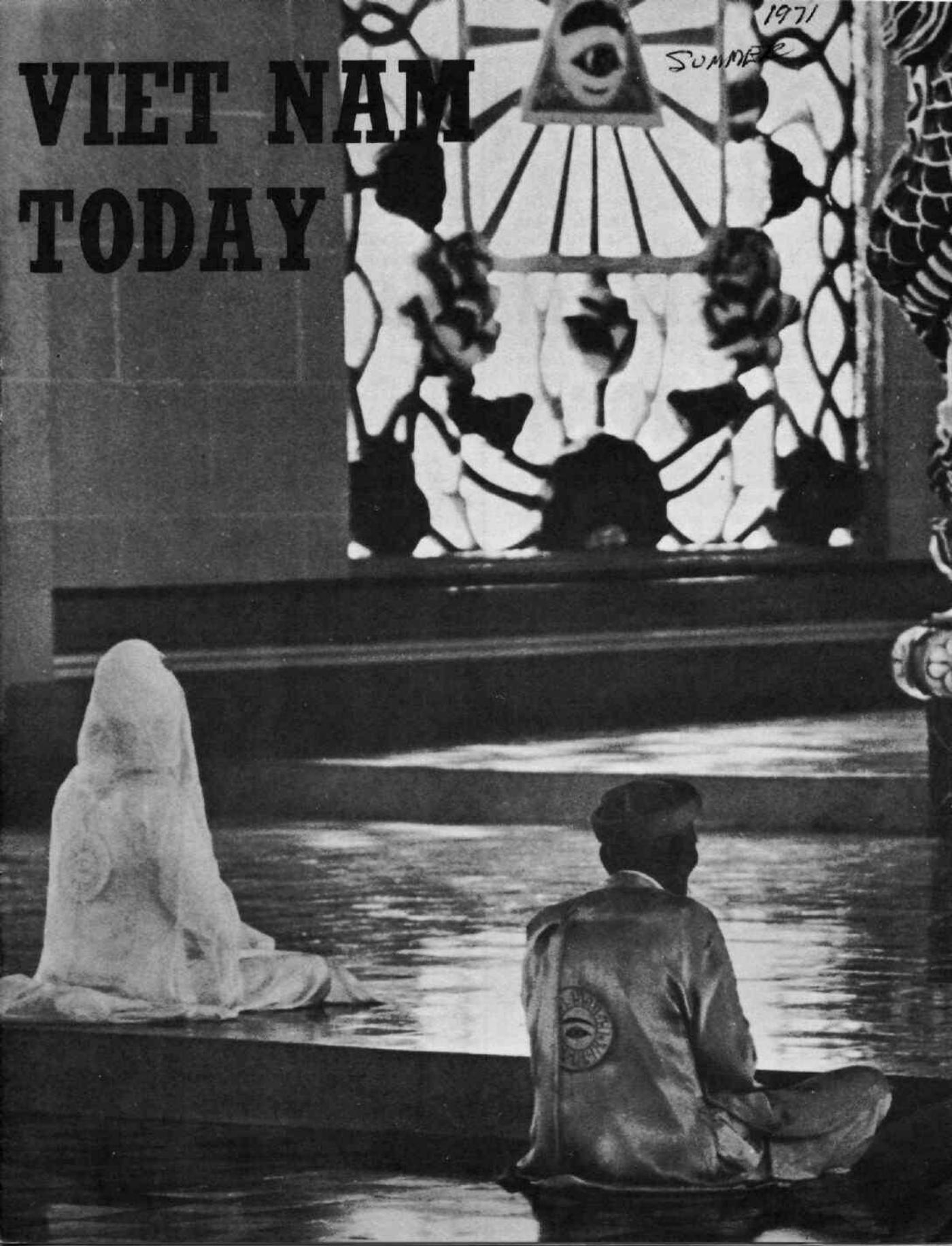


VIET NAM TODAY



VIET NAM TODAY

NEWS MAGAZINE OF THE
VIET NAM FIELD

CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE

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Cover: Worshippers in a Caodai temple. See article on page 6.

Disillusioned?

