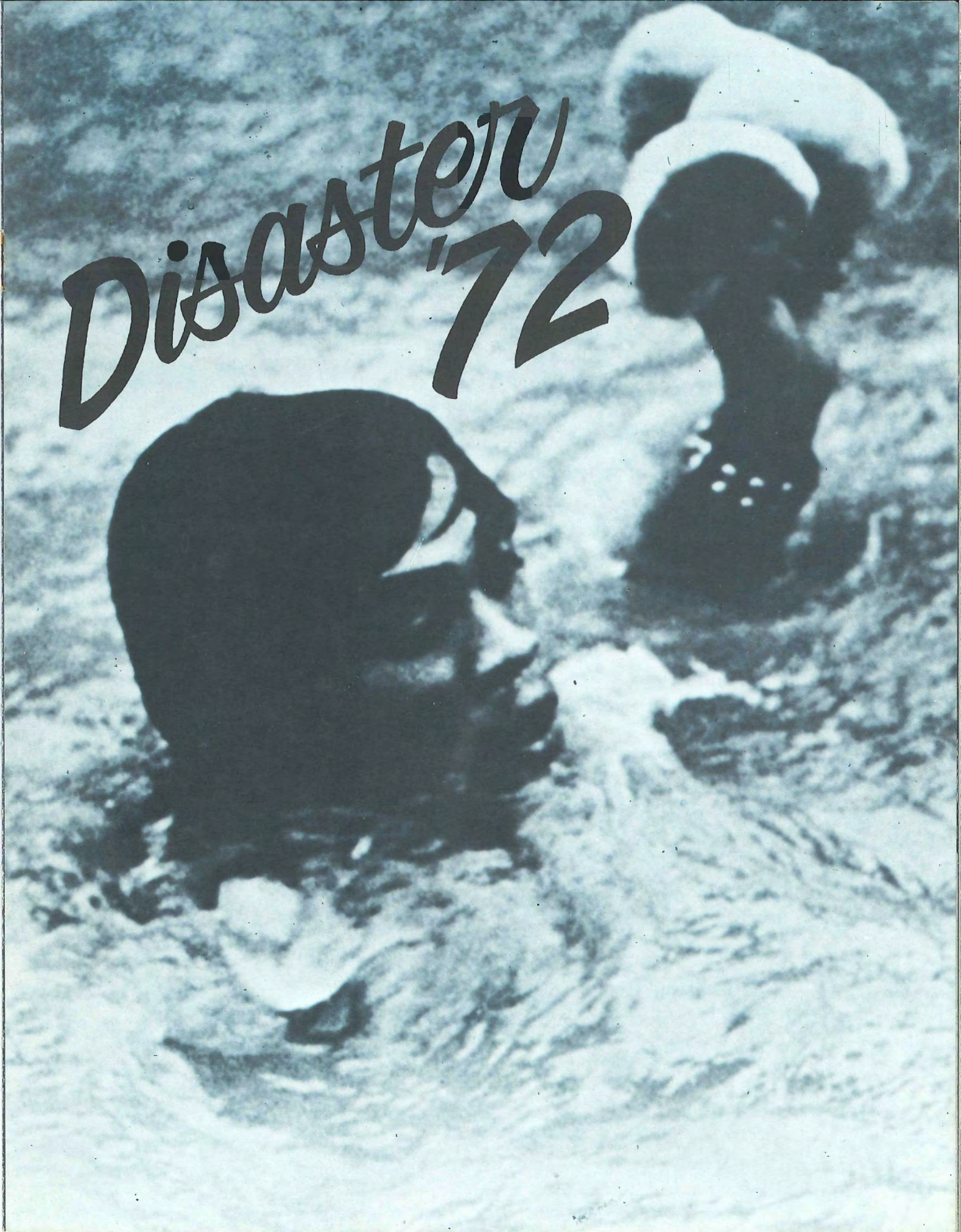

Disaster '72

THEN THE RAIN BEGAN IN MID-JULY, no one paid attention. Rain in the Philippines in July is hardly unusual. By the time it ended some six weeks later, no one in the Philippines would ever forget it, for what it left behind was a disaster of historic proportion.

The monsoon and typhoon-spawned rain began on July 8, 1972. When it finally stopped, it left more than one and a half million direct victims in 15 provinces of Luzon. Rivers overflowed, roads disappeared. Farmers watched helplessly as the rising waters covered their land with silt and sand. Refugees perched on rooftops waiting for food—or a miracle.

But miracles seldom happen, as the Government of the Philippines well knew. Quickly perceiving the potential scope of the disaster, it mobilized its own resources, calling on relief agencies and volunteers. And then realizing that its own resources would not be sufficient to meet the rapidly growing need for assistance, it sent an appeal to foreign embassies and international organizations.

