

Napalm: Made In USA

Rima E. Laibow

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In a war, no nation loses: the Nation of Man is lost.

In Viet Nam, the unwilling penitents who bear the brunt of that nation's suffering are those who know least of any suffering but their own.

These unfortunates are the children who, burned horribly by napalm, tossed to chance care by the death of parents, and maimed in a thousand ways, are suffering the fate of Viet Nam in their small bodies.

Those who survive the long trek over poor, rural roads in arms, on backs, in bicycles, taxies, junks and slings are few. And those who survive such treatment as the hospitals can give them are fewer. In hospitals where two and three mangled bodies share a sheetless bed, and many crowd the floor, dirt and flies, lack of sanitation and drugs insure that these small victims will both suffer horribly and survive poorly.

Once at a hospital, there is no reason to think that a child's wounds will be dressed with gauze and ointment: there are none. He will not be given anesthetics and intravenous preparations to keep him alive are non-existent.

His relatives, if he is fortunate enough to have any, must nurse him and feed him, change his meager tatters.

If he survives this portion of his ordeal, the real test of survival awaits him.

In South Viet Nam's 77 orphanages, there are between 80,000 and 110,000 children whose needs are unattended, whose lives are devoid of hope or help. And each month, parents despair or death forces the abandonment of some 2,000 more children.

In these places of despair, minor cuts and scratches, bites of the ever-present vermin and mosquitoes, become the site of raging infection for which there is neither soap nor hope to treat them with.

Over-crowding is a word of little meaning beside the realities of squalor and the real misery in which these children reside.

The horror of the burnt child is, perhaps, worst of all.

For, with careful surgical treatment and medical care, the techniques of plastic surgery can restore some semblance of human form to these brutally mangled tiny people. But there is no such care for them in Viet Nam.

The burns inflicted by the exclusively American-employed weapons, napalm and white phosphorous, are both deep and excruciating. They are too uniquely devastating to the flesh of the victims.

They actually cause a "melting" of the flesh to produce the tragic distortions in the accompanying photographs.

The victims of weapons far worse, but strikingly similar to Greek Fire may then be unable to close his mouth or his eyes, unable to turn his head. But worse, he is not likely to be restored to physical normality.

In a war-torn land like Viet Nam, one would expect some effort bent on reconstitution of the lives of those maimed and brutally wrenched from a normal life. One would expect either the country being used as a battle field or the "friend of freedom" whose weapons are causing this cinder-fleshed havoc to aid its innocent victims.

True, there might be neither personnel nor finances for such an attempt in South Viet Nam FROM South Viet Nam. The United States is not anxious to make the plight of these victims known to its citizens.

When representatives of Terre des Hommes, a nonpolitical Swiss committee to aid the child-victims of war asked the United States for air passage to Europe, where medical care for them had already been arranged, Chester L. Cooper officially replied that U.S. aircraft would not be available to transport these children.

He further stated that to remove these children from the "familiar surroundings" they belonged in would be to expose them to trauma and culture shock.

But the familiar surroundings of his peaceful helmet for an orphaned child are gone. And the culture shock comes when he must survive in war-torn, devastated, starving Viet Nam.

Through private finance, Terre des Hommes arranged the removal of 26 children, all badly burned and crippled by the war, to Europe where medical care specially suited to their needs, and totally unavailable in their country, awaited them.

But, when the plane landed in Europe, 26 children afflicted with heart problems, cerebral palsy and polio disembarked. The fate of the 26 children selected for treatment by the Terre des Hommes representative is unknown.

Undaunted by such tales as these, more than three hundred physicians in the United States have joined with other interested people in the formation of the Committee of Responsibility. They are led locally by Dr. Paul Lowinger of the Lafayette Clinic.

It is especially concerned with the small war-burned victims of napalm and white phosphorous whose only chance for normal life and survival lies in medical treatment in this country or Europe. For without this aid, there lies nothing ahead but, despair for these children of pain and grief.

These people have been brought together by Mrs. Helen Frumin to undo a little of all the pain which our planes have been showering on Viet Nam.

There are hundreds of thousands of lives awaiting the chance to be lived in the broken bodies of these children.

The Committee on Responsibility will bring these bodies here and, through medical care and the interest and affection of selected families, recreate people from the tortured wreckage which arrives.

According to a member of the Executive Committee of the Committee of Responsibility, those children whose legal status requires that they return to Viet Nam after treatment will do so.

Those who are free to be adopted, however will hopefully be placed with acceptable families.

The treatment will be provided to these children free of charge by the cooperating physicians who represent many branches of medical specialty. But the realization of this plan requires support. And that support must come from the people from whom the money comes to buy napalm: the American public.

Because of the government position on the transportation of these children, the funds must be secured to transport them by commercial air lines to America. The cost is high. Once here, the best' medical treatment possible is available for the child.

Those interested in supporting this means of fighting, for those left living, may secure further information or send contributions to:

The Committee of Responsibility
777 United Nations Plaza Suite 7-F
New York, N.Y. 10017

Editor's Note: See the January issues of RAMPARTS and the LADIES' HOME JOURNAL for feature stories on the effects of U S. napalm on Vietnamese civilians.

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