

MEMORANDUM  
RM-5267/2-ISA/ARPA  
MAY 1968  
(ORIGINAL EDITION: JULY 1967)

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON  
VIET CONG OPERATIONS  
IN THE VILLAGES

W. P. Davison

PREPARED FOR:  
THE OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
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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.

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For a description of the Viet Cong Motivation and Morale Project and interviewing process, the reader should first consult W. Phillips Davison, *User's Guide to the Rand Interviews in Vietnam*, R-1024-ARPA, March 1972.

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PREFACE

The following account of life in South Vietnamese villages controlled by the Viet Cong is based mainly on an examination of approximately 200 extended interviews with persons who had lived in the villages, or who had become familiar with village life while serving with the Viet Cong armed forces. About two thirds of the respondents were defectors from the Viet Cong (or "ralliers" as they are called in Saigon). The remainder were military or civilian captives, or refugees. A more detailed description of those interviewed will be found in the Appendix. In addition, Viet Cong documents captured during 1965 and the first half of 1966 were reviewed in order to compare their content with the statements of the respondents. These documents were translated and made available to RAND through the courtesy of MAC/V-J-2.

Though both interviews and captured documents abound in observations about village life, their contents are not limited to this kind of information. Nearly all the interviews were made in the context of a larger study conducted by The RAND Corporation under contract with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Department of Defense. In addition, a small number were made by military authorities in Saigon. In both cases, the focus of the interviews tended to be on subjects that were more immediately related to military morale or operations, and only a relatively small number of the questions asked dealt directly with village life. Similarly, the captured documents that were used cover a wide range of subject matter.

This study, then, is an instance of "secondary analysis," in that the data have been used for a purpose that was not originally envisaged. For this reason, some aspects of village life have not been explored as thoroughly as one might wish. The picture presented here is an unfinished one, though certain outlines stand out boldly. Consequently the title of the Memorandum begins with the phrase, "Some Observations on. . . ."

Since the analysis was prepared in the summer of 1966, none of the interviews and documents used were dated later than the spring of 1966. Later inspection of similar materials from the second half of 1966 and early 1967 did not, however, suggest that village life under the Viet Cong had changed in any essential respect. Whether important changes have taken place as a result of events in late 1967 and the first half of 1968 is not known.

That there is a fairly stable pattern of Viet Cong policies and operations in the Vietnamese countryside is suggested by the rather striking parallels between observations made in this study and those arising from earlier research by Douglas Pike.\* The two analyses were conducted completely separately -- indeed neither researcher knew of the work of the other -- and were based on different bodies of material. The two sets of observations thus tend to confirm each other at least partially.

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\* Douglas Pike, Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1966.

SUMMARY

The great strength of the Viet Cong derives from its superb organization in the countryside, by which the majority of those who support the movement have been simply caught up, often unwillingly, sometimes at first unawares. Ideological and material appeals are important, but play a secondary role.

This analysis, based primarily on some 200 interviews with former Viet Cong personnel who defected or were captured during 1964-1966, describes the insurgent organization, how it was built up, and how it is used to support Viet Cong military activities. Where possible, statements of captives and defectors have been checked against information contained in captured documents.

Examination of these materials makes it abundantly clear that popular support for the Viet Cong decreased substantially during the 1964 to 1966 period. This change in sympathies seems to have been based in part on acquaintance with what life is really like under Viet Cong rule and in part on the fact that fewer rural people expected the insurgents to be successful.

Before assuming control of a hamlet or village, Viet Cong agents customarily prepare the ground by recruiting supporters, collecting intelligence, and engaging in selective terrorism. Few South Vietnamese join the movement spontaneously; they have first to be persuaded. The appeals are many: nationalistic, promises of glory, adventure, social equality, land, and escape from personal problems. About to be drafted into the government

forces, some young men prefer to join the guerrillas so they can stay close to home. When persuasion alone proves ineffective, recruiting agents may entrap a young man by destroying his identity card, thus making him an "illegal person" in the eyes of the government, or by letting it be known that he is already working for the Viet Cong.

While expanding and strengthening their own organization, the Viet Cong disorganize the local administration by assassination and other forms of terror and intimidation. However grisly some of their methods are, they do not use terror indiscriminately. Officials and government sympathizers who are killed are likely to have been either intensely unpopular, on the one hand, or able and well liked and therefore particularly dangerous to Viet Cong purposes, on the other. Nonpolitical villagers are sometimes killed to demonstrate that nobody is safe unless he cooperates. But Viet Cong organizers do not rely on terror alone: They can be friendly and helpful. Above all, they talk constantly, and eventually people have to listen.

When the time is ripe, the insurgents attempt to take over a hamlet or a village completely, either with or without the help of organized military forces. If they fail, the area may become contested. Unpopular local officials and misrule are not necessary preconditions for a village to become contested or completely controlled by the Viet Cong. "Happy" villages can also be subverted, cowed, and overrun. Assumption of control is all the easier because in most country districts of South Vietnam there are few strong community organizations. The family is the major social unit, and by itself is no match for the insurgent organization.

Where community organizations do exist, as among the Catholics and the Hoa Hao, the Viet Cong have more difficulty.

Once under military control, a village is rendered politically reliable by further terror, the displacement of the remaining members of the elite, and intensive indoctrination.

The Viet Cong administer villagers under their control through a network of committees and associations that reach down to every family in every hamlet. Although the political structure differs from village to village, individual families are usually organized into small cells, each under the supervision of a minor Viet Cong official. This official reports to a hamlet administrative committee, which in turn is represented on the village administrative committee. As individuals, villagers are incorporated into groups: a Farmers' Association, a Women's Association, a Youth Association, and so on. The Village Administrative Committee includes members in charge of propaganda, finance, security, military affairs, and sometimes other functions.

The village administrative machinery is under the policy control of the party, and key positions at all levels are ordinarily occupied by party members. These members comprise the Village Party Chapter, from which is chosen a smaller Party Chapter Committee. The Secretary of this committee is ordinarily the most powerful person in the village, controlling the local guerrillas as well as the civil administration.

In theory, a third major structure in Viet Cong villages is the National Liberation Front, but this is

a shadowy organization. In some villages a Front Committee has been organized to include influential villagers and religious leaders, but this seems to be the exception rather than the rule. There is no evidence that it has any authority. The party, however, uses the name of the Front "on all legal papers," according to one respondent, and many respondents use the word "Front" to refer to the entire Viet Cong apparatus, making no distinction between it and the party or village administration.

Supplementing the above-mentioned control structures are networks of secret agents. Some of these agents, whose identities are unknown to the local population, appear to be under the direction of the Village Party Secretary or the committee member in charge of security. Others, unknown even to the Party Secretary, are sent in by higher authorities.

The durability of the Viet Cong organizations, once they have been established, is impressive. Not only are there many functionaries and agents, but they are grouped in parallel chains of command and may be unknown to each other. Furthermore, when government forces succeed in retaking an area, principal Viet Cong cadres are sometimes temporarily withdrawn as a group. The control structure can thus be reimposed almost immediately when conditions permit.

It is commonly noted by respondents that "everybody [in the villages] works for the Front." Young men either volunteer for service with military units or are drafted. Older men and large numbers of women are set to work moving supplies, building fortifications, or sabotaging the roads. Women, trained for both military duty and civil

administration, can now be found in greater numbers at all levels in the Viet Cong structure. Labor duty and military service have proved increasingly burdensome to the population, and many families are unable to care for their ricefields satisfactorily.

At the same time, everybody in Viet Cong areas and in some contested areas is subject to heavy taxation. Income taxes, collected in money and rice, are supplemented by a variety of other taxes as well as by forced contributions of rice and forced purchases of troop-support bonds. The Front authorities have attempted to make taxes progressive, but the cumulative effect of the many indirect taxes has been to throw the tax burden most heavily on the poor. Tax evasion is difficult, since villagers are induced to inform on each other. The constantly increasing tax load has led some rural residents to abandon their property and flee to government-controlled areas, while others have sought to protect themselves by cutting production and raising only what is necessary for themselves and their families.

Despite labor duty and high taxation, some villagers have benefited from the land-reform program. Families that have received land are strong supporters of the Front. Nevertheless, this program has had its difficulties. In many areas land could not be distributed because of the military situation, or there was not enough land to go around, or (less frequently) because everybody had land already. Some people are reluctant to accept land that has been taken from fellow villagers, or fear the return of the former landowner, or resent favoritism

shown to Viet Cong cadres. There are indications that the Viet Cong contemplated a much more thorough land-reform program for 1966, but were forced to defer this so as to maintain food production for their military forces.

While vigorously propagandizing the population, the Viet Cong also seek to prevent communications from government sources from reaching the villages. In addition, travel between Viet Cong and government-controlled areas is sharply limited and even within territories occupied by the insurgents travel is closely supervised.

Security agents watch everyone, and members of the population are encouraged to watch each other. Even village officials are often kept in the dark about some Viet Cong activities in their village and the identities of higher officials are kept secret. The efficient Viet Cong security controls have kept most individual villagers from knowing very much about what is going on in their areas.

Propaganda is carried on by means of news sheets, magazines, "information houses," and bulletins pasted on walls and trees, as well as by Radio Liberation, operated by the Viet Cong, and Radio Hanoi. More important, however, are public meetings and face-to-face persuasion, where the themes most heavily stressed are hatred of the Americans and the Saigon government and the constant victories of the insurgents. Much of the propaganda is successful, but there is always the doubter whose own experience contradicts the official line. Thus, some respondents did not believe statements about Americans or the Saigon government because personal contacts had



enabled them to make their own observations, and many more had found that Viet Cong battle reports tended to be highly distorted.

Furthermore, reports from nonapproved sources have a way of reaching the population. A substantial proportion of the villagers listen at least occasionally to Radio Saigon, at the risk of having their radio receivers confiscated or of suffering more severe punishments. Leaflets are also seen frequently, and most respondents knew about the Chieu Hoi (open arms) program for defectors. These sources are supplemented by a few smuggled newspapers and occasional loudspeaker broadcasts from planes. Those allowed to visit markets in government-controlled areas often bring back rumors, but these circulate only to a limited extent because the Viet Cong have been remarkably successful in making people afraid to talk to each other. They know about the bombing of North Vietnam, for example, but dare not speak of it.

To enforce their controls, the Viet Cong use a wide range of pressures and punishments, including admonition, public humiliation, "re-education," and death. Re-education is a far heavier punishment than it sounds, since it involves taking a person away from his home and ricefields until he becomes "enlightened." He or his family have to provide the necessary food during his enforced absence. For poor families a re-education course can mean disaster. The death penalty may be invoked against informers, government intelligence agents, recaptured defectors, "reactionaries," and exceptionally stubborn villagers.

Denying an accusation is itself a crime, and can result in execution. Ordinarily, prisoners are judged by a "people's court," which includes most of the village population, but these sessions are carefully managed, and those who seek to defend the accused may themselves come under suspicion. The best way to avoid suspicion is to lead an exemplary life, which sometimes means joining the insurgents.

If life under the Viet Cong becomes unendurable, the only recourse of most villagers is flight. Some, however, try to protect themselves by passivity. They simply say that they are unable to pay the required taxes and that it is up to the Front to decide their fate. In a few instances, villagers have resorted to mass noncompliance, which has forced the cadres to give ground. These instances are rare because the Front has usually been successful in first removing or discrediting the village leaders.

Although popular sentiment in the countryside has increasingly shifted away from the insurgents, the Viet Cong organization is not falling to pieces. The Front's tasks are made more difficult, but the cadres are still in full control of large areas. Until a way can be found to loosen the grip of the organization and to provide new leaders at the village level, the Viet Cong structure is likely to survive. The significance of this shift in attitude is not that people in Front-controlled villages are likely to rise up spontaneously, but that they are more ready than before to accept and support a government that is able to serve and protect them.

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express appreciation for the assistance and advice of numerous members of The RAND Corporation staff. Miss Eugenia Arensburger was very helpful in abstracting and ordering data from captured documents. Much of the information bearing on Viet Cong tax and land-reform policies was speedily gathered and expertly analyzed by Miss Victoria Pohle. Helpful comments on the draft -- both mordant and encouraging -- have been made by S. T. Hosmer, K. Kellen, N. Leites, G. J. Pauker, C. A. H. Thomson, and C. Wolf, Jr. The writer has benefited more generally from consultation with D. W. P. Elliott, L. Gouré, G. C. Hickey, and J. J. Zasloff. If the analysis still shows a number of avoidable deficiencies, these are the responsibility of the writer alone and not of those who have been so generous with their counsel.



CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	iii
PREFACE.....	vii
SUMMARY.....	ix
AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	xvii
Section	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. TAKEOVER STRATEGIES.....	7
Introduction.....	7
Activities of the Clandestine Network.....	8
The Transfer of Authority.....	29
III. VILLAGE ORGANIZATION.....	47
The Units of Organization.....	48
Some General Observations on Village Organization....	62
Relations between Village and Higher Echelons.....	63
Cadre Personnel Policies.....	66
IV. MOBILIZATION, TAX COLLECTION, AND LAND REFORM.....	77
Total Mobilization for the Military Mission.....	77
Tax Collection and Economic Activities.....	85
Land Reform.....	94
V. CONTROL MECHANISMS.....	103
Persuasion and Propaganda.....	103
Communication Controls.....	115
Travel and Migration Controls.....	122
Surveillance.....	130
Internal Security.....	134
Sanctions: Pressure and Punishment.....	139
Popular Defense Mechanisms.....	149
VI. PUBLIC ATTITUDES.....	153
Satisfactions and Grievances.....	153
Pro- and Anti-Viet Cong Sentiments.....	157
Attitude Changes in Recent Years.....	164
APPENDIX.....	173



## I. INTRODUCTION

In any analysis that is based to a large degree on the statements of persons who are obviously disaffected with the Viet Cong cause, a major problem is one of validity. Do respondents tell the truth or do they say what they think the interviewer wants to hear? There is undoubtedly some bias in the direction of telling the interviewer what he supposedly wants to hear, and efforts have been made to take this bias into account by disregarding extreme statements and by calling attention to statements that may be of questionable accuracy. Nevertheless, the internal consistency of nearly all accounts of life in Viet Cong villages is remarkable. If respondents are inventing stories, then those from widely-separated areas and different strata of society show a remarkable facility in inventing the same ones. Even more convincing is the fact that captured documents reflect approximately the same picture as that given by the respondents: There are no major or head-on conflicts between the two bodies of data.

The only completely variant version of life in Viet Cong villages comes from hard-core captives who are completely indoctrinated with the ideology of the insurgents. At the outset, the author attempted to take the statements of these captives into account in arriving at judgments regarding Viet Cong practices, but eventually the attempt had to be given up. The most compelling reason for rejecting many of the statements of hard-core personnel was that they were directly contradicted by evidence contained in captured documents. In addition, their allegations are

so far from reality as it can be determined from all other sources that they seem to describe an imaginary world. For instance, a completely indoctrinated member of the Viet Cong is likely to deny that the insurgents have resorted to taxation and to insist that all monies and supplies contributed by the population are voluntary offerings. He is also likely to deny that men are drafted by the Viet Cong for military service, or that there are North Vietnamese personnel serving in South Vietnam. An analysis of the picture of the world as carried around in the heads of hard-core elements would certainly be of value because these are the men who direct the insurgency at middle and possibly higher levels, but it is very doubtful whether such an analysis would enlighten us as to what actually is going on in South Vietnamese villages. This Memorandum therefore makes no attempt to describe the world as seen by hard-core personnel, although it does take account of their statements when they describe specific historical events.

A problem of a very different order is that of terminology. Insofar as possible, the terminology of the respondents themselves has been used. This procedure has the advantage of preserving the flavor of their observations, but it also makes a word of explanation regarding various usages desirable. For example, some respondents refer to the insurgents as "the Viet Cong," others say "the Front," and even more villagers simply use the pronoun "they" to describe the authorities on the insurgent side. For this reason, the expressions "Viet Cong" and "Front" are used interchangeably in this Memorandum,



except in cases where the Front is discussed as a specific organizational entity. Actually, many respondents make it clear that the National Liberation Front does not exist as an organized body in their areas; nevertheless, they still use the term. A few persons refer to the insurgents as "the Communists." This may reflect different usage in different sections of the country. For instance, one man reports that in Tay Ninh Province people generally say "Communists" instead of "Viet Cong" or "Front." It is probable that the political opinions and level of political awareness of various respondents also play a role in their choice of one term rather than another.

Another terminological problem is presented by the word "Party." Most respondents do not give any further designation of the political body to which they refer. If they are pressed by the interviewer, they nearly always reply that there is only one party and therefore no more specific name is necessary. Others say that they are referring to the South Vietnamese People's Revolutionary Party, to the North Vietnamese Labor Party, or to the Communist Party. Actually, it is clear from the content of both interviews and captured documents that there is only one party structure involved, and that those who say simply "the Party" are accurately reflecting reality as they have experienced it.

The word "cadre" is used to refer to anyone who occupies a position of authority in the Viet Cong political or military structure, from a hamlet chief or assistant squad leader up to the highest echelons. Low-ranking Viet Cong officials, who themselves might properly be called "cadres," often seem to use the term to refer to those

higher in the structure than they are, as when a village official says he was afraid of being criticized by the cadres.

A few specialized terms may require definition. Fortified hamlets set up under government auspices were originally referred to as "strategic hamlets," but in part because of the arbitrary methods sometimes used in establishing and administering them, this term soon came into disrepute. After the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem, hamlets that were equipped with defenses against the Viet Cong were called "new life hamlets." Nevertheless, some respondents, especially those who approve of the fortification program, use the older term. When the Viet Cong fortified a single hamlet or a whole village, they designated it a "combat hamlet" or "combat village." A "regroupee" is a person born in South Vietnam who was taken to North Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva Agreement and then infiltrated back into the South. An "infiltrator" is a North Vietnamese serving with the Viet Cong. Other specialized terms will be explained in the body of this Memorandum.

Because of the nature of the available materials, the analysis presented here is qualitative rather than quantitative. Respondents could not be chosen on a random basis, although they were selected in such a way as to include persons of all types and from all areas. Therefore, no tabulations of responses will be presented, since these would not be meaningful. It is possible, however, to determine with considerable confidence whether certain classes of phenomena or events occurred frequently or rarely. Whenever a generalization is made, particular attention has been given to determining whether or not

any of the available testimony contradicts this generalization. A number of specific examples have been included, but it has been necessary to limit these rather severely in order to remain within a reasonable number of pages. As a rule, each example could be supplemented with many others of a similar nature.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in an analysis of this kind is to take account of differences among the various regions of South Vietnam. There are few generalizations that apply equally to the whole country. The analysis can bring out only those patterns that have been frequently observed; it cannot offer assurances that any one pattern applies in all provinces. It can present the dominant themes that appear in the available materials, but it cannot deal with all the possible variations.

In spite of these difficulties, the information contained in the documents and interviews does make it possible for us to come closer to a composite picture of life in Viet Cong-controlled villages than has been possible heretofore. The picture must be viewed with caution, and it will certainly have to be corrected in some respects as additional data become available, but it at least provides some clues as to the kind of life that has recently been experienced by several million villagers.



## II. TAKEOVER STRATEGIES

### INTRODUCTION

A South Vietnamese regroupee reported that while in the North he had been trained in three methods of capturing strategic hamlets. First, there was the military method -- an armed attack from the outside. Then there was the political method, according to which cadres would be sent into the hamlet to organize an underground. Finally, there was the military proselyting method. This involved winning over members of the defending forces, who would then serve as spies or would open the gates to the attackers. He might have added a fourth method: simply walking in after the government had withdrawn its protection.

These strategies, and combinations of them, were applied in all populated places that have come under the control of the Viet Cong -- not only strategic hamlets. In January 1965, about 100 armed insurgents appeared at a village in Darlac Province, overwhelmed the 40 to 50 Combat Youth who were defending it, and confiscated their weapons. From that time on, the Front was in full control. In another village, this one in Kien Phong Province in the Delta, the Viet Cong started underground activities in 1959. They began to collect money and rice, to recruit supporters, and to arrest or kill government officials. Soon they were able to organize their own village administration. In the neighboring province of Kien Hoa, entire government defense posts were turned over to the insurgents by their defenders during a concerted uprising in 1960. Farther north, in the coastal province of Binh Tuy, Viet Cong forces entered a village

immediately after government defenders had been withdrawn. The population did not know the identity of the entering forces until they were told that the National Liberation Front had taken over.

The apparent simplicity of the strategies by which the Viet Cong assumed control of large areas of South Vietnam is deceptive because it obscures the enormous amount of preliminary work that was necessary and reveals nothing about the political measures that had to be taken after the initial military phase. Even a relatively peaceful takeover assumes a military and political capability, good intelligence, and an adequate supply of money and rice. While the Viet Cong always enjoyed some support from outside South Vietnam, in the early years of the insurgency this support was confined largely to a trickle of weapons and a large stream of trained regroupees returning from the North. They therefore had to rely heavily on a judicious mixture of military force, terror, and propaganda in order to expand from the base areas in South Vietnam which they had controlled since before 1954.

#### ACTIVITIES OF THE CLANDESTINE NETWORK

Large numbers of those who later became Viet Cong cadres were regrouped to the North in 1954, but a substantial number of former leaders of the Resistance against the French stayed behind. Most of these apparently remained inactive from 1954 until 1957 or 1958, but some continued to serve in an underground network. One respondent claimed that he worked as a liaison agent for a clandestine village committee from 1954 to 1957. Other respondents mention

1956 or 1957 as the date when underground activities were resumed on an important scale. At first, these activities were conducted mainly by cadres who had remained in the South together with regroupees who had returned from the North, but by 1960 substantial numbers of new personnel were being recruited. A former Viet Cong village official from Go Cong Province reported that at first there were only seven to eight insurgents in his village. Two of these were important cadres who had left the village soon after the armistice in 1954 and returned in 1961 to mobilize the others.

During the early stages of organizing in each area, the underground network apparently concentrated mainly on strengthening itself, and on clandestine recruiting of additional personnel. One source mentions that the Viet Cong worked "without the knowledge of the people." Another was under the impression that he was the only member of the movement in his hamlet, although he was not sure because his superiors never let him know about such things. Just how much the ordinary villagers actually knew about what was going on is open to question. A youth who was recruited in 1958 says that nobody denounced the underground cadres in his village because they behaved well and won over the people, while another who joined the insurgents in 1960 said that the local organization was kept secret from the villagers until 1962. The situation probably differed from area to area.

When the Saigon government started to establish strategic hamlets, the Viet Cong succeeded in building underground networks in these also. The inside agents then helped personnel from the outside to infiltrate at night.

In at least one province (Phuoc Tuy) the procedure was first to persuade a family to work for the Front and then to have that family move into the strategic hamlet. Once inside, the mission of this family was to make friends with other families and recruit more supporters for the insurgents. Agents in the hamlets, who were known as "secret young men," were instructed to exploit any conflict between the population and the local officials. When residents of a strategic hamlet worked ricefields outside the guarded perimeter, the guerrillas allowed them access to their fields only if they consented to become secret agents. More recently, the Front has agreed to let people move from an area of military operations into a government-controlled area on condition that they join underground cells and inform on behalf of the Viet Cong. This tactic has been only partially successful, since people often moved very suddenly into pacified areas in order to avoid bombing or shelling, or to avoid heavy Viet Cong taxes, and the cadres did not hear about the moves in advance.

The principal tasks of underground networks, once well-established, included conducting propaganda, gathering political and military intelligence, collecting rice and money from the population, recruiting additional personnel, and engaging in selective terrorism.

Viet Cong propaganda during early phases of the insurgency was either subtle or blatant, depending on the circumstances. One man who started his activities in 1957 reported that initially he was instructed by higher cadres to spread certain rumors and news items among persons in the village whom he trusted. In accordance with these instructions, he informed his friends and acquaintances



about such matters as popular demonstrations in nearby villages, and urged them to demand that the government repeal the tax on ancestor worship ceremonies, and give them more schools, fertilizer, and drugs. He was instructed not to identify himself as a Viet Cong agent, but to pretend that he was passing on gossip that he had heard from someone else. More blatant propaganda in other areas included denunciation of strategic hamlets as "prisons" for the villagers, criticism of individual government officials or landowners, and stress on the inevitability of a Viet Cong victory.

In general, any facts that were unfavorable to the government were used as grist for the propaganda mill. A former propaganda cadre described the technique as follows:

The Viet Cong tactic is to exaggerate all the bad news and bad public opinion as far as the government is concerned. For example, Buddhist students demonstrate against the government. The Viet Cong will exploit this and exaggerate the incident. They will say that the demonstrators have been ruthlessly suppressed. They were killed and arrested because they oppose the government. However, the Viet Cong don't make up stories from nowhere. They always base their rumors on real fact or on general public opinion. What they do is simply to exaggerate that piece of news or that public opinion. However, if they invent stories, they are clever and make their stories sound logical and believable, so that people don't doubt the accuracy of the rumors.

This same man added that he thought Viet Cong propaganda was effective because it was very specific (how many pigs and oxen were killed in a bombing attack, how many houses

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burned, etc.), it was carefully tailored for each audience ("the Viet Cong analyze every one of their targets of activity, and try to find out the wishes and likings of each"), it stresses a person-to-person relationship (the cadres live close to the people; they wear the same clothes, behave amicably, and in turn, gain trust and friendship), and it is persistent (the cadres talk constantly, and eventually the people have to listen). He contrasted this approach with the one used by government propaganda teams, which set up their loudspeakers, give public lectures, and then move on.

Propaganda was usually conducted on a person-to-person or small group basis during the early phases of the insurgency, although larger meetings were used when the situation permitted. Sometimes Viet Cong military personnel infiltrated a government-controlled hamlet in force, and then went from house to house talking with people, or else gathered a number of the villagers together to harangue them. An Assistant Platoon Leader from the Hau Nghia local forces described how his unit had moved into a New Life Hamlet on National Route 1 for a brief visit: "A cadre from this hamlet was our scout. We stayed there from 9:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Each squad went and talked to people in one area. We went to about 100 families in all. The neighboring [government] post was not aware of our presence." An underground guerrilla told of hiding in the bushes during the daytime, while at night he emerged to welcome the Viet Cong cadres who came to his village to hold meetings. Sometimes an underground propaganda organization was established in a government-controlled village, and then it was presumably unnecessary to rely

so heavily on outside personnel. In a Dinh Tuong village, for instance, one of the tasks of the original underground agents was to establish a Propaganda, Culture, and Indoctrination Section.

