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THE
VIET-CONG
STRATEGY
OF
TERROR

DOUGLAS PIKE

**This monograph was prepared by Douglas Pike
for the United States Mission, Viet-Nam**

The Viet Cong Strategy of Terror

By Douglas Pike

Saigon, Viet-Nam

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This monograph was written privately as a contribution

to understanding the present-day situation in Viet-Nam. It

does not necessarily reflect the views of the United States

Government.

Chapter I: Overview

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As this is being written, early in 1970, the so-called Vietnamization process is well under way in South Viet-Nam. What is going on is the assumption of responsibility by the South Vietnamese for all aspects of the war, accompanied by the orderly -- but not precipitous -- disengagement of U. S. military forces. Only as this process reaches its conclusion (and no man now knows, exactly, when that will be) will one be able to assess the degree to which the coherence of the social structure in South Viet-Nam, including both civil and military elements, has been retained and strengthened in the face of the communists' persistent efforts to reduce it to chaos.

The communists have indicated ¹ that they are picking up the "Vietnamization" gauntlet thrown down by the governments of Viet-Nam and the United States. They appear, at least in terms of public pronouncements, to be confident they can spoil this effort to transfer the burden and frustrate the endeavors of the South Vietnamese to establish, after the Americans have departed, a system that can stand alone. From the documents and pronouncements noted above², it is apparent that the communist leadership has mapped out for its forces four tasks which, if successful, will yield communist victory. In order of priority they are:

1. To prove by demonstration (possibly with division-sized operations) that the Republic of Viet-Nam Armed Forces (RVNAF) cannot successfully fight alone.
2. To prove that the Government of Viet-Nam (GVN) in Saigon is a mere facade propped up by the Americans and will collapse when American disengagement reaches a certain point.
3. To destroy the various political, social, economic and militia-type programs the GVN has under way in the country's 2,500 villages -- collectively known as the Pacification Program -- thus destroying or minimizing any faith and trust villagers might have in the Saigon government.
4. To increase American casualties so as to turn the disengagement into a rout.

In pursuing these four objectives, particularly objectives two and three (one and four being essentially military activity), it is quite probable that the communists will make increased and intensified use of what they variously call armed struggle, armed reconnaissance or sapper work, or what the other side calls terror.

It is more difficult than might first appear to distinguish between terror and violence or between terror and war. Terror, of course, is a pejorative word, one which each side uses to deprecate the activities of the other. Without being drawn too far afield, it would seem fair, for purposes of this monograph, to define terror as illegal violence, assuming that warfare, although immoral in ethical terms, is legal in the context of international law, but that even in warfare certain acts are illegal and may properly be termed terror. This latter point rests on the belief that in all things there are limits, and a limit in warfare is reached at the point of systematic use of death, pain, fear and anxiety among the population (either civilian and military) for the deliberate purpose of coercing, manipulating, intimidating, punishing or simply frightening into helpless submission. Certain acts even in war are beyond the pale and can only be labeled terror.

Probably the men of Hanoi would subscribe to this. They use the word terror frequently in describing their enemy's actions in the South, usually drawing a legal distinction: terror is a criminal act of violence, although other acts of violence are not criminal. It should be made clear that Hanoi theoreticians do not endorse any form of pacifism, which would equate war with terror. In fact, they reject flatly and vehemently the Gandhian type of passive non-violence in favor of what they term the armed struggle movement. To get a communist in Viet-Nam to admit to a terror act (by your definition) is not necessarily to show him guilty of anything in his own mind.

In part, of course, this is a semantic question -- that is, the difference between terror and force. What seems more to the point is not language but thought pattern, world view, philosophy of politics or however you want to characterize the question which divides us most sharply in the 20th Century: what are the limits to force, irrational violence, terror, in

that ascending order, in bringing about social change? All of us fall somewhere along this force-violence-terror continuum. Toward one end are those who believe that less rather than more is justified; toward the other are those who advocate more on grounds of imperative need or as principle. As one looks about at various world societies in various conditions of social pathology, one cannot help but conclude sadly that the drift toward the extreme end, terror, is anything but a diminishing phenomenon. Thus the question of force/terror is not one of concern only to the Vietnamese, but one that concerns us all.

III

The communists in Viet-Nam, as we shall see, are far down the continuum. Terror is an essential ingredient of nearly all their programs. Current intelligence in Viet-Nam points to a continuation of this. Indicators, such as information on communist training programs, weaponry shipments, personnel assignment, public statements on doctrine and strategy, all suggest that the communists are in the process of reverting to the so-called protracted conflict thesis, perhaps in some new form. Much of the intelligence indicates that this new form will involve what in part might be termed a strategy of terror. An example is the conversion of communist military and para-military elements into wide-ranging, well-trained sappers or city commandoes assigned to full-time terrorism. This does not necessarily mean a substantial increase in terror incidents -- already the incident rate is at a high level -- but that terror will become even more central to communist strategy than in the recent past.

Therefore, it seems worth-while that a monograph on this new strategy, and especially the aspects dealing with terror, be written at this time. It would not be worthwhile nor is it the purpose of this monograph, to produce a word picture of Vietnamese communist as fiendish fanatics with blood dripping from their hands. Most of the world that pays any attention to the war in Viet-Nam learned years ago the communists engage systematically in what we here define as terror (indeed, as we shall see, the communists assert they have a right to do so). If there still be at this late date any who regard

them as friendly agrarian reformers, nothing here could possibly change that view. Hopefully this monograph will be of some aid in understanding communist doctrine and strategy as they unfold during the crucial next year or two. If it also is an indictment of communist behavior, it is because the behavior is indictable.

D. P.

Saigon, Viet-Nam
February 1, 1970

Chapter I - Footnotes

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1 - See especially Resolution Nine, which contains a detailed communist assessment of the current military situation and represents an accurate portrayal of the collective judgment of the men of the DRV politburo; The Party's Military Line, by General Vo Nguyen Giap; and Under the Party Banner by Colonel General Van Tien Dung. All three have been published recently in the Viet-Nam Documents and Research Notes series by the U.S. Mission, Viet-Nam. Earlier indications of changed communist strategy are found in the author's War, Peace and the Viet Cong (MIT Press 1969).

2 - Ibid.

Chapter II: Doctrine and Programs

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The goal of the communists in Viet-Nam is unification of North and South Viet-Nam under the communist banner. Their leaders have reiterated this goal in virtually every speech since 1954. It is implicit in their every act, in Viet-Nam or in Paris. To most South Vietnamese, this is what the war in Viet-Nam is all about. The issue is not peace, the issue is forced unification.

In seeking their objective over the years the communists have employed various grand strategies:

- * Unification by relying on French diplomacy (1954-58).
- * Unification by fostering anarchy, chaos and social pathology in South Viet-Nam (1959-64).
- * Unification by big-unit war, i.e., 130 battalions of North Vietnamese soldiers in South Viet-Nam, doing 80 percent of the day-to-day combat (1965-present).

Through the years the struggle in Viet-Nam has had a dual character, in effect it has been two wars. One war, in communist terminology the armed struggle, pitted the Liberation Army and later the North Vietnamese Army against the South Vietnamese Army and later the Allied armies. This kind of combat is as old as war itself -- contending armies each trying to destroy the other. It is an adjunct to the more central war, the political struggle¹ waged on the communist side by various specially-created organizations collectively (and inaccurately) termed by the world the Viet-Cong. The individual fighting this other war is the man in the black pajama of the Vietnamese peasant. His mission is to steal people away from the government. His concern is almost exclusively control of the people, as distinguished from the big-unit war, where the concern is "control" of the enemy's army. He seeks to achieve this through programs designed to control the people, programs augmented

and made possible by as much (and as little) military effort as is required.