Giant waves slam against the concrete seawall along Roxas Boulevard in Manila. Life in the City came to a halt as transportation was cut-off.

Cold and hungry in the flood.

Old man shivers from cold after several days in a flood-isolated village. U.S. Marines assisted these villagers to move to a safer area.

Pampanga River overflowed its banks washing away homes and roads, breaching dikes and knocking down bridges.

The appeal received a sympathetic response from many nations and from United Nations agencies. Money was pledged and food and supplies made available as rapidly as transportation could carry these goods to the Philippines.

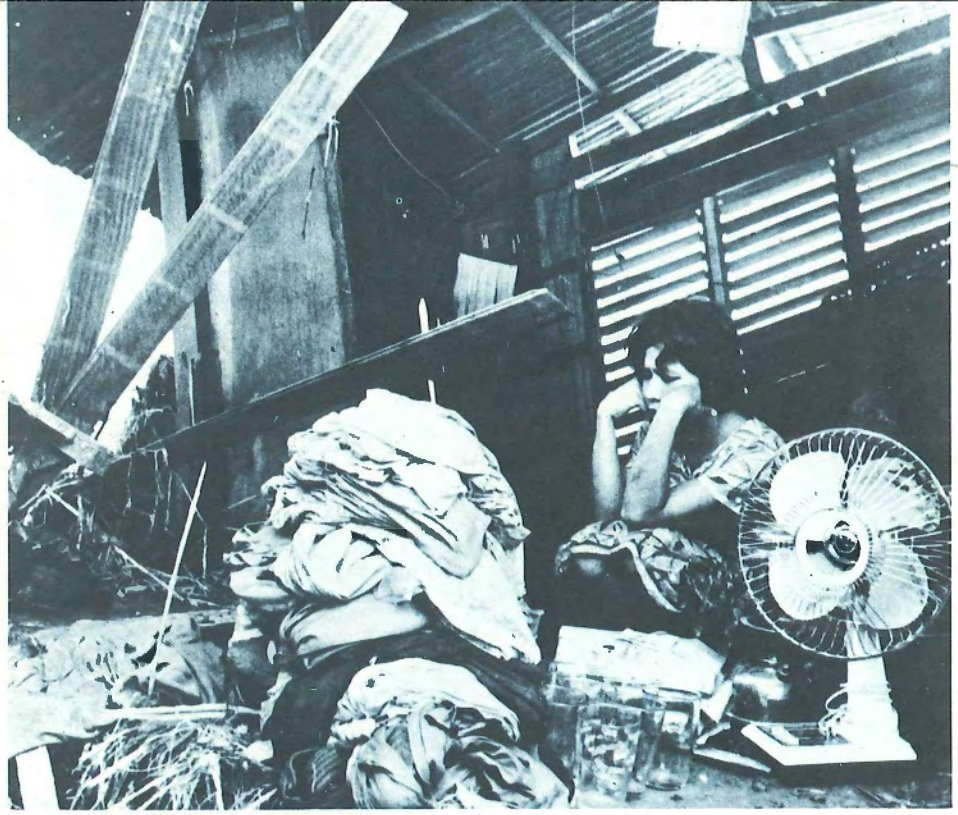
The contribution of the United States was unique —as was appropriate. With special historical and cultural links with the Philippines, and with logistical means available at Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Base, the U.S. lost no time in demonstrating once again its commitment to Philippine-American cooperation.

A regional Disaster Relief Coordination Center was set up at Clark Air Base, situated in the heart of the flood-stricken area—manned by Filipino and American relief experts. Special U.S. Army teams, the famous Disaster Assistance Relief Teams (DART), were flown in from Okinawa to wage a massive battle against disease and starvation in the Central Luzon barrios. A Navy helicopter carrier was sent to Subic to provide fast transportation for teams and supplies.

Helicopters regularly transported emergency food and medical supplies to many cut-off villages.

A U.S. Air Force officer delivers a bag of USAID provided nutribuns to a stranded family.

Specially equipped and trained members of the U.S. Marine Disaster Area Relief Team (DART) undertook hundreds of rescue missions.



Some areas were under water for a month or more.

Phil-American relations were strengthened by the obviously selfless acts of hundreds.

