Part One

THE REGROUPEES IN THE NORTH
II. REGROUPMENT AND INITIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE MOVE

It may be useful to speculate on the expectations and plans of DRV leaders at the time that 90,000 Southern troops were ordered to the North for what then promised to be no more than a two-year stay. They were certain of victory in the elections that they hoped would take place in 1956, but they also found it necessary to prepare for the contingency that these elections would not be held. In this case, they must have thought, it would be helpful to have available a reserve of Southern troops which, if necessary, could achieve by military means the goal of communist domination of all Vietnam.

Since the DRV leadership had no reason to count on the goodwill of the French, still the authority in the South, nor on that of their "Vietnamese puppets," they must have reasoned that any Vietminh troops demobilized and left in South Vietnam would be exposed to great danger from the Southern authorities. By contrast, the political cadres, who by training and experience were better able than the military to hide their identity and purpose, could more safely be left in the South, where they were needed to carry on the Communists' propaganda and organizational activities.

From the point of view of Hanoi, therefore, it was a wise move to take most of the Southern fighting forces to the North, select the best of them for special training in the DRV's new professional army, "the People's Army of Vietnam" (PAVN), and assign those unsuitable for the professional army to helping develop the state economy.
Those of the Vietminh who were left behind to be demobilized could be recalled into service in the South if ever this were judged necessary.

There were other advantages to bringing the Southern army to the North. The Party leaders needed a strong professional army to help them consolidate the new nation north of the 17th Parallel and implement its programs. Not only did they fear the military threat from the South, but they looked upon a strong army as a useful instrument in the maintenance of public order, for they were not sure what would be the people's reaction to the implementation of their communist program. (As we shall see, they found Southern soldiers most useful in enforcing the brutal land reform of 1955-1956 because, coming from a different region, the regroupees had few sentimental ties with the local populace.)

To the author's knowledge, there has been little analysis of the makeup of the regroupees -- referred to simply as "troops" in most of the official documents -- and it is therefore worthwhile to look in our interviews for accounts of the kind of personnel who went north in 1954. The majority were the Vietminh combat troops who had fought in the South. According to our respondents, the general order was for Vietminh political cadres to remain at their posts in the South, while the military personnel were instructed to embark for regroupment in the North. Besides the troops, however, a large number of youths with no previous military training volunteered, or were persuaded by recruiting cadres, to accompany the Vietminh forces. (They were called "soldiers of Geneva" by the older men in a mildly derisive manner.)
A Vietminh soldier who had fought against the French, and who later rose to the rank of senior captain in the DRV intelligence service, has given us a record of his experience, entitled *Regroupment Diary*, in which he tells of the reorganization of his unit after it was temporarily settled in the North. The following excerpts from his memoirs provide a glimpse at the makeup of at least one unit of regroupees:

One day, after a regiment-level meeting, our battalion staff informed us that all units from the South had to go through preliminary reorganization. This was for two reasons: (1) What was called the regrouped army from the South was not really an army. The regroupees were made up of guerrillas, security agents, administrative clerks, etc. They had been signed in as troops for the regroupment, and therefore the number was very high; but, in reality, the combat troops comprised only about two-thirds of the number. Now there had to be a reorganization to pull out those who were not soldiers in order to give them work commensurate with their ability. . . .

After studying the order for preliminary reorganization, our unit began to reorganize. Cadres or personnel who were not soldiers or guerrillas, such as administrative or Front personnel, were taken out and sent to the Ministry of the Interior to receive new assignments. There were no reactions to this. The troops would be used for fighting, as they should be; the others hoped for assignments more suitable for them than those in the army. (22., *Regroupment Diary*, Chapter 3.)

The youths who signed on with the Vietminh forces going North, the "soldiers of Geneva," did so from a mixture of motives. Many of them had lived in Vietminh-controlled villages and were carried along by the enthusiasm of the victors. Some felt clearly identified with the Vietminh movement because members of their
families had been involved in it, and they were fearful about what would happen to them if they remained in the South. Also, there was adventure in traveling to the North, especially since the young men were told that it would only be for two years, until the elections of 1956, which would bring reunification. For some, the North meant promise of new opportunity, especially education. Vietminh recruiting cadres worked on these fears and aspirations in persuading youths to join the forces going north.

A Southern peasant lad, who in 1954 had been a seventeen-year-old in the fifth grade of a Vietminh village school in Quang Tri Province, told the following story of his regroupment:

I wanted to continue my studies; I would regret the interruption of my studies if I stayed in the village. Also, I was certain of being able to return after two years in the North. Five or six young men from the hamlet left with me. Counting all the people leaving from the village, there were seventeen.

Q: Why do you say that you couldn't continue your studies in the village?

The Vietminh cadres told us that the French would seek out former Resistanst, that they would let the people stay ignorant. If we stayed, we would be tracked down by them and we would not be able to continue the studies I valued very much. I believed these threats because I had seen with my own eyes the atrocities committed by the French, particularly the Moroccans. From that, I decided that the Vietminh were right. My mother didn't want me to leave, but when I said that I would be back in about two years, she accepted it. (27.)
Another Quang Tri youth, born in 1933 and orphaned in 1945, worked as a servant in his landlord's house, where he was treated badly ("but as a servant, what else could I expect?"), and later took a job as a hired laborer. He reported: "In the fall of 1954, the Vietminh said anyone who wanted to go north to study could do so. I was alone and interested in that." (12.) In the North he joined the army and completed his studies through the South Vietnamese equivalent of the fourth grade while a soldier.

Our interviews confirm the assumption that among the regroupees were highlanders (also called "montagnards"). A 32-year-old member of the Rhadé tribe, who had been captured in January 1964, was one of two montagnards in our sample. He had achieved a fifth-grade education in the DRV, and spoke Vietnamese competently enough to tell the following story of his recruitment by the Vietminh when they took over his village in 1952:

The Vietminh came to the village at night. They summoned the villagers to a meeting and picked out the young men to go with them.

I do not know why the Vietminh chose me. I think because I was the only young man in the village at that time. Of course, there were other young men in the village, but they had all been married, and I was the only one without a family. (62.)

