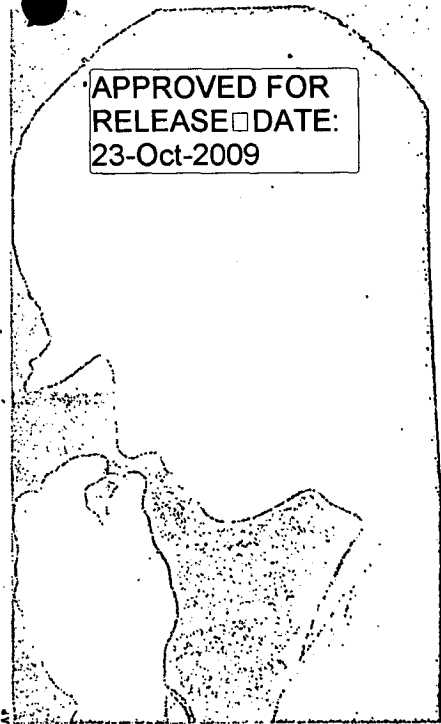




EXHAUSTED G.I.s AFTER COMBAT MISSION



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SOLDIER SNIFFS HEROIN VIAL

New Withdrawal Costs

WITH the horror of a nightmare, the U.S. is discovering that getting out of Viet Nam has a price that it did not anticipate. One longtime supporter of the American cause—sympathetic enough so that President Nixon granted him a lengthy private interview only last February—is Peregrine Worsthorne, columnist and assistant editor of London's *Sunday Telegraph*. Now, Worsthorne argues, the U.S. presence in Viet Nam "may have become more a curse than a blessing, may now actually be doing the cause of South Viet Nam's independence more harm than good." The problem, says Worsthorne, is that American troops—once necessary to inspire the laggard South Vietnamese—have become dangerously demoralized. "Drug-saturated, mutinous, defeatist, incompetent, they constitute more of a threat to the South Vietnamese than do the Viet Cong," he contends.

Ominous Mutant. Worsthorne's brutal language is plainly exaggerated, but he has properly pointed to an ominous new mutant of the American tragedy in Viet Nam. The most melancholy statistics to come out of the war are, of course, the casualty figures of dead and wounded. Yet there is another, subtler casualty list that will haunt American society even after the last G.I. has left Viet Nam—the troops who became addicted to heroin while serving in Southeast Asia. The number is staggering: between 10% and 15% of U.S. troops in Viet Nam have developed a heroin habit. That represents from 26,000 to 39,000 Americans hooked. Some estimates are even higher—20% or more, which means upwards of 50,000 G.I. addicts. Only a small number, about 5,500, have enrolled in the Army's drug-amenity-rehabilitation program since the first of the year.

These figures are not the work of antiwar propagandists. They were brought back by retiring Army Secretary Stanley Resor from a recent visit to Viet Nam, and repeated last week in a study conducted for the House Foreign Affairs Committee by Connecticut Republican Robert H. Steele. Steele made this chilling observation: "The soldier going to South Viet Nam today runs a far greater risk of becoming a heroin addict than a combat casualty." In all seriousness, he recommended that the President order all Americans home unless the governments of South Viet Nam, Laos and Thailand put an end to the traffic in illegal drugs. Corruption is so ingrained in Viet Nam, however, that stamping out the heroin trade would be a monumental task (see THE WORLD).

One reason for widespread G.I. addiction is the high quality of the "No. 4" crystalline white heroin distributed in Viet Nam. In the U.S., where most heroin is diluted with milk sugar or quinine to 5% strength or less, the drug is usually mainlined with a needle, a process that not only is unpleasant but also carries a considerable social taboo. In Viet Nam, by contrast, the heroin is so pure—95% or better—that it can be smoked with an equally powerful effect. Many G.I.s long since caught up in the pervasive marijuana culture have fallen prey to the myth that heroin is not addictive if smoked. Now a joint of heroin is passed around a group of soldiers in exactly the same manner as a joint of marijuana.

Off Limits. Under pressure from the U.S., the Saigon government is trying to curb the narcotics traffic and other smuggling. Several arrests were made in March, and two U.S. pilots for Air America, an airline that operates widely out of Laos and is often used by the CIA, were fired.

into Viet Nam. The U.S. command declared all Vietnamese drugstores off limits to U.S. servicemen in order to discourage the buying of amphetamines and barbiturates. The Army followed suit by banning troops from bars, hotels and other businesses where drugs are known to be sold. But such measures have no effect on the thousands of other outlets, where most of the heroin is bought. A member of TIME's Saigon bureau asked a pedicab driver outside the U.S.O. club for "skag." After perfunctory hesitation ("You cop?"), the driver took the correspondent to a heroin source ten minutes away.

Palliative. No one can reckon the moral and emotional coin that the U.S. must eventually expend for the war in Viet Nam. General Creighton Abrams, the U.S. commander in Viet Nam, felt it necessary last week to warn against any form of "laxity" among the remaining G.I.s as the American pullout continues. Said Abrams: "It requires a herculean effort to keep alertness up." President Nixon acknowledges that heroin addiction in the military has become a serious problem; he is about to announce an ambitious federal program to combat the narcotics crisis through a new Government agency. It would confront the national drug problem generally, and would have specific authority to take over all cases of addiction in the armed forces and among veterans who became hooked while in uniform. That is at least a palliative gesture. Still, the President has often cautioned his countrymen against the hazards of a premature American withdrawal from Viet Nam; the dimensions of drug addiction among American troops offer one more heart-rending reason why the U.S. should get out as rapidly as possible.

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