

Tunnels of the World

The Mother

by Duong Huong Ly, Vietnam

When she dug the tunnels,
her hair was still brown.
Today her head is as white as snow.
Under the reach of the guns she digs
and digs.

At night the cries of the partridge
record the past.
Twenty years,
always the land is at war.
The partridge in the night calls out
the love of the native land.

The mother,
she digs her galleries, defenses.
Protecting each step of her children.
Immeasurable is our native land.

The Enemy
must drive his probes everywhere.
Your unfathomable entrails, Mother,
Hide whole divisions under this
land.

The dark tunnels make their own
light.

The Yankees have captured her.
Under the vengeful blows she says
not a word.

They open their eyes wide
but are blind.
Cruelly beaten the mother collapses.
Her body is no more than injuries
and wounds.

Her white hair is like snow.
Night after night the noise of picks
shakes the bosom of the earth.
Columns, divisions, rise up from it.

The enemy,
seized by panic, sees only
hostile positions around him.
Immeasurable is our native land.

Your entrails,
Mother, are unfathomable.

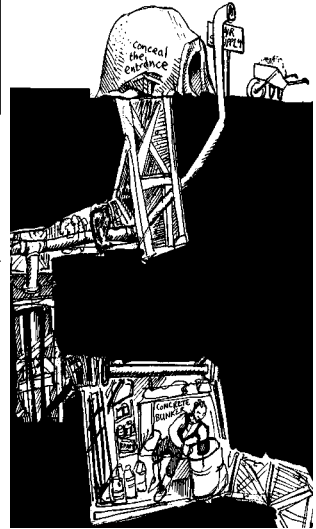
Since we started digging tunnel defences at the Fairmile and Trollheim (1) anti-road camps a few years ago, they have evolved into one of our most effective tactics. This spring at the Crystal Palace eviction (p. 189) they lengthened the eviction from 2 to 19 days, holding down hundreds of security and police, costing thousands. Digging tunnels is a labour of love and a life changing experience. Deep in the soil you can almost hear the pulsating heart of the earth. Recently at Ashton Court (p.148) the digging has been sped up thanks to pneumatic drills (2)—no trowels for us anymore—but still an hour under ground can feel like a day. Our tactics link us to other struggles in the past. To *go underground* is to leave the surface world and take up the secret resistance. Often in history this has been no mere metaphor. The key to the success of the Vietnamese peoples in fighting America was their 150 plus miles of tunnels. These housed hospitals, kitchens, military workshops, printing presses (3) and allowed covert movement around a devastated landscape. While the napalm burned the forest above the resistance below flourished. The Americans were left baffled (4). The Eritreans too took up the underground world as their own. (see box on opposite page). Tunnels have always been a place of refuge. In Turkey in Capa Doccia there is an entire underground town 100 metres down. It was used in the 14th and 15th Centuries to hide from the

Left: A homeless Canadian finds solace hidden underground in a bunker in the forest.