Following his selection by the Vietminh, he was sent off to Phu Yen Province with three to four hundred other highlanders -- Jarai, Rhadé, Stet, Mpong, and Na Thua -- for "cultural training," after which he was assigned to a battalion as a soldier. On August 5, 1954, his unit
was given orders to regroup to the North. In the North he was assigned to a battalion of Regiment 120, called the Regiment of Independent Western Highlanders. Though most of the leaders of this regiment, including its commander, were highlanders, he reported, "plains people" (Vietnamese) filled certain posts in communication and served as quartermasters and cooks. The respondent himself was a cook in his unit in the North, and from 1958 to 1961 he also attended "cultural" classes. In June 1962, after fifteen days of special training, he infiltrated to the South with fifteen western highlanders and ten Vietnamese.

In addition to the seasoned troops and newly-recruited young men, the Vietminh regrouped children in the North. According to one source, 10,000 children between the ages of seven and seventeen were sent to North Vietnam in 1954. From 1956 on, the informant reported, thirty highland children were marched each year from their homes in the mountain regions of South Vietnam to a school site at Dan Toc, on the northern bank of the Red River near

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13 The source is a Viet Cong lieutenant colonel who had visited North Vietnam in 1955, 1956, and 1958. He was engaged in intelligence activities in South Vietnam beginning in 1956, serving as field commander of the VC Research Bureau since its establishment in the South. He was captured in Saigon in November 1961 and held in prison until he was transferred to the National Interrogation Center (NIC) on March 25, 1964. In 1954, as a cadre of the 5th Subzone, with three daughters who could not yet read, he interested himself in the Party's efforts to care for the children of VC cadres. His dossier points out that two of his daughters were later educated in Germany and the USSR. (From Report 204/64 of the Saigon Interrogation Center.)
Hanoi. Fourteen elementary and high schools were reserved for these Southern children in the DRV, and all children attending the schools were boarded there.

According to the same source, Pham Hung, a member of the Politburo and Vice Premier of the DRV, announced during the Third Party Congress, in 1960: "The Party has tried to develop 10,000 teenage children regrouped from the RVN into a cohesive group of engineers, doctors, professors, and other specialists for the future. This is proof that the Party has looked out for the welfare of the South Vietnamese, too." In the informant's opinion, the DRV's intention for the future of these regrouped children was not to conscript professors, students, or other technically qualified persons for military service, but to let them pursue their professional careers and thereby serve the ends of the government. He reported that a four-day conference was held in 1961 to establish a plan for the utilization of regrouped teenagers who had been graduated and qualified. The last of the regrouped children were to have completed their high school education by the end of 1965. Until the time of his capture, in November 1961, the informant had not heard of a single case in which such a youngster had been drafted.

The two prisoners in our sample with children who had been regrouped to the North tended to confirm the information cited above. One of them, whose activity among revolutionary cadres dated back to the 1930's, told us that, though he himself received orders to remain in the South after the Geneva Agreement of 1954, he sent his seven-year-old daughter to the DRV. At the time of his interview, in 1965, she was seventeen and due to complete
her high school education at the end of the academic year. The father told the interviewer that he received word from her from time to time on a radio program from Hanoi that sent personal news. (d.)

Another cadre, who had joined the Resistance in 1945, sent his seven-year-old daughter to the North in 1954 at the same time that he himself was regrouped. As his conversation with the interviewer reveals, he was pleased with the care she was getting from the DRV government:

My daughter was a little schoolgirl in 1954 and she regrouped with a lot of other kids in my village. The government in the North has been looking after her since. The groups of students were taken care of very carefully: they had a manager, a managing board, teachers to educate them . . . they lived together in organized centers.

Q: Why would the Vietminh let a seven-year-old girl go north without her mother?

A lot of these girls regrouped. They went away together in order to get an education. They were organized into groups. There were people who looked after them. Besides, at that time, regrouping was just for two years, just to get an education. That was why these little children were allowed by their families to go away.

Q: Why could they not go to school down here?

We thought that the government in South Vietnam would not provide them with an education. It might have been the same for them if they had stayed. But they were assured of an education in the North and we thought they would stay in the North only two years.

Q: Did you not think it important for a young girl to be with her mother?
Many other girls went with my daughter. These girls formed organized groups. She would have been frustrated if we had forced her to stay home while her friends all went north. Her friends comforted her when she was away from her mother; we knew she would miss her mother, but her friends were around her to keep her happy. Twenty children went north from my village to get an education. (24.)

Later in the conversation, sounding both wistful and proud, he volunteered these additional comments:

[My daughter] is still going to school. She must be in the university now. The government is looking after her. There are separate quarters for boys and girls who regrouped to the North in 1954. They all got a free education.

Lots of engineers were formed out of the fourteen-, fifteen-year-old regroupees. They were sometimes educated in China or Russia. Most were trained in the DRV itself. . . . It was a really smart thing those people did, taking all those kids to the North in 1954 and 1955. (24.)

Reactions to the order for regroupment varied. Some members of the Vietminh, particularly the younger, unmarried, adventurous ones, were pleased at the opportunity to see the northern half of their country. Others, who had hoped to go home, were greatly disturbed by the order. Many were torn between their duty to the Party and their disappointment at being unable to rejoin their families. Though the Party reassuringly pointed out that the Northern assignment would be temporary, and that after the 1956 elections and reunification they would all return to their families in the South, the diversity of attitudes toward the northern journey is reflected in the statements cited below.
The same respondent who had told us at length about his daughter stressed the voluntary nature of the regroupment and pointed out the danger to Vietminh cadres who remained in the South:

Those who did regroup did it voluntarily, after realizing that it was the thing to do. They did it to protect themselves from being arrested by the authorities in the South. They were afraid of being charged with having participated in the Resistance before.

All cadres were afraid of future persecution by the South Vietnamese authorities; they all wanted to regroup; even the "little" cadres -- the subhamlet cadres, the small cell leaders -- asked to be regrouped. They were afraid. Their fears were justified, because even these "tiny" cadres were arrested by the South Vietnamese authorities later. (24.)

A different account came from a farmer who had enlisted in the Vietminh only in January 1954, at the age of twenty, and had participated in one battle before the cease-fire. He recalled his reaction to the regroupment order:

At that time, I didn't like it at all. I couldn't stand the cold in the North. What's more, my comrades said that in the North people didn't have enough to eat. And besides, I missed my family and wanted to visit them, but I wasn't allowed to go. So I escaped while in Qui Nhon, but I was caught halfway home. (57.)

