

LIFE

Return of the Red Man



DECEMBER 1 • 1967 • 35¢

LIFE

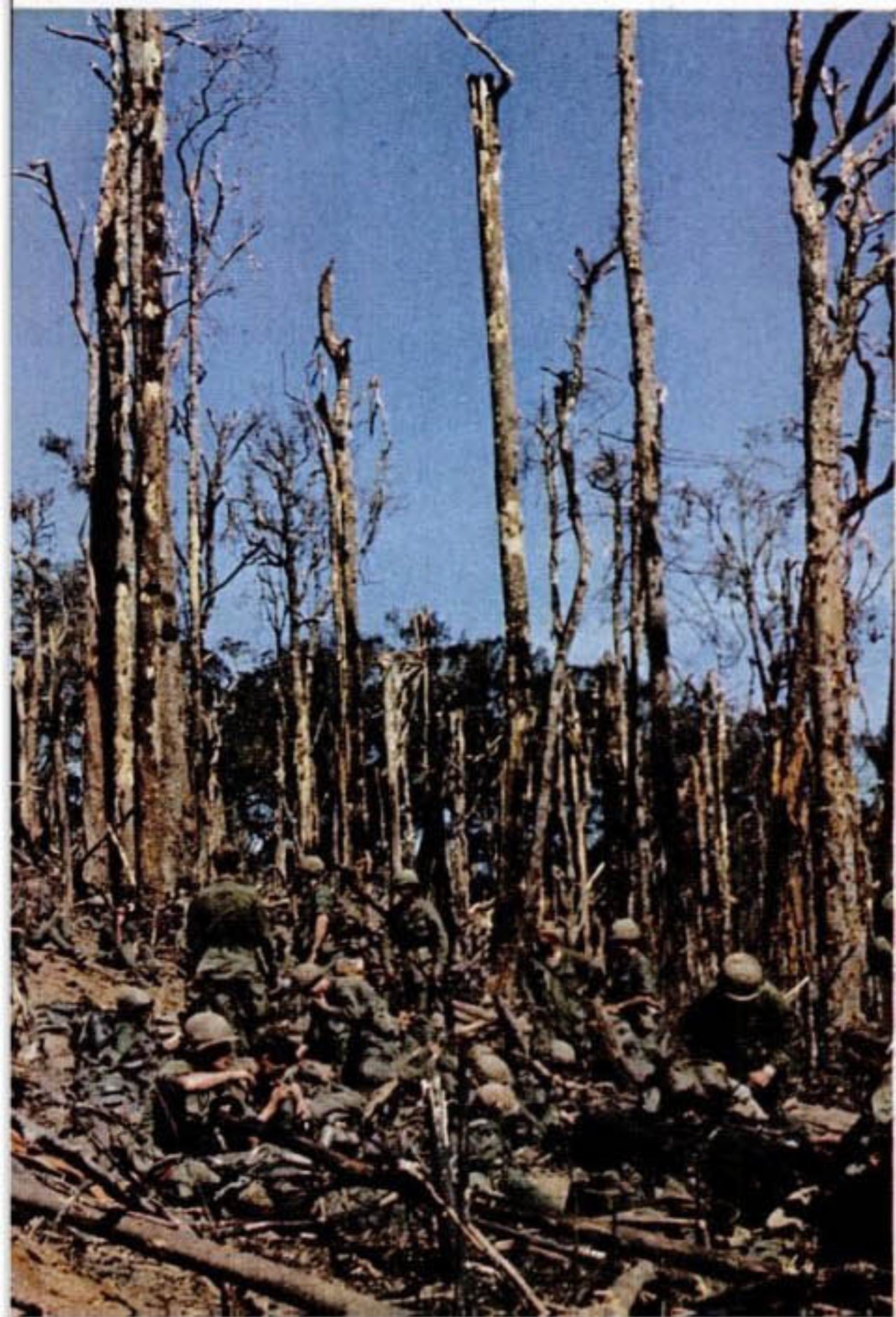
