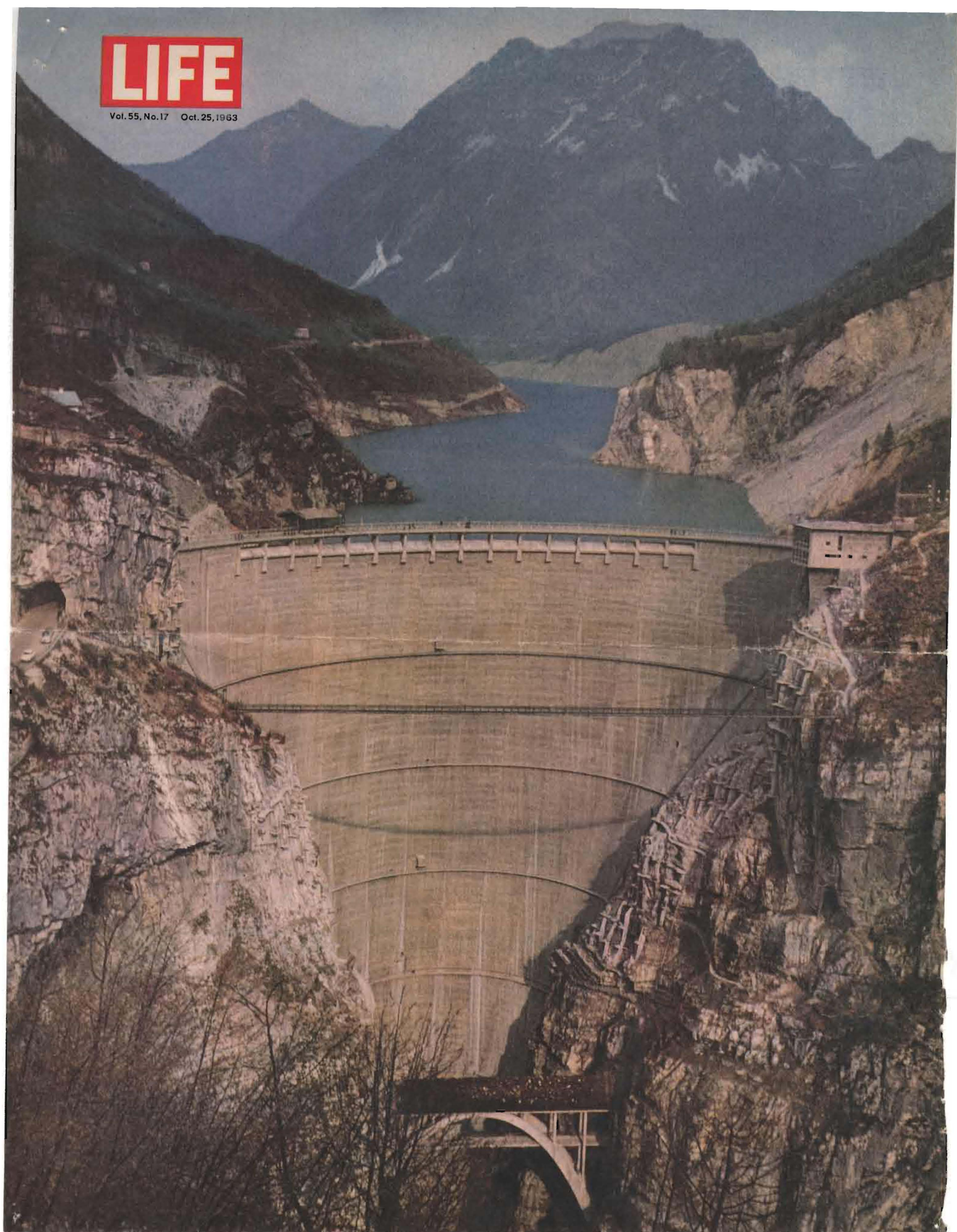


LIFE

Vol. 55, No. 17 Oct. 25, 1963



LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

DNA

Sirs:

Regarding your article on DNA (Oct. 4): thank God for creating, thank the scientists for discovering, and LIFE for explaining this miracle of life.