The youth remained in the army in the North, joined the Communist Party, and had earned the rank of sergeant-major by the time he was ordered to infiltrate to the South, in 1962, to serve as a deputy platoon leader.
The aforementioned senior captain and author of the *Regroupment Diary* describes the ambivalence of many of the cadres about going north and leaving friends and family behind. Many were worried, "with the soldiers gone how the French would treat people in the Resistance area," while some expressed doubts that reunification would take place as promised. He recounts an anecdote about a sardonic cadre in his unit who tauntingly bet his comrades that "three to ten, the country won't be reunified in two years," causing the political officers to preach the following sermon:

1. Have confidence in the leadership of the Central Committee. In two years, the country will be reunified, because that was the decision of an international body, which gives us reason to trust it. This does not mean that we should be too trustful, but we must continue to struggle.

2. The Party will never abandon the people of the South who will stay to fight; when the time comes, they will be led.

3. Those who go north should feel happy in their duties. Those who remain behind should carry out the glorious missions entrusted to them by the Party, standing side by side with the people in every situation of struggle.

4. In family relations, don't let emotion lead you away from your duties. Cadres should be leaders of their own units. (22., *Regroupment Diary*, Chapter 2.)

The excerpts from other interviews quoted below illustrate some of the expectations of the Vietminh troops at the time of regroupment, the diversity of their reactions to the order, as well as the general belief that they would return home in two years:
Q: Were you a volunteer for regroupment?

At the time it was said that we were volunteers. In reality, they took measures to make sure that everyone left. At the time of regroupment, we had to go. If I had remained, I would have been arrested. I believed that I would remain in the North two years. (49.)

* * *

I was a political officer. I went to the North just like all the other combatants in my unit.

I believed, at the time, that regroupment was only temporary, because from the study sessions on the Geneva Agreement we drew the conclusion that we could return to the South after the general elections. (51.)

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[Our political officer] explained that the communist policy had been successful. Vietnam is small and weak, but we beat the French. Because we triumphed at Dien Bien Phu, the French were obliged to depart. We were granted Vietnam north of the 17th Parallel now, but in 1956 there would be a general election and we would regain the South and be reunited with our families.

Because of interest and curiosity and the opportunity to travel, everyone was happy. They thought they would be there in the North only two years and then would be able to return to their homes. (41.)

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At that time, we were told that we would come back in two years. The Geneva Conference had provided for a general election in two years. Then we would be able to come back and see our families. (31.)
Q. What were your feelings on the subject of regroupment?

I did my duty as a soldier. (34.)
III. POLITICAL ATTITUDES WHILE IN THE DRV

INDOCTRINATION AND ACCULTURATION

Before we describe significant political attitudes of Vietminh regroupees during their stay in the North, a word of caution is in order. Those who expressed these attitudes had long been subjected to communist propaganda and indoctrination: throughout their service in the Vietminh prior to 1954, during the six to ten years they spent in the DRV, and, subsequently, while they served in the Front. Their political lessons and most of their news came from communist sources, and it is no wonder, therefore, that the vast majority, including defectors who denounced the communist policies, saw events through communist-tinted glasses. Though our interviewers had a measure of success in encouraging respondents to recapture some of their spontaneous feelings about significant developments in the DRV and the Front at the time they experienced them, many of these recollections were no doubt reinterpreted by the respondent himself in light of the political lessons he had since received in his service in the North and with the Front.

The fact that political attitudes may be derived largely from indoctrination does not, of course, rule out their being held with deep conviction. Many interviewees, including the better-educated, when asked their opinion about certain problems and events of political significance, would begin by saying, "We were taught that . . . ." Asked whether they believed what they were taught, most respondents answered in the affirmative. Defectors
frequently pointed out that only subsequent experience and observation had led them to doubt their lessons and change their minds.

Formal political lessons, however, were not the only influences that shaped the political philosophies of our regroupee respondents. Attitudes were formed in everyday life, informal contacts, and the day-to-day exposure to events. In a candid and thoughtful discussion of the development of his own, frankly Marxist, philosophy, a VC physician summed up the impact of his communist environment:

I lived in the Resistance for eight years, and eight or nine years in the DRV, in a socialist world. It is not a political book which influenced me and formed my political ideas. I think that they grew in me from day to day. Each day a small quantity of socialist ideas entered me. (26.)

THE IMPACT OF THREE SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

During the first two years of the regroupees' stay in the DRV, three issues arose which seriously affected the course of Vietnamese history in both North and South: the flight of some three-quarter million Northerners to the South in 1954; the DRV land reform of 1955-1956; and the announcement that the elections for the reunification of Vietnam, scheduled for 1956 under the Geneva Agreement, would not be held. These important developments, and the manner in which the DRV leadership handled the issues, might well have undermined the confidence of the newly-regrouped cadres in their communist leaders. The reaction to them among our respondents will therefore be explored in some detail.
1. Flight of the Refugees (1954)

A South Vietnamese soldier who believed he was fighting for a movement which had the broad support of the people might have been greatly disturbed to learn of the flight south of vast numbers of Northerners, most of them simple peasants and fishermen, though intellectuals and bourgeois were also among them. He had been told, of course, that most of the refugees were Catholics, who were being encouraged by their priests to leave. Nevertheless, in the light of the DRV leadership's constant assurance that there was freedom of religion in the North, the escape of so many frightened people bore witness to a fear of communism among a large part of the populace.

In fact, however, our interview data suggest that the flight of the refugees did not seriously disturb the regroupees. Although we lack reliable statistics, it is unlikely that more than a few of the regroupees were Catholics, and their direct concern about the refugees was thus minimal. Told by DRV propaganda that the Catholics were ordered to leave by their hierarchy and were led by village priests, and that the bourgeois refugees were fleeing because they feared to lose by the more equitable distribution of wealth in the DRV, the majority of regroupees seem to have accepted these explanations, although the communist leaders apparently had misjudged the magnitude of the exodus. The following excerpts from interviews show how two loyal Communists interpreted the refugees' departure:

The physician quoted earlier gave this explanation:
There are two points of view to explain this flight: one reason is the natural reason. The functionaries and military people, the people with resources, wanted an easier material life; they did not want a modest life in a socialist regime.

