

## A Man of Peace Terrorists Execute Dedicated Pacifist

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SAIGON — The report came in as dozens of other terrorist reports come in every day. National Police accounts said 20 Communist-fired mortar rounds impacted into the tiny Central Highlands village of Di Linh on April 26, period.

It hadn't enough significance to be included in the newspaper account of terrorist activities for that day.

A few days later a newspaper wire service carried the story saying that Communist troops overran the village and that a young conscientious objector serving two years of alternate service with a church missionary organization in Vietnam had been slain.

Neither account is accurate.

Ted Studebaker, 25, from a small community outside of Dayton, Ohio, a man who had never learned how to hate, is dead. He died in a way that can only add mystery to a war which no one understands.

Studebaker was a conscientious objector who refused military service. He chose instead two years of alternate service with the Vietnam Christian Service (VNCS) serving with their development group at Di Linh, 35 miles southwest of Da Lat. He recently extended his term for another year, according to VNCS officials.

Studebaker was proficient in Vietnamese and Koho, the tribal language of the Montagnards with whom he worked most closely. The gratitude of the Vietnamese and Montagnards he worked with was displayed by the numbers who came to the VNCS house in Di Linh to express their sorrow and regret for what happened.

Although Di Linh is generally agreed to be a relatively insecure area, VNCS has had a program there since September, 1966, VNCS officials said. There have been a number of attacks on government buildings and installations in the district, but this was the first time a VNCS worker had been injured at Di Linh.

The director of the Di Linh group, Terry Bonnette, said he just didn't think it could happen to them, although they live without firearms in the community and not in a protected compound.

"We never dreamed anything like this could ever be. The Vietnamese had no better friend in Di Linh than Ted Studebaker. He was completely nonpolitical. The programs he was operating in no way hindered anyone. He was there merely to help the people, no matter who they were," Bonnette said.

At 1 a.m., April 26, the silence of the night was broken as Communist B40 rockets impacted near the back of the VNCS house in Di Linh. The four occupants ran for their bunker on the bottom floor. Studebaker, his Chinese wife of one week and two other female workers all made it to the bunker when Studebaker went back to his room for unknown reasons, Bonnette said.

The Viet Cong threw a satchel charge against the back door and then charged into the house. Studebaker was caught in his bedroom and after a brief series of questions the Communists executed him and then ransacked the house.

The women in the bunker said they could hear Studebaker's voice and shots through the wall which separated them from the bedroom.

One of the terrorists opened the door to the bunker and saw the three women inside. He paused for a moment and then told them to stay where they were. He closed the door and left.

Five hours later the women left the bunker and found Studebaker's body where the Communists had left it. Ven Pak Lee Studebaker was a widow.

A police station, an ethnic minorities center and a school near the house were also heavily damaged in the coordinated raid into the village, Bonnette said.

The headquarters and garrison of the 53rd ARVN Inf. Regt., 23rd Inf. Div., is a few hundred yards up the hill from the police station and the VNCS house—a mere stone's throw. The women huddled in the bunker said they could hear the Communists in the house for over 45 minutes. Apparently no reaction force was sent out from the regiment to give protection to the village during this time. The Communists eventually withdrew of their own accord.

A missionary family living next door to the VNCS house was untouched in the raid. They are Canadians. The director of the Di Linh VNCS unit had spent the night in the nearby district town of Baoloc.

The Viet who ransacked the house took watches, a camera and a tape cassette deck but did not take valuable medicines sitting in the open in the nurses clinic, Bonnette said.

Montagnards in the area reported to the missionaries next door that Viet Cong political cadres held a rally in one of the Montagnard villages bragging that they had killed all the Americans in Di Linh on the 26th and that the people no longer had to fear American suppression. The Montagnards, showing very little fear of Americans, had come to express their sympathy.

No one understands why the Viet Cong decided to assassinate Studebaker after he had worked among the people for two years, or why they decided to attack the VNCS house after it had been in Di Linh for five years.

Maybe it is as an American adviser in II Military Region once said, "The politically spirited nationalists, the heroic Viet Cong patriots have all been killed in years of war. The Viet Cong ranks are now being filled with rubble, thugs, and punks. The idealism has been drained from them and they are bitter, hardened and desperate."

Or maybe Studebaker was cursed with just being an American. Ted Studebaker was a dedicated Christian pacifist. He came to Vietnam to serve as a man of peace in a country at war.

In a recent letter to the States he wrote: "I believe strongly in trying to follow the example of Jesus Christ as best I know how. Above all, Christ taught me to love all people, including enemies, and to return good for evil, and that all men are brothers. I condemn all war and conscientiously refuse to take part in it in any active or violent way. I believe love is a stronger and more enduring power than hatred for my fellow man, regardless of who they are or what they believe."