CAMILLA TURNER

Dorval, Que., Canada

Sirs:

Your excellent article reaffirms my confidence that man is, indeed, capable of exercising control over his destiny.

DONALD R. BURLESON

Midland, Texas

Sirs:

More than four hundred years ago the famous staircase at Chambord was built structurally the same as the molecule we now know as DNA. The staircase consists of two spirals which are superimposed but do not meet.

When my 11-year-old sister and I visited Chambord she was baffled when she passed me on the stairs without reaching me. Your article is a fine explanation of a great scientific discovery. It has also enabled me to explain the staircase mystery to my sister who now understands it. I think it is amazing that the architects of the Renaissance in France built a huge model of the molecule which we now know holds the secrets of life!

ANDREW KAY

Cincinnati, Ohio

Sirs:

The translation of such complex scientific issues as "DNA's Code" into laymen's language is a difficult art, and you have succeeded remarkably well.

I also noted with interest your discussion of recent research on memory. As you mentioned, much of the impetus for this attack has been provided by studies of the lowly flatworm. I think explicit recognition is due to the psychologist who pioneered in this research, Dr. James V. McConnell, head of the Planaria Research Group at the University of Michigan. He first demonstrated the startling regeneration and cannibalism effects that have excited the imaginations of scientists in various fields. Many of us believe that further interdisciplinary research on planarians will be central in the cracking of the "memory code," a most persistent and significant problem in psychology.

ALLAN L. JACOBSON

Los Angeles, Calif.

EDITORIAL

Sirs:

Your editorial on Sukarno (Oct. 4) splendidly emphasizes the necessity of

prompt, vigorous action against an irresponsible, dangerous man. I have recently returned from Indonesia and I heartily concur that we should stop Sukarno's aggressiveness against Malaysia. I also visited Malaya and Sarawak and was greatly impressed with their cleanliness and healthy economy.

My personal contacts with businessmen in Indonesia make me feel certain that they recognize and decry Sukarno's rash actions and the chaos which has resulted from his grandiose and egocentric policies.

C. A. MIKETTA

Los Angeles, Calif.

Sirs:

What insanity is it that causes the U.S. every year to funnel massive sums into morally bankrupt governments, supposedly on the assumption that we are helping underdeveloped nations to achieve progress and stability?

Whatever has happened to that peculiarly American trait of good old horse sense? It appears in pitifully short supply in Washington today. Please continue using yours.

LOLA WISMER

Chappaqua, N.Y.

Sirs:

Regarding your editorial, "What the Newer Nations Need," I am sick and tired of the West acting as Big Brother, adding "to the dialogue of the world . . . by giving to it the best he is and has." The trouble with the small, inexperienced, ignorant and "uncivilized" younger brother is that he does not, sometimes, look through Big Brother's glasses.

What would you do if a person applies the same line of argument which you have tried to fight hundreds of times previously? Would you listen to it all over again, strangle him, or just walk away quietly?

SATISH N. SHAH

Stillwater, Okla.

Sirs:

I was rather shocked and puzzled by your editorial concerning the Afro-Asian countries (Oct. 4). You say that by walking out of the Assembly during the speech of the delegate of South Africa, the Afro-Asian bloc made the policy of apartheid seem almost "defensible by comparison." How can one indeed compare an act which at worst seems impolitic and tactless with a system which is founded on the most inhuman premises and which involves the most sinister consequences, a system that torments as it corrupts millions of people?

ELIE FLATTO

New York, N.Y.

► We have made it clear that we have no use for apartheid. But the Afro-Asian walkout was worse than "impolitic and tactless." A willingness to hear the other side, and to acknowledge the force of reasoned argument as well as of majority sentiment, is essential to the success of any parliamentary process, including the U.N.—ED.

KREBIOZEN

Sirs:

If a hitherto incurable cancer patient is still alive and useful after Krebiozen treatment (Oct. 4) of several years, is this not evidence enough that the drug is efficacious?

If we accept the hypothesis that Krebiozen is a faith cure, what other faith cures have produced such remarkable results? Krebiozen's detractors will be hard put to account for infant cancers being healed by faith or imagination.

