

VN FILE / *Thales* SUBJ.

DATE *6/19* SUB-CAT. *Hue*

*one  
year  
later...*

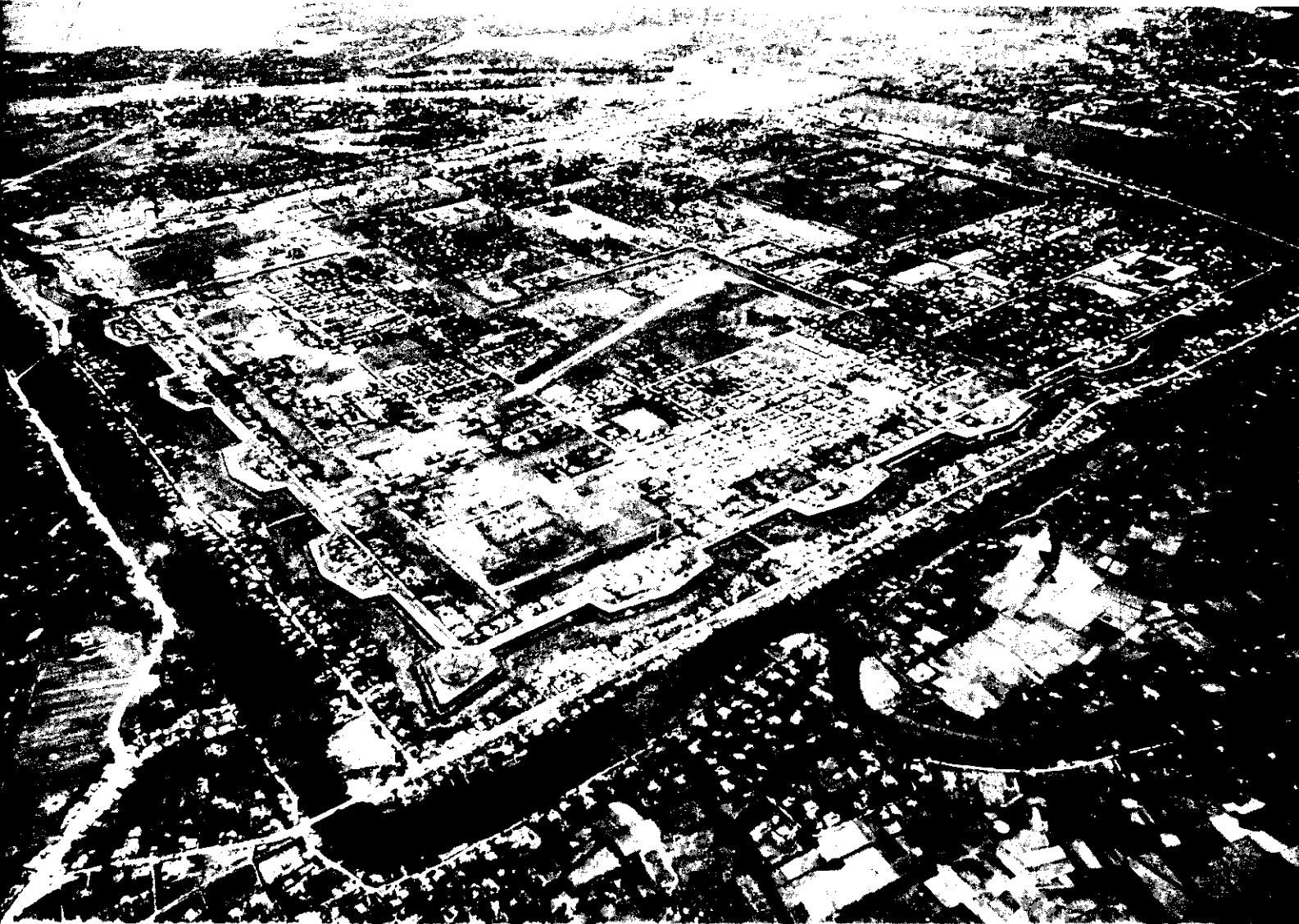


# THE REBIRTH OF HUE



one year later...

# The Rebirth of Hue



Aerial view of Hue shows the six-square-kilometer Citadel surrounded by three-meter-thick walls. Shiny aluminum roofs show where buildings were repaired or replaced after the Tet offensive.

Throughout Vietnam, North and South, there is no city more celebrated in legend or revered in folklore than Hue, no people more proud than its 160,000 citizens, no region more beautiful than the surrounding countryside of Thua Thien province. The last imperial dynasty was founded in Hue. Now the educational and cultural heart of the Republic of Vietnam, this stately community stands on both banks of the Perfume River 100 kilometers south of the Demilitarized Zone bordering the communist North. It was no accident that during the 1968 lunar new year, when the communists launched their Tet offensive against 120 urban centers in the South, no city suffered such grave wounds as Hue. Within Hue's storied Citadel the communists held out for 25 days, and before they were ousted some 75 percent of the city was damaged. During their occupation 3,500 civilians died, some by military action, most in a revengeful reign of terror launched by the Viet Cong which reached such extremes that 600 Hue civilians were buried alive.

Now, one year later, with the arrival of another Tet holiday season (February 17, 1969), Hue has rebuilt from the ashes. Its people again have roofs over their heads, the economy has revived beyond all expectations, and a post-offensive malaise of the spirit has evaporated. Optimism has replaced fear, and with good reason, for military authorities attest that today there is no more secure city than Hue anywhere north of Saigon.

What has transformed Hue and its rural countryside into one of the most pacified areas of South Vietnam? There are a number of factors, some military, some economic, some of the spirit, but these are the major ones:

- Communist terrorism during the Tet offensive so alienated the people that the last vestiges of apathy, neutralism or procommunism vanished;

- The government's pledge to rebuild Hue and rehabilitate its 115,000 Tet refugees was carried out so competently, leaving such a reservoir of good will, that the people for the first time have become united in commitment to the government cause;

- Integration of Vietnamese and U.S. military operations on a scale never before seen in this war created a capability so strong that the main-force units of the enemy quit the populated plains and fled to remote mountain hideouts. South Vietnamese soldiers and militia are now carrying the heaviest part of the defense burden, and they

are determined that never again will the enemy regain the ability to menace Hue in any strength.