The young candidate is now ready for missionary service. He boards a plane and is soon soaring 30,000 feet over the ocean. Visions of what he has read and heard pervade his thoughts.

Language study. A small station in the jungle. Half-naked savages coming for help. Treks over jungle trails. Nights infested by mosquitoes, rats and eerie sounds. Strange people with strange customs. Preaching numerous times a day. Praying with many for the forgiveness of sins. Teaching new converts the deeper truths of Scripture. All this to look forward to in the next four years on the "field"!

The plane lands. The new missionary is greeted by colleagues and whisked off in a mission car to the guest residence. The city is modern, the people dress like Westerners and life is as bustling as in America. But this is the capital. Wait a few days!

A few days go by, full of shopping for house-keeping essentials, filling out papers for the government and looking around to see where one could ever find "missionary work" to do. But this is the capital. Wait until we get up country!

Finally the young missionary arrives at his area of language study and work. He approaches his assignment with enthusiasm, eager to fulfill his calling and ready to assume a place of responsibility. But instead he finds a well-established Church with its own group of capable leaders. Preach? Certainly — when invited. Pastors are happy to share their pulpits occasionally. He will be asked to pray for the sick and the needs of the Christians. He may be asked to take a Sunday School class or teach English to the young people. He may even preach in the prison or refugee village. And it isn't long before he discovers "missionary work" also includes material services such as chauffeuring, entertaining, interpreting and a thousand other small tasks.

The young missionary is sick at heart. His preconceived ideas of missionary endeavour are rapidly proving wrong. Jungle trails have become paved highways. Small villages have become cities. The people are not savages, but educated, intelligent individuals. They have their own doctors, hospitals, schools, churches and Bible colleges.

What is his role as a missionary? Cannot the

National Church get along without him? Is he really needed?

A National Church president answers that missionaries are needed today more than ever before. Opportunities to present the Gospel are so many that nationals cannot be trained fast enough to meet them. The Church *does* want him — but on *its* terms — working, not independently, but cooperatively. It is a wise young person who realizes that it requires time to win the confidence of the national pastors. He must see himself through their eyes. He is frequently younger, more inexperienced and hampered by language. He will be observed and his words and actions carefully weighed. It is only as he arrives at a place of close fellowship and understanding that he will be able to function as a partner in evangelizing, training, teaching, translating or assisting in the fields of radio, television and medicine.

The door of missions is not closed. There is still unlimited work for the young man or woman with initiative, adaptability and the call of God on his life. His work may be witnessing to two or three a day instead of two or three hundred. It may mean Bible study groups instead of evangelistic campaigns. It may mean working quietly in the background, helping in the work of the Church. But to the missionary who accepts his changing role, disillusionment brings enlightenment and satisfaction as he works together in harmony with his national brothers — dedicated to the same Lord and the same vision of winning a lost world to Christ.

**A missionary
re-evaluates
his role in
modern missions**



THE MONSOON RAINS pour relentlessly down. A desperately frightened twelve year old Vietnamese girl huddles under the shredded fragments of a roof and door frame. A few hours before these were part of her home. Her father is dead, her mother lies wounded in a hospital far away, and her brother and two sisters are "missing". The VC rocket destroyed six other homes with hers. She is a "refugee".

A lone man stumbles numbly along in the dusk. His heart is filled with fear and hopelessness and his body aches with the fatigue of a long day in his field. He is hurrying to the nearest headquarters to report the abduction of his family of five and the burning of his house. The enemy needs supply and ammunition carriers. Any size will do. Now he is a "refugee".

The trucks grind incessantly along in the glare of the midday sun. Dust covers everything like a great red blanket, choking drivers and passengers alike. Few speak. Some children and babies cry from fright and thirst. It is so crowded there is room for nothing more than what they wear and hold in their hands. Their new village of eight months, their meager ripening crops and their few animals and chickens are left behind. Now it is unsafe to live there as well. It is their second move this year. They are "refugees".