LOUISE Q. SUTER

Glenview, Ill.

► Government and medical investigations have never found acceptable scientific proof to show that any cancer patient was ever cured, or even helped, by Krebiozen.—ED.

Sirs:

I was interested in reading your article on Krebiozen and infrared spectroscopy. I do feel a little put out that the photographs were made in our laboratory, and Ruth Kessler has on my coat, and nobody will ever know.

TRAUDE HAGEL

Sadtler Research Laboratories
Philadelphia, Pa.

NAVY—CRUNCH

Sirs:

Your article "Go! said the Navy" (Oct. 4) was hilarious, but I do regret the fact that you did not see fit to give equal publicity to Admiral Noel Gayler's winning the Navy Cross.

EMELEEN TYLER RAMAGE

McLean, Va.

► Admiral Gayler won the Navy Cross with two gold stars added for his distinguished service, "zeal and courage" as a Naval fighter pilot in the Pacific in 1942.—ED.

LINDBERGH

Sirs:

Your article, "How Lindbergh Gave a Lift to Rocketry" (Oct. 4), could

easily mislead the reader into assuming that the "Lone Eagle" permitted himself to be admired by the Nazis for the sole purpose of being in a better position to obtain and relay to the U.S. government information with respect to German airpower.

However, I distinctly recall speeches by Mr. Lindbergh sponsored by the America First Committee in which he seemed to feel that this country could learn to live with a Europe dominated by Hitler and his brood.

BERTRAM J. ZOSLAW

Abington, Pa.

Sirs:

Your reference to Dr. Robert H. Goddard recalls a very exciting period of my life.

As a young boy of 13 growing up in Roswell, I was aware of the tremendously exciting developments going on at Dr. Goddard's. When Lindbergh showed up on the scene we all knew it was the clincher to all the stories we heard. One of the men who worked with Goddard called on my sister several times, and because he had a thick German accent and was named Max, we were convinced he was some sort of a spy. When we heard the rockets were all named "Nell," I was able to brag to all my cohorts that it was named after my sister Nell. For all these years I have believed that. You have now shattered one of my favorite stories. But thank you for a fine article.

JOHN HILL DEFORD

Abilene, Texas

RUSSIA

Sirs:

Your Letters to the Editors department is an eloquent and very important reporter in itself.

Some of the comments (Oct. 4) on your Russian issue were less than flattering. It is appalling that a person from a major state in a major country should accuse you of Communist sales talk just for reporting on the Communists, which is nothing less than a duty nowadays. The bright future of this country depends, I think, on how many people don't have the attitude of "don't talk about it, maybe it will go away."

JACK ELIEZER

Brooklyn, N.Y.

FASHION

Sirs:

Thank you so much for your fashions by Gernreich (Oct. 4). They are just wonderful ideas for Halloween costumes for my daughters.

MRS. ALTON J. DUPUIS

Port Arthur, Texas

IN NEXT WEEK'S

LIFE

COMING SOON

World of James Agee

Color photographs evoke the nostalgia of 'A Death in the Family'

Fast reading for first graders:
A new alphabet works wonders

BATTLE CRY FOR WOMEN

by author of 'Feminine Mystique'

THE WORLD'S FASTEST DRIVER

Jimmy Clark, Scottish farmer,
grabs the grand prize

PART V HUMAN BODY

Fabulous Chemical
Balancing Acts
That Keep You Alive

Step by Step the Incredible Horror Unfolds at Longarone

THERE THE DAM STOOD, PROUD AND BEAUTIFUL

by ROBERT AJEMIAN

LONGARONE, ITALY
Like every other tourist who visits the Piave River Valley in mountainous northeastern Italy, Bob and Betty De Lazzero made a point of going to see the massive Vaiont Dam. Completed only three years ago and located in the cleft of a spectacular gorge 1¼ miles above the village of Longarone, the dam is a showpiece of Italian engineering skill, the highest structure in the world to use the delicate but fantastically strong, curved, egg-shell construction. Nevertheless, as Bob De Lazzero gazed up at its towering concrete face, he found himself wondering if the people of Longarone might not be uneasy living directly under the dam.