There are other reasons for the rebirth of Hue and the pacification of Thua Thien province—the amazing resiliency of the people, mounting rice stocks, better transportation, a more efficient administration. But most can be traced to a new and, for Hue, an untraditional burgeoning of patriotism. It is personified in the young, competent province chief and Hue mayor, Colonel Le Van Than, one of the South's most dedicated leaders.

#### THE HUE CITIZEN

The people of Hue have always been different from other Vietnamese. The narrow Pass of the Clouds separating Hue from Da Nang symbolically separates Hue's citizens from the rest of the South Vietnamese. "The rivers around Hue are not very deep and the mountains are not very high," said the Emperor Tu Duc, "but the hearts of the people will never be known."

Since the rise of the French colonialism, and particularly since the fall of the last empire, Hue has been the home of most of Vietnam's *ancien* nobility. Living in comfortable villas on the northern and eastern edges of the city, these nobles still set the tone for Hue. The man in the street shares the nobles' dignity, reveres the old traditions and places pride in his city above region and nation. Strangers are welcome so long as they play the role of properly reverent tourists. Hue's people see themselves as above the people of nontraditional Hanoi and French-built Saigon, and for years before the Tet offensive many of them saw themselves as above the struggle between Hanoi and Saigon.

"When a man from Hue is in Saigon you can spot him in a crowd very easily," said one Saigon University student. "He talks differently, he walks differently, he eats differently. He even smokes his cigarette differently. I wouldn't exactly call him a snob. He is self-confident, self-contained and self-sufficient."

Although Hue has always been a cultural center, it has never been a center of nationalism in terms of a mass movement. The Viet Minh center of activity and support in Annam was at Quang Ngai to the south. The rise of the Viet Cong inspired more refined distaste than opposition among Hue residents. The central government

was 640 kilometers away, the war before 1968 had remained distant from Hue doorsteps, and the succession of short-lived governments in Saigon between the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem and the rise of Nguyen Van Thieu had done little to develop any strong feeling of allegiance in Hue.

"I think the reason the communists attacked Hue so determinedly and so ferociously during Tet," said one Hue University student, "was that they were angry with the city's people for not supporting either side. They could understand opposition, but they couldn't tolerate indifference."

Dr. Marjorie Nelson, a California Quaker captured in Hue during the February battle, was a prisoner of the communists for two months. "They said they didn't like the people of Hue with all their easy living," she recalled later. "At first I thought it was just the Party line because the communists didn't control the cities. Then I saw they meant it personally. They took out their grudge against Hue during Tet."

That was a mistake, for the communists' attack on Hue, shattering a truce they themselves had proclaimed on Vietnam's most revered holiday season, resulted in a psychological revolution. No longer apathetic, no longer neutral between Hanoi and Saigon, the people of Hue today are among the most bitterly anticommunist in the Republic of Vietnam. A new flame burns in old Hue.

#### BUILT 167 YEARS AGO

Hue is not really very old, although journalists inevitably call it "the ancient imperial capital (perhaps mistranslating the French *ancien*, meaning former). It was built in 1802 by a powerful noble of the court named Nguyen Anh, who later became the Emperor Gia Long. Nguyen lived in the provincial town of Phu Xuan, which occupied a small part of the site on which Hue now stands. Another powerful noble named Trinh lived at Thang Long, the actual "ancient imperial capital" now called Hanoi. With the Le dynasty growing progressively weaker from the turn of the 17th century on, the Nguyen and Trinh families came to hold all power, and a confrontation to reunify the country under one or the other was inevitable. The final battle of a long series of clashes came in 1802, when Nguyen defeated not only the Trinh army but Tay Son, leader of Vietnam's first popular insurrection, who had his headquarters at Qui Nhon. (Captured and brought to Phu Xuan,

Tay Son was tied to four elephants and torn apart. His wife chased a wild elephant around the execution ring before finally dying under its feet, and her heroism is commemorated in Vietnam's towns today by streets named Bui Thi Xuan.)

Nguyen built a new capital city for the united empire on the site of Phu Xuan, naming it Hue, a word derived from the Cham, meaning lily. Within it he constructed a walled Citadel six kilometers square. The one-meter-thick walls of the city were modeled after those of Peking, and the layout of the palace grounds was copied from the older capital at Thang Long. To the south of the city, beyond the river, the hill of Ngu Binh was joined to a companion hill by a man-made earthen saddle in order to create a barrier against storms and evil spirits.

The Nguyen dynasty founded by Emperor Gia Long\* ruled over an expanding empire which exerted strong influence on neighboring Laos and Cambodia but which in turn was a protectorate of the Celestial Court at Peking, although the Chinese had held the reins only loosely since Nguyen Hue ousted their armies in the 1789 battle at Thang Long. Gia Long's French adviser, the Bishop of Adran, had helped him build a strong navy during the dynastic wars, and the emperor sought new advisers from Paris after the bishop's death. But the new advisers wrung concessions for France in exchange for every service rendered the emperor. As Chinese influence waned, French influence strengthened, and Vietnam passed from the hegemony of one to the other without gaining real independence. The French set up their administrative center at Saigon, but in Hue each passing generation saw another Nguyen emperor ascend the throne while ornate tombs were built in the Perfume River valley—tombs for the Emperors Minh Mang, Thieu Tri, Tu Duc and Dong Khanh. The last emperor, Bao Dai, took the name Nguyen Vinh Thuy when he abdicated in 1944.

In 1947 the heart of Hue's palace grounds burned in the first flames of the Viet Minh attack.

---

\* Nguyen Anh took the reign name of Gia Long by combining the "Gia" from Gia Dinh and the "Long" from Thang Long, thus signifying the reunification of the North and South in one empire. Gia Dinh, now the province almost surrounding the metropolitan limits of Saigon, then was Vietnam's most populous region in the South, even though Saigon had not yet been built. Thang Long, in the North, was the "ancient imperial capital" now called Hanoi.

Nearly one-third of the buildings were badly damaged, but the great wall and the old buildings simply gained dignity from the blackened fire scars, and South Vietnam's third largest city resumed its even ways. The Viet Minh moved from the stage, to be replaced in the South by the Viet Cong, while in Hue a university was built and tourists continued to visit the Redemption Cathedral, the Linh Mu pagoda, the emperors' temples and the Forbidden City. Then, on the night of January 30, 1968, during a truce proclaimed so all Vietnamese could celebrate the Tet holiday launching the Year of the Monkey, war came to Hue's doorsteps. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army launched a savage assault on the city.

