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VIET CONG MOTIVATION AND MORALE IN 1964: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

John C. Donnell, Guy J. Pauker and Joseph J. Zasloff

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Rand
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FOREWORD

This report is one of a series of Rand studies that examine the organization, operations, motivation, and morale of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces that fought in South Vietnam.

Between August 1964 and December 1968 The Rand Corporation conducted approximately 2400 interviews with Vietnamese who were familiar with the activities of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army. Reports of those interviews, totaling some 62,000 pages, were reviewed and released to the public in June 1972. They can be obtained from the National Technical Information Service of the Department of Commerce.

The release of the interviews has made possible the declassification and release of some of the classified Rand reports derived from them. To remain consistent with the policy followed in reviewing the interviews, information that could lead to the identification of individual interviewees was deleted, along with a few specific references to sources that remain classified. In most cases, it was necessary to drop or to change only a word or two, and in some cases, a footnote. The meaning of a sentence or the intent of the author was not altered.

The reports contain information and interpretations relating to issues that are still being debated. It should be pointed out that there was substantive disagreement among the Rand researchers involved in Vietnam research at the time, and contrary points of view with totally different implications for U.S. operations can be found in the reports. This internal debate mirrored the debate that was then current throughout the nation.

A complete list of the Rand reports that have been released to the public is contained in the bibliography that follows.

(CRC, BJ: May 1975)

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RM-4517-1 Some Impressions of the Effects of Military Operations on Viet Cong Behavior, L. Goure, August 1965.

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

This report is based on 145 interviews with Viet Cong POWs, defectors, and suspects, carried out between July and December 1964. As explained in greater detail in the Preface, the findings of this study, which was the first to assess Viet Cong motivation and morale, were made available immediately through briefings in Saigon and Washington, D.C. in December 1964 and January 1965. Then, in March 1965, this report was circulated within the U.S. Government. The report was declassified and released for open publication by the Department of Defense in March 1971, and is now being reissued by The Rand Corporation to make it more generally available.

PREFACE

This Memorandum attempts to convey how the Viet Cong see themselves and their revolutionary struggle in South Vietnam. It is an expanded and revised version of a briefing given by the authors in Saigon to the American Ambassador and the United States Mission Council; to the Commander, United States Military Command, Vietnam, and his staff; to the staff of the United States Information Service; and to Vietnamese staff officers. Subsequently the briefing was given in Washington, D.C., to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and his staff, the Vietnam Coordinating Committee, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Advanced Research Projects Agency, the Air Staff, and the Department of State.

Some of the questions asked during these briefings are reproduced with the authors' answers in the final section of the Memorandum.

The views and conclusions presented here are based on a preliminary analysis of the data collected. A systematic study of the interview material, and of correlative information from captured VC documents, is now in progress. RAND staff members have undertaken additional interviewing in South Vietnam to determine, particularly, the precise impact of various tactics and weapons on Viet Cong morale.

SUMMARY

This briefing report is based mainly on interviews with 145 Viet Cong POWs, defectors and suspects, carried out by a RAND team of Americans and Vietnamese between July and December, 1964. The interview sample was composed as follows: Southern VC POWs, 36 per cent; Southern POWs who had been regrouped in the North and later infiltrated the South, 29 per cent; defectors from these two categories, 21 per cent; persons imprisoned by the Vietnamese government as VC suspects, 11 per cent; and Northern POWs captured after infiltration of the South, 3 per cent. Captured VC documents and earlier interrogations of POWs and defectors in our sample have also been utilized in rounding up the information on which this Memorandum is based.

The Viet Cong movement embraces a mass of Vietnamese, ranging from the casual peasant supporter who occasionally buys supplies for the VC on a trip to the local market, to the most deeply dedicated cadre in the main forces. The latter usually is a Southern Vietnamese "returnee" from North Vietnam where he received after 1954 five to ten years of systematic training and indoctrination before infiltrating the South sometime after 1959. We focus here on the hard-core VC, who is usually a cadre and a Party member. About one-third of our sample were Party members. The proportion of cadres with military or civilian command responsibility was somewhat higher. (When a cadre is not a Party member, he is usually an applicant for membership in the Party or its mass feeder organization, the Liberation Youth.) Our underlying assumption is that the cadre's views are shared by the rank and file to an extent which can be predicted fairly accurately in any individual case when such factors as the following are known: his level of intelligence and energy, length of service in the movement, highest rank and function attained, and, particularly, whether he is a returnee from the North.

The older generation of VC fought as Viet Minh against the French and by now are 30 years old and older. Many of them were regrouped in the North, but some remained underground in the South. These men

form the backbone of the revolutionary effort in the South and they see it as a continuation of the war of independence against the French.

The regroupees were bitter at the United States and the South Vietnamese government for the cancellation of 1956 reunification elections and the consequently prolonged separation from their homes and families in the South. Many were antagonized by the harshness of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) land reform of that period, but appear to have had their faith in the wisdom of the leadership and its ability to learn from mistakes confirmed by the regime's subsequent "rectification of errors" campaign.

