Part Two

THE REGROUPEES IN THE FRONT
IV. RETURN TO THE SOUTH

ASSIGNMENT TO THE SOUTH

In late 1959 Hanoi apparently decided to open its clandestine offensive aimed at bringing down the Southern government through violence and ultimately to achieve unification under Northern control. The communist organization in the South was ordered to step up both its recruitment and its program for subverting the government in the rural areas. Whereas previously Hanoi had sent relatively few agents into the South for liaison, intelligence, and organizational activities with the Southern communist apparatus, regroupees now were trained in larger numbers to serve in the expanding Southern revolutionary movement, most of them as military cadres.

Because of their familiarity with local dialects, custom, and terrain, these Southern soldiers from the North had obvious advantages over Northerners when it came to sending personnel for the ranks of the insurgents. Perhaps the most important reason for choosing Southerners over Northern troops was that it made it easier for Hanoi to camouflage its involvement in the insurgency and thereby reduced the danger of retaliation against North Vietnam. Besides, most regroupees were eager to return to their homes in the South, and this gave them a strong incentive to fight for a victory of the Viet Cong that would make it possible for them to go back to their villages and live in peace. So long as the GVN retained control of the

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16 According to the U.S. White Paper, 1,800 infiltrators came South during 1959 and 1960. (see p. 11, above.)
South, the regroupees could not safely return; the Diem government's treatment of those who had participated in the Vietminh Resistance precluded the possibility that a man whose regroupment in the North had obviously identified him with the hostile communist regime could come home to live in peace. From Hanoi's point of view, this was all to the good, as it reduced the danger of defection among regroupees who were infiltrated to the South.

Many regroupees, battle-seasoned in the war against the French, made good soldiers for the "Second Resistance," as did some of the Southern youths without combat experience who had received their military training in the Northern army. From this pool the DRV leadership selected those most suitable for service in the South. Not all the regroupees were found appropriate for such assignment. The best elements of those chosen, most of them members of the Communist Party, were singled out for positions of responsibility and authority in the Southern insurgency. The less capable, including those who had performed civilian tasks in the North, were drafted into the army and given special training for lesser tasks. A key criterion in the process of selection was political reliability. As shown earlier, time had generally strengthened political loyalty to the DRV. Service in the Vietminh prior to 1954, followed by five to ten years of life in the North, had exposed most of the regroupees to heavy doses of political indoctrination. The less reliable were now weeded out, and those selected for infiltration to the South received further political training, no matter what their assignment.
Though this pool of regroupees represented a great asset to Hanoi, the original figure of 90,000 may tempt one to overestimate it. By no means all the regroupees were of leadership caliber. A sizable number had no army experience or even army training. Some lacked the intelligence, and others the physical fitness, for the arduous assignments in the South. Men who at the time of regroupment, in 1954, had been in their thirties or forties were likely by now to be too old -- by Vietnamese standards -- for difficult service in the field. There was the danger, too, that the prolonged separation from their families -- our interviewees frequently called it "absence of sentiment" -- had affected the morale, and hence the reliability, of some regroupees. On being sent close to home, these lonesome men would be tempted to give up the revolutionary struggle to rejoin their families.

ATTITUDES TOWARD RETURN

In selecting possible infiltrators from among the regrouped civilians, the DRV authorities approached men they considered "reliable and patriotic," preferably those with some education or skill, and urged them to "volunteer" for Southern duty.

One such case was that of a 46-year-old cadre interviewed in January 1965, whose education had taken him through the "cours supérieur" at a Qui Nhon high school. He had joined the Resistance movement in his home province as early as 1945, out of patriotic sentiments, and had gone to the North on May 15, 1955, the "deadline" for
the voluntary population exchange provided by the Geneva Agreement. From 1955 to June 1960, he was in charge of accounting at the DRV Ministry of Reconstruction. Asked whether he had volunteered to go south, he said:

Yes, I did volunteer. In 1957-1958 national reunification was sabotaged. All the regroupees in the North were homesick. They often met to talk about going back to South Vietnam to help liberate their compatriots. The communist authorities learned of this general aspiration and contacted the re­grouppees, who all volunteered to go south. (30.)

In the South, he was a propaganda specialist who, until his capture, performed functions of middle-level responsibility: proselyting among the Banar Cham highland people; establishing training programs for Viet Cong recruits; and proselyting among religious groups.

The physician mentioned earlier, who had been practicing in a hospital in Haiphong, told of being asked to work among the Hrê mountain people in South Vietnam, but claimed that he had the option to refuse the assignment. He said about his recruitment:

I was told in the North that in the liberated zones of the South there was a group of montagnards who lived without medical care. They said my task would be difficult, with malaria, hunger, technical privations, lack of instruments and tools. I was asked to discuss this with my wife for a while. . . .

I have some colleagues who refused to go south by saying that they were not healthy, that they could not stand the climate of the jungles, that they had their families in the North. . . .

