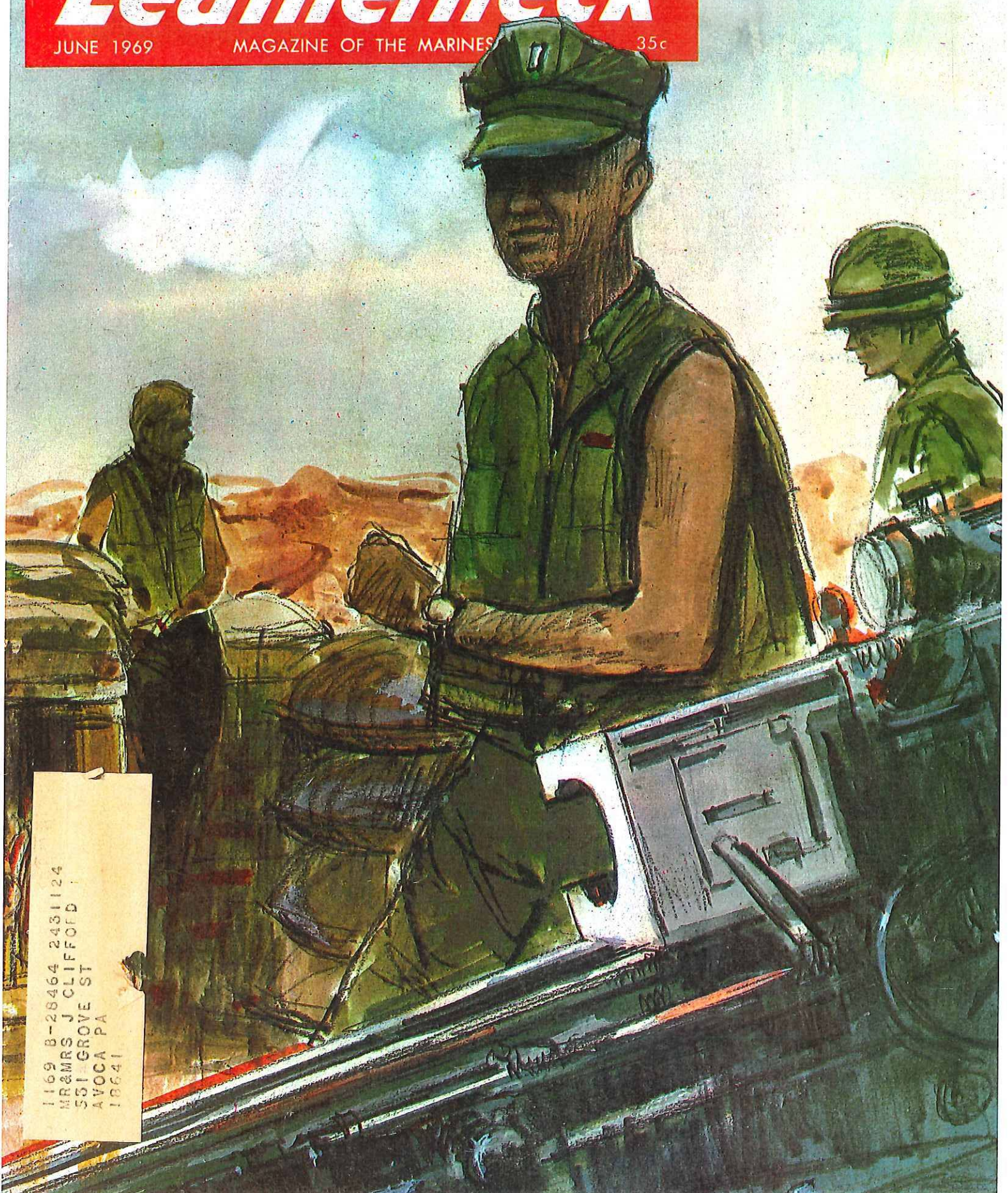


# Leatherneck

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# NEW happy haven

Story and photos by  
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**"Move the village!" was the order. The Marines moved in, reinforced with tanks and amtracs. The lepers smiled as the VC fled.**





(BOTTOM LEFT) Vehicles of the 3d Amtrac Bn. lined the beach as the lepers moved their homes.

(LEFT) A Chieu Hoi (with sandbag mask) and an ARVN interpreter looked for Viet Cong among the refugees who moved into the leprosarium.



