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Baptist Couple Ministers
Among Vietnam's Destitute

By William T. Roberson
Southern Baptist Missionary to Vietnam

QUI NHON, South Vietnam (BP)--Baptists have not forgotten the people of this city.

The city of 200,000 people who live in shabby huts is the last stronghold of government forces south of the mountainous area where communist forces have never been uprooted.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert R. Compher, Southern Baptist missionaries, work among the ragged and destitute population which most people have tried to forget. Missionary work here is not like any other place in the world. The people are hungry. They are troubled. They are destitute and desperate.

Many of these people are selling the furnishing of their shacks, their electric wires and bulbs that speak of past better days and even the clothes off their backs to buy a little morsel of rice for their tables.

Life is met a day at a time.

Most of the people who have crowded the city during the last dozen years are refugees. They came from the rice fields of Binh Dinh and neighboring provinces in search of safety and survival as the war pressed in upon them.

American military and contract teams which once gave them employment have gone. And tens of thousands are lingering on with no jobs, their savings spent and no place to go.

The Comphers, in cooperation with the Vietnam Baptist Social Ministries, have carefully planned to help resettle some of these people on nearby abandoned fields.

One baptist resettlement area, about 10 miles south of the city and on the perimeter of security, is a former American ammunition depot.

The mounds that once housed explosives will be leveled so that a small fraction of the hurting people may return to the soil that they love so much to try to make a simple and basic living for themselves.

These missionaries have not despaired. Many other people would have given up, seeking a more peaceful climate. U.S. Government aid has all but disappeared for the people of Qui Nhon.

Compher preaches and teaches each week at three churches and five mission points. More people gather each Sunday in Baptist meeting places here than possibly any other city in Vietnam. New Bible study groups are popping up all over, some 15 miles from the city.

Qui Nhon churches have a national flavor in worship that may concern some missionaries, but not the Comphers. Vietnamese stringed and wind instruments often furnish the only accompaniment as people sit on the dirt floor or on the thin concrete covering.

Baptists have only three permanent church buildings in Qui Nhon because all the other groups meet in private houses or rented facilities. All of the rented facilities are paid for by the national Christians themselves. Actually, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has invested only about \$35,000 in land and buildings in the city.

The churches and chapel groups have many activities to minister to the aching needs around them, though they have essentially no resources.

One church conducts two kindergarten classes for needy children who have little chance for

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other formal training. Another church has a small elementary school and a sewing class to help train youth to earn a living for themselves.

The Comphers admit that their most urgent problem is lack of trained personnel and leadership to preach and teach the Bible. On any given Sunday Compher teaches and preaches at least five times. There is no ordained national pastor to help. Laymen assist as they can.

Baptist work was begun in Qui Nhon by the Comphers in 1969, when the war was at its worst. The city suffered many rocket and mortar attacks, but God spared the lives of the missionaries. As rockets hit within only a few yards of the missionary dwelling.

The drama and pathos of the Qui Nhon mission work was seen recently as Mrs. Compher sat in the crowded living room of a missionary's house in Saigon. As prayer concerns were being spoken, in her quiet voice she spoke of the poverty of the people, of their hunger and despair.

Tears welled in her eyes as she related how she and her family felt when they ate from their table of relative plenty, knowing that scores around them would retire any given night with gnawing hunger pains.

There is no way, however, the Comphers can feed the hungry hordes of Qui Nhon, though they have done much to assist in many ways. They are only two among so many. Yet these missionaries work tirelessly to help people help themselves.

A visit with the Comphers leaves one with the bold impression that time is running short but gives assurance that the thrust Southern Baptists are making in Qui Nhon is broad and well-formed.

As christian missionaries, the Compher's feel they can do nothing less than try to minister as much as possible to the total need of the suffering people who engulf them.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers.

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Home Mission Board Appoints
14 Missionaries, Associates

1/10/75

ATLANTA (BP)--In its first meeting of the new year, directors of the Southern Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board appointed nine missionaries and five missionary associates to serve in eight states.

Missionaries appointed were Henry and Patricia Collins of Atlanta, as director of weekday ministries in Washington, D.C.; E.J. and Patricia Dier of Santa Rosa Beach, Fla., as pastoral missionaries in Palmer, Alaska; Robert and Judith Ann Focht of New Orleans, as director of Christian social ministries in Little Rock, Ark.; and Bill and Nita Lumpkin of Crowley, Tex., as director of outreach for the Prince George Baptist Association, Maryland.

Appointed missionary associates were Charles Holmes of New Orleans, as a student intern at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and a counselor at the Baptist Rescue Mission in New Orleans; Kevin Jones of Honolulu, as a student intern at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif.; Marcie McRae of Louisville, to work at the Baptist Center in Detroit; and Andrew and Bonnie Taylor of Fairbanks, Alaska, whose status has been changed from church pastoral aid to pastoral missionary associate in Tok, Alaska.

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