Whereas the older interviewees went into the Viet Minh mainly for nationalist reasons, the younger generation, recruited mainly after 1958, has joined the VC for a mix of motives including protest against social injustice at the village level, lack of educational and career opportunity on the Government of Vietnam (GVN) side, antipathy to being drafted by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) under circumstances making that appear to be a dangerous and politically dubious commitment, adventurousness, the desire to escape from unpleasant personal situations, admiration for an older Viet Minh member of the family, and, intertwined with these as a result of VC political indoctrination, a desire to protect Vietnam from "the American imperialists and their lackey, the GVN." Coercion, e.g., kidnaping, is used in recruitment but usually is combined with persuasion and patriotic appeals.

The extremely effective political control mechanisms of the VC owe their inspiration to the Chinese Communists. The cadre has a more heroic image in South Vietnam than in older European or Asian Communist movements because of the qualities of leadership and self-sacrifice he must continually be ready to demonstrate in this "national liberation" phase of the struggle. The three-man cells into which the squads are divided are a politicized "buddy system." The kiem-thao criticism and self-criticism sessions usually held daily at the three-man cell and squad levels (and less frequently at higher levels) are effective not only as intimate indoctrination units, but also as a continuous psychological prophylaxis against tension and anxiety which could threaten

unit solidarity and, more generally, a combatant's revolutionary commitment.

The VC claim that they "live splendidly and die gloriously," even though their living conditions are miserable from the material viewpoint (e.g., food rations are monotonous and insufficient). Over the long run, however, living standards have improved somewhat and morale generally appears to be rising. Most interviewees believed the war would last a long time and would end not in a VC military victory, but in a gradual exhaustion of the enemy.

The flow of defectors from the VC could be increased by improved GVN treatment of its POWs. The VC convinces its men that surrender to or capture by the GVN will only bring torture or execution and actual GVN practices all too often lend credibility to this allegation.

Defections from the VC have resulted mainly from personal rather then ideological factors: the principal ones are inability to stand the rigors of the revolutionist's life and prolonged separation from home and family. While defectors and some POWs did criticize the VC, they usually expressed disaffection with difficulties in their own personal roles in the movement rather than with the aims of the revolution. Indeed, most of them displayed some embarrassment or feelings of guilt over their inability to stand the hardships of guerrilla life.

A monkish solidarity is achieved in the main forces by a strict puritanical sexual code, and by compensatory strong emotional ties within the unit heightened by an emphasis on the "father image" of the military commander and the "mother image" of the political officer. Violations of discipline are dealt with, not by corporal punishment or imprisonment, but usually by prolonged criticism sessions and temporary assignment of a man to headquarters for a period of enforced idleness on full rations.

The second generation of VC has a shallower comprehension of Communist doctrine and tends to cite the revolution's goals as simply "peace, independence, democracy and neutralism." They consider "socialism" good and many identify it vaguely with communism, although they often cannot discuss communism in any detail.

Both generations call this a revolution by and for Southerners, with some welcome assistance from Hanoi, and even the returnees stress the nationalist idealism of the movement rather than socialism and communism. Many Southerners appear uninformed on the extent of Hanoi's role in the war and the returnees appear to have been instructed to play it down. The Southerners know little about the Sino-Soviet split and the resultant increase of Chinese military and political influence on the DRV, but both generations tend to reject any suggestion that the Chinese Communists might eventually try to use their influence in an exploitative way because these Chinese are not the "feudalistic Chinese of Chiang Kai-shek." Even so, there is some evidence that the VC are reluctant to let their followers know the extent of the Chinese commitment to the war effort (e.g., Chinese weapons distributed to them are unmarked) for fear of arousing long-standing, somewhat latent fears and suspicions of the Chinese.

CONTENTS

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In April 1964, RAND was asked by the Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, on behalf of the Vietnam Coordination Committee, to study the motivations of the revolutionary fighters in South Vietnam, commonly known as Viet Cong (VC). Despite the scope of United States assistance to the counterinsurgency operations of the Government of Vietnam (GVN), the Diem regime had refused American research personnel access to enemy captives or defectors. No systematic study of VC motivations, attitudes, and behavior had been possible before November, 1963. The human factors of the insurgency were therefore understood only in an impressionistic and intuitive fashion. This was bound to affect policy decisions with respect to counterinsurgency.

Dr. Guy Pauker and Dr. Stephen Hosmer of RAND's Social Science Department visited South Vietnam in May 1964 to survey the feasibility of a study of VC prisoners and defectors. It appeared that captured enemy personnel could be interviewed at Divisional and Corps Headquarters of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and at the Military Interrogation Center (MIC) and National Interrogation Center (NIC) situated in Saigon. Defectors were also available in a number of camps, especially at the Chieu Hoi Center at Nha Be, near Saigon. The American intelligence community in South Vietnam, military and civilian, offered generous assistance in the implementation of this project, while GVN authorities promised to facilitate access to the sources needed.

Consequently, Professor Joseph Zasloff, of the Political Science Department of the University of Pittsburgh and a RAND consultant, arrived in Saigon in July 1964 to initiate the research operations. On the basis of his past connections with the Vietnamese National Institute of Administration and of the University of Saigon, he enlisted the assistance of a score of Vietnamese scholars as interviewers, translators, and research assistants.

Between July 27 and September 5, Professor Zasloff and his Vietnamese associates interviewed forty-two persons at NIC, MIC, Nha Be,

and in the project's Saigon offices. The interviews, administered in Vietnamese, followed structured questionnaires, but this enough latitude to give the informants a chance to develop occasional points of special interest. The interviews were then translated into English or French from notes taken on the spot in Vietnamese by members of the team working with Professor Zasloff.