A new motorbike flashes by with the sound of open exhaust and the sparkle of sunlight on chrome. The young Montagnard's bronzed face is smiling, his long wavy hair streaming out in the wind. He is gone in a moment; only the dust hangs

in the still, clear air. But the memory of him will not soon settle out. The fortunes of a strange war have smiled briefly upon him, and he has found some quick gain and a temporary home in the large hostile city. He has fared better than many but he does not belong. He grows idle, bored and restless. Now his resources are spent. He has no training or skill with which to win a job. Hope and initiative ebb slowly away. He too is a "refugee".

Every day a thousand scenes like these glare starkly against the backdrop of Viet Nam struggling in war. To say "be warmed and clothed, be trained and fed, be comforted and healed" certainly acknowledges the tragic need. But the cups must be filled with cold water, the loaves and fishes must be presented to the Master, the wounds must be cleansed with oil and wine, and even the innkeeper must be paid.

Here in Viet Nam, World Relief Commission has the privilege of helping the refugee to be fed, clothed, healed and trained for the future. Measured against the enormous need of a war-shattered people the gain is small and the progress often seems halting. However, thousands *are* receiving help. Christian youth, pastors and churches are our faithful, capable "hands and feet" distributing food commodities and relief supplies to the destitute, the displaced, the old and the sick. The discouraging, overwhelming task of building new villages, homes and schools, clearing new land and digging new wells is made possible by the giving of food in "payment" for work

THE

VIETNAM TODAY



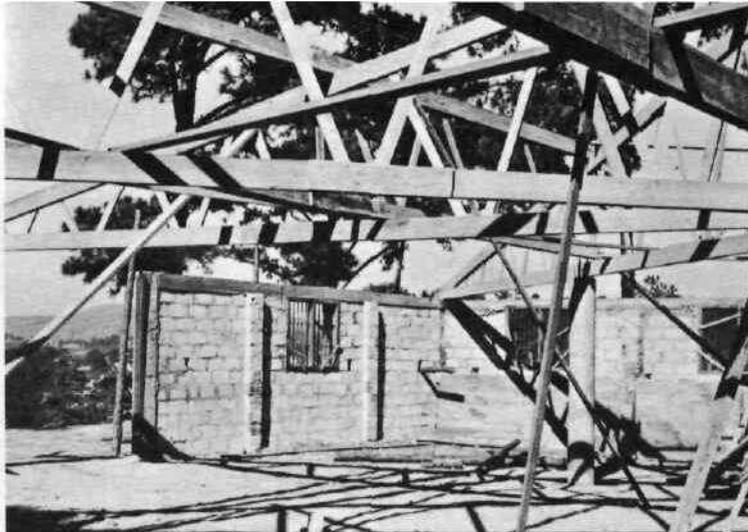
the refugee expends.

In Hue the Vocational Training School teaches carpentry, mechanics, agriculture, basket weaving, sewing, masonry and hat making as well as providing spiritual training through Bible classes. It also provides elementary schooling for more than 250 refugee children, both Vietnamese and Montagnard. There is a day-care center for pre-schoolers and now a new Vocational Training Center for orphan boys is being opened in cooperation with Viet Nam's Ministry of Social Welfare and the Christian Youth Social Services.

In Danang, with help from WRC, a similar, even larger school is being developed by the Christian youth organization. A 120-bed hospital cares for scores of wounded, sick and diseased children from Danang's refugee resettlements and much of Military Region I.

At Dalat, perhaps by mid-summer, the new Montagnard Vocational Training Center's main classroom building will be dedicated, with dormitories to follow soon.

We are thankful to the Lord for dedicated, highly motivated men and women who labor in this ministry. In addition to the Western staff we have over a hundred national employees who serve willingly for small wages in order to help their own people. It is a great joy and rare privilege to work with those who give their means, their time and their very lives to help the downtrodden, desperate victims of war to find peace in Christ, and know the encouragement of the gifts of love, concern and a helping hand.



Vocational School at Dalat

Orphanage at Hue



REFUGEE

By Bob McNeel



HOME

Fred and Toni Zoeller, after twenty years as a Navy family, came to Saigon with a special understanding of the problems and temptations which the military man faces. During the past four years the Lord has used them to touch many lives through the ministry of their "Home". A number of young men are now attending Bible Colleges as a result of the spiritual contact and growth they experienced while in Viet Nam.