Population Control

Control of the people, and here we are chiefly concerned with the two-thirds or so of the population living in the nation's villages, is sought through a number of specific methods. One means is enmeshing the villager in a network of social movements and organizations which develop social pressures to keep the dissenter in line, probably the most powerful force in any society. Another is through intensive communication efforts: education, "thought reform", agitation, propaganda. A third means is coercion, force and terror. All, and others besides, are essential to the system.

To understand fully their use by communists, one must understand the political and social instruments through which the communists work. This apparatus includes the Party, the various military elements, the popular front organization and mutual interest groups². All are engaged in various types of programs. All of these programs contain elements of terror, not as a capricious addition, but as an integral part. In short, the communists operate a population control system resting in part on terror.

This does not mean a system in which terror is dominant, all pervasive and always at the forefront. Quite the contrary. What is vital to the system is not terror which has been employed. Terror employed, at that point and in that particular case, must be put down as a program failure. What is vital is the underpinning of terror, the ominous spectre always hovering in the background; ideally, threatening but never emerging. Of course credibility demands periodic demonstrations that one still is able and willing to use terror.

Too often communist terror is portrayed in simplistic terms: viciousness for its own sake, terror simply to terrorize, the communists presented as sub-human sadists

indifferent to the blood on their hands. Those who paint it thus do a disservice to truth and a greater one to understanding. The average communist in Viet-Nam thinks of his system not in moral but in utilitarian terms. He finds terror to be the single greatest advantage he has over the government, one which he credits for making possible most of his successes. This being the case, he can intellectualize and semanticize its use and easily come to regard himself as a finer person than those whom he terrorizes.

It has become an axiom for the communists that their successes are a direct function of the degree of people's sense of insecurity: the greater the insecurity, the better their prospects. This is well known and fully understood at all communist levels. Insecurity is not exactly the same as terror, but is closely allied to it. Conversely, for the government, the more security the brighter its prospects. To the government, security is not exactly the same as organization, but it is its heart.

Thus, in effect, the tool of the communists in establishing control consists of those programs which terrorize, just as the indispensable device of the government, also seeking to establish control, is organization. This is not to suggest that terror is the only concern of the communists any more than that the only concern of the government is organization. In each case it is the respective essence. All communist programs therefore have development of insecurity/terror as their center.

A frank word is required here about "terror" on the other side, by the government and the Allied forces fighting in Viet-Nam. No one with any experience in Viet-Nam denies that troops, police and others commanding physical power, have committed excesses that are, by our working definition, acts of terror. No one can justify these, no one can condone them. They are wrong and beyond atonement. The heat of battle is no excuse. Neither is the argument that every army, now or in history, has been similarly guilty.

But there is an essential difference in such acts between the two sides, one of outcome or result. To the communist, terror has utility and is beneficial to his cause, while to the other side the identical act is self-defeating. This is not because one side is made up of heroes and the other of villains. It is because, as noted above, terror is integral in all the communist tactics and programs and the communists could not rid themselves of it if they wanted to. Meanwhile, the other side firmly believes, even though its members do not always behave accordingly, that there is a vested interest in abstaining from such acts.

One might remark that terror from passion is the same as terror from policy, but in fact there is a world of difference: the difference of one side seeking to maximize its use and the other seeking to eliminate it from its ranks.

Rationale

Two devices are employed constantly and intensively by the communists in verbalizing their use of terror: semantics and legalisms.

The communists choose their words most carefully when writing or talking about what we here define as terror, and it is virtually impossible to condemn them out of their own mouths by quoting them. A whole range of terms and words are studiously avoided. In print especially the subject of communist violence is treated delicately, alluded to, or circumnavigated. Communist writers are masters of the technique of writing around a subject, leaving the desired impression without ever dealing directly with it. Something of the nature and flavor of this exercise in semantics is contained in the following examples taken from communist announcements and reports.

* Blowing Up Saigon Police Headquarters. "At 0830 hours on August 16 a commando unit of the Liberation Army, Saigon-Gia Dinh area, attacked valiantly the Saigon puppet administration's Directorate General of National Police at

the intersection of Vo Tanh street and Cong Hoa Boulevard... The hooligan police faced with the violent attack dared not resist and their losses were very heavy... This was an appropriate blow directed at these lackeys of the Americans, notorious for their dishonesty, wickedness and cruelty."³

* Execution of Two American Prisoners of War. The punishment of September 26 of U.S. Captain Humbert R. Versace and Sgt. Kenneth M. Roarback is a fully justified act, severe and well deserved... a proper protest against the fascist sentence and execution by the lackey government of three patriots (convicted by the GVN of terror acts - Ed.). To prevent further such crimes on the part of the U.S. aggressors and their henchmen the NLF has carried out its severe verdict against the aggressors."⁴

* Killing of Civilians. "We never did it without reason. We advised people who worked with the government to stop. Some of them were very stubborn. We would warn them three times, but still some refused to leave the government side. Since they stayed with the government, it meant they supported the government's fascist suppression efforts. So they deserved to be punished."⁵

*Killing Government Social Welfare Workers. "The (enemy) is concentrating its greatest efforts against the countryside. It is trumpeting about the vanguard role of the so-called Revolutionary Development groups. These are people who are given a quick training course to turn them into hunting dogs to operate under the cover of cultural, educational and social welfare work, using intimidation and demagogery... We are attacking and punishing these cadres right in their dens or when they crawl out to spray their poison...."⁶

* Killing Government Civil Servants. Smash the enemy pacification scheme... The U.S.-puppet vile terrorist methods have given (our) self-defense armed combatants new urgent tasks, which are to heighten vigilance..., wipe out enemy spy organizations, maintain security for compa-

triots... (Our people) have relentlessly demonstrated their gallantry, steadfastness, resourcefulness, determination and boldness."⁷

Note the absence of any words that imply terror. In communist output (and this is generally true of internal documents circulated only among Party members as well as published statements) one is seldom shot or decapitated; he is punished or the Front has exercised its power. The victim is never a civil servant but a puppet repressor, or a cruel element; never a policeman but a secret agent or a lackey henchman. One is not an American, Korean or Thai, but an imperialist aggressor or imperialist aggressor lackey. One is not a member of a political or religious group opposing the communists but a key reactionary or recalcitrant elements (when more than one) in an oppressive organization. Always cruel fascists are brought to justice or criminal acts against patriots avenged or the Front has carried out its severe verdict against the aggressors, not that non-combatants have been slaughtered. Such is the language that can rationalize use of terror.

The second device employed is the facade of legalism. It is no accident that the head of the NLF is a lawyer. Or that the NLF has carried on extensive public communication over the years with the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, a communist-front group, including sending representatives to each of its meetings, even those in Central Africa. All communist efforts in the South are cast in terms of having a judicial base. A codified system always is intimated, even though none exists. Assassinations are carried out after a "trial" in a "people's court". The "verdict" is handed down and then "implemented". For an example of this effort to create an image of code-based law, consider the tone and language of two public pronouncements, the first dealing with the execution of the two American prisoners cited earlier:

"Faced with this situation (GVN execution of communist terrorists), the NLF could not let the U.S. aggressors

and their lackeys go unpunished. Logically, the U.S. aggressors captured by us should have been brought before people's courts for trial long before, because they illegally invaded our country and committed many crimes against our people... To punish the U.S. aggressors and their lackeys for having massacred our compatriots indiscriminately, the Liberation Armed Forces command ordered the punishment of the two aforementioned U.S. aggressors.¹⁸

The second:

"In order to severely punish the reactionary agents and spies, defend the revolutionary power and safeguard the people's lives and property, the people's courts of Ca Mau and Can Tho provinces recently held public trials of the reactionary agents and spies who had created disturbances and undermined public safety in the liberated areas."¹⁹

This is the language of law, seeking to convey the aura of the courtroom, the judicial process at work. It is a constantly-employed screen with which the communists hope to avoid the stigma of illegality for their terror-based programs.