Another reason for this flight south was the religious obligation of the peasants and Catholics who were gathered together by their priests to go south. I see in the flight south a very profound and important political aim. I see someone who ordered this flight of Catholics to the South to serve a political aim -- and this person was Ngo Dinh Diem.

Q: Diem couldn't have done that at that time. He didn't have enough authority and prestige with the people.

Oh yes. There were always close relations between Diem, who aimed for the presidency, and his brother Thuc, who led the Catholics. The flight of Catholics was a unique fact. All the Catholics above the 17th Parallel fled en masse to the South. That is why I believe this to have been a supreme command.

Q: What was Diem's political aim?

To have the people believe that the Vietminh regime was an atrocious one, without religion, etc.

Q: The Catholics were right to fear the communist ideology, weren't they? A true Marxist or Socialist is against the Catholic religion. So the Church was afraid of losing its flock. The people went south voluntarily, didn't they?

Not at all. The volunteers were the priests. The peasants did not go voluntarily, but followed the priests who said that in the North God existed no longer. That is why they left their families and their homes to flee south. But certain ones did not abandon their native villages so easily. The Vietminh cadres came to the villages to persuade the people to stay, and the peasants stayed, with their religion. (26.)
A cadre who had just told the interviewer of the warm reception which the regroupees had received from the Northern population was challenged by the apparent paradox that, at that very moment, almost three-quarter million North Vietnamese were fleeing southward in fear and misery. He said:

I heard about that when I got to the North. But those people were Catholics who believed the propaganda that, in the North, socialism was going to abolish all religion. They thought they would not be allowed to practice their religion if they stayed in the North.

The cadres explained to them why they should remain in their homes, why they should not listen to false propaganda. They were not going to lose their God if they remained in the North; they received assistance from the government in their worship: cathedrals which had been destroyed during the Resistance were reconstructed with government money. The big cathedral of Ninh Dinh was rebuilt completely.

Some people were really fooled by false propaganda that their God went south and that they were losing Him if they stayed in the North. When they were persuaded by our cadres and did remain in their homes, they received special assistance in their living. Others who did not listen to us sold their houses, brought their newborn babies with them down south, died on the way down... Some really suffered and were willing to die to follow their God just because they were fools.

Q: You must know communist doctrine well enough to know its opposition to organized religion. Any good communist regime must regard the Church as a vestige of feudalism.

Socialism and communism proclaim all that, but out there [in the North], freedom of religion of the people is respected. There is a special policy toward religion; a question of religion is given special
attention. People's faith, what they believe in voluntarily, is one of their interests. People's interests should be supported. How can you force people to believe in something when in their own mind and in their heart they believe something else? (24.)

Later in the interview, while the respondent was relaxing over a beer and only the interpreter was present to hear him, he volunteered the following additional comments:

The damn Catholic fathers and fanatics were really fooling people. They put on shows for people: they had a little boy climb up the altar and tell the masses in church that God had fled south, that the people should follow their God.

Our job, the ones who regrouped in 1954, was to tell these people who were ruining themselves, who would brave death and misery to go south to follow their lost God, that God was still with them everywhere and that they had been fooled.

The ones who remained in the North received special privileges from the authorities. The processions that the Catholics organized for their saints and their God were really big affairs. Catholics were allowed to worship their God as they pleased and they were really delirious. The noise they made in their processions must have reached the heavens. . . . (24.)


The agrarian reform was potentially even more threatening to the regroupees' loyalty to the DRV, since, by the regime's own admission, it led to widespread excesses and injustice. It imitated the violent land reform carried out earlier in Communist China, down to the classification of the entire population and the categorization of landlords according to various levels of evil. Southern military units, probably because they had no strong ties with
the local people and could therefore be counted on to enforce this unpopular program with the fewest misgivings, were entrusted with much of its implementation.

The author of Regroupment Diary devotes one chapter to his unit's role in the land reform. Entitled "Nightmarish Indoctrination Sessions," it is an excellent description of the brutality of this program. He shows how political cadres incited both the peasants and the troops to denounce the landlords, many of whom were totally innocent of the charges leveled at them. Like avalanches, the denunciations often acquired a momentum beyond the control and intention of even the most vindictive cadres. In a series of anecdotes from his experiences, the captain brings to life the details of the brutal program, concluding with this summary of typical proceedings:

That was how the drive to motivate the populace to enforce land reform was conducted; and this drive ended in each hamlet with the trial of the landlord by a people's tribunal [Toa An Nhan Dan]. Guilty as well as innocent people were tried. Before the people's tribunal the accused had no one to defend them. They could only bow their heads and listen to the enumeration of their crimes; they could not utter one word. The prosecutor was a man or a woman belonging to the land reform unit; the presiding judge was also from the land reform unit. The audience only knew to applaud and to shout "Down with...." The death sentence had been decided upon in advance. After the denunciations had all been made, the presiding judge pulled the death sentence statement out of his pocket and read it. Then the prisoners were immediately executed, about 100 meters away from the tribunal. (22., Regroupment Diary, Chapter 4.)
The writer expressed anguish at this corruption of the ideals for which he had fought in the Southern Resistance:

Alas, the whole program was a process which turned society upside down, the like of which had never been witnessed in history. Where were the patriots, the cadres who had achieved merit in the prolonged anti-imperialist struggle? They had been exterminated, imprisoned, eliminated, and besieged economically and politically. Their human dignity had been trodden upon. Was this the effect of a wheel turning in reverse and grinding them to pieces? (Ibid.)