It was the afternoon of Oct. 9, and for two weeks heavy rains had pounded the entire Piave Valley. Saturated by water, the fragile clay and rock banks of the mountains above the dam had been sending small rock slides tumbling into its reservoir. Technicians at the dam

had lowered the water level some 66 feet—enough, they calculated, to prevent a flood even if 26 million cubic yards of earth should fall into the reservoir. But everyone was long familiar with the avalanche danger of “the walking mountain,” and although there was worried talk in the valley, only a handful of people took it seriously enough to move up to higher ground. The others had faith in the dam.

The De Lazzeros finished their sightseeing and headed back into the valley to Longarone’s best hotel, the Albergo Marina. Visitors from Scarsdale, N.Y., they had come back to see the 20 De Lazzero relatives who still lived in the region. But they were staying at the hotel because the proprietor, Giacomo Tovanello, had been a friend and schoolmate of Bob De Lazzero’s father 60 years before. The De Lazzeros decided that this would be a good night to have dinner with his 87-year-old Aunt

Elizabeth. First they dropped in to the hotel bar to have a drink with John De Bona, another American, from Riverside, Calif., who was winding up his 13th visit back to his homeland. They had a lively discussion about the purchasing power of the Italian lira, and he kidded the waitress, Giacomina Coletti, about the warm martinis she served. Then the De Lazzeros climbed the flight of 150 stone steps up the hillside to his aunt’s house.

It was after 8 p.m. now, and much of the rest of the village was beginning to quiet down for the night. A few blocks from the hotel, waitress Giacomina Coletti’s three children dressed for bed. Their mother had left them at 7 o’clock that morning and wasn’t due to finish work until 11 o’clock that night. Their father, Sergio, worked nights at the dam’s power plant, and he would be home late as well. So it had been up to Grandmother Coletti to cook risotto for Matilda, 17, Michela, 12, and their little brother Giancarlo, 6. Afterward the two girls listened to dance music on the radio. They giggled with delight to one of their favorites, “If you want to leave me.”

At 9 o’clock the three children and Grandmother Coletti went to bed. Matilda slept alone in one bedroom on the second floor. Michela and Giancarlo slept in the other. The little boy was afraid of the dark and after a few minutes in his own bed he began to whimper. Michela took him in with her, and by 9:30 they were cuddled together fast asleep.

On a nearby street Lucio Della Mora, 46, and his wife Luisa were having more of a problem getting their two children into bed. As the family ate their simple supper of boiled eggs and vegetables,

Lucio’s 14-year-old son Livio and 12-year-old daughter Olga pleaded to stay up until 10 o’clock to watch a championship soccer match on TV. The crack Real Madrid team was playing the Glasgow Rangers. But Della Mora would not yield. At 9 o’clock the family watched a detective story on TV, and afterward the children were ordered to bed promptly. Olga kissed her father goodnight, but Livio refused to say goodnight to his parents and stalked off angrily. The small crisis over, Della Mora went outside and climbed back in his car. He was the supervisor at the wallboard factory in the village of Faè, which lay three miles farther down the Piave Valley, and he still had some paperwork to finish.

At the same time Della Mora was making his way along the hillside, others were gathering in cafes and houses all over the valley to watch the big soccer match. Ives Polet, a visitor from the town of Feltre 25 miles away, had come to Faè a month before to help her cousin Latitzia run the family cafe there. Her husband had recently arrived to take Ives and their son home but had been persuaded to stay on one more day. Now, after a big farewell supper of soup, rice, potatoes, cheese and tomatoes, she settled down in the cafe’s bar to watch the game. The breathless cascade of the TV announcer’s descriptions became the dominant sound in the clear and star-filled night.

AND THEN...



THE DAM. The pride of Italian engineering, Vaiont Dam was the highest structure of its type in the world.

THE TOWN. Nestled on Piave River, 1¼ miles below the dam, Longarone was a popular tourist resort.