In September 1964, Professor John Donnell, of Temple University and a RAND consultant, joined the research team in Saigon. At that time a very detailed questionnaire was developed with the hope that extensive socio-economic background material could be obtained from the prisoners and defectors under study.

Between September 28 and November 6, 86 interviews based on the new questionnaire were obtained. These interviews ranged in duration from one to twenty-five hours each. They, too, were recorded in Vietnamese, translated into English or French, and then coded and processed statistically.

In addition to the three above-mentioned centers in and near Saigon, the team conducted interviews inside two prisons in the Saigon area, as well as in POW camps in Hue, Da Nang, Tam Ky, Pleiku, Bien Hoa, Can Tho, My Tho, and Bac Lieu, thus covering the territory of all four ARVN Corps. By going to a number of Divisional Headquarters, the team was able to interview some recently captured prisoners, including part-time village guerrillas, or simple liaison agents who were not likely to be transferred to the higher echelon interrogation centers. In a number of instances, the team screened suspects, casual collaborators, and victims of circumstance.

Dr. Guy Pauker was with the team in Saigon between November 18 and 29 to review the general direction of the project. It appeared that the data did not lend themselves to meaningful quantitative treatment, and the effort to follow a rigorously structured interview schedule was abandoned. It was then decided that Professors Donnell and Zasloff would continue their research in South Vietnam until late December 1964, concentrating on a smaller number of unstructured depth interviews, aimed at a more detailed comprehension of those questions

revealed as most significant by the previous research. Until December 18, when the first phase of data-gathering was completed, 44 additional interviews were obtained, bringing the total to 172.

Before leaving Saigon, Professors Donnell and Zasloff briefed Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor and the U.S. Mission Council, General William C. Westmoreland and his MACV staff, officers of ARVN GHQ, and USIS personnel.

Essentially the same briefing was given in the second half of January 1965 in Washington, D.C. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs John McNaughton and his staff, as sponsors of the study, heard the briefing first. It was then repeated a number of times for the Vietnam Coordination Committee, the JCS, DIA, ARPA, the Air Staff, and the Department of State.

The text presented in this Memorandum represents a slightly edited version of this briefing, so as to make available without delay what we learned about the Viet Cong fighting the current revolutionary war in South Vietnam. These findings should be regarded as tentative, to be followed by a detailed study based on a careful analysis of the interviews and on captured documents of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV).

The first phase of this study concentrated on understanding the reasons why the Viet Cong join the Front, why they fight against the government of Vietnam, and how their movement maintains morale and inner cohesion. It soon became apparent that from an operational point of view it was very important to establish what the impact was on VC morale of different kinds of weapon systems and military operations. Consequently, a second phase of this study, which is still going on, was initiated in late December 1964. It involves, in addition to the Vietnamese members of our team, Dr. Leon Goure, Dr. Stephen T. Hosmer, Dr. Charles A. H. Thomson, Joseph M. Carrier, Jr., and Anthony J. Russo of the RAND staff. New questionnaires have been developed and are being constantly refined for the second phase of the study of VC motivation and morale.

From July to December 1964, 145 POWs, defectors, and suspects were interviewed. The composition of this sample, which included

persons who had been detained for more than two years as well as very recent captives, is as follows:

	Persons	Per Cent
Southern Viet Cong POWs	52	36
Southern Viet Cong POWs who had been sent North after 1954 and then infiltrated back South	42	29
Defectors from the two categories above	31	21
Suspects arrested by the GVN for alleged VC activities	16	11
Northern Viet Cong POWs	4	3

REPRESENTATIVENESS OF VC ATTITUDES IN THIS SAMPLE

A fundamental question that must be asked is whether the VC attitudes described here are representative of the VC movement as a whole. This question must be considered in two aspects: the representativeness of the interviews as concerns all VC POWs and defectors, and the relevance of views expressed by any VC whom we could interview with regard to the attitudes of the VC in the natural state, who are not subject to the coercions and inducements that can be assumed to affect the attitudes of captives and defectors.

We are confident that our sample is representative of POWs and defectors, and we believe that the VC hard-core cadres in the natural state, roaming the delta, training and fighting, and so on, hold essentially the same attitudes that are expressed here. The salient factors are the scope of the political indoctrination and the degree of conviction it carries in the recipient's mind. Here there is a spectrum that begins with the least experienced, indoctrinated and committed persons in the movement, i.e., the low-level couriers, peasants who occasionally assist the guerrilla sabotage squad to dig up roads or block the canals with bamboo staves, or people who participate in VC-organized public demonstrations or marches on local GVN offices to protest ARVN artillery and air attacks on villages.

At the other end of the spectrum are found the most experienced, indoctrinated, and dedicated VC, i.e., the ex-Viet Minh résistants who fought against the French, went North as "regroupees" in 1954-1955, and were infiltrated into South Vietnam as "returnees," beginning in 1959. In their five to ten years in the North, these men received intensive and systematic political indoctrination as well as additional military training. Thus, their commitment has developed with time and experience in the movement. It is fostered by combat and other experience and by the political indoctrination which accompanies such experience. Or, more accurately, the indoctrination interprets such experience and integrates it in the VC's perceptions. This obviously does not hold true for defectors or for a certain percentage of other VC who are hoping or planning to defect when a suitable occasion presents itself.