#### THE BATTLE OF HUE

A Regional Forces company to the east of Hue was hit at 10 P.M., and at 3:40 A.M. on January 31 two salvoes of communist rockets flew from the western mountains toward the Citadel. The city erupted in flames and bitter fighting broke out in all sections. In Hue and within a 50-kilometer radius of the city some 10,000 communist regulars and guerrilla fighters went over to the attack, including all regiments of the veteran 324-B North Vietnamese Army Division.

The North Vietnamese drove two battalions of the Sixth Regiment, the 802nd and the 800th, into the walled Citadel toward the First ARVN Infantry Division headquarters in the northern corner of the Citadel. By 4 A.M. an action developed that has gone into the records as one of the glorious moments in South Vietnam's military history. The 800th NVA Battalion struck out for the Hue airfield, but was met head-on by the Hac Bao, the all-volunteer Black Panther Company of the First ARVN Division. The Hac Bao commander, Captain Tran Ngoc Hue, positioned his men facing west across the airfield runway. As the NVA battalion crossed the open field it was met with a fusillade of M72 LAW rounds, which broke up the attack and spread confusion among the North Vietnamese. Then the Hac Bao, using hand grenades, bayonets and pistols, moved forward for the close-in fighting that had become their speciality. The 800th lost 30 men. Although opposed by only one company, the NVA battalion broke off the action and fled south, there to dig in 1,000 meters short of First ARVN Division headquarters.

By daylight, however, the enemy controlled the entire Hue area except for his two prime objectives—the First ARVN Division headquarters, under Sixth NVA Regiment attack, and the MACV compound, hit by the Fourth NVA Regiment. Brigadier General Ngo Quang Truong, First ARVN Division commander, ordered reinforcements for those two remaining pockets, where the situation was serious. He sent his Third Regiment, the First Airborne Task Force and the Third Troop of the Seventh ARVN Cavalry to move on the Citadel. Two companies and four tanks from the First Battalion, First U.S. Marine Regiment, were dispatched to MACV from Phu Bai. The enemy also reinforced, sending in the 804th NVA Battalion to surround the Fourth Battalion of the Third ARVN Regiment heading for MACV. The U.S. Marines likewise ran into newly arriving NVA units, clashing with the First Battalion of the Fourth NVA Regiment at the An Cuu Bridge. But all South Vietnamese and American units finally reached their two objectives, though they suffered many casualties in fighting their way through the encircling North Vietnamese ranks and some were delayed four days.

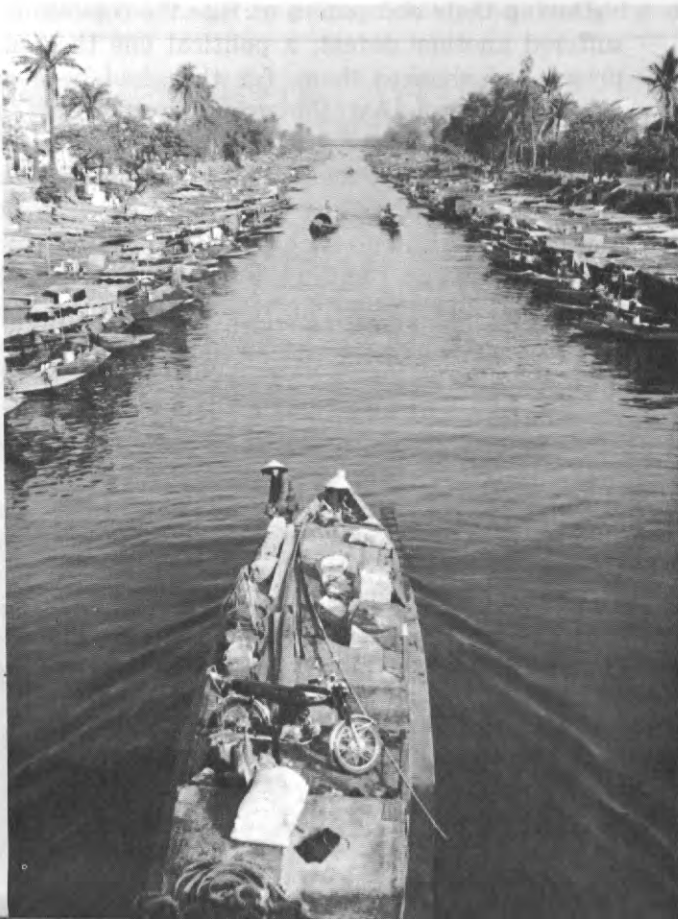
The Hac Bao and South Vietnamese airborne and cavalry troops recaptured the airfield on February 1, by which time an allied perimeter had been established around most of the Citadel, where the enemy was strongly dug in. The U.S. Marines' First Battalion of the First Regiment, now with all companies in action, was joined by the Second Battalion of the Fifth Regiment, and later by the First Battalion of the Fifth Regiment. Before the battle of Hue was to end the units on the line would also include four battalions of the First U.S. Air Cavalry Division, all Vietnamese Regional Forces and Popular Forces units in the area, and such crack ARVN units as the Third Regiment, the Fourth Battalion of the Second Regiment from Dong Ha, the Second Battalion of the First Regiment from Quang Tri, the Seventh Armored Cavalry Squadron, and the Reconnaissance Company, all from the First ARVN Division; the First Vietnamese Marine Corps Task Force's First, Fourth and Fifth Battalions; the First ARVN Airborne Task Force's Second, Seventh and Ninth Battalions, and the ARVN Ranger Task Force's 21st and 39th Battalions.

The weather for the first week of fighting was overcast, enabling the enemy to move men and





The high Pass of the Clouds, in the mountains between Hue and Da Nang, now is crossed by a rail line in operation for the first time since 1965. Below: The canal Gia Hoi, with a fleet of sampans and boats along its two banks, is now a busy waterway.



The Khai Dinh tombs outside Hue are typical of the imperial grandeur that contributes so much to the city's atmosphere and makes it revered by Vietnamese from throughout the country.

supplies into the Citadel without interference from allied air power. But on February 7 the Vietnamese Air Force dropped two dozen 500-pound bombs on the southwest wall in the first large-scale bombing mission. Enemy casualties by this time had reached 1,200 killed. Two NVA Battalions remained within the Citadel, one in the southwest and the other in the southeast. A third battalion remained outside the western corner, blocking Highway No. 1. And the enemy maintained the capability of resupplying in large quantities from the west. Infiltrating fresh troops every night, the North Vietnamese continued to send out assault groups to probe Third ARVN Regiment positions near the airfield.