(ABOVE) Lepers traveled with the Marine armored convoy down the beach of the South China Sea, heading for a safer life.

(LEFT) Even the female lepers worked during the village exodus. This woman loaded tiles from her roof into a Marine amtrac.



**L**EPROSY is a continuing battle against pain. Deteriorating limbs are a constant reminder of the slow, tortuous yielding of the body.

The Viet Cong, not satisfied with observing the suffering of the lepers, moved, with their families, into the leprosarium.

Laughter gave way to the children's cries of hunger.

Chirping birds hushed, silenced by the "brap-brap-brap" of AK-47 assault rifles.

When the Viet Cong moved into the leprosarium they knew what they were doing. They knew that the Americans wouldn't return fire into the lepers' haven for fear of shooting innocent people.

Roughly six miles south of Da Nang, the Happy Haven Leprosarium was founded in 1953 by Rev. Gordon Smith, an American Protestant minister. Some 150 lepers and their families moved into the colony.

The lepers lived in sturdy, concrete houses covered by tiled roofs. They raised their own food and livestock, becoming nearly self-sufficient in a few short years.

The people were happy; unaffected by war. The Viet Cong stayed out of their reservation, a land grant from the Government of the Republic of Vietnam.

American-donated clothing and foodstuffs were given directly to doctors and nurses for distribution. The Americans considered the haven "off limits."

The United States Overseas Mission supported the project, and Reverend Smith saw to the needs of the lepers.

Recently, Marine patrols near the area began taking small arms fire. A Marine amphibian tractor hit a command-detonated mine and three Marines were wounded.

## HAPPY HAVEN (cont.)

Other Marines were wounded near the haven by enemy fire, and the unmistakable sound of the AK-47 assault rifle was often heard coming from the clumps of pine around the leper colony.

Then the Viet Cong ordered a Vietnamese doctor at the leprosarium to tell Reverend Smith that "no white man would be permitted inside the leprosarium." Violators, military or civilian, would be killed.

A week later, SSgt Charles Smith (Redwood, Calif.), a platoon sergeant with the 1st Tank Bn., First Marine Division, was leading a patrol near the leper colony.

"I was carrying a load of grunts on the tanks when all of a sudden we got hit. The fire was coming from a tree line near the leper colony.

"I yelled for the grunts to take cover beside the tanks," Smith said.

"Man, let's face it! You gotta be nuts to open up with rifles against a platoon of tanks! I instructed my men to open up with their M-16

(RIGHT) Vietnamese women carried everything in balanced loads (including children and chickens) while men loaded vehicles.

rifles, and instead of the enemy fire slowing down, it picked up in volume. "It wasn't coming from just one location any more," Smith continued. "The tree line seemed like a solid wall of fire.

"We opened fire with the tanks and fired six, maybe seven, rounds.

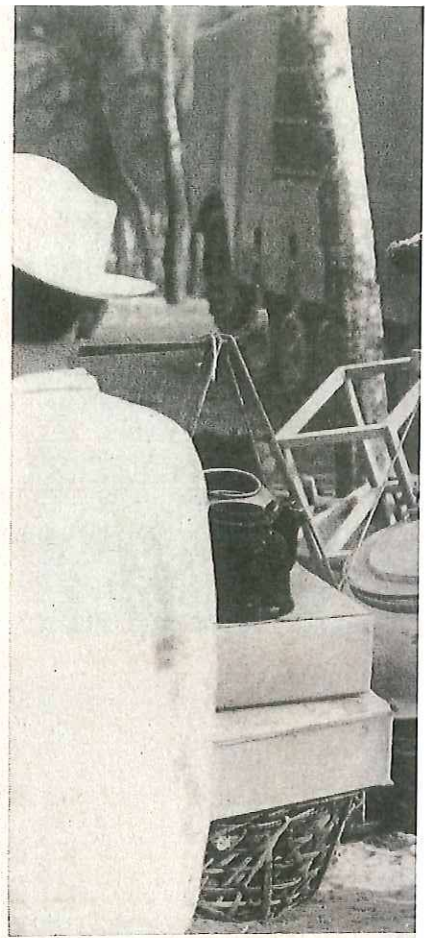
"Then we spotted a couple of Viet Cong running toward the leper colony. They knew we wouldn't shoot into it," Smith said.