When I heard that there was a liberated region in the South where the population was not cared for, and I was asked to aid this population, I said "yes," because I thought I could accomplish my task. I had lived in the jungles. I knew the montagnards. (26.)
A 39-year-old regroupee from Binh Dinh Province had worked in the North for the Reunification Committee, a committee manned largely by Southern cadres. Among his duties was the supervision of all civilian Southern cadres in the North. Unfortunately, he was extremely guarded in his responses, and the brief interview with him did not reveal much concerning the important work of the Reunification Committee. He did say that the committee kept personnel files and that he had to follow up all activities of its cadres. He also mentioned that the committee was responsible for the education of the cadres' children and for sending the cadres back to the South. Asked whether they volunteered or were ordered to the South, he said:

The Reunification Committee decided about that. Some of the cadres requested to be sent back, but they could only go when necessary clearance was given. As for me, I was designated by the Committee. . . .

Everybody was enthusiastic about going. No one refused. (61.)

Although to the regrouped civilians the voluntary nature of service in the South may indeed have been emphasized, army personnel were not so coddled, but were given their military assignments in more routine fashion. But most of those who had been thus ordered to go told interviewers that they had not been reluctant; many even said they were enthusiastic about the assignment. Some of the interviewees, especially the typically hard-core who are given to citing political slogans, stressed their satisfaction at the opportunity to help liberate their countrymen in the South from American imperialism. Others
candidly stated that in returning to the South they hoped to rejoin their families. Many of them were bitterly angry at the Diem government's treatment of the families of regroupee, and they were looking for a chance to punish the evil authorities. These are samples of various responses:

I was joyous to learn of my assignment to go south. I was eager to see my home village, to see my family, to get in contact with my wife. (41.)

* * *

I returned to South Vietnam in February 1962. When I received my orders to go south it was the happiest moment of my life, for I would fight, suffer, and win with the people. . . .

My return to the South is the duty of all Vietnamese. I had to come south to help liberate the people. I was not ordered by the North to do so. I applied to go back to the South, but if I had not wanted to go, the North could not force me to do so. (29.)

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The Party ordered me to join the Front in September of 1962 [approximately]. I left right away, filled with enthusiasm for two reasons: I could participate in the liberation of my compatriots in the South, and I could return to my family and village. (25.)

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17 Though the information they received in the North concerning the treatment of regroupee families in the South was exaggerated by the communist authorities in the North, there is no doubt that many of these families suffered persecution.
I was ordered by my superiors to go [south].

Why should I be dissatisfied? I was going south to help liberate the country from the imperialists and to unify the fatherland. (12.)

* * *

When we just started the march, we were very enthusiastic, because we had learned of Diem's dictatorial Party rule, and of his massacres of innocent people. We were all eager to go south and liberate the population. Before we left the North, we were told that the South Vietnamese population's revolutionary strength was great, and needed only leadership.

Q: Did you have the opportunity to meet other groups of infiltrators who arrived at a later date?

Yes, they were all very enthusiastic and in great earnest. But upon reaching the South, they became weary; however, their revolutionary fervor did not diminish. (51.)

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We were told that a third of the South had been liberated, that production had to be increased to feed the liberation troops, and that we were being sent to the South for this purpose. The infiltration movement began in 1961 with the regroupees chosen from among the more vigorous. My cell chief, Do Thun, left with the first contingent. My turn came later because I am weak. (47.)

An occasional respondent, generally a defector, would speak of recalcitrance among regroupees about going south to fight. A 30-year-old defector, who stressed his own disgruntlement at the Viet Cong, was one of those who maintained that few wished to return to the South. This senior sergeant (who, incidentally, represented a minority point of view in our sample) had worked as a
porter in a mountain station of the infiltration route carrying supplies from North Vietnam to the South. He had this to say on the subject:

I think everybody was forced to go south. In 1960 and 1961 people volunteered to work for the Liberation Front. But from 1962 on, people were forced to go south even if they did not want to. One fellow had a mistress in the North and pretended to be sick so they would not take him south; but when the doctor found out he was not ill he was forced to go . . .

I think there were extremely few volunteers. We did not like to live in the high mountains, [but] we knew we would have to live in the mountains, because we could not live in the plains where the ARVN is. The mountains are far from civilization; transportation is difficult there. We told ourselves, "we will surely die in the South." But we did not dare tell our officers. We would rather have stayed alive to see the country united and then see our families again than come down south at that time and risk getting killed. Besides, we would not be able to see our families when we came south to work for the Liberation Front. (33.)

TRAINING FOR THE RETURN

Those selected for service in the South were then assigned to special training programs lasting from a few weeks to several months. The most important Northern training school for service in the South, at least in the early period after 1960, was Xuan Mai. Emphasis was placed on political training, in particular upon indoctrination concerning recent developments and conditions in the South. Some regroupees reported that as much as two-thirds of the total training time was devoted to political instruction.
The central theme of their indoctrination was the regroupees' duty to return south to help their compatriots expel the American imperialists. By 1963, cadres in training were being told that the Front occupied two-thirds of the land in South Vietnam and controlled half the population. (Several defectors said later that these exaggerated claims had led them to feel, when faced with actual conditions in the South, that they had been deceived.) "Peace, neutrality, and reunification" were said to be the Front's policies. One respondent described still other important themes of training:

The first line was the land policy. Once an area had been liberated, the land of the landowners who were not present in the village or those who followed the Nationalist government should be distributed to those who lacked land. In addition, the communal land should be given to the landless and to the people who did not have enough land to sustain their families. As for the village which had no absentee landowners and no communal land, we should mobilize the landowners to share their land with the less fortunate populace.