Vietnamese Air Force, U.S. Marine and U.S. Air Force planes pounded the enemy-held Citadel in raids that continued to the bitter end, supplementing tons of shells sent in by allied batteries. On February 16 the commanding officer of the NVA troops in the Citadel was killed by artillery fire. His replacement requested Hanoi's permission to retire from Hue, but was ordered to stand firm.

Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, flying to Phu Bai for a situation report, promised General Truong additional support, and as it arrived from other areas of I Corps the position of the North Vietnamese grew precarious. But resistance remained tough—so tough they managed to mount a counter-offensive on February 22. Feeling the pressure of the advancing First U.S. Air Cavalry Division, the NVA launched a massive ground attack through the southwest wall against the Third ARVN Regiment and the Fourth and Fifth Battalions of the Vietnamese Marines. Eight-inch fire from the First Air Cav and 105 mm ARVN artillery hit the enemy for two hours, breaking the back of the offensive. Then the elite Hac Bao Company spearhead a counterattack by the Vietnamese Marines.

The end was nearing. The U.S. Marines, giving respite to exhausted ARVN troops that had been spearheading the attack, took over the meter-by-meter advance through the Citadel. But when the climax came it was the ARVN writing history. On February 23 the enemy launched a last-ditch rocket and mortar attack followed by a ground assault in the western area of the city. But at the same time the allies were penetrating deep into the communist stronghold. The Second Battalion of the Third ARVN Regiment on February 24

seized the area of the main flagpole and at 5 A.M. ripped down the Viet Cong flag that had been flying for 24 days. They ran up the flag of the Republic of Vietnam. This ARVN battalion, reinforced by the Hac Bao, then took the palace, securing it by 5 P.M. From then on it was a matter of mopping up the retreating enemy.

By then the Third Regiment had been in continuous action for 26 days. Said General Truong: "They fought long and hard. Many fought without knowing how their families were, always wondering if they were still alive. They were subjected every night to enemy attacks by fresh troops who infiltrated from the west. They did very well."

On February 25 President Nguyen Van Thieu flew into First ARVN Division headquarters to congratulate General Truong on his victory. He read intelligence reports indicating that during the battle, 16 NVA battalions and two divisions were committed against Hue. Allied forces killed 2,642 of the enemy in 25 days. (Total NVA losses during the battle and the subsequent mopping-up period were about 5,000 killed.) Friendly losses were 357 killed, 1,830 wounded and 42 missing between 3:40 A.M. January 31 and 6 P.M. February 25.

#### TERROR CAMPAIGN

During their occupation of Hue the communists suffered another defeat, a political one that surprised and shocked them, for they had been assured by Hanoi that the urban dwellers of the South were ripe for revolution. The invaders called on Hue's citizens to rise against the Republic's government and join them in the communist cause. But no such uprising occurred. Said General Truong: "Failing to motivate or incite the people into revolution, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army began to execute great masses of the population. This only added fuel to the people's hatred of communism and added to their determination to resist a communist takeover."

Entering Hue behind the fighting troops, the VCI (Viet Cong infrastructure members, the leaders of the underground shadow government and their cadres who enforce terror rule) had been armed with lists of names. Government workers and intellectuals were their prime targets, but they were indiscriminate in their killings. Eventually mass graves were uncovered at 20



Above: Tran Hung Dao, the main street in Hue city, heavily damaged during the Tet offensive, is now rebuilt and business is thriving. Below: The Trung Vuong Camp School, where Hue girl students gathered on the occasion of the Trung Sisters Memorial Day.







Displaced from their houses by the fighting, Hue residents run for shelter during the Tet offensive of February 1968. The Bach Ho Bridge across the Perfume River (right) is repaired by work crews following the ousting of the communists from Hue in February 1968. The Bridge Trang Tien is repaired and a new pontoon spans the river.





Traffic now is heavy on Highway No. 1, which has been repaired and improved since the Communists' Tet offensive of February 1968.

locations within an eight-kilometer radius of Hue, and they contained nearly 1,200 bodies. About half were frozen in contorted positions showing they had been buried alive. Discovery of the graves forced authorities to raise the estimate of civilians killed in the fighting around Hue or executed by the communists to nearly 3,500. Eighteen hundred civilians in Hue and its suburbs were wounded and more than 1,000 taken prisoner by the communists, many never to be heard from again.

Of the 65,000 families in Thua Thien province—670,000 persons—half suffered property damage during Tet. In the city of Hue alone, 115,000 of the 160,000 residents qualified for refugee relief. Sixteen thousand family dwelling units throughout the province's 13 districts were uninhabitable after Tet, including 7,600 houses in Hue's three districts, where 46,000 people were homeless. Water and power were in short supply and wells were contaminated, many of bodies floating in them. Property damage in the city alone totalled 372 million piasters (US\$3,152,545).

Then began the rebirth of Hue. Vietnamese from the northern border to Ca Mau—Tonkinese, Annamite or Cochinchinese—have always held Hue in high esteem, and now they showed it. In an outpouring of sympathy, from all corners of South Vietnam help flooded to Hue's victims of the Tet offensive, even from towns with their own refugee and rehabilitation problems in the wake of the nationwide offensive. The central government sent 200 million piasters (US\$1,610,170) for distribution to the homeless in the form of reconstruction grants. A total of 260,000 aluminum sheets of roofing and 100,000 bags of cement imported by the Agency for International Development (U.S.AID) went into the rebuilding of Hue's homes. Central government and provincial government officials merged facilities to create 37 refugee camps, and volunteers flocked into the camps to help the victims. Youth groups and social welfare agencies from Da Nang, Dalat and as far away as Saigon sent contingents to assist in the relief task. People from throughout the free world sent donations. The U.S. CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) and international voluntary agencies provided experts and supplies. Within seven months all 115,000 "official" refugees in Hue plus about 40,000 refugees from other Thua Thien districts had been resettled or enabled to return to their

homes. This was in addition to thousands of "unofficial" displaced persons—independent, hardy souls who refused to ask for refugee grants—who made their way back to normal life without any assistance but that of their neighbors.