In the Communist-Controlled Villages

Some 400 villages of the 2,500 total in the country, chiefly in the more remote parts of the country (and incorporating about 10 percent of the population) are under communist control and it is the programs in these villages that we seek to examine briefly here.

Some of these villages have been under more or less continual communist control for a generation and have come to be something of an enclave communist society. Not a great deal is known about life in these villages but it is known that certain social institutions have changed considerably -- production and marketing of rice, the parent-child relationship, the nature of social organization, for example.

In this sub-society the aims are: internal order,

external security, expansion of geographic size, revolutionary justice and mutual welfare, in that order. Its economics are semi-collectivist with considerable socialist competition. Its political tools are custom and terror. Its cloak of authority, Party ceremony and symbolism. Political obedience exists in these villages because of villager self-interest and habit resting on fear and force with outward manifestation of inertia, deference, sympathy or numbed resignation.

A host of social organizations at the village level enmesh the villager in a web of social control. Strong social sanctions -- physical, psychological and economic -- are used to force conformity. There is no escape except to flee the village for the government area. This villagers have done by the tens of thousands. Most of the so-called refugees in Viet-Nam are not refugees from battle but are self-displaced war victims, having as much attempted to escape the repressive hand of the communists in their villages as to escape dangers of war. "Refugees" do not come from secure government-controlled areas.

The communists portray the "liberated village" as a sort of peaceful, tranquil Shangri La where not only hostility but even animosity has vanished and the only worry is the intrusion of the government. Those who come from such villages, however, depict them as places of never-ending "urgent tasks of revolution." Cadres constantly harangue villagers to raise more food for PAVN troops in the vicinity; to engage in corvée labor such as transporting supplies for the military; to join local "self-defense" units; to buy more "war bonds" or pay more "national defense taxes"; to root out spies. These are merely some of the tasks in a never-ending list.

Authority in the village is essentially negative, denying the government access to the villagers. Adjudication of non-political internal disputes is handled casually by local committees. All else, especially anything involving security, is handled by district level cadres virtually as they please. Such a cadre is judge, jury and executioner rolled into one.

Freed prisoners from communist "jails" have told bone-chilling stories of communist justice in action. The most grievous crime is "spying" which can be any act the communists decide is hostile. Cadres, as well as the apparat as a whole, have developed a paranoic preoccupation with spies in recent years.

Any suspect may be arrested by any cadre. He is then handed over to the district level political officer along with his dossier and a bill of indictment. He goes before a "People's Court" which tries and sentences him -- to death or imprisonment. Usually the death penalty must be approved by provincial officials. District cadres may sentence persons to prison or detention up to one month. Longer sentences must be approved by provincial officials. An exception is "anyone who uses force to prevent the people's will... , he may be executed on the spot by the district cadre..."¹⁰

To handle a rather large volume of villagers who are suspected of harboring anti-communist thoughts and are therefore not to be trusted, but who have committed no known act of "spying," a "sentence of surveillance", which is in effect house arrest, has been devised. A captured directive described its operation:

"The following persons should immediately be put under the sentence of surveillance: Those enemies of society whose arrest and execution or imprisonment would not be beneficial to the Revolution; those guilty of being enemies of society who have not repented but whose cases are not so serious as to warrant imprisonment; former inmates of (communist) prisons who have not repented. Names of all persons under surveillance sentence must be sent immediately to district cadres. Persons in this category must make a public confession and denounce their accomplices. They must present themselves every 15 days to the village security cadre and make a public report on their re-education progress. They must perform forced labor to redeem themselves. The surveillance sentence can last up to two years at the end of which time the person, if still unredeemed, will be tried by a People's Court."

Thought reform sessions were introduced by Northern cadres in 1966 and since have become a standard institution in the areas tightly controlled by the communists. The magnitude of the effort is indicated by one captured document from the zonal level (roughly 10 provinces) in the Mekong Delta in which it was reported that 2,700 people in a three-month period had taken the district-level "thought reform course". The system employed with such people is as follows: He (or she) is persuaded to go voluntarily to a district level camp established for the specific purpose of thought reform. If he refuses he is taken under guard. The "classes" in the camp run from two weeks to a month, after which the individual, if reformed, is allowed to return home. If he indicates he is not "reformed" he is run through the course again. If he still remains recalcitrant (and one wonders why he would not overtly go along with his captors) he is sentenced to jail at the provincial level. A person who is allowed to return home finds that his relatives have been notified ahead of his arrival that they will be held accountable for his behavior. This is the so-called double-hostage system, also employed in the military ranks (if a son serving the communist forces deserts, his parents will be punished; if they do not support the cause, the son will suffer).

Captured records describe individual villagers who have been sent through the thought reform course several times. One report described a villager in these words: "He remained totally unrepentant, continued to work for the enemy by creating confusion in the village and doubt (about communists)."

One cannot help but wonder about such a person, his motivation, his source of courage, his stubborn refusal even to pretend to bow before those who have a life-death hold on him. How many of these have gone defiantly to the firing squad we do not know. How many remain to fight we do not know. But in such is the great untold story of this Viet-Nam war. Such a person is by any standard an authentic hero of that war. Alone, in silence, facing incredible odds, with no

very great hope of accomplishing much, he fights on against the deadly communist apparat in the most dangerous arena of all, the communist-controlled village.

In the Contested Village

The true battleground in the "other war" is the so-called contested village, with its struggle for power between the communists and the government, between the two contending programs resting on two separate bases.

The communist programs now are chiefly defensive. They seek to blunt and nullify the government efforts known as Revolutionary Development or as the pacification program. Revolutionary development or pacification is not so much a program as a concept, alternative generic terms covering a whole host of specific programs, which range over the entire social, political and economic spectrum in Viet-Nam. Included are the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) or amnesty program; specific offers of doan ket or national reconciliation to higher ranking cadres who quit the communist side (offers including everything from money to specific political posts, but made to cadres as individuals, not as members of the NLF); organization of the People's Self-Defense Force, ¹¹ which is a new village defense group, static in concept, composed chiefly of youth under draft age and of old men--an armed homeguard; the local election program under which the villagers choose the people who run affairs in their villages through a council; economic development in the rural areas, chiefly through improved methods of rural credit and marketing as well as introduction of innovations in agricultural technology; and finally, increased communication efforts with focus on better two-way communication between leaders and led, between the village and Saigon. This is what is meant by Revolutionary Development or pacification. This is the gauntlet thrown down by the government, an organizational offensive which the communists seek to destroy.

The attention paid by the communists to this challenge is relatively new. In the years after the big-unit war began,

in 1965, the communists allocated few resources to disrupt the various government programs in the countryside. Their focus was military. Part of the trauma of the Tet offensive in February 1968 was the high communist casualty total, which caused the leadership to reassess its doctrine of victory through big-unit war. And part of the trauma, a reflection of those personnel losses, was a resounding improvement (from the government view) in the security condition of the countryside, especially in late 1968 and early 1969. The Pacification Program, which previously had not been taken seriously, gradually assumed major significance for the communists. A full scale attack on it is now under way, and in fact, one could approach all present communist programs in the contested villages in these terms. For example, hoi chanh¹² (especially officers) are sought by large numbers of "defector-hunting teams" who would otherwise be engaged in combat.