At the same time that they spread propaganda, the underground agents collected political and military intelligence. One of their tasks was to compile files on all personnel who worked for the government in any given area. If a policeman came to arrest a member of the underground in a village "the name and the crime of that policeman was recorded immediately." Agents also found out which families in the village had members working for the government, and passed this information along to higher echelons. Some of the intelligence was gathered in order to make propaganda more effective. As one former cadre reported: "Before we carried on propaganda, we had to have a clear idea of the population in question -- whether farmer or storekeeper, and what religion they belonged to, so that we could adjust the propaganda and make it more effective."

Other information collected by the underground was of more direct military significance. An effort was made to keep track of government counterintelligence personnel and to report on their activities, so that they could be assassinated or arrested. Underground personnel also had to keep track of the movements of government forces so that higher Viet Cong authorities could plan ambushes or larger attacks. Some of this intelligence was of an extremely detailed nature. When Viet Cong forces overran a Land Development Center, for example, they assembled all members of the government defense force, called each man by name, and ordered him to surrender his weapon. One of

the defender's had buried his rifle in his backyard, but the Viet Cong attackers still knew where it was.

In some cases, the underground network was able to collect money and rice in villages that were still under government control, but this is mentioned relatively rarely as a principal activity during the early phases. Systematic tax collection usually came after a village had become contested or had been taken over completely.

A much more important activity was the large-scale recruitment of new personnel, both for the underground itself and to serve with the growing guerrilla forces. In areas where the insurgency was still relatively weak, recruitment usually took place by persuasion, although force was also sometimes employed. As time went on force and threats were used more often.

When the situation permitted, underground agents approached young men directly, asking them to join the Viet Cong fighting forces or to assist the movement in some other way. This was always done after carefully sizing up the prospect. A man who later worked for the Viet Cong as a draftsman told how two underground cadres repeatedly brought him propaganda material, and later told him that it was youth's duty "to follow Uncle Ho's path in the Revolution in order to bring happiness to the people." He eventually joined them. Others who were approached by underground cadres in their villages note that the process of persuasion usually required a considerable period of time; they rarely threw in their lot with the insurgents immediately. A Viet Cong agent who was already active in 1956 described how he closely watched the families of men who had regrouped to the North in 1954, and also kept in

touch with antigovernment elements and persons who were already sympathetic to the Viet Cong, and then recruited members of these groups for various insurgent organizations, each according to his ability. If a man was experiencing family problems, had gone badly into debt, was in trouble with the law, was about to be drafted into the army, or had been mistreated by government officials, this was likely to come to the attention of watchful Viet Cong agents, who would approach him and ask him to join their movement.

When there was no underground network in a village, or when the village was so secure that local agents were unable to operate effectively, this did not stop recruiting completely. Either cadres from another village could be brought in, or young men could be approached when they were out in the fields. One Viet Cong propaganda official who was assigned to work in a government-controlled area said that he had stayed outside where he was safer, but had sent messages and letters to likely prospects asking them to come and talk with him. Sometimes the messages were delivered by relatives or friends of the prospects, and sometimes by other agents. People then came out, usually in groups of two or three, and he propagandized them for up to eight hours, asking for their support. In other cases, Viet Cong recruiters approached young men when they were working in their fields outside the village, fishing in a nearby stream, or just taking a walk. Usually, these approaches were repeated over a period of time. A man who joined the insurgency relatively early reported that he was first spoken to by two Viet Cong agents when he was taking a walk one afternoon. These

agents, who were from another village "but came to my village often," talked with him for some time and then returned to their sanctuary. He had only two conversations with them, but they then sent two young girls who came to visit him on three or four occasions and urged him to join the Viet Cong. When he finally agreed, they gave him a wallet and a handkerchief as souvenirs.

What were the appeals that were so skillfully manipulated by the Viet Cong in recruiting personnel? They differed somewhat in each case, and usually a combination of appeals was used, but the following were among the most important:

1. Fear of being drafted into the army. If you don't join the Front you will be drafted by the government. You may have to shoot at your friends and relatives, and you probably will be killed. You will be much safer as a guerrilla, and you can stay in your home district instead of being sent far away.
2. Nationalism and patriotism. It is the duty of all Vietnamese to fight the Americans and their lackeys so as to unify the country and bring happiness to the people. The Front represents the "good cause"; government soldiers fight only for money.
3. Desire for honor and position. If you join the Viet Cong you will be honored by the people, and if you are killed they will remember you as a hero. You will have an opportunity to rise in the ranks, and after the war will receive a good position.

4. Desire for land, education, and a better life. Those who join the Viet Cong will be given an opportunity to get an education and will receive land if they have none.
5. Desire for adventure. You will lead an exciting life, be able to fire a gun, and enjoy good comradeship in the VC ranks.
6. Hatred for the Saigon government and the Americans. Just look at the corruption and arrogance of the local officials serving the Saigon government! The government and the Americans have destroyed your house and crops during sweeps, bombing, and shelling. Local troops steal your chickens and fruit.
7. The attraction of socialism and equality. After the Viet Cong victory all classes will be equal and everybody will be treated with respect.
8. Escape from personal problems. If your wife has left you, if your mother-in-law nags, or if you are in debt, you can escape from all this by joining the Viet Cong.
9. Social pressure. Some of your relatives are already serving with the Viet Cong, or have regrouped to the North. Why should you sit at home when your country needs you? Even the girls are joining. Aren't you ashamed?
10. Desire to be on the winning side. The Viet Cong will soon win. It has grown steadily stronger, while the government can't do a thing. Just see how the Viet Cong agents are able to come into almost any hamlet at night, and how the Front's forces win every battle.

The way several of these appeals could be combined is illustrated by the case of a former village guerrilla, who said he was propagandized for five or six months before he finally joined. Viet Cong agents told him over and over again that as a young man it was his duty to go out and fight to save his country. They promised that he would be honored and receive benefits after the inevitable victory. He would be able to continue his schooling, could marry the girl of his choice, and would receive good land. They taunted him by saying he should follow the example of the girls who had already volunteered to work for the Front, and predicted that if he did not volunteer to serve with the guerrillas he would be drafted into the government forces anyway. He claimed, however, that all these appeals had little effect until the Saigon authorities sent personnel into the village to search for draft dodgers. Then he joined the insurgents.

A somewhat different view of the recruiting process is given by a former Viet Cong propaganda cadre, who said that he had learned four lessons as a result of his experience. First, one should recognize the importance of the family, and persuade young men and their wives and parents at the same time. Second, recruiting was much easier in areas where the government was drafting men.\*

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\* This respondent is referring to the period before 1965. At that time, service with the Viet Cong was widely regarded as safer than service with government forces. Also, those who joined the guerrillas were, initially at least, allowed to stay in their home districts. Since 1965 the balance seems to have shifted, and more youths opt for service with the government when a choice is forced upon them.



Third, it was advisable to organize some kind of send-off ceremony in the village when the young men left, and to take care of the families of those who had already joined. (Note: In practice, one of the major complaints made against the Viet Cong by defectors is that they did not take care of families.) Fourth, it was not advisable to use force in the recruiting process.

In spite of the observations of this cadre, force was frequently used. Many young men were kidnapped or arrested, taken to areas controlled by the Front, and then subjected to indoctrination. More often than not, this indoctrination was effective. The following statement by one defector was repeated in substance by many others: "Sometimes they kidnapped young men they met outside the village in the fields or the forest. The Viet Cong told them they would have to leave home for only three or four days, but actually kept them at least a month and sometimes three to four months." After this indoctrination, some were convinced and voluntarily joined the Viet Cong; others did so because they feared the insurgents would harm them or their families. Men who were on home leave from government units, or who had deserted temporarily with the intention of rejoining their units after a visit back home, were frequently captured by the Viet Cong and taken to the forest where they were indoctrinated for a month or more. They were then assigned to serve with the guerrillas. In another pattern of recruitment, described by a defector from the Viet Cong Main Force, five villagers who were destroying a roadblock were seized by guerrillas, taken into the jungle, and imprisoned. Two of them were shot because they resisted indoctrination, so the rest volunteered to join.

Force also played a more indirect role. Veiled threats were often used in conjunction with positive persuasion. One man reported that all 30 men from his village who joined the Viet Cong forces were alleged volunteers, but that actually most of them had been coerced by pressure or threats; only five or six out of the 30 were real volunteers. In other cases, recruiting agents threatened that if young men did not volunteer they would be taken away by force. If a family refused to let their sons or daughters join the Front, the Viet Cong might ask that family to sign a guarantee that their children would not be drafted into the government army, and "no family would dare accept that challenge."

Viet Cong agents frequently employed a kind of jujitsu tactic by enlisting the power of the Saigon government against itself. A man would be asked to perform a relatively minor service for the insurgents, and would later be told, or would realize, that he had become a criminal in the eyes of the government. He would then see no alternative to throwing in his lot entirely with the Front. Thus, one man initially agreed to serve only as a guide for underground cadres between his hamlet and a nearby canal. Others were given trivial jobs, such as the distribution of leaflets; or they would be allowed to borrow a rifle. Such persons "would be suspected by the authorities -- and inevitably joined the Front," in the words of one informant.

A former Viet Cong village official described the way that he had been gradually compromised:

Before my hamlet became contested, the Front guerrillas sneaked in at night, and forced the villagers to participate in destroying the strategic hamlets, or in laying spiked boards near these hamlets. They selected some of us to stand guard to cover the group. . . . Those who were chosen for this mission were satisfied because they would not have to work. I was among those privileged persons. But the cadres entrusted me with a grenade and one told me: "You have to keep it with you to defend yourself in case we are attacked. . . ." I agreed to keep the grenade with me. But, the next day, rumors circulating throughout the hamlet let everyone know that I had volunteered to stand guard with a grenade in my hands. Since then, I became committed to the Front's sabotage activities and was exposed to being arrested by the government. Many other villagers were in the same circumstance and all of us began to fear the government. Therefore, little by little, and perhaps unwillingly, we considered it as our enemy, and we thought of ourselves as illegal persons.

Occasional reports allege that the Viet Cong have dealt with recalcitrant elements by denouncing them to the government. For instance, if a man refused to join them they might allow him to return home but later would direct into the hands of government officials a letter addressed to him that made it appear that he was a spy in the Front's pay. He was then likely to be arrested by the local authorities of Saigon. Similar subterfuges were sometimes used to eliminate loyal government officials who stood in the way of the insurgents. It is not clear, however, whether or not such tactics were frequently used.

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In some cases, potential recruits became compromised without even knowing that they were dealing with the Viet Cong. One youth served as a guide for a stranger in his area and claimed that he learned only later that this man was a Front cadre. Another was invited to play the mandolin at a dance. He sat on the stage where everyone could see him, and was told afterwards that it would not be safe for him to go back to his job because the dance had been sponsored by the Viet Cong and everyone now thought he was working for the Front. Such stories appear with sufficient regularity to suggest that at least some of them are true, although in other instances it is probable that the respondents are trying to excuse their earlier behavior.

More common and well documented are cases in which the Viet Cong tore up people's identity cards, or prevented them from going to town to obtain necessary papers. Without these papers they were regarded by the government as suspects and were subject to arrest. The severity of the government in dealing with suspects thus played into the hands of Viet Cong recruiting agents.

An equally important task for the insurgents during these early phases was to convince the population that the Viet Cong were strong and worthy of both fear and respect. They did this in part through their propaganda and military activities, but also through deception and terror. A substantial number of sources mentioned efforts of the Viet Cong to appear strong even in areas where they were still weak. The following statements are typical: "They were not numerous, but made believe they were." Or, "The Viet Cong were not strong in the village, but their methods

were refined and effective, so if you were an outsider looking in, you would think [they] were extremely strong and everywhere." A Viet Cong armed propaganda team might hold a meeting in a given locality several times a month in order to create a good image for the Front, to make propaganda, and to let the population know that the Front forces were everywhere. One respondent recalled that an attack on a strategic hamlet was carried out in an area where the Viet Cong were actually weak mainly to show that they were strong enough to make the attack: "They did not keep the hamlet; they only wanted to show their strength and spread their influence."

Elementary deceptive stratagems were sometimes employed. There are frequent reports that during the early days of the insurgency the Viet Cong carried rifles made of wood in order to impress the villagers. They might also carry dummy mines "in order to frighten the people," or might send patrols through a village at night, "shouting slogans through a megaphone." A man who joined the Viet Cong in about 1960 noted that when the Front's forces came to his village they appeared to have rifles just like those of the government troops. After he had been recruited he found that the rifles were made of wood. He added: "They made believe they were very strong." Another man, recalling this early phase, reported:

At night, groups of men -- no more than five or six, crossed and recrossed bridges over the water-courses, making much noise. They carried wooden pieces wrapped in canvas to simulate guns. The day after, there were rumors that the Viet Cong had crossed the village with ultra-modern weapons.

He also mentioned that prior to the start of the active insurgency there were rumors to the effect that the Viet Cong had all sorts of modern weapons and gadgets: collapsible pneumatic motor boats, precooked rice, and a new gun that could kill 50 men with a single shot.

Much more important in establishing the Front as a force to be feared and respected was the use of selective assassination and abduction. The usual targets for terror were village officials and real or suspected government informers. Some of these officials were corrupt and hated by the populace; others appear to have been honest and well liked. One source reports that the Viet Cong did the villagers a favor in killing two officials in Ba Xuyen Province, because these men took bribes, arrested innocent people, and oppressed the poor and helpless. Similarly, when a village notable was assassinated in Dinh Tuong Province in 1961, the villagers were said to be "satisfied with his death."

On the other hand, some officials were apparently marked for death just because they were well liked by the villagers, and therefore were even more dangerous to the Viet Cong than the unpopular ones. A former cadre in Binh Duong Province reported hearing it said that good officials were either killed or driven away, and this apparently happened in his own village. First, the Village Council member in charge of the police was assassinated, then the hamlet chiefs. At this, all the other government officials in the village became afraid and resigned their posts. They were replaced by personnel who proved to be arrogant and corrupt. Similarly, a man from Dinh Tuong Province mentions the killing of two popular officials, and adds:

"In principle, the Front tried to kill any government officials who enjoyed the people's sympathy, and left the bad officials unharmed in order to wage propaganda and sow hatred against the government." A hamlet chief in Ba Xuyen Province was allegedly killed "for having efficiently served the government. On that account he was an obstacle to local Communists." The "very good" and "very bad" government officials thus seem to have been the prime targets for terror, while those in between were more likely to be left alone.

The assassination or abduction of those considered by the Viet Cong to be government "spies" or informers was probably even more frequent. A former village guerrilla reported that about ten persons in his village had been accused of spying for the government, and were taken away to the mountains where they were killed. He thought that some of them were probably innocent of the charges against them, while some were guilty, and added: "That was during the time the village was supposed to be safe -- when the government was still there." In another village the carnage was said to be even greater:

At Ngu Hiep alone, 20 spies have been murdered, including women, since the beginning of 1965. They all had their heads cut off and their bodies thrown in the street. On them were pinned the charges written on a piece of paper. Government cadres and village officials were also terrorized to scare them away and slow down their activities.

Especially in areas where the Viet Cong were still weak, assassinations were carried out in such a way as to have a major psychological effect on the villagers. In

1960, for instance, two villagers were beheaded in a public square at midnight, and early in the morning women coming to the market found the bodies lying in pools of blood. According to this source, "everybody in the village came to look at the dead men, but the villagers did not dare say anything because they were afraid of the Viet Cong, although at that time the Viet Cong were still weak. There were just a few guerrillas then, and they did not come to the village often."

A former member of the Main Force confirmed that a major purpose of assassinations was to inspire fear. He reported that in 1960 and 1961 the Front's military power did not permit the cadres to bring pressure on the population with a show of force, so they had to resort to terror. When they killed someone, they threw his body into the river. "A corpse in the river could be seen by people in many villages along its banks." He thought that starting in about 1962 the cadres may have found this sort of thing no longer necessary. The village guerrilla who reported the death of ten alleged government spies came to a similar conclusion: "The Viet Cong might have killed these people just to keep the villagers and middle-of-the-road people in line." A former Party member observed: "The Viet Cong must use these symbolic acts to show their power. . . . As long as the people dread terrorist actions, the Viet Cong can tell them what to do."

Whatever the intentions of Viet Cong leaders, these terror tactics were extremely successful in making people reluctant to cooperate with government officials. A man from Tay Ninh Province expressed a widely-held view when he said: "If the Viet Cong wanted to arrest or kill anybody,



they could do it." Two of his fellow villagers, accused of spying for the government, had been killed, even though at that time the government controlled the village and the Viet Cong forces were still hiding in the forest. As a result of this widespread terror, people in some areas were afraid even to speak to the government officials who nominally represented the controlling authority. The Front cadres encouraged this kind of behavior by telling people that the officials were traitors and that anyone who got in touch with them or worked for them would be considered an accomplice. The villagers therefore avoided civil servants for fear of reprisals from the Front cadres.

When a popular figure was murdered, or when people felt that the Viet Cong charges were unjustified, they were unlikely to complain. Indeed, in villages that were nominally government-controlled it was sometimes impossible to know whether the people liked or hated the Viet Cong, because they didn't dare express their feelings. Terrorist actions may occasionally have boomeranged, however. After nine persons were assassinated in a Dinh Tuong village, several of the village youths were so afraid that they joined the Front forces; but others, equally terrified, sought safety by enlisting in the government army.

Viet Cong underground cadres usually tried to make themselves popular with the villagers, but even when they failed to do so this did not necessarily mean that they would be denounced. One man mentioned that people in his village didn't like the cadres, but feared to report them to the authorities because the whole family of the informer might be killed. For the same reason, people did not dare to take measures that might look as though they

were aimed at stopping the infiltration of the cadres. "If one did, one could be branded as anti-Front and killed accordingly."

Terrorism was carefully planned. A Viet Cong document captured in September 1965 in Kien Giang Province gives instructions for action to be taken against a number of New Life Hamlets projected by the Saigon regime, and directs Viet Cong personnel to "destroy the seven hamlets planned and half of the tyrants." Why only half of the "tyrants" (presumably local officials) were to be eliminated is not clear; this may have represented an effort to avoid more bloodshed than necessary, or it may have been that the other half were to be killed later. The same document specifies that in each month "at least 20 minor incidents, including terrorism, should be initiated in each village."

According to a long-term member of the Viet Cong, when a plan called for kidnapping this or that person, then it was up to the District level to decide whether he should be left alive or "liquidated." In his words: "When an order is given that such and such a person should be terrorized, the person in charge of the operation does the planning and studying." This man added that it usually took about a week from the time such an order was given to the time it was carried out.

The Viet Cong clearly attempted to keep terror under control -- to apply just the right amount to achieve their purposes. Village cadres were not given a free hand. Nevertheless, there are occasional reports to the effect that lower-level personnel abused their power and used

assassinations to achieve personal revenge or to satisfy other motives. Such actions were not condoned by higher echelons.

Terror had a more obvious function than that of cowing the population and convincing people that it was advisable to cooperate with the insurgents. It also had the effect of disorganizing local administration, especially when efficient civil servants were killed. Similarly, when the Viet Cong were successful in identifying and eliminating government intelligence personnel, they made it much more difficult for the authorities to cope with the guerrilla infrastructure. Together with propaganda and subversion, terror helped to soften up a village to a point where the Viet Cong could assert overt control.

#### THE TRANSFER OF AUTHORITY

Village or hamlets ceased to be government-controlled and became Viet Cong-controlled or contested when the balance of power in or around them shifted in favor of the insurgents. This happened for many reasons. The Viet Cong might build up its political infrastructure and military force to a point where it could successfully challenge the government, the government might withdraw its defense elements and even its administrative personnel for tactical considerations, or the balance of forces might be affected by military operations in the region. When the balance of power was fairly even, a village might be divided between the government and the insurgents, or it might simultaneously have two sets of authorities, one representing Saigon and the other the Viet Cong.

In some instances the government did not have sufficient strength to hold a village or hamlet effectively, but neither did the local Viet Cong have the capability of taking it over. In such cases the insurgents might bring in political or military forces from the outside, either permanently or temporarily. Two regroupees have mentioned the existence of "travelling cadres," who were available to assist in the organization of newly-acquired hamlets or villages. They would move in and assist in setting up a political structure and guerrilla force, and then would go on to another assignment, leaving defense and administration to local people. More often, military personnel had to be brought in from the outside to assist in reducing government power. These troops might be from the regional or main forces, and if so they usually were withdrawn after several days. Or the local guerrilla force might be augmented by personnel from other villages. One former guerrilla mentioned that his unit was sometimes "borrowed" to operate in "weak" villages. When outside forces were used, local personnel who had joined the Front earlier often served as guides for the incoming troops.

If a village came under total, or almost total, Viet Cong military control, three processes were likely to be necessary in order to insure that political control was also established. These were further terror, the displacement of the previous elite, and intensive education and indoctrination.

In terrorizing a village after having assumed military control, the Viet Cong were apparently carrying to a logical conclusion several developments that had been set in motion by earlier terror: thoroughly frightening the

villagers, destroying the government administrative apparatus, and rooting out the government intelligence system. Many respondents mention executions or other measures as having been for the purpose of ensuring the cooperation of the populace. For example: "When the Viet Cong first came to the village they arrested all the village government officials and shot them at Duy Can market. This was to frighten the villagers into submission and working for them." Or again: "They killed these people [some villagers] not only to eliminate those who could be harmful to the movement but also with a view toward making the people afraid of them, and to prevent them from cooperating with the government."

As in the stage before military take-over, some of the executed figures were disliked by the population, but others appeared to have been popular. A former guerrilla related:

The Front's followers killed two persons in my hamlet. . . . The first person who was assassinated by the Front was Nam Hiep, who was then acting as the An Nghia hamlet chief. Nam Hiep was accused of having organized the Republican Youth for the government. Nam Hiep was a good man, and the An Nghia villagers liked him. I was then a Front follower and I had to participate in arresting Nam Hiep. . . .

The second victim in this hamlet was a simple peasant who "liked to move around at night looking for a drink." Because of this the Viet Cong Village Committee was suspicious that he might be a government security agent and shot him as he was wandering around the village one evening. Another respondent had this to say about the execution of a policeman in his village:

The villagers had no complaints against the victim; he had committed no crime, but the Viet Cong accused him of owing a blood debt to the people. [What did the villagers say?] When the Viet Cong were there no one dared say anything. All they could do was to deplore in secret the death of an innocent person.

In the case of alleged government security agents it is probable that the Viet Cong killed an even higher percentage of persons whom the villagers believed to be innocent of the charges against them. One execution in a Delta village aroused particular resentment locally not only because the villagers believed the victim to be innocent but because he was the only son of his mother and his wife was pregnant. About eight other persons in the same village were accused of being agents of the police and also executed. A more detailed account of this process in another hamlet is given by a man who had served as a low-ranking Viet Cong military cadre:

When the Front rose up, a youth named Soan led the Front's activities in my village. He carried out the "destruction of the oppressors" by killing two youths. They were both friends of mine. We were then working as boatmen and we had to go out of the village most of the time. Soan gathered all of the boatmen and charged two of them with being government secret police agents. In the presence of the villagers and these two youths' families, Soan sentenced them to death. The two youths, very scared, kneeled down to ask for mercy, but Soan coldly seized a machete and cut off their heads. It was a chilling spectacle! Since they were friends of mine, I knew that, actually, they were not working for the government. . . . The third person killed by the Front was an uncle of

mine who had worked as a village chief under the French administration. He was arrested and led away at night, and he never came back.

Soan became the Village Secretary after the government hamlet chief had undergone the reduction of his personal prestige and had resigned.

This report might be suspect, since at least one member of the source's family had previously been identified with French rule, and because the subject ultimately defected from the Viet Cong. Nevertheless, it is thoroughly consistent with the statements of numerous other sources and with information provided by captured documents.

As some of the above accounts have indicated, the Viet Cong did not kill all government officials in areas that came under their control. The extent of terror was apparently carefully circumscribed. A report from Binh Duong Province states succinctly that in 1961 the Viet Cong came into the subject's village, tore up the people's identity papers, killed all the hamlet chiefs, and asked the other officials to resign. In another case, four men in one hamlet were killed by the Front, but the hamlet chief himself was merely threatened. He became ill and died (presumably from natural causes) some months later. "Since then, nobody dared replace him and the Front took over control of my hamlet." In still another village, all the Republican Youth members and hamlet chiefs were arrested, and "some of these persons were beheaded by the Front in the presence of the villagers during meetings." If an official was properly submissive toward the Front it is possible that he would be spared, as the following report from Dinh Tuong Province suggests:

The underground cadres who had stayed in the village during the years of peace took the leadership of the village and urged the government hamlet chiefs to resign. Those hamlet chiefs who complied with their orders were unharmed, whereas those who kept on serving the government were assassinated. The chief of my hamlet got scared and fled. He came back to the hamlet later on, wrote out a self-accusation, got through a reduction-of-prestige session and was freed. He is now living as a common villager in Thanh Phu.

The experience of this hamlet chief reminds us that besides death and submission there was another alternative available to at least some persons in villages that came under Viet Cong control. They could take flight. Substantial numbers apparently did, including both officials and common villagers. The available reports do not, however, give any clear indication of the numbers of persons who chose this course. In some cases, village officials attempted to continue at least some of their administrative responsibilities from nearby government-controlled areas.

Since not all officials in Viet Cong villages were killed or fled, some way had to be found to deal with the rest. The most common method of doing this appears to have been through "reduction of prestige." This technique involved forcing those who had previously worked for the government to publicly "confess their crimes," and beg the people's forgiveness. A former government official described his treatment in some detail. After his village was overrun, he was taken to the mountains and subjected to intensive indoctrination. Then he was ordered to write out a declaration telling about all his activities since



1954, all the positions he had occupied in the government administration, how many underground cadres he had helped to arrest, and how many secret Viet Cong organizations he had helped the government authorities to uncover. He also had to describe the activities of his parents, brothers, and sisters.

After he had completed this document, he was taken back to the village and a "condemnation meeting" was assembled. There he had to read his declaration before the villagers, and the cadres asked the people whether he had told the full truth, and whether he had actually committed any other "crimes." Those present were urged to denounce him if he had not told the truth.

In this case, the villagers remained silent, so the cadres assembled a second meeting at which the accused was not present. Apparently urged on by Viet Cong authorities, several villagers denounced the former official for vague crimes, such as general abuse of power or arrogance. These accusations were then read at still a third gathering -- this one a general meeting of the entire population. As the source described it, "the cadres wanted to debase us in the eyes of the villagers."

It is probable that a simpler procedure was usually adopted, although it is also possible that those who were merely observers of the process and were not directly involved in it didn't appreciate its complexity. A former Deputy Village Secretary for the Viet Cong reported:

First, the Front always created an atmosphere of fear in the hamlet by killing those suspected of cooperating with the government security service or those who had openly protested against the Front. In my hamlet, one

villager was accused of being a spy for the government and then was shot by the Front.

