

Plastic surgery skills  
in Vietnam  
help the maimed

# Face The Future

Len Brown



Before performing plastic surgery on the face of this badly burned Vietnamese girl, Major Pollock restored the use of her neck.

**M**EDICINE is regarded almost everywhere as a useful art and its practitioners are considered healing artists. But in Vietnam the doctor is regarded as a sort of magician who does away with ailments and hurts.

Major Harlan Pollock, plastic surgeon on the staff of 3d Field Hospital in Saigon, doesn't regard himself as a magician although some of his work in correcting physical deformities caused by war and poverty may seem magical. Most of his patients are Vietnamese with cleft palates or hare lips. He regards their afflictions as important as wounds. To him it is imperative that those with physical defects lead normal lives after the fighting is ended.

Major Pollock has already operated on more than 50 patients. He spends one morning weekly in Saigon's Cong Hoa Hospital assisting Vietnamese physicians with patients who need relatively simple plastic surgery. He considers this an opportunity to train his Viet-

namese colleagues to carry on the work.

"I feel there are enough elemental operations that need to be done to give the Vietnamese doctors a real grasp of plastic surgery," Pollock says. "One's first inclination is to move into some of the more complex surgery to give the patients relief as soon as possible. But these doctors must learn to perform the operations that are within the capabilities of their own skills and equipment. The razzle-dazzle of intricate plastic surgery I could perform would perhaps help one patient," he explains. "But it's frustrating to Vietnamese doctors who know that they wouldn't be able to duplicate that effort because of lack of sophisticated equipment or training. Consequently, our program here is geared to help the greatest number."

A tour on the wards with Major Pollock is much like tramping through a gallery with a master craftsman as he explains some of the complexities of his profession. Over there is a burn patient. Down the hall is one with no upper lip.

He stops at the bed of a Vietnamese soldier whose nose was blown away by a land mine. Major Pollock explains his plans for the soldier. "I built the little nub that you see there with a piece of his abdominal wall. The next step will be to take some bone and use it for a bridge. In a few months he should look quite normal. You can usually tell when the patient begins to notice physical improvement because there is psychological change as well."

The 33-year-old Army physician from Columbus, Ohio is a graduate of Ohio State University Medical School. He served his internship and residency at Parkland Memorial Hospital, Dallas, Tex.

After training 1 year in the Burn Unit at Brooke Army Hospital, Fort Sam Houston, Tex., and 2 years as a plastic surgery resident in Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D. C., Major Pollock speaks of his Vietnam surgical service, "I've worked hard to get here but this is where it begins to count."