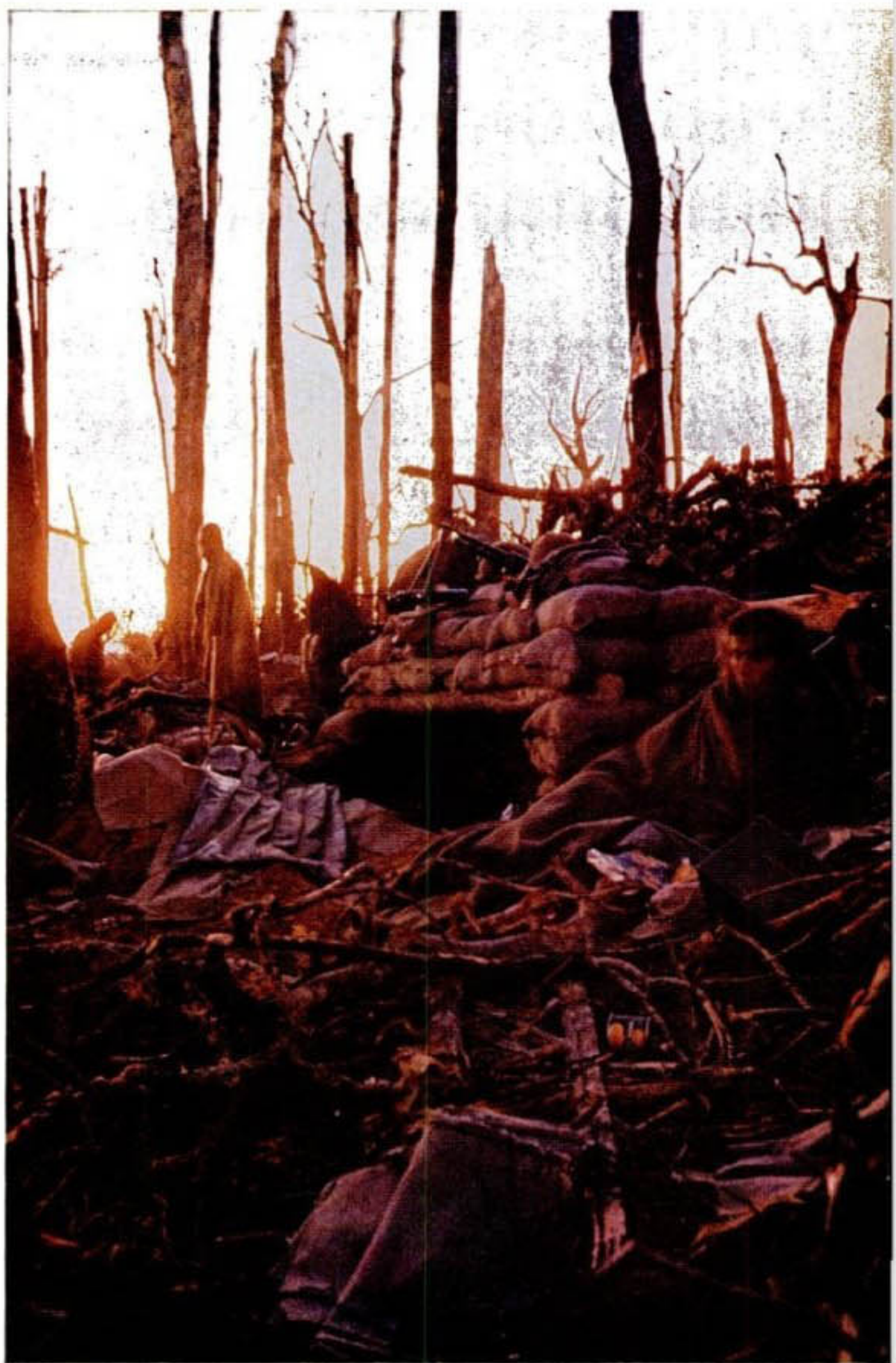
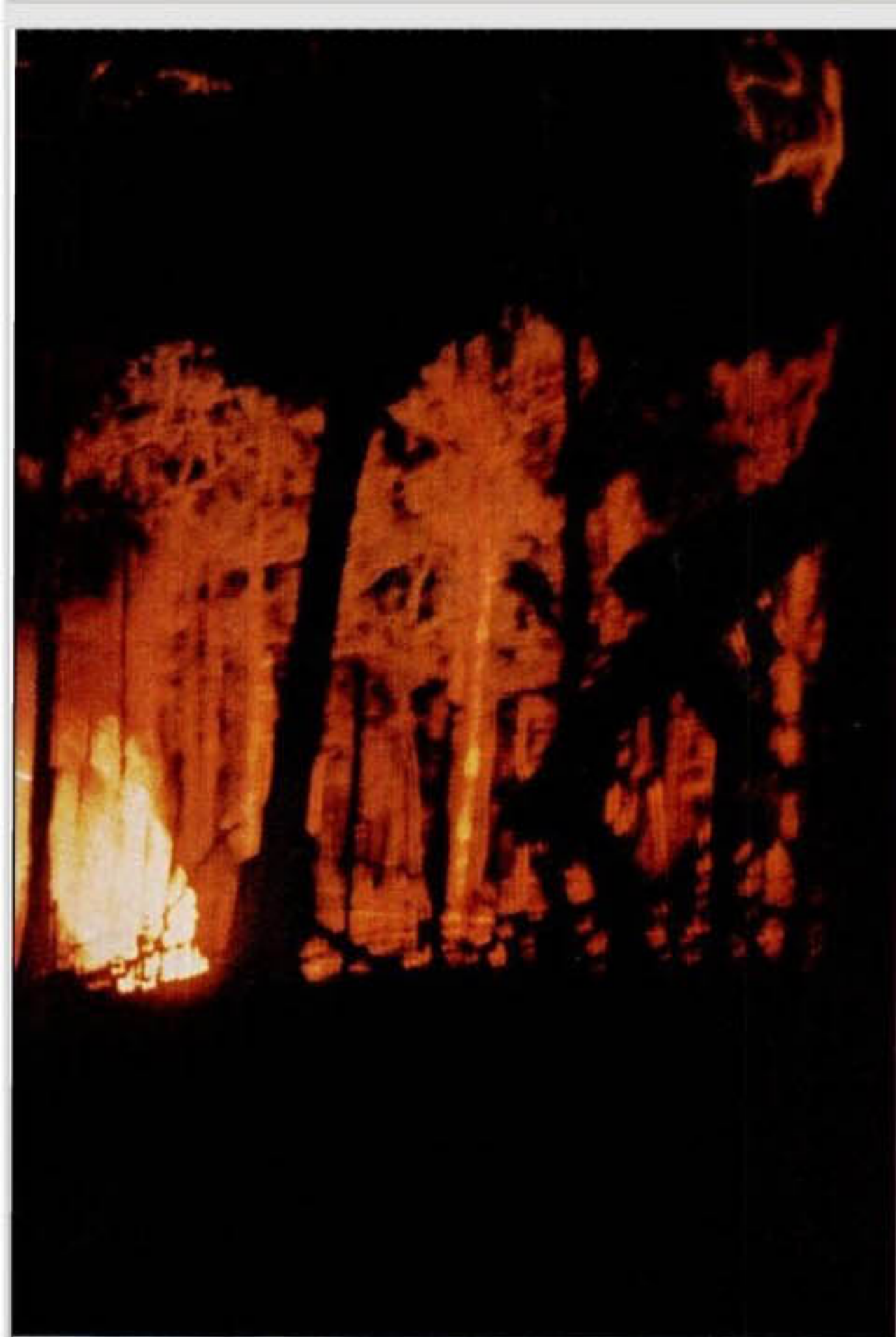
On the Newsfronts of the World