Then, all members of my hamlet administration were arrested by the Front and led before a village meeting. Government officials had to confess that they were guilty because they had worked for the government, and had to swear never to work for the government again. They were then pardoned and released. They were mostly rich or moderately well-to-do farmers and were glad to have escaped death.

This respondent volunteered that the government officials concerned "were nice people and behaved correctly toward the villagers." He also mentioned that they continued to stay in the hamlet afterwards. Another source reports that when the Front rose up in his village all the hamlet chiefs were terrified and fled. But the Front promised to forgive them and compelled their families to call them back. When they returned, the Front set up a "People's Court" to reduce their prestige. "They were good men and therefore the villagers begged the Front to forgive them. The Front agreed to be lenient and they were set free." From then on the Viet Cong had control of this village. Or again:

One night they [the Viet Cong] came to the village with soldiers armed with dummy pistols and knives. They convened the villagers to a meeting and led there some village officials with their arms tied together. They denounced their crimes and forced them to bow to the ground and beg people's forgiveness. They killed only one government official who had extorted money from the villagers. . . . The Viet Cong prestige grew in a few days.

In some cases, a village falling under Front control didn't involve any executions or even any sessions for the reduction of prestige because all those who might have been affected took flight. One villager reported: "The Front did not kill anyone in Hung Thanh My village, and didn't even reduce anyone's prestige, because all the village officials fled after withdrawal of the (government defense) posts." According to this account, most of the villagers also fled, so that the Viet Cong actually had little left to work with.

On the basis of the information available about "reduction of prestige," it appears probable that the Viet Cong usually used this technique to deal with officials who were fairly popular with the local population. In this way they could effectively destroy the influence of these officials, but at the same time could avoid stirring up extreme popular resentment and could even gain credit for showing "leniency." In Vietnamese society, however, a reduction of prestige session was probably a cruel form of punishment. Extreme loss of face and public humiliation were sanctions only slightly less severe than death itself.

Concurrently with their program of terror and reduction of prestige, the Viet Cong made strenuous attempts to win over the inhabitants of villages under their control. This was done in part by a series of public meetings and "education" sessions, often conducted on a very intensive basis. These efforts were probably successful in many cases. According to one source:

After the Front's uprising, the people were asked to attend classes which would teach the policy of the Front. They appealed to

different religious groups and to different social classes to be at peace with each other, to love one another, and to help the Front fight against the Americans so there would be no more bloodshed. These appeals from the Front were in line with the aspirations of the people. That was why so many people were eager to join the Front.

Meetings and classes were often held on a marathon basis. Several respondents report that they were conducted every day or every night, starting right after the Front's takeover. Meetings might begin at 7:00 p.m. and last until midnight, or even later. One man complained: "There was a meeting every night for a month without a break." Some meetings were for the general population; others were for young men, girls, or older people. Those for the young men usually concentrated on securing further volunteers for the Viet Cong armed forces. In one case, after overrunning a nearby government military post, the Front first gathered all the villagers together and told them about the aims of the Revolution. Then they invited the young men to attend a re-education course, and afterwards asked each one to join the Viet Cong. The respondent was "very impressed" by their ability to take the post, and believed they were very strong and that the time for victory would soon come. He volunteered. The recruiters were not always so successful. In another village only five or six youths volunteered even after very intensive propaganda. Then the cadres held a meeting of the older men and asked them to urge their children to join. Front authorities also asked the girls to join to set an example to the boys. Some girls did, but all of them came back again to the village shortly thereafter.

Attendance at meetings was compulsory. A village guerrilla recalled that when Viet Cong personnel came to people's houses to announce meetings they were very fierce, and strictly forbade anyone to stay away. Numerous other reports are to the same effect.

To describe the Viet Cong as ruthless practitioners of terror and artful propaganda is not, however, to give the full story; they were also capable of genuine kindness and helpfulness. The Front strove mightily to ensure that all its personnel were honest and upright -- according to its own standards. It was capable of the most extreme cruelty, but tried very hard to conceal the iron hand within a velvet glove, and when it used violence it argued persuasively that this was only because violence was necessary for the ultimate happiness of the people. One is reminded of the behavior of fanatical religious bodies at various times in history. The faithful were capable of torturing those who did not agree with their doctrines, but much preferred to attract converts through persuasion, and to treat them and each other with warmth and gentleness as long as the rigid prescriptions of the faith were not violated.

A captured Viet Cong document dealing with "Motivation of the Masses During the Second Half of 1965" gives a number of rules of behavior that have an almost religious quality to them:

- Study hard and work hard.
- Lead an orderly, clean, and simple life, consistent with the resistance conditions; have a good appearance; abstain from luxury.
- Observe discipline and order; be considerate of public property.

Practice equality between men and women in the family and in the society; respect and help the elderly, women, war wounded, and children on all occasions.

There is ample testimony that the Viet Cong were, in fact, able to maintain a high standard of behavior for both their military and civilian personnel in most cases. A poor farmer who had initially been recruited by force noted that he had later believed Front propaganda because he saw that the Viet Cong treated even the members of the lowest social class as equals. Many respondents mention the "Three Togethers" that were part of the rules of conduct for both civilian cadres and combatants: eating together, living together, and working (or fighting) together with the people, and often added such comments as, "this is a policy favorably received by the masses." A Viet Cong telegrapher who had occasion to do a large amount of travelling from village to village reported:

Wherever we went, we tried to win the people's hearts by helping them in their daily work. When we lived in a villager's house, we cleaned the floor, made repairs to the house, sometimes did cooking and took care of the children. We mingled with the people.

A military cadre mentioned that whenever his unit came into a village, the cell leaders of his platoon would go from house to house and would "appeal to people's emotions by visiting them and inquiring about poverty, asking about their sufferings." Reports about the behavior of ordinary guerrillas are more mixed, but we nevertheless find a fair number of statements such as the following: "The guerrillas behaved very nicely, and they always helped the villagers

in their work." This report, incidentally, did not come from a guerrilla, but from a civilian entertainer working with the Viet Cong.

The insurgents also attempted to enforce high -- indeed, puritanical -- moral standards. They punished personnel for molesting village women, or even for flirting with them, they discouraged rowdy behavior, and they insisted that the property of villagers be respected. One former guerrilla reported that he had been purged twice from the Viet Cong ranks -- once for an affair with a village woman and once for fighting with a neighbor.

Nevertheless, in spite of their best efforts, the insurgents were plagued by occasional bad behavior on the part of both civilian cadres and military personnel. This is indicated not only by scattered reports of respondents but also by captured documents. A Viet Cong document, probably written early in 1966, calls for more intensive indoctrination in order to eliminate misconduct toward the local population. It goes on to relate that some soldiers had been caught red-handed stealing rice, vegetables, chickens, pigs, and even personal effects from the villagers. There had also been complaints that some personnel were engaging in unauthorized trading with the villagers and had been "bothering them with requests for gifts." Complaints such as these nevertheless underline the fact that serious efforts to assure good behavior were made.

The behavior of government personnel, at least until recently, contrasted unfavorably with that of the Viet Cong. Respondents frequently accused village officials of arrogance, capriciousness, dishonesty, and cruelty, and some cite hair-raising incidents. Government armed forces,

especially the Self Defense Corps, militia, and Republican Youth, were said to have oppressed the local population in many cases, and to have stolen from the villagers. Complaints against the regular army were far less frequent, but did occur.

However, to look only at these complaints without examining the other side of the coin is to give a false picture. Just as the Viet Cong were troubled with bad behavior, government personnel often distinguished themselves by good behavior. Neither side was all white or all black. Indeed, it is probable that even under the Diem regime there were far more kind, honest, and helpful local officials than has been generally realized: cruelty and dishonesty are easily noted and commented on, while virtue is accepted as "normal" and receives less attention. Furthermore, the respondents make it clear that the behavior of government personnel, both military and civilian, improved significantly after the overthrow of the Diem regime. Local officials are reported as being most honest and helpful, the armed forces as being better disciplined and more correct.

In the context of the present discussion it is especially important to remember that at least some of Saigon's local representatives were well liked by the population, since it is clear from the reports of the respondents that unpopular officials and local misrule were not necessary preconditions for a Viet Cong takeover. It certainly was easier for the insurgents to gain sympathy, organize, and recruit manpower in areas where government personnel had been guilty of cruelty, gross dishonesty, or merely negligent administration, but "happy" villages could also



be subverted, overrun, and turned into Viet Cong bastions. The takeover techniques used by the insurgents were not dependent on popular dissatisfaction. The following, for example, is a description of the situation in a village that came under Viet Cong control in 1964:

The government cadres were nice to the people and behaved correctly. They helped the people and didn't do anything against the people's wishes. . . . They were elected by the people. . . . They were from the village. . . . They weren't in conflict with the people, and they didn't do anything that was unfair. . . . I didn't live in the village permanently, so I don't really know how they were when it came to money. But the times I was in the village, I noticed that they behaved correctly toward the people and they weren't corrupt. . . . They granted Agricultural Credit Loans and gave chemical fertilizers to the villagers. They also gave hogs and oxen to the local farmers' association.

This respondent reported that the Viet Cong cadres, also, "behaved nicely" when they came to the village. In other words, as far as we can tell there were few complaints against either side, but the virtues of the government officials were not by themselves sufficient to prevent the Viet Cong from assuming control.

The above case is not exceptional. Numerous other ones have been reported. A former Viet Cong civilian cadre described how all the government officials from one village were assembled at the market place and shot after the area was overrun, and then added that these officials had been elected by the people and were apparently trusted and respected. They helped the population by providing them with clothes, rice, buffaloes, and other items. The

militiamen who had been defending the village were also well liked, and consequently the villagers refused to reveal the hiding places of these militiamen to the Viet Cong. Another respondent mentioned that prior to the assumption of power by the insurgents the local officials in his village had behaved well. They didn't accept bribes, and the members of the Self Defense Corps had conducted themselves correctly. "The villagers were very happy then," he recalled. Still another source, describing a similar case, volunteered that all the officials in his village were nice people, and that "life was good under the government." It is impossible to make an accurate estimate of the proportion of Viet Cong villages that previously had well liked government administrations, but it is clear that the numbers involved are substantial.

It is also noteworthy that there is little evidence to indicate that many people spontaneously joined the Viet Cong. Indeed, in the cases examined there was only one man who says that he actively sought out the insurgents. He had lost his identity card and feared that he would be arrested if he stayed in his village. Some respondents may have been unwilling to admit that they took positive steps to join the Front, but this seems unlikely in view of the readiness with which many of them acknowledged that they responded enthusiastically to the Front's propaganda, or to recruiting appeals, after they had been approached by local cadres. In villages where local authorities had been guilty of extreme cruelty the population certainly looked upon the Viet Cong as liberators, but there are no indications of a self-generated uprising against intolerable oppression.

In short, the success of the Front in assuming control of large areas of the countryside does not seem to have been due mainly to maladministration by Saigon or to widespread popular dissatisfaction, although both of these clearly existed in many villages. The successful Viet Cong formula depended on an initially small, but well trained and highly-motivated nucleus, superb organization and hard work, on the one hand; and on a series of secure sanctuaries within South Vietnam and a measure of outside encouragement and support, on the other. Even in "happy" government villages, underground agents could be infiltrated and a number of men recruited by the combined use of force and persuasion, the clandestine structure could be protected by elaborate security precautions and by demonstrating to the villagers that anyone informing against the Viet Cong would be killed, and governmental officials could be eliminated or deprived of influence either before or after the village was overrun by the Front's military units.

An analysis of why the Viet Cong technique worked so well is outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, it seems probable that the Front's success in many rural areas depended on the almost total absence on the local level of any organizations other than the family and the village administration. Scattered observations in the available materials suggest that the Viet Cong formula did not work in Catholic or Hoa Hao villages because in these there was a strong organization interposed between the family and the state. In other parts of the countryside, the individual or the family unit was much more exposed to outside pressure, whether this came in the form of terror or persuasion. The state apparatus offered the only protection, and it was not

difficult for the Viet Cong to disorganize and then root out this apparatus. It is remarkable that throughout several thousand pages of free-answer interviews, there are almost no references to clubs, associations, or organized religious groups. The great majority of respondents considered themselves Buddhists, but they either took no part in religious activities outside the home or else they went to the pagoda only once a month. In one village, where there seems to have been a fairly well-organized Buddhist Association, the Viet Cong experienced a serious rebellion, led by the local Bonze. But this is one of the few mentions of any such organization. References to the family dominate, and the family is a singularly weak instrument for resisting outside pressure. The emotional and material dependence of family members on each other meant in many cases that if one member was co-opted into the Viet Cong, the other members felt it necessary to give the movement their support in order to insure his safety. Furthermore, pressure on one or two members of a family brought indirect pressure on all the other members. Many men were induced to join the Viet Cong ranks because they feared violence to their parents. The family, especially in a rural economy, is also very sensitive to economic sanctions: if a man can be prevented from working in his rice fields the whole family may starve. Even in its earliest and weakest days, the Viet Cong organization was far more powerful than any family or any village administration. Only the government military forces could stand against it, and they could not be everywhere at once.

### III. VILLAGE ORGANIZATION

After the Viet Cong had taken either partial or complete military control of a village, organizational work proceeded rapidly. The organizational outlines had usually taken shape already during the clandestine phase, so that this work had to be started from the beginning only when the takeover was accomplished solely by the use of force from the outside -- and such cases seem to have been relatively rare. If Viet Cong military control was only partial, the village might be classified as "contested," but even in contested villages the Front was usually able to build up its organizational structure and to pursue most of the activities that it conducted in areas that it dominated: tax collection, manpower mobilization, intensified propaganda, and so on. The insurgents did not, however, attempt to fortify villages that were regarded as contested.

The number of organizations that were formed and their exact structure varied according to local conditions. The available materials do not make clear whether this was because the Viet Cong varied their organizational patterns to suit local conditions, or because they simply were unable to apply the patterns they wished. Probably both explanations are partially correct. Sometimes the military situation did not permit the full organizational structure to be developed; sometimes there was a shortage of cadres. In any case, the business of fighting the war had to come first.

Describing the organizational pattern in Viet Cong

villages is made more difficult by the tendency of higher echelons in the Front to keep revising organization charts, by the secrecy surrounding the activities of various sections and committees, and by translation difficulties. Since the same Vietnamese term may be rendered by a number of English equivalents, it is sometimes impossible to know whether one is dealing with two slightly different groups or with one group that has been given two different names. The description that is given here is therefore a tentative one.

#### THE UNITS OF ORGANIZATION

According to a captured document, dated February 9, 1966, dealing with local organization in Bien Hoa Province, each village was to have three principal organizational units: the Party Committee, the "People's Village Liberation Committee," and the Front Committee.

Subordinate to the Party Committee were sections dealing with training, education, and organization.

The "People's Village Liberation Committee" was to function as the local administration. Under it came the "village units" (presumably the guerrilla military units), the Finance and Economy Section, the Propaganda and Information Section, the Forward Supply Council, the Cultural and Social Section, the Civil Health Section, and the Security Section. The Committee was to be composed of a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman, a Secretary General, a member in charge of military affairs (commanding the village unit), a member in charge of economy and finance, a member in charge of propaganda and information, a member in charge

of culture and education, a member in charge of social affairs, and a member in charge of protection and security. The directive added that if there were not enough Party Chapter members to take charge of all the above branches, the following critical positions must have Party members assigned to them: chairman, military affairs, security, and finance.

The Front Committee was to be in charge of the Youth Group, the Liberation Women's Association, the Liberation Farmers' Association, the Military Proselyting Section, and the Political Struggle Committee.

A few of the subordinate units listed above were mentioned rarely or not at all by respondents, and presumably existed mainly on paper. Furthermore, many former members of the Viet Cong do not distinguish clearly among the Front, Party, and Administrative Committees, and it is possible that the lines dividing these were shadowy in some cases. In one village, for instance, only the existence of a Party Chapter and a village guerrilla unit was reported. Other respondents mention only these formations, plus units in charge of propaganda and tax collection. These were, in any case, the essential organizational elements.

Whatever the exact structure of the Viet Cong apparatus within a village, it was clear that the Party Chapter Committee was in control. The Party Chapter was composed of all Party members in the village and might vary considerably in size. According to a former Viet Cong official from Dinh Tuong Province, a chapter could have from nine to twenty or more members, and from among these there would be chosen seven or more committeemen who would

direct the affairs of the village. His village, which was a large one with some 12,000 inhabitants and eleven hamlets, had seventeen members of the Party Chapter Committee.

Within the Village Party Chapter Committee the Village Secretary was usually mentioned as the most powerful figure. One respondent reported that in his village only the Village Secretary knew what was going on, and therefore when the Secretary was killed by government forces the subordinate units in the village were confused, didn't know what to do, and began to disintegrate. In many cases, the Secretary actually directed one or more of the subordinate sections of the village administration, in addition to his other duties. He might also head the Finance Section, the Farmers' Association, or the Military Affairs Section.

The purpose of forming a Village Administrative Committee was apparently to separate administrative functions from policy functions, the latter being the province of the Party. A Party member mentioned that in the eyes of the population it was the Administrative Committee that was in charge of all the business of the village, but in reality it was the Party that decided everything. In any case, the key sections subordinate to the Administrative Committee were nearly always headed by Party members.

Like the Party Chapter Committee, the size of the Administrative Committee could vary. One respondent reported that in his village the body included twelve members, with three members forming a Current Affairs Committee, which made most of the administrative decisions.



The remaining nine members represented the nine hamlets in the village. In another case, the Administrative Committee was initially composed of only three members -- a chairman, the Chief of the Economic Section and the Chief of the Military Affairs Section, but these men were assisted by 30 staff members and agents in administering a village of some 6,000 inhabitants. This Committee was later expanded to include other section chiefs in charge of youth, military proselyting, and security. In still another village, the Committee was said to include the chiefs of the following sections: Propaganda, Youth, Women, Military Affairs, and Finance-Economy. The chief of the last-named section was also the Village Secretary.

In theory, the third major organization in Viet Cong villages was the National Liberation Front, but this was ordinarily a shadowy organization. One source mentions that the Front was organized in his village as a cover for the Party, that all leading officials of the Front were Party members, and that the Chairman of the Front Committee was also Party Secretary. The Committee was supposed to gather the most influential villagers and representatives of the various religious groups in the village under the banner of the National Liberation Front, and according to a number of reports this actually was done in some areas.

More frequently, a Front Committee was not organized. Sometimes this was because of local resistance. One former cadre said that a Front Committee could not be established in his village because the local Cao Dai and Buddhist leaders declined the invitation to become members. They said they were religious men and should not engage

in politics. In another village the local Buddhist leaders actively resisted the Viet Cong, and it is doubtful that the Front was organized there, although this is not specifically stated.

It is probable, however, that the principal reason for not organizing a Front Committee was that local cadres were too busy or didn't feel the need for such a body. A former Village Secretary stated:

As far as I know, the Party has paid little attention to the necessity of organizing a Front in the villages. We will do it when we can afford the time.

This man added that in spite of the fact that the Front had not been organized, the Party acted on the Front's behalf and used its name on "all legal papers." Another source said that the Province (Party) Committee in An Xuyen paid little attention to the Front, because they did not think that most people in the province were interested.

Under the direction of the Party Chapter Committee, the Administrative Committee, and the Front Committee (where it existed) were a number of sections and associations. These that were mentioned most frequently are as follows:

Farmers' Association. In theory, all farmers who were in good standing with the Viet Cong were members of the Association, and paid dues of one piaster a month. In practice, the inclusiveness of this organization seems varied. In one village it might enroll nearly all farmers; in another a lower proportion. Sometimes well-to-do farmers were deliberately excluded. The Association's functions included collecting rice for the Viet Cong forces, providing manpower for constructing

roadblocks and other sabotage missions, digging air-raid shelters, making fences for combat hamlets, encouraging people to increase production so that they could contribute more to the fighting forces, summoning people to come to meetings, and engaging in propaganda in general. In the words of one respondent, "everything in the village is done by members of the Farmers' organization. . . ."

Another did not think the association was so important, and said that it only took care of land questions and was assigned to solve land disputes among the villagers. It apparently also sometimes played a role in land reform, and sometimes took part in assessing taxes on rice crops.

Youth Association. This group included both male and female members, who paid small monthly dues. Like the Farmers' Association, it assisted in mobilizing civilian workers when they were needed, but its main functions seem to have been to provide a mechanism for training and indoctrinating young people and a manpower pool for recruiting.

Women's Association. While there are a number of references to a general catch-all organization for women, there were also more specialized women's groups, such as the Foster Sisters' Association and the Foster Mothers' Association, both of which concentrated on taking care of Viet Cong military personnel. Whether all these groups were related is not clear. In any case, women were used extensively to persuade young men to join the Viet Cong forces, and they often cooked and mended clothes for fighting men who passed through the village. They also sent embroidered handkerchiefs, letters, and presents to Front soldiers. Young women, especially, were encouraged to send letters telling young men in the forces that they

were anxiously awaiting their return after victory was achieved. To comfort the families of those who had been killed in the war, the women's organizations also promoted the "three glorious movements: It's glorious to have a fighter in the family; it's glorious to have a family member who died for the Front; it's glorious to have a cadre in the family."

Propaganda Section. This section is referred to as being in charge of education, indoctrination, cultural activities, and sometimes entertainment, in addition to straight propaganda. It organized meetings and political indoctrination courses "to explain to the population the decisions and orders of the Front and . . . to spread news of the victories of the Front's army." It also composed and reproduced slogans to be posted throughout the village and arranged for banners to be made and hung out on appropriate occasions. Some villages had an "Information House," which was managed by the Propaganda Section.

Finance Section. The principal duty of the Finance Section was to implement the Viet Cong taxation policy in the village. It also frequently had other economic functions. For example, some respondents mention that "economic cadres" arranged for transporting food to the Viet Cong forces.

Security Section. Several sources state that all cadres in the Security Section had to be Party members. In any case, the functions of this section were of a sensitive nature. They classified all residents of Viet Cong villages according to their reliability, established files on people who had previously worked for the government, arrested suspected spies, carried out executions,

and in general kept a close watch on everyone in the village.

Military Proselyting Section. Cadres of this section were charged with inducing members of the government forces to defect or desert. Their principal method was to contact village families which had relatives working for the government and to persuade these families by threats, promises, or other means to call their relatives home. Proselyting cadres also got in touch with men who were just about to be called into government service and urged them not to go, and talked directly to any of Saigon's military personnel who came within their reach. In some areas, and possibly throughout South Vietnam, questionnaires were distributed to all Viet Cong military and civilian personnel asking for the names and addresses of relatives or friends working for government or U.S. elements, how much influence the person filling out the questionnaire had with these relatives or friends, what was the best way to approach them, and so on. One copy of this questionnaire was to be retained by the Village Party Committee, and another sent to the Military Proselyting Section. A document reproducing the substance of one such questionnaire was captured in 1965. Other captured documents suggest that the duties of the Military Proselyting Section included espionage, subversion, and intelligence work, as is indicated by the following extract from one of them: "If possible, military proselyting should provoke military revolt in enemy ranks by using the example of the Phu Cuong uprising to encourage soldiers' dependents and to arouse the masses."

Military and Paramilitary Forces. Most Viet Cong villages included three types of military or paramilitary forces. Of these the village guerrilla unit was the most important, but there were also hamlet guerrillas -- who usually served on a part-time basis -- and a militia or self-defense force. The militia was ordinarily not armed, or had very rudimentary weapons. It was used primarily for transportation duty, and sometimes for guard duty. Hamlet guerrillas also had to perform guard duty, and sometimes labor duty, and to serve as guides. One respondent who spent some time in this capacity reported that he had to stand guard at the hamlet gate one day in every ten and to make a tour of the hamlet every third night, and that he had made one long trip to transport munitions.

Village guerrillas were used for a wide variety of additional tasks. One of their main functions was to harass nearby government military posts and if possible to scare the defending forces to a point where they feared to come into the village. They also provided guide services or other support for larger Viet Cong units, laid small ambushes, served as armed guards for tax collectors and other cadres, engaged in sabotage operations, "invited" people to attend meetings and stood guard at these meetings, and acted as liaison agents with higher echelons. Both the militia and the guerrillas provided a military manpower reserve for the larger Viet Cong units, and commonly were reassigned to district or provincial forces when the latter needed additional personnel.

The strength of guerrilla and militia forces varied widely from village to village. According to a captured document, apparently drawn up in 1966, 5 per cent of the

population was to be enrolled in guerrilla units in plain and Delta areas, while in mountain areas 10 per cent were to serve in this capacity. Another 15 per cent of the population was to be included in the militia. The guerrilla forces were to be composed of men from 16 to 50, women from 16 to 45, and children from 10 to 15 years of age.

Another document from the previous year stated that each hamlet in liberated or contested areas should have one guerrilla platoon, while hamlets under government control were to have one or two guerrilla squads, which could be either overt or covert. Militia forces were to comprise four platoons for each "liberated" hamlet, two platoons for each "half-liberated" hamlet, one platoon for each contested hamlet, and two squads for each government hamlet. This document is entitled: "Plan for Guerrilla Warfare -- Phase 8."

As far as can be determined from the reports of respondents, few Viet Cong or contested villages came up to the prescribed force levels. Most commonly, villages were said to have one guerrilla platoon of about 30 men, while hamlets ordinarily had one squad of ten men or less. As of 1965, some villages had even lower force levels. One village of 5,000 persons in Dinh Tuong Province was said to have had a squad of 12 village guerrillas, and four "self-defense militias," armed with large and sharp sabres. Another village in the same province was defended by 15 guerrillas and 12 militiamen. A third village in Dinh Tuong was controlled by 16 guerrillas armed with eight rifles.

There are several reports indicating that the guerrillas were often poorly trained and sometimes

undisciplined. A former district cadre stated: "Some guerrillas did not know how to plant mines, and unintentionally overturned busses when they passed by. The majority of the guerrillas did not understand the rules in the Front and angered the population with their tactlessness." Another cadre said that the guerrillas were unruly -- they were always asking to be allowed to stay home and do their own work, and sometimes even threatened to surrender to the government or to lead government forces into the village. The same cadre, who previously had been a village guerrilla unit leader, alleged that he had refused to respect the authority of new cadres who had been sent to replace local officials killed in a government ambush.