In discussing the approach of July 20, 1956, the date on which elections for reunification were to be held, the captain again spoke of his deep dismay at the DRV land reform program. He claimed that not only his confidence but that of many other honest revolutionaries in his battalion had been severely shaken. So badly disturbed was he by what he had witnessed that he even expressed doubts as to the desirability of reunification, if unity were to bring an equally horrible land reform for the South. He writes:

During the initial part of their stay in the North, the Southern units had experienced many new things. But the thing which was inscribed in the minds of the Southern soldiers was what we heard and saw for ourselves during the application of land reform. We had gone through nightmarish indoctrination sessions on agrarian reform; each soldier or cadre had more or less witnessed the drive to motivate the populace in the struggle for land reform, the denunciations, arrests, imprisonment, forcible classification of people's backgrounds, unfair trials, public denunciations and insults from the people's tribunal, the arbitrary actions of the all-powerful land reform units. All this made us wonder what had happened to human nature.
If the country were reunified, how would land reform be carried out in the South? How would the denunciations be conducted? In fact, we all looked forward to the day when the country would be reunified, but we also feared national reunification. We all wanted to see the country reunified because of our love for our families. We wanted national reunification so that we would be reunited with our families, and also because of the tense and unbearable atmosphere in the North which we could escape with national reunification. But we feared national reunification, for when this took place, the South would have to go through all the sufferings due to land reform which the people in the North had had to endure. How would we be able to stand such a sight? (Ibid.)

Another cadre who had participated in the Northern land reform program confirmed the account given by the captain, though he did not share the latter's pessimism about the danger that its excesses would be repeated in the South. Following are excerpts from his detailed description of how the program was carried out:

The landlords were classified into categories:

1. The dishonest and ferocious landlords [dia chu gian ac] were those who mistreated the peasants, who worked for the French, who oppressed the poor people. These landlords were punished according to the gravity of the charges against them. All their land was confiscated.

2. The average, normal landlords [dia chu thuong] were still landlords, but they did not oppress the peasants. They were ordered to cede part of their land to the poor peasants.

14 For another account of the land reform program in North Vietnam, which generally confirms the description given by the author of the Diary, see Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., New York, N.Y., 1964.
3. The landlords who had participated in the Resistance, who were patriots, were just asked to give some land to the people. They gave whatever they judged was proper. But those darn "very poor peasants" really messed up the redistribution of the land. The average landlords were "promoted" to ferocious landlords; and the government cadres who knew the right policies of the authorities did not dare to say anything. We had to sit there and watch them [the very poor peasants] confiscate every landlord's property, even if the landlord was a good one. Later there came the "rectification of errors" and I participated in this also.

Some of the former Resists who came back to their village and to their properties were denounced as "landlords" by the peasants. The peasants promoted everybody up the landlord ladder: Nonlandlords to landlords; good landlords, former Resists, to average or even cruel landlords; average landlords to cruel landlords; cruel landlords to very inhumann landlords deserving a death sentence.

Too many of these excesses ruined the land reform. The Rectification of Errors was mostly carried out by competent cadres who had to remain silent in the earlier denunciation sessions, and also by the old cadres from the Resistance who were mistreated during the land reform of 1956. These old cadres from the Resistance had seen their land confiscated or perhaps they had been physically mistreated, too. But they had patiently waited for the Rectification of Errors to come. When it did come, they rose up to remove the incompetent peasants from the government organizations in the villages and districts.

How could we be so rude to the landlords when Mr. Dong [Pham Van Dong], Mr. Giap [Vo Nguyen Giap], and Mr. Chinh [Truong Chinh] were landlords too?

This respondent, however, like many of those we interviewed, was confident that the mistakes of the land reform in the North would not be repeated in the South.
He was almost indignant at the suggestion of such a possibility:

How could they be? How could it happen again?

The popular movement to fight for freedom and democracy, to let people realize their mistakes themselves, was hurried along too much. It didn't work. The peasants, and especially the very poor peasants, were given importance. They took advantage of the favored positions they were in to commit excesses; and the government cadres did not dare say anything because they would be accused of not defending a firm position about the classes.

But the superior levels have corrected these errors already. The South already has the lesson of the North before its eyes.

The land reform in the North has been reexamined, and the committees and organizations who committed the excesses, and the old cadres who were "in there" with the peasants, were all removed. Understanding cadres were sent to the villages to correct errors and the results have been satisfactory. After having made the mistake once, how could they do it again? At that time, the situation was difficult; the land reform was copied from the big one in China. . . .

For Vietnam as a whole, landlords are few and not extremely wealthy. The land reform in the North was carried out based on the Chinese model; it was not accomplished according to the conditions in Vietnam. The mistakes have been corrected. It is impossible that the South would commit the same errors as the North did. If the other side [the Front] won, the land problem would be solved with balance. There are landlords in the South, but not many. (24.)

The VC physician in our sample also was sure that the land reform mistakes would not be repeated in the South:
My conviction is that, if a thorn pricks you on a path and you bleed, that is not a reason to discontinue; it is a lesson for avoiding future thorns.

Grave faults in agrarian reform were admitted before everyone. That is more of a reason for showing that the North will benefit from the lesson.

The policy of the Front is that, if the Front wins, the agrarian reform will not be carried out like the agrarian reform in the North. The state will not confiscate the land. The state will buy the properties from the landowners to distribute them to the peasants. For the landowners, immoral and terrible denunciations will be avoided. (26.)\(^{15}\)

Although the comments of VC members show that most regroupees remained loyal to the DRV leadership, several respondents said that the land reform program had caused them to lose confidence in the Party. At least three of these claimed that they defected, as soon as they were back in the South and had the opportunity to do so, because of what they had suffered under the program in the DRV. An especially bitter story was told by a cadre who now works for the Chieu Hoi (defector) organization of the South Vietnamese Government. He had been placed, along with nine others in his company, in the category of dia chu (a category of landowners who allegedly had committed "abusive acts" on the land, made collections on the farms, and "collaborated with feudalists"). He described the denunciation session to which he was subjected:

I was denounced from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. I was beaten the least, because I was most docile. They

\(^{15}\) For statements by other Southerners who participated in the land reform program see p. 159.
said that in 1954 (this denunciation was in 1955) I had returned late from leave, that I had argued about the studies, that I had treated a superior cadre who didn't speak fluently as if he were not only uneducated but stupid, that I criticized superiors, that I had class feeling, that I voluntarily joined up with undesirable elements who had deserted.

The buildup for these sessions was very carefully done. A superior cadre called me over, spoke to me very nicely, slowly. He didn't say I was going to be denounced, but only that I was being evaluated and criticized [kiem thao]. He told me: "The Party," he said, "doesn't want to cut off your arms and legs since you are a Party member," but the aim of kiem thao is to convert me, to rebuild me.

