Communist Rationale

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

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

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

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

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

The hypothesis offered here connects and fixes in time the communist assessment of their prospects for staying in Hue with the kind of death order issued. It seems clear from sifting evidence that they had no single unchanging assessment with regard to themselves and their future in Hue, but rather that changing situations during the course of the battle altered their
prospects and their intentions. It also seems equally clear from the evidence that there was no single communist policy on death orders; instead the kind of death order issued changed during the course of the battle. The correlation between these two is high and divides into three phases. The hypothesis therefore is that as communist plans during the Battle of Hue changed so did the nature of the death orders issued. This conclusion is based on overt communist statements, testimony by prisoners and hoi chanh, accounts of eye witnesses, captured documents and the internal logic of the communist situation.

Hue: Phase I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Hue: Phase II**

In the first few days, the Tet offensive affairs progressed so well for the communists in Hue (although not to the south, where Party chiefs received some rather grim evaluations from cadres in the midst of the offensive in the Mekong Delta) that for a brief euphoric moment they believed they could hold the city. Probably the assessment that the communist were in
Hue to stay was not shared at the higher echelons, but it was widespread in Hue and at the Thua Thien provincial level. One intercepted communist message, apparently written February 2, exhorted cadres in Hue to hold fast, declaring: "A new era, a real revolutionary period has begun (because of our Hue victories) and we need only to make swift assault (in Hue) to secure our target and gain total victory."

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

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

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

As seen earlier in North Viet-Nam and in Communist China, the communists were seeking to break up the local social order by eliminating leaders and key figures in religious organizations (Buddhist bonzes, Catholic priests), political parties (four members of the Central Committee of Viet-Nam), social movements such as women's organizations and youth groups, including what otherwise would be totally inexplicable, the execution of pro-communist student leaders from middle and upper class families.
In consonance with this, killing in some instances was done by family unit. In one well-documented case during this period a squad with a death order entered the home of a prominent community leader and shot him, his wife, his married son and daughter-in-law, his young unmarried daughter, a male and female servant and their baby. The family cat was strangled; the family dog was clubbed to death; the goldfish scooped out of the fishbowl and tossed on the floor. When the communists left, no life remained in the house. A "social unit" had been eliminated. (Appalling though it was, one stands in that family's living room and, as a parent, thinks perhaps this was the kindest way, for in Hue one is haunted by the feeling that bereavement is worse than death).

Phase II also saw an intensive effort to eliminate intellectuals, who are perhaps more numerous in Hue than elsewhere in Viet-Nam. Surviving Hue intellectuals explain this in terms of a long-standing communist hatred of Hue intellectuals, who were anti-communist in the worst or most insulting manner: they refused to take communism seriously. Hue intellectuals have always been contemptuous of communist ideology, brushing it aside as a latecomer to the history of ideas and not a very significant one at that. Hue, being a bastion of traditionalism, with its intellectuals steeped in Confucian learning intertwined with Buddhism, did not, even in the fermenting years of the 1920's and 1930's, debate the merits of communism. Hue ignored it. The intellectuals in the university, for example, in a year's course in political thought dispense with Marxism-Leninism in a half hour lecture, painting it as a set of shallow barbarian political slogans with none of the depth and time-tested reality of Confucian learning, nor any of the splendor and soaring humanism of Buddhist thought. Since the communist, especially the communist from Hue, takes his dogma seriously, he can become demoniac when dismissed by a Confucian as a philosophic ignoramus, or by a Buddhist as a trivial materialist. Or, worse than being dismissed, ignored through the years. So with the righteousness of a true believer, he sought to strike back and eliminate this challenge of indifference. Hue intellectuals now say the hunt-down in their ranks has taught them a hard lesson, to take communism seriously, if not as an idea, at least as a force loose in their world,
The killings in Phase II perhaps accounted for 2,000 of the missing. But the worst was not yet over.

**Hue: Phase III**

Inevitably, and as the leadership in Hanoi must have assumed all along, considering the forces ranged against it, the battle in Hue turned against the communists. An intercepted PAVN radio message from the Citadel, February 22, asked for permission to withdraw. Back came the reply: permission refused, attack on the 23rd. That attack was made, a last, futile one. On the 24th the Citadel was taken.