#### DEFENSE PLANS

Hue's people were cared for promptly, but the city still had to be made secure against any renewed assault by the NVA or the VC. Vietnamese and U.S. military commanders mapped a joint defense pattern. The First ARVN Division beefed up its strength, adding a newly formed regiment, the 54th, to garrison the crucial Phu Thu district to the east and sending the battle-tested Third Regiment to man defenses to the west and southwest. The 101st U.S. Airborne Division moved all three of its brigades from Bien Hoa to the Hue area by March 9, later expanding its area of interest to the Thua Thien borders. The First U.S. Air Cavalry Division, which had sent four battalions from the La Chu area to Hue during the height of the battle, committed additional elements that remained in Thua Thien until November. A brigade of the 82nd U.S. Airborne Division manned blocking positions along the Quang Tri border to the north.

In the post-Tet period, the ARVN and militia recruitment rate in the province tripled. The province chief and his military deputy, Lieutenant Colonel Le Tich Thieu, recruited 12 more Regional Forces companies for a total of 34, and 14 more Popular Forces platoons for a total of 140. Thirty percent of these "Ruff Puffs" were assigned to static defense, guarding vital installations, but the majority were turned loose for offensive patrols. Twenty-four Combined Action Teams, each composed of eight U.S. Marines and about 30 Vietnamese local or provincial militiamen, moved into contested hamlets from Phu Bai to launch civic action and self-defense programs. More than 33,000 *Nhan Dan Tu Ve*—Civilian Self-Defense Force volunteers, including youths, men and women residents of the 472 hamlets in the province—were mobilized and trained, and they were issued more than 9,000 carbines, shotguns and submachine guns.

Of this formidable force, some 10,000 military and paramilitary troops were concentrated in a 32-kilometer radius from Hue's center, excluding the police and the 18,000 self-defense volunteers





More than 7,500 buildings like this in Hue were made uninhabitable during the Tet offensive of February 1968, but reconstruction has been rapid and 80 percent have been replaced or repaired, like the Post Office, Municipal Treasury (right) and University of Pedagogy (below).





in Hue itself. But they faced a strong foe—five NVA regiments and seven local-force VC companies, for a total of about 7,000 battle-hardened enemy troops.

It took three months to break the back of enemy resistance and to rid the countryside of the NVA main-force and VC local-force units. Most of the major actions between March and May were fought on the plains surrounding Hue, especially the rice area to the west and southwest, in the area of responsibility of the 101st's Second Brigade and the First ARVN's Third and 54th Regiments. The fighting on the plains and the adjacent piedmont gave the allies a 49-to-one "kill ratio"—49 enemy killed for every allied soldier lost. They fought four major "big unit" battles, the last one at Phuoc Yen village south of Hue. There, in a classic "hard cordon" operation, the Second Brigade and Vietnamese militia surrounded an entire NVA battalion (the 813th) and pounded it to pieces with artillery, chopper and aircraft strikes. More than 100 NVA troops surrendered.

#### COMBINED OPERATIONS

The battle of Phuoc Yen (April 30-May 2) marked the end of the "big unit" war in Thua Thien and the start of integrated Vietnamese-U.S. "small unit" operations aimed at rooting out the communists' shadow government, the VCI in the hamlets. The Fourth and Fifth NVA Regiments and part of the Sixth NVA Regiment pulled back into the jungled mountains, some of them soaring to a height of 1,700 meters, lying southwest of Hue on the route to the A Shau valley. Remaining on the plains and in the piedmont in a 32-kilometer radius of Hue were the remnants of another NVA regiment—six companies totaling fewer than 200 men in all, plus about 250 VC guerrillas. The rest of the 7,000 man force that survived the battle of Hue were dead, captured or fleeing.

From May on, the concept of joint Vietnamese-U.S. operations was put into practice on a scale not yet attempted in the other Corps areas. Since its arrival the 101st's Second Brigade, for example, has conducted more than 500 operations, half of them combat assaults, in tandem with ARVN, RF or PF troops. Other U.S. units in Thua Thien report similar statistics. At first two American companies and one RF company would join in a mission, but soon it became one American com-

pany and two RF companies. Now the Ruff Puffs conduct the majority of operations on their own, probing with only Vietnamese ground forces but able to call on U.S. choppers for gunship or resupply support. In the plains and piedmont areas of the province the RF and PF now can patrol in company strength, while prior to June they had to operate in forces composed of two or three battalions. But in the high jungles where the NVA regiments are dug in, Vietnamese and Americans work in close support and rely heavily on big-unit air and artillery power. In this rugged, unpopulated terrain the kill ratio has dropped to two-to-one and occasionally one-to-one, for it is good ambush country.

The partnership between the Vietnamese and the Americans has been mutually profitable, for the Ruff Puffs have increased their tactical effectiveness by emulating the professional troops from the big units, while the Americans have found that only by working in close cooperation with the Vietnamese could they hope to obtain the intelligence data needed for anti-VCI operations. The decision to integrate Vietnamese-U.S. operations was of major significance, one that traditional militarists would view with alarm, for even disparate units within one army often have difficulty achieving coordination in combined operations. Second U.S. Brigade and Third ARVN Regiment troops are skilled professionals, but they are accustomed to different standard operating procedures and they have a language barrier to surmount. And for professional soldiers to go on the line with less well trained militiamen would have been unheard of in any other war. But in Thua Thien the experiment paid off. In a two-company operation, for instance, a Vietnamese company commander and a U.S. company commander would hover over the battlefield in the same helicopter, linked by radios to their individual units and supply channels. Shouting above the rattle of the chopper's blades, they would make joint decisions quickly with the battleground spread before them. They achieved flexibility of decision and prompt response to battle situations. And quickly they gained respect for each other's capabilities.

"I have never seen a division as sharp as the First ARVN Infantry Division, and I have been in two wars," says Colonel John A. Hoefling of the Second Brigade. "They could handle any task given them, now or in the future, if provided with

The recruitment of Vietnamese soldiers and militia tripled in the period after Tet. Many were assigned to guarding vital installations, but the majority were used in offensive operations.



Above and left: At Hue there are 18,000 civilian Self Defense Force volunteers, armed and confident that the enemy will not penetrate the city again.

proper artillery and helicopter support." To this the 101st's Major General Melvin Zias adds: "The Regional Forces and the Popular Forces in Thua Thien are good and competent men, with high motivation. They are gaining confidence, and now they are fully capable of carrying out the missions assigned to them. Their leadership has improved, and promotions are going to deserving men. We are fortunate to have such good men to work with."

