

- Cigarettes and cigars have been effective in the Vietnam war.

## THE VIETCONG'S SECRET WEAPON: MARIJUANA

While the Paris peace talks drone on, and the thunder of artillery and machine gun fire trickles down to a desultory non-and-then sniper's shot or quick fire fight, the Vietcong is staging a new and subtle attack on the American fighting man.

The VC's secret weapon: *Cannabis sativa*. More commonly known as marijuana.

"This is the first war in which the Army has been more concerned with marijuana than with V. D.," says psychiatrist Dr. John A. Talbott, who just returned to the U. S. after a year in South Vietnam with the Army Medical Corps.

He reports an increasingly high incidence of psychotic reactions among servicemen after smoking Vietnamese marijuana — probably because of opiate additives

present in the Vietnamese product.

The Pentagon is seriously alarmed not only because of the psychological consequences but also because they know that money spent on the drug is being funneled right back into the hands of the Vietcong.

Says U. S. Navy Rear Admiral James Kelly flatly, "Our commanders have evidence that the Vietcong and North Vietnamese have large stocks of the drug in the vicinity of our troops in an effort to subvert them."

The mere mention of *con xa* (Vietnamese jargon for marijuana) brings an instant look of recognition from Vietnamese taxi drivers, sidewalk vendors and even children playing in the streets. Usually, the marijuana is sold in cigarette form, already rolled, in cel-

lophane packets of 10. The cost is dirt cheap — ranging from \$1.00 to \$2.50. In Saigon, packets are purchased openly on any cigarette stand on the Tu Do — the city's main street in the heart of the downtown area.

Da Nang-based servicemen pick up their junk at China Beach near the USO. At Cam Ranh Bay, the site of a major U.S. logistics supply area, almost every bar in the village is selling marijuana for the asking. At Chau Doc, not far from the Cambodian border, four ounces of marijuana sells for about \$4.25 while a kilogram can be purchased for just under \$34.

The GI is exposed to marijuana from the very moment he lands at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airfield. Little Vietnamese beer stands set up in the rear of the base fill all orders. Sold in what looks like an ordinary pack of regular American cigarettes, the marijuana has been neatly packed into what once were American brand packs. Only a small piece of Scotch tape near the bottom of the pack indicates that the tobacco ciga-

rettes have been replaced by reefers. One alley lined by brothels near the base is also a marijuana den. Says one trooper, "There's so much marijuana in that alley that if it ever caught fire, it would stone out all of Saigon."

Government officials are usually loath to talk about the problem. One 1966 Joint United States Public Affairs Office press release underestimated the situation, stating "One soldier in 2,000 has been found to possess or use marijuana." Slowly since then the brass has begun to admit that the problem is bigger than this. Figures for 1967 over 1966 show an *increase* of marijuana-smoking reaching 62 per cent. And this figure reflects only officially investigated cases and does not cover the tens of thousands of GIs who are smoking but have not been caught. The Defense Department announced in January that nearly nine out of 10 young soldiers court-martialed for military offenses in Vietnam had smoked marijuana before they joined the service. Continuing their habit be-

came quite easy when they reached the streets of Saigon.

"There is just no way of really telling how many men have used drugs," say Colonel Everett G. Hopson, an Air Force officer involved in investigating narcotics. "If I were to hazard a figure it could be as high as 15 to 20 percent. That is the figure experts use when they talk about how many high school and college students have tried some kind of drug, and those are the people we pull into the service."

John Steinbeck Jr., son of the late author, stirred up a Pentagon hornet's nest when he returned from Vietnam to say that 60 percent of the GIs "turned on" and that he had "direct experience" with about 350 marijuana users in the military including "a great number of military police and legal officers."

Another major problem is that the GI smokers, after their year's tour is up, are trying to bring marijuana back into the States with them. A record 26,000 pounds of the drug has been

seized from GIs in the last fiscal year — twice as much as during the previous 12 months.

Admits Colonel Hopson, "A soldier leaving Vietnam may have his baggage carefully screened without his knowing it." About 50 German shepherd dogs have been trained at Fort Gordon, Ga., to recognize the scent of marijuana. The dogs sniff the stuff even when it's concealed in duffle bags or carefully wrapped. Another drug sensor is a small X ray spotting device which can "look into" suitcases and boxes searching for marijuana.

The VC are so clever that for a time some GI prisoners at the LBJ — the Long Binh Jail, the GI name for the Army stockade — were actually getting marijuana even though behind bars. The junk was being slipped in from the outside through "trusties." A stockade officer accidentally picked up a pack of cigarettes from a desk one day, lit one, and found he was smoking marijuana. The pack probably had been dumped by a frightened guard.

In Cam Lo, just south of the DMZ, infantrymen get pot from children who live in the refugee camp there. Sharp Vietnamese kids at Da Nang make money by doublecrossing U.S. Marines. They peddle a few joints to a trusting trooper, then double time to the nearest MP and collect a reward for reporting that the Marine has junk his possession.

An increasingly common practice is to lace the marijuana with opium; this gives a higher high. "You'll put both legs around the rafters when you smoke one of these," says one CID investigator. It is such opiate additives that have psychiatrists worried about pot-smokers in Vietnam.