When someone is already denounced, he must cut off all relations with his family, in three ways: economically (for fear that the family, informed, will sell his things before the denunciation to save the most they can), politically, and emotionally. This was a general measure. All the denounced cadres like the dia chu owe a debt of blood to the peasants; and we must write a "letter with the blood of our hearts" to cut off all relations with our families. I found this denunciation system really inhuman.

In 1957, in the rectification campaign, they decided that these denunciations harmed the forces for fighting; that's why they were stopped in the South.

When I was denounced, I lost confidence in the other Party members and people. In general when the people know someone is a Party member, they believe that everything he says is from the thoughts of the Party and the Uncle [Ho]. They admire him.

At the time of the denunciation, the people approached the Party members to try to find out who would soon be denounced, and took certain measures to save the possessions of the victims. Some Party members used this situation to take revenge. (50.)
Another defector, who also was working for the GVN's Chieu Hoi organization, was equally critical of the DRV land reform program, of which he, too, had had personal experience:

In North Vietnam, we had fought famine, flood, typhoons, we had attended indoctrination courses, but the worst of all was the land reform. I had attended public accusation sessions in which landowners were brought to popular trial. I was in charge of keeping order during these sessions, and I felt much pity for those landowners who had known an easy life and who were then brought to trial.

The Communists picked up the very poor peasants to do the accusing because the very poor peasants are the foundation of the Party. For instance, the Communists chose about fifteen very poor peasants in a village and brought to trial three rich people. The property of the rich was confiscated because, according to the Communists, it was people's labor which had earned them this property.

When I saw all this cruelty I sat there and sighed with my other comrades from the South. We said that our own parents would have to undergo all this if it happened in the South. All those whose parents belonged to the middle-farmer category were very worried and saddened by this. Sometime afterward, the Communists assured us that they would adopt a different policy toward the landowners and the rich people of the South. But I have seen no difference with the Revolution in South Vietnam. (69.)

Although the agrarian reform left deeper scars on the political loyalty of the regroupees than did the flight of the refugees, the Rectification of Errors program and a heavy political indoctrination campaign helped the DRV regain the support of most -- though not all -- of those whose loyalty may have wavered.
3. The Geneva Agreement and the Elections of 1956

The Geneva Agreement of 1954, in ending the armed struggle against the French, brought welcome relief to the Vietminh fighting forces. On the other hand, there was disappointment at the partition of the country and the regroupment of the Vietminh troops. DRV leaders, in an attempt to relieve this anxiety, instructed the political cadres to stress the temporary nature of the partition and the prospect of the return home after the general elections of 1956.

A "hard-core" propaganda cadre gave an interpretation of the Geneva accord to his interviewer which revealed what the troops were taught:

We emerged victorious from that war [with the French]. The enemy [the French] was conquered, but his forces had not been completely destroyed. That is why we had to sign the Treaty of Geneva.

Our purpose in signing the Geneva Treaty was to oblige the enemy to recognize publicly [before world opinion] our authority over the whole territory of Vietnam, and to withdraw his armed forces from it. We accepted the temporary division of our country in order to facilitate the withdrawal of the French forces, because if our forces had stayed where they were in the South, movements of enemy forces would have provoked incidents which would have threatened the peace desired by our people.

We were to withdraw all our soldiers and cadres to the North and a temporary government would be set up in the South. During the period of two years allowed to the French to withdraw their armed forces from Vietnam, the people had to continue their struggle to guard the advantages which they had gained [the division of the country under the Vietminh regime], to force the temporary government to improve the conditions of national life, and to prepare for the voting called for by the Geneva Treaty. (30.)
When the deadline of July 20, 1956, passed without general elections, the regroupees in the North were disappointed and angry. The great majority of our respondents recalled that in 1956 they blamed "the Americans and Diem" for the failure to hold elections. A 34-year-old senior sergeant, a loyal Party member from Thua Tien Province, put it this way:

Everybody was extremely angry against the South Vietnamese regime which, obeying the orders of the Americans, refused to organize the general elections. The regroupees, at that time, were confused. (64.)

A defector, though normally critical of the DRV, admitted having held the same view:

In the North, I believed that the fault [that elections were not held in 1956] lay with Diem and the Americans. (49.)

Our respondents recalled most clearly their terrible disappointment at the news that they would not be rejoining their families, and many spoke of their anger at the Americans and Diem. Their inclination to blame only one side was reinforced by careful indoctrination on this subject provided by political cadres in the DRV. The author of *Regroupment Diary*, who shows an unusual ability to cut through the heavy crust of propaganda and still remain loyal to the Vietminh's revolutionary ideals, writes of dissatisfaction among Southerners and contends that this discontent was turned against the Northern regime and seriously demoralized Southern units of the PAVN. It may be worthwhile to quote at length from the relevant passage in the captain's diary:
The date of July 20, 1956, which we all looked forward to, finally arrived. At that time, the people in the North were no longer interested in this date because they were suffering a great deal, and their minds were preoccupied with more realistic thoughts, such as how to end their present suffering. National reunification meant nothing to them because they had nothing to gain from it, and because it would reduce their suffering. So why should they look forward to it? As for us, the Southern troops, we looked forward to national reunification which would deliver us from the sight of suffering which we had to face every day. But July 20, 1956, arrived noiselessly. Nothing stirred.

We were worried and watchful; we asked for explanations when the higher echelon ordered a "struggle to demand that the South observe the Geneva Agreement." There were demonstrations, slogans were shouted, and then Prime Minister Pham Van Dong sent a message to the International Control Commission demanding the application of the clause in the Geneva accord which provided for national reunification. The situation flared up for a few days and then quieted down. We waited and became desperate. We were sad and confused; we no longer believed in anything. Many of my comrades during indoctrination sessions frankly expressed their lack of confidence. They were told by the higher echelon: "We must be patient in our struggle, and we must believe in the Central Committee's line of struggle to achieve national reunification. We should increase our efforts to wage the struggle so that the Southern government, like a big rock lying in the middle of the road to block the people's path, would be rolled over by the continuous effort of the people." . . .