#### THE SOFT CORDON

The effectiveness of the Vietnamese-U.S. combined operations format was proved in September when the first large-scale "soft cordon" operation was launched against the island district of Vinh Loc, off the Thua Thien coast 24 kilometers east of Hue. The 10-day operation, which utilized every military, paramilitary, police, psychological warfare and intelligence capability in the area, already has gone into military historians' archives as a classic of this type of anti-VCI warfare.\*

Forty kilometers long and five kilometers across at its widest point, Vinh Loc before the Tet offensive was a garden spot for 50,000 producers of truck farm items, fish, oranges and tobacco—a prosperous enclave militarily secure and relatively untouched by VCI harassment. But concentration of allied forces around Hue during Tet had left a vacuum to the east, and the Viet Cong began moving local-force elements into Vinh Loc. Twelve thousand residents fled communist encroachment, moving to Thua Thien refugee centers, to Phu Bai and as far away as Da Nang. Those who remained were kept docile by terrorism, exemplified by the VCI's murdering of a 65-year-old village elder and a 13-year-old girl chosen haphazardly from a lineup. So confident did the communists on Vinh Loc become that they started using the island as their "rest and recreation" center, sending VC troops there for medical treatment, recuperation, re-outfitting and vacation.

The island obviously had to be taken from the communists, not only to give the good life back to its 5,000 families, but to remove a potentially dangerous staging base from Hue's eastern flank. The province chief, Colonel Than, conceived the basic plan for its recapture. He knew any massive

frontal assault would be self-defeating. The people of the island would have to be spared the horrors of a "hard cordon," with death and destruction raining from the skies. And they would have to be assured of continuing security once the VC troops were ousted from the island, so the communist infrastructure would have to be effectively rooted out and the VCI rendered impotent to return. Therefore the operation would have to be a "soft cordon" combining military tactics with psychological operations; the machine gun would have to be no more important than the mimeograph machine as soldiers and psyops warriors worked together. There would have to be a minimum of property destruction and civilian casualties, and there would have to be a maximum of effectiveness in screening out the VCI.

Colonel Than had the experience of the battle of Hue and the post-Tet operations on the surrounding plains to give him a precedent, and he knew how effective combined operations could be. Besides using the Vietnamese and American military forces to secure the island, the province chief reasoned that only maximum use of the civilian *can bo* (cadres) available to him would secure the peace. So it was that Vietnamese and U.S. big units, all RF and PF units in the area, the National Police, Civilian Self-Defense Forces, Revolutionary Development teams, provincial census-grievance teams, intelligence experts, provincial and district S-5 (civic action) officers, and Vietnamese and U.S. naval forces were brought into the operation. "Seldom has an operation occurred which melded together as many valuable and diverse assets to produce results," wrote the official military historian.

A combined S-3 military operations command was set up including the Thua Thien security staff, the 54th ARVN Regiment, the 101st's Second Brigade and district military and advisory personnel. Even more important, a combined intelligence coordinating center was provided so skilled Vietnamese and U.S. interrogators and analysts could screen suspects and order operations against pockets of hidden VCI as intelligence data pointed them out.

Jumping off on September 11 after Vietnamese and U.S. naval units had blockaded the island, ARVN, Ruff Puff and Second Brigade units landed behind brief artillery and gunship preparation at six unpopulated landing zones. They quickly crossed the width of the island in six columns.

\* "Historical Study 5-68, Vinh Loc," 31st Military History Detachment, XXIV Corps.



Above: Members of Revolutionary Development teams are engaged in building houses for their countrymen. Below: New dams are being built like this one at Phu Bai Ha in the district of Huong Thuy to help stimulate agriculture.





Now the end-to-end sweep started — back and forth for 10 days the troops slowly moved, sweeping up hundreds of suspects that were fed through the intelligence coordinating center for interrogation. The size of the invading force—nearly 4,000 men—discouraged open resistance, so the VC and the VCI went underground. Rooting them out was the troops' job, and classifying them and the knowledge they might carry in their brains was the job of the intelligence personnel. In the meantime, the civilian *can bo* moved in the wake of the troops, helping to move innocent civilians to "safe" hamlets, feeding the people, presenting culture-drama shows, explaining the government's purpose, distributing relief supplies, medicines and posters, and enlisting the support of the island's people.

Weeding out the VC troops and the VCI leaders from among the innocent villagers was not always easy, even though local hamlet elders and chiefs assisted in the screening. The ARVN task force, for instance, one day rounded up 231 detainees for shuttling back to the interrogation center by helicopter. Awaiting them was Lieutenant Bui Van Hoa, S-2 (intelligence) officer of Vinh Loc district. As the confused and disorganized detainees unloaded from the Chinook choppers, Lieutenant Hoa bellowed: "K-4-B battalion over here, C-117 company over here, C-118 company over there." To the surprise of everyone, except perhaps Lieutenant Hoa, most of the detainees segregated themselves by VC unit, trudging to the assembly points he had indicated.

As the days passed, more and more *Hoi Chanh*—"returnees" turning their backs on communism to defect to the government's side under the *Chieu Hoi* (Open Arms) program—started to filter in to allied command posts. Their knowledge was invaluable; time and again they led the troops to buried ammunition caches or dug-in VC guerrillas or hiding VCI. As the people of the island saw how prompt was the reaction of the allied troops to such information, they too came forward in increasing number to help flush out the communists.

"If we had terminated the operation after two or three days," said one ARVN military observer, "we never would have been so successful. For it was not until the sixth or seventh day, after days and nights of continual sweeps, that we started getting a real flow of intelligence information.

During that time the people came to trust us, for they had been assured that the enemy would not be allowed to return. The psychological operations paid off in valuable intelligence data being volunteered by everyone from 13-year-old boys to ancient village elders. A 10-day 'soft cordon' operation like this, where every day is a 'county fair' for the villagers and the enemy has no place to run to, showed itself to be a far more productive exercise than any three or four short-term operations could ever be."

Captain Francis T. Butler, S-2 of the First Battalion, 501st Infantry, explained the vital importance of working with Vietnamese who know the area of operations. "I am sure that working without local Vietnamese, we have had many members of the VCI pass through our hands," he said. "To be most effective as the enemy's 'invisible government,' the infrastructure members must appear to be normal citizens with proper identification cards. This makes it very difficult to identify them, particularly for us Americans. If we move into a contested area and detain everyone, we have probably captured the infrastructure. But we don't know who they are. This operation on Vinh Loc has been different. The National Police, the Police Special Branch, the province and district intelligence sections and the U.S. intelligence personnel were all working together. This operation resulted in detailed information that has paid off. The infrastructure was identified because we brought everyone into the picture."