The second line of the Front was the troop proselyting policy, the mobilization of government soldiers' families to call their sons back. In the field, the wounded enemy should be given equal medical care and be released right away. As for the captured, educate them for a few hours, then release them.

As far as the strategic hamlets were concerned, we were told that they were prison camps where people were not allowed to work after 4:00 p.m. and at night people were not allowed to go anywhere. (16.)

The propaganda specialist mentioned earlier made a lengthy statement on the course that prepared cadres for the return to the South. As he was a dedicated Communist and Party member, his description carried the substance and the tone of his political indoctrination and is therefore quoted here in full:
Situation in the South: A temporary government was set up by Diem and his clique. Representing the big landlords and capitalists, who were counterrevolutionary, the government was wholly in the pay of the Americans. The government's aim was to avoid applying the clauses of the Geneva Treaty, under the pretext that South Vietnam was not a signatory to it. They wanted to transform South Vietnam into a new form of American colony.

Transformation of social classes: The poor peasants were herded into the "Land Development Centers." Propaganda asserted that there they would become small landholders, but in reality they were forced to work there in the status of coolies. Thus the class of poor peasants was transformed into a "coolie class." A tiny party of the well-to-do peasants became rich, thanks to their servile obedience to the authorities. But the majority, especially those who had worked in the Resistance or those who had children or brothers sent to the North, were badly maltreated by the local authorities and the rich landlords who avenged themselves for the land reform under the Vietminh regime. Their property and their fortunes were confiscated by the Diem government. Thus the class of well-to-do landholders was changed into a class of poor peasants. A completely new class was created out of whole cloth by the Americans in the cities. This class comprised the slaves of the financiers. They lived an easy life, like that of the capitalists, but in reality they had nothing for themselves. Also this new class was linked forever to the Americans.

Development of the revolutionary spirit: The revolutionary spirit of the workers rose higher and higher, and from day to day gained new converts. The majority of the well-to-do landholders and the intellectuals turned in favor of the Revolution. That state of affairs forced the Diem government to promulgate the decree of October 1959 calling for capital punishment for the revolutionaries. That law forced the revolutionaries in the South to adopt a new form of struggle; political struggle accompanied the armed struggle. Activities of the cadres thus fell under three principal types: political struggle,
armed struggle, and "military proselyting." Military proselyting [i.e., winning over the enemy soldier by propaganda] was in principle part of the political struggle, but since military proselyting could bring us victory without spilling any blood, it constituted an essential point in itself. (30.)

THE JOURNEY

Following the training, the regroupees began their infiltration into the South, some in groups as small as 40 to 50, others in larger groups ranging from 200 to 400. Each of our respondents spoke at some length of his long, hard hike to the South. In only a few cases was there infiltration by sea or by the short land journey over the Ben Hai River that separates North and South Vietnam. In most cases, the regroupee was transported through North Vietnam by truck and, upon reaching Laos, would begin the long trek to the South on foot. The journey generally took at least two-and-a-half months (usually more), and was extremely arduous, leading as it did through dense jungle, streams, and thick underbrush and over steep mountains. However, the infiltration corridors, though rudimentary, were quite well organized. A local guide would meet a group at a position halfway between two posts, and guide it halfway past his own post. After an evening's bivouac, a guide from the next station would take the group to a point beyond the next post, and so forth. The journey generally carried the group through the Laos corridor into the highland region of South Vietnam. For those going farther south, similar paths within Vietnam led from one infiltration post to the next, to the final destination. Strict instructions governed the maintenance
of camouflage and discipline within the corridor, including smoke regulations for cooking, and a prohibition against asking questions of the permanent corridor personnel. Those who fell ill along the way (and many were suffering from malaria) were treated at the post if their illnesses were minor, and then continued the journey with their own infiltration group. If their illness required a longer rest period, they would stay at the post until they could join a later infiltration group.

INTEGRATION INTO THE FRONT

The well-indoctrinated regroupees added strength to the Front by providing experienced leadership, especially at the middle-cadre level, where they did much to bolster the morale of the younger Southern insurgents. One regroupee, who had arrived in the South in winter 1963 and was captured in the fall of 1964, showed great pride in his comrades as he spoke of their impact on Front fighters:

[The regroupees] have a very high combat spirit. They have received an intensive training. They can put up with all the material difficulties and they believe firmly in the final victory of the Front. On the other hand, a large part of the Southern youths who have left their families to join the Front have insufficient training. When they live for a long time in the forest and mountains, they are susceptible to illness, hunger, and cold, which badly lowers their morale. They do not believe firmly in the victory of the Front. There are some among these who wish to defect, but the regroupee political cadres can propagandize and control them. (18.)
A 30-year-old Southern cadre who had not lived in the North testified to the superior quality of the regroupee cadres from experience in his own unit. He had served in the Front from 1961 on and risen to the rank of platoon leader in a main force unit, until he defected in 1964. He said:

In comparison with the fighters and cadres in South Vietnam, the regroupees were militarily and politically better, and also they were the ones who trained the local fighters and cadres. (f.)