There is of course a continuum from the dedicated hard-core VC to the casual joiner or kidnapped village youngster. We observed meaningful regularities as we became better acquainted with our sample. Thus, given the intelligence of the subject, the length of time he has been in the movement, the rank and responsibility of function attained and, particularly, whether or not he was regrouped to North Vietnam, we found it possible to predict with considerable reliability the range of political information and political values of the interviewees and their degree of dedication to those values. This is understandable. One cannot expect that a 17 year-old Southern village guerrilla who has been in the movement for a few months will know very much about the possible implications of the Sino-Soviet split for the DRV and ultimately for the Southern revolution. It is likewise quite predictable that even a Resistance veteran who went as a regroupee to North Vietnam but was siphoned off early into farm production or other "reconstruction" manual labor will give a relatively superficial description of the revolutionary movement as compared with the statements of a more intelligent and higher-ranking source.

In addition to the nature of his experience in the VC movement, another factor which bears directly on the reliability of a specific interviewee is his post-capture (or post-defection) experience and

particularly the length of that experience. We found that some of our most recently captured prisoners (e.g., a few of those interviewed at Bac Lieu in the Mekong Delta), who had been taken less than two weeks before, tended to be poorer interviewees than many who had been in detention much longer. They appeared to be preoccupied with their wounds, the abrupt break in communication with their families and friends and the fear that these people might believe they had been killed, and, finally, dread of their future prospects of more forcible interrogations, brutality, and imprisonment in other jails probably even farther from their homes.

After the POWs had gone through a series of four or five such interrogations and prison transfers and after their cases had been passed on judicially, culminating in a jail sentence of a specific duration or even "preventive detention" that they realized could be prolonged indefinitely, they tended to feel that the worst was over and to "settle down" emotionally. They then appeared to talk more freely. And because they had been forbidden (formally, at least) to talk about politics in prison, some even appeared to enjoy what was to them a rare opportunity for discussing their VC experience and their revolutionary values and aspirations. A few of the most deeply dedicated VC seemed at times to be attempting to convert their interviewers to an acceptance of some of their views. It is not improbable that in stressing the positive and pleasurable aspects of their VC experience, interviewees were affected by the psychological phenomenon of "selective forgetting," and so tended to filter out some of their anxieties and doubts.

Another kind of distortion which undoubtedly crept into some of these men's stories was a type stemming from a similar kind of need, i.e., for quieting their own inner doubts and believing wholeheartedly that their sacrifices for the cause had not been in vain. This situation probably inclined some of our interviewees to portray themselves as more dedicated and optimistic toward the cause than they might have been before capture. The political doubts some of them may well have had tended to be weakened by the experience of living together with other VC POWs with whom they shared a common background of abuse at

the hands of GVN jailers and interrogators. Cut off from political and military news from the outside (except for some rather stale GVN periodicals) and in many cases not able to visit regularly with relatives because the latter lived far from the prison and could afford the trip only occasionally, these men seemed to experience a mutual psychological, social and political strengthening of their sense of membership in a community still serving the revolution by undergoing the deprivations of prison life.

It is a curious commentary on GVN pessimism regarding its possibilities of coping with the attitudes implanted by VC political indoctrination that only prisoners detained as common criminals receive from the GVN anything resembling anti-Communist political education and even this in only a rather superficial kind of "civics" course. This may explain in part why most interviewees in this sample were not as critical of the VC movement as the reader might expect. As discussed more fully in the section on motives for defection, those VC POWs and even most of the defectors who expressed dissatisfaction with their VC experience focused on personal rather than ideological factors, e.g., the physical hardships of the guerrilla life, long separation from home and family, and so on. Furthermore, most of them exhibited some sense of guilt over not having been up to the rigors of the revolutionary life. They seemed to remain convinced that most if not all of the goals of the movement constituted a just cause.

To leave the reader with a clear image of the nature of our sample, we wish to emphasize that approximately one-third of the interviewees were Party members and gave responses that could be considered "hard-core" in terms of depth of indoctrination and commitment. Hard-core status, for ordinary Southerners as well as the Southerners returned from the North, reflects the length and nature of experience in the movement, along with such personal traits as intelligence and energy.

We are therefore satisfied that our sample provides adequate information on the state of mind of those VC elements who constitute the steel frame of the insurgency movement and insure, short of major future setbacks to their cause, its perpetuation as an effective social organization. At this stage of our research we believe the less

committed elements, although they form perhaps as much as two-thirds of our sample, are less significant. For it appears that once the Front was able to establish itself as a going concern, the less motivated VC recruits could be made into efficient combatants without necessarily having the same high motivation and morale as the hard-core. Naturally, the implications of the present and future ratio of dedicated hard-core VC to less dedicated village recruits for the continuation and nature of the counterinsurgency efforts are considerable and require constant scrutiny.

II. WHO ARE THE VIET CONG?

The revolutionary fighters of Vietnam, the VC, are composed of two generations: those who are, say, over 30 years old, and those under thirty. The VC who was 30 in 1964 (when these interviews were conducted) would have been 20 at the time of the Geneva Conference in 1954 when the war against the French ended with the partition of Vietnam. This means that he, and his generation, probably came to the age of political awareness during the period of the French colonial regime, so that his thinking is indelibly marked by the spirit of nationalism that grew during that period. His younger comrade of the new generation matured after the French departure, growing up under the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem.