Phase One of the operation was terminated on September 20 and the second phase started immediately. In this phase the objectives were those of the traditional Revolutionary Development program: local governments were bolstered, self-defense units were created and trained, the troops partially withdrew as local and district forces took over security, civilian *can bo* continued interrogation of the people to identify any remaining VCI, and self-help projects were started to rebuild the hamlets' economic and social life.

As the troops started to withdraw from the island, the results of Phase One were tabulated. A total of 116 VCI were captured and an undetermined number were killed. Of the VC soldiers, 154 were dead and 254 were prisoners-of-war. Fifty-six *Hoi Chanh* had rallied to the government side. For the allies, casualties were light: one member of the Armed Propaganda Team (a for-



In Hue most businesses are back to their former level of activity. The market of Dong Ba is crowded with sellers and buyers. In the background can be seen the new market which is under construction and will have 1,400 vendor's stalls.

Thousands of hectares in the Hue area are newly planted to the high-yielding IR-8 "miracle rice", and a bumper crop is expected this year.



mer VC turned *Hoi Chanh*) and one policeman were killed, and 12 men were wounded (seven ARVN, two RF, two U.S. Army and one U.S. Navy). On the civilian side, two of the island's residents were wounded and three grass huts were destroyed. Vinh Loc's 12,000 refugees returned home.

#### APC RESULTS

Vinh Loc set the pattern for three more "soft cordon" operations that autumn, and the VCI were decimated. Then the central government ordered APC—the Accelerated Pacification Campaign—to rid the VCI from more than 1,100 contested hamlets throughout the country between November 1 and January 31. The hamlets were not picked at random, but were carefully mapped so that their capture or their pacification would support military and economic development objectives—hamlets controlling road junctions, or flanking major highways or rail lines, or dominating potential troop assembly areas.

The Ministry of Revolutionary Development in Saigon designated 33 hamlets in Thua Thien province to be upgraded from contested or insecure to the status of relatively secure. The province chief thought he could do better than that, and designated an additional 11 hamlets to be pacified in that period. With U.S. and Vietnamese troops working in concert with Vietnamese civilian *can bo*, as they now were well accustomed to doing, the drive kicked off. By the end of January, not only had all 44 hamlets been pacified, but an additional eight hamlets were upgraded securitywise in the regular RD program. As a result of the addition of 52 hamlets to the category of relatively secure, a total of 25,000 "official" refugees and 15,000 "unofficial" refugees were enabled to return to their original homes. When the first phase of APC ended, some 82 percent of Thua Thien's citizens lived in hamlets under the unchallenged administration of the government of the Republic.

The second phase of APC was ordered to run through April 1, and in that two-month period Thua Thien was assigned 63 more hamlets to be upgraded, some of them now contested, some insecure, some abandoned. All, says the province chief, will be pacified and their former residents brought home again by the target date. For all of 1969, Thua Thien's goal is 116 hamlets to be

pacified, which should enable half of the 60,000 refugees now in the province's 37 camps to go back home. If this "return to the village" campaign succeeds as well as Colonel Than anticipates, at least 18 refugee camps will be vacated this year.

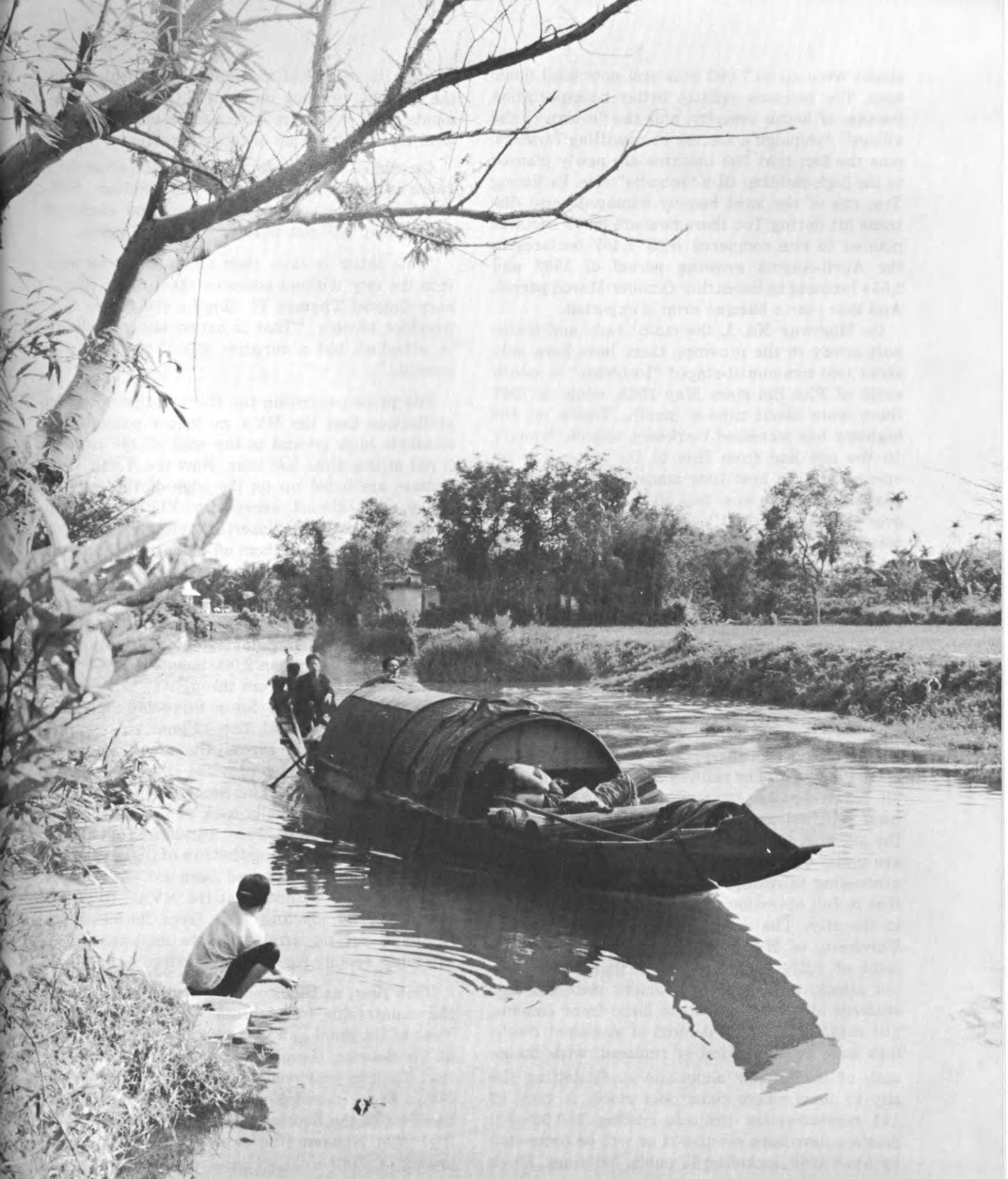
The year that started so tragically for Hue and Thua Thien ended with a set of statistics all on the plus side. Enemy casualties in 1968 were calculated at 23,193 killed, 3,715 captured (most of them NVA) and 15,636 weapons captured. Friendly casualties totaled 2,368 killed in action, 368 missing and 525 weapons lost.