The opium trade is almost as active as the marijuana business. Vietnam has long been one of the major way stations in the world's opium traffic. The poppies come out of Laos, Northern Thailand, Burma and Red China through Vietnam on their way to the Western World. Tons of opium pass through Saigon every year. Rumors have long had it that Saigon gov-

ernment officials are working with the VC to make illegal fortunes in this opium traffic.

A major Pentagon problem is that since a GI figures he's breaking the law by smoking pot, he becomes a law breaker in other ways as well. Many deserters in Saigon live comfortably by selling marijuana and opium to American servicemen. Marijuana income long supported the "Home of Lonely Hearts" on Cong Ly Street, which appeared to be just a booking office for Saigon's call girls but was actually part of an extensive criminal network that furnished American deserters with everything they needed, from forged identification papers to pistols.

Is pot smoking confined to the rear areas or is it done in the battlefield? Major Robert Donovan, Assistant Provost Marshall of the First Air Cav. Division, believes "few troops smoke in the field because the GIs have a strong sense of loyalty to other soldiers they're with and they're afraid of what people will think."

Adds one Marine Sergeant, "Out in the field we never smoke, but here in our barracks we're smoking all the time. I'd say half the guys in this town smoke grass a lot."

On the other hand, one Saigon-based newsman recently reported spending a night with a Fourth Infantry Division patrol in the central high-lands during which ten soldiers wiled away the evening in their tent by smoking pot. A First Air Cav. Division doctor says medical men occasionally see wounded soldiers in clearing stations whom they suspect may be high on pot. One group of soldiers whose job is to escort dead bodies from the field into the mortuaries at Saigon and Da Nang told a reporter recently that they were taking marijuana from four out of every five American dead during Tet. "We took a pack of Camels off a lieutenant," they said. "It turned out to be full of joints."

GIs in Vietnam apparently smoke pot for the same reasons that college students in the States turn on: to relieve tension and boredom,

because they are looking for a kick and as a means of rebelling against authority. Many pot smokers are among the most intelligent members of the regiment. Says Colonel Douglas Lindsey, a medic, "Soldiers who smoke pot are more likely to be found among the better soldiers in the unit."

Officially, the government takes a hard line on marijuana. Raids are frequent. CID men posing as GIs in search of a smoke constantly try to seek out VC suppliers. MPs and Vietnamese cops frequently stage joint raids on suspected cellars and bars. When GI bar patrons see a raid coming, they dump the contents of their pockets on the floor. The sweeping after one recent raid produced about 30 joints.

The main reason behind this hard line is that Army authorities agree that it's a good source of income for the VC and reduces the effectiveness of the U.S. troops. "The enemy is the big pusher," warns a First Cav. officer. "The use of marijuana in Vietnam not only endangers the life of the user but also the lives of those de-

pending upon him for the successful accomplishment of his mission."

The Army feels the marijuana user is as dangerous behind the wheel of a car as a drunk. In Vietnam, where any trooper can get his hands on a weapon and ammunition easily, anything that affects his judgment can be dangerous. "Marijuana and gun powder don't mix," says one officer.

As evidence, authorities point to an incident at Cu Chi which was being hit by Vietcong rockets. Two troopers, high on maryjane, became so enchanted with the fireworks that they sat on the sandbag wall to watch. A round landed a few yards away, killing one of the soldiers and wounding the other. In another case, two airmen at Tan Son Nhut were killed while passing a hand grenade back and forth with the pin pulled. The men were high on pot.

Although the Pentagon insists it is holding to a hard line against marijuana, in the ranks, there's a great deal of permissiveness. Some GIs say their officers and NCOs know there is pot in

the outfit but don't turn in smokers, especially in combat outfits. "If a guy's been on the line a while and is experienced," says one sergeant, "why should the company commander turn him in for smoking a little pot? He's going to lose a good man and get a green replacement." The strong bonds of loyalty and friendship which grow between men in units who face combat together can often make a line officer or NCO reluctant to turn a pot-smoking trooper over to the MPs. "We've talked to some kids who smoked marijuana and we haven't prosecuted them," says one legal officer, "because we were convinced they tried it only once and didn't use it regularly. Almost every college kid in the U.S. is experimenting with pot. We can't expect our soldiers not to."

It adds up to a major dilemma. The soft-liners, inside the military and out, say that marijuana is less harmful than liquor or tobacco and shouldn't be illegal.

Hard-liners answer that drugs are harmful and should

be controlled even if it means handing out bad conduct discharges and five years' hard labor in jail — the maximum sentence for drug offenses.

And all the time, Victor Charlie's getting rich on the

proceeds, possibly beating with marijuana cigarettes those American GIs whom he hasn't been able to defeat with gun powder. By *Arturo F. Gonzalez Jr.*, from *the Science Digest*, April 1969 issue.

## DEPARTMENTAL TERMINOLOGY DEFINITIONS

*It is in process* — So wrapped up in red tape that the situation is almost hopeless.

*Expedite* — To confound confusion with commotion.

*To implement a program* — Hire more people and expand the office.

*Under consideration* — Never heard of it.

*Under active consideration* — We're looking in the files for it.

*Reliable source* — The guy you just met.

*Informed source* — The guy who told the guy you just met.

*Unimpeachable source* — The guy who started the rumor originally.

*A clarification* — To fill in the background with so many details that the foreground goes underground.

*Give us the benefit of your present thinking* — We'll listen to what you have to say as long as it doesn't interfere with what we have already decided to do.

— From *The Communicator*, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.