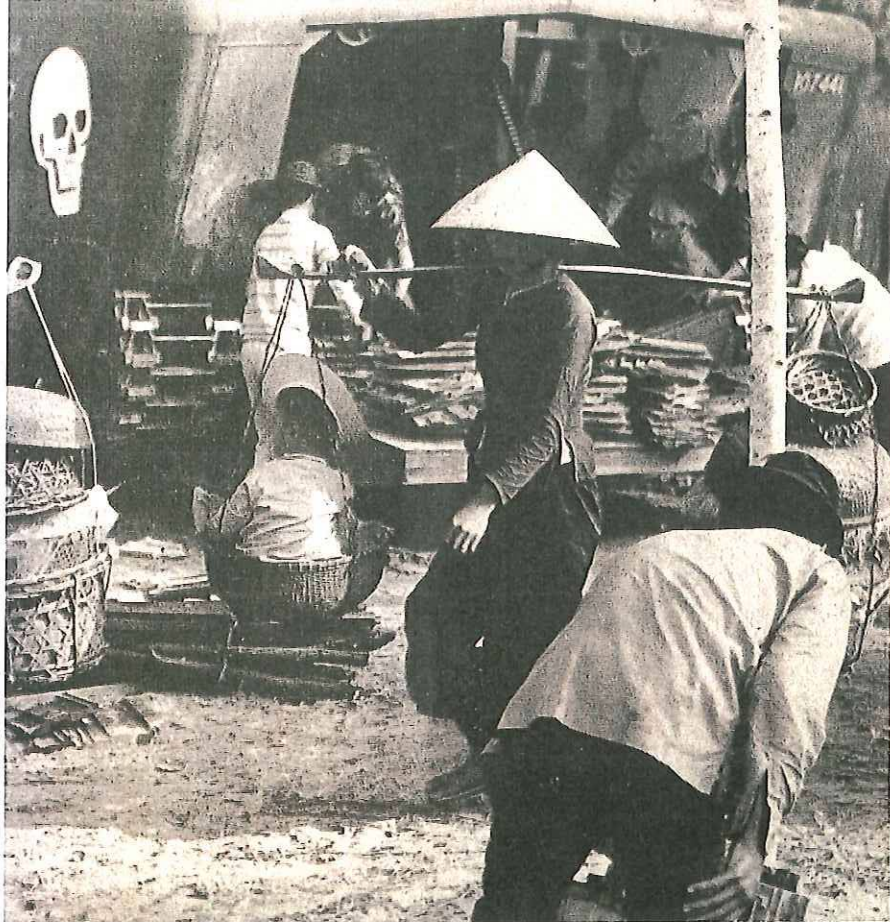
Smith and his patrol were credited with 20 enemy killed.

The tank patrol rumbled on. They couldn't follow the retreating enemy. Besides, they'd been given a mission, and SSgt Smith decided they'd been held up long enough.

Reverend Smith, after hearing of the latest attack on American troops, and with evidence that the VC had taken refuge in the leper colony, requested permission from the Vietnam Government to relocate the lepers in another area.

He contacted the 3d Amphibian





Tractor Bn., First Marine Division, near Marble Mountain, asking for assistance. The lepers *could* move, but *how*?

Arrangements were made. A platoon of the 1st Tank Bn., one from the 3d Amtrac Bn., and "F" Co., 2d Bn., First Marine Regiment, would assist the lepers in relocating.

Early one morning, Capt Len Hayes (Whittier, Calif.) moved with "F" Company to form a cordon 100 meters from, but completely surrounding, the leper colony.

Nine amtracs escorted by five tanks moved along the coast of the South China Sea. By 8 a.m., the entire colony was sealed; the armored vehicles were moving in, accompanied by Reverend Smith and an interpreter from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN.)

The lepers were moving their homes and possessions, loading them into the gaping jaws of the amtracs.

Sgt Thomas A. Matteo (Miami, Fla.), a platoon commander with

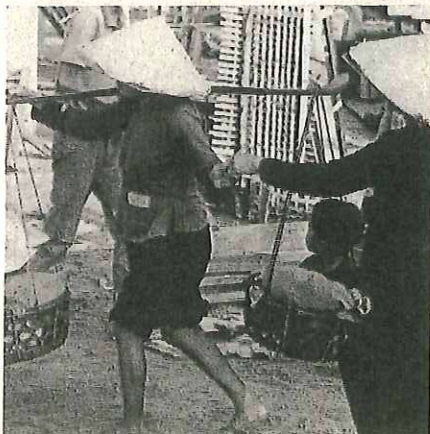


(ABOVE) Amtracs lined the beach as the lepers moved. "Grunts" from 2/1 provided security during the transfer.

