixon, later added that she, too, would be willing to die "to save the freedom of seventeen million South Vietnamese," I was reminded of how many soldiers in South Vietnam have an opposite point of view. The most common effect of the war on the Vietnamese in the South is to make many of them realize they do not really want to fight it.

Standing on Route 9, the highway that goes from South Vietnam into Laos, in March 1971, during the Vietnamese drive to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Operation Lamson 719, I spoke to retreating troops. They had met the enemy, and they were running from him. For many of the 20,000 men it was the first encounter with the North Vietnamese, and never had they dreamed of anything so fierce and so frightening.

Private Moc was a twenty-two-year-old marine who had fought near a fire base about eight miles inside of Laos. He had walked and crawled through jungle for two nights and a day before being airlifted out by a U.S. helicopter.

"The last attack came at about eight p.m.," Private Moc said. "They shelled us first, and then came the tanks moving up into our positions. Our whole brigade ran down the hill like ants. We jumped on each other to get out of that place. No man had time to look for his commanding officer. It was quick, quick, quick, or we would die. Oh, God, now I know for sure that I am really alive."

What demoralized many of the troops was the large number of wounded who were left behind, survivors said, begging their friends to shoot them or to leave hand gre-



**"I wanna go to Vietnam
I wanna kill a Vietcong
With a knife or with a gun
Either way will be good fun**

**But if I die in the combat zone
Box me up and send me home
Fold my arms across my chest
Tell my folks I done my best"**

—Army marching cadence

nades with which they could kill themselves before the North Vietnamese or the B-52 raids killed them. None of them had ever dreamed the enemy was so strong.

"They were everywhere, and they were so daring," Private Moc also said. "Their firepower was so enormous and their shelling so accurate that what could we do except run for our lives?"

He told how he and a small band of others "moved like ghosts" through the jungles, terrified of being ambushed, and how, to their horror, they bumped into an NVA unit during their retreat.

Private Moc knew of no words to describe the utter panic.

"We ran again like ants. And the lieutenant, he whispered to us, 'Scatter! Scatter! Don't stick together, or we will all be killed.' After each firing there were fewer and fewer of us. Nobody cared for anybody else at all."

I thought of Private Moc again this spring when the North Vietnamese offensive began, and of how he had told me that day what he wanted most was to sleep—and desert. The spring offensive, and the collapse and the retreat of the Third Infantry and Twenty-second Infantry divisions, reminded me again of what a sad, disbelieving army it is, and how they have been lied to. I suppose all soldiers are deceived, or the infantry would never move forward, but for years the Vietnamese in the South have been told the enemy was a starving phantom without supplies. The presence of the big Americans—with their Cobra gunships and Phantom jets and B-52 bombers, their helicopters and their beer and their ice in the jungle—also gave the impression it was all okay when, of course, it never was.

I do not expect that I shall ever see Private Moc again, nor shall I probably ever find out whether he is alive. But if he is, I suspect he is hiding from the war and that he will never again believe the existing Saigon government or the Saigon generals. A man can survive combat, and even a ghastly retreat. What he often loses forever is his ability to believe and trust the men who led him into that situation.

So desperately demoralized was the South Vietnamese Army, even well before the North Vietnamese attacked this year, that Gen. Nguyen Van Minh, commander of the military region that includes Saigon, admitted last year that he had "told a lie" to raise the morale of his troops during fighting on the Cambodian border.

The general radioed from his helicopter to his commanders on the ground: "We killed four thousand North

Vietnamese. We have photos." The actual number of North Vietnamese killed during the ten-day operation was put by General Minh on October 5, 1971, at 450. He also admitted that he had, in addition, told his battalion commanders that South Vietnamese troops were going beyond the immediate area of fighting—which took place from sixty to ninety miles northwest of Saigon—to Chup and Memot in Cambodia.

"That was a lie, too," General Minh said. Indeed.

So pummeled and so weary were the South Vietnamese that their disbelief and suspicion, if ever heard throughout the land, would have sounded like a death rattle.

How often we said it was for the good of the Vietnamese: the bombing, the napalming, the mass expulsion of thousands of people from their homes and land so that an alien army could kill without qualm, the murder of civilians because they were unlucky enough to be in the wrong places at the wrong time, the chemical destruction, the foolish and deceptive programs to cheer up the survivors that had such names as "Brighter Life for War Victims." No, the Vietnamese are not grateful.

Ask Le Van Phuoc, once a farmer, whose only son was killed in Cambodia, a country he knows very little about. Now he is a carpenter living with his wife, his eighty-year-old mother, and the youngest of his five daughters in a one-room house on stilts on the bank of a small canal in Cantho.

He is only twenty-five miles from his home, Longtri village, where he grew rice on his father's land and tangerines and other fruits in the garden behind his house.

"Sometimes I cannot sleep at night," he said. "I think of that hamlet, and where I made grow a certain plant, where a certain tree grew in the garden, and how we set off early in the morning to the rice fields."

His wife weeps while her husband pretends not to notice. She wants her son back.

Le Van Phuoc says he does not know much about the war but he knows what concerns him—that he has lost a son and, like more than one-third of the Vietnamese in the South, he has been forced to leave his home.

He is not a foolish man who will tell everything in his heart to a foreigner. So he only says that the family house in Longtri village was a fine one. It was destroyed when American helicopters dropped rockets and napalm on the village.

"The wood columns of the house burned for seven days," he said, "and all we had left was a basket of nails." □