We probed in our interviews for possible friction between regroupees and Southerners, particularly cadres, who had never been to the North. In a country where the historic divisions between North, Center, and South have produced genuine differences in dialect, custom, and attitudes, it seemed likely that regional antagonism would show itself somewhere. Men who had fought and suffered in the South might be expected to resent those coming from a secure life in the North and moving into positions of command. However, the regroupees in our sample said that there was no such conflict. One explanation for this claim may be that the communist movement in Vietnam, both North and South, regards regional conflict as backward and puts great pressure on its members not to succumb to it. A 29-year-old defector, a first lieutenant who had joined the Party in the North in 1956, commented on the relations between regroupees and native Northerners, and revealed the Party's attitude on the subject:

There was no conflict between the Northerners and the regroupees. Army life has very stringent disciplines. The self-criticism session insured that there was no conflict. I speak only for my unit -- I do not
know about other units. In my unit, the question of
conflict between regroupees and Northerners was very
seldom raised in self-criticism sessions, perhaps once
in several months or even a year. Northerners and
regroupees maintained very good friendships. (54.)

Similar comments were made by regroupees regarding the
relationship of Southerners fighting with the Front. One
of them said:

It is true that those fighting in the South had
suffered a great deal. However, those in the North
had suffered very much during the French period and
those in the South realized this. Also, those coming
from the North suffered their long journey coming to
join the Southern revolutionaries. There was good
feeling between them. (41.)

It seems evident that, quite apart from the Party's dis­
approval of petty regionalism, the regroupees earned
genuine respect from the younger Southerners for their
experience and professional capability.

"AUTUMN" AND "WINTER" CADRES

Though the regroupees themselves did not acknowledge
it, the few interviews with Southerners who had not been
in the North -- particularly with defectors who had served
in the Front several years -- showed that the regroupees' role in the Front did cause some friction.

One sign of this friction was a set of terms, dis­
covered by an especially perceptive interviewer, which
members of the Viet Cong used to distinguish between re­
groupees and those who had not gone to the North. The
interviewer had asked his subject, a young Southern de­
fector with more than three years' combat experience in
the Front army, if there was anything about the Viet Cong
army which he disliked. The respondent, who had not been to the North, said:

There was discrimination between "autumn combatants" and "winter combatants." The autumn combatants were more favored. . . .

They are called so in view of the time of the year when they joined the army. Autumn combatants are regrouped soldiers, who had lived and had been trained in the North. There were differences in treatment with respect to rank, promotions, and living conditions. The autumn combatants behaved loftily, being proud of having been to the North. Soldiers of the two seasons were in casual brawls but did not fight one another.

Another young Southern defector who, like the aforementioned soldier, had served more than three years as a combat soldier for the Front, expressed a similar view of the "winter" cadres:

I, myself, was considered a "winter" cadre by some people, though I was not really a cadre. Autumn cadres meant those people who had gone to the North and returned [regroupees]. Winter cadres meant those who had come, like us, from Zone 8 or 9.

I didn't consider myself a winter cadre, but I was considered a winter recruit by some of the women attached to us.

Q: Did these women like the autumn cadres?

Many of these autumn cadres had gone to the North unmarried. They stayed unmarried in the North for 9 or 10 years and now they had returned to the South. Most of them were 40 or more. They wanted to get married. These women were very proud to have them for husbands. They were proud to have husbands who were officers. We new recruits, we didn't want to get married -- and they weren't interested in us.
Q: What did you and the winter recruits think of the autumn cadres?

Those who had returned from the North were all cadres and had high positions. We were only soldiers. If they mixed with us and liked us, we would like them too. If they despised us, we would hate them. Most of them looked down on us. Most of us hated them and thought they were haughty.

Q: Why should they feel that way?

They were haughty because they thought they were returning from the North and they knew everything, and we knew nothing. They thought that anything they told us we should obey, whether it was right or wrong. In fact, we had to obey. But some of us who knew the leadership policy well dared to oppose them. Some of us did answer back. (c.)

A 25-year-old assistant platoon leader in a regional force unit, a Party member since January 1963, who had served with the Front from 1959 until his defection in April 1965, showed his resentment of the regroupees:

The regroupees thought they had made important contributions to the movement; and, because they had just returned from the North, they despised the recruits in the South. The majority of them were individual heroes. Therefore, there was conflict between us and the regroupees. We were not close to them. (h.)

A 28-year-old district-level propaganda and training cadre, who had joined the Front in 1960, was admitted to the Party in 1961, and defected in March 1965, also revealed hostility toward the regroupees:

The Front lauded them to the skies and trusted them more than the Southern cadres. They were often assigned to steering committees.
They behaved badly toward their Southern comrades, whom they despised, thus destroying the unity of the Front. They didn't reveal it, but everybody knew that complex.

The Southern cadres and fighters endured hardships for years, while they were enjoying themselves in the North where peace prevailed. And now, when the struggle had already started in the South, they came to command and showed themselves to be overbearing, etc., thus bringing division into the Front ranks. (g.)