(FAR LEFT) Maj King D. Thatenhurst, 2/1 Exec (L), briefed tank and amtrac commanders during the villagers' move.

(LEFT CENTER) The leper colony was located on the South China Sea, which would provide fish and clams. Even their boats were moved.

(LEFT) Vietnamese children had a "swingin' time" as their mothers packed them for the move.



## HAPPY HAVEN (cont.)

"F" Company, was moving his unit toward the village when he spotted a booby trap.

"It was a dud M-79 round, rigged with a trip wire," he said. Members of his unit found another as they neared the colony boundary.

Maj King D. Thatenhurst (Twentynine Palms, Calif., and Birmingham, Ala.), executive officer of the 2d Bn., First Marines, was confident that his men would find something.

"We've been receiving too much fire from this area. The VC have to be here," he said.

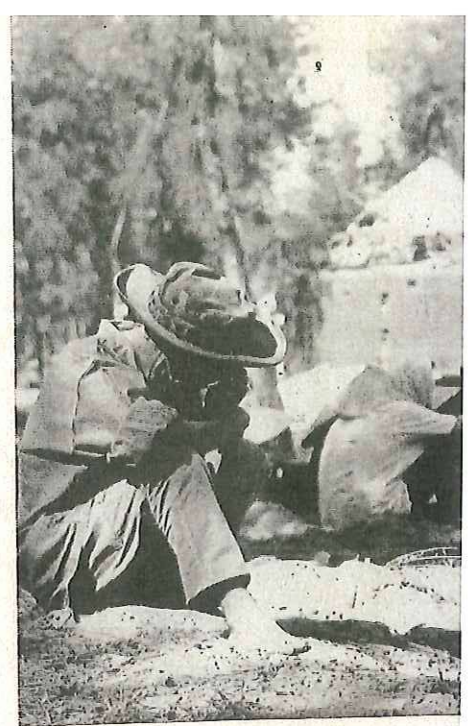
A group of Vietnamese refugees

had moved close to the leprosarium. Some of them might have been Viet Cong?

They were moved into a large, flat area. The ARVN interpreter told them to form two groups; those with proper identification and those with lost or misplaced credentials.

While both groups were being checked, the interpreter went to one side, returning with a "Chieu Hoi" (a Viet Cong who surrenders, returning to the Government of Vietnam under the "open arms" program).

The Chieu Hoi had been a VC who had operated from the area of the




(ABOVE) The Chieu Hoi sat under armed guard after identifying three Viet Cong terrorists living in the leper colony.

(LEFT) While lepers moved their possessions, "F"/2/1 screened refugees. The Marines found three Viet Cong suspects and a booby trap school.

(RIGHT) After unloading the amtracs, the lepers crowded into buses and trucks, moving to their new home in Hoa Van.

(BELOW) An armored vehicle of the 1st Tank Bn., First Marine Division, cleared suspected VC sniper nests from a pine grove.





leper colony. Masked to protect his identity, the Chieu Hoi pointed out several refugees whom he claimed were Viet Cong.

The lepers were loaded with their possessions into the amtracs and moved to a beach area near Marble Mountain. Later, they transferred their belongings to Hoa Van, where the Reverend Smith has established a new leprosarium.

"The new camp is right on the ocean. A beautiful site," he said, "where the lepers can fish and swim and raise their crops and livestock.

"But more important," he con-

tinued, "there are no Viet Cong in the area."

"F" Company remained at the site of the old leper colony until the refugees were screened and transported to a refugee settlement near Hoi An.

While searching the refugees' homes, a booby trap school was found.

"It was definitely a VC school," 1stLt Monte E. Nelson (Lawrence, Kan.), the 4th platoon commander of the amtracs, said.

"We found empty 105-mm. shell casings, primers, sheet metal, tools and a work bench as well as a few dud rounds."

"Charley's gonna be awful sore," Maj Thatenhurst grinned. "We not only took his haven away from him, but we also found his booby trap school."

"Well, school's out for now . . . guess you might say that we've declared a recess!"

END



(ABOVE) A soldier of the Republic of Vietnam predicted a new start for the lepers, away from refugees and VC terrorism.