THE GENERATION OVER THIRTY: BACKBONE OF THE VC

The vast majority of the VC over 30 in our sample participated in the Viet Minh struggle against the French. They see themselves as Vietnamese patriots who joined a widespread popular nationalist movement to expel the colonialist rulers and win independence for Vietnam. We often found it useful to begin our interviews with the older VC by discussing their Viet Minh experience in the struggle against the French, for they are proud of their role and often seem to enjoy talking about it. This generation, because of its age, revolutionary experience, and prestige, unquestionably provides the crucial leadership of the current insurgency in Vietnam.

This Viet Minh generation followed two separate paths after the partition of Vietnam in 1954. One segment, composed primarily of regular members of Viet Minh military units, was ordered to North Vietnam by the Viet Minh High Command following the cease-fire. MACV estimates that some 90,000 Viet Minh troops were regrouped to the North, in this manner, and other estimates hold that some 40,000 civilians also went North. The other segment stayed in the South. Some remained under direct Viet Minh discipline while others simply returned to their normal occupations, believing that they were quitting their political engagement.

THE "REGROUPEES" (TAP KET)

The Viet Minh soldiers who were sent North tell stories that follow a pattern. Many, especially the younger, single men, report that they were pleased by the order to go North for it would give them the opportunity to see more of their country. Some expressed disappointment that, at the completion of their arduous struggle, they could not return to their villages and rejoin their families, but almost to a man they spoke of a solemn duty to obey their leaders. They all believed, in any case, that they would return to the South in 1956, for they had been carefully taught that the Geneva Agreements ensured elections in 1956, and that their side was sure t· win. Thus the accords would delay for only two years the goal for which they had fought: a unified, independent Vietnam under Viet Minh leadership.

Some who sailed North on Russian ships said they were pleased to be transported by a powerful socialist ally in their struggle. Those who were taken by French ships reported that the Viet Minh behavior toward the French was under effective discipline, and that the behavior of the French personnel on the journey was correct. A few in our sample, located in positions in Central Vietnam, marched across the 17th parallel to the North. All these Viet Minh Southerners were deeply moved by the warm reception they received from their Northern compatriots. They recount that they were garlanded, embraced, and invited into local homes, where food and drink were pressed on them, and where gratitude for their courage and sacrifice was showered on them.

While waiting for the elections of 1956, when they expected to return South, they generally continued in the military service, often assigned to tasks of community development which gave them an added sense of service to the people. When it was announced that the elections would not be held, they were bitterly angry and sorely disappointed. Asked whom they blamed for the denial of elections, they generally responded unequivocally, "the Americans and Diem."

In the years after 1956, the tap ket either remained in the military, alternating between training and community service tasks, or were demobilized, especially after 1958 when the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN)

was professionalized and weaker elements screened out. Those who left the army took jobs in the civilian economy, particularly on the state farms. Those who remained in the army generally continued to serve in units with fellow Southerners. The civilians, too, tended to remain in a Southern milieu. In general, they did not seem to be displeased with the Communist political system that was being consolidated in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). But they said they were distressed about the rigorous land reform implemented with maximum severity in 1955, and accompanied by many of the abuses and cruelties of its Communist Chinese model. Many of the regroupees in our sample reported that they were reassured when the regime backed off from the excesses of the land reform program and announced a "rectification of errors" campaign. Few spoke of political disaffection toward the North after 1956, but most retained pride in the South. For many the colder North, with its seasonal variations, was unpleasant compared to the South and its gentler climate. The Southerners now appreciated the greater abundance and ease of life in the naturally richer, agricultural South. They found the peasants of the North had to work much more diligently and live more frugally than those in the South. Some of our Southern respondents confessed that they found Northerners, especially the women, cold, severe, and straight-laced compared to the more easy-going, relaxed Southerners. Few of our sample married in the North. Besides the difference in customs and the limited availability of Southern women, they were handicapped by inadequate income and, probably most important, by lack of family connections to arrange a marriage and help to establish a household.

Many regroupees recalled their nostalgia for the South with a commonly used catch-phrase, saying they spent "Northern days and Southern nights." "During the day," they would say, "we worked hard and had no time to think of our families in the South. But at night, when we could relax, we would think about our wives, our children, our brothers and sisters, our parents, our homes.... We longed to see them." Most of the regroupees claimed that they were happy to be called up for training to return to the South after what the VC call the "uprising" in 1960.

Though our interviewees were apparently not aware of it, there is strong evidence to indicate that a decision was made at the highest level in Hanoi, probably sometime in 1959, to step up the insurgency in the South. Tap ket in the PAVN, now with more than five years' service in the army of North Vietnam, armed with the military skill and political indoctrination that this experience provided, were sent to special training programs that lasted from three months to more than a year, in preparation for infiltration to the South. Those released to civilian life, too, were recalled for training and indoctrination to serve in the Southern insurgency. All were taught that their fellow Southerners were carrying on a valiant struggle against the oppression of the Americans and their puppet, Diem, and needed and would welcome the assistance of the Southern Viet Minh patriots who had been ordered to the North after the Geneva Conference. Almost invariably, they spoke of a sense of duty to join this struggle, and many described joy, even elation, at the prospect of going home.