Another propaganda specialist was a 34-year-old defector, who had served four years with the Vietminh but had quit in 1953, though he claimed later to have directed a staff of 120 persons in Viet Cong propaganda activity. He said of the regroupees:

Cadres recruited in the South are dissatisfied with their leaders for having assigned regroupees to replace them. The cadres recruited here are not well enough educated to assume positions of leadership. These cadres complained that during the period when they were persecuted and imprisoned in the South, and when the war was at its deadliest peak, the regroupees enjoyed a peaceful life in the North. Now, suddenly, these regroupees jumped on the scene and became fathers of the movement. (e.)

It is not surprising that Southern cadres, especially after several years' service with the Front, should have felt resentful when newly-arrived regroupees were placed above them and given positions and prestige formerly reserved for the senior Southerners. In our sample, however, this resentment was limited largely to defectors, who, for obvious reasons, tended to be more critical of the Front than were the prisoners. Among the more severe critics were several who seemed more than ordinarily ambitious; they might therefore be expected to be jealous
of the regroupees who were brought in from outside and placed in positions of authority. But whatever antagonism there may have been between Southern cadres and regroupees, it does not appear to have been serious enough to reduce the effectiveness of Front operations.
V. POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF REGROUPEES IN THE FRONT

WHAT THEY ARE FIGHTING AGAINST

1. American Imperialism

To the regroupees, the primary enemy was American imperialism. The theme that the Americans had replaced the French as the imperialist power in South Vietnam and that they were using Diem and his successors as puppets was strongly impressed on them in the political indoctrination sessions and by DRV propaganda in general. Interviews with prisoners and defectors alike show that Hanoi had succeeded in convincing the regroupees that America was the principal enemy. Thus, one defector (the senior sergeant whose disgruntled views of the DRV and the Front have been cited earlier) told the interviewer what he and the majority of his comrades believed to be the chief goal in the struggle:

I thought that the South must be liberated. I did not know anything about the government of Vietnam except what they [the communist cadres] told me. The foreign powers are exploiting Vietnam; that is why the South must be liberated. But thinking that is not enough. Action must be taken. That is why the North is sending troops out to unify the country. (33.)

And a 31-year-old former laborer, a prisoner, said:

I am a citizen of Vietnam -- the son of the people. I don't want any foreigner to dominate our country politically and militarily. I wish the country to be ruled by the Vietnamese people. (12.)
To the regroupees, the labeling of the Americans as the major enemy of the Vietnamese revolution was plausible. They were ready to hold the Americans, as the chief foreign supporters of the Diem government, responsible for the fact that they had not been allowed to return to the South as promised. Having been prevented from rejoining their families and villages since they first fought against the French only reinforced their sense of being involved in a single long war, in which the Americans had merely replaced the French as the colonial power. Excerpts from interviews reveal the prevalence of this attitude:

From our point of view, the Americans replaced the French in 1954, after the French defeat. The pro-American government in the South let the Americans turn the South into a military base in order to fight the spread of socialism. (36.)

The French before and the Americans at present have the same goal -- to invade Vietnam, enslave the people, and exploit human labor and resources to enrich the totalitarian capitalists in their own country. They have the same goal, but their methods differ. The French sought outright enslavement and exploitation of the people, heavy taxes, etc. . . . The Americans are more subtle. They say their aid is a proof of friendliness. (30.)

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The French invaded Vietnam under the pretext of being asked by Nguyen Anh, who wished to reestablish his personal position; before that, the French had already intended to annex Vietnam, and Bishop D'Adran was only a spy. American aid is just as artificial. Although I have not yet seen the aid given by the
Americans, I understand that it is only an artifice. The products the Americans offer to the government of the South are proportionately very little in comparison with the bombs, the arms they offer to our compatriots, to the women and children of the people of the South. Before, Gia Long took the initiative in inviting the French to come here; today, the Americans voluntarily annex the South, because the government of the South is created by the Americans. The proof is that a man like Diem came from the U.S.; the U.S. sent him here to form the government. (37.)

The suspicion of colonialism, or "neo-colonialism," is a common phenomenon in the emerging nations. The Communists in North Vietnam and the Front, in particular, have a strong antipathy toward anything that suggests foreign domination, since, from their point of view, the Vietnamese revolution that was to have expelled the foreigners has been achieved in only one-half of the country. To explain the American presence in Vietnam, the Communists use Lenin's doctrine of imperialism, which states that the capitalist nations seek colonies as a source of cheap raw materials for their industry and as captive markets for their products. In addition, they cite America's political and military motives of containing the spread of Communism. Our data indicate that these themes are both pervasive and enduring. When asked to discuss U.S. interests in Vietnam, the majority of our group, including some defectors, repeated them. One defector said:
We must understand the true nature of our enemies in order to combat them. I find that the Americans are more pragmatic, stronger than the French were during the Resistance [1946-1954]. Their method of conquest of Vietnam is also different. Their principal objective is the economy. They are more clever and more subtle than the French, who only saw the military side. The Americans, to distinguish them from the French, did not construct an administrative apparatus in the South. They did not separate the governors from the governed. American economic aid, far from developing the abundant resources of the South, is aimed solely at subordinating the Southern economy to the American economy. America doesn't bring what we lack; she brings what she has a surplus of. On the other hand, the aid in munitions and in jet airplanes takes precedence over aid and food and economic equipment. Another point to mention is that everywhere one finds the American presence, a flagrant sign of intervention in Vietnamese affairs. (39.)