Whereas the communists previously made little effort to prevent villagers from becoming "refugees" (and may in some instances have encouraged it, to add a further burden on the government), now considerable effort is made to prevent them from leaving their home area; in fact this is the primary duty of many main force companies in the Mekong Delta. Resettlement camps are harassed, or worse (see examples in Appendix).

The People's Self-Defense Force is a primary target, as might be expected. It is an impediment to communist tax collectors and recruiters, but equally important, since it is from and of the village it defends, it serves there as a stabilizing and unifying force.¹³

Village elections, also ignored at first by the communists, now are physically disrupted, as indicated by several examples contained in the Appendix. The government's social welfare projects occupy the attention of several thousand communist cadres whose only duty is to disrupt them, sometimes employing terror that is beyond explanation; consider, for example, what could have been the policy decision behind an act such as this:

"They (the communists) are particularly interested in closing schools (in this area). For example, last month an armed propaganda team stopped a local school bus on a side road one morning and told the driver the children were not to attend school any more. The driver conveyed this message to the parents who could not believe the communists were serious. The bussing continued until a few days later when the same team stopped the same bus, took off a little girl and cut off her fingers. The school has been closed since."¹⁴

Revolutionary Development is attacked chiefly through its personnel -- the cadres specially trained at a school at Vung Tau or the individuals who are part of the various programs at the village level. Revolutionary Development cadres and other governmental officials working in the countryside are first targets for assassination, either directly or following kidnaping.

The second most important target -- and certainly not a new one -- is key individuals in the villages -- not just officials, but the natural village leaders, those individuals who hold no office but who, because of age, sagacity or strength of character, are the ones to whom people turn for advice and look to for leadership. They may be religious figures, school teachers or simply people of integrity and honor. Because they are superior individuals they are the communists' most deadly enemy. Steadily, quietly and with a systematic ruthlessness, the communists in 10 years have wiped out virtually a whole class of Vietnamese villagers, and many villages today are devoid of natural leaders. Natural leaders are perhaps the single most important element in any society, representing a human resource of incalculable value. This loss to Viet-Nam is inestimable; its replacement will take a generation or more.

Specifically there are fifteen types of South Vietnamese who come within the scope of the assassination program. This "Fifteen Categories" list has been frequently found among captured documents; the language varies slightly,

but this is typical:

"1. Enemy personnel in fields of espionage, police, public security, special forces psywar, including covert organizations.

"2. Members of reactionary political parties and organizations, and parties working behind a religious front (i. e., Dai Viets, VNQDD, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao).

"3. Members of enemy military and para-military organizations.

"4. Puppet government officials, from inter-family level upwards.

"5. Leading and key popular organization leaders (i. e., village organizations such as farm cooperatives, women's and youth organizations; trade unions).

"6. Members of the enemy's cultural, art, propaganda and press establishment.

"7. Leading and key members of religious organizations still deeply superstitious (i. e., Catholics).

"8. Thieves, assassins, gangsters, prostitutes, speculators and fortune tellers.

"9. Defectors who have given information to the enemy, who have taken with them automatic weapons or important documents, or who are suspected of having done same; or who were cadres or officers.

"10. Members of the exploiter class and their spouses who have not specifically sided with the workers. (The communists in Viet-Nam as elsewhere divide society into exploiter and exploited.)

"11. Individuals with backward political tendencies

including those who do dishonest and corrupt deeds, yet try to justify them.

"12. Relatives of persons engaged in enemy espionage, security, special forces or psywar organizations; relatives of important members or leaders of reactionary political parties or religious groups still deeply superstitious; families of military above the rank of private; members of families of government officials from village level upwards.

"13. Relatives of persons who have been punished by the Revolution (i. e., in earlier years) and who subsequently have grumbled about the Revolution; relatives of those jailed by the Revolution for spying.

"14. Deserters or AWOL's who have returned to the Revolution but without clear explanation (i. e., who may be government penetration agents.)

"15. Individuals with suspicious background or record of past activity."

It has been estimated that this list, if strictly applied to all of South Viet-Nam, would total at least three million. This probably is what Col. Tran Van Dac, the highest ranking hoi chanh, meant when he said, "There are three million South Vietnamese on the (communist) blood debt list."¹⁵

In the Urban Areas

The communist calculation (basic Maoism) has always been that assault on individuals, as individuals and as key members of organizations, should begin in the villages and work its way up through district and provincial levels until finally a direct attack is made on the establishment in Saigon. For this reason there never has been as concerted an assassination effort as might be expected in the more secure areas, which include most cities. As far as can be determined only recently did the communists begin a concerted effort to assassinate cabinet-level government officials. Prior to

this such attempts were regarded as "adventurism", wasteful of resources even if successful. Now there are indications this is changing. Attempts in 1969 were made on the lives of two cabinet-level officials, one of them successful. From reports of communist training camp activities currently underway, we can expect a step-up in urban terror, especially kidnaping and assassinations. There is further discussion of urban area terror in Chapter IV.

Doctrine

The public rationale for use of terror employed by the communists is that the enemy has permitted no alternative. Such justification, or any other for that matter, never has been an easy matter among the rank and file. The natural abhorrence of Vietnamese for systematic assassination was and is a major and continuous doctrinal problem to the cadres. To the locally recruited especially, even the use of force seems both repugnant and unnecessary. Among the more sophisticated cadres, especially those from the South, there was widespread belief that victory could be obtained by political struggle alone and would not require terror. The response by the leadership to this view was to mix thoroughly the violence program and the political struggle and to call the result political. It also involved administering massive doses of indoctrination to cadres to convince them that victory could be achieved only through force and violence.

The doctrinal underpinnings for use of terror have tended to shift over the years. The present doctrine seems to be that terror is required to achieve three major proximate objectives:

1. Terror to diminish the opposing force, both in the sense of eliminating key individuals and in reducing the totality of power which the other side has accumulated. Terror weakens greatly and that is the single most important gain the communists achieve in its use. This is a hard objective with little of the fuzzy psychological considerations of other objectives. A person is kidnaped and killed or is

assassinated: gone not only is an individual, but a service, a resource, an asset which the enemy had and now is without. From a doctrinal standpoint any one in any of the fifteen categories is someone that the country would be well rid of and that is excuse enough for his removal. But there are limiting factors. One is expediency: one does not kill a prominent "neutralist" because the Party currently is wooing neutralists. Nor is it as easy to kidnap, say, a province chief, as an outsider might assume, and the mortality rate on would-be assassins (as well as the failure rate on assassinations) has been exceedingly high this year. Therefore cost is a factor; the price must be worth it. A kind of priority exists. The criterion followed is: How much power is subtracted from the other side. From this, for example, follows the policy that it is better to kill a Vietnamese official than his American advisor since: "If we destroy the Americans, they are capable of bringing in replacements. But (it is) difficult to find replacements for the experienced old foxes (i.e., GVN officials) who are familiar with the local situation."¹⁶ The measure of this objective: it contributes to the cause to the degree that it diminishes the force opposite.

2. Terror to sustain communist morale. This may not be considered by outsiders as a serious objective. But a guerrilla leader knows that the morale of his followers is far more ephemeral and subject to greater swings from euphoria to dysphoria than is the morale of regular soldiers. And he knows that a sense of impotency is the most debilitating thought that can infect his men and drive morale down to the point where he dare not commit them to action. Always the guerrilla sees himself alone, beleaguered, surrounded, outnumbered. Initially terror builds confidence; later it sustains morale. Nothing so sends guerrilla morale soaring, and wipes out past feelings of despondency and doubt, as a shattering blow delivered the enemy in his lair, one expertly planned, faultlessly executed and culminating in unscathed escape. In a moment the enemy's great fire power, his overwhelming numbers, his huge logistic base, shrink into unimportance. Whether the blow the terrorist struck was little more than inconvenience to the enemy does not matter. Prowess is demonstrated;

invulnerability again proven. The caution, of course, and the worry to the leader in serving this objective, is that the act must be perfect. If it is botched, he is far worse off than if he had never attempted it.