What makes a Christian Servicemen's Home? A comfortable place to relax, games, music, Bible studies, fellowship, good food? Yes, these are all important in the activities of a Servicemen's Home, but something more is involved in planning and conducting a spiritually meaningful ministry with servicemen. It is important that the director and his wife be truly vitally concerned for the men who come to them, providing a warm spiritual influence in a relaxed situation.

A special effort is made to make the Servicemen's Home in Cholon a "home" in a very real sense to the men who come there. When a new man drops in one of the old timers offers him refreshments and shows him around, pointing out the bunkroom, library, bookstore, games, and other facilities. One has even been heard to caution a newcomer to be sure he removes his boots and turns the bedspread down when he naps in the bunkroom! Since most of the men live in noisy barracks, they appreciate the quietness and privacy of the Home. Mealtime in an informal atmosphere promotes warm fellowship. Men linger long at the table after meals involved in discussions on the Bible and spiritual topics essential to their Christian walk.

Primary attention is given to challenging Christians to maintain a growing relationship with Christ as Lord. In personal and group Bible studies men are encouraged not only to acquire Bible knowledge

but to relate it to their lives. They often spend hours pouring over their Bibles in concentrated study. Men are urged to put into practice an organized system of Bible memorization. The importance of the daily quiet time with the Lord is stressed and help is given in beginning and carrying out these times.

A well-stocked bookstore is maintained which has proven to be a most effective tool in reaching the unsaved and training believers. It is a great help to have just the right book a man needs to help him with some problem he is grappling with.

Probably more time is spent in personal counselling than in any other way. Loneliness, separation from family and loved ones, circumstances at home, the powerful force of temptation — any of these may cause a man to become intensely problem conscious or even desperate. Such men need love, understanding and a sense of security. The Home seeks to provide spiritual counsel and direction through God's Word to Christ who alone can meet their need.

The military years are times when men are searching for purpose and direction in their lives. This is the time when Christians are seeking God's will as to which school to attend upon discharge from the service. Contact with nationals and missionaries here in Viet Nam often awakens them to a wider consciousness of the needs of a world without Christ and their own personal responsibility.

By Toni Zoeller

A RETREAT THAT IS AN ADVANCE — to the average military mind this would seem to be a confusion of terms, but it is a very meaningful experience to those men who attend retreats at the International Servicemen's Center in Saigon.

They come from scattered fire support bases bordering rice paddies to bases built within the shadows of nearby jungles, from fire support bases along the jeweled coastline of the South China Sea to those within walking distance of the Cambodian border. From isolated hilltops, from dusty compounds, they come with their jungle fatigues, their peace symbols and their decorated headgear, into the city of Saigon for a time of physical and spiritual renewal.

For three days they can forget the loneliness and boredom of outpost life. For three days they cannot hear the roar of the big guns in their ears. For three days they can forget the sweat and toil of "humping joes" (loading heavy projectiles into the breeches of their weapons). If they desire, they can change into civilian clothes and bask in the non-military atmosphere.

They come for a variety of reasons. Some come merely to get away from the everyday routine of life, others to escape from the sergeant's details. Some come seeking answers to spiritual questions, with a thirst only the "Water of Life" can quench. Some come for a time of re-dedication. They all come for a time of relaxation and rest.

A well-planned program is ahead of them. Time is provided for an afternoon tour of the city of Saigon. They visit the main sections of the city. They walk through the dock area and the open markets. They travel Flower Street, see the old French Opera House and take pictures of the President's Palace. They walk through the new Central Vietnamese Church and stand in the warehouses of World Vision where stores await the needy. With a smile and a friendly greeting they brush elbows with the people of the city and their hearts are touched with the needs of the people of this land.

On another afternoon they go to MACV (Military Assistance Command, Viet Nam) for a time of recreation. Everything from swimming to basketball is provided. Here emotions sometimes run high as once again they seem to be back in their home-

RETREAT

ADVANCE

By Maj. Herbert H. Spencer

Major Spencer is an Alliance chaplain serving with the Army in Viet Nam.

town school gym, and are able to find physical release from suppressed tensions.