Following is the view of a 44-year-old unreconstructed regroupee, a prisoner, who had joined the Vietminh in 1946 and become a Communist Party member in 1947:

As I see it, the Americans will turn South Vietnam into one of their bases, their colonies, and cut off the unification of Vietnam. From the political point of view, it will help them to stop the flow of communism into the South, because if communism can't spread into the South, it can't spread to Southeast Asia. From an economic point of view, they will have the best of conditions in which to sell their products and buy raw materials. (36.)

An intelligence officer, also a prisoner, and equally "hard-core" in his attitudes, said almost the same thing:

According to my knowledge and people's understanding, the United States Government wants to turn South Vietnam into its colony, a market or a military base. But this is only their immediate aim. What they want most is to use South Vietnam as the gate to enter Southeast Asia. South Vietnam is already an
American colony. A rich person will never be satisfied with what he has. The richer he becomes the more he wants. Americans sell their products in Western Europe, but Western Europe is not enough. The Americans want more markets. But to say that the Americans want to sell their products here is to simplify things. There are politics involved. (29.)

Concerning U.S. military policy in Vietnam, the Vietnamese Communists maintained, at least until the end of 1964, that the Americans were conducting a "special" war and were using Vietnam as a testing-ground for a new type of counterinsurgent warfare. A communist propaganda specialist was articulate on this point in an interview in January 1965:

In my personal opinion, the Americans (and I mean by Americans the totalitarian capitalists in the U.S. who are controlling the government) are invading Vietnam and experimenting with this special kind of warfare which is raging here. This war has influence over the U.S. colonies in Southeast Asia and also in the world. So the American imperialists have to defeat this nationalist liberation movement. The world situation at present is such that the actions of the American imperialists could easily plunge the world into a third world war or a regional war, so they have to apply a limited warfare within the confines of a single country which cannot degenerate into a third world war. The American imperialists are experimenting with this kind of warfare here against the national liberation movement. (30.)

The Communists have adapted their interpretation of American policy in Vietnam to the changing conditions. Prior to America's recent troop increase and more active and direct involvement, the role of the American adviser was presented as a means by which the Americans could control their "puppets" without a large expenditure of men. A 34-year-old second lieutenant, who had served in
the Northern army and was captured in June 1964 while on an espionage operation across the 17th Parallel, explained the role of American advisers in the manner typical also of those regroupees who had learned their political lessons:

   Earlier, in the North, I heard it said that South Vietnam was almost under American domination. Vietnamese officers were subordinate to the orders of American military officers. The dependence is not simply military but also political and economic. All of the Vietnamese army is in the hands of the Americans. Control is carried out by the procedure of American "advisers" at all echelons. In my opinion that's a new form of colonialism. (i.)

The official communist argument went on to present the American advisory effort as a clever, diabolical design for making Vietnamese fight Vietnamese.

2. The Feudalism of Diem

Since most of the regroupees lived in the North during the better part of Diem's ten-year rule, they had to rely principally on communist news sources for their perception of his "feudalist" regime, the fight against which became intertwined with the struggle against American imperialism. The regroupees had little reason or opportunity to doubt the lessons they were taught about Diem as the "puppet" of the American imperialists. One respondent, whose views are the epitome of Party policy, spoke as follows about Diem and his refusal to hold elections in 1956:

   I think this is because the government in the South did not want to reunite the country. They wanted to keep the South as their own. In 1956 Ngo Dinh Diem made known his desire to drive toward
the North. Ngo Dinh Diem did not want to unite the country because he knew that he was unpopular in the country. The people would vote against him in an election. That is the reason he refused to hold an election.

Ngo Dinh Diem was very greedy. He wanted to keep the South under his control. In 1956, he wanted to drive to the North and take revenge against all the old fighters. He established prisons in South Vietnam. The most famous of these prisons was Phu Loi. Ngo Dinh Diem forbade communications with the North. The 17th Parallel was supposed to be only a temporary military demarcation line. However, Diem used it to forbid communication between North and South. (37.)

This statement was typical of the regroupees' deep anger at Diem, whom they often referred to as "My-Diem"; (literally, the "Americans and Diem," it has become an expletive used to denounce the enemy). In joining the Front, they saw themselves as Southern patriots returning home to free their country from the oppression of the Americans and the Diem regime. One regroupee was indignant when his interviewer, a South Vietnamese functionary, charged him and the other regroupees with being aggressors who had brought "weapons, ammunition, and soldiers to South Vietnam to wage war." He replied testily:

I don't think it is right to call us the aggressors. We are infiltrators, not aggressors. We are returnees who came to overthrow the dictatorial regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. (46.)