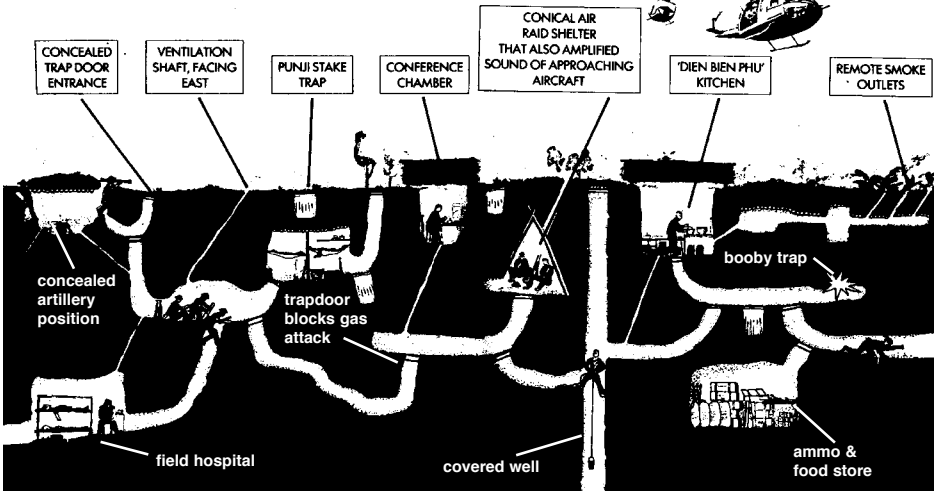
John Pilger, (in his book *Heroes*), describes visiting the Eritreans during their struggle against first US then USSR backed Ethiopian regimes. *'The shock upon reaching Eritrea was the illusion that there were no people. Then, out of the ground they came, flashing torches, embracing the drivers. A generator somewhere in the scrub thudded into life... Spokes of light picked up vegetation that had been neatly singed. Napalm had been dropped here that morning... This was a nation of the night. The guerrillas carried out their ambushes in the early hours and retrieved their dead and wounded before the planes came at first light. Children went to school [often housed in caves] in the early evening and farmers worked in their fields by moonlight. In the north, an astonishing, complete town had been built underground. At the end of tunnels and mineshafts were factories and foundries, insulated by Ethiopian parachutes and powered by captured Birmingham-made generators... In the 'gun factory', weapons of every nationality, from Kalashnikov rifles to huge artillery pieces, were stripped, studied and duplicated... In the 'metal shop', an entire Soviet MiG-21 bomber, which had crash landed, had been recycled into guns, buckets, ovens, kitchen utensils, ploughs, hoes, X-ray equipment and machine tools... In the 'woodwork factory' school desks were laid out with rows of crutches and artificial limbs.'* The field hospitals had to tend their injured in 'wards in dank crumbling tunnels.' (5)



Mongul hoards—housing a staggering 100,000. During the destruction of the Paris Commune in 1871 many revolutionaries escaped death through the sewers. As well as places of refuge and resistance tunnels also are amazing places to live. Our ancestors often lived underground either in naturally occurring tunnels or self dug pits. The Satarchae, the indigenous of the Crimea, lived in them, while Xenophon noted that the Armenians also lived in well like homes. Eskimos and the Hopi also. As recently as the 14th Century whole trogladite cultures existed on the edges of civilisation in the Hebridean islands of Lewis, Harris and Uist—some with highly developed defences(6). It was these cultures that became the basis for the gnomes of our myths. Derbyshire saw the last trog village at Buxton. One French visitor reported, *'I looked in vain for the habitations of so many labourers families without being able to see so much as a cottage when at length I discovered the whole tribe, like so many moles, had formed their residences underground'*. Today thousands of homeless live under New York—in a labyrinth of metro, utility and sewer tunnels (7). One of them caught the magic of tunnels thus: *'It seeps through your ears and your skin. It's like a hug with nothing to hold you, an understanding. It's like when the stars fill your eyes with their light, and they fill your emptiness. The same connection.'* Tunnels are a great tactics and amazing, almost magical, places.



3 Typical Viet Cong tunnel complex 1960-70



Going Underground...

Some Thoughts On Tunnelling As A Tactic



Two years on from when it was first used as a defensive tool at the anti-A30 road camps in Devon (see 'Farewell Fairmile—Road Raging in the South West' in *Do or Die* No. 6, p. 48 and the *Earth First! Action Update* No. 36/Feb 97 for some reports and analysis of this campaign), the tunnel has become a cornerstone of site-based direct action—as much a part of the scenery as treehouses and lock-ons. Tunnels have certainly done great things for our ability to resist evictions for longer periods of time, but there are widespread concerns about tunnels in terms of tactics, the way they are seized upon by the media, and about where we are going with them—both as an idea and a tool.

So why did this use of tunnels develop, and what have they done to take site-based resistance forward? My view is that the initial enthusiasm was for something new, radical and—as much as anything—something physically demanding into which site occupants could direct their anxiety, frustration and need to 'do something'. Tunnelling was not something that required skill or knowledge, as with some tree work, just physical energy, a tolerance of enclosed spaces, and a certain bloody-minded determination.