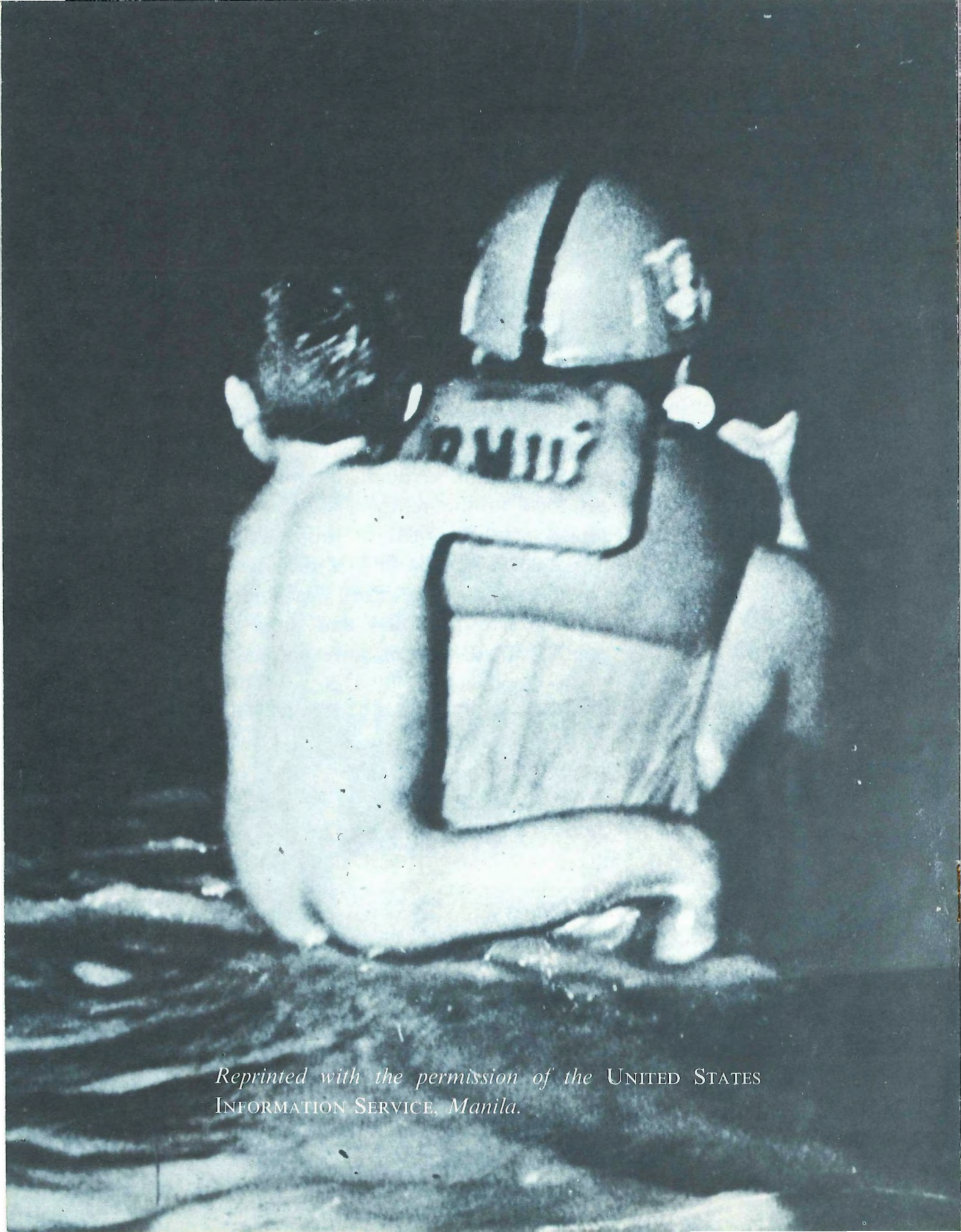
The U.S. Agency for International Development organized a 24-hour-a-day operation aimed at coordinating U.S. civilian and military relief efforts to get food to the refugees—fast. Some 50 USAID personnel were assigned to this massive operation and worked through the end of the crisis weeks later. By the time this USAID effort was completed, more than eight million nutribuns and more than one million pounds of other foods were prepared and distributed to the flood victims by U.S. Air Force transports, by U.S. Navy and Marine helicopters and by the Philippine Air Force and private plane owners.

One may forget these statistics, impressive as they may be. What will never be forgotten are those special moments experienced by those who tried to help in the barrios. One American serviceman reported that when he reached an isolated barrio, an aged Filipino looked up at him and expressed his gratitude. "Thank God we are not going to die here," he told the young officer.

High speed jet injection devices permitted the innoculation of thousands as a guard against flood spread diseases.

For others it was the shouts of "Hi, Joe!" by the Filipino children whose fathers had shouted the same words to another generation of American GI's.

None of these will forget Disaster '72 in Luzon.



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