Many of these regroupees, being former Vietminh, believed that those of the South Vietnamese people who recalled the Resistance were grateful to them for returning to bring the revolutionary movement to its final fruition. One dedicated Resistance fighter, a 34-year-old
senior sergeant, a prisoner, who had fought in the Front from 1961 to 1964, spoke for the large segment of regroupees whose revolutionary ardor had not cooled. Speaking on what motivated people to become active in the Front, he said:

They joined the Front because they understood what a right cause is. During the eight- or nine-year period of peace, the GVN didn't treat them right, so they joined the Front. The ARVN and the government said they were protecting the freedom and happiness of the people. But in their actions they are only concerned with their own interests and pay no attention to the people. Every day, the people are accused of being pro-communist. They have lived through the Resistance, and they can see for themselves that life under the Resistance government was completely different from life in the period of peace under the GVN. The difference lies in the fact that, under the Resistance, government people enjoyed freedom from every point of view. During the period of peace, the families whose sons had regrouped to the North were constantly watched by the GVN. They had to bribe the officials to be left alone. (64.)

An issue which caused great resentment among the regroupees was their belief that the Diem regime was arresting and mistreating not only former Vietminh members who had remained in the South but also the families of those who had regrouped to the North. A regroupee prisoner who had joined the Vietminh movement in 1946, when he was 25 years old, spoke at length of his anger and gave his reasons for it as follows:

The Diem government murdered many people whom they considered Vietminh. During the period between 1955 and 1957, 300 former Resistance members were murdered by Ngo Dinh Diem and buried in Go Vang. These victims were from My Ha, My Hiep, and My Trung hamlets (Phu My District, Binh Dinh Province).
Under the Diem regime, the behavior of GVN cadres contrasted with that of Resistance cadres. The GVN cadres liked to insult and beat up the villagers, and also they suspected everybody. They had a "feudal" attitude. They liked to maintain class distinctions. The high-ranking officials were haughty and their subordinates were obsequious, and they thereby destroyed the spirit of service in the people. The atmosphere in the countryside was similar to that existing in the feudal period...

Most of the people in the countryside had relatives who had regrouped to the North or were more or less involved in the Resistance movement, and for this reason they were often suspected by the GVN, arrested and beaten, or taken away to attend educational courses.

In general, the suspects had to attend these courses for three days every month, but the length of time depended also on their denunciation by other villagers. Three days spent like that meant they lost three days' work.

These classes were conducted by the hamlet chief, or by the assistant hamlet chief. Those families whose members had returned from the North [the regroupees] and were staying in the neighborhood [neighboring mountain areas] were all forced to take the courses. The families whose members were still in the North were not forced to attend the classes.

There were about ten families in my village whose members were regroupees who had returned south, but these ten families were also related to at least 20 or 30 other families. (36.)

It should be noted that the prisoner, captured in September 1964, had been infiltrated to the South only in September 1962, and so had not been in South Vietnam during the period he described. His account and his anger were matched, with different details, by many of those interviewed.
In view of the prevalence of these beliefs, many regroupees naturally thought that the Front was doing a great service to the Vietnamese people by overthrowing Diem and even more so by putting an end to the reign of his venal local officials. A propaganda specialist, who had infiltrated in September 1960 and was captured in August 1964, gave this long account of the overthrow of Diemist officials in a Central Vietnam province:

The officials in the hamlet under Diem were cruel toward the people. They liked to threaten them, and they accepted bribes from the people they falsely accused as VC. They did so deliberately to force the accused person to pay them. They rented the public rice fields, which they should have distributed to the people, and pocketed the rent. When the strategic hamlet was set up, they forced all villagers, young and old, to cut down trees and get wood and build a length of the fence -- some very old people were forced to do this hard labor. The majority of the Council [the village governing body] members were Catholic.

After the overthrow of Diem, the people automatically demanded that these village officials be punished. They also made a formal protest to the GVN denouncing their crimes. The village Council members were angered by the protests and demands and reacted by throwing grenades at the people. Fortunately, they did not explode. The Council then called in the militia and arrested a few villagers whom they sent to jails in the district. But the villagers went to the district and demanded that their neighbors be released -- and the GVN had to comply with their wishes.

The villagers' strong opposition drove the Council members out of the hamlet and they fled to Qui Nhon. The GVN appointed another village Council. The members of the new Council were much nicer than the old ones. They were afraid of the people and complied with all the people's wishes.
As the people's strength grew, the Front decided to send cadres to the hamlet to propagandize and educate the villagers. The purpose of the Front was to call on the people to rise up and destroy the strategic hamlet. The people wanted to destroy the hamlet, but they were afraid of GVN reprisals. The cadres pushed them to destroy the hamlet, saying that it would be difficult for the GVN to punish them when it is presented with a fait accompli. Then the cadres told them how to go about destroying the hamlet. The Front sent a squad of guerrillas to the hamlet to help them carry out their plan. The villagers and the VC then burnt down the fence surrounding the hamlet. All the GVN officials fled from the hamlet. After the incident, I went to the hamlet to set up the agent affairs section which became the administrative organ in the hamlet. (30.)

A considerable number of the regroupees interviewed further justified their hatred of Diem and the Americans by blaming them for wanton attacks on innocent villagers by air bombing and artillery. The physician who had worked with the Hrê mountain people told about his discussion of this issue with an ARVN officer after his capture:

Once I exchanged words with an ARVN officer as cannon fire was heard in the distance. I asked him if the cannons came from the U.S. He said yes. Then I told him that the Americans are supposed to come to the aid of the people. These cannons don't aim at the VC; they aim at the inhabitants. The officer answered with a Vietnamese proverb which says, "When two buffaloes fight it is the flies who die." I find this war unjust. I am a combatant and you can do with me what you want, but the people are the people. (26.)