Aside from the holed-up NVA regiments in the Annamite Mountains, the present enemy strength in Thua Thien is estimated at less than 1,500 guerillas and about 700 VCI in 10 rural districts. In Hue's three urban districts there are no guerillas, 90 percent of the VCI have been rounded up, and the handful remaining all have been identified by name, rank and job description and no longer are capable of carrying out their assignments. Opposing the enemy forces, aside from the American troops, are 37,000 South Vietnamese under arms, and they are now carrying the brunt of the anti-VCI campaign.

Among the most significant statistics cited by Colonel Than were the number of *Hoi Chanh* who rallied to the government's cause during 1968. A total of 1,297 former VC and VCI turned themselves in—only four fewer than the number recorded in the top province in the nation, Go Cong. Thua Thien's 1968 figure is higher than the cumulative total recorded for all the years the *Chieu Hoi* program has been operating between 1963 and 1967. More than 100 *Hoi Chanh* defected in each of the months from August through November 1968, with a record 240 turning themselves in during November. Then in December the number slumped to 37 and in January to 32. "There no longer are sufficient numbers of VC and VCI in the province to maintain the high monthly rate," explained Colonel Than. "They're pulling out. We've licked them on the plains and in the piedmont, and the NVA regiments holed up in the mountains are isolated."

Keeping pace with this new-found security, Thua Thien has recovered economically. With the province's monthly rice consumption averaging about 4,000 metric tons, reserves in Hue warehouses had never totaled more than 3,000 tons in 1967 and prior years, but by July 1968 the reserve





One year after the 1968 Tet offensive, the city of Hue has been completely reconstructed, its economy recovered, its transportation re-established, security restored, and life is much brighter than before.



stocks were up to 7,000 tons and now total 9,000 tons. The increase reflects better transportation because of better security, plus the "return to the village" campaign's success in resettling farmers, plus the fact that 200 hectares are newly planted to the high-yielding IR-8 "miracle" rice. In Huong Tra, one of the most heavily damaged rural districts hit during Tet, there now are 3,035 hectares planted to rice compared with 1,457 hectares in the April-August growing period of 1968 and 2,554 hectares in the earlier October-March period. And this year a bumper crop is expected.

On Highway No. 1, the main trade and transport artery in the province, there have been only about two communist-staged "incidents" a month south of Phu Bai since May 1968, while in 1967 there were about nine a month. Traffic on the highway has increased markedly, and on January 10 the rail line from Hue to Da Nang was reopened for the first time since 1965. Up to 400 passengers a day now pay 59 piasters for a trip over the Pass of the Clouds that costs 250 to 300 piasters by bus. For 1969, plans envision the extension of security so that repairs can be made on the Hue-Dong Ha rail line to the Demilitarized Zone. Also destined to spur trade this year is the scheduled completion of a barge offloading wharf on the river, a new Hue market with 1,400 vendors' stalls, and access roads to Highway No. 1.

#### OPERATION RECOVERY

In Hue most businesses are back to their usual level of activity. The railway and highway bridges, all blown by the communists during Tet, have been repaired and a new pontoon bridge spans the river. A fishing marina and processing plant are under construction downriver, and plans are proceeding to restore the limestone plant west of Hue to full operation and to bring new industries to the city. The schools are operating and the University of Hue is in session with an enrollment of 3,214—slightly higher than before the Tet attack, although some faculty members and students still have not come back from communist captivity. Eighty percent of damaged dwellings have been repaired or replaced, with thousands of bright new aluminum roofs dotting the city to show where ruins once stood. A total of 134 reconstruction projects costing 140,500,000 piasters have been completed or will be completed by April 1969, including 72 public buildings. Much

damage to historical monuments, particularly in the Citadel, remains unrepaired, for these testaments to old emperors have a much lower priority than the requirements of today's residents.

On almost every street corner in Hue after dark there stands one of the 18,000 Civilian Self-Defense Force volunteers, armed and confident that enemy will not penetrate the city again.

"One thing is sure, they aren't going to walk into the city without someone shooting at them," says Colonel Thomas W. Bowen, the senior U.S. province advisor. "That is not to say we couldn't be attacked, but a surprise attack would be impossible."

The principal reason for Hue's optimism is the realization that the NVA no longer controls the strategic high ground to the west of the city, as it did at this time last year. Now the North Vietnamese are holed up on the edge of the A Shau valley, and almost every day Vietnamese and American troops are "inserted" into the mountains by helicopter to keep them off balance and prevent their massing for another attack on Hue.

While the north Vietnamese regiments no longer pose a direct threat to Hue's security, they still are capable of causing damage and casualties. On February 1, 1968, when 2,000 members of Civilian Self-Defense Forces from throughout Thua Thien were camping in Hue for a three-day rally, the north Vietnamese sent five 122mm rockets into the city. They hit across the river from the crowded camp, near the province chief's house, but caused little damage. The Second Brigade's guns promptly sent 500 shells back at the north Vietnamese rocket sites. Five secondary explosions were observed, indicating that five of the communist rocket launching sites had been hit. It was the first time since October that the NVA had risked retaliation by shelling Hue from its mountain hideouts, for no army likes to experience 100 incoming rounds for every one outgoing.

This year, as thousands flocked into Hue from the countryside to celebrate Tet, the end of the Year of the Monkey and the beginning of the Year of the Rooster, there was talk in the marketplace that the new year would see the departure of the NVA. Sages recalled that it was during Tet in the Year of the Rooster (1789 by Western reckoning) that Nguyen Hue expelled the Chinese invaders of Vietnam.