But weightier matters are also touched upon during this time. Hearts are stirred as the retreat leader presents challenging messages. Decisions are made. Some, for the first time respond to the Gospel message and accept Christ as their own personal Savior. Others turn once again to the Man of the Cross and re-dedicate their lives to Him.

They join in the times of singspiration with Bob Gunther, Director of the Center, leading the singing, and with Peg, his wife, at the piano. At first they don't sing with much volume, but before the retreat ends, they are singing with gusto.

After the message of the evening hours, they gather for dessert with coffee or cokes and then conclude the day with the showing of a Moody Science Film.

Time passes so quickly that before they know it, it is time for them to bid farewell, thankful for the time spent. As they board the bus for the trip that will terminate at some remote fire base, you know from the look in their eyes and the smile on their faces, that this certainly wasn't a retreat, but an advance.

FOCUS ON

Vietnamese Religions:



Temple altar pervaded by all-seeing eye which represents Cao Dai

Approximately one tenth of the South Vietnamese population are disciples of Caodaism. This is a religion which originated in South Vietnam in 1925. Caodaists believe that all religions are divinely created paths to God. They teach that the eternal, all-powerful Creator has revealed himself through the founders of the world's major religions, Buddha, Lao-Tzu, Confucius, Jesus and Mohammed. Because the message of these men was culture-bound, understandable only within their own society, the truths they propagated were inapplicable to all the world's peoples. Their original teachings were corrupted by their followers and this led to heresy — thus the need for a further revelation from God, whom the Caodaists refer to as Cao Dai.

The Caodaists believe that the final revelation of God for this cycle of the world's history has been given to the Vietnamese who are to proclaim it to the other nations of the earth. The key element in this revelation was and is the seance. Cao Dai uses spirit messengers to be the agent of revelation. The sacred laws, doctrinal formulations, rituals and organization of the religion have all been given via the seance. Mediums act as receptors and interpreters of divine truth for the mass of Caodai believers.

Caodaism is a deliberate attempt at religious syncretism. One section of the hierarchy is basically that of the Roman Catholic Church with a pope, cardinals, bishops and priests. The theology is an amalgam of the "Tam Giao," the three religions of the East, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism

CAODAISM

with admixtures of Judeo-Christian theology and philosophy. Prayers, rituals, music and dress also give evidence to the movement's eclectic nature. Caodaists actively participate in social work, politics, and when necessary, military affairs.

There have been a number of major divisions within the movement producing several sects, each with their own organization and policies; however, most Caodaists are united in their acceptance of certain basic philosophical and theological suppositions:

1. The worship of God as symbolized by an eye within the rays of the sun.
2. The veneration of God's messengers, spirits in the heavenly realms.
3. The necessity of vegetarianism to avoid harming other beings in their spiritual evolution.
4. The rejection of riches and luxurious living in order to attain a high degree of spiritual development.
5. The fulfilling of one's obligation to humanity by acts of charity and thoughtfulness.

In summary, Caodaism is a religion which teaches its followers to seek salvation and future spiritual bliss by observing a life of good works toward God and mankind. The practice of virtue guarantees divine acceptance, escape from the continuous cycle of reincarnation and a place in the hierarchy of spirit beings.

By Victor Oliver



Caodai temple at Danang showing distinctive architecture

FOR MORE THAN 150 years Bible Societies have been serving the Church and non-Christian people in many areas of the world.

Bible Societies exist to provide Scriptures for everyone in a language which they can understand and at a price they can afford to pay. That is a tremendous undertaking when one considers the hundreds of languages spoken throughout the world. In the last third of the twentieth century the Bible Societies are being challenged with a rapid increase in population and a growing rate of literacy.

Bible Society activity can be summed up in three words: translation, production and distribution. Whether or not a Bible Society is engaged in all three of these

THE BIBLE SOCIETY IN VIET NAM

activities in any given country depends on the development of the Church in that area. Many language groups have a translation of the Bible. That Bible needs to be printed and distributed. In some countries missionaries have spent years to translate the Word of God into a new language, sometimes having to reduce the spoken language to writing before translating. In some areas the Bible Societies take the initiative and sponsor the translation work, following through with printing and distribution.