The story of their infiltration is familiar. Some came in groups as small as 15; others infiltrated in bands of more than 200. The long trek through the rugged mountains and jungles of Southern Laos and Central Vietnam took from one and a half to three months. (Only a few in our sample reported that they came from the North by sea.) They were well aware that they were marching through a well-organized infiltration system. Posts were established along the route a day's march apart. A guide met them half way from one post to another and conducted them to the next post, where they were instructed to bivouac for the evening. They were given rations and briefings about the local situation necessary for the continuation of their journey. They had strict security regulations, and were cautioned not to question the local guides or divulge information about themselves. They were required to take camouflage precautions against enemy air surveillance. Those who were ill -- it seems that a majority contracted malaria -- were given medicine and encouraged to stay with their group if they had the strength. Those who could not continue the march were taken for medical treatment and joined later infiltration groups when they recovered. Some infiltrators stated their belief that the more

seriously ill were returned to the North. Few of the infiltrators reported fear of attack by either air or ground forces. The pattern of infiltration indicated by the infiltrators themselves was confirmed by several of our interviewees who served in the infiltration system either as guides along the personnel route or porters along the materiel route.

The infiltrators tell of their long, arduous trek with a certain pride. The march was tiring and often painful, since it lay through streams and heavy brush, and over steep hills and rugged terrain. When pressed for their personal feelings during this journey, many responded with a self-sacrificing stoicism: "It wasn't a question of liking or disliking the march; it was our duty." Others, who admitted fatigue, claimed that the morale of the infiltrators was high because they were returning South to liberate their homeland and to see their families again. Though none of our respondents put it into words, we drew the strong impression that these Southerners, who had lived in the North and walked back down over a good part of Vietnamese territory, had developed a sense of the oneness of their nation.

It is clear that the infiltrators were awaited by VC cadres not only along the infiltration route but also at the end of the journey. Some, especially the older and less robust of these "returnees" (hoi ket), were assigned at first to "farm production units," particularly in such food-deficient areas as the Central Vietnamese highlands and War Zones C and D of Southern Vietnam, or to clerical and administrative jobs. However, the more healthy and vigorous of the returnees were most frequently assigned as cadres for Southern combat units, as well as to special positions that required either the technical competence they had gained in the North or the leadership skills and experience they had acquired by revolutionary war service and continued training in the PAVN. Our interviews make abundantly clear that the returnees, at least up to 1964, have provided the backbone of leadership and experience for the combat effort of the VC main force, and in part of the regional force in the South.

RESISTANCE MEMBERS WHO REMAINED IN THE SOUTH

The second category of the older generation of the VC comprised the résistants who remained in the South. Most of this group in our sample stated that they returned to their villages in 1954, after Geneva, hoping to live quietly with their families in normal, nonpolitical pursuits. A few admitted that they remained under Viet Minh discipline, with orders to return home, live quietly, and prepare for the elections of 1956 by spreading propaganda among the villagers. All of them described the period from 1954 to 1956 as a quiet one in the countryside. When the elections were not held, this group, like their Viet Minh counterparts who had gone North, became, as the reports indicate, angry and disappointed. They blamed the refusal of elections on the 'My-Diem" (American-Diem) regime. In addition, they feared greatly for their future when elections were denied. They sensed that as former Viet Minh adherents they would be considered enemies of the state by the Diem regime.

These former résistants now claim that their fears were justified, since in the period from 1956 to 1959 the Diem regime, through its local officials, put unbearable pressure on them. Some in our sample with means -- a bourgeois landowner and a small manufacturer in a regional town, for example -- stated that local security agents, particularly the police and the sûreté, squeezed them for bribes with the threat that they would be denounced as Communist agents. All of them felt hounded by village and district officials because of their past connections. Added to their fear for themselves and their families was a revulsion shared by the peasants against the style of the Diem regime in the countryside, with its petty corruption, spinelessness, and incompetence. They also disliked intensely Diem's family entourage that had consolidated itself in the Saigon palace. These résistants point out that they had no alternative but to turn back to the Viet Minh organization for refuge. Their anger at local conditions reinforced their antipathy for the Diem regime.

After 1959, returnees came in greater numbers to join their Southern comrades of the earlier resistance against the French in the continuing

struggle against the Americans and Diem. By 1960, it appears, some of the Southern rural population was sufficiently alienated from the Diem regime to be ripe for VC mobilization. A Viet Minh network, composed primarily of the older revolutionary fighters we have described above, was in place in the South to tap into this discontent and to organize and encourage rebellion in the South. We stress the importance of this experienced revolutionary organization, which was available to exploit the widespread rural protest. This organization had dedicated, well-trained cadres from the region who drew recruits from the younger, peasant generation for training as new revolutionaries. The recruiting techniques of these Viet Minh cadres are impressive. They study family characteristics as well as personal and local grievances. They gather recruits, in good part, by persistent face-to-face encounters. The training provided by the VC organization, too, is effective in developing a significant number of new, well-indoctrinated VC cadres.