...THE MOUNTAIN FELL AND HURLED A

DAM CONTINUED

At exactly 10:43 an explosive roar thundered up and down the valley. Perhaps the first to see what had happened were Sergio Coletti and his fellow employees at the dam. In their final moments of life they may have had time to realize that all their calculations about lowering the level of the reservoir had been disastrously wrong. Above the dam the entire north face of Monte Toc—how many million cubic yards of earth no one will ever know—had collapsed. From the bank of the res-

ervoir opposite the slide, residents of the towns of Erto and Casso saw entire cliffs, with their tall pine trees still rooted to the soil, crashing downward. So immense was the mass that virtually the entire lake piled up before it onto one vast, curving wave. In less than 10 seconds the cascade of earth forced the three-mile-long lake upward into a tidal wave that leaped the opposite bank, clawed away all but the highest parts of the villages, then turned and roared over the dam in a wall of water perhaps 1,000 feet high. Sweeping away the dam's upper roadway and super-

structure, the control building and the model village where 43 technicians lived with their families, the displaced lake thundered into the narrow gorge below. Instants later it exploded out the mouth of the canyon. Longarone lay directly in its path.

All up and down the valley the sound of the crashing mountain woke the sleeping villagers, but few had time to realize what had happened. Those who jumped up to investigate heard and felt, for a few seconds, a sudden, screaming wind. Thinking it was a mountain storm, some people hastened to

close the green and blue shutters of their stone houses. Moments after the great wind, the wall of water hit Longarone. More than 2,000 men, women and children of the little town were annihilated as the gigantic wave swept over the town to crash against the hillside behind it and then retreated into the valley.

The Albergo Marina, like all but a fragment of Longarone, was destroyed, along with owner Giacomo Tovanello and his family, the California visitor, John De Bona, and waitress Giacomina Coletti. Only Marco Tovanello, safely away on a business trip, survived.



ELMER WEXLER

FLOOD ON THE TOWN

In the Coletti house Giacomina's daughter Michela woke to the sound of the landslide and clasped Giancarlo closer to her. She heard the whistling wind and thought it was a storm. Suddenly the house was shattered. She went underwater, still holding Giancarlo, and fought for her breath. Somehow, when the water receded, they were still huddled together and still alive. Her sister Matilda also survived, but the orphaned children's grandmother was dead.

High above the town, at Aunt Elizabeth's home, Bob and Betty De Lazzero heard the wind and

looked out the window. Almost instantly the top crest of the wave ripped away the front wall and water engulfed the room. Totally submerged, Bob De Lazzero pulled and thrashed toward the surface. Just as he was telling himself to surrender, his face broke through into air and the deluge fell away. His wife, badly injured, was still alive, but across a pile of rubble in the same room Aunt Elizabeth lay dead. In the town below, so were all 20 De Lazzero relatives whom they had come to visit.

On the winding road down the valley from Longarone to Faè, boss

SEQUENCE OF THE DELUGE. This drawing shows the three stages of the disaster—which started when the whole side of mountain sheered off and plunged into the reservoir. The landslide's impact hurled water 1,000 feet into the air. Most of the lake then

went hurtling over dam and tumbled down the gorge in a huge tidal wave across Piave River toward Longarone, which it engulfed. The deluge swept off to the left down the river valley. Below, the fallen mountain all but fills reservoir basin behind the dam.





AFTER THE DELUGE. The townsite of Longarone is demolished almost as though it never existed. Beyond the old woman, and across the river valley where the search for the dead goes on, is the

gorge from which, only hours earlier, the 300-foot-high wall of water had spilled. Of the 2,300 who were in the town of Longarone at the time of the disaster, fewer than 200 lived to see it in ruins.





THE SURVIVORS NEVER EVEN HAD A CHANCE TO BE BRAVE

DAM CONTINUED

Lucio Della Mora was heading back home to Longarone and his family. He was driving faster than usual, about 60 mph. In the distance, on the empty road ahead, his lights beamed on rolling water. He swung the car around. With water licking the tires, he raced the car back toward Faè. Della Mora's first thought was that at least his villa was high enough (400 feet up the slope) to keep his family safe.

The wave crest slammed on through the valley, demolishing everything in its path. Short circuits from power lines flashed yellow and red and green and violet streaks across the sky and gave off the light of day. Bawling cattle were hurled through the air. Long stretches of steel track were scraped from the railroad bed and carried as far as three miles.

