



The scar on this man's leg was caused by a bamboo spear inserted in his leg during torture in a South Vietnam prison and left to fester in the wound.

Ex-prisoners recall prison mistreatment

Reports of the torture and mistreatment inflicted upon Vietnamese political prisoners have done much to re-focus world attention on Vietnam.

Ton That Lap and Vo Nhu Lan were ex-prisoners of the Saigon regime who spoke at the University of New Brunswick Jan. 12 and related instances of torture.

Lanh was arrested during a demonstration in May, 1972 and released over a year ago. During this, his second arrest, he was transferred through five different prisons. He underwent mental and physical torture including the "submarine treatment" where he was strapped to a bench, had his mouth and nose gagged and cold or soapy water forced through the gag down his throat.

His resistance to the water was broken by continued beatings on the abdomen. "The water was forced down my throat and caused my stomach to swell until I brought the water back up through my mouth and nose," he said.

After consciousness was regained, the process was repeated—as many as three times a night.

Lap said two paraplegics in his prison were deprived of crutches and forced to drag themselves along the floor. Their pain was doubled, he said, by their inability to support themselves while being beaten.

While at the Saigon detention centre, he observed two- and three-year-olds being held as well as pregnant women. It was common for his fellow students to be arrested along with their family and wives tortured in front of husbands or fathers beaten before their sons. Women were arrested as mothers, wives or landladies of activists.

One woman had a nail driven through her hand. Others had nails "slightly larger than thumbtacks" driven slowly under their fingernails. Lanh said he was in solitary confinement for eight months in a cell with no room to stand and allowed to wear only one black suit.

He witnessed the death of a

fellow prisoner which was caused by this confinement.

Criminals in prisons were often used to beat and torture political prisoners.

Torture has had a long history with the Saigon government. One of the more notorious revelations concerned the Tiger Cages on Con Son Island.

Built in the 1800s for use by French colonists, the Thieu regime adopted them for political prisoners. Individuals would be crammed into the cages.

An international uproar developed after the disclosure by U.S. Congressmen Augustus Hawkins and William Anderson. Paralyzed prisoners shackled to iron bars

with lime thrown in their faces if they complained of lack of food and water outraged world opinion.

President Thieu was apparently so embarrassed he transferred Colonel Ve from head prison keeper at Con Son to another installation.

By 1974, any embarrassment had worn off. Colonel Ve is back at Con Son, and two years ago the U.S. government shelled out \$400,000 for 288 new Tiger Cages at Con Son, dubbed by a cynical wag as "Buffalo Cages" because they are even smaller than Tiger Cages.

The specific treatment accorded to prisoners is a litany of abuse heaped on abuse. Interrogation sessions apparently are where a great amount of the abuses are committed. Amnesty International, Cong. Hawkins and Anderson, and dozens of writers and investigators plus the PRG tell much the same story as to what happens.

A person can get picked up for something as overt as being a known communist, or something as unexpected as being fingered by a quarrelsome neighbour grinding a personal axe.

Beatings are the most common abuse. The bottom of the feet get pounded, a painful experience as that part of the body is particularly sensitive. In some

(See page 14)

What can Canadians do?

Canadian aid to the Thieu regime will only continue the unjust imprisonment and torture of Vietnamese pacifists, said Vo Nhu Lan Jan. 12.

The chairman of the Vanh Hanh Buddhist University students' association was speaking at the University of New Brunswick during a nation-wide tour to promote international efforts to have political prisoners released from South Vietnamese internment.

United States foreign aid now being spent in Vietnam has been channeled into the war effort creating critical weaknesses in the economy. The situation, he said, is so desperate some families have opted for collective suicide by poison rather than face starvation.

A group of Catholics, Buddhists and students—the Popular Movement against Famine—have combined to have the aid used to feed the Vietnamese. This group, he said, are being suppressed by the Saigon government.

Canada has directed \$2.4 million in grants and aid to the Thieu regime, according to a U.S. Senate foreign relations committee report released in May, 1974. The report said Canada's 1973 support totalled \$4 million and projected \$5 million for 1975. No aid has been directed to the

Hanoi-based provisional Revolutionary Government.

Lanh said many Canadian organizations have helped both to further Vietnamese development and the release of prisoners.

His tour was underwritten by the International Committee to Free Political Prisoners, The Canadian Council of Churches, Amnesty International and locally by The Voice of Women and the UNB Political Science Students' Association.

Lanh said he was "deeply moved" by the letters of support smuggled into prison to him by his family. The letters were sent by Britons, Canadians and Americans and translated by the Saigon-based Committee for Prison Reform. A list of such prisoners for those who want to send letters or donations to prisoners' families can be obtained from Nancy Pocock, 52 Elgin Avenue, Toronto M5R 1G6.

He suggested Canadians write to their Members of Parliament protesting the sending of aid to the Thieu regime.

More information on the prisoner issue can be obtained from the International Committee to Free South Vietnamese Political Prisoners from Detention, Torture and Death, Suite 201, 40 St. Claire Ave. East, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M9.