Hamlet Organization. The Viet Cong apparatus reached down and touched every individual in each hamlet of those villages that were under full control of the Front. Sometimes the village-level structure was mirrored in the hamlet, although the hamlet structure was usually much more simple. One respondent reported that each hamlet in his village was headed by a Hamlet Civil Affairs Committee, composed of three to five members: a chairman, an assistant in charge of propaganda and political education, a secretary who commanded the hamlet self-defense unit, and two other members. Among other things, these Committees were responsible for welcoming and billeting Viet Cong forces that passed through the village. They chose the larger houses and asked the owners for permission, "which the owners never refused." Another source mentioned a Hamlet Front Committee, which he headed, a Security Committee, a branch of the Farmers' Association, and a hamlet



guerrilla unit. A captured document dealing with political organization in Vinh Binh Province specified that two or three guerrilla squads were to be organized in each hamlet, along with one Party cell and two Group cells. The reference to "Group cells" is apparently to the Youth Group of the Party and not to the Youth Association. Another captured document directed village authorities to designate two security agents in each hamlet, as well as one Assistant Hamlet Chief who at the same time was to be in charge of the Farmers' Association. A minor Viet Cong official said that his hamlet had been in charge of a Hamlet Autonomous Committee, which included a president, two assistants, a secretary, and a guerrilla leader.

The most basic unit in the hamlet seems to have been a group of families or a cell of families. One respondent mentioned that every ten families formed a group, and every three formed a cell. He added: "By that the Viet Cong controlled the people and organized them for the fight." More commonly, only the interfamily group is mentioned. This might consist of anywhere from seven to 40 families. A respondent who managed to avoid joining any of the Viet Cong associations reported that even so he still had to go to the interfamily group meetings and do labor duty.

Immediate supervision and control of family groups seems to have been exercised through the Farmers' Association. According to a former Viet Cong security cadre, on the hamlet level this association was organized into cells of five to seven members, and each cell member was responsible for seven to eight families. Another respondent

reported that he joined the Farmers' Association as an interfamily group leader. He had 15 families under his supervision, and there were 16 interfamily groups in the hamlet. "I was like a middleman between the 15 families I represented and the hamlet committee."

Personnel who were in charge of individual interfamily groups had to summon people for sabotage or labor duty, mobilize them to fortify the hamlet, assemble them for meetings, explain the policy of the Front to them, and sometimes collect contributions and taxes. One man, whose duties in the hamlet Farmers' Association had included collection of taxes, reported that he had been so bothered by people's complaints about Viet Cong levies that he had asked to be allowed to serve as a liaison agent instead.

Regardless of the exact manner in which individual families were brought into the administrative structure, it is clear that the Party was charged with over-all supervision of whatever went on in the hamlet. Each hamlet usually had one Party cell, but in larger hamlets there might be two or more. If something important occurred, the chief of the Hamlet Civil Affairs Committee reported it to the Party cell leader, who in turn reported to the Village Party Chapter Committee member in charge of that hamlet. According to another source, each Party member in his hamlet was in charge of two cells of the Farmers' Association, each cell being responsible for about 35 families.

The intensity with which the Viet Cong apparatus in the village and hamlet was supposed to function -- and probably did so in some cases -- is indicated by a captured document that deals with the motivation of the

rural people in Bien Hoa Province during the period August-October 1965. A section from the document, which purports to emanate from the Central Office for South Vietnam, the highest Viet Cong echelon in the country, reads as follows:

Instead of following Plans No. 6 and 7, proceed as follows:

1. Hold cell meetings to discuss the four major missions mentioned above (wear down the enemy forces and develop guerrilla warfare, conduct political struggles in rural and urban areas, step up military proselyting activities, and encourage people's production and savings). After discussion, draft plans for proselyting farm families, with emphasis on encouragement of young men to join the army and work as civilian laborers, to buy bonds, pay taxes, perform military proselyting missions (if their sons are in enemy ranks), increase agricultural production, develop husbandry and practice economy.
2. Farmer members will return to their families and discuss these missions with them.
3. Hold cell meetings again to review results. Reward outstanding elements.
4. Hold meetings between cells to review the general results. It is possible that only cell leaders and assistant cell leaders participate in these meetings.
5. Meetings continue to be held between intercells.\*
6. When the whole hamlet or village has completed the discussion on the four above missions, the village or hamlet steering committee will meet with the Party Chapter to review the general achievements recorded; reward individuals, families, hamlets, and villages that have performed in an outstanding manner; and then prepare for a meeting with participation of the whole village or hamlet to celebrate the success.

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\* No further information about "intercells" is available.

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON VILLAGE ORGANIZATION

A review of the Viet Cong organizational structure in villages and hamlets leaves one with a picture of an extremely complicated apparatus that required a small army of functionaries for its operation. Indeed, it may have been the intention of the Viet Cong to involve as many people as possible in one official capacity or another. In this way, these people would become outwardly identified with the Front's cause, even if not inwardly. One respondent suggests this specifically:

Every villager had to belong to one of these organizations. No one could stay uncommitted. . . . Also, they [the Viet Cong] were sure that these men wouldn't dare to stay in their villages when the government soldiers came for fear that they would be accused of having joined the Viet Cong. They would have to run with the Viet Cong and become more closely involved in the Front.

Another general impression is of the close inter-relationship of military and civilian activities. Some guerrillas were also farmers; village secretaries and hamlet chiefs had guerrilla forces at their disposal; guerrillas might assist in tax collection or in summoning people to meetings; a cadre could be transferred from a civilian to a military job, or vice versa; and some cadres performed military and civilian functions simultaneously. An additional kind of relationship is indicated by a respondent who said: "The Party teaches that the army can be strong only if the organizations in the village are

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The term may refer to units composed of more than one cell, or it may refer to "interfamily groups."

strong, and we saw that this was correct." He added that thanks to the organizations functioning in the village it was possible to station troops there.

Finally, as in the case of the individual, little was left to spontaneity. Even at the lowest level, organizations carried out tasks that were specified in detail by higher echelons.

#### RELATIONS BETWEEN VILLAGE AND HIGHER ECHELONS

Above the village organization was the district organization and the province organization, each more complicated than the last. A single section of a district administration might include as many as 30 cadres -- enough to staff an entire village. The size of the district bureaucracy was due in part to the fact that it took care of more functions than did the village administration. For example, there usually was a fairly well-developed medical section in the district, the district military affairs committee had a workshop to manufacture weapons and an engineer section, and district cadres assumed such specialized functions as caring for disabled veterans and the fighters' graveyards, proselyting Bonzes, and spreading propaganda among minority groups such as Cambodians.

Another reason for the size of the district structure was that it exercised close supervision and control over the villages subordinate to it, and also provided training services. Fiscal control, for instance, was tight. The criteria for tax collection were passed down to the village finance section by the district, and the village then had to remit the entire sum that was collected (or almost the

entire sum) to the District Party Chapter Committee. One respondent said that the district then gave back 10 per cent of this to the village to be used for such expenses as buying office supplies, printing leaflets, and procuring materials to make flags. Another respondent reported that the village was allowed to retain only enough tax funds to keep its cash balance from slipping below 1,000 piasters.

District cadres also made frequent visits to the villages. The security cadre in one district, for instance, went around showing village chiefs how to organize and administer their security sections. In another case, a district cadre led the self-criticism sessions held by village cadres. This, of course, gave him an excellent opportunity to keep in touch with morale and activities at the village level. A former Village Secretary noted that he was under the formal control of the District Party Committee. He actually met the chief of the District Committee only about twice a year, "but he sent his cadres to my village to supervise all the tasks."

Both technical and command channels were used in transmitting orders between echelons. Thus, military orders might be sent from the District Party Secretary to the Village Party Secretary, who was formally the commanding officer of the military element in his echelon. Or the same orders could be transmitted directly from the District Military Affairs Committee to the village guerrilla unit leader. In the latter case the Village Party Secretary was supposed to be informed concurrently. Similarly, in relations between province and district, orders concerning culture or propaganda might be sent directly from the Province Propaganda Section to the

District Propaganda Section.

Nearly all sources report that it was possible for a lower echelon to question orders received from above, but that the objections had to be very well-grounded. When, for example, the district received orders from the province to attack a certain place, the district would call together its cadres who were concerned with military matters to discuss whether the attack was possible. It would then report the results of the meeting to the province. Similarly, when an order was received by the village from the district, the members of the Village Party Chapter Committee met to study it carefully and to decide how it was to be implemented. The order would then usually be forwarded to the Village Administrative Committee with all necessary directives. On rare occasions, however, an order would be returned to the District Party Headquarters with an explanation as to why it could not be carried out and suggestions for changing it in such a way as to make the desired action possible. One former Village Secretary claimed that he successfully resisted orders from the district to draft young men by force, but a former Deputy Village Secretary reported: "All the members of the Village Chapter Committee disliked the Front's draft policy, but we told one another that we could do nothing but carry out the Front's orders." He himself had been worried about being drafted into the Viet Cong forces.

On some occasions the province or even the Central Office intervened directly in the affairs of a village, or a district would concern itself with a specific hamlet. This was usually when a pilot project was to be carried out, or when a new policy or procedure was to be tested

on a small scale. For instance, a captured document entitled "Plan for Guerrilla Warfare," presumably issued by a province, states that each district was to maintain a perfect combat hamlet, and that the knowledge thus gained in each hamlet was to be disseminated for the common benefit. Another document, this one apparently a report from district to province, says that 17 hamlets and three areas had been selected as "pilot areas" in which to conduct intensified "motivation" of the people. A cadre from a Regional Committee (the level between province and the Central Office) described how he had been sent in October 1965 to a number of experimental areas in order to try out a new policy of mobilizing the population against the landlords. In the course of these visits he held meetings with local guerrillas and education cadres in order to test their reactions to the new policy. Pilot projects and experimental areas thus enabled higher cadres to keep in direct touch with personnel at the base of the Viet Cong administrative pyramid, as well as to test new policies and help set up model demonstration projects.

#### CADRE PERSONNEL POLICIES

Higher cadres had always been available to the insurgents. They were provided from among the underground leaders who remained in the South and the regroupées and North Vietnamese who began infiltrating South Vietnam in increasing numbers after 1956. As the demand for higher



cadres grew, these were provided in part by searching out former Vietminh resistants who had not yet joined the new insurgency and persuading them to become active again. One respondent mentions a course, or screening session, held in about 1961 to select the best elements from among former resistance personnel who had not yet joined the Front. As the movement grew it was, of course, also possible to promote personnel from within.

To man the complex village and hamlet machinery, however, enormous numbers of new cadres had to be recruited. Ordinarily, these cadres were appointed by higher echelons, but there seem to have been some efforts to provide for the election of civilian cadres in villages and hamlets, or at least to provide the appearance of elections. One respondent reported that when the Viet Cong had taken over his village they held meetings and asked the villagers to listen to their lectures on the policy of the Front. "In the end, they asked the people to choose among themselves those who they thought could be promoted to cadres. . . . The Viet Cong had arranged that such and such a person should be elected, and the villagers elected them according to the Viet Cong's wishes." Another respondent, when asked who the most important cadre in his village was, replied: "His name is Det. He was elected by the people but had been selected beforehand by the Viet Cong for that position." A third source said that the Front occasionally called a meeting to elect hamlet officials, but that this was largely a matter of form: "The Front had chosen its

man and recommended him to the voters; they had no choice but to elect that man over the other matter-of-form candidates." In some cases, however, the Viet Cong authorities seem to have allowed a free, if limited, choice, as in the following example:

In August [1965] a Village Popular Administrative Committee was organized. All members of this committee were men of the village. In each hamlet the cadres made a list of seven men from among elderly and uneducated villagers who had worked for the resistance but never for the government. The people in each hamlet chose five men from the list of seven. The elected men from all the hamlets formed the Village Popular Administrative Committee. This committee chose five men in each hamlet for a Hamlet Administrative Committee.

One source mentioned that in principle the members of the Village Administrative Committee should have been elected by the villagers, but that the security situation in his area did not permit this. Therefore, the higher cadres chose them from among Party members and loyal sympathizers. A cadre from An Xuyen Province reported that late in 1965 the cadres were sent to a number of hamlets and villages in the province to show people how to elect representatives to such bodies as the village and hamlet administrative committees. In these elections the farmer and worker classes were to be favored, and the landlords rigorously excluded. The same respondent reported that in each district and province a "research committee" was working to evolve a system by which administrative systems could be set up through democratic elections. As of October 1965 the committee in his province was still working on sub-hamlet, hamlet, and village structures, but expected

to start discussions in 1966 on ways that district and provincial authorities might be set up on a democratic basis.

These, of course, were administrative structures and subordinate to the authority of the Party, but Party officials, too, were in theory chosen by democratic elections. Party cell leaders in each hamlet were supposed to be chosen by all the cell members. Similarly, the Village Party Chapter Committee was to be elected by all Party members in the village. In practice, however, this election did not necessarily take place. One respondent reported, for instance, that in his village the Party Secretary was appointed by the District Chapter Committee.

Indeed, in a great many villages taken over by the Viet Cong, cadres initially had to be brought in from the outside in order to run the Party and administrative apparatus, and elections therefore did not come into question at all. Respondents from several provinces reported that village secretaries or other important cadres were strangers to the local people, apparently having been appointed by the district authorities. In one village it was reported that the Front had no cadres at all, and provided all of them from the outside. Cadres might also be sent temporarily from districts in order to assist village authorities with specific jobs, such as tax collection. Higher cadres, especially those at province or district level, were assigned as needed and sent from one area to another. In some cases, the Viet Cong authorities apparently felt that a stranger could do a better job than a local man. One cadre, who was in charge of local propaganda, reported that he had been transferred to other villages "where,

being a stranger, I could more easily educate and enlighten the people. And they sent other men from other villages to my village so as to facilitate their activities."

Where did new local cadres come from? Large numbers were personnel who had served the Front well in some more minor capacity, and were then promoted to a higher rank. For instance, underground workers might be appointed to administrative posts after a village had been taken over. When a village had been subdued mainly by military means, however, it might have very little in the way of Viet Cong infrastructure, and in such cases cadres sometimes were selected from among the population. Some respondents reported that when new cadres had to be appointed in a hurry they were chosen from among the poorer and less educated segments of the population. Others suggested that such choices were deliberate since illiterate cadres would presumably carry out orders without asking questions.

Nevertheless, the Front could not escape the necessity of using quite a few cadres with backgrounds of at least some wealth and education. This may have been in part because of the large amount of paper work that was required of them. In such cases, more indoctrination was necessary. The former chief of a village military proselyting team noted that "the more his formal education, the longer a man has to be indoctrinated."

Regardless of his social background, it was desirable that a cadre be a persuasive speaker. A great many men who described the process by which they had been recruited into the Viet Cong ranks mentioned the persuasiveness of the cadres who had approached them. "He spoke very well. He made good promises to me." Or again, "His talk was

sweet to my ears." A former cadre explained his promotion by saying: "I was young myself, I had a gay spirit, I spoke easily to the people. . . ." And in the words of a district official:

A Viet Cong cadre, to be effective, must be a very good actor. He must show all sorts of emotions in order to provoke the same among the villagers. He must show anger, joy, love, contempt, etc., when the speech requires him to do so, in order to draw the attention of the people and make the speech interesting. If he drones on and on in a monotonous manner, nobody will listen to him.

The Front did not rely entirely on native persuasive ability. It also tried to cultivate this ability. One former cadre who admitted that he "talked badly" said that he had been scheduled to attend a training course to cure this deficiency. Careful advance preparation was also involved. The district official who was quoted above also remarked:

If the cadres want to talk about a certain topic, they will hold a meeting in advance to discuss it. They will try to find out the answers in advance to all the questions which the people . . . will probably ask . . . . That is why they never get stuck, and have an answer ready for any question. However, if they cannot answer the questions asked by the people, they should say that they will report these questions back to their superiors, who will provide the people with satisfactory answers.

Other cadres were probably chosen because they were good administrators or able technicians. This may have been the case especially in the case of military leaders. One respondent, describing the guerrilla leader in his

village, whom he considered very able, said that this leader was not antigovernment or attracted by the Party's doctrine -- he just loved to fight.

Any native ability that a cadre might have was reinforced and developed through careful training. Initially, this might be given on an individual basis right in the village. In one village where the Viet Cong had a weak infrastructure, for instance, only a single cadre was experienced, so he trained the other village cadres. Another report about this same village states that the Village Secretary was trained by a regroupee who came to talk to him frequently. This kind of informal training and indoctrination was supplemented by a multitude of more formal training courses. One subject told of attending a 25-day course on how to lead a Party cell. Another was given a ten-day course on military proselyting. Courses might also be for the purpose of explaining specific policies or orders. Thus, there were special training sessions for Village Secretaries and Village Finance Section Chiefs on tax policy, and others for district cadres on the policy governing the reduction of administrative personnel. There seem to have been few cadres of village level or higher who had not attended at least one formal training course.

Once trained, cadres were valuable assets, and had to be protected. The Viet Cong took considerable pains to assure their physical security and also to guard their prestige and status in the eyes of the population. (In closed sessions of Party members or officials, however, cadres were often subjected to savage criticism by their peers or superiors.) Physical security was provided not

only by the guerrillas, who were assigned to protect cadres in the village, but also by actually removing them from areas that were threatened by government forces. When it appeared likely that the government would uncover underground cadres in one area, for instance, these men were simply transferred to another area and did other work until circumstances enabled them to return. A former district official reported that when his district had come under government military control during the first six months of 1963, "the whole District Military Affairs Committee and its revolutionary institutions and the village chapter committees had to evacuate to Cong-Coc Island, except for a few cadres who stayed on the spot to conduct clandestine activities." As soon as the military balance shifted in favor of the Viet Cong, the entire apparatus returned to the district.

The Front was also concerned with protecting the prestige of its cadres, and thus its own image. When a regroupee lieutenant became disaffected and was confined in a Viet Cong village as punishment for his "poor attitude," Front officials told the local people that he actually was there to recuperate from a recent illness. If a cadre murdered an innocent person for personal reasons, the Viet Cong authorities would not admit this in public, but would tell the villagers that the slain man was in fact a spy. Then the guilty cadre would be secretly punished after he had been transferred to another place. In the words of a former Front official: "Thus the Party's and the Front's prestige is left intact." A high-ranking Viet Cong functionary stated that when it was discovered that cadres had taken liberties with village women the

authorities dared not take drastic measures for fear of destroying the cadres and consequently the revolution's prestige. Disputes within the ranks of the cadres were, insofar as possible, settled quietly by "education, criticisms, and especially by heart-to-heart talks." When these methods did not avail, the parties involved in the dispute were transferred to other locations.

As the above examples suggest, the administration of cadres involved many headaches for higher echelons. A Viet Cong document, captured in Binh Dinh Province in 1966, complained that local cadres were neglecting indoctrination and education. Instead of persuading, they ordered the people to work. Furthermore, they did not set good examples. Most of them tried to avoid doing heavy labor themselves. Respondents frequently reported troublesome disputes among cadres, efforts of cadres to protect their relatives from the draft, and cases where cadres embezzled money or rice. In order to prevent travelling cadres from accepting free meals from villagers and then collecting expense money from the Front for them, a system of meal coupons was worked out during 1965, at least in some areas. A former Village Secretary from Go Cong Province submitted a whole bill of complaints:

In my village, the cadres were young people -- under 30. Therefore, they didn't have enough experience and couldn't win the people's confidence. Moreover, they behaved badly and indulged in vices: they stole chickens, ducks, and small things; they got drunk and they brawled; they clandestinely gambled more often than before. I think that the long war has affected their morale. I was dissatisfied with them, because they sometimes used threats to get things done.



To cope with problems such as these, the Viet Cong had a whole series of mechanisms, including self-criticism sessions, heart-to-heart talks, transfers, and constant surveillance of cadres, as well as imprisonment or death in extreme cases. From examination of the available materials, it appears that disciplinary violations by cadres have become more numerous during the past two years, but this would be only natural in view of the rapid expansion of the cadre corps and the increasing demands placed upon it. There are no indications that violations and internal conflicts have risen to a point where they are out of control and present a serious threat to the cohesiveness of the Viet Cong structure.



#### IV. MOBILIZATION, TAX COLLECTION, AND LAND REFORM

The Viet Cong treated villages under their complete or partial control primarily as sources of manpower, rice, and money with which to carry on the war. Therefore, they gave first attention to mobilizing the population for military or quasi-military service and to collecting taxes and contributions. In addition, they saw control of villages as an opportunity to create a new kind of society in South Vietnam, and this required such measures as land reform, ideological remolding of the population, and building a new leadership class. Military requirements, however, had to receive priority.

#### TOTAL MOBILIZATION FOR THE MILITARY MISSION

In commenting on Viet Cong activities in their villages, many respondents say simply that everybody worked for the Front. Those who were not in some kind of military service were tapped for labor service, and those who were too old or weak to perform labor service were assigned some other kind of duty. This high degree of mobilization was made possible by the Viet Cong organizations, which embraced nearly everybody. "Generally speaking," remarked one respondent from the delta, "only children under seven years stay out."

The greatest pressure was brought on men of military age. Up until 1965 or early 1966, they were often given an initial choice of either enlisting in the army or the guerrillas, or else performing labor services. The latter kind of service appears to have been intensely unpopular,

so most chose to enlist in the guerrillas to escape it. In some cases, all young men were simply drafted into military service. If those who joined the guerrillas were lucky, they might be allowed to serve only part time and would be able to take care of their fields when not on duty.

Labor service involved providing support for Viet Cong armed units, transporting food and ammunition, and digging up the roads or engaging in other forms of sabotage. Those villagers who were assigned to support the fighting forces directly usually had to carry ammunition or remove the wounded and dead from the battlefield. Labor details were also needed to destroy the defenses of strategic hamlets that had been overrun, and to cut government communication routes. A subject who had somehow been able to avoid joining any association said that he still had to perform labor duty five to seven times a month. Sometimes this lasted all day, but sometimes only for the morning or afternoon.

Transportation missions might involve going on long trips. These were especially dreaded, not only because of the danger and discomfort involved, but because each person had to provide his own rice to eat on the journey and at the same time lost income because he was unable to do his own work. One source reported that in theory people from his village had to do transportation duty only once a year for three months, but that in fact some men had been home only a week from a mission when they were called to go out for three months more. A second respondent said that in his area those between 35 and 45 years of age were forced to do labor as coolies. They

would work far from home for one or two months, and then would be allowed to return to the village for a few days. He added that many were trying to escape to the cities to avoid this duty.

There was another type of quasi-military activity in which all could join: This was constructing defensive fortifications for Viet Cong combat hamlets. In some cases, much of this work was done by those who were old and weak, since the young and healthy personnel had been sent on transportation missions. Digging trenches, sharpening spikes, and planting traps might take as much as two days a week out of a person's working time. Sometimes quotas were assigned. In one village, for instance, each man had to furnish ten pointed sticks, 2.5 meters long, and these were planted in the soccer field (probably to keep helicopters from landing). Each person also had to provide a little wooden board with iron spikes protruding from it and 300 large bamboo needles. These were used in various kinds of booby traps. In another village, each family was assigned a quota of 500 spikes, and in a third, each villager was told to cut 300 to 400 bamboo spikes and to make two iron spike boards. One respondent, after describing how people were forced to sharpen spikes, dig trenches, and construct roadblocks, said simply: "Everybody had to work."

Old people and children probably participated in such light work as sharpening spikes, but in addition they were assigned a more specialized role in some areas. In one village, for instance, they were given a two-day course in military proselyting. Then, if government forces came into the village on a sweep operation, they

were to go out and greet the soldiers and inquire about their health and welfare, as well as that of their families, in order to attract the soldiers to the revolutionary cause. According to this report, the people were in fact terribly afraid and did not dare to do as they had been told.

Women, especially, were frequently mobilized for a political task: that of going in a body to government authorities (usually in the district capital) and protesting the bombing and shelling of villages. Sometimes compensation for the damage done would also be demanded. These demonstrations, or "face-to-face struggles," were ordinarily organized by village cadres right after an attack. One respondent reported: "Once the militia in Tan Tru Post shelled a village and wounded an old woman. Immediately after the shelling, the Viet Cong incited the villagers to carry the wounded woman to the district center and protest." According to another man, the cadres required that at least one member of each family participate in such demonstrations, and that "they especially wanted the women to participate."

Some of these demonstrations seem to have been genuinely popular. When the government Self-Defense Corps killed 20 villagers in an attack, the local people were reported to have been extremely resentful, and the Front authorities had no difficulty in launching a Popular Struggle Movement. However, villagers seem to have been quick to classify attacks as "legitimate" or "illegitimate," and were reluctant to protest "legitimate" attacks. When, for instance, people believed that bombing or shelling had been provoked by the guerrillas, they blamed the Front

authorities and showed no enthusiasm for participating in a "struggle" at the district town. On the other hand, if the villagers could see no rational military reason for the attack they were more likely to cooperate with the cadres when they came to organize a protest.

Whether because people blamed the Viet Cong for provoking attacks or because they simply became tired of engaging in demonstrations that didn't seem to do any good, it became increasingly difficult for the cadres to organize these demonstrations during 1965. One former cadre told of a case in which 35 old women had been mobilized to go to the district town and protest a shelling, but all except nine dropped out on the way. In another case, there were only a few women who were enthusiastic about going on a demonstration, so the cadres organized the women into squads, with an enthusiastic one in charge of each squad, and in this way made sure that the column did not disintegrate before it reached its goal.

The reaction of the government authorities to these protests seems to have varied, but usually was mild. In one case, the women were detained for three days and told that if they did it again they would be kept a week. In another, a military spokesman told the women that there would be no more shelling if they could persuade the guerrillas not to fire at the post. In still a third, the district officials read the protest and promised that they would stop the shelling.

In addition to taking part in demonstrations, women were assigned a wide range of important tasks throughout the Viet Cong structure. As more and more men were drawn into the fighting forces or put to work doing heavy

transportation duty, women took over much of the ploughing, land clearing, and fuel cutting. In addition, women constituted an important percentage of the guerrilla forces and the corvée labor force, and also could be found in high political and military positions.

Mention has already been made of the activity of women in military proselyting and in shaming men into joining the Front's armed forces. Apparently some women overdid this. In one case a girl is said to have promised marriage to six or seven men at the same time if they would join the Viet Cong army. Another source alleged that whenever someone was arrested by government forces, any woman who happened to be present was supposed to say that the person being arrested was her husband or son, and was to beg for his release.

The Viet Cong high command was well aware of the importance of women as a source of military manpower. A document captured in April 1966, dealing with an unspecified area, prescribed that 50 percent of the guerrilla force should be composed of women. It also gave the number of women at that time involved in the Front military or paramilitary forces in the same (unidentified) area:

Guerrillas	3,304 (including 1,266 women)
Secret guerrillas	94 women
Self-defense force	17,009 (including 9,334 women)

A document captured earlier in the same year merely noted that more women than before were participating in guerrilla activities in Cu Chi District, Gia Dinh Province.

A number of respondents mentioned the presence of women both in the guerrillas forces and in larger units.