3. Terror to disorient and psychologically isolate the individual. Terror is a rot in the social fabric. Hue was a classic example. Terror to disorient and isolate relates directly to our earlier discussion of the communist subliminal goal: raising the level of the people's sense of insecurity. The communists need only a single index to measure their progress (assuming it can be measured objectively) -- a people's anxiety-level graph. If it goes up and stays high long enough, the communists will have won; if it goes down and stays there, they will have lost. Obviously, and even by definition, nothing serves to increase a sense of individual insecurity as does terror.

But here we are also concerned with the social context, what terror does to the relationship of the individual to his society. An assassination in a village not only frightens a villager but it destroys part of the structure which previously was a source of security. Terror of any sort shifts the ground strangely, as an earthquake. It removes the underpinnings of the olderly system leaving confusion as much as fear. A civilian expects safety and order in his society and when it vanishes he becomes disoriented. Terror isolates. An individual can no longer draw strength from customary social support. He can rely only on himself. Physically he may be untouched by a terror act, but because of it he is suddenly terribly alone and in anguish. A terrorized village, said an American psychiatrist in Viet-Nam, is a case of collective anxiety neurosis, the victim seeking only relief. The victim, in this case the village, stops behaving as a normal social unit; each individual is fragmented within, searching desperately to fix his own personal security. When this happens, the third communist proximate objective has been served.

These programs and doctrine are the face of communism which the Vietnamese people in the past decade have

come to know well. Much water and blood have flowed beneath the bridge. The Vietnamese people are wiser, and sadder, even if the world is not. How outsiders can assume they would prefer communism to an extension of the security being brought them by the government is a universal and never-ending puzzlement to all in Viet-Nam, Vietnamese and foreigners alike.

The impression with which one is left, following a survey of communist terror uses, is that its effectiveness as a political and psychological weapon has been overrated by the communist leadership. Despite intensive efforts, the villagers' sense of insecurity is not driven upwards or, if it is, refuses to stay there. The villagers' anxiety is converted into hatred and increasingly they have taken calculated risks to strike back; the nominally indifferent Buddhist leader is incensed and angered by communist rockets dropping into a school yard; the average man's reaction is no longer fear, but anger.

Yet the communist leaders are prisoners of their own policy. If they were to eliminate terror as a base they might win worldwide commendation but would commit suicide; and theirs is a power struggle, not a popularity contest. We can expect them to continue increased efforts to terrorize but with diminished effect.

One also concludes that to end the military defense in Viet-Nam, to halt opposition to these communist programs, would not, as has often been suggested, bring an end to the long suffering that has been the plight of the Vietnamese people. Considering the integral part terror plays in communist social change, it does not follow that the quick and sure route to peace, to a moratorium on death, is to permit the communists to assume power.

Chapter II - Footnotes

Chapter II: Footnotes

1. Political struggle as defined by the communists does not preclude the shedding of blood; it would be more accurate to use, in English, the term non-military violence program.
2. See listing of forces on the communist side, in glossary.
3. Radio Liberation, August 21, 1965.
4. Nhan Dan, as quoted by Radio Hanoi, September 28, 1965.
5. Remarks to the author by hoi chanh, chief of assassination unit, My Tho province, November 1969.
6. Radio Liberation, April 5, 1969.
7. Radio Liberation, December 5, 1968.
8. Ibid, note 4.
9. Radio Liberation, February 24, 1969.
10. Numerous descriptions exist in captured documents; this one came from the Mekong Delta, circa 1965.
11. The military and para-military forces of the GVN are organized to correspond to the enemy structure, i.e., the Republic of Viet-Nam Armed Forces (RVNAF) or regular military, made up of Army of Viet-Nam (ARVN), the Air Force, the Navy, the Marines and several elite units of paratroopers, Special Forces, etc., is matched against the PAVN and the Main Force elements of the PLAF; the GVN's Regional Force, operating chiefly at the provincial level, is matched against the communist para-military Regional or Territorial guerrilla force; the GVN's Popular Force, operating chiefly at the district level, is matched against the communist para-military Local Force; the GVN's Self-Defense Force as noted above is a static village guard. In addition there is operating in the country-

side the GVN's National Police Field Force, a lightly-armed para-military force with police duties.

12. See glossary.
13. The terror incident level involving People's Self-Defense Force members was about 200 cases per month in mid-1969 (the assassination rate being 65 per month; the kidnaping rate, 140 per month). The Revolutionary Development cadres, numerically far fewer, were being killed at the rate of about 20 per month and the village official assassination rate at about 33 per month.
14. IV Corps Advisor's Official Report, February 1969.
15. Col. Tran Van Dac, press conference in Saigon, February 6, 1969.
16. III Corps captured document dated March 1967.

Chapter III: Hue

Chapter III: Hue

The city of Hue is one of the saddest cities of our earth, not simply because of what happened there in February, 1968, unthinkable as that was. It is a silent rebuke to all of us, inheritors of 40 centuries of civilization, who in our century have allowed collectivist politics--abstractions all--to corrupt us into the worst of the modern sins, indifference to inhumanity. What happened in Hue should give pause to every remaining civilized person on this planet. It should be inscribed, so as not to be forgotten, along with the record of other terrible visitations of man's inhumanity to man which stud the history of the human race. Hue is another demonstration of what man can bring himself to do when he fixes no limits on political action and pursues uncautiously the dream of social perfectibility.

What happened in Hue, physically, can be described with a few quick statistics. A communist force which eventually reached 12,000 invaded the city the night of the new moon marking the new lunar year, January 30, 1968. It stayed for 26 days and then was driven out by military action. In the wake of this Tet offensive, 5,800 Hue civilians were dead or missing. It is now known that most of them are dead. The bodies of most have been found in the past 20 months, in single and mass graves throughout Thua Thien province which surrounds this cultural capital of Viet-Nam.

Such are the skeletal facts, the important statistics. Such is what the incurious world knows, if it knows anything at all about Hue, for this is what was written, modestly, by the world's press. Apparently it made no impact on the world's mind or conscience. For there was no agonized outcry. No demonstrations at North Vietnamese embassies around the world. Lord Russell did not send his "war crimes tribunal" to Hue to take evidence and indict. In a tone beyond bitterness, the people there will tell you that the world does not know what happened in Hue or, if it does, does not care.

The City

Considered by Asian standards, Hue is not old, less than two centuries. The ancient imperial capital was Hanoi. A dynas-

tic breakup in the early 1800's afforded a powerful court noble the chance to seize the mantle of power, which he did. He proclaimed himself Emperor Gia Long and went on to become one of Viet-Nam's most famous rulers. One of Gia Long's first acts was to move the capital far to the south, to the banks of the meandering Perfume River half way between Hanoi and Saigon. There he settled his court behind the newly-built walled fortification now called the Citadel. Inside his artisans erected buildings, working with sketches of the palaces of Peking. The city of Hue grew up around the Citadel.