In Viet Nam the Bible Society began work in 1890. From the time the Protestant missionaries came 21 years later until now there has been close cooperation between the Bible Society and the missionaries and churches. Last year a total of 9,527 Bibles, 25,158 New Testaments, 1,152,458 portions (complete books of the Bible bound separately) and 919,576 selections (less than a complete book) were distributed throughout Viet Nam. This distribution was made possible by the dedicated efforts of Christians, colporteurs,

pastors, chaplains and missionaries in many places: markets, homes, military camps, hospitals and prisons. Except for the Bibles most of these Scriptures were received by non-Christian.

It is a continued source of rejoicing to the Bible Society staff to learn of the blessing which results from the reading of God's Word. Last year approximately 1,500 individuals indicated their desire to know more about God's Word, and many of these have declared their intention to follow the Savior.

Recently a Vietnamese military medical doctor came to the book-room to inquire about the possibility of getting some Scriptures for a large prison. The prison is located off the coast of Viet Nam. The doctor said there are approximately one thousand Christians among the 30,000 military prisoners.

In spite of the fact that many people have written off these prisoners as atheists, the doctor declared that there is a great spiritual hunger manifested in many lives. Therefore he desired some Scriptures so that this spiritual hunger may be satisfied.

Even before he made his request, I began some mental arithmetic and wondered if we could grant him his petition. Then I was both surprised and pleased with his moderate request. He desired five Bibles and ten New Testaments to be placed in five libraries. He thought 500 illustrated portions and 150 copies of Proverbs would be very useful. Then he asked for 300 each of the seven different selections available in Vietnamese.

But the doctor's concern was not only for the Vietnamese for he also asked, "Do you have any Scriptures available in the Bahnar and Jarai languages? We have about 200 Jarai and 200 Bahnar prisoners. We need something for them." Fortunately we had some selections in both languages.

Only God knows what will be the cumulative result of such a distribution. The doctor said that he will return for more Scriptures when they are needed. We rejoice that these Scriptures are available for such circumstances and that the Bible Society has made provision for free distribution to people who cannot afford to purchase the Word of God.

By Otis Fisher

NEWS IN BRIEF

TRIBES CENTER DEDICATION — A new tribes center for the Roglai was dedicated at Phan Rang. It includes a missionary residence, chapel, hostel, and two classrooms.

CHINESE YOUTH RETREAT — Mr. Stephen Chan of Hong Kong was the special speaker who came to minister to the youth of the Cholon area. Fourteen accepted Christ and about forty made commitments to follow God's will for their lives. The retreat was held at the seaside resort of Vung Tau.

FURLOUGHING MISSIONARIES — Those leaving Viet Nam this summer are the following: Gene and Cleo Evans, Bob and Peg Gunther, George and Harlette Irwin, Keith and Joyce Kaiser, Royce and Betty Rexilius, Don and Esther Weidemann and Fred and Toni Zoeller.

DALAT — On April 30th the new dormitories and classrooms of the Koho Bible School were dedicated. On May 29th the Vocational School for training Koho young people was dedicated. Funds for this project were provided by World Relief Commission.

WITH THE LORD — Two veteran missionaries of the Viet Nam field recently passed away — Mrs. Edith Olsen on January 29th and Rev. I.R. Stebbins on January 5th.

SOUTH AMERICAN MINISTRY — Miss Sariaane Su, a Chinese student from Cholon attending Toccoa Falls Bible College, will travel with the Alliance Youth Corps to minister to Chinese living in Peru.

WEDDING BELLS — Tim Zeimer and Joanne Evans will be married on June 12th at Aliquippa, Pennsylvania. David Thompson and Becki Mitchell will be married on June 26th at Nyack, New York. All four are Alumni of the Dalat School.

GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY — Rev. and Mrs. D.I. Jeffrey celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on June 28th. Mr. Jeffrey first came to Viet Nam in 1918 followed two years later by his wife. We extend to them our congratulations and appreciation for their many years of faithful ministry.