One subject, who was caught by female guerrillas while trying to defect from a Main Force company, noted that there was a company of very zealous female volunteers in the village: "If they met you they would propagandize you until you were exhausted." Two subjects reported the existence of female platoons in their units, but neither thought much of the military worth of these platoons. One of the platoons was armed with submachine guns, but was used mainly for transport duty. Another respondent, who mentioned the presence of a female guerrilla squad in his village, said that they carried weapons but hadn't used them yet.

If there were doubts about the military worth of women in the fighting forces, this was not the case when it came to units performing labor services. A document captured in September 1965 contained the observation that women laborers did better work than the men, and "in the future the more women the better." In some areas young women as well as young men were drafted and assigned either to the military or to the labor forces.

Reports of female cadres are frequent, and mentions of women in very high positions are not rare. One respondent noted that control of many villages in Viet Cong areas had passed into the hands of women cadres because all the men had left to fight. Two other sources said that the Party Secretaries of their villages were women. Some of the instructors in a political training course were reported to be girls, and at another political training course 30 of the 80 participants were said to be women: "They came from Tay Ninh and were all volunteers."

A captured Party Development Plan for Bien Hoa Province dated November 10, 1965, advises that "special attention should be given to women in recruiting new Party members."

Women could be found at all levels of the Viet Cong organization, not only at the village level and below. Two respondents knew of female district cadres, one of them a Chairman of a District Party Committee, with 14 villages under her control. Women were mentioned as being the Deputy Secretary of a Province Party Committee, the Deputy Commander of Military Region II, and the Deputy Commander of the Central Office for South Vietnam. Concerning Mrs. Ba Dinh, the Military Region II Deputy Commander, a respondent noted:

She visited my battalion for a week. She was about 41 years old. She talked like a man. Her female bodyguards were always by her side with a box of betel nuts. The men in my unit respected her very much, for nothing could pass under her sharp eyes unnoticed. I heard that she was a native of Ben Tre who had helped to start a guerrilla unit in her village. Later she was promoted to village committee chief, then to district committee chief, to province committee chief, and lastly she ended up in the Region as deputy commander.

In spite of the opportunities the Viet Cong organization offered women, it may have regarded them with some ambivalence. One former cadre mentioned that the Front was very afraid of women, because if a man fell in love and was married he became a poor fighter. Also, women were believed often to serve as spies for the government. The same man recalled that in theory a cadre was not supposed to talk to or even smile at a woman,

except in line of duty. When this man met female cadres he would dare to talk with them only if two or three other people were present. Another man noted that even the older cadres wanted to have young wives, and that this made the middle-aged female cadres dissatisfied.

Whether the Front actually had a special appeal for women, as some of the reports suggest, is difficult to determine. Especially in country districts, where chances for a woman to escape the drudgery of daily existence on the farm were limited, some girls were undoubtedly drawn to the Viet Cong in hope of adventure, whether or not they also were attracted by ideological appeals. This is confirmed by one female respondent, who said that she welcomed an assignment as a Viet Cong liaison agent because she had never been outside her province (Binh Dinh) and was eager to see the rest of the country. On the other hand, the demands of the Viet Cong clearly conflicted sharply with the requirements of family life, and many women -- left by themselves to till the fields as best they could -- must have felt bitter toward the movement that had taken their husbands and sons.

#### TAX COLLECTION AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The Viet Cong have developed a complicated and far-reaching system of taxation, which closely parallels that of a legitimate government. Few people escape the tax collector in villages that are controlled by the insurgents or are in contested areas, and large numbers of persons even in government-controlled areas are forced or induced to pay. Taxes have been imposed on the production,

milling, transportation, and marketing of individual crops (especially rice), on farm animals and fish, and on property and incomes. There are also sales, manufacturing, marketing, transportation, and trade taxes on almost every major product. The population is frequently taxed on services as well. These imposts are supplemented by bond sales drives, and by forced sales of surplus products to the Viet Cong at below-market prices, and by a variety of supposedly "free will" contributions.

In imposing this network of taxes, the insurgents not only assured themselves of a financial and material base. Viet Cong taxation also deprived the Saigon government of money and rice, and tended to force up the price of articles that finally reached markets in government areas. Tax collection was an important demonstration of Viet Cong power, and the act of paying linked the individual to the revolutionary cause. Indeed, it might also compromise him in the eyes of the government and help to make him an illegal person. One respondent noted that in contested areas people tried to pay up as quickly as possible in order to clear the tax collectors out of the village before government forces appeared to accuse those who had paid of being Viet Cong sympathizers.

In spite of the systematic nature of the Viet Cong taxation system, the insurgents tried to avoid the use of the word "tax." One respondent said that this was because the Front had criticized the government for imposing a multitude of taxes and didn't want to be tarred with its own brush. The Front may also have felt that payment would be made more willingly if people felt that they were providing free will offerings for a specific purpose.

In any event, individual taxes were usually labeled "contributions for the support of the army," or "contributions for the battle against the Americans." Before 1963, payment may have been voluntary in many cases. Thus, there are reports from this period or earlier that cadres only asked for "help" and didn't specify any amount. Nevertheless, there seems to have been some form of pressure, direct or indirect, exercised in most cases.

Taxation rates varied somewhat from province to province, but in all areas they rose steadily during 1964 and 1965. Thus, a respondent from Go Cong Province who had paid VN\$ 500 to the Front per mau (hectare) of rice land in 1963 had to pay VN\$ 1,500 in 1964 and VN\$ 2,000 in 1965. He was forced to borrow to pay this last sum. A farmer in neighboring Dinh Tuong, who paid the Front VN\$ 1,000 in 1963, was assessed a tax of VN\$ 3,500 in 1964 and 1965. Taxes were sometimes collected in money and sometimes in kind, or both methods of payment might be involved. For instance, according to an analysis by the Agency for International Development, the tax schedule in Quang Nam Province appears to have been as follows as of 1965:

<u>Class</u>	<u>Cash</u>	<u>Salt (kilos)</u>	<u>Rice (gia)</u>
Landowner	VN\$ 3,000-6,000	40	40-80
Rich farmer	1,000-3,000	20	20-40
Average farmer	500-1,000	12	4-12
Poor farmer	100-500	4	1-2

Products were often taxed twice. Thus, a farmer who had already paid a percentage on his total rice crop might be taxed another 2-10 percent on any rice that he took to sell in the market. Or a man who had already

been taxed 10 percent of his total income would have to pay another tax on each pig he sold. Sampans were also taxed, the amount depending on the size of the boat and whether or not it was motorized. Nor were oxcarts overlooked as a source of tax revenue.

These and other direct taxes were supplemented by indirect taxes on cigarettes, beverages, and so on, by special collections, and by bond sales. One widespread method of rice collection was the "handful" or "jar of rice" policy. To provide for local troop support, each family regardless of size was required to put aside a handful of rice at each mealtime, or every day. This was placed in a jar, and the contents were then collected at intervals by Viet Cong workers. The contribution was known by various names, such as "Anti-American Rice," "Combat Rice," or "Unity of Heart Jar of Rice." Special drives were conducted for specific causes, such as aiding flood victims, for the forthcoming liberation of some particular area, or for the relief of a village that had been damaged by air attack.

In many areas, troop support bonds were sold by the Viet Cong, often accompanied by vigorous propaganda and pressure. A captured "Province Activity Plan" for the period August-October 1965 provides that preparations for selling bonds should be made up until August 30. Then, from August 30 through October 15 "motivation" should be continued and the bonds sold. Between October 15 and 30 the accounts were to be closed and the funds collected sent to the province. The total amount desired from this (unnamed) province was VN\$ 3,000,000. In An Xuyen Province two kinds of bonds were reported: those backed by rice, with a value of ten bushels each, and

those backed by money, which were valued at VN\$ 500. Each family was expected to buy at least one bond. A farmer from Tay Ninh Province reported:

They [the cadres] told us we should buy bonds to support the Front. Each certificate cost 500 piasters. We paid for the certificates but never saw any of them. The Viet Cong knew who had more money and who had less, and they decided how many bonds each family should buy. They said that when the country became independent we would have high honors because we had bought these bonds. Also, we could get our money back.

Those who bought bonds were, of course, committed to the Front's cause in the sense that the bonds would have a value only in the event of a Viet Cong victory, and this may have been one of the reasons for using this form of money raising. As one respondent noted: "Those who bought bonds would continue to serve the Front hoping they could be reimbursed later on ..., but I think there have been no volunteers to buy them. Those who have bought them must have been forced to do so."

In areas where people were too poor to pay taxes, or where the insurgents especially needed food supplies, groups of families or even whole villages were sometimes turned into production units to supply the troops. In certain areas of Darlac Province, for example, each family was forced to grow cassava roots for the Viet Cong, and in Phu Yen villagers who were too poor to pay taxes were organized into production units.

Tax quotas and rates were fixed by higher echelons, but the village authorities had to decide how much each individual should pay. When a quota was placed on a village, this meant that the fewer the people remaining there, the higher the tax for each one, but if the harvest had been very bad a lower quota might be accepted.

One way of deciding on the amount to be assessed against each family was to hold a meeting of all heads of families, where villagers were required to declare how much rice they produced, and how many people there were in the family. Since a man was likely to know the capacity of his neighbors, each villager checked on the others to ensure that their declarations were correct. As one respondent said: "If anyone did not tell the truth, his neighbors would denounce him. Then the Civil Affairs Committee would decide how much each family should pay." If a villager declared that he owned only four cong of land but really owned five, the authorities might confiscate the undeclared rice land. When no formal quota was set for a village, one technique was to have "plants" at the meeting volunteer to pay a high amount, and then to scale the share of other villagers accordingly. Or formal criticism sessions might be held to determine if each villager was paying enough. To assist in tax assessment, the village authorities often drew up a complete list showing every person in the village.

Actual collection of rice or money was usually done by members of one of the associations in the village, most often by the Farmers' Association, but young people, women, and guerrillas were also used. In contested areas taxes might be collected by a three-man cell system. Each member of the cell had to form another cell with two trusted acquaintances. A cell member would then make collections from his family and relatives and deliver these to his cell leader, who would turn over the yield to a higher cell leader, and so on. Receipts were then issued by



fiscal cadres. Underground tax agents operated in government-controlled areas. For instance, a coconut merchant who gathered his wares in Front-controlled villages was allowed to continue his business only if he delivered tax notices to people living in New Life Hamlets.

The Viet Cong made their tax system progressive as far as direct assessments were concerned, and taxed the rich at a higher rate than the poor. The effect of the many indirect taxes and special contributions, however, was to place a relatively heavier burden on the poor and to make the whole system somewhat regressive. In Kontum Province, for example, all the "poor" had to contribute 12 percent of their total yield in 1964 and 24 percent in 1965, and a poor villager who sold a duck in the market had to pay at the same rate as his more affluent neighbor. Forced labor, which often had the effect of taxation, was especially burdensome for marginal families, since their assets consisted mainly of the time they could spend in the fields.

As higher and higher taxes were imposed in Viet Cong areas, the authorities had increasing difficulty collecting them. A captured document dealing with tax collection for 1965 in an unspecified area (possibly all South Vietnam) starts out by saying that "the agricultural and tax policy applied in the past two years has been approved and supported by the people because it prescribes just and reasonable contributions and has a sound basis for tax computation." Then it goes on to detail the many difficulties that had been encountered: Low motivation had resulted in poor collection, especially in "weak" areas,

few bonds had been sold, and people did not want to make loans. In fact, the document anticipated that only 70 percent of the total amount programmed for 1965 would be collected, and that there would be a 30 percent deficit. Since, however, the 1965 tax goal was 150 percent of taxes collected in 1964, the actual revenue in both years was about the same. A high echelon cadre reported that a tax quota of VN\$ 60,000,000 had been fixed for Long An Province in 1965, but that only 47 percent of this had been collected. Nevertheless, the quota for 1966 had been fixed at double the 1965 amount, or VN\$ 120,000,000. He added that before trying to collect taxes in 1966 the Front would have people study the theme: "Never mind poverty; never mind hunger."

As tax collectors experienced increasing difficulties in meeting their quotas, they necessarily became more harsh in their methods. Whereas collections were formerly made at every harvest or once a year, they became more frequent -- often monthly. Furthermore, full payment was demanded within a week or a month, whereas previously it could be made in installments or delayed up to a year. Those who could not pay were asked to borrow. Threats and intimidation, actual confinement for "reeducation," and the death penalty sometimes had to be used in order to make people pay up.

Villagers reacted to the burdensome demands of the tax collector in three ways: They grumbled, they fled from the area, or they reduced production. One source said that his family had been unable to pay the prescribed tax, and that if the economy continued on a low level in the following year many people would starve. In

An Xuyen Province it was reported that the tax policy caused discouragement among cadres and soldiers also. One assistant district unit leader even opposed the fiscal cadres openly and conducted what amounted to a small rebellion against the Viet Cong. A number of men from this unit then defected to the government. According to this report, people were especially angry at being compelled to buy troop support bonds.

Reports of villagers fleeing to avoid taxation are even more frequent. A man who had to pay VN\$ 1,200 in 1964, and VN\$ 2,000 in the following year -- plus a special contribution of VN\$ 200 to feed the troops -- said that about seven out of ten people from his village had moved into New Life Hamlets to avoid the high taxation. Another respondent recalled the villagers as often saying: "We would do better to go to town and settle there than to stay on here to work as slaves for the Front." A district level cadre mentioned that the Viet Cong had threatened people to make them contribute and concluded that such activities were both good and bad for the Front. They were good because in that way they obtained rice for the troops, but they were bad because the villagers all left.

Villagers who did not flee might decide merely to raise enough to feed their families, reasoning that anything more than this would be taken by the tax collector. Viet Cong taxation policy thus tended to weaken incentives to produce, especially among poorer farmers. A former military cadre recalled: "The people refused to increase their level of production because life had become too difficult for them. They just produced enough for

themselves. We tried to stimulate their spirits, but they were uninterested."

Viet Cong taxes were seen as especially burdensome in that people often recalled that government taxes had been lighter. Indeed, some villagers remembered the years of government control as "the good old days."

### LAND REFORM

If the Front lost a great deal of good will among the villagers with its taxation policy, its land-reform program was at least initially popular with the farmers who benefited from it. Nevertheless, this program was beset with a number of problems, and its impact was not as favorable to the Viet Cong as has been popularly supposed.

The nature of land reform differed from area to area. In some villages, rich landowners were told to divide their land among their tenant farmers, who in turn were told to give the landowner some of the yield. The landowner might also be promised compensation later on. If a landowner fled the village, however, his land was likely to be confiscated outright. A respondent from Dinh Tuong Province observed: "Those who left the village for the town and those whose sons had joined the government army lost land if they did not come back to the village after they had received their third notice from the Front. Their land was seized and given to families the sons of which were regroupees or draftees." Such warnings were apparently delivered by women who went to market in the government towns. A report from

An Xuyen Province states that late in 1964 provincial authorities ordered that all lands whose owners did not live in Viet Cong-controlled territory must be confiscated. Since relatively little land was confiscated under this order, however, early in 1965 the province requisitioned all unused land, regardless of its ownership, and turned it over to cadres, soldiers, and tenant farmers. It is not clear whether they received ownership or only the use of the land. On the other hand, a respondent from Binh Tuy Province reported that, at least as of 1965, there had been no land reform in his village and that the land of those who had moved to government areas had been left untouched.

In areas where land reform was carried out, it often had the effect of rallying a large proportion of the population behind the Viet Cong. One respondent reported that two-thirds of the people in his village liked land reform: "They took the land of the rich and divided it among the poor, so there were no rich or poor in the village any longer.... The poor people were very happy." Nevertheless, this man (whose parents were classified as "poor farmers" by the Viet Cong) defected to the government, since he did not like other aspects of life under the Front. Another man said that from 1960 to 1965 about 50 people had been given land in his village, and "all of them have had an easier life. Only the rich farmers whose land was taken by the Front did not find the land distribution to their liking." In one delta village, after the government village chief and the interfamily group leaders had been beheaded, the Viet Cong forced the landlords to repay to the villagers the land rentals

they had previously received. This caused the majority of the poor people to favor the Front. The rest of the villagers were demoralized but didn't do anything. Other comments are to the effect that the villagers "really believed in the land reform of the Front," that land distribution made the youths enthusiastic to join the Front, or merely that "people were very enthusiastic." On the other hand, one respondent estimated that 70 percent of the people in his village hated Viet Cong land reform, "and only the idle, lazy people liked it." However, he had been classified as a rich landowner, and his family had lost land in the reshuffle, so it is not unlikely that his judgment was biased.

Those who received land often saw themselves as having a vested interest in a Viet Cong victory. For instance, families that had received land were more likely than others to send their sons to join the insurgents for fear that the land would be taken back by its former owner if the government regained control of the area. Sometimes the Viet Cong may have demanded certain services in return for land. One respondent says that from five to seven poor farmers in his hamlet received land, and "all of them had to work for the Front."

Nevertheless, the benefits accruing to the Viet Cong as a result of land reform were limited by the fact that this program could not be implemented satisfactorily in many areas under their control. In some cases the military situation apparently did not allow it, or so many people had fled the area that there was nobody left to work the land that might have been distributed. In other

villages, nearly everybody already had land, and the interest in land reform was therefore low. More commonly, the reverse was the case: There wasn't enough land to go around. In such a situation, many landless farmers received no land, or else they received such small plots that they could not support themselves.

Popular enthusiasm for land reform also tended to be dampened by the unwillingness of some people to accept land that had been taken from fellow villagers, by the expectation that government forces would return, by the high taxes that deprived poor farmers of the benefits of having more land to work, and by favoritism shown to Viet Cong cadres in the distribution. One respondent noted merely that "many people refused to accept land." The same man said that production went down by 30 percent after land reform because the new tenants did not have the means to exploit their new holdings.

Favoritism to the cadres was mentioned with particular frequency. As one man complained: "During the last few years the Front has not done anything good for the poor. It only gave land to the cadres of the village committee and the poor did not receive any assistance." Other respondents said that the turn of the poor came only after Front members had been taken care of, or that those who worked for the Front were given more land or better land than others. On the other hand, one villager maintained that "the distribution was fair enough -- the Front tried to gain people's hearts."

According to several captured documents, and also to a number of respondents, the Viet Cong viewed their

land-reform program up through 1966 as a provisional one. The final shape of things to come had not yet been determined, and this may also have hampered the effectiveness of the program. Those who received land were given the use of it on a temporary basis, and formal title did not pass to them. The intention of the Front's high command was apparently at first to be relatively lenient with landlords and rich farmers, in order not to cause a drop in production and also not to make more enemies than necessary. A new reform was to come in 1966, and then the landowners were to be treated with much greater severity. A regroupee who was interviewed early in 1966 remarked: "[In 1965] the Front didn't have a clear-cut policy. They took land away from absentee landlords to give temporarily to landless farmers. But the landlords' other belongings were left untouched. This year they will take everything from the houses down to a pair of chopsticks. Last year they confiscated land to grow rice to feed the troops. This year they give all the land to the people but they double the troop support tax rate." This source also maintained that in 1966 land and property would be taken away from all rich farmers and landlords -- and apparently not only from the absentees.

The reform contemplated for 1966 involved whipping up sentiment in the countryside against landowners and instituting a kind of class warfare. A cadre who was sent out from a regional headquarters during 1965 to test the new policy in experimental areas told how this was to be done.

Local guerrillas and cadres were to be gathered together on the village or hamlet level and were to study a document entitled "The New Situation and New Duties."



Then they were to be urged by the discussion leader to "recall the causes of their poverty and enumerate their hardships." This was supposed to involve the recitation of real or imaginary crimes and misdeeds perpetrated by landowners. After whipping themselves up to a state of fury against the landowners, the local cadres were presumably to involve as many of the population as possible in similar denunciation sessions. Then, armed with the conviction that their cause was a just one, all concerned were to go forth to strip the landowners of their property, and possibly to deprive them of liberty or even of life, as had been the case during land reform in North Vietnam. A captured directive entitled "Concerning the Motivation of Farmers in 1965" seems to refer to this process when it says: "Initiate the denunciation of imperialist and feudalism crimes.... Draft plans to cope with eventual reactions of the landlords and enemy sabotage."

In a number of pilot areas, at least, this process did not work as well as had been expected. The above Regional cadre who held trial sessions found that local Viet Cong personnel were not at all interested in denouncing landowners. He made them do so for about an hour, and told them some bad stories about landowners that he had picked up locally, but only one or two collaborated by adding something of their own. The others merely said, "I think the same as you." He finally gave up.

Whether because of reports received from this man and others like him, or whether because of military setbacks, the Viet Cong decided not to institute the intensive campaign against landowners in 1966. Instead,

denunciations of landowners were to be somewhat muted (although not given up entirely) and popular aggression was to be channeled mainly against the Americans and the Saigon government. A captured letter to district authorities, apparently from a province, dated August 14, 1965, reads in part as follows:

By order of higher echelons, the sentence: 'Abolish the landlords' right of land appropriation, give back all the lands to the farmers and workers,' in the letter [of May 1] from the Party to the farmers, must be replaced by this one: 'Continue to carry out the land policy, seize all the lands from the traitors, temporarily administer lands of the absent landlords for distribution to the farmers, reduce land rents and taxes.'

Another document, designated as an activity plan for the period August-October 1965, states:

Suspend the new Land Reform policy. Apply the old land policy of 1964. Continue to seize lands from the traitors and village bullies. Distribute the seized land to the farmers. The other landowners should observe the established rates of land rental and loan interest.

Prohibit dropping of cultivation.... If the landowners are absent, we administer their land and give it to the farmers to farm on. They will not be called back. If they come back, no land rentals will be paid to them, unless they actually cooperate with us and make themselves eligible. Continue to give government lands to farmers in reasonable proportions.

A similar document, this one identified as coming from the Central Office for South Vietnam, on Motivation of Rural

People in Bien Hoa Province for the period August-October 1965, says somewhat the same thing in greater detail. It charges local committees with reducing land rents, "partially by persuading the landowners," making a reasonable and just distribution of public lands, and confiscating the land of "traitors and puppet government officials" for distribution to poor farmers. The document also specifies that "only the missions stated in this directive will be carried out." The dissemination and implementation of the directive concerning land reform previously sent to districts is to be temporarily suspended. "Nam Truong knows that this change in directive will give rise to problems, and asks patience." A portion of the text of the directive, making it clear that the landowners have been given only a reprieve and not a pardon, reads as follows:

Continue to follow Plan No. 4. The crime denunciation is made by intercells and then by individuals. During the crime denunciation in the cell, two men will be assigned to denounce the crimes of the American imperialists and their lackeys, and one man the crimes of the landlords. However, after denouncing landlords' crimes, we must see that our principal enemies are the American imperialists and their lackeys because they help the landlords. As long as American imperialists exist, the landlords will survive. Consequently, we must concentrate all our efforts to attack the American imperialists and their lackeys while we struggle against the landlords only for the proper reduction of land rents.

Crimes committed by wicked lackeys in the local area must be continuously denounced....

Pilot area: Continue to carry out the mission in the two villages selected as pilot areas in

the province. Reassignment of cadre must be made....

It must be understood that this movement is directed against the Americans and their lackeys, and not the landlords, although the struggle against the landlords must go on in complete secrecy. T2 hopes that [poor] farmers will closely unite with rich farmers to isolate the landlords. It is very important that friends be differentiated from foes....

Make more friends than foes.

It is too early now to establish a rule for tax collection, purchasing, confiscation, and land distribution. These require further study....

It is also too early to publicly denounce the crimes of the enemy....

Direct the 'spear of hatred' at the Americans and their lackeys.

No references to future collectivization was found in the materials examined, although there were occasional references to rural cooperatives.

## V. CONTROL MECHANISMS

In order to carry through its mobilization, taxation, and reform programs, the Front attempted to secure total control over the thinking and behavior of the villagers. To this end it conducted vigorous propaganda and at the same time tried to exclude nonapproved ideas from the outside; it instituted elaborate security precautions to protect itself from subversion or dissidence; and it made effective use of a wide range of punishments for those who strayed from the prescribed path.

### PERSUASION AND PROPAGANDA

Although one cadre in every occupied or contested village had primary responsibility for propaganda, culture, and education, all Viet Cong personnel from the Village Secretary on down had to concern themselves constantly with persuading and motivating the population. Fiscal and military cadres, as well as those in charge of propaganda and education, were involved. For instance, a former Assistant Village Secretary mentioned that his most important task was giving ideological guidance to the people.

All available channels of communication were pressed into service. District and Provincial authorities, as well as higher echelons, issued a variety of newspapers, books, and other publications which were distributed in the villages either free of charge or for a very small sum. Some materials were duplicated in the villages themselves, although texts were usually supplied by higher echelons. This may have been the case with a mimeographed news sheet

entitled "Liberation of the South," which a hamlet chief reported receiving periodically. In addition, literature was available in an "information house" in many villages, where handwritten bulletins were posted for the attention of the population. Bulletins and other materials might also be posted on walls or trees. For the benefit of those who were illiterate or did not take the time to look at written communications, propaganda cadres read Front newspapers or news bulletins to the population through megaphones. People who had radios were urged to listen to Hanoi or to "Radio Liberation," which was operated by the Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

A captured document on "motivating the masses" for the period June - December 1965, apparently prepared by provincial authorities, gives instructions for organizing propaganda activities in villages. Among these are the following:

- Organize a club where propaganda and information can be disseminated. The District will establish a pilot club in C12 [apparently a code name for a village]. This mobile club will be located in a house borrowed from the people.
- It is imperative that news and newspaper reading cells be set up in hamlets and villages in both liberated and disputed areas. Stress the necessity for debating important pieces of news.
- Urge people to listen to our radio broadcasts. Radio listening groups may be organized on the basis of the number of radio owners in each housing area. Initiate public discussion of important news topics broadcast.
- Concurrently, a resolute and unfailing effort should be exerted to motivate the population into boycotting the enemy radio broadcasts.

- It behooves C10, C15, and C16 to rehabilitate their information halls and adorn them with attractive features. See that up-to-date news is published.
- Bulletin boards should be set up at road junctions, intersections, shopping centers, and so on, in liberated areas.
- Organize a megaphone team. Try to use a dual megaphone system in which two propaganda people engage in conversation on a topic of discussion.
- Reorganize psychological warfare entertainment teams, including three musical teams and three dance teams. As far as stage shows are concerned, smaller and shorter skits are more suitable for the situation.
- The most important thing is to saturate the weak areas with revolutionary songs.