As the years passed Hue became the center of religious and intellectual leadership, while Hanoi assumed the political and Saigon the commercial leadership. Throughout the days of French rule, Hue maintained what neither Viet-Nam's two other major cities could manage, and that was dignity. In Hue the French hand was behind a facade, the Court. But a facade is better than nothing and in Hue pride could grow. Confucianism and Buddhism mingled harmoniously, first in the temples and later in the university, each reinforced steadily by the growing power of nationalism. Traditionalism became a means of affronting the French, and Hue specialized in tradition. So the old classics were read and revered, the ancient musical instruments taught and played and each new building went up according to time-honored architectural precepts. Hue came to regard itself as the repository of a great esthetic and cultural inheritance with the special task of defending and transmitting this to the future. Hue as guarantor of culture was a concept held even by the illiterate cyclo driver in the street. Gradually Hue assumed a personality, then character, then ambiance.

Each emperor before joining his ancestors carefully constructed his own tomb, fine gardened areas which now grace the river valley behind the city. The tombs of Tu Duc, Minh Mang, Khai Dinh and Dong Khanh are treasured national landmarks known to every Vietnamese school child.

Now Hue has a new tomb, Nui Ba Vanh (Three Hills Ringed). It is destined to become a hallowed national shrine, for here are buried the unidentified victims of the Hue Massacre (others having been reinterred in their own ancestral plots), all civilians. It is appropriate somehow that in this kind of war the tomb of the unknown should contain a civilian.

The Battle

The Battle of Hue was part of the communist Winter-Spring campaign of 1967-68. The entire campaign was divided into three phases:

Phase I came in October, November, and December of 1967 and entailed "coordinated fighting methods," that is, fairly large, set-piece battles against important fixed installations or allied concentrations. The battles of Loc Ninh in Binh Long Province, Dak To in Kontum Province, and Con Tien in Quang Tri Province, all three in the mountainous interior of South Viet-Nam near the Cambodian and Lao borders, were typical and, in fact, major elements in Phase I. Phase II came in January, February, and March of 1968 and involved great use of "independent fighting methods," that is, large numbers of attacks by fairly small units, simultaneously, over a vast geographic area and using the most refined and advanced techniques of guerrilla war. Whereas Phase I was fought chiefly with North Vietnamese Regular (PAVN) troops (at that time some 55,000 were in the South), Phase II was fought mainly with Southern Communist (PLAF) troops. The crescendo of Phase II was the Tet offensive in which 70,000 troops attacked 32 of South Viet-Nam's largest population centers, including the city of Hue.

Phase III, in April, May, and June of 1968, originally was to have combined the independent and coordinated fighting methods, culminating in a great fixed battle somewhere. This was what captured documents guardedly referred to as the "second wave". Possibly it was to have been Khe Sanh, the U. S. Marine base in the far northern corner of South Viet-Nam. Or perhaps it was to have been Hue. There was no second wave chiefly because events in Phases I and II did not develop as expected. Still, the war reached its bloodiest tempo in eight years then, during the period from the Battle of Hue in February until the lifting of the siege of Khe Sanh in late summer.

American losses during those three months averaged nearly 500 killed per week; the GVN losses were double that rate; and the PAVN-PLAF losses were nearly eight times the American loss rate.

In the Winter-Spring Campaign, the communists began with

about 195,000 PLAF main force and PAVN troops. During the nine months they lost (killed or permanently disabled) about 85,000 men.

The Winter-Spring Campaign was an all-out communist bid to break the back of the South Vietnamese armed forces and drive the government, along with the Allied forces, into defensive city enclaves. Strictly speaking, the Battle of Hue was part of Phase I rather than Phase II since it employed "coordinated fighting methods" and involved North Vietnamese troops rather than southern guerrillas. It was fought, on the communist side, largely by two veteran North Vietnamese army divisions: The Fifth and 324-B, augmented by main forces battalions and some guerrilla units along with some 150 local civilian commissars and cadres.

Briefly the Battle of Hue consisted of these major developments: The initial communist assault, chiefly by the 800th and 802nd battalions, had the force and momentum to carry it across Hue. By dawn of the first day the communists controlled all the city except the headquarters of the First ARVN Division and the compound housing American military advisors. The Vietnamese and Americans moved up reinforcements with orders to reach the two holdouts and strengthen them. The communists moved up another battalion, the 804th, with orders to intercept the reinforcement forces. This failed, the two points were reinforced and never again seriously threatened.

The battle then took on the aspects of a seige. The communists were in the Citadel and on the western edge of the city. The Vietnamese and Americans on the other three sides, including that portion of Hue south of the river, determined to drive them out, hoping initially to do so with artillery fire and air strikes. But the Citadel was well built and soon it became apparent that if the communists' orders were to hold, they could be expelled only by city warfare, fighting house by house and block by block, a slow and costly form of combat. The order was given. By the third week of February the encirclement of the Citadel was well under way and Vietnamese troops and American Marines were advancing yard by yard through the Citadel. On the morning of February 24th, Vietnamese First Division soldiers tore down the communist flag that had flown for 24 days over the outer wall and hoisted their own. The

battle was won, although sporadic fighting would continue outside the city. Some 2,500 communists died during the battle and another 2,500 would die as communists elements were pursued beyond Hue. Allied dead were set at 357.

The Finds

In the chaos that existed following the battle, the first order of civilian business was emergency relief, in the form of food shipments, prevention of epidemics, emergency medical care, etc. Then came the home rebuilding effort. Only later did Hue begin to tabulate its casualties. No true post-attack census has yet been taken. In March local officials reported that 1,900 civilians were hospitalized with war wounds and they estimated that some 5,800 persons were unaccounted for.

The first discovery of communist victims came in the Gia Hoi High School yard, on February 26; eventually 170 bodies were recovered. In the next few months 18 additional grave sites were found, the largest of which were Tang Quang Tu Pagoda (67 victims), Bai Dau (77), Cho Thong area (an estimated 100), the imperial tombs area (201), Thien Ham (approximately 200), and Dong Gi (approximately 100). In all almost 1,200 bodies were found in hastily dug, poorly concealed graves. At least half of these showed clear evidence of atrocity killings: hands wired behind backs, rags stuffed in mouths, bodies contorted but without wounds (indicating burial alive). The other nearly 600 bore wound marks but there was no way of determining whether they died by firing squad or incidental to the battle. Among these victims were three West German doctors, a medical technician who was the wife of one of the doctors, and two French Catholic priests, one of whom was buried alive.

The second major group of finds was discovered in the first seven months of 1969 in Phu Thu district -- the Sand Dune Finds and Le Xa Tay -- and Huong Thuy district -- Xuan Hoa-Van Duong -- in late March and April. Additional grave sites were found in Vinh Loc district in May and in Nam Hoa district in July.

The largest of this group were the Sand Dune Finds in the three sites of Vinh Luu, Le Xa Dong and Xuan O located in rolling, grass-tufted sand dune country near the South China Sea. Separated by salt-marsh valleys, these dunes were ideal for graves.

On the discovery of the Sand Dune Finds a story is told that a local farmer, walking over the dunes one morning, tripped over a piece of wire sticking out of the sand. In ire he jerked at the wire and out of the sand, at the other end of his wire, came a bony hand and arm.

The find was made. Excavation work was ordered, and 809 bodies began to be uncovered.

A fixed procedure then developed, now used in all the excavations. Four-person teams, usually young people, operate as a unit. They wear surgical gloves well-doused in alcohol, their faces masked to avoid odor. They dig systematically, using sound archeological principles. The area is marked off into a grid. Digging is done with flat shovels used in a peculiar sideward motion that slices away layer after layer of sand until a strike is made. Then, with the aid of a small garden trowel, the body is uncovered. It is removed and placed on a sheet of plastic. Then comes registration: a number painted on the skull and a description (dental impression, color of hair, identifying papers, clothing, jewelry, religious artifacts, etc.) listed in a record book. The body is then carted away to a central clearing station where the information gathered is posted before waiting relatives. It is slow work, averaging six man-hours per body.