BANMETHUOT — April 29th marks the dedication of three new missionary residences and the Skin Clinic. These buildings replace those destroyed at Tet, 1968. The Raday Bible School will also dedicate its new facilities including residences, dining room and classroom.



PHUOC LAM

The village of Phuoc Lam, in the foothills of the Que Son mountains, presents a picture of peace and beauty. But appearances are deceiving. It was here in 1968 that the pastor of the Evangelical church was captured by the Viet Cong. His wife remained for two years waiting for her husband to return. Finally another pastor, who had also been captured, escaped and brought news of his death from beriberi.

Despite the loss of their pastor the church continued to hold Sunday services led by the elders. The District Super-

intendent from Danang visited occasionally and was surprised to find a church congregation of over one hundred faithfully meeting.

Because the road into Phuoc Lam from the main highway has been unsafe for travel for nearly five years the village is cut off from the outside world except by helicopter. In July, 1970 Pastor Tin was appointed to the Phuoc Lam church. He first traveled in alone to see what would be needed for his family of six. After his survey trip the pastor reported that the church and parsonage were in a bad state of repair. The house contained no furniture except a small cabinet, a table and two chairs. Knowing that the district had no means to help this congregation, the local missionary used the help of American chaplains to obtain cement, plywood, tin and lumber to rebuild the parsonage and construct some furniture. It was arranged to airlift the pastor and his family with these supplies into Phuoc Lam. So on a bright, clear



day a huge chinook helicopter swallowed up the family and their personal belongings and flew them, with the cement, tin and wood fastened on its belly, to their new home. There they found the Christians gathered to help them get settled.

They soon discovered that life was not as easy there as in the big modern city of Danang. Cut off from civilization, prices were considerably higher. Rice was more expensive and salt was scarce, as were medical supplies.

One day their baby became so ill that the family despaired of his life. They had no medicine and no doctor but the Christians met together and asked God to spare this little one. In answer to their prayers the fever broke and the child began to improve immediately.

There was an influx of some tribal Christians who had resettled in Phuoc Lam after escaping from VC territory. This caused the congregation to increase to over two hundred. Soon it became necessary

to hold two Sunday services, one in the morning for the local Vietnamese congregation and one in the afternoon for the tribal refugees who were able to speak and understand Vietnamese quite well.

In October, 1970 a typhoon swept through the area leaving many homeless, and still worse, with damaged crops. When the pastor came out to find help for his people the emergency relief fund of the Mission provided money to buy rice, salt and fish sauce. The chaplains provided air transportation and the two congregations received the food supplies before Christmas.

Phuoc Lam continues to be a difficult and dangerous area of service. Remember to pray for the pastor and Christians as they endure hardship — that as they remain faithful the Church of Christ will prosper.

By Woody Stemple





As soon as the Social Relief Committee of the Evangelical Church of Viet Nam learned of the damage caused by the floods in central Viet Nam its chairman was sent to the area so as to know more clearly about the situation. According to the data and statistics we gathered, there were then 1,041 pastors and Christian families who had lost all their belongings, crops and cattle due to the floods.

Funds totalling 1,050,000 piasters and five and a half tons of relief supplies were raised by the following groups: The International Protestant Church, World Vision, the Evangelical Church of Viet Nam, The Chinese Protestant Church in Cholon, The Viet Nam Christian Service and the Asian Christian Service. The relief supplies included used clothing, blankets, new baby clothes, luncheon meat, raincoats, rubber sandals, towels, powdered milk and an amount of vitamins and medicines.