By the summer of 1995 digger-diving and blockading had been effectively curtailed by the Criminal Justice Act (CJA). This law, passed in the Autumn of 1994, criminalised a whole range of direct action activities—such as disrupting work—that had previously been legal. I feel the gap this left was replaced

with a drive for the height advantage; such as the scaffold tower at Claremont Road (resistance to the construction of the M11 link road in East London) and the treehouses at Stanworth Valley (direct action camp against the building of the M65 in Lancashire). Tensions between protesters and bailiffs were rising, and it seemed as if the risks and levels of antagonism might carry on escalating until something horrendous happened. To me it seemed that whilst with tunnelling the personal risks were greater, here was a chance to re-set the agenda. I had high hopes for it as a bringer of calm—all you had to do (after the months of digging and construction) was sit, wait, read a book and eat your stash of food. State of the art non-violent resistance!

The first eviction of an occupied tunnel was at the Trollheim anti-A30 camp in January 1997, and it was



nothing like this at all. The bailiffs were heavy-handed and oblivious to safety concerns as they sledgehammered at structural supports and doors. One person who was locked on had a rope tied to his foot and was winched until he had to release because of the pain. The eviction lasted less than a day.

Eleven days later, and a few hundred metres away, the approach at the Fairmile camp was very different. Bailiffs and police arrived in the evening, secured the tunnel entrance, and waited until the morning, when a new lot of bailiffs (the mysterious 'Men in Black') appeared for the first time. They went about evicting the tunnel very slowly and carefully, building their own shoring as they went, talking to the occupants, and allowing them to communicate with others outside for a few days. The eviction took a week until the last person emerged voluntarily. In terms of a site eviction the tunnel could hardly have been more effective. It prevented the use of machinery (cherry pickers) and tree felling, and bought time so everyone could focus on what was actually occurring. This succeeded beyond anyone's expectations.

After the Fairmile camp eviction, one tunneller was seized upon and hounded by the media; portrayed as 'spokesperson' and a 'representative' of the movement, dressed in suits for newspaper photo shoots and appeared in a game show. This brought to light some of the drawbacks of tunnelling as a front-line tactic. (For a more detailed account see 'Personality Politics—The Spectacularisation of Fairmile' in *Do or Die* No. 7, p. 35) Tunnels are efficient; a couple of people barricaded underground will have a large impact. But this brings up issues of how to get more people involved in taking direct action, as well as the problems of domination of the movement by 'elites'. Tunnelling is an exclusive activity, in which most visitors to direct action sites will only be in a position to support. The 'eco-warrior' myth is taken to new heights by the use of tunnels and this perceived 'elite' is often seen as a barrier to wider public involvement in direct action. It also potentially leads to the celebrity-style focus on individuals that nobody, or the movement, needs.

Another reason for not unquestioningly embracing tunnelling as a tactic is that it can epitomise the defensive mentality which has developed since the introduction of the CJA. This is not just a cheap stab at the role of sites in direct action, as I recognise that we cannot always be pro-active and that there are times when sites do need defensive action. The problem is that sites have become almost institutionalised in their format—we turn up, stick up treehouses, dig

tunnels and then wait to be evicted. In the past we have been effective by constantly evolving new tactics, keeping ahead of the opposition. If we sit back on our laurels and assume that these tactics are all we need to win a campaign, or at least satisfy ourselves that we have done our best to prevent destruction, then we will increasingly be disappointed. Bailiffs have developed ways of dealing with people in trees, and if we're not intelligent in our use of tunnels then they'll develop ways of dealing with them as well.

We've got tunnels, they're being used and they are a good tactic. However, we need to stay one step ahead of the state. One possible way forward might be to use the space and time created by an extended eviction period to try and mobilise the often considerable amount of local support into taking more accessible forms of direct action; office occupations, security and police blockades, site invasions, or phone and fax blockades, for example. That way people can become empowered and involved in the process, as well as making evictions more effective.

For details of an excellent guide to tunnelling, including the sorts of things you need to think about if you are digging a tunnel, see the review of the pamphlet *Tunnelling—A Beginners Guide* on page 317 of this issue.



Revenge Is A Dish Best Served Cold

The 'Men in Black' tunnellers used in many evictions are hired from: Specialist Rescue International, 128 Station Road, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 1ET, UK. Telephone: 01737 244652. It also trades from: PO Box 266, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 1GA, UK.