That expulsion was inevitable was apparent to the communists for at least the preceding week. It was then that began Phase III, the cover-the-traces period. Probably the entire civilian underground apparatus in Hue had exposed itself during Phase II. Those without suspicion rose to proclaim their identity. Typical is the case of one Hue resident who described his surprise on learning that his next door neighbor was the leader of a phuong (which made him 10th to 15th ranking communist civilian in the city), saying in wonder, "I'd known him for 18 years and never thought he was the least interested in politics." Such a cadre could not go underground again unless there was no one around who remembered him.

Hence Phase III, elimination of witnesses.

Probably the largest number of killings came during this period and for this reason. Those taken for political indoctrination probably were slated to be returned. But they were local people as were their captors; names and faces were familiar. So, as the end approached they became not just a burden but a positive danger. Such undoubtedly was the case with the group taken from the church at Phu Cam. Or of the 15 high school students whose bodies were found as part of the Phu Thu Salt Flat find.

Categorization in a hypothesis such as this is, of course, gross and at best only illustrative. Things are not that neat in real life. For example, throughout the entire time the blacklist hunt went on. Also, there was revenge killing by the communists in the name of the Party, the so-called "revolutionary
justice." And undoubtedly there were personal vendettas, old scores settled by individual Party members. (How else can one explain one body found at Phu Thu in which every principal bone had been broken?)

The official communist view of the killing in Hue was contained in a book written and published in Hanoi:

"Actively combining their efforts with those of the PLAF and population, other self-defense and armed units of the city (of Hue) arrested and called to surrender the surviving functionaries of the puppet administration and officers and men of the puppet army who were skulking. Die-hard cruel agents were punished." The communist line on the Hue killings later at the Paris talks was that it was not the work of communists but of "dissident local political parties". However, it should be noted that Radio Liberation April 26, 1968, criticized the effort in Hue to recover bodies, saying the victims were only "hooligan lackeys who had incurred blood debts of the Hue compatriots and who were annihilated by the Southern armed forces and people in early Spring." This propaganda line however was soon dropped in favor of the line that it really was local political groups fighting each other. The line on Hue much later is exemplified by this Radio Hanoi broadcast of April 27, 1969:

"According to LPA, in order to cover up their cruel acts, the puppet administration in Hue recently played the farce of setting up a so-called committee for the search for burial sites of the hooligan lackeys who had owed blood debts to the Tri-Thien-Hue compatriots and who were annihilated by the Southern armed forces and people in early Mau Than spring.

"The local puppet administration sent its lackeys to carry out searching activities in city wards and to force compatriots to pay for ritual presents. The compatriots in the Dong Ba city ward, especially the small merchants, were forced to collect the greatest sum of money. Profoundly indignant, the Hue compatriots cursed and violently opposed
the puppet administration agents. Faced with this, on 19, 20 and 21 April, the Hue puppet administration was forced to broadcast a communique denying this act by its lackeys and cast the blame on others for pocketing money in the name of the above-mentioned committee. Well aware of the Thieu-Ky-Huong clique's cheating and crafty tricks, the Hue compatriots told one another to resolutely boycott its searching and memorial service force."
HYPOTHESIS IN SUMMARY FORM:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>COMMUNIST ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>PATTERN OF LIQUIDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First few days of Tet.</td>
<td>We have our orders to stay in the city for seven days, no more.</td>
<td>Drumhead Court Phase. Blacklists, advertised trials, public executions, bodies not hidden. &quot;Tyrants, enemies of the revolution&quot; liquidated, especially those whose deaths weaken the structure of the Hue establishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle period</td>
<td>We can hold the city. We are in Hue to stay.</td>
<td>Social Reconstruction Phase. Purge the old social order and begin to build a new one. Liquidate the &quot;social negatives, all imperialist lackeys.&quot; Killing done quietly and bodies usually hidden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final period</td>
<td>We cannot hold; we are going to be driven out.</td>
<td>Leave No Witnesses Phase. Liquidate anyone in communist hands who could identify individual Party members. Kill secretly and hide bodies carefully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throughout</td>
<td>Liquidation on grounds of Party retribution or in vendettas by individual Party members; also, of course civilian casualties incidental to Battle of Hue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of deaths probably would have been higher but for limitations of time and circumstance. Consider the milieu in which the communists were operating: The population of the city at the time of the attack was about 180,000; the surrounding districts, where many victims were found, contained another 326,000. Some 16 communist battalions in and out of the city battled 14 allied battalions. People were fleeing, chaos and confusion were on all sides. The communist civilian cadres numbered about 150, aided by several hundred local communists who had surfaced. The communist population control and organization plan was to divide the city into phuongs or precincts, a geographic unit containing up to 8,000 persons each. A ten-man cadre team was to run each phuong, charged with the task of locating, organizing, identifying and sorting out people in its area. After the first few days, allied military action divided the communist forces and denied them roughly half the population. They maintained this control for about three weeks. One cannot but conclude that the number of civilian victims would have been much larger than the 5,700 currently estimated had the communist grip been tighter and longer.