Sadness and discouragement spread throughout the unit. We met in groups of five or six to drink tea and talk about national reunification. We confessed our discouragement to each other, our nostalgia, our despair over the prospect of an indefinite separation from our families. Many soldiers became discouraged and lost all interest in army life. They applied for transfer to another field, so that they would be discharged and earn their living. Others did not want to accept the transfers handed down by the convalescent section. They
did not want to be discharged, to become
to organize production groups, or to set up
restaurants, refreshment stands . . . which to
leave behind to return to the South when nation
unification was achieved through negotiations.

The captain goes on to describe individual cadres of
acquaintance who were so demoralized that they lost
interest in their army service. Several, he writes, pro-
fessed their disgust with life in the North and attempted
an escape to the South by boat. They were caught,
arrested, and sentenced to three years in jail.

A defector now employed in the Chieu Hoi organiza-
tion confirmed the captain's judgment on the shaken morale
of the regroupees in 1956. He said:

At the departure [for the North] in 1954, all of
us, without exception, were firmly convinced that we
would return to the South in two years. There was
great disappointment when, in 1956, the general
elections didn't take place. I then took a course at
the E.M.G. (Propaganda, Information and Liaison
Service). A great majority of Southerners felt the
same way. Some went to the E.M.G. with their packs
to ask for a return home; many asked to leave the
army; some went over the line of demarcation.

Those who stayed showed their weariness by spend-
ing their time at games and drinking. You know the
psychology of the Southerners. They speak frankly
and can't endure a hard life. They have seen the
poverty of the Northern peasants; they are afraid of
the Tonkinese cold; they had an easier life in the
South. The Party had to send some cadres to give
explanations, to calm the men. I should tell you that
in 1956, 1957, the North met many difficulties, as
much from the postponement of the general elections
as the backwash of the agrarian reform. (39.)

Another respondent also confirmed the unrest among
the regroupees after they realized that elections would
not be held and their prospects for returning home looked dim. As a loyal Communist cadre, he attributed the regroupees' disquiet largely to the oppression under Diem in the South of which they had learned, rather than to any disgruntlement at their own position in the North:

In 1957, when the unrest among the regroupees was strong, the authorities had to do something about them. Diem was heard to be quite barbaric in oppressing the people in the South, especially the former Resistants. The regroupees could not stand to let people in their native villages suffer under Diem's rule. Someone had to talk to them during a whole night to try to calm them down, and he did not succeed at all -- or accomplished little. The regroupees wanted to go very desperately. They would just have to be sent south. When they were finally allowed to go south, they were exuberant. Those who were promised a trip south were very nervous during the waiting. They wanted to go home to their district, to their villages very much. Some died on the way south. Some who were so sick that they could not be sent south were extremely disappointed. Sometimes the latter insisted on a trip south and gave up their lives in the mountains. (24.)

Though the morale of the regroupees obviously was badly shaken when elections were not held and their journey home was, at best, considerably postponed, the communist leaders appear to have largely succeeded in turning disappointment into anger at the "Americans and Diem," and, through effective indoctrination, channeling this anger into a revolutionary commitment against the Saigon regime. Thus, while a relatively few of the Southern regroupees were permanently disaffected, the majority remained loyal to the DRV.
ADJUSTMENT TO THE NORTH

1. Problems of Regionalism

Personal problems of the Southerners' adjustment to life in the North were important in the development of their political attitudes. The regroupees were generally impressed by the warm reception they received from the Northern population upon their arrival in 1954. The DRV government had obviously arranged for demonstrations of enthusiasm from the population, but there was a spontaneous warmth too, as the following account suggests:

The Northerners really welcomed us with joy. They had organized a welcoming crowd to take care of us as soon as we disembarked. There were flags, crowds, cheers . . . . they surrounded us and led each of us to their homes.

Everywhere we went in the streets, they came out to embrace us and then take us home with them to give us food and drink. . . .

They knew that we had suffered in the nine years of resistance; and they loved us because we were Southerners who left our homes to regroup in the North to help them work for a living, to help them in their production work. (24.)

The Southerners who settled in the North confronted the many problems of adjustment to the peculiarities of an unfamiliar region: the differences in climate, dialect, and local custom, Northern concepts of interpersonal relations, and the appearance and behavior of women. Some of these inevitably caused friction, but none apparently to the point of serious political detriment to the DRV. Excerpts from the interviewees' recollections of their reactions to the North suggest the range and the kind of human problems that arose:
At first, I did not like girls with blackened teeth. In Thanh Hoa, almost all the girls have blackened teeth. But farther north there were many girls with white teeth. (46.)

* * *

People from the South were more frank; if they didn't like something, they told you right to your face. The Northerners were more subtle, more polite.

Q: Were there any misunderstandings between people from the three sections of the country?

No, not in my unit, but there were the local characteristics. The Northerners stayed with Northerners, the Southerners with Southerners. They didn't mingle easily. (42.)

* * *

We Southerners are more spontaneous, talk more easily; we say what we think; we try to speak from the heart. The Northerners speak more cleverly, and the Centrists are more sly, deceitful, stingy, and are flatterers. From all this come differences in behavior, in a way of life. I have seen some small trouble between Southerners on the one hand and Northerners and Centrists on the other, as well as between Northerners and Centrists. Sometimes some Southerners drinking tea break up when they see a Centrist or Northerner come. The Party, several times, had to make an appeal to their sentiments and solidarity. (39.)

* * *

We lived with the population of the North, three or four in a family. We slept there during the night, but we took our meals elsewhere together. Clothes were distributed by the government. We went to many locations; at each location we remained one, two, or three months. We helped the population.

Q: What was the attitude of the population?
Good, kind; they helped us. (49.)

* * *

At the beginning, regroupees mixed only among themselves. After a while, relations developed. The Tonkinese had a tendency to mix with Tonkinese and the Annamese with Annamese. But the Tonkinese and the Annamese get along more easily than they do with the Cochin Chinese. The Cochin Chinese . . . have a different character. They spend everything they earn. (50.)

* * *

There was a fight once between regroupees in Ha Dong and the Northern students. This was in 1958 or 1959. It was important, because the whole school of regroupees participated in it. I think that the reason for this disagreement had to do with love affairs and jealousy. After one student got into trouble the whole school stood behind him. That's why the dispute enlarged. The other incidents were only incidental disputes that involved a few persons. In the student dispute, the police were sent for. But the police were also beaten by the students. Finally, President Ho Chi Minh talked to them over a public address system. (54.)