The teams are now experienced and even specialized. Some are assigned the task of probing the sand with long iron rods and have developed an almost sixth sense as to where the bodies are. Others specialize in removing bodies intact, important in terms of later identification. One old man has gained fame for his ability to identify persons he has known by the shape and feel of skulls.

Vegetation is one indicator, the presence of bright green grass is an almost certain sign that a body is beneath. Young children are another source of information. A fourteen-year-old buffalo boy with a sharp eye and a good memory pinpointed the location of more than a dozen bodies, which he had watched the communists bury a year and a half ago.

In the Sand Dune Find, the pattern had been to tie victims together in groups of 10 or 20, line them up in front of a trench dug by local corvee labor and cut them down with submachine gun (a favorite local souvenir is a spent

Russian machine gun shell taken from a grave). Frequently the dead were buried in layers of three and four, which makes identification particularly difficult.

In Nam Hoa district came the third, or Da Mai Creek Find, which also has been called the Phu Cam death march, made on September 19, 1969. Three communist defectors told intelligence officers of the 101st Airborne Brigade that they had witnessed the killing of several hundred people at Da Mai Creek, about 10 miles south of Hue, in February of 1968. The area is wild, unpopulated, virtually inaccessible. The Brigade sent in a search party, which reported that the stream contained a large number of human bones.

By piecing together bits of information, it was determined that this is what happened at Da Mai Creek: On the fifth day of Tet in the Phu Cam section of Hue, where some three-fourths of the City's 40,000 Roman Catholics lived, a large number of people had taken sanctuary from the battle in a local church, a common method in Viet-Nam of escaping war. Many in the building were not in fact Catholic. A communist political commissar arrived at the church and ordered out about 400 people, some by name and some apparently because of their appearance (prosperous looking and middle-aged businessmen, for example). He said they were going to the "liberated area" for three days of indoctrination, after which each could return home. They were marched nine kilometers south to a pagoda where the communists had established a headquarters. There 20 were called out from the group, assembled before a drumhead court, tried, found guilty, executed and buried in the pagoda yard. The remainder were taken across the river and turned over to a local communist unit in an exchange that even involved handing the political commissar a receipt. It is probable that the commissar intended that their prisoners should be re-educated and returned, but with the turnover, matters passed from his control. During the next several days, exactly how many is not known, both captive and captor wandered the countryside. At some point in Phase III (see below) the local communists decided to eliminate witnesses. Their captives were led

through six kilometers of some of the most rugged terrain in Central Viet-Nam, to Da Mai Creek. There they were shot or brained and their bodies left to wash in the running stream.

The 101st Airborne Brigade burial detail found it impossible to reach the creek overland, roads being non-existent or impassable. The creek's foliage is what in Viet-Nam is called double-canopy, that is, two layers, one consisting of brush and trees close to the ground, and the second of tall trees whose branches spread out high above. Beneath is permanent twilight. Brigade engineers spent two days blasting a hole through the double-canopy by exploding dynamite dangled on long wires beneath their hovering helicopters. This cleared a landing pad for helicopter hearses. Quite clearly this was a spot where death could be easily hidden even without burial.

The Da Mai Creek bed, for nearly a hundred yards up the ravine, yielded skulls, skeletons and pieces of human bones. The dead had been left above ground (for the animists among them, this meant their souls would wander the lonely earth forever, since such is the fate of the unburied dead), and 20 months in the running stream had left bones clean and white.

Local authorities later released a list of 428 names of persons whom they said had been positively identified from the creek bed remains. The communists' rationale for their excesses was elimination of "traitors to the revolution." The list of 428 victims breaks down as follows: 25 percent military: two officers, the rest NCO's and enlisted men; 25 percent students; 50 percent civil servants, village and hamlet officials, service personnel of various categories, and ordinary workers.

The fourth or Phu Thu Salt Flat Finds came in November 1969, near the fishing village of Luong Vien some ten miles east of Hue, another desolate region. Government troops early in the month began an intensive effort to clear the area of remnants of the local communist organization. People of Luong Vien, population 700, who had remained silent in the presence of

troops for 20 months apparently felt secure enough from communist revenge to break silence and lead officials to the find. At this writing, excavation work is under way. Based on descriptions from villagers whose memories are not always clear, local officials estimate the number of bodies at Phu Thu to be at least 300 and possibly 1,000.

The story remains uncompleted. If the estimates by Hue officials are even approximately correct, nearly 2,000 people are still missing. Recapitulation of the dead and missing:

After the battle, the GVN's total estimated civilian casualties resulting from Battle of Hue

(A map of the Hue area showing locations of major body finds is inside the back cover of this monograph.)

Communist Rationale

The killing in Hue that added up to the Hue Massacre far exceeded in numbers any atrocity by the communists previously in South Viet-Nam. The difference was not only one in degree but one in kind. The character of the terror that emerges from an examination of Hue is quite distinct from communist terror acts elsewhere, frequent or brutal as they may have been. The previously noted objectives for communist terror (see page 21) scarcely fit for Hue. The terror in Hue was not a morale building act--the quick blow deep into the enemy's lair which proves enemy vulnerability and the guerrilla's omnipotence and which is quite different from gunning down civilians in areas under guerrilla control. Nor was it terror to advertise the cause. Nor to disorient and psychologically isolate the individual, since the vast majority of the killings were done secretly. Nor, beyond the blacklist killings, was it terror to eliminate opposing forces. Hue did not follow the pattern of terror to provoke governmental over-response since it resulted in only what might have been anticipated--government assistance. There were elements of each objective, true, but none serves to explain the widespread and diverse pattern of death meted out by the communists.

What is offered here is a hypothesis which will suggest logic and system behind what appears to be simple, random slaughter. Before dealing with it, let us consider three facts which constantly reassert themselves to a Hue visitor seeking to discover what exactly happened there and, more importantly, exactly why it happened. All three fly in the face of common sense and contradict to a degree what has been written. Yet, in talking to all sources--province chief, police chief, American advisor, eye witness, captured prisoner, hoi chanh (defector) or those few who miraculously escaped a death scene --the three facts emerge again and again.

The first fact, and perhaps the most important, is that despite contrary appearances virtually no communist killing was due to rage, frustration, or panic during the communist withdrawal at the end. Such explanations are frequently heard, but they fail to hold up under scrutiny. Quite the contrary, to trace back any single killing is to discover that almost without exception it was the result of a decision rational and justifiable

in the communist mind. In fact, most killings were, from the communist calculation, imperative.

The second fact is that, as far as can be determined, virtually all killings were done by local communist cadres and not by the PAVN troops or Northerners or other outside communists. Some 12,000 PAVN troops fought the battle of Hue and killed civilians in the process but this was incidental to their military effort. Most of the 150 communist civilian cadres operating within the city were local, that is from the Thua Thien province area. They were the ones who issued the death orders. Whether they acted on instructions from higher headquarters (and the communist organizational system is such that one must assume they did), and, if so, what exactly those orders were, no one yet knows for sure.

The third fact is that beyond "example" executions of prominent "tyrants", most of the killings were done secretly with extraordinary effort made to hide the bodies. Most outsiders have a mental picture of Hue as a place of public executions and prominent mass burial mounds of fresh-turned earth. Only in the early days were there well-publicized executions and these were relatively few. The burial sites in the city were easily discovered because it is difficult to create a graveyard in a densely populated area without someone noticing it. All the other finds were well hidden, all in terrain lending itself to concealment, probably the reason the sites were chosen in the first place. A body in the sand dunes is as difficult to find as a sea shell pushed deep into a sandy beach over which a wave has washed. Da Mai Creek is in the remotest part of the province and must have required great exertion by the communists to lead their victims there. Had not the three hoi chanh led searchers to the wild uninhabited spot the bodies might well remain undiscovered to this day. A visit to all sites leaves one with the impression that the communists made a major effort to hide their deeds.