The only statistics available yet, and they are lamentable, suggest this rough breakdown of the 5,700:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military or para-military men or officers</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government officials or civil servants</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under age 16</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown or unidentified</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beyond these crude figures, and they are based on study of about 800 bodies, lies a vast ignorance. We do not know who the dead are, nor even how many.
Answers to these, and other questions await the coming to Hue of a good historian who will piece together the mosaic of information into a coherent picture.

**Aftermath**

In the days after, when awareness gradually spread, the attitude of the people of the city moved from surprise to shock to horror to a kind of numbness. The effect on the men and officers of the First Division was perhaps most striking.

It is a generally accepted fact in military circles in Viet-Nam that the ARVN First Division in terms of spirit and fighting \& has changed from one of the worst divisions in the Vietnamese Army to perhaps the best.

The civilians of the city will tell you that in the months after communist departure they were gripped by a social malaise, strange but understandable. The huge wound inflicted on them healed only slowly. An all-pervasive mood settled over the city. Fear lingered in every quarter. Activity in the streets was subdued and even the children played quietly. It was an atmosphere compounded of sadness, remorse, bitterness, perhaps a little guilt mixed in, but most of all it was a pathetic desire of each to rid his mind of memories too dreadful to hold. Blot out the past, each seemed to say, for this is the way back to light. "Don't look for the graves," was the unspoken rule. Only the families of the missing were determined to face reality. They were the ones who persisted in the search and in most cases their children were the ones who did the actual digging.

Parenthetically it might be noted that, outwardly, this mood in Hue largely has evaporated. The city once again is alive, a beehive of construction work with business flourishing and people filled with ongoing projects and future plans. Physically Hue has almost completely recovered. Materially all economic indices are up. But one senses deep recesses in the mind of Hue that will never again know the sun.
As might be expected an undercurrent of irrational bitterness developed among people of Hue against the outside—the Americans because they did not somehow prevent the massacre, the Vietnamese government for what is viewed as insufficient subsequent assistance. Both are unreasonable, of course. Had it not been for the Americans the slaughter in Hue would have been infinitely worse. The government has poured many recovery resources into the area in the past 20 months and its efforts to rebuild are wholly commendable. Such bitterness slowly will dissipate. This attitude, of course, in no way even touches the measures of hatred for the communists and all they stand for. In listening in the evening to a flood of words from survivors about what happened at Hue, one is submerged in a hate that is almost a fog. Gone from Hue are the attentistes, the fence sitters, the advocates of non-involvement. Hardly a person exists in the city who did not find a blood relation or intimate friend in a communist grave: the implacable hatred for communism by the people of Hue has become a function of mathematics.

The meaning of the Hue Massacre seems clear. If the communists win decisively in South Viet-Nam (and the key word is decisively), what is the prospect? First, all foreigners would be cleared out of the South, especially the hundreds of foreign newsmen who are in and out of Saigon. A curtain of ignorance would descend. Then would begin a night of long knives. There would be a new order to build. The war was long and so are memories of old scores to be settled. All political opposition, actual or potential, would be systematically eliminated. Stalin versus kulak, Mao versus landlord, Hanoi communist versus Southern Catholic, the pattern would be the same: eliminate not the individual, for who cares about the individual, but the latent danger to the dream, the representative of the blocs, the symbol of the force, that might someday, even inside the regime, dilute the system. Beyond this would come communist justice meted out to the "tyrants and lackeys." Personal revenge would be a small wheel turning within the larger wheel of Party retribution.

But little of this would be known abroad. The communists in Viet-Nam would create a silence.

The world would call it peace.
Chapter III - Footnotes
Chapter III - Footnotes

1. Including one Son Lam (Party name), the highest ranking civilian prisoner taken who was part of the Hue offensive; he was a combination political commissar, district chief and local guerrilla unit leader in Hue at the start of the battle as well as during most of the subsequent period. He was not captured until much later.