THE YOUNGER VC GENERATION: THE RANK AND FILE

The generation of VC under 30, who comprise the bulk of the VC combat personnel, join the Front for a series of intertwined motives. Many come from revolutionary family backgrounds and find it normal that when they are of military age -- much younger in VC than in Western, or even GVN, practice -- they should follow the tradition of their fathers, or uncles, or older brothers, whom they regard as heroes for their service with the Viet Minh or the Front. Some in our sample were discontented with the lack of opportunity they found in their villages. We recall a particularly poignant case, that of a bright, 25 year-old former medical aide (male), with four years' service in the Front, who still had three slugs in his body when we interviewed him in Da Nang. He spoke of his frustration while living at home. He told us that he had finished primary school in his village and wanted to continue his schooling, but there was no possibility of that in his village. His family were poor peasants without the means to send him away to school. He plaintively described his family life as nothing but work in the rice fields, eating, and sleeping. "I didn't want to live like that," he said, "I wanted to

go to school, to secondary school.' He had told us earlier about his older brother who had been regrouped to the North in 1954. One day in 1960, a VC recruiting cadre came to his house and discussed his grievances with him. When the cadre asked him if he wanted to follow his brother and go to school, he replied, "Wait, I'll go get my pants," and departed without telling his family, whom he did not wish to alarm. Instead of going to the North to school, as he was led to expect, he was taken with other youths of the district to a VC zone of security, where he received a six-month course of training to be a VC medical aide. He then served two years on combat duty, was sent back for another six months of advanced medical training, and once again returned to combat duty, serving until he was wounded and captured in 1964. We probed his reaction to his experience with a challenge: "They cheated you, didn't they? You thought you would be going to school. Instead they trained you to serve in combat. Why didn't you try to leave them?" He reacted indignantly: "How could I leave them? What alternative did I have? Where could I go? I couldn't abandon my duty like that. Besides, they did give me training.... I had a year of training as a medical aide.' A number in our sample, especially those who had been in the North, were especially grateful for the opportunity for education and self-improvement in the Communist forces.

Many of our younger generation respondents spoke of their protest against the conditions in their village. They expressed anger at arrogant, corrupt, incompetent local officials. A significant number were especially indignant about the Self Defense Corps (SDC) or village militia, who had among them brutal, blustering types who would steal, annoy the local girls, and treat villagers with insolence. It seems that after 1960, when the rural security situation grew worse and the climate of tension and suspicion increased, the police and <u>sûreté</u>, the local functionaries, and the SDC grew increasingly severe in their relations with the peasants. Many of our respondents registered their resentment against the rural relocation schemes, the 'agroville' program of 1960, its successor, and the strategic hamlet program of 1962. They were required to quit their homesteads, abandon the tombs of their ancestors, their fruit trees, their familiar surroundings, and to build a new home,

often at a painful financial sacrifice. They had to work at constructing these agrovilles and strategic hamlets, though they often had no enthusiasm for the finished product.

Young men nearing army age recognized that they would have to serve either with the Front or the government. For most in our sample, the great majority of which came from the poor peasant class, this necessity for choice produced little conflict. For them, the Diem side represented the rich, the landowners, the city people. The Front they believed, was for the poor. For some, entry into the combat forces of the Front appealed to their spirit of adventure. We found others who wanted to escape from unpleasant conditions at home such as family tensions, mistreatment by parents or step-parents, and unbearable adult pressure. Most found outlandish or offensive the suggestion that they might equally as well have joined the government security forces.

As the Front extended its control in and after 1960, it became the effective government in a significant area of the countryside. No longer can this be regarded as a jungle insurgency led by a small band of committed Communist cadres, but rather it must be seen as a war waged by an alternative government. This alternative government performs the normal tasks of any government: it administers and controls; it collects taxes; and it drafts young men into the army. From this source the bulk of our lowest level VC respondents came -- the village guerrillas, liaison agents, ammunition carriers, gatherers of the dead and wounded, road-destroyers, spike-trap planters. These were the most marginal and the least committed, but the most numerous element working for the Front. They were the most difficult to interview. They are the least articulate, and most fearful, and perhaps the most severely jolted by their unhappy life in prisons and defector camps. Many of this low-level group are limited in their perspective to their hamlet, even sub-hamlet. One young boy said that the only time he had left the limits of his hamlet was for one visit to an uncle who lived 15 kilometers away. Many of the young, uneducated, poor peasants give the impression that they respond to Front control in a traditional peasant manner: they obey authority. When asked what their activities had been, many of these young peasants replied that they served in "the army."

It is not a simple matter to determine the precise mix of persuasion and coercion that goes into the recruiting practices of the Front. It is evident that a number of their best elements enter the movement voluntarily. The most articulate and committed Communist prisoners interviewed by us stressed the voluntarism of the movement and pointed out that you cannot make a revolutionary fighter out of a person dragooned into service. As one interviewee put it, "A man forced to join would be the first to lose his rifle." Certainly many are persuaded by the very effective recruiting techniques carried out by experienced cadres who discuss genuine grievances and appeal to legitimate aspirations. Some recruits are drawn into subversive activities by the local party organization in the village while they are still living at home until, as one youth put it, "you become an illegal man." Then, like this youth, they may leave home for full-time service with the Front, at first as a village guerrilla. Then, if their service is exemplary, they may be promoted to the local (regional) and main force units. In areas that have fallen under the effective control of the Front, the obligation for youth to serve the Front is made clear by VC functionaries, even to those unhappy about joining "the army." For all those taken into the military arm of the Front, through whatever combination of persuasion and coercion, there is a selection process that identifies those most apt for responsible revolutionary service, and a training and indoctrination process designed to develop promising attitudes and skills into the desired revolutionary mold.

