

# U.N. Column

by Laura Parks

The Sahara Desert is always beautiful. Its pastel colored sands of delicate pinks, rusts, greys and yellows delight the eye. The cobalt heavens ring the sands like an imperial crown as the recklessly hot ruby sun sails through the skies in its carbonhydrogen ark.

I have come a long way from my concrete and glass habitat to walk in the Sahara. Scientists say that the Sahara has been a desert for over 100 centuries and each year it extends its dominions. Before that the land was green and fertile. But I know nothing of this.

I have come to the edges of the western Sahara to cover a bloody revolt against colonial rule. Here my footprints vanish before my eyes, swallowed by the sand and whisked away by the wind. There are no echos here. I scream. In New York this would have brought at least six police squad cars to the scene. Here my screams fall to earth like wounded decibels of sound and are immediately buried between the dunes and waves of sand.

Between the sand and the sky there is a vast mystery. In this mystery the God of all desert peoples is a living reality. His presence is affirmed with passion and conviction. I watch the faithful at prayer crouched on the ground; they are part of the earth; they are pebbles and grains of sand.

In the desert the dead are buried in shallow sand graves with a few stones to mark the spot. In a little while the grave will vanish but the memory of the departed will linger on through several generations.

Each year when it is time for the children to be born the caravan may stop for a little while. The peoples of the desert love their children and in turn are loved and respected by them. From the elders the children will learn every trick of the sands and winds and of the animals that carry them, feed them, clothe them, and house them.

But the Western Sahara is more than just the desert, the sky and the people, and all the romantic things we sometime associate with it. The peoples of the desert are in revolt against ancient tyrannies and colonial rule.

Springtime in Western Sahara followed the death of Spain's African Empire in 1976. At that time Spain was forced to relinquish her colony known as the Spanish Sahara. Spain after 40 years of Dictator Franco's rule was economically and politically exhausted and not in a position to battle the peoples of the desert, now under the leadership of the Polisario Front.

The inhabitants of Spanish Sahara, some 750,000 people, anticipating victory over Spanish colonialism, stepped up the assault against forces of Spain and were ready to govern the new independent nation. But at the same time Spanish Sahara's neighbor to the north, Morocco and her neighbor to the south, Mauritania, also sensed the imminent collapse of Spanish rule and invaded the colony, dividing it between them and ignoring the wishes of its indigenous population that did so much of the fighting against Franco's Spanish colonial rule.

Today, Mauritania, a former French colony, with strong economic ties to France, is battling and napalm bombing the peoples led by the Polisario Front. Morocco, also with aid from France, is conducting military operations in the north and has asked for U. S. arms to fight the Polisario Front. To date, the U. S., has refused Morocco's request for arms.

In 1976 the peoples of the former Spanish Sahara declared themselves the independent nation of the Saharai Arabian Democratic Republic. To fight the Mauritanian and Moroccan invasions, they appealed to their neighbor Algeria for help and Algeria with her long

anti-French colonial tradition agreed to help the new nation.

Fighting a two front war is a difficult task in the desert. French planes have made Saharai Arabian forces easy targets and the casualties are high. Civilian casualties are also high. There are over 100,000 refugees living in refugee camps just inside the Algerian borders.

Yet in spite of all the difficulties, the Polisario Front commands the intense loyalty of the people and is in control of over 80 percent of its territories, the Moroccans and the Mauritanian troops are confined to the coastal towns.

With memories of their common struggles against Spanish rule and with the special bonds that bind nomadic desert peoples to one another during times of crisis it is clear that the Polisario Front will fight until their new nation drives out the invaders and secures its frontiers.

## VA

More than 30,000 veterans recently discovered a better way to pay their GI life insurance premiums. Thanks to a direct mail notice from the Veterans Administration, they've changed to other than a monthly mode of payment -- at a savings to themselves and VA.

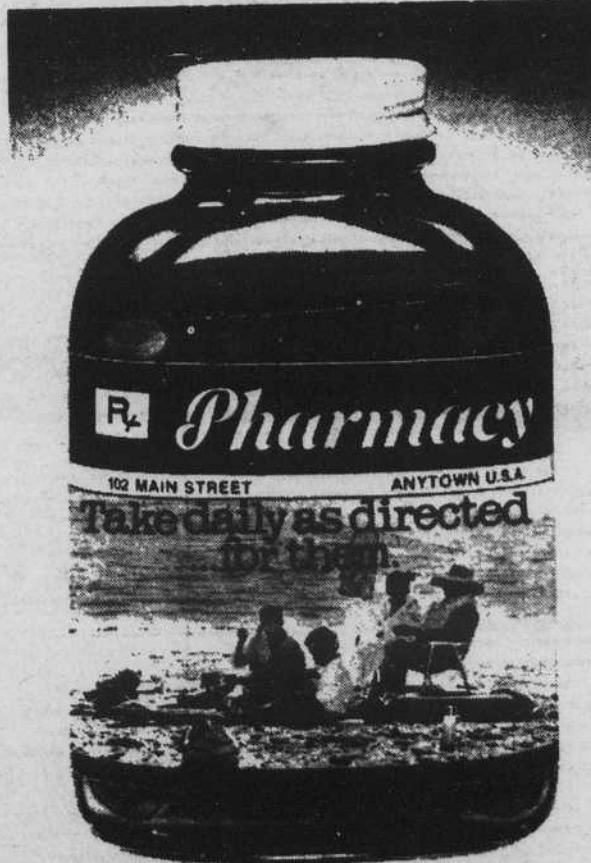
Quarterly, semi-annual or annual payments offer advantages over the monthly plan, according to VA's promotional flyer which has reached some 500,000 policy holders. Another one half million will get the note before the one year campaign ends in August, 1978.

The notice highlights an advanced payment discount, reduced risk of lapse and smaller postage charges for those who elect a less frequent payment schedule.

On the anniversary date of their individual policies, veterans get the flyer as an enclosure to a twelve month supply of payment coupons and envelopes.

If positive response to the program continues, the preparation, handling and mailing costs of the monthly billing packets will be reduced.

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ALLAN A. STEPHENSON is dupty director for Operations of the Office of Minority Business Enterprise, U.S. Department of Commerce. He has a broad administrative background in administering minority business enterprise programs at the city, state, regional and national levels.




Answer to Puzzle

T	E	A	L	S	S	E	P	A	L	
B	O	R	N	E	O	C	L	O	S	E
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