3. A theory widely circulated in Hue but without foundation is that Ho Chi Minh, having been socially rebuffed when teaching high school in Hue years ago, hated the place much as Hitler hated Stalingrad and personally ordered mass slaughter in Hue.


5. That is, the military who lived in Hue, were in the city on leave, etc., but not in the units which took back the city.
Chapter IV: Technology of Terror
Chapter IV: The Technology of Terror

The basic unit in any communist organization, in Viet-Nam or elsewhere, is the three-man cell. But while the three-man cell may be a firm entity, the larger groups of cells are not. Vietnamese communists are casual and often inconsistent in structuring organizations or assigning missions to organizations. Line of responsibility, chain of command, the organizational chart itself, tend to be far vaguer than, say, in the U.S. Army.

Decentralization easily becomes compartmentalization. One can ask a political commissar hoi chánh to draw an organizational chart of his province and the resulting jumble of lines and boxes soon obviously confuses even him. Particularly in the case of terror units the communists employ an almost endless variety of unit names, special designations, and code list-ings (which are changed frequently as a security measure)--some highly descriptive if not informative (The Red Arrow Into The Enemy Heart Squad); some so vague as to be meaningless (Cluster Two). Further, organizational structure varies throughout the country and what is a common pattern in the Mekong Delta may be unknown in the Hue area.

Sorting out and keeping straight this welter of overlapping terror designations is hardly worth the effort unless one is a specialist. Therefore, in approaching the organization of terror units, it seems best for our purposes to do so in terms of function and confine ourselves chiefly to the basic unit, the cell, rather than the larger units.

Most of the non-military violence and terror programs by the communists in Viet-Nam are the work of three types of functional units.

The Para-Military Cell

This is a special unit within the para-military or guerrilla structure which engages in sabotage, small strike operations and "punishment" missions in the cell’s familiar home territory, the villages of the rural area. It is the least professional of the three types and differs from an ordinary para-military or guerrilla unit cell in that it receives special training. Its members
also tend to be younger and more dedicated.

Functionally these may operate in units up to as many as nine cells, (i.e., 27 persons). They may work as an Armed Propaganda Team, the most ancient of the para-military units in Viet-Nam (references in documents go back as far as 1958), or as Special Action Units (Biet Dong Doi), or as part of Armed Reconnaissance Teams. They are civilians and their orders come from the Party Central Committee at the provincial level. The determining factor in their terror is almost always political rather than military. Much of the assassination work in the less-defended hamlets, or along the minor highways and canals, is the work of the people in the para-military cell.

Special Activities Cell

These are the most efficient of the terrorists, operating both in rural and urban areas. Into their hands go most of the kidnapping, assassination, extortion and intimidation assignments. Normally they do not handle explosives, at least nothing more complex than a hand grenade. Their basic weapon is the AK-47 submachine gun with the folding stock. This cell, in the main, is a fixed, in-place unit operating within a single designated area, either doing the work itself or running amateur volunteers or hired terrorists. Members are highly motivated and many have long experience. In the past they were often remarkably clever and skillful but in recent years their proficiency has dropped markedly because of attrition. In urban areas they may stay deeply covert and non-operational until the moment when their services are needed, at which time they emerge to perform their assignment. There is unquestionably a large number of such Special Activities Cells in the Saigon area, for example; but since they do nothing to expose themselves, they are virtually impossible to uncover.

The Sapper Cell

"Sapper" is a military term for a military engineer who is trained in demolition work and who is found in every army in the world with the same assignment: to destroy during combat those enemy fortifications, road blocks, etc., which impede his army's advance. The term as applied to communist activities in South Viet-Nam is both confusing and inaccurate, but, like the term
Viet-Cong, it is now so widespread that we all are obliged to use it. As employed here, the term "sapper cell" has no military implication; rather it means a cell whose members use explosives in attacks on non-military targets.

PAVN has two types of sappers, infantry sapper and "commando" sapper. The first is the usual military engineer; the second is more of a special saboteur who engages in what, in other wars, would be behind-the-lines activities, often on one-man missions. Both types of PAVN sappers now operate in the south and engage in what we here call terror. The PLAF division of sappers is more functional: those used in rural areas (field sappers); those used in urban areas (city sappers) and those used to attack targets in the rivers and canals (water sappers).