In our sample were a few ethnic Northerners, between 18 and 25 years old, who were performing their obligatory military service in the North and were selected (in several cases "to volunteer") for service in the South. Most of these Northerners did not find it unusual that they were sent to participate in a war they had learned was for Vietnamese national liberation.

III. WHAT ARE THE VIET CONG FIGHTING FOR?

Responses to a set of questions designed to gain an understanding of what revolutionaries are fighting for obviously vary according to length of service and indoctrination, level of responsibility, intelligence, and articulateness. The well-indoctrinated VC, generally those with the longest service, gave the most clear-cut, and most predictable, responses. Those with the shortest service, the low-level personnel operating at the village and hamlet level, frequently were fuzzy and confused about the goals of their struggle. The analysis that follows will be drawn from the responses of the more articulate and better indoctrinated members of the Front -- i.e., the hard-core. In addition, attention will be called to the views and motivations of the hard-core shared by the non-hard-core members of our sample.

The indoctrinated VC claim invariably that they fight primarily "to expel the American imperialists." The VC, especially of the older generation, see this as the continuation of a struggle, once against the French colonialists and now against the American imperialists, to establish independence for Vietnam. When asked how the Viet Minh differ from the Viet Cong, the great majority of our interviewees, including those too young to remember clearly the French colonial period, responded, "They are the same; only the enemy has changed. The Viet Minh fought the French: we are fighting the Americans and their lackeys." They regard the Americans as more formidable enemies than the French, recognizing the superiority of American material resources. The older generation imply, too, that even the government of South Vietnam sees no difference between the Viet Minh and the Viet Cong. They recount how, as Viet Minh, they were regarded by authorities of the Diem regime as enemies of the state. On the question of reunification, all see the unity of Vietnam as desirable and necessary. Reflecting the official doctrine taught in the training sessions, the more responsible and articulate VC members state that the question of reunification must be settled at a later time by the Vietnamese themselves, after the departure of the Americans.

The indoctrinated VC see the American interest in Vietnam as

twofold: They see, first, an American military-political interest in South Vietnam as a bastion against the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. Second, they see a U.S. economic interest in using Vietnam as a source of raw materials and as a market for American products. This view, derived from their Marxist political indoctrination, is reinforced when they see American articles, sent as governmental aid under the commercial import program, for sale in Vietnamese shops.

In their struggle to establish independence, the VC, especially those of the older generation, see themselves as the legitimate rulers of an independent Vietnam. They look upon the Diem regime and its successors as puppets of American imperialism. They certainly do not regard the present war as a struggle between North and South Vietnam, or between Communists and anti-Communists, but as a struggle between the legitimate leaders of an independent Vietnam and usurpers protected by a foreign power.

Another fundamental set of goals for which particularly the hard-core VC fight can be summed up under the rubric social justice. They refer to the program of their cover organization, the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, as follows: "We are fighting to end poverty. We are fighting to redistribute the land. We want to end unemployment." The Front fights for the poor; the government consists of and therefore protects the rich, the landowners, the bourgeoisie.

As we probed into the economic background of our interviewees, we found that very few of our large majority of poor peasants conceived the possibility that they would have a chance to acquire land of their own under the Diem regime. Class divisions deepened as time passed. As security in the countryside deteriorated after 1960, and the VC influence spread, those with means fled to the province towns and Saigon, leaving the poorer element as almost the sole dwellers in the countryside. The poor came under the control of the Front, and the war became in a real sense a class war. But in line with Communist "national united front" tactics, the most articulate of the VC would deny that they are fighting a class war, and would say that there is a place in the Front for members of all classes, including the national (as opposed to the reactionary) bourgeoisie, landowners, and intellectuals, as well

as peasants. But the bulk of their ranks is composed of poorer peasants, who see the rich as their enemies.

A large component in the VC struggle for social justice seems to be a striving to enlarge the area of opportunity for the poor. They are particularly eager for more education. Regroupees who had the opportunity while in the military service in North Vietnam to receive "cultural training" often achieved the equivalent of several years of high school education. They expressed their gratitude, and were confident that their struggle would open a future opportunity to others. The possibility of advancement in the Front even for those with little formal education was an attraction to the more intelligent and ambitious. Two senior VC captains from poor peasant backgrounds, with only a few years of village schooling, noted that they could never have achieved their rank on the government side, where officers must have at least a high school education and inevitably come, therefore, from the upper classes. Our findings give the lie to the old cliché, still frequently intoned by Saigon intellectuals, that all the Southern peasant wants is his "petit lopin de terre et qu'on lui fiche la paix" (little plot of ground and to be left alone). We found in our sample many poor peasants with no formal schooling who were eloquent in the expression of their aspirations for education, economic opportunity, equality and justice for themselves and, especially, for their children. They were equally eloquent in expressing their indignation at the injustices they knew.

The struggle for social justice aims also at putting an end to the abuses by GVN civilian and military officials. Members of the Front frequently refer to the venality and arrogance of the local government authorities, and compare the latter with the Front cadres whom they regard as honest, self-sacrificing, and gentle in their relations with the population. On the minds of nearly all of the prisoners we interviewed was a desire "to end brutality." They pointed out that the Front operated upon the principle "lose an enemy and win a friend." Enlisted men of the government forces taken prisoner by the Front are indoctrinated for anything from a few hours to a few days and released. Officers from the government side, we were told, are indoctrinated over a longer period and at least some of them are released. Members of the Front