It was understood by the regroupees that the principal aim of the Front was to overthrow the hated "My-Diem" regime and to "liberate" South Vietnam. This was explained
by a senior captain in the Viet Cong, who had been a member of the Province Party Committee before his defection, and who described to his interviewer the methods of the Front at the time he came south to join it:

The immediate purpose was to develop our forces on all fronts, political, military, and economic, leading to the overthrow of the Diem regime and to the liberation of the South Vietnamese people.

The methods used to achieve this aim were:

a. to initiate an ideological campaign among the masses to instill hatred of the My-Diem regime, and to bring about a breakdown between the population and the My-Diem regime;

b. to develop our armed forces by inducing the people into joining our ranks;

c. to motivate the people to increase production and to supply food to the army. . . .

[In our political activities] our main purpose would be: to propagandize the people, to enlighten them on all matters. First of all, we made the people lose all confidence in the GVN and become demoralized. We then worked on this general demoralization and built up their revolutionary spirit. We brought about their self-awakening and caused them to participate voluntarily in various Front organizations (such as Students for National Salvation, Women's League for National Salvation, etc.). If we did not carry out our activities in a legal manner, we would resort to illegal means, such as distributing leaflets, raising the flags, or making the people oppose GVN policy and prolong all work beyond the time limit prescribed by the GVN and sending information to the Front. (51.)
3. Successors to the Diem Regime

The fundamental attitude of the regroupees in our sample toward the regimes that succeeded Diem's was much the same as toward the previous rulers. According to the propaganda line of the Front, the popular opposition to Diem had obliged the Americans to replace him with a succession of military dictators, all subservient to the American imperialists. Those regroupees in our sample who were still with the Front after the fall of the Diem regime perceived no actual change in the local situation except, in several cases, an expansion of VC control immediately following the downfall of Diem. They had no evidence or other reason to question the Front's position concerning the successor regimes.

A member of a main force armed propaganda team, a 34-year-old senior sergeant who had joined the Vietminh in 1949 and was a Party member, told of the argument with which his team won over many peasants in contested areas after the November 1 revolution which overthrew Ngo Dinh Diem:

After the revolution, the Americans replaced Diem with another man. We told the people that Diem's stubbornness and the strong opposition of the people had forced the Americans to change their cards, saying that it was a revolution. When we considered the matter closely, the content of the GVN was still the same: the GVN still maintained the policy of new-life hamlets and was still under the command of the Americans. Everything was supplied by the Americans, from the clothes to the weapons of the ARVN; therefore we could not call the new government revolutionary. Under the French colonialists we had Bao Dai; now we have another man under the command of the Americans. Only the master has changed (from French to American), but the people should not let themselves be taken in by the GVN. (64.)
Another loyal VC member, a regroupee who served as an adjutant in the Front until he was taken prisoner in April 1964, gave this opinion on the Diem regime and its successors:

As for Diem, even the persons of the GVN say that he was a dictator; he had a family system. I believe that that was true. The government of Diem and of Minh were the same, ruled by the Americans. The Diem government was anti-communist with a neutralist tendency; the government was against the Communists and against neutralism.

The Americans saw that Diem was no longer advantageous because of his repression of the population and the dictatorship. Also, they thought that it was necessary to replace him with another government, more faithful to the Americans. The people rose up against Diem. The new chief is more clever. The policy of Khanh is more subtle, more adept. (2.)

The aforementioned physician interpreted the fall of the Diem regime as follows:

The Front was sure that one day Diem would be dethroned. I don't know the program of the Front after the fall of Diem; perhaps some strategic viewpoints were changed. Diem's fall was a good thing for the Front, because the aim of the Front was to overthrow the Diem government, which was full of nepotism and oppression. Diem's fall proved that what we said was just. It proved even more that the Front was right. The population became more disposed to listen to Front propaganda. (42.)

The interviewer asked the doctor whether, with the fall of Diem, the Front might not face a dilemma if a new government, with American aid, were to win the favor of the people. His response included this analysis of the problems facing any national government fighting the Front:
It is impossible or at least very difficult for this government to attain that. Under the Diem regime the combatant sought two aims: (1) overthrow Diem and (2) eliminate American military aid. Now the second aim is always before our eyes. A more democratic government is difficult to foresee. It has already been thirteen months that this so-called more democratic government has shown itself to be not democratic.

I can see a contradiction very difficult to resolve: (1) If the new government is less democratic than that of Diem, it will be overthrown; (2) if the new government is more democratic than that of Diem, it will be easier for the Front to have organizations. I don't know the head of the national government now, but I would say that a government that would win the support of the people would win.

A completely military (GVN) regime cannot win over the people, especially when even the soldiers of the government ravage the population. Here, there is still another contradiction. On one hand, a civil government is incapable of beating the Front and at the same time of using democratic means. A civil government does not have real power. For example, a Minister of Interior does not have the same power as a Minister of War; soldiers obey their military chiefs. On the other hand, a completely military government cannot apply democratic means. It cannot authorize freedom of assembly and freedom of propaganda.

4. The