What we are concerned with here is the sapper, be he military or "non-military", who is engaged in what clearly are non-military activities: attacks on Revolutionary Development teams, "pacified" villages, refugee centers, People's Self-Defense Force units, etc. In truth this "non-military" sapper from the ranks of the military is a sui generis, a true cross between soldier and terrorist. Again the line between what is military and what is terror becomes a thin one. It would seem that our definition, terror is illegal violence, should be amended or interpreted here in context of intent or motive. For instance blowing up a line of helicopters at an airfield would not be an act of terror while blowing up a Saigon electrical power plant would be. The difference is not so much one of function of the target as motive of the sapper, the criterion being whether his objective was military. In any event our interest here is not with the military sapper assaulting an airfield full of helicopters but with a cell engaged in destruction which under our definition is terror.

Sapper cells operate chiefly in the urban areas. Some members belong to PAVN or PLAF; others are part of the Party structure, reporting to the provincial level Central Committee (although the organization within Saigon is a special command structure both in the case of the military and the Party). The majority are Northerners. Most are Party members (the requirements for urban sappers are quite strict: one must be a Party member, must be nominated and seconded by Party members, must pass certain "ideological" examinations, etc.).
Military sappers are formed operationally into four-man teams (see description of training, below) which combine into detachments of from four to seven teams. Five detachments make a battalion; five battalions make a regiment. Those from the military side think of "my unit" as the battalion. Indeed the sapper battalion does not have identity, for it is made up of mutually-supporting organic elements and is not simply a group of independent detachments or teams. For example, one team (or even one detachment) may be assigned exclusively to reconnaissance work, another to transporting explosives, another to manufacturing charges to order, etc. Most operations are the work of a few persons, say eight or twelve members, but there have been cases, such as the Cam Ranh Bay hospital attack, of full sapper battalions in action.

This organization into battalions probably was not necessary for operational reasons but was done to develop greater esprit de corps, to reduce morale problems afflicting members who cannot operate in isolation or without psychic support; and to facilitate matters for the Northerners in the unit who have a particularly difficult time operating clandestinely in the district towns and provincial capitals.

Functionally, what distinguishes the sapper cell from the other two is not organization but the fact that it works with explosives and its members are expected to be able to handle TNT, dynamite, C-4 or plastique, the primary explosives used in Viet-Nam. Some cells or individuals are highly specialized, for example, in setting series-charges timed to explode one after the other.

The chief targets of the sapper cell are government buildings, communication and transportation centers, port and storage facilities, as well as a range of individually smaller targets, such as people, vehicles in the streets, key enemy personnel in public concentrations, etc.

Sapper cell members, of necessity, are bolder and more willing to take risks. And it is policy for them to do so (unlike PAVN and Main Force units, which generally are conservative in terms of risk-taking). They are for the most part strongly dedicated and highly militant. Recruiters seek chiefly the young, because they are more easily influenced in their thinking, are
more willing to run risks, physically are better able to carry out their assignments, are less likely to question the arrangements for an operation, and are less apt to be or become double agents. Optimum age seems to be around 18; seldom is a sapper older than the late 20's (an exception being the specialist), and it is not uncommon to find 14-year-olds playing a key role in an operation.

Since many of these now come from the North Vietnamese military, there is a penchant for the military approach. For example, in assassinations grenades or satchel charges are preferred to a pistol; a mortar at a distance is preferred to a satchel charge up close. The approach in effect is to think as a soldier, not as a saboteur, to fight a personal or small-unit war rather than a "clandestine" one, to substitute surprise for covertsness, shock of impact for scalpel precision, escape from an operation under cover of a barrage of fire rather than by stealth. The result of the terror act may be the same, but the character often is quite different.

Bold they often are, but seldom foolhardy. Public reports over the years of "death squads" and "suicide missions" probably are exaggerated. The number of fanatical true believers indifferent to pain or death is as small in the communist ranks as anywhere else. What often appears to be a suicide mission actually is an act of credulity. For example, a 14-year old boy is persuaded that he can hop off a motorcycle, carry a satchel charge through a gate of a police headquarters, hurl his charge and be out and away before the enemy is alerted. He may know (or he may not be told) that on the roof of that headquarters is a 50 caliber machine gun, manned day and night, and aimed directly at the gate. If he does know it, he believes, or has been convinced, that surprise and speed will still permit his successful departure. When he is shot at the gate his act is put down as another fanatic communist freely sacrificing himself for the cause. The communists later, of course, have no interest in correcting such a mistaken view.