This same document also contains instructions for organizing a photographic project. Each district was ordered to supply cameras and two reporters, who would attend a short photography course given at the province level, "since in the past no photographers were available to cover significant subjects." The pictures to be taken were to deal with crimes committed by the enemy in local areas, and were to serve as documents to denounce the enemy at home and abroad, as well as for propaganda among the masses. They should also show laborers engaging in production work, the heroic struggle of the people, and the vivid activities in the liberated areas. Province would undertake to see that the best pictures were exhibited. Each photograph was to be equipped with an explanatory caption. Slides and projectors would also be provided.

In spite of the emphasis placed on mass media by the Viet Cong, meetings and face-to-face propaganda still remained the most important means for reaching the villagers. Meetings became somewhat less frequent after the first month or so that the Viet Cong had been in control of a village, but they still occurred periodically. They might be called for purposes of general propaganda -- to tell people about the happiness of living under "Uncle Ho" and the Party and the hardships under the government regime -- or for a more specific purpose. The specific purposes most frequently mentioned by respondents were for the study and explanation of orders received from higher echelons, and to aid in recruiting, tax collection, or organizing "struggles."

One respondent reported that in his village there had been about one meeting per month during 1961 and 1962, and less frequent meetings during 1963. When these were to be held, the cadres visited every house and asked people to go to the soccer field. At least one representative from each family had to be there, and usually 300 to 400 people attended. First, a cadre would talk for ten or fifteen minutes about such things as "contributions for the liberation" or enlistment in the Viet Cong forces. Then, there would be a theatrical performance, songs, and dances performed by little girls. This respondent concluded that people liked to go to meetings because of the theatrical performance.

Other sources were not so sure that attendance was either voluntary or enthusiastic. One said that the Viet Cong had to force people to come to meetings because otherwise nobody would have been willing to listen to their



speeches. Another mentioned that people who did not attend meetings were forced by the guerrillas to attend an "education" course for two or three days.

Whether attendance was voluntary or not, it is clear that meetings were carefully managed. A captured document issued by the Central Office for South Vietnam advises that at meetings where people are urged to engage in self-criticism, some reliable cadres and Farmers' Association members should be selected to testify first and thus set an example to the others. According to a former village propaganda cadre, when meetings were called for the purpose of stimulating special contributions to the Viet Cong, a few men would be primed in advance to step forward and "spontaneously contribute their part." Similarly, when meetings were held for purposes of recruitment, a few bogus volunteers would be planted among the youths in order to stimulate them. One man reported that at the end of each propaganda talk there were always two or three villagers who applauded loudly and shouted "Long live the Front!" The others would then follow their example. None of these techniques of meeting management, of course, are unknown in Western countries.

The entertainment part of the program at public meetings had to carry its share of the ideological freight. Theatrical performances, for example, might deal with such time-tested themes as the wicked landowner and the poor farmer's daughter. When films were shown, these were likely to portray the Vietminh victory over the French at Dienbienphu, or the good life of people in North Vietnam. Viet Cong songs nearly always had a high ideological content. Even gatherings that were not organized primarily

for propaganda purposes, such as funerals and weddings, were also used as occasions for ideological indoctrination.

Emphasis on mass appeals did not lead the Viet Cong to ignore the necessity for constant face-to-face exhortation. As a former guerrilla leader stated: "The farmers only trust those who remain close to them, talk to them frequently, and help them in their everyday life." There is ample evidence that this principle was followed, at least as far as propaganda was concerned. The Viet Cong were less able to give the farmers real help, although they tried.

The general themes emphasized most strongly in the Front's propaganda were that the Viet Cong were winning the war and that the Americans and the Saigon government were enemies of the people. Respondents mention again and again that news bulletins and other informational reports dealt almost exclusively with the victories of the insurgents and the losses of the other side. Propaganda materials also stressed that the victory of the Viet Cong was inevitable, because they were supported by the socialist countries which were becoming constantly stronger and because South Vietnam was already almost completely "liberated." According to this theme, the Front already controlled ten million people and the government only four million, and of these four million one million supported the Front and another million were undecided.

Captured documents harp on the necessity of constantly fanning the flames of hatred:

To initiate motivation of the country people  
and heighten the political awareness of urban

people, to kindle their hatred of the U.S. imperialists, the landlords, bourgeoisie, and the lackeys of the U.S., to improve the masses' political posture, political awakening, and patriotism on the basis of classes. . . .

Incite farmers to harbor a grudge against the U.S. imperialists, their henchmen and landlords, and to lay claim to the land.

Or again:

- Keep vigilant and strong the hate of the Americans and feudalists.
- Strengthen hate for the imperialists and feudalists.
- Place an absolute belief in the Party, and in one's capabilities for self-aid and strengthening. . . .

A later document mentions that political training was to be conducted for guerrilla personnel in order to "nurture their hatred against the enemy and improve their class-warfare awareness."

The theme of hatred is echoed in the reports of respondents who lived in Viet Cong territories. These observers note that general themes were often expressed in terms of down-to-earth stories that could easily be appreciated by the villagers. For instance, there were stories about government soldiers who had made bets about who could first shoot down a child riding on a buffalo, or who could kill a girl working in the fields at some distance. The man who related these stories added: "Those incidents happened years ago, but the Front has been using them to make their propaganda everywhere and is still capitalizing on them in order to make a comparison

between the government and the Front treatment of the population."

In their propaganda activities, village cadres not only had to follow general themes applying to a large area or to the whole country, but also were given themes that should be accorded special emphasis in their particular area. Thus, the promotion of troop support bond sales might be given more attention in one province than another.

Viet Cong propaganda was probably widely successful in influencing the attitudes and behavior of people in controlled or contested areas, although many exceptions have been reported. One respondent said that "in my area, by dint of hard propaganda, they made the villagers believe them in the long run," although he added that there were some people who believed the Viet Cong outwardly but not inwardly. Another involuntarily revealed the success of the Front's indoctrination process when he recalled: "At that time, although I longed to enjoy peace, I was not willing to accept the peace conditions laid down by the Americans: that is, that land be concentrated in the landowners' hands." The best evidence of the effectiveness of Viet Cong propaganda is that numerous former insurgents who voluntarily defected to the government still repeated the Front's line on many subjects.

Nevertheless, there were also seeds of doubt. People frequently became suspicious of the Viet Cong's claim that they won every battle. As one man noted: "Their news always dealt with victories, and I never heard of defeats. I trusted some of their news, such as victories over the Self Defense men or the Civil Guards, but I didn't believe

the Front's news when it dealt with big battles." Another respondent indicated that up until 1964 he had generally believed the Front's propaganda, but then came the Ban Long battle. After this engagement the Viet Cong claimed that the government forces had suffered 350 casualties, but the subject knew from personal knowledge (he was a village secretary in Dinh Tuong Province) that the actual figure was only 40. "From then on," he said, "I no longer trusted the Front's news." This case is especially interesting because it exactly parallels well-documented reports from other societies where the authorities have attempted to impose rigid controls on information. The Vietnamese seem especially likely to suspend judgement on claims made by contending parties until they can "see for themselves."

The task of propaganda cadres was made more difficult by government counterpropaganda, although they struggled resourcefully against this. One man observed that a government heliborne operation had made the work of the Front more difficult because the forces that landed carried out counterpropaganda. The villagers then formed a true estimate of the situation and didn't listen to the Viet Cong propaganda any more. "Before that, they blindly believed what the Viet Cong told them." (Emphasis supplied.) Similarly, when people were able to obtain Saigon newspapers they often began to be doubtful of information provided by the Front. A former village guerrilla reported, however, that government propaganda was

less successful in his area:

The villagers did not believe this news [broadcast by loudspeaker aircraft] because we were propagandized by the Viet Cong every day, while the aircraft came over once every three or four months. People are always inclined to believe those who stay close to them. The villagers only trusted what they had witnessed, or what had been told them by others coming from their own village.

When villagers had been exposed to government propaganda, the local cadres often tried to counteract this by holding special meetings or training courses. One village secretary learned that Catholics in his area were blaming the Front for not being willing to settle the war by negotiation and were saying that the Viet Cong were responsible for their hardships. He therefore gathered the population of three hamlets together for two training sessions, in which he explained that the United States advocated peace negotiations only to fool the people, and that a negotiated peace would be profitable only for the rich. After leaflet drops, loudspeaker broadcasts, or government sweeps through the village, the cadres frequently called meetings to discuss the government propaganda. One technique was to point out that government actions always went counter to what it said: For instance, it talked of peace only to prolong the war. This argument sometimes backfired as, for instance, in a case where government leaflets advised people to evacuate a village because it was about to be bombed. The cadres said that these warnings were lies and that the government would not dare to attack the area, but then the bombing raid occurred. One respondent reported that Saigon's Chieu Hoi Program, under which Viet Cong personnel

were promised that no penalties would be assessed against them if they surrendered, caused the Front particular headaches. To counter the Chieu Hoi appeals, a new program was launched in mid-1965 called the "three nothings: hear nothing, see nothing, know nothing."

The efforts of propaganda cadres to counter government appeals seem to have been often successful. As a former District official observed: "The government can penetrate villages, but does not occupy them permanently, thus allowing the Front to go ahead with long-term struggle tactics. After each big sweep, the political cadres return to the villages to stabilize the situation morally and to resolve all the worries of the population." If any individuals were affected by government propaganda, the cadres attempted to ascertain their identity, so that further corrective measures could be taken. For instance, at meetings devoted to counteracting Saigon's appeals, "the cadres forced the people to express their opinions on the matter, in order to find out who believed government propaganda."

More indirect persuasive measures were also taken by the Viet Cong: these included honoring those they considered particularly meritorious, conducting competitions among the villagers, and instituting social welfare programs. Fighting men from the village would sometimes be honored at a locally organized festivity, or might even be lauded by a poem published in one of the Provincial magazines. At ceremonies and study sessions the families of Viet Cong fighters and cadres would be seated in places of honor.

"Emulation campaigns" were frequent. These might

consist of a contest among school children to see who could study hardest or be politest, or a competition among hamlets to see which one could grow the most manioc. Similar "emulation campaigns" might be started among adults who were engaged in fortifying a Viet Cong village. Emulation was recommended by higher echelons as a valuable tactic for stimulating agricultural production.

Social welfare activities are less often mentioned, possibly because the energies of the Viet Cong were almost entirely taken up with their military tasks. In An Xuyen Province, for instance, a 1964 directive provided that each village would open a popular education course for illiterate adults and an elementary school for children. In fact, however, most villages had not accomplished either of these tasks by the end of 1965. Health programs were also drawn up, but usually met a similar fate.

An activity that perhaps cannot be considered under the heading of social welfare but nevertheless certainly helped to maintain morale in Viet Cong villages was a conciliation service that was available to help settle disputes. Two respondents mention having been engaged in this kind of work. One said that if a villager's buffalo ate another villager's rice plants, he would try to work out a peaceful solution. "I would see how much the buffalo ate, and so on." This was "to maintain solidarity and cohesion among the villagers." Another, who also investigated local disputes, defined his task as "making people love each other." Within the limits of their own political and ideological framework, the Viet Cong seem to have made a real effort to ensure justice to the people in areas they occupied -- at least as long as no political question was involved.



COMMUNICATION CONTROLS

To facilitate the indoctrination and motivation of people under their control, the Viet Cong sought to shield them insofar as possible from unapproved ideas -- especially news and views from Saigon. In this they were never more than partially successful; information and propaganda from the outside seeped into Viet Cong villages by way of radio broadcasts, smuggled newspapers, leaflets, announcements from loudspeaker aircraft, and rumor. A captured document, originally issued by the Propaganda and Training Section of Bien Hoa Province in June 1965, and sent to districts, complains about this situation:

Recently the people living in contested and liberated rural areas, and even our cadres and men, have bought a great quantity of radio sets. They tune to the enemy radio broadcasts, pretending to listen to broadcast plays, soap operas and Vietnamese classical music. In addition, a substantial quantity of enemy publications -- all reactionary and pornographic literature and maudlin songs -- have been smuggled into our zone, thus exerting a bad influence over our cadres and men and the population at large.

The document goes on to say that ways should be sought to get rid of nonapproved publications and to motivate people not to listen to the Saigon Radio. Those who continue to listen should be indoctrinated; people should be instructed on ways to draw up a "ban-the-enemy-radio" regulation, so that "they can control each other and criticize those who still persist in listening to the enemy radio, reading

enemy publications, and singing enemy songs." A captured Party resolution from the Eastern Nambo (Delta) region contains the terse directive: "React to the enemy Chieu Hoi operation. Prohibit listening to the enemy radio."

In spite of instructions such as these, many people tuned in on Radio Saigon covertly. Some posted a lookout at the door to make sure that they would not be detected, one man wrapped his radio in a blanket and used it as a pillow, and others bought earphones. Local cadres were authorized to confiscate the receivers of those who violated the prohibition against listening to Radio Saigon, and some did so, but there are also reports that cadres preferred to overlook "black listening" even though they knew it was going on. One subject insisted that the cadres themselves listened clandestinely. Nevertheless, in certain villages the prohibition may have been effective. A former guerrilla from Dinh Tuong Province remarked: "In rural areas the people are not well-informed about the general situation, for the Front forbids them to turn on Radio Saigon." Another man said that he had listened to music from Saigon, but turned the radio off when news was broadcast. It might also happen that a set owner would allow friends or neighbors to listen to music only, because he feared arrest if he allowed them to hear anything else.

Music, and especially the Cai Luong -- or Reformed Opera -- was in any case the most popular type of program. A former Assistant Platoon Leader recalled:

Generally speaking, the villagers hated the cadres for forbidding them to listen to Radio Saigon. All the villagers loved to listen to Reformed Operas over Radio Saigon, but the cadres forced them to listen to Radio Hanoi,

which played Northern classical music that nobody cared for. Even the men in my unit hated this order.

Similarly, a former Viet Cong hamlet chief said he had overlooked "black listening" because he too liked the Cai Luong programs. But he didn't dare listen very often, because the higher cadres might become suspicious. It is reasonable to suppose that most of those who tuned in to hear music also heard news, and quite a few respondents do indeed specify that news was popular. One man said that everyone in his village knew about the North Vietnamese refusal of U.S. peace offers through the radio.

The available information does not enable one to calculate even approximately how many receivers were available in Viet Cong villages. In some hamlets, as few as two sets were reported; in others as many as 20. One village of three to five thousand inhabitants was said to have more than 150 sets.

Newspapers, too, played a role in bringing word from the outside, although they were probably less important than radio. People who went to the market in government areas quite often smuggled Saigon newspapers back with them, and these were read by a few trusted friends. Some boat owners in the Delta who regularly transported goods to market brought back a few newspapers to sell to villagers, but this must have been a limited and risky business.

Leaflets that were dropped by aircraft were another frequently mentioned source of information. The Viet Cong authorities made strenuous efforts to prevent people from reading leaflets, and designated cadres were usually in charge of seeing that they were collected and burned, but

many people read them anyway. One respondent remarked that "everybody read those leaflets, but nobody said anything."

Messages from loudspeaker aircraft could sometimes be heard by the villagers, spreading word about the Chieu Hoi Program, appealing to farmers to move into government-controlled areas, giving warnings of air attacks, and so on.

Many people felt that the most trustworthy information about the world outside the village came by word of mouth. The Viet Cong authorities discouraged those who had been in government areas from talking about what they had seen or heard, but there were always some who talked. One man said that villagers who regularly went to government areas on business -- the market women and the pedicab drivers -- kept their mouths closed, but that three old and respectable people who had obtained permission to attend an anniversary celebration in town had not been so prudent. They got drunk, and on their return told everyone what they had heard about Saigon's Chieu Hoi Program. Front cadres arrested them and sent them to a detention camp in the forest. Other villagers reported that those who went to town from their areas brought back stories which had been circulating in the market, but were discreet about repeating these. Such information seems to have been prized by villagers in Viet Cong areas. As one said: "They had the habit of believing news brought back orally by other people. This is why a lot of them relied

on this news, especially when it was not told in a loud voice." When a defector was asked what he considered the most reliable source of information about the Chieu Hoi Program, he replied that he had been most impressed by reports circulating among the villagers to the effect that defectors would be well treated. Quite a few other former Viet Cong came over to the government side because of information received through word-of-mouth channels. Indeed, it is a rare defector who did not seek -- and obtain -- confirmation from someone he knew of information about the Chieu Hoi policy he had obtained through the mass media.

Nevertheless, the amount and importance of person-to-person communication in Viet Cong areas is less impressive than the degree to which the insurgents were able to inhibit this kind of exchange. They did this partly by forbidding any large gatherings that they did not control, but even more by creating an atmosphere of fear and suspicion in which people were afraid to say what they thought. One respondent said that villagers were forbidden to gather in large numbers and that unofficial meetings had been banned by the cadres. Another reported that no more than five villagers were permitted to assemble at any one time. Both these reports come from the same province (Dinh Tuong), and it is not known whether prohibitions of this kind were in force in all Viet Cong villages. Villagers from other areas may have been referring to the same kind of restrictions, however, when they said that they were not allowed to talk with each other while they were doing sabotage work for the Viet Cong, or when they reported being constantly watched while working.

It is certain, however, that as a rule people in

Viet Cong areas were afraid to talk freely with anyone whom they did not know very well indeed, and that the effectiveness of radio, newspapers, and other means of bringing word from the outside was greatly limited by these inhibitions. Many of those who were able to read Saigon newspapers kept silent about what they read, most people saw leaflets but did not dare discuss the leaflets' content, villagers secretly listened to the Saigon radio but rarely talked with each other about what they had heard, people knew about the bombing of North Vietnam but didn't dare speak of it, and so on. Comments of this sort are volunteered with almost monotonous regularity by those who have lived under Viet Cong control. When several Viet Cong personnel defected from the same hamlet or from a small military unit, it was the rule rather than the exception that none of them was aware of the intentions of the others. Defection was not a safe subject for discussion among any but close relatives and the closest friends.

How many other villagers a person felt he could talk to freely depended, of course, on the individual case, but the circle was usually pitifully small. Some respondents said simply that there was nobody they could trust, not even members of their own families, but these were in the minority. Others reported being able to talk freely with members of their immediate families, but with their friends they discussed trivial matters only. As one said: "Nobody dared speak out because nobody could trust anyone, not even his best friends." When a youth complained to his mother that Viet Cong taxes were too heavy for poor people to pay, she told him to be quiet. As he put it: "We didn't even

dare complain among ourselves at home, because we'd risk being heard by an outside man. If that reached the ears of the cadres, we would surely be sent to the re-education sessions in the mountains." There were others, however, who had a few friends they could trust, as well as family members, and in rare cases still wider discussion was possible. Even in the latter villages, however, frank discussions were always conducted in strict privacy.

Because of the lack of mutual trust outside a small circle, most villagers felt that they did not know what other people were thinking, and it was impossible for public opinion to grow. Again and again individuals who have lived under Viet Cong controls make such comments as: "Those who were dissatisfied didn't dare say or do anything"; or "No one dared make known his feelings." Even more common are remarks such as: "We never trusted each other," "everyone was suspicious of each other," or "people didn't trust each other." This lack of free communication in the community was advantageous to the Viet Cong in that it helped to restrict the spread of both information from without and dissidence from within, but it also tended to keep the Front's officials from knowing what people were thinking. As the former chief of a village Military Affairs Section reported: "The Catholics had their own views about this matter [a negotiated peace] but they did not say anything. As for other villagers, I did not know how they felt because they dared not reveal their true feelings to me."

Although hamlet and village level cadres seem to have been subject to most of the same restrictions and inhibitions as the ordinary villagers, cadres at higher echelons

were allowed to listen to non-Communist radio stations and expose themselves to other nonapproved communications. Indeed, they probably were instructed to do so. One respondent reported that all District Committee members had the right to listen to Saigon broadcasts in order to be able to wage counterpropaganda when necessary. A cadre from a Regional headquarters said: "We had documents and newspapers from the government-controlled area, but we used them only to back up Front propaganda." A former District propaganda cadre gave a fuller description of the way outside sources were used:

High-ranking Viet Cong cadres listen to the news broadcasts from foreign stations, such as the BBC and the Voice of America, and make a summary of the news. From this summary they will choose the items which are favorable to the Front or which could be exploited to the Front's advantage. For example, the news of Mr. Huong's removal from power could be exploited by saying that [Ambassador] Taylor is inconsistent. He raised Huong to the position of prime minister but now he wants Khanh to assume the prime ministership, and that when you come down to it the Vietnamese government is only a puppet government of the Americans. After the high-ranking cadres have written a summary of the news, these summaries are distributed among low-echelon cadres to be exploited for propaganda purposes.

#### TRAVEL AND MIGRATION CONTROLS

Far-reaching controls were imposed on the movement of people who lived in Viet Cong areas, and especially on travel to government-controlled towns. These controls



clearly served as another way of keeping out unwelcome ideas, although they may have been imposed primarily for reasons of economic or military policy.

A captured Viet Cong directive, dated April 15, 1966, to one of the districts in Tay Ninh Province, reads in part as follows:

Movement permits to the enemy-controlled area shall not be granted. Trustworthy civilians going to the enemy-controlled area are issued letters of introduction specifying time and destination. If they return late they should be made to explain.

Actually, the stringency of travel controls seems to have differed greatly from area to area, and from time to time, but their essential shape remained the same. A report from Dinh Tuong Province as of the end of 1965 states that it was possible to travel to government-held areas without advance permission, but that if one stayed for two or three days the local cadres would make an investigation. It seems to have been more common in this and other provinces, however, for advance permission to be required. Permission was usually given only to trusted persons -- for example, those who had a close relative actively working for the Front. It was also more likely to be given to women and old people than to men. Indeed, in some areas all men of military age were forbidden to go to the market if it was under government control.

These travel restrictions were enforced in part by guards stationed on the roads, but even more by fear.

As one respondent mentioned, everyone who went to government-controlled areas to see his relatives was suspected of being a government spy, and therefore nobody dared to go. Another added that if a person made such a trip without advance authorization he would be suspected of espionage and would be arrested. The brother of one source was arrested because he had gone secretly to the city to see his wife who was living there. A medical practitioner who travelled around to care for his patients was killed by the Viet Cong, apparently because he was suspected of carrying information to the government.

Travel controls made the life of people in Viet Cong areas much more difficult. Those who had been engaged in trade frequently had to give up their business, since they could not move freely from one place to another to buy and sell. Even the ordinary farmer found the restricted access to markets burdensome. As a Viet Cong soldier from Go Cong Province stated: "Life in Front areas was not as good as life in government areas. The people lacked freedom of movement. . . . People became dissatisfied and wanted to move to government areas, but didn't know how to get away from the Viet Cong."

The local authorities also made careful checks of civilians who came into Front-controlled areas from the outside. A person who entered a Viet Cong village and had no relatives there to guarantee his good behavior might be detained as a possible spy. Those who came on business would be watched to ensure that they actually

engaged only in buying and selling. If a village was attacked by government forces shortly after a stranger had been there, he would probably be arrested the next time he appeared. Villagers who received frequent visitors from the outside were likely to be suspected of subversive activities, and this also must have helped to cut down the flow.

Travel restrictions were linked with economic controls. In some areas, local families were allowed to sell fish in the government markets, but they weren't allowed to sell rice or chickens. In others, they were forbidden to take any produce out of the Viet Cong area, although they could bring food in. In any case, the local cadres were likely to want to know what was being taken out of the village or what was being brought in.

Even within Viet Cong areas travel was difficult. A directive from Tay Ninh Province that was cited above provides as follows with respect to "internal" travel:

Good citizens travelling within the base area for livelihood should be given movement permits every six months. Suspect elements [should be] given permits for every three months, which should further mention the area authorized for their movements. Suspect elements who travel once in a while to a specific village with an appropriate reason would be given a letter of introduction, mentioning the date and area of travel.

Some respondents mention more stringent restrictions. For example, within a Viet Cong village movement by civilians was discouraged at night, and some hamlets were split up into smaller units in order to tighten

controls over the villagers. A former hamlet guerrilla reported that he and his fellow guerrillas had not been allowed to move from one hamlet to another in the village unless they could give good reasons. Therefore, hamlet guerrillas knew only about their own hamlets.

The Front also made strenuous efforts to prevent people from fleeing to government areas to escape shelling, bombing, taxation, and other threats to their lives and well-being. A captured document entitled "Directive Concerning 1966 Spring Activities," dated February 10, 1966, reads in part as follows:

With a view to preventing the masses from going over to the enemy zone after the destruction or liberation of the strategic hamlets, local authorities should timely solve the problems related to their daily lives. Instruct the masses on anti-airstrike measures. Place emphasis on breaking up the enemy control, motivating and indoctrinating the people, looking for backbone cadre\* and support among the population. Every endeavor should be made to win over the population, to familiarize the troops with all policies concerning the population. They should be solicitous of and helpful to the people. They should behave properly. . . .

The most frequently mentioned method by which the Viet Cong tried to prevent people from fleeing to government areas was to threaten to confiscate their property if they left. As one respondent reported: "The cadres said that villagers who left were considered

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\*The meaning of the term "backbone cadre" will be discussed in the following section on surveillance.

to be for the government. Therefore, their property, houses, orchards, and ricefields were confiscated. Many people were afraid of losing their belongings, and didn't dare leave." In other areas, the Viet Cong authorities sent messages to refugees asking them to return to the village. If they refused, their properties would then be confiscated. This tactic brought quite a few people back. Threats of thought reform sessions, arrest, and actual arrests were also used as deterrents. It is clear, however, that the Front was even more opposed to having people moving back and forth between government and insurgent areas than it was to having people leave altogether. The position most frequently taken by local cadres was: "Stay put, or else leave for good."

People often sought to protect themselves from the hazards of bombing, shelling, and military operations in general by taking temporary flight. If they saw Viet Cong forces coming into the village, they might move out into the fields -- away from the village proper -- until the fighting men had left. Or they might seek safety next to a nearby government military post. When a hamlet was frequently bombed, the inhabitants frequently constructed huts in their fields and stayed there during the day, leaving their houses in the morning and returning late at night.

These evasive tactics caused hardships to the Viet Cong. When civilians left a village, the Front units were deprived of their services in cooking meals or in providing other forms of assistance, and the fighting

forces doubtless felt more exposed to the dangers of bombing or shelling. Even the work of the civilian cadres became more difficult, since they were unable to gather the population "to transport things, wage propaganda, do communal work, or start any kind of movement." The Viet Cong tried to prevent people from taking temporary flight by explanations, propaganda, and threats, but these frequently were unsuccessful. In one case it was reported that local guerrillas provoked an incident to discourage people from fleeing. They infiltrated among the villagers and shot at approaching helicopters, which then strafed the crowd.

It is probable that local cadres felt helpless in the face of the widespread desire to seek safety; they couldn't arrest everyone in the village. Also, they may have applied the controls available to them only half-heartedly, or may even have shared the fears of the population. One respondent reported: "They only told the people to stay, but once the latter didn't listen to them they didn't try to stop anybody from leaving." Almost the entire population eventually left some villages, leaving only a few old people to look after family properties.

