

"A" Co. Medics Lend Helping Hand

*Haake*  
*Your copy.*

Medics attached to Co. A, 70th Engr. BN (Cbt) are putting their professional skill to work in the Central Highlands city of Khanh Duong in an effort to overcome the ailments suffered by the local Montagnard Tribesmen. MEDCAP - a program of medical assistance co ordinated through MACV is being inaugurated by the medics and is meeting with success in its early stages.

Villagers commonly suffer from a number of disorders attributable to inadequate protection and washing of the skin. Co. A medics report recurring cases of skin rash, ring worms, and infection of minor cuts and scratches. This type of malady does not always bring a request for treatment. A medic explains, "People with skin diseases are somewhat reluctant to seek aid because in most cases they have lived with the condition for some time and have learned to tolerate it. In such cases we depend upon our former patients to convince them that we can actually help. Once a person has received aid from us he has no qualms about returning; the problem is with those who have <sup>never</sup> encountered modern medicine and are naturally suspicious and fearful". Even among the ones who seek assistance there is often a "failure to communicate". In one memorable example related by medic <sup>Ron</sup> Ron Rosen a middle-aged woman when given a container of liquid medicated soap for a rash thanked the medic most sincerely and then drank the entire contents in one gulp.

After the medical team makes inroads into a hamlet or village by administering aid to a few tribesmen they rely on the "grapevine" to augment their following. Village chiefs and leaders are particularly helpful in gaining acceptance for the medics among other villagers. George Bernington, one of Co. A's medics states, "If we can get a

respected village elder on our side the rest is easy". In some cases the medics rely more on fate than on persuasion to make their worth apparent to the local populace.

When a Montagnard boy from a hamlet that had declined MEDCAP aid badly cut his arm a passing  $\frac{1}{2}$  ton operator responded to the mother's frantic appeal for help by summoning a nearby medic. The boy was treated and recovered. Having gained trust in the medics the mother convinced a neighbor to allow the team to treat an infected foot that had been bothersome for several weeks. As one success begot greater acceptance in the backward society, further successes generated genuine confidence in A Co.'s medical unit.

At present Co. A medics have carried MEDCAP into 33 hamlets and expect to expand their operations in the near future. As 20th century medicine is introduced into Montagnard society the "witch doctor" methods of old are slowly fading away. But as Capt. John Rice, commander of Co. A, explains, "Their resistance to change is rooted in centuries of tradition and will not be easy to overcome but our medics are certainly making an effective start".