Victory on a Shattered Ridge



The fight for Dak To was so furious that entire stands of 200-foot-high trees were ripped away. Above, a U.S. patrol moves out after being ferried into battle by a helicopter. Hit by enemy groundfire, another helicopter

crashes, setting the night ablaze (*top picture, middle*). Troops take a break under the topless trees (*right*) while others dig in by dawn's pale light (*far right*) in bunkers and trenches that they had captured from the enemy.



The stark ridge lines studded with shell-splintered tree trunks are the site of the longest and bloodiest single battle of the Vietnam war. The fighting began a month ago after 6,000 North Vietnamese troops—protecting infiltration routes along the Cambodian border—moved into the hills overlooking the U.S. airstrip and Special Forces camp at Dak To. Under attack from 15,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese troops, the bulk of the enemy withdrew into the jungle. But last week, on Hill 875, a tough and disciplined force of North Vietnamese took a stand. Holed up in deep bunkers that defied constant air and artillery attacks, they pinned down a bat-

talion of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade with such fire that for three days the paratroopers could not even evacuate their wounded by helicopter. Finally, behind flame-throwers, reinforcing battalions clawed their way up Hill 875 and took it. The cost: 178 wounded and 79 dead paratroopers—30 of them victims of a misplaced U.S. bomb. Dak To as a whole had claimed at least 273 Americans, 32 South Vietnamese and 1,290 North Vietnamese, a toll exceeding that of the fight for the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965. General William Westmoreland, in Washington for meetings with the President, called Dak To the start of “a great defeat for the enemy.”