Nevertheless, it was not easy to escape Viet Cong controls over travel and migration. Not only was there the constant danger that other family members would be held as hostages, or that properties would be confiscated, but the insurgents usually had an efficient system of guarding possible escape routes. As a North Vietnamese

infiltrator remarked: "Once you lived in the Viet Cong areas you couldn't get out easily." Other respondents mentioned that all exits to their villages were guarded night and day by the guerrillas. Anyone who tried to leave the village without authorization was subject to penalties. In the words of a former military cadre: "The Viet Cong posted guards at every corner of the village to stop people from getting away. Those who were supposed to go to market were followed. Anyone who was suspected by the Viet Cong of being progovernment was sent for reeducation immediately." Unauthorized movements were made even more difficult by the booby traps, spike pits and spike boards that were planted around most Front-controlled villages. Ordinary villagers did not know where these were, and especially at night they were likely to come to physical harm if they attempted to flee through the woods.

The government indirectly helped the Viet Cong to enforce their controls on population movement through the system of identity cards and the draft policy. Numerous respondents who otherwise might have had an opportunity to enter government areas either temporarily or permanently said they did not do so because they had no identity cards and feared arrest. Young men often remained in Viet Cong villages when others left because they feared being drafted.

Controls on population movements were most difficult to enforce during ground sweeps by government forces. Such sweeps usually forced the Viet Cong forces to go into

hiding, and anyone who wished to could then depart. Sometimes nearly the entire population of a village or hamlet would take advantage of this opportunity. The Front did, however, have a method of enforcing its controls even during ground sweeps. This was to remove most of the inhabitants, especially the young men, by either persuasion or force, and to take them into the jungle along with the cadres and guerrillas. One respondent said that people had to take flight when government forces approached because: (1) if they didn't they might be suspected of spying; (2) the Front cadres said that the villagers would be beaten up by the government troops; and (3) nearly all the villagers were working for the Front in one capacity or another and therefore felt guilty. This man added that he had wanted to stay in his village during a sweep, but didn't have the courage. Nevertheless, it was not always possible for the Viet Cong to use this tactic. Sometimes ground sweeps came so suddenly that people could not be moved out in time, and on other occasions so many people simply refused to move that the cadres and guerrillas were powerless to force them.

#### SURVEILLANCE

Villagers in Viet Cong areas had the feeling that they were being constantly watched, that secret agents were everywhere. Any chance remark might be overheard and reported. As a former hamlet official said: "People might be afraid of the cadres, because the cadres watched them all the time." One respondent, who lived in



a village where sentiment apparently was strongly opposed to the Viet Cong, told a rather unusual story. When American forces entered his village on a sudden ground sweep the cadres fled to a safe area, but the people were sure that secret informers had been left behind and feared to express their pleasure directly. Instead, they put on their best clothes and stood silently in the streets when the Americans came through. The significance of this behavior unfortunately seems to have been lost on the American personnel. Another strongly anti-Viet Cong villager believed that he was being observed even in a refugee camp, and was afraid to accept government relief money. When asked why he wouldn't accept the money he made the following statement which, however, is not believed to be typical:

Because I was afraid the Front agents might have followed me and then killed me. One time, in July, I went to Island Ba Co to get away from doing my [Viet Cong] military duty. While I was there the airplanes dropped butterfly bombs and strafed my hamlet. Standing on this side and watching the airplanes attack my hamlet I got so excited that I shouted: "Let the airplanes strafe and kill them all." Someone heard what I said and reported me to the Front cadres. The latter forced me to confess in writing. They made me sign a paper that said if I was found guilty of being against the Front again I would be killed. Now, if I receive my relief money from the government, the Front cadres might know about it and they might kill me.

It is certainly true that people whom the Viet Cong had reason to suspect of dissident attitudes were watched

very carefully. A former member of the government Self-Defense Corps, who returned to his village when it was under Front control, said that he was watched constantly and didn't dare move around. Other respondents reported that the relatives of refugees or of government soldiers were kept under constant surveillance. In the words of one man: "Even if they wanted to go for a walk for three or four hours they would have to ask permission." Similarly, a villager who had managed to resign from the local guerrilla force was watched constantly and was not permitted to go more than one kilometer from the village.

Although surveillance may not have been as close as some respondents believed, it was certainly well organized. A captured document dealing with village organization mentions that there must be at least one "backbone cadre" in each hamlet. These backbone cadres, also referred to by respondents as "backbone elements," or "foundation agents," were apparently workers who remained underground or who were recruited for underground work even after the Viet Cong had taken formal control of a village. Their identity was not revealed to other villagers, and several former local officials have reported that they relied on such backbone elements to inform them about what people were saying. For instance, complaints about high taxes were rarely heard by the cadres themselves, but were reported to them by backbone elements.

Other respondents report the existence of secret intelligence networks in Viet Cong villages, but do not

specify their nature. For example, in a village near Hue there was said to be an intelligence network to obtain information from villagers who went to town on business. A District propaganda cadre had as one of his duties going from village to village and asking the local officials what people were thinking, and especially about the extent of progovernment sentiment. Since it is almost unanimously agreed that people feared to express their opinions openly, this information about local attitudes must have come from an underground network.

In some cases, underground personnel were sent in from higher echelons. A former cadre reported that security personnel had been sent into his area by District authorities: "They mingled with the people and lived like one of them. Their job was to investigate other cadres. They watched for other cadres' ideological deviation or any progovernment thoughts. We didn't know who these security agents were or who was under investigation." The same subject also said that the cadres from the District spied on the ordinary villagers as well.

Finally, in some areas the technique of "each one watch the others" was used. The Village Security Section would call each villager to the security office and would give him instructions on how to observe and report on his neighbors. These reports would initially be sent to the Hamlet Security Cell, which in turn sent them to the Village Security Office. From there they would go to District. The latter would then make any necessary

investigations to verify the reports received. In the words of one respondent: "Everyone was followed by someone else, and yet nobody knew about it except the Security Office." This technique was mentioned by another man in connection with migration control: "The Front has urged families to watch over one another, and the surveillance was so tight that the villagers dared not move out in groups."

#### INTERNAL SECURITY

The Viet Cong enforced a "need to know" policy on all echelons, and even on ordinary civilians, so that no person was often in a position to know more about the workings of the organization than his immediate duties required.

Careful measures were taken to ensure that villagers knew very little about the activities of local guerrillas or cadres. Sometimes ordinary civilians were even forbidden to go into the forest where they might see Viet Cong installations, and had to gather their firewood at the edges of the forest. Bamboo spikes were frequently planted around Viet Cong installations in the woods to prevent local people from coming near them. The villagers were also forbidden to talk about the labor service they had performed for the insurgents. When Front forces prepared an ambush, they attempted to keep this a secret from the population, sometimes arriving at the site between one and two in the morning in order that they would not be observed. If a Viet Cong unit came into a

village, roads leading to government areas were blocked for fear that someone would disclose the presence of the troops. Local guerrillas kept their hideouts a carefully guarded secret. A former hamlet official reported that each guerrilla had his own hiding place, which he alone knew. Another source said that secret underground caves should be dug personally by the men who were to hide in them. Nobody besides the three cell members and one civilian accomplice should know about these caves. The accomplice, who was usually an old woman or a not-so-pretty middle-aged woman, had the tasks of informing the hidden guerrillas when it was safe to come out and of supplying them with food and water when necessary.

Hamlet and village officials were apparently informed only about matters within their immediate spheres of competence. For instance, a former Village Secretary said that the guerrilla squad leader alone was notified in advance when a larger Viet Cong unit was to come into the village -- "one hour in advance at the earliest." A former guerrilla was of the opinion, however, that "only the Village Military Affairs Committee and the Village Party Chapter" would know about the comings and goings of larger units. In general, village officials concerned with civilian affairs claimed ignorance about local military matters, while those concerned with military affairs said that they did not know about the civilian organization. A village cadre in charge of propaganda was allegedly not informed as to where and to whom money that was collected in the village was sent, or how relations with higher echelons were conducted.

Even stricter compartmentalization seems to have been the case at the District level. There was little contact among the various functional organizations at this level, and they were often located in different hamlets or villages. For instance, a District cadre knew that there was a transportation section located in his village, but didn't know to whom it reported. In the opinion of one village cadre, it was only at the Province Committee level that the working of the whole system could be observed, since at lower echelons each committee passed its reports to a higher committee and it was at the Province that the various functional divisions were related to each other. A former village secretary mentioned that he had had channels only to the District, and had no way of getting in touch with Province officials.

In the Viet Cong organization, personal names, identities, and places were also carefully guarded. Villagers were not supposed to know the identity of guerrillas from their own hamlet, presumably so that they could not denounce them. A village guerrilla (who, however, believed he was under suspicion) was not told the identity of the village secretary. Another guerrilla claimed to know the names only of the village military affairs cadre and "Uncle Ho." Otherwise he was unfamiliar with the names of any Viet Cong officials. A third guerrilla, this one a cell leader, was able to name only one village official. He observed: "In the Viet Cong you do not know who is who. You do not know your superiors. It is not like in the government forces where the leaders wear their

rank on the outside." Even at higher levels ignorance about officials was the rule rather than the exception. A Deputy Company Commander said he did not know the names of the Party Central Committee members in South Vietnam, and added: "We were never told about our superiors. I don't even know who the leaders of my own Province's Party Committee are, let alone the Central Committee." Substantially the same statement was made by a regroupee lieutenant: "It was useless to ask, because nobody else knew about the Front leaders. We executed their orders, but we knew nothing about them." When cadres from higher echelons came to inspect work at lower echelons, their names were often not revealed.

Viet Cong officials were similarly reluctant to disclose their location. A hamlet chief reported that the chief of his Village Front Committee moved very often, would suddenly appear, then disappear again. District officials sometimes didn't know where other District cadres were located. A provincial headquarters in the Delta was said to move constantly, and never to stay longer than three days in one place.

Furthermore, both villagers and cadres in Viet Cong areas soon learned that it was inadvisable to ask questions about military or organizational matters, and usually did not dare. A female liaison agent was told by her superior not to be curious. If she had asked about men being drafted by the Viet Cong in her village, for instance, she might have been accused of being a government spy and could even have been arrested.

Security was, of course, even tighter in the case of personnel engaged in underground or communication activities. A Viet Cong telegrapher said that he was given messages that were already encoded, and hence he never knew the meaning of what he was sending. A group of men and women who were being trained for sabotage activities in government areas were never allowed to see each other's faces, let alone learning each other's names, so that the capture of one could not lead to the denunciation of the whole group. For the same reason, propaganda personnel in the Saigon-Gia Dinh area were divided into two independent "sectors." Viet Cong military liaison personnel were not allowed to meet personally with the civilian intelligence agents who provided them with information about internal conditions in strategic hamlets. Instead, this information was relayed through the local Party Secretary.

The statements of respondents on many subjects make it clear that the Viet Cong security system was not completely efficient. The names of a few higher cadres did become known to subordinate officials, some villagers were able to gain a fairly accurate picture of the Viet Cong organization in their villages, knowledge about military operations could not be completely denied to the civilian population, and so on. Nevertheless, these leakages are sufficiently rare as to emphasize the tightness of the security system as a whole.



The emphasis on secrecy even in territories controlled by the Front was certainly a carry-over from the organization's conspiratorial past, and part of its Communist heritage. However, the tremendous range of subject matter about which the Viet Cong sought to preserve secrecy and the pains they took to accomplish this suggest a basic lack of mutual trust, both within the organization itself and between the organization and the population. For a movement that placed great emphasis on "keeping close to the people," the extent to which it sought to protect itself from the people is impressive.

#### SANCTIONS: PRESSURE AND PUNISHMENT

To enforce their controls, the Viet Cong used a wide range of pressures and punishments, some of them seemingly mild and others of draconian severity. Several of these sanctions involved collective action by the people of a village or hamlet. In such cases, much of the population became involved in enforcement, even if unwillingly.

One of the milder pressures used by the Front's cadres was admonition. People in combat hamlets who tried to avoid taking part in building fortifications or other labor duty might be reproached in such terms as: "You aren't the people's fathers if you stay idle and let others work for you, are you?" Or, if a man made a "voluntary" contribution that the cadres regarded as too small, they might talk to him for hours on end until they

finally succeeded in persuading him to raise the amount. A more severe form of admonition was public criticism, which often took place at village meetings. This might involve a serious loss of face.

Or, if a person stayed away from a village meeting, he might be forced to do additional labor service.

Families of government soldiers or defectors, or men who had been purged from the Viet Cong ranks because of relatively minor infractions might be subjected to one or more of a number of relatively mild punishments. They might be placed under house arrest, their movements about the village might be limited, a part of their property might be confiscated, or they might be "isolated." When a person was isolated, the cadres forbade the other villagers to talk with him or have anything to do with him, but this technique didn't always work. A respondent from Dinh Tuong Province reported that quite a few people from his hamlet had been isolated because their sons had either left to join the government forces or else had moved out of the hamlet to settle in government controlled areas. The village authorities gathered the people together, pointed out these families to them, and said that nobody should have anything to do with them. This lasted a few weeks, but then the villagers resumed normal relations with the supposedly isolated individuals and the local cadres had to resign themselves to this.

A punishment that was widely used and greatly feared was "reeducation." A reeducation course, consisting of

ceaseless indoctrination and sometimes additional labor service as well, might last for a few hours or it might go on for months. In one case, villagers who complained out loud about taxation or forced labor were taken into the jungle for a five-day course. In another area, those who were caught listening to the Saigon Radio would have their receivers confiscated and would be forced to attend a session lasting three months. People who said they were too poor to pay taxes were taken away for reeducation for ten days in one village, and for longer or shorter periods in other villages.

Re-education was a useful punishment from the point of view of the Viet Cong because it sounded mild but in reality could be very severe. A person usually was not released from reeducation until he admitted his errors and became "enlightened." Otherwise, he would be retained for another course, and if necessary for still another. In other words, it was an indeterminate sentence. Those who refused to pay taxes were simply detained until they agreed to pay. Also, people who were taken away had to take their own rice with them, or have their families provide it, and at the same time they were prevented from working in the fields. For poor families this could mean disaster. Added to this were the dangers and discomforts of living in the jungle, where reeducation courses were usually held. A villager from Binh Tuy Province, who told the guerrillas not to fire at overflying planes because the planes might retaliate, was taken away to attend a thought reform session the next day. He returned after four months with malaria. Then he tried to move his

family to a government area, but was arrested by the Viet Cong and was not seen again. Very often, the mere threat of reeducation was enough to make a person pay taxes, to volunteer for the Viet Cong forces, or to call a relative back from government areas or the government army.

Another fairly severe punishment in the context of Vietnamese society was "reduction of prestige." This has already been described in connection with the treatment of government village officials. Families of those who had defected to the government, or persons who had been caught reading Saigon newspapers or listening to the Saigon radio might be forced to participate in a reduction of prestige session, during which they would have to denounce their own "crimes" before the assembled villagers and beg for forgiveness.

Death was, of course, the most severe form of punishment, and the threat of death the most extreme kind of pressure. The extreme penalty might be invoked against many categories of persons, but was apparently applied selectively. Those executed included informers, Government Strike Force soldiers, agents who tried to infiltrate at night, recaptured defectors, "reactionaries," and exceptionally stubborn villagers. A former village secretary from Dinh Tuong Province said that, in contrast to the situation in areas which had not yet come under the control of the Front, assassination could not be resorted to in Viet Cong villagers. Offenders must be tried. Ordinarily, prisoners were judged in front of the "people" at a village meeting, condemned, and then shot or beheaded with a machete. There are many reports that this

procedure was in fact followed in most cases, but there is also no question that at least some of the village meetings were managed -- how many is not known. The following account of the trial of a recaptured defector in Dinh Tuong Province was given by a former Party member:

When the villagers gathered, Ba Phuoc read the dossier of the culprit and the Front's accusations. The villagers were then asked to give the verdict. The backbone elements demanded that the culprit should be killed. The Village Secretary confirmed the people's sentence by stating that the culprit was a bad man. A representative of the Liberation Youth confirmed the village secretary's opinion and, finally, a representative of the Farmers' Association stood up to declare that the culprit deserved the death sentence that the people were demanding. When all this was over, Xanh was shot, although his wife and his children tearfully pleaded for clemency. I noticed that, in fact, the families that supported the Front were very eager to have Xanh sentenced to death. . . . [Afterwards] nobody dared to speak about this trial. The people have been scared of the Front for many years, and they just tried to avoid being punished by the Front.

Another account, this one from Vinh Long Province, suggests that the burden of proof was placed on villagers who might want to speak for acquittal:

In 1963, the guerrillas killed Mr. Ba Truyen for personal reasons. But they accused him of giving information to the posts. They always based their actions on the Front's policy so the people couldn't protest. Before they killed Mr. Truyen, they wrote a paper citing all his crimes. Then they gathered the people and asked them: Shall we condemn

him or release him? The people were afraid and went along with the guerrillas because the latter said that the revolutionary policy called for the execution of Mr. Truyen. If anybody wanted to absolve Mr. Truyen, he would have to give the reasons why Mr. Truyen should be released. The guerrillas would ask him: Why do you want us to release such a criminal? So nobody dared to oppose the action of the guerrillas.

When, for one reason or another, an execution had to take place without a public trial, a meeting to justify the death might be held afterwards. One subject reported that his brother-in-law, a poor farmer, had been arrested and killed by the cadres because he criticized the Front when he went to town one night and got drunk. The cadres then held a meeting, denounced the farmer, and announced his execution. The man's younger brother, who had been arrested at the same time, was set free at this meeting. He was terrified, and thanked the Front for its leniency, also admitting that his brother deserved the death penalty. The deceased's wife, who was there with her five children, was then asked whether she agreed with the penalty. She said she didn't know anything about it and cried profusely. "The villagers felt much compassion for her, but nobody dared show his true feelings, and none of them dared to comfort the deceased's family." In another case, the justification procedure was more cursory. The Viet Cong was alleged to have killed a man because he protested that his wife had been compelled to take part in a demonstration. Then they announced to the villagers through a megaphone that the man had been executed because he had carried on counterpropaganda against the Front and

also because he had taken advantage of a village girl.

There are also cases where an execution was apparently kept secret. For instance, a guerrilla who had been purged from the Viet Cong ranks defected to the government, but was later recaptured when he returned to his hamlet. He was taken before the District Committee, which later sent word to the Village Committee that he had been executed. The Village Committee kept this a secret, although the news later leaked out.

There are relatively rare reports of public trials in which the villagers refused to accept the accusations made by the cadres, with the result that the accused was set free. Some of these reports also make it clear that the defendant was later done to death quietly by the Viet Cong authorities, while others indicate that his acquittal was respected.

It took enormous courage for a villager to defend someone who was publicly accused by the Viet Cong cadres, especially since in some areas public trials were apparently used as a means of detecting potentially dissident elements. In Phong Dinh Province, for instance, it was reported that the Front would simulate the arrest of a cadre, take him before a public meeting, and ask the population to decide his fate. If there were some people who raised their voices against the death sentence for the alleged traitor they would be accused of collaborating with him.

The available materials make it appear that two rather different principles were followed by the Viet

Cong in the use of sanctions. One was to apply the least severe punishment that would accomplish the purpose of the authorities. Sometimes the actual severity of punishments was extreme, but this was the case when no lesser penalty was regarded as effective. As a matter of policy, the Viet Cong did not kill for the sake of killing, but to accomplish a specific aim. The other principle may at first appear contradictory: to make examples of a number of victims in each community, even when these victims might be innocent of the charges against them. Behind both principles was the view that justice was a means to a political end -- not an end in itself.

The principle of least severity is suggested by a captured Viet Cong document, dated April 20, 1965, dealing with ways of discouraging those who listened to the Reformed Opera over Radio Saigon. A first offender was to be subjected to a public critique in the hamlet. If he repeated his offense, he was to be given a public warning. If his love for Reformed Opera drove him to transgress a third time, he was to be sent away for a ten-day reeducation session and was obliged to provide his own rice.

Similarly, government personnel who were subject to reeducation were not held longer than was necessary. Those who achieved "enlightenment" early were released after three months. Others were kept for as much as a year. During this period they were fed very little, sometimes were chained or bound, and were subjected to daily indoctrination sessions combined with appeals to the effect that "we need you." The process appears to be



similar to that used by the Chinese Communists in brainwashing.

A penalty less than the one prescribed might be invoked against an alleged malefactor. For example, a man who had been accused and publicly convicted of giving information to the government that led to a mortar attack on a Viet Cong village might be given one chance to correct himself. Instead of being put to death immediately, he would be indoctrinated and asked to write out a confession. If he relapsed again, he would be executed. This procedure had the effect of making the defendant an unusually loyal and enthusiastic member of the movement, since his life depended on it, at least as long as he stayed in Viet Cong territory. Even if the original charge had been without foundation, he could not afford to be accused a second time.

On the other hand, several sources mention that people who were almost certainly innocent were wrongly accused and then treated with severity. One respondent described this technique as follows:

The cadres accused the victim of largely imaginary crimes. If he confessed he might be released after serving some time. If he refused to admit false crimes he would be considered as stubborn and reactionary and condemned to death. The cadres then gathered a number of people, read the verdict, and chopped off the victim's head in front of everyone. The body was thrown into the river or buried in an unknown place.

A former cadre who had been in charge of a district jail stated that public beheadings of this sort were carried

out with the intention of scaring people so that they would not dare work for the government and would work only for the Viet Cong.

The combination of apparent leniency and arbitrary severity probably made the Front's task of ensuring both acquiescence and active cooperation much simpler. Literally anybody could be accused of being a spy or of harboring reactionary thoughts, and such an accusation might mean death. The best way of avoiding accusation was to lead an exemplary life in the eyes of the Viet Cong. Several young men mention that they, or others, joined the Viet Cong because if they had not done so they would have been accused of sympathizing with the government or spying for the government. When government forces were in the area, villagers were careful not to do anything that might possibly give away the Viet Cong for fear of later being accused of being uncooperative, or even of treason.

If one were to be so unlucky as to be accused, the safest course obviously was to confess to all the alleged misdeeds and throw oneself on the mercy of the cadres. The Viet Cong's victims were ordinarily not tortured, because they would confess to anything anyway. In the words of a former member of a district security force: "If they kept on denying crimes, they would be executed. Therefore, all the prisoners had to bow to the pressure and admit to all the crimes which the Front accused them of." In other words, denying an alleged crime was in itself a crime. Another security cadre said that the Viet Cong did, in fact, sometimes resort to torture, but this was apparently rare.

A clever and courageous man might protect himself at least temporarily, and one such case has been reported. A man falsely accused admitted his guilt to his captors. Then, when he was brought before the People's Court, he told the entire truth to the villagers. This saved him from immediate execution, but the respondent thought he was killed later anyway, because "revealing secrets to the people is harmful to the Front's prestige."

#### POPULAR DEFENSE MECHANISMS

The most obvious way that people could protect themselves against punishments and unwelcome demands was by flight to government-controlled areas, and thousands availed themselves of this option. How many refugees were driven from their homes mainly by bombing or shelling, how many were set in motion by mixed motives, and how many simply wanted to avoid pressures from the Viet Cong is not known, but members of all three categories can be found among the respondents. There were, however, many other thousands who could not flee because the Viet Cong controls were too tight, because they were unwilling to leave their relatives, property, and the graves of their ancestors, or because they feared possible government penalties more than they did the insurgents.

For those who stayed in Viet Cong areas, the most common defense mechanisms were silence and passivity. A former cadre said that when he and his fellows tried to explain the Front's taxation policy to the villagers,

"they kept silent when we spoke to them." Some refused to pay the taxes, and the cadres then threatened that they would be punished. "To such threats they replied: 'I am a good citizen. I have not done anything against the Front. Therefore, it is up to you to decide my fate. I am resigned to accepting any treatment the Front wants to impose on me, because I have no choice.'" This cadre concluded: "At last, we had to leave them alone." Other former Viet Cong officials also report that people merely remained silent when the cadres attempted to propagandize them. Little could be done with such people. They might merely be stupid, and stupidity was not a crime even in the Viet Cong lexicon.

Another form of defense was to deny the validity of the family ties that were so effectively manipulated by the Viet Cong. For instance, when military proselyting cadres told village women to call on their sons to desert from the government army, the women might pretend to disown their sons and would say that these youths had left home against the instructions of their parents. There was therefore nothing the parents could do to call them back. In the face of such protestations the cadres had to give up their efforts.

Collective action against the Viet Cong was an even more effective defense mechanism. The cadres were able to deal with a few dissidents very efficiently, but when faced with mass noncompliance, they usually had to give ground. For instance, in one case all the inhabitants left a government-controlled village when Viet Cong forces

came to "liberate" it. In another case, people in a Viet Cong village refused to leave when government forces entered. Collective action was rare, however, because the Front usually was able to assassinate, terrorize, or discredit local leaders either before taking over a village or immediately thereafter. In the absence of local leadership, each villager was left to deal with the insurgents on an individual basis, and in such a relationship the Viet Cong had an overwhelming advantage.

Very few local leaders other than the cadres were allowed to survive in areas controlled by the Front, but there apparently were some. A portrait of one such leader is given by a man from the delta. He thought that the most respected person in the village, and the one whose advice was most heeded, was the father of Mr. T\_\_, the teacher. "He was a respectable, serious old man, always ready to help the poor. All the people liked him and listened to what he said. I think he was the most important person in the village." This respondent added that the father of Mr. T\_\_ did not seem to like the cadres, but they didn't say anything against him. We may assume in this case that the cadres felt that the old man in question could do them little damage, while if they proceeded against him the ire of the villagers would be considerable.

The most successful method of self-defense at the disposal of individual villagers was outward conformity. Whether or not they shared the ideology of the Viet Cong, or were moved by their appeals, they could usually avoid harm by doing as they were told, not asking any questions, and confining themselves to their own personal concerns.



## VI. PUBLIC ATTITUDES

### SATISFACTIONS AND GRIEVANCES

The satisfactions of village life under Viet Cong control were mostly in the form of hopes for the future; the hardships were in the present. Nevertheless, even as far as daily life was concerned the picture was not all black.

The satisfactions most frequently mentioned were national pride, social equality, and land reform. A number of respondents who had lived in villages where the previous government administration had been cruel or corrupt referred to their relief at having been freed from this burden, and others expressed nationalistic pride in the achievements of the Vietnamese insurgents in the face of foreign-supported Saigon governments. Those who mentioned social equality usually said that they liked a system where there were no rich or poor, no higher classes and lower classes, and no arrogant officials with a mandarin attitude. The Viet Cong cadres and troops, rather than looking down at the people, helped them in their work. As to land reform, it was generally agreed that poor farmers who received land were at least initially pleased. Their satisfaction might later be tempered by the effect of high Viet Cong taxes, but they certainly approved the principle of land reform.