Training Terrorists

One of the clearest picture of the purpose and direction of communist terror programs comes from an inspection of training efforts.
Camp Ba Thu in the "parrot's beak" of Cambodia, due west of Saigon, is the chief training area for communists slated to engage in terror work. About one hundred students are in this area at any one time taking the basic two-month elementary course called "Armed Security Training." Others in smaller numbers receive more advanced or specialized training. Students either are Northerners who have had previous training at Camp Xuan Mai in North Viet-Nam, or local communists who have come in for the training.

About 40 percent of the coursework at Ba Thu is political indoctrination, all incorporated into one lecture session titled, "Role of the Revolution During the General Uprising Period." (In the communist view, Viet-Nam is now in the stage of Tong khoi nghia or general uprising, the final stage before victory.) Specific topics include: "Situation in the South," "Historical Analysis," "Meaning of the General Uprising and the General Offensive," "Role and Responsibility of Armed Security." The mission of the individual, he is told, is:

"To eliminate tyrants, local administrative personnel, betrayers, those who undermine our movement and those who terrorize the people; to protect the revolutionary organs; to heighten the prestige of the Revolution and lower the prestige of the enemy; to create conditions favorable to binh van (troop proselytizing) or capturing enemy personnel, especially those who can supply us with information, especially if they steal enemy documents which help us understand enemy plans and estimates. The main objective of the Revolution is the government. In order to oust the puppet government and seize power for ourselves, we must resort to revolutionary violence, both military and political, also to oppose the enemy's anti-revolutionary violence. The Armed Security Force in particular and the People's Security Agency in general should be the main tools of the Party and the Revolution in this effort."

The rest of the coursework consists of classes in: "Techniques of Security" (protection of fixed installations or simple guard duty); "How to Set Ambushes" (which means how to kidnap and how to assassinate as well as how to set ambushes for the same purposes); "Reconnaissance" (casing the target and route planning); "Methods of Camouflage and Disguise"; "Tactics of Urban Warfare"; and something called "Personnel" which appar-
ently deals with handling amateur collaborators and, an increas­ingly common phenomenon, the hired terrorist whose services are engaged for a single operation for which he receives a con­siderable sum of money. Students also receive training in weapons handling, if they have not already acquired it elsewhere; the basic weapon is the AK-47. There also is training in the use of pressure- and electrically-detoned mines, and use of B-40 and B-41 rockets. In the physical education classes, emphasis is on silent swimming.

Toward the end of the training period those students who are part of the communist military structure (as opposed to those who operate under the control of the Party) are formed into four-man teams: a chief, who does the actual detonating of the charge and thus has the most dangerous assignment; a logistics man responsible for assembling the explosives and detonators; a reconnaissance man who maps the target as well as the routes to be followed before and after the operation; and an outside man, who is responsible for transportation and who acts as the "cover" man during the getaway, that is, as a counter-pursuit force. These teams, singly or in clusters, then receive team training both at the sand table and in mock operations.

Operations

Communist terror activity seldom is conducted in isolation. Almost every act is part of a program and every program an integral part of some project which the leaders feel is required at the moment: the refugees must be forced back to their home villages, American casualties must be increased, villagers must be discouraged from voting in village council elections, etc. Normally the activities of the various cells are integrated into the perennial "offensives" which communist planners love to divide into three phases and mount as "Autumn-Winter" and "Spring-Summer" offensives of "Dry Season" and "Wet Season" campaigns. Between "offensives" the cells are available for other assignments, but also during these periods they do a good deal of training.

The specific acts of terror as well as the intent and purpose behind them can be quickly understood by skimming the Appendix, "Terror: The Record", and, in fact, that is the reason it was included in this monograph.
Especially in Central Viet-Nam, the terror units operate under a kind of Stakhanovite quota system. The six-month quota imposed on six units (probably district special activities squads) in southern Phu Yen and northern Khanh Hoa Provinces for the last half of 1969 is reproduced below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Designation</th>
<th>To Be Annihilated</th>
<th>To Be Captured &amp; Re-educated (At District Centers)</th>
<th>To Be Re-Educated At Village Level</th>
<th>Warning Letters To Be Sent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B-1</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-5</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The quota takes note of four of the five major activities of various terror units: assassination; kidnaping (with indoctrination and later release, or with subsequent assassination); "re-education" in the village (a whole range of indoctrination, agitational and propaganda efforts by special action teams, armed propaganda teams and agit-prop teams); and psychological intimidation (those on the warning letter list may later be moved to the assassination list; in any event the warning letter is cheap and can be highly effective in individual cases). The fifth activity, beyond the capability of the units for which this quota was designed, is the use of explosives for terror purposes.