On the hillsides above Longarone other people, most of them in their nightshirts, stared in disbelief. From the town below, where many of them had relatives, came screams. As soon as the rain of boulders and earth stopped and the waters receded, they rushed down and stumbled through the mire and darkness. There was a terrifying silence. What used to be Longarone resembled a muddy beach. The last waters smoothed the mud as though it were polished. Bodies were everywhere: hanging from trees, buried in the mud and sticking out of it, awash in the tributary rapids that flow into the valley. Many were dismembered and unrecognizably crushed, while others were intact and serene as though asleep.

When he arrived back at the factory, Lucio Della Mora found it still standing. He tried to calm his hysterical employees, then got hold of a jeep and headed back toward Longarone. As he drove farther and farther up the valley, he saw the increasing wreckage and devastation and began to realize

the enormity of the disaster. He began to see bodies in the road, some of which were being run over by rescue vehicles racing toward the dam. He finally abandoned his jeep and stumbled on foot to a razed hill where his villa had stood. Now there was nothing but a disarray of timber and fresh mud. It was a while before his mind could take it all in. Then he simply sat down—and there he stayed for hours, in a state of shock.

Unlike Longarone, which caught the full force of the water wall at its highest velocity, Faè farther down the valley caught the wave after it had expended its initial impact. At the Munarin cafe in Faè, the roar of the sliding mountain drowned out the voice of the football announcer. Ives Polet, sitting in the cafe, heard her cousin scream. Seconds later they were catapulted against the walls. Germano Acimilleri, a neighbor who had arrived in the bar just in time to watch the football match, groped through the water and yanked Ives Polet from a pile of wreckage. But Acimilleri's own wife and baby son, a few doors away, were swallowed in the torrent.

Within five minutes of the time it had begun, the terrible flood had vanished. The moon hung cleanly over the plain of the Piave.

What is the future of the dam on the Vaiont? The answer seems obvious—there can be none, abso-

lutely none. The dam itself stands intact. But behind it there remains little more than a pond. The rim of the structure is now literally in the shadow of a newly formed mountain that towers several hundred feet above it, all but filling what once was the reservoir.

Below the dam the desolation is still more awful—a valley destroyed, a pitiful handful of survivors whose lives have been shattered beyond restitution. Perhaps its only future function is to be a shrine—a monument to the people of Longarone, who did not even have enough time to be brave.



AMERICAN'S ORDEAL. Visiting from the U.S., Mrs. Betty De Lazzerio and her husband escaped death because they had climbed the stairs (right) to have dinner in an aunt's house, seen



damaged but still standing on the hillside at the top of the rubble. They were struck down by the wave that knocked out the wall of the lower room in which they were eating. The aunt was killed.



BLUDGEONED. Ives Polet, lying here in a hospital, was hurt when the mere edge of the flood caught her in a cafe.

ORPHAN. The only one left in family, 4-year-old Silla Gabriele reaches out toward man who saved her life.

CONTINUED

THE SEARCHERS FEAR



ONE MAN'S SEARCH. In the ruins of Longarone from which he was away at work when the waters came, Gio-

vanni Piucci discovers the foundations of his own house, but could not find a trace of his wife and four children.



PREPARATION FOR BURIAL. Getting his 5-year-old son ready for the grave, Franco Franchini dresses body

in salvaged clothes. This father also lost his wife and another son, whose body was found miles downstream.



THEY WILL FIND WHAT THEY KNOW THEY MUST



BACKWASH OF DEATH. Downstream from Longarone, Italian army rescue workers poking in debris and

scanning thickets along the bank come upon a body floating in the shallows of the Piave River. Bodies were found

as far away as San Donà di Piave, 60 miles from Longarone and only 10 miles from the Gulf of Venice.

A LAST REUNION. After a long search, a father finds his daughter at end of a row of coffins. For the bodies that were recovered, wooden coffins were hastily gathered, and

they were buried as quickly as possible to avoid the growing menace of epidemic. Many of the bodies lay under tons of mud and probably never would be recovered.