Another satisfaction, which was rarely mentioned explicitly but certainly existed, was with regard to opportunities for social mobility. The rapidly expanding Viet Cong structure made it possible for a young man or

woman from a poor family to rise in the hierarchy, to assume a position of power, and to be respected by the population. This opportunity for social mobility affected not only the attitudes of young men and women themselves, but also the attitudes of their families. The poor man whose son had become a Viet Cong cadre was likely to approve of the system as a whole.

On the other side of the ledger were innumerable grievances and hardships, most of them in the present. One complaint was that the Viet Cong did not always observe their own rules. The Front did not invariably treat everyone equally; cadres and the families of cadres were frequently favored. They could move about more freely and sell their produce at higher prices at government markets, they were given better land when large holdings were parceled out, and they were sometimes excused from labor duty. Despite their talk about equality, there were definite class distinctions in the Front, and Viet Cong personnel frequently behaved in a haughty manner. Furthermore, the insurgent troops sometimes did steal from the people, cadres occasionally molested the wives of those who had been drafted, and some corrupt village officials stole the tax money. Higher echelons strove to eliminate the causes of complaints in this category, but they obviously could not be completely successful in a large and rapidly expanding organization.

Perhaps the most frequent complaints were with regard to the misery, death, and destruction caused by



bombing and shelling of Viet Cong villages. Blame for these attacks was divided between the Americans and the Saigon government on one side, and the insurgents on the other. When people regarded an attack as unprovoked or unjustified, they were furious at the attackers, and some joined the Viet Cong ranks or became more firmly committed to the revolutionary cause. When an attack was provoked by guerrillas shooting at planes, or when it came after Viet Cong forces had moved into the village, then the Front received much more of the blame. In some areas the Viet Cong became associated in people's minds with military operations, and therefore were to be avoided. As one respondent said: "Wherever the Communists go, bullets and bombs rain down on that area, and the majority of victims are innocent people." Nor did Viet Cong efforts to pin the onus for bombings on the government always fall on receptive ears. Another man remarked:

It was really irrational to believe that the government wanted to kill the villagers by bombings. If the government did, why didn't it drop bombs in other hamlets, such as mine for example? Besides why did it give money and rice to those who had taken refuge near the post if it wanted to kill them by bombings?

In some areas, the cadres forced people to wear dark clothes, so that the guerrillas could mix in among the villagers without being so noticeable. The military significance of this regulation was presumably not lost on the population.

The Viet Cong received almost exclusive blame for another source of danger: the booby traps, spike pits,

and other hazards that were planted around combat villages. These were a cause of injury to cattle, children, and the villagers themselves. In one village, 70 villagers were said to have been injured by spikes, and in another village there were six, but in neither case had any government soldiers been harmed by the obstructions. Similarly, when villagers were forced to sabotage roads, they might be killed if their shovels or picks struck grenades or mines previously planted by the Viet Cong. At least two such incidents were reported.

Almost as frequently mentioned as the danger of bombing and shelling was the burden imposed by high Viet Cong taxes and other economic restrictions. People had to pay extremely heavy taxes, and sometimes had to sell their property or borrow to meet the demands of the tax collector, and at the same time they were often forbidden to sell their rice on government markets where it would command a higher price. The result was near-starvation in some areas. Nobody dared kill and eat his poultry or cattle without permission; those who ate good food were criticized for living in luxury.

Piled on top of economic restrictions and taxes was the requirement that the villagers house and feed local cadres. Families that had trouble feeding themselves found this extremely burdensome; yet if they complained, they were likely to be sent for a reeducation course or subjected to public criticism. A regroupee lieutenant gave the following picture of a Viet Cong hamlet in Long An Province as of the end of 1965:

I don't know how things were before I came, but when I was there I found the people poor and miserable. I've never seen people work so hard, worry so hard, and earn so little. The crops were often eaten by insects. After the harvest, most of the rice went to the Viet Cong and the people had to do some river fishing to supplement their incomes.... They only talked about the heavy Viet Cong taxes.. The sight of the unhappy old men and women sitting in front of their doors after sundown made me sick. Nowhere in the hamlet could I find a smile.... They were all too unhappy to enjoy anything -- even each other's company.

Nor were people free to devote themselves to improving their economic lot. There were countless bitter complaints that forced labor duty took the villagers away from their fields and other work. Constant meetings and indoctrination sessions also cut down still further the time that people could devote to supporting themselves.

Fewer respondents, but still an appreciable number, mentioned the burdensome character of Viet Cong travel and migration controls, the oppressive climate of life where nobody could trust anyone else, and the constant din of propaganda. As one former cadre remarked: "I suffered most spiritually."

#### PRO- AND ANTI-VIET CONG SENTIMENTS

The extent of popular grievances in villages controlled by the insurgents does not necessarily mean that over-all popular attitudes were opposed to the Viet Cong. In many cases, hardships were compensated by benefits both material and nonmaterial, including the hope for

future rewards. Furthermore, there were undoubtedly many who adjusted rather easily to life under Front control. These are the people who enjoy regimentation and the freedom from making personal decisions that goes with it. The orderliness of Viet Cong ideology also appeals to them, and they can identify themselves completely with the organization.

The incidence of such "authoritarian personalities" among the Vietnamese has not been explored, and is an important subject for investigation. It is probable, however, that most of those with this kind of mental structure were rapidly absorbed within the Front's hierarchy and did not remain as ordinary villagers.

As far as the villagers are concerned, the available materials do not make it possible to provide a statistical breakdown of pro- and anti-Viet Cong sentiments, and such a breakdown probably would not be meaningful even if it could be provided, since sentiments tended to alter rapidly as circumstances changed. Nevertheless, certain important facts about public opinion in Viet Cong areas stand out, and these will be summarized briefly.

1. Attitudes varied sharply from village to village. No matter what index of opinion one uses, some villages and hamlets seem to have been strongly pro-government and some strongly pro-Viet Cong, while the great majority ranged in between. When respondents were asked to characterize the opinions of people in their villages, some of them gave percentage figures. One man from Ba Xuyen Province, for instance, believed that 30 per cent were for the Viet Cong, 50 per cent for the government, and

20 per cent were undecided. In a Go Cong village, 40 per cent were said to be for the government, and 60 per cent for the Front. A former cadre of the Viet Cong Second Region believed that 80 per cent of the people wanted peace and didn't care which side won. The validity of such percentages is probably slight since it is clear that people were afraid to talk. Not even Viet Cong officials can make an accurate estimate of popular sympathies.

Another way to measure opinion is to find out how many people from a given village volunteered for service in the Viet Cong forces and how many enlisted in the government army. Here again wide variations are reported. A man from Dinh Tuong Province reported that about 50 men enlisted in the government army from his village and about 35 joined the Viet Cong -- but of these 11 later defected to the government. In another village in the same province, about 100 men joined the Front forces, while there were some 40 families with sons who were soldiers or civil servants on the government side. This measure also is of little value because it is impossible to know how many voluntarily joined either side. A substantial majority of respondents agree, however, that most young men wanted to stay out of both armies, and that both sides had to resort to the draft or, in the case of the Viet Cong, to other forms of pressure as well.

A measure which affords even greater difficulties is the number of refugees from Viet Cong territories. Large numbers of refugees fled to avoid bombing or shelling, and their flight does not necessarily give an indication

of their sympathies. However, there were also substantial numbers of refugees from areas that had not been bombed or shelled. In such cases, heavy taxation was the most frequently mentioned reason for flight.

Captured documents suggest similar variations in people's attitudes in different villages and areas. One Front official complained in writing that half of the civilian laborers in his area had a "poor ideology," were reluctant to work, and created trouble for the cadres. Of these, 111 had deserted. Another official reported to his superiors that he had been unsuccessful in motivating youths in three villages to enlist in "Vanguard Groups" (apparently a form of labor service). Even those already in the Youth's Association had refused, saying that they had to stay home to harvest the crops. Other captured documents of about the same date gave a quite different picture. One stated that "generally speaking, the residents of Tan Thoi [village] are Communist sympathizers, and willingly participate in political and armed activities, civilian labor, financial contributions, etc." Another reported that "the workers have utmost confidence in the Resistance and willingly make cash and manpower contributions to the revolutionary cause."

2. Families tended to favor the side with which their sons were serving. Viet Cong officials believed that they could usually trust families that had one or more sons serving with the Front as soldiers or cadres. By the same token, they suspected the relatives of government soldiers or civilian employees. Numerous respondents

confirm the important role that a son's occupation played in determining the sympathies of the whole family. For instance, those with family members in the Viet Cong not only gave more assistance to the Front, but were also more likely to believe its propaganda. Families with sons who were affiliated in some way with the government were likely to comply reluctantly with the Front's demands. Families with sons on both sides were, of course, in the middle.

The Viet Cong realized the importance of family affiliations and sought to take advantage of them. Several respondents mention that the cadres tried to require that each family have at least one member working for the Front, although one source denied this. Military proselyting activities were also based largely on family ties, and here the cadres sought to pressure families whose sons were government soldiers to call them home. Nevertheless, family ties could also cause difficulties for the Viet Cong. A captured document states: "There is a lack of enthusiasm among some individuals who care more for their families than for the cause. The number of these individuals varies from area to area."

3. Land distribution promoted Viet Cong sympathies; aid promoted government sympathies. Respondents generally agree that those who received land from the Front were likely to sympathize with it. This is confirmed by a captured report: "Having received land from the Party, the people have identified themselves with it." These families were likely to send a son or brother to join the "units and agencies." On the other hand, the

effect of aid from the government was to make some people credit the government's propaganda and to take a sympathetic attitude toward it. One man said he believed Chieu Hoi leaflets because he had observed that refugees were actually aided when they fled to government areas to avoid being bombed.

4. The very poor, and those who had been persecuted by the government tended to favor the Viet Cong; the more affluent, the religious minorities, and those who had been injured by the insurgents tended to favor the government. These tendencies are well known, and the available materials bear them out. It should be noted, however, that there are many exceptions, and that some factors tend to cancel each other out. For example, many defectors are from the ranks of very poor farmers; a man might have had one relative killed by the government and another by the Viet Cong; some relatively wealthy persons attained positions of responsibility in the Front; the cadres were occasionally able to win over the family of a man they had assassinated, and so on. There was also a sprinkling of Catholics, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai in the Viet Cong ranks.

5. People tended to favor the side they believed was stronger. "When the Front was the stronger and the government forces didn't dare come, people obeyed the cadres. When the government was the stronger, people no longer respected the cadres, didn't obey their orders, didn't mix with them, and didn't speak to them." These words of a former hamlet military cadre were frequently echoed by other respondents:



Before the bombings the village people were entirely on the Viet Cong side. They were sure the Viet Cong would win. After the bombings in 1965 they saw that the Viet Cong victory wasn't near. They had been wrong. So they left for the secure zone, and the people's contribution to the Viet Cong decreased.

Another said simply that the people "respected the strongest side."

Similarly, a number of sources remarked that in government areas people tended to be for the government, while in Viet Cong areas they tended to favor the Front. As a very simple farmer, possibly reflecting a widely held belief, observed: "It is a matter of course that those who lived in the areas controlled by the Viet Cong supported them." A North Vietnamese infiltrator spoke more disparagingly, but to much the same effect:

The Viet Cong made propaganda among these old people [in the village] and they listened very respectfully. But these were old people; they didn't care what was happening. If you tell them this is black, they'll agree; if you say it's white, they'll also agree. You know these Southerners! They don't know very much.

The same man went on to contrast this situation with the one in government areas, where people naturally agreed with the government. Indeed, there seems to have been a strong tendency among many people to extend the doctrine cuius regio, eius religio\* to the political sphere.

When it was not clear who was winning, then the villagers were in a quandary:

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\* A doctrine stemming from the religious wars in Europe. A rough translation is: "The people's faith should be that of their ruler."

The villagers saw the guns and weapons, and their behavior toward the Viet Cong was most correct. They were still wavering. They didn't know which side was stronger. How could the people judge which side was winning? They saw the Viet Cong coming into their village with great noise, but yet government soldiers would come too. The people were in the middle. At night the Viet Cong summoned them out to destroy the roads, and in the daytime the government soldiers made them repair the roads again.

Another respondent spoke in much the same way:

Generally speaking, the people were in the middle. When the government told them to build the strategic hamlet, they did; and when the Viet Cong told them to destroy it, they destroyed it. . . . To speak from the point of view of the villagers, they were fed up; they had to build and they had to destroy things they had built.

In one village the Viet Cong were said to enjoy widespread popular support after they had staged a successful uprising, but then the government forces returned. Since then "neither the Viet Cong nor the government could win the people over to their side." This may have been the situation in many contested villages.

#### ATTITUDE CHANGES IN RECENT YEARS

While the distribution of political attitudes among villagers in Viet Cong areas cannot be determined with any precision, practically all respondents agree that sentiment has shifted away from the Viet Cong during the past few years. There is little agreement as to the exact date when this shift started to occur, probably

because it started at different times in different places, and moved at varying paces, but nearly all sources agree that the change has been a substantial one.

The shift in attitudes was noted particularly by Viet Cong cadres who were charged with motivating, mobilizing, and directing the population. A man who had been in charge of propaganda activities in a village recalled:

In 1962 and 1963, the population had confidence in the cadres. They esteemed and respected the cadres. They believed everything the cadres said. But starting in 1964, I observed that the people gradually shunned the cadres. Of course, they did not show, by manner or word, that they disliked or hated the cadres. But it appeared that they no longer believed what the cadres said; they became colder, less nice and less obliging toward the cadres.

A former village guerrilla stated:

I noticed a slow-down in 1964 compared with 1962 and 1963. . . . In 1963 the people began to get fed up and in 1964 they kept further away from the Communists, for whom they showed much less enthusiasm. The special fund of "Anti-American Rice" has declined since 1963. This I know, because I was myself one of the Front's collectors.

Similar accounts are numerous. A former Village Secretary said that from 1961 to 1963 about 60 youths of both sexes from his village voluntarily enlisted in Viet Cong units, but that in 1964 he was unable to recruit anybody. When he tried to carry out draft orders, the youths fled. Another former village official had been involved in organizing demonstrations in which women had been sent to the district town to protest

shellings. In 1964 this had been easy, but in 1965 it was almost impossible to make the women go. With regard to the sympathies of the villagers in general, he said: "I noticed that many of them had changed their views. Those who had supported, believed in, and longed for the Front's success began to curse the Front this year."

The picture of initial enthusiasm for the Viet Cong, followed by a marked cooling, is a common one:

People who participate actively in the Front are in the minority now. When the Viet Cong first arrived, the great majority of the villagers bubbled with excitement, but that has gone now. The few people who remain loyal to the Viet Cong have family members working with them, and so they stay in the village. The rest have gone to Saigon.

A former platoon leader from the local forces in Vinh Long Province noted decreased participation in meetings and a reluctance to have visits from local cadres:

Before, the villagers loved to come to meetings and listen to the cadres talk. But this year [1965] things have changed. When they were invited to come, they came, but then sneaked away. Before, a man would be honored and would have gained face if the Village Party Chapter stayed in his house. But this year the people no longer wanted the Village Party Chapter to come to their houses.

Another former village secretary stated that since 1964 the people had been turning away from the Front. "They no longer like it as before. They refused to participate in sabotage work, in showing the way to Front units, and so forth. We had to use threats to force them to do such missions. The same situation took place in every Front-

controlled village." Viet Cong military personnel, also, mention repeatedly that they used to receive an enthusiastic welcome when they entered a village, but as of 1963 or 1964 the welcome cooled, and people didn't seem to want to see them any more. The cool reception given Viet Cong units may have been caused in large part by the fear that they would draw bombing or shelling down on the village, but since cadres in charge of many other types of activities also found the people turning away from them it is probable that something more than fear of government attacks was involved.

A frequent refrain is that sentiments in government-controlled or contested villages were more favorable to the Viet Cong than in those areas fully controlled by the Front. According to this way of thinking, villagers were often attracted by the propaganda and promises of the insurgents, but after they had actually lived under Front control they began to realize that the reality looked quite different from the promise. As a former Viet Cong fighter from Dinh Tuong Province put it:

People in the safe areas tend to idealize the Viet Cong because they haven't had to endure their yoke. The people in the liberated areas know better. They have been deceived by the Viet Cong with their sugar and honey propaganda. The Viet Cong assured them year after year that the end of war was in sight and that unification wouldn't be far away. There were also the taxes which kept increasing. One can only try to picture the villagers working all day long and then in the evening being required to attend meetings, build road blocks and sabotage roads. The people in the liberated areas were really fed up with the Viet Cong.

Or as a District cadre from Vinh Binh Province stated:

People in contested areas believe in the Front and want the Front to win, but it is a different story with people in Viet Cong areas, because they have come to understand the Front. . . . They have to pay contributions and heavy taxes, to work on combat villages. They suffer damages caused by the war, and have to do other chores for the revolution.

According to another respondent, people in his village were at first enthusiastic toward the Front, but they became disenchanted within only two months. A former military cadre from the southernmost tip of the country believed that the process of disenchantment started in 1963: "Before 1963, the Front was still something new and the people could not yet realize how the Front is." And another man from a regional forces unit reported: "In the areas that had long been liberated we were detested by the population because they had to give us food and lodging. In areas which had newly been liberated we were liked by the people."

Although observations to the effect that when people got to know the Front they didn't like it are frequently made, there seems to be some conflict between the conclusions of these respondents and the observations of others that have been mentioned above to the effect that people in Viet Cong areas were more likely to favor the Front. This conflict cannot be satisfactorily explained on the basis of the available materials. It may be, however, that the respondents are distinguishing between attitudes that are mandatory, and have to be expressed in public, and private attitudes that are harbored in secret. Or they may be thinking of different groups within

the population, distinguishing between those who will accept any ideology that is handed down to them by authority and those who are capable of forming their own opinions. All respondents, with the exception of a small group of thoroughly indoctrinated revolutionaries, nevertheless agree that sentiment in general has shifted away from the insurgents.

This conclusion is supported by a number of captured documents from 1965 and 1966. One, which is a report on the general situation, notes "erosion of morale and will to fight among a number of Party members and cadre -- notably village officials -- occasioned by the unfavorable turn of events and by the fear of U.S. weapons and bombings by B-52's." Another which apparently is a local account from Binh Dinh Province, says that one cadre after another reports that people are demoralized and are not willing to do their assigned work, and that guerrillas are deserting: "The people do not believe in the positive success of the revolution. Some of them have created difficulties for the cadres by demanding that the latter return their ID cards to them." Or again: "Guerrillas have fled with their weapons, thus affecting the morale of the local inhabitants. Self-Defense members have given up their guard mission after recent sweep operations."

The reasons for this shift in sentiment have for the most part already been alluded to. Government and U.S. military operations have increased, thus undermining expectations of victory for the Viet Cong cause. Government forces appear to be fighting with more determination and to be behaving better in their relations with the

local population. Memories of persecution or corruption by local officials during the Diem regime are fading, and the successor governments have been able to enforce somewhat better standards of behavior. Viet Cong taxation and other demands on the population have grown heavier. People have become disillusioned with the Front's promises and are reluctant to adopt the doctrine of a "continuing struggle." Most of all, they long for peace and security, and more and more of the villagers have come to believe that the Viet Cong will never be able to assure this.

In the light of their present unhappy situation, life as it was before the start of the insurgency is remembered with nostalgia by a number of residents in Viet Cong areas -- how many is not known. A former guerrilla stated:

Since the Front has controlled Binh Ninh Village [Dinh Tuong Province], life has been harder than before. The people are nostalgic for the period of peace and are very discouraged. They are also most resentful of the Viet Cong who have caused all the trouble. At present, even my father, who dared not make any comments on the Front before, complains about it to a landowner who is still living there. Both of them often stated in private that if the government manned the village post with its soldiers once again, they would volunteer to fight for the government, even though they are old, in order to exterminate the Viet Cong cadres of Binh Ninh.

Another former guerrilla from Quang Tri Province at the other end of South Vietnam stated: "The population is afraid; they do not say a word, but they don't do what the cadres tell them to do. They even want to re-establish 'Hoi-te' [village authorities loyal to the government] as



in time of old, in order to be able to move around for their daily work." Other comments of a similar nature are fairly common: "The people in the countryside want only peace. They are even longing for a time like that prior to the Front uprisings." Or as in the case of a village that was retaken by government forces: "Having learned how it was to live under the Viet Cong, when the Nationalists came back people were so excited that they supported the government with enthusiasm."

It is probable that the strategic hamlet or "New Life Hamlet" program, which previously met fairly widespread resistance, is now welcomed by a larger group of country people than before. Several respondents make statements to this effect. For instance: "I think that since mid-1964 the villagers have realized that the strategic hamlets are a good thing." Or: "They preferred life in New Life Hamlets, which could give them more security. Therefore, many left for New Life Hamlets."

Although sentiments have increasingly shifted away from the Viet Cong, and at least to some extent toward the government, this does not mean that the Viet Cong organization is falling to pieces. The Front's cadres may find their tasks more difficult to perform than before, but they are still in full control of large areas of the countryside. Until a way can be found to loosen the grip of the organization and to provide new leaders at the village level, the Viet Cong structure is likely to survive. The significance of the shift in attitude is not that people in Viet Cong villages are about to rise up spontaneously, but that they are more ready than before to support new leadership, and to accept a government that can serve and protect them.



APPENDIX

The narrative content of this Memorandum is based mainly on RAND interviews with members of the Viet Cong civilian and military forces and with civilian refugees who have fled from Front-controlled or contested areas. Although a large number of interviews were examined, 209 interviews with Front members and 5 with refugees proved to be particularly relevant to the study and will be described within this appendix.

Of the Front members who were interviewed, approximately 60 percent were ralliers, or persons who had deliberately defected to the GVN side. The remaining were mainly prisoners, and there were a few deserters. The experience of these respondents with the Front in the South covers the period from late 1957 to the spring of 1966. Ninety percent of the sample defected or were captured during the period of mid-1964 until the end of 1965. Most of the interviewees had served a considerable time in the Front, as illustrated below in Table A. Of those serving over 2 years, 47 reported having been involved in the first stages of the insurgency in the South sometime during the period 1958-1962.\*

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\*Of this number, at least 7 were former Resistance leaders who remained in the South from 1954 on. The sample also includes 5 regroupees who describe their training and preparation in the North after being regrouped in 1954.

Table A

LENGTH OF EXPERIENCE IN THE FRONT (IN SOUTH VIETNAM)

Length of Time	Over 2 years	1-2 years	4 months to 1 year	3 months or less
Number of Respondents (% of total in parenthesis)	97 (46%)	27 (13%)	57 (28%)	28 (13%)

The interviews also describe Front operations in almost every province of South Vietnam. The number of those from each of the Military Corps areas is shown below in Table B.

Table B

REGIONAL REPRESENTATION

Corps Area	I	II	III	IV*
Number reporting on that area	22	37	52	96

\*The figure for IV Corps includes 31 special interviews conducted in Dinh Tuong Province. Two respondents could not be classified by region.

Approximately 60 percent of the respondents served the Viet Cong in a military capacity, while the remaining 40 percent occupied a variety of civilian positions. Of the total, 23 percent were Party members involved in important decision-making and administrative roles at the regional, province, district and village level. Another

40 percent, however, also played a leadership role of some kind.

The interviewees thus are able to report several different types of experience which are directly relevant to this study. First, there are the members of the Main and Local Forces who have frequent contact with village activities while carrying out their military tasks, and who also describe their earlier experience in their home villages. Second are those civilian cadres who, at a variety of echelons, make the decisions regarding the conduct of the insurgency in the countryside and who actually administer local programs. Third, there are those newer recruits and rank-and-file civilians who serve the Viet Cong within their native areas either as members of guerrilla and paramilitary units or as members of civilian associations. The numbers involved in each of these areas of activity and their positions are illustrated in Table C.

Table C

LEADERSHIP AND AREA OF ACTIVITY

Area of Experience	Number of Respondents (Percentage of total sample in parenthesis)	Number in Leadership roles: Asst. Squad Leader, Low Civilian Cadre, and above
1. Main and Local Forces	86 (41%)*	75
2. Key civilian cadre	46 (22%)	46
3. Members of local organizations	77 (37%)	9
-guerrillas	34 (16%)	9
-village associations	43 (21%)	0

Main and Local Force Members

The familiarity of the 86 members of the Main and Local Force fighting units with Front strategy and activities at the village level is derived from several sources. Local Force members, in particular, often have frequent contact and association with the villagers between (or during) military operations, as they stop for food, lodging, or information. They are also able to observe Front activities in the village at first hand. In addition, members of these military units usually describe life within their native villages prior to their own enlistment or draft into the regular Viet Cong forces. Some of them were

previously village or hamlet guerrilla members, or were involved in the civilian programs in their villages.

The Civilian Control Apparatus

Of the 46 respondents described as "key" civilian personnel, 20 were Party members and 13 operated at a level above that of the village and hamlet. Their experience ranges over a variety of activities within both liberated and contested villages and at higher echelons. The level and area of responsibility of each is described below in Table D.

Table D

ROLES OF KEY CIVILIAN CADRE

Operational Level	Total Key Cadre (No. of Party members in parenthesis)	Propaganda and Proselytizing	Administrative	Security	Finance and Economy
Region	3 (2)	2			1
Province	1 (1)	1			
District	9 (7)	6	1	1	1
Village	26 (9)	14	4	3	5
Hamlet	7 (1)	4	1	1	1
Total	46 (20)	27	6	5	8

Village Guerrillas and Civilian Association Members

The 34 members of village and hamlet guerrilla units and militia forces played an important role in securing Viet Cong objectives in the village, serving within their native areas in units engaged in defense and protection, as well as in sabotage and harassment. The operational area and leadership positions of these respondents are shown below in Table E.

Table E

VILLAGE AND HAMLET MILITARY FORCES

Area and Responsibility	Village Unit	Hamlet Unit	Squad Leader	Assistant Leader of Unit
Number of Guerrillas	25	9	4	5

The remaining 43 civilian interviewees are also classified as "members" of the Front by virtue of the fact that they have been active in the various village associations, and have participated in Viet Cong programs aimed at increasing agricultural production, constructing combat hamlets, organizing demonstrations, and so forth. A number of the sample were women and older people, and several were moved out of their villages to serve in various capacities (teacher, typist) at higher echelons. Ten persons were members of production and transportation teams, and four were messengers.



The 5 interviews with refugees from Front-controlled or contested villages provide additional information about life in Viet Cong villages as it is experienced by ordinary members of the civilian population.