The tricks of the terror trade are endless:

* Poisoned cigarettes given eleven police officers in Kien Hoa province; one died, the others were hospitalized.

* Two 12-year old boys in Binh Dinh Province were kid-
napped by a Special Activities Squad. The chief held their heads under water until they promised to throw two grenades in their village, which they did, killing 27 persons.

*Poison injected into bottles of wine with hypodermic needles. Or wine bottles used as grenade carriers; the bottom is cut off the bottle, a hand grenade fitted snugly into the bottle with the pin removed and the bottom cemented back on. When the bottle is hurled it breaks, releasing the firing arm (an excellent way to conceal a grenade when traveling in the city).

*Doors, drawers or automobile engines booby trapped; booby traps of explosives, but also of poisoned darts.

*Assassinations directed against the very best and the very worst enemy officials, against the highly popular and effective civil servant and against the most corrupt and oppressive local official, stimulating a policy of mediocrity.

*The bicycle or motorcycle can be a death instrument, with its hollow tubular frame packed with plastique and the timing device fixed under the saddle. The terrorist rides into the area, leans his machine against the building to be destroyed, sets the fuse and walks off.

*The use of a B-40 rocket for purposes of extortion. For example, a Chinese transportation company owner is delinquent in his payments to the communists. One of his trucks, traveling over government-controlled roads (meaning that a communist unit would not dare openly stop the truck) is blown up from a distance, with a rocket; there is virtually no risk to the communists and the pay-off is high, as the owner doesn't want to lose another truck.

Increasingly we have seen develop in Viet-Nam the large scale terror attack, a commando-type raid by sappers but with the purpose of terrorizing rather than accomplishing some military objective. The raid on the U.S. Sixth Convalescent Hospital at Cam Ranh Bay, August 7, 1969, may be an ominous foreshadowing of this new face of communist terror: a 100-man sapper force infiltrated the hospital compound, detonated several dozen charges, shot some American patients and then vanished without a casualty to themselves. The capability, scope and
importance of this sort of mass terror operation has broadened steadily in the past 18 months. We can expect it to continue to grow in importance. More communist resources will be allocated to it, more emphasis will be placed on it doctrinally. This is a reflection of the steadily changing nature of the war since mid-1968. For the communists it is a trend toward less costly warfare, especially less lavish expenditure of men and materials. A sapper battalion attack is more economical than an assault by far larger numbers of PAVN. Not only does it allow the better husbanding of resources, it also provides greater precision in strikes at those enemy targets which represent maximum threat at the moment— for example, the Revolutionary Development cadres, or the People's Self-Defense Force. Therefore it is quite possible that the communist leaders may during 1970 restructure the war and put the chief burden of the struggle on the shoulders of the terrorist. Indeed, an increasingly impressive body of evidence from captured documents points clearly toward this eventuality.

Limitations

We would be remiss if we did not consider the limits which exist in communist use of terror, for they are many and significant. The chief limit, of course, is that imposed by the other side, the so-called counter-terror measures which for the most part are nothing more than patient detective and police work; these have always been important but in recent months have at times become impressive. Poor quality of personnel is probably the second greatest limitation. Closely allied to this is the matter of individual morale. Doctrine also can be a limitation. Some examples:

*The Saigon police intercept a shipment of explosive materials and detonating devices en route to Saigon but without communist knowledge. Experts then sabotage them. For example a fuse is removed from a hand grenade. Or the fuse is changed from a five-second to a half-second one. Or the explosive is replaced with material that looks identical but is harmless. The word which eventually gets back to the terror teams is that their equipment is faulty.

*GVN penetration agents in a sapper squad are under orders to watch for signs of faint-heartedness or loss of zeal among
members. If an agent detects this in a member, he carefully reveals himself and offers to arrange the next assignment as a staged affair, appearing to be genuine but run with the cooperation of the police and thus involving no danger to the faint-hearted member.