The hypothesis offered here connects and fixes in time the communist assessment of their prospects for staying in Hue with the kind of death order issued. It seems clear from sifting evidence that they had no single unchanging assessment with regard to themselves and their future in Hue, but rather that changing situations during the course of the battle altered their

prospects and their intentions. It also seems equally clear from the evidence that there was no single communist policy on death orders; instead the kind of death order issued changed during the course of the battle. The correlation between these two is high and divides into three phases. The hypothesis therefore is that as communist plans during the Battle of Hue changed so did the nature of the death orders issued. This conclusion is based on overt communist statements, testimony by prisoners¹ and hoi chanh, accounts of eye witnesses, captured documents and the internal logic of the communist situation.

Hue: Phase I

When the communists were preparing their attack on Hue, their cadres at the sand table exercises deep in the jungle told officers they would be in the city seven days and no more. A message was passed on to most of the attackers on the eve of the battle. It was stated more or less openly in public pronouncements. Radio Hanoi, on February 1 for example, described the attack as an effort "to remove Saigon power at certain levels, accelerating the process of decomposition of the Saigon administration."

Thinking in Phase I was well expressed in a PRP resolution issued to cadres on the eve of the offensive:

"Be sure that the liberated ... cities are successfully consolidated. Quickly activate armed and political units, establish administrative organs at all echelons, promote (civilian) defense and combat support activities, get the people to establish an air defense system and generally motivate them to be ready to act against the enemy when he counterattacks..."

This was the limited view at the start--held momentarily. Subsequent developments in Hue were reported in different terms. Radio Hanoi on February 4 said:

"After one hour's fighting the Revolutionary Armed Forces occupied the residence of the puppet provincial governor (in Hue), the prison and the offices of the puppet administration... The Revolutionary Armed Forces punished most cruel agents of the enemy and seized control of the streets... rounded up and punished dozen of cruel agents and caused the enemy organs

of control and oppression to crumble..."

During the brief stay in Hue, the civilian cadres, accompanied by execution squads, were to round up and execute key individuals whose elimination would greatly weaken the government's administrative apparatus following communist withdrawal. This was the blacklist period, the time of the drumhead court. Cadres with lists of names and addresses on clipboards appeared and called into kangaroo court various "enemies of the Revolution." Their trials were public, usually in the courtyard of a temporary communist headquarters. The trials lasted about ten minutes each and there are no known not-guilty verdicts. Punishment, invariably execution, was meted out immediately. Bodies were either hastily buried or turned over to relatives. Singled out for this treatment were civil servants, especially those involved in security or police affairs, military officers and some non-commissioned officers, plus selected non-official but natural leaders of the community, chiefly educators and religionists.

With the exception of a particularly venomous attack on Hue intellectuals, the Phase I pattern was standard operating procedure for communists in Viet-Nam. It was the sort of thing that had been going on systematically in the villages for ten years. Permanent blacklists, prepared by zonal or inter-zone Party headquarters have long existed for use throughout the country, whenever an opportunity presents itself. Quite obviously not all the people named in the lists used in Hue were liquidated. One meets today a surprisingly large number of people who obviously were listed, who stayed in the city throughout the battle, but escaped. Throughout the 24-day period the communist cadres were busy hunting down persons on their blacklists, but after a few days their major efforts were turned into a new channel.

Hue: Phase II

In the first few days, the Tet offensive affairs progressed so well for the communists in Hue (although not to the south, where Party chiefs received some rather grim evaluations from cadres in the midst of the offensive in the Mekong Delta) that for a brief euphoric moment they believed they could hold the city. Probably the assessment that the communist were in

Hue to stay was not shared at the higher echelons, but it was widespread in Hue and at the Thua Thien provincial level. One intercepted communist message, apparently written February 2, exhorted cadres in Hue to hold fast, declaring: "A new era, a real revolutionary period has begun (because of our Hue victories) and we need only to make swift assault (in Hue) to secure our target and gain total victory."

The Hanoi official Party paper Nhan Dan echoed the theme: "Like a thunderbolt, a general offensive has been hurled against the U.S. and the puppets... The U.S.-puppet machine has been duly punished... The puppet administrative organs... have suddenly collapsed. The Thieu-Ky administration cannot escape from complete collapse. The puppet troops have become extremely weak and cannot avoid being completely exterminated."²

Of course, some of this verbiage is simply exhortation to the faithful, and, as is always the case in reading communist output, it is most difficult to distinguish between belief and wish. But testimony from prisoners and hoi chanh, as well as intercepted battle messages, indicate that both rank and file and cadres believed for a few days they were permanently in Hue, and they acted accordingly.

Among their acts was to extend the death order and launch what in effect was a period of social reconstruction, communist style. Orders went out, apparently from the provincial level of the Party, to round up what one prisoner termed "social negatives," that is, those individuals or members of groups who represented potential danger or liability in the new social order. This was quite impersonal, not a blacklist of names but a blacklist of titles and positions held in the old society, directed not against people as such but against "social units."

As seen earlier in North Viet-Nam and in Communist China, the communists were seeking to break up the local social order by eliminating leaders and key figures in religious organizations (Buddhist bonzes, Catholic priests), political parties (four members of the Central Committee of Viet-Nam), social movements such as women's organizations and youth groups, including, what otherwise would be totally inexplicable, the execution of pro-communist student leaders from middle and upper class families.

In consonance with this, killing in some instances was done by family unit. In one well-documented case during this period a squad with a death order entered the home of a prominent community leader and shot him, his wife, his married son and daughter-in-law, his young unmarried daughter, a male and female servant and their baby. The family cat was strangled; the family dog was clubbed to death; the goldfish scooped out of the fishbowl and tossed on the floor. When the communists left, no life remained in the house. A "social unit" had been eliminated. (Appalling though it was, one stands in that family's living room and, as a parent, thinks perhaps this was the kindest way, for in Hue one is haunted by the feeling that bereavement is worse than death).

Phase II also saw an intensive effort to eliminate intellectuals, who are perhaps more numerous in Hue than elsewhere in Viet-Nam. Surviving Hue intellectuals explain this in terms of a long-standing communist hatred of Hue intellectuals, who were anti-communist in the worst or most insulting manner: they refused to take communism seriously. Hue intellectuals have always been contemptuous of communist ideology, brushing it aside as a latecomer to the history of ideas and not a very significant one at that. Hue, being a bastion of traditionalism, with its intellectuals steeped in Confucian learning intertwined with Buddhism, did not, even in the fermenting years of the 1920's and 1930's, debate the merits of communism. Hue ignored it. The intellectuals in the university, for example, in a year's course in political thought dispense with Marxism-Leninism in a half hour lecture, painting it as a set of shallow barbarian political slogans with none of the depth and time-tested reality of Confucian learning, nor any of the splendor and soaring humanism of Buddhist thought. Since the communist, especially the communist from Hue, takes his dogma seriously, he can become demoniac when dismissed by a Confucian as a philosophic ignoramus, or by a Buddhist as a trivial materialist. Or, worse than being dismissed, ignored through the years. So with the righteousness of a true believer, he sought to strike back and eliminate this challenge of indifference. Hue intellectuals now say the hunt-down in their ranks has taught them a hard lesson, to take communism seriously, if not as an idea, at least as a force loose in their world.