



John Pugh With Son, Christoph, in Albuquerque Hospital
Smoked Opium in Vietnam to Ease Pain

By JOHN LEAHIGH
United Press International

A hospitalized combat veteran, suffering from an injured back, said he smoked opium in Vietnam, "to kill the pain--both physical and psychological."

The hurt was physical, 25-year-old John Pugh said, because he was wounded twice and "ruined" his back jumping 10-15 feet from helicopters while carrying a 40-pound weapon and 500 rounds of ammunition.

He said it was psychological because of "having to shoot people and seeing atrocities."

ALSO, PUGH said, "a lot of the guys used dope because they knew they could die anytime and they wanted to grab as much life experience as possible while it lasted."

Whatever the reason, the former airborne infantryman said he had his first experience with narcotics in Vietnam in 1966. He returned to Albuquerque in 1968 with his painful physical impairment--the reason for being hospitalized seven times in two years--and bitter memories.

But it could have been worse. If he hadn't kicked the opium habit before returning home, Pugh also could have brought with him drug addiction.

MANY DID, according to leaders of anti-drug efforts in New Mexico, and still other youths "got hooked" on hard narcotics to avoid the draft and Vietnam in the first place.

The Korean conflict made addiction a major problem in Albuquerque 20 years ago and now the Indochina War is making it worse, they agreed. Interviewed were top officials of the Quebrar Methadone Maintenance Program, a pioneer rehabilitation program serving 370 drug addicts here. Also contacted were police officers and the director of the Veteran Administration Hospital.

GIs INTRODUCED to drugs in Korea and youth who emulated them when they returned home were the original major "market" for hard narcotics in this area, said Joe Fernandez, 41, former Quebrar director who is now board chairman of the organization.

Fernandez said the returning veterans brought the drugs with them. He said a sailor on the same boat that returned him from duty in Korea was arrested when he accidentally dropped two cigarette cartons full of heroin."This was just one who got caught," Fernandez said.

"The best precautions," such as checks for needle marks and running soldiers through showers, couldn't stem the flow of drugs and GI addicts into the country undetected, Fernandez said.

WHEN THE soldiers' drugs from Korea ran out, he said, the demand still existed and was "gladly supplied by people mainly from across the border (Mexico) who are willing to provide whatever the market wants."

"The first death from a heroin overdose in Albuquerque was in 1954, just after

Korea," said Fernandez who served as a sergeant in the Army Medical Corps for a year in Korea. "Now we've got a list of over 250 guys" who suffered drug-connected deaths, he said.

Dr. Leonardo Garcia-Bunuel, Quebrar medical director and assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, agreed with Fernandez that there was a "leveling off" in the number of addicts just before Vietnam.

"IN ALBUQUERQUE it appeared that the use of heroin was going down," Garcia said. "But because of Vietnam, that kind of trend is now being reversed. Without any questions there is a very clear connection" between the war and drug addiction.

The psychiatrist also cited a sociological difference. Whereas "the poor Chicano used to have a monopoly, representing about 98 percent of the known addicts," he said, the Mexican-American addicts were now only about 80 percent of the total here.

"Young, middle class Anglo kids were getting on heroin," Garcia said. "Among veterans, it was Anglos as well as Chicanos and blacks.

BOTH GARCIA and Robert Campos, who replaced Fernandez as Quebrar director last Nov. 1, noted a considerable number of servicemen who got hooked in Vietnam and went AWOL to seek professional help upon being reassigned to the states.

Campos said this was especially true in California, where he was a drug abuse program coordinator for the Santa Clara County mental health services before coming to Albuquerque. "It was quite common," Campos said. "This indication in California was quite heavy--guys coming back from Vietnam addicted."

Paul Garcia, director of the Quebrar "colony" of addicts being treated here, also cited "many young kids coming to us for help after getting hooked in order to keep from going to Vietnam."

DETECTIVE LT. Mehl Tafoya, of the Farmington police force, which has had its share of drug deaths and narcotic problems despite its isolation and reduced population, said, "a lot of drugs" were introduced into the area from Vietnam.

"They (the veterans) bring it in all sorts of ways," he said. "It comes mailed, shipped in. I don't mean to say all the drugs come from Vietnam but it is a source."

The VA is aware of the problem, according to Paul Schmoll, director of the VA hospital here. "We don't have a drug unit here because of the work done by Quebrar," Schmoll said. "We refer problems to Quebrar."

But Schmoll said the national VA "in the last year or two has been planning for drug addiction centers" and already has "five or six open."