*On several occasions naval patrol boats have seen underwater explosions from a distance and upon investigation have found the remains of what undoubtedly were water sappers who had blown themselves up. Allied forces have captured several stockpiles of water sapper explosive devices and equipment: magnetic-acoustic mines, pressure-influence detonators, torpedoes and scuba-diving equipment, all of it communist-bloc manufactured and of first-rate quality. Yet there has been surprisingly little water sapper activity. Probably this is a limitation imposed by lack of trained and experienced water sappers, who are much harder to come by than is good watersapper equipment.

*Getting and keeping safe houses, especially in Saigon, is a steadily more difficult task. Captured documents indicate that the leadership does not expect any safe house to remain secure more than six months.

*Lack of skill means more accidents. On May 15, 1969, for example, there was a large explosion in Saigon's Fifth District. Later, it was determined that a team had been transporting three rockets and 88 pounds of plastique and because of carelessness or ignorance, or sabotage, had accidentally set them off. Sappers carrying concealed charges in Saigon during the 1968 Tet offensive failed to carry out their assignment because they got lost (and aroused suspicions with inquiries as to location of target; one passer-by notified police who arrested them).

*Morale is a major limitation. Terrorists must be zealously energetic or they are nothing. Losses in their ranks have a cumulative effect, tending to cause survivors anxiety about living on borrowed time because of the discouraging prospect of the arrival of new and usually green recruits with all the consequent hazards. The knowledge that GVN penetration agents are everywhere, reporting and internally sabotaging the effort, must have a particularly corrosive effect.
*Limits are recognized frankly by communist theoreticians, writing in cadre handbooks and even publicly. In earlier years especially, cadres were advised to use terror judiciously, selectively and only sparingly. Terror, they were told, was largely useless against a dedicated opponent, such as the South Vietnamese Catholics. In general the theoreticians seemed to regard terror as a technique which provides quick but rapidly diminishing returns, a weapon of the weak that would fall into disuse as power grew. Writings also repeatedly make the point that terror methods can succeed only when the objectives of the terrorist are widely and fully supported by the general population (the example always given is the Viet Minh war against the French). One concludes that had these theoreticians had their way, terror would never have grown to the proportion that it did, nor would it have become integral in virtually all communist programs, as is the case now.
Chapter IV - Footnotes
Chapter IV: Footnotes

1. Three-member cell in Vietnamese is to ba nguoi. Also employed are to keo son (glue-welded cell) and to tam gia (three-participant cell).

2. In Vietnamese, to thanh phan ban quan su.

3. In Vietnamese, to tieu dac cong.

4. The standard Vietnamese word for sapper is cong binh. However, it now is common to encounter sapper as the translation for dac cong, the same term employed in our second type of terror cell and translated as special activities. In communist usage dac cong means literally special operation, as for example doi dac cong cam tu or special operations "suicide" unit. However, as noted dac cong now is being translated by GVN translators as sapper.

5. From the captured notebook of a cadre who had attended the course at Ba Thu. Circa early 1969.
Appendix: Terror -- The Record
Appendix: Terror -- The Record

To provide the reader with a sense of the all-encompassing nature of communist terror in Viet-Nam, representative, but by no means comprehensive, examples have been selected from books, government files, newspaper morgues and International Control Commission reports.

Viet Minh Terror

The Viet Minh war against the French was marked by considerable use of terror, not only against the French but against Vietnamese who did not support the Viet Minh.

Beginning in the final days of World War II, the communists, under Vo Nguyen Giap, destroyed all non-communist nationalist leaders they could run to earth.

In the Viet Minh controlled areas during the war, "enemies of the Resistance" were systematically eliminated.

Something of a blood bath took place following victory in 1954, one which would have been greater had not some 900,000 North Vietnamese escaped to the South in Operation Exodus.

Terror again surged upwards in 1956 with the so-called land reform program, which actually was destruction of the natural leader class in the North Vietnamese villages. A conservative figure of the number who died at this period is 50,000; some estimates run as high as a half-million (population of North Viet-Nam at the time was about 14 million).

Accounts of various communist terror activity is found in the standard works on the Viet Minh war, including: Bernard Fall, Le Viet Minh; Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled; Lucien Bodard, The Quicksand War; George K. Tanham, Communist Revolutionary Warfare: The Viet Minh in Indochina. The later terror, during the so-called land reform period, is detailed in Harvey Smith et al, Area Handbook for North Viet-Nam; Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism; Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indo-China; and Dennis Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Viet-Nam.