The Church Relief Committee flew to Danang with the funds and relief supplies. The means of transportation was supplied by the Vietnamese Government. At Danang we worked in close cooperation with the Church District Committee, the local missionaries and pastors and the Christian Youth for Social Service. We were divided into two groups. One group went aboard two helicopters to Thuong Duc, a far remote district in Quang Nam, about 40 kilometers from Danang, where for security reasons all supplies to the local people were heliborne. There were 2,500 families of more than 20,000 members who suffered most heavily the consequences of the floods and so far very few charity organizations had arrived for the reason mentioned above. Here we have a local church called Dai An with 170 very poor families. Each one of the flood victim families — both Christian and non-Christian — received a package of clothing, a towel, sandals and food we got at the official price. The most aged and needy received a raincoat because we only had 120 raincoats. Doctors and medical students gave medical care to those who were sick and students cut the hair and nails of children. These children were also taught to sing choruses and short hymns. As a result the Captain Chief of the Thong Duc District and all its inhabitants were deeply impressed and they said that now

report

they understand what Christianity and Christian love mean, not only through our relief supplies but also from the manner of giving and the behaviour of our students.

Simultaneously, another group went with the District Superintendent and a number of local church leaders to call on and give relief supplies to the other thirteen churches struck by the floods in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai, with a total number of 1,105 Christian families. As the funds we had were so limited we decided to give to each family an amount of 500 piasters and asked the pastors of these churches to get permission from the Government to buy rice at the official price to distribute to their Christians. Rice was plentiful in Danang, but it was very difficult for the flood victims to buy, especially those who lived in far remote areas because the Government feared that the rice they bought could be "borrowed" by the Viet Cong. Besides the sum of 500 piasters a number of families received some used clothing, blankets, baby clothes and powdered milk. Each pastor of these flood-stricken churches received one raincoat.

Though the funds and relief supplies were comparatively small, they were also a comfort and encouragement to these unfortunate pastors and Christians because they know that they do not stand alone, that God has always been and is with them, and that their brothers and sisters in Christ not only in Viet Nam but in many other countries throughout the world are on their side, ready to support them both by prayers and material assistance.

Please pray for them so that God will help them in their rehabilitation.

Though having to work hard under the unusual cold and heavy rain we all felt very happy to have this opportunity to serve the Lord and our compatriots, particularly our Christian people in central Viet Nam.

In closing this report, may I say that glory be to God alone. I wish to take this opportunity to show our deep gratitude to all the servants and children of God, and all the Christian charity organizations who have enabled the Church Relief Committee to make this wonderful trip to central Viet Nam.

By Nguyen Van Van

**Mr. Van is the chairman of the
Social Relief Committee of the
Evangelical Church of Viet Nam.**



A LEGEND OF THE Bahnar

The Bahnar tribe, numbering about 80,000, live in the highlands near Pleiku and Ankhe.

The world was astir with excitement.

All the spirits — those from the lofty cloud countries as well as those from the dim nethermost regions — were busy carrying the message to all the peoples inhabiting this planet.

On a certain day all the earth dwellers were to meet together to receive written languages.

From mountain, valley, hill and plain, humanity began to stream toward the appointed place.

Among the mountains of Viet Nam dwelt a tribe of people called the Bahnar. Preparations for the trek began when they received the news and soon they could be seen wending their way down steep jungle trails.

As they came into unfamiliar territory they met the Vietnamese and French and decided to travel together. The journey was long and they became tired and hungry. Suddenly someone gave an exclamation of joy and pointed to some tall leafy stalks growing by the side of the road.

“Sugar cane!”

Immediately the band of people came to a halt. The French and Vietnamese cut off some stalks, sat down and began to enjoy themselves. They discarded the top leafy sections and soon satisfied their hunger and thirst by chewing the fleshy base of the stems.

The tribespeople decided they too would try the succulent plants. But, instead of beginning at the base of the stalks, each began to chew the top leafy part. They chewed — and chewed — and chewed. At first it wasn't very good, but as they progressed the stems gradually became sweeter.

They hardly noticed the others leave.

It took some time for them to work their way through the whole stalks of sugar cane, but they persisted and finally, their hunger assuaged, resumed their journey. Little did they realize how much time had been consumed until they found that their traveling companions were out of sight and they were left far behind.

After a long walk the tribespeople were overjoyed to reach the meeting place — but their gladness quickly turned to sorrow when they discovered that the meeting was over.

They were too late.

All the languages had been given out and there was none left for them. So, with heavy hearts they returned to their home in the jungle highlands.

And that is why the Bahnar have no written language.