* * *

Outwardly there was no difference, but deep inside there was segregation between soldiers coming from different parts of the country. The Southerners didn't think much of the Northerners and the people from the Center. In a mixed unit the Northerners were always isolated; the Southerners and the Central people would be on the same side. (48.)

* * *

In general there was no conflict between the people from the North and those from the Center. There were conflicts between the Southerners and the Northerners. But that was only conflict dealing with the daily life. (44.)
The greatest problem of the regroupees was loneliness, and most of them told us how they missed their families and their own villages. Several in our sample had married in the North, but the greater number either had left their wives in the South, or they were bachelors who lacked both the financial means and the official encouragement to marry and, probably most important, had no family intermediaries to arrange a marriage for them. A senior sergeant described his loneliness with an expression that was used also by several others:

I did not have any news of my family. We used to tell each other "Northern days, Southern nights" [Ngay Bac, Bern Nam]. Everybody in Company 82 was from the South. In the daytime we worked in the North and we did not have any time to think about our families in the South. But at night, when we lay down, we could not help thinking about how our families were getting along. We talked to each other about our lives in the South. (33.)

In Vietnamese society, with its strong tradition of family solidarity, it is not surprising that this prolonged separation was to prove a major cause of defection.

Even though the Southerners' problems of acclimatization did no serious political harm to the DRV regime, the regroupees were not fully integrated with their Northern compatriots. Our respondents clearly regarded themselves as Southerners; they lived separately in an environment where they did not feel securely at home.

2. Reactions to the DRV Regime

The majority of those interviewed spoke favorably of the Northern political system. Some expressed gratitude to the "Party and Revolution" for affording them
personal opportunities which, they believed, would never have been open to them in the South under either the French or the Diem regime. Several who came of poor families but had obvious intellectual talent were particularly grateful for the education they had received. Through a program of "cultural training," available to military personnel, the ambitious could rise to the equivalent of a full high school education. The author of *Regroupment Diary*, a man of unusual intellectual ability and literary talent, had had less than two years of village schooling before he was regrouped. While in the army in the North, he completed the equivalent of a primary school education in his home district.

Those who in the Northern army had risen in grade to levels of responsibility were explicitly or implicitly grateful to the DRV system; they knew that poor peasants with little education -- in other words, the bulk of the Vietminh and Viet Cong -- do not enjoy similar opportunities in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Some mentioned the fact, for example, that the requirement for an officer in the ARVN includes a high school education, which in the South is accessible only to the well-off.

Some of the regroupees felt closely identified with the DRV regime as the successor of the Vietminh movement, to which they owed their sense of "dignity." By its victory over the French, the revolutionary movement had
dispelled the humiliation of colonial domination, supplanting feelings of inferiority with a sense of achievement. And the pride at having won national independence was evident also in a new self-confidence on the part of the individuals who had participated in the revolution. Even the more uncomfortable and unpopular political measures of the DRV could not easily efface this dedication to a revolutionary movement. If there was serious unhappiness among the regroupees, it was due less to the political regime than to other, personal, problems of adjustment: the separation from family and village, the greater hardships of life in a poorer part of the country, and the temperamental differences between the Southerners and the more straitlaced Northerners. A few, as we have shown, became disaffected for political reasons, especially those caught in the meat grinder of the agrarian reform program. But the attitudes of the great majority of our respondents -- including, curiously enough, the defectors -- ranged from neutrality to a strong pro-Northern commitment.

The physician quoted earlier is an example of the intellectual among regroupees. Although relatively flexible and open-minded, and professing himself an advocate of "democracy," he was a loyal supporter of the DRV government. When his interviewer (the present author) pointed out to him that the DRV government permitted neither freedom of opposition nor freedom of expression, the doctor said:
While I lived in the North, the South said that life in the North was going only in one direction and no opposition was permitted. That is not true. There is often opposition in the North. The opposition is written up in the newspapers . . . there are often polemical poems or articles frankly opposing the government. But opposition in the North is only permitted in a certain amount. Opposition cannot be so well organized that it would be in a state of overthrowing the government. But there is enough opposition. . . .

Q: You have two pairs of glasses to see things, it seems -- one pair of rose-colored glasses to see the DRV, and one pair tinted black to see the facts here [in the GVN].

What you say is rather exaggerated. I see nothing rosy about the faults committed during agrarian reform in the North. Even in the present life in the North, there are faults committed. We saw them. But when we are on this side, we try to correct them. Daily, in the hospital services, in the organization of the hospitals, I always said, and I'll say it again, that everything is not perfect. It is not an easy thing to reorganize a country ravaged by war.

But the essential thing is that the faults must be understood in order to be corrected. Several people in the South have told me I see life as rosy in the North.

The ignorant peasants can be indoctrinated; but for me, life in the North is not yet an ideal life.

Before my departure for the South, the North had very great economic difficulties. The country must be rebuilt independently of other socialist countries. I have seen faults in the North. But the faults can be corrected. (26.)

A senior sergeant who said that he had disliked life in the North and had defected at the first opportunity once he was back in the South, grudgingly affirmed that "the North has the support of the people," adding:
When somebody from the South is sent into the North, he is caught right away, after four or five days, because people have confidence in the government of the North; the people arrest the spy and bring him to the government. (33.)

(If this was indeed how the Northerners behaved toward infiltrators from the South, their conduct might equally well have been explained by the people's fear of punishment by the police, or by the attractiveness of rewards in a poor country.)

A mountaineer of the Rhadé tribe was enthusiastic in his appraisal of the DRV regime:

Life in the North was very wonderful compared to the previous years. There have been many changes in the North. The living conditions of the people were getting better and better every day. The people were well off. They had enough to eat. They were able to attend school. They were free with no oppression from anyone. There were no imperialist foreigners in the North. They had land to work on and buffaloes to help them plow the land. There were no more cruel landlords to lord it over them. (62.)

Possibly, the life that this Rhadé saw in the North seemed rich and abundant compared to what he had known in the mountains as a boy. His views, moreover, reflect heavy communist indoctrination, as did the statements of other respondents who similarly praised the Northern system. Though still others were less enthusiastic, only a small minority of the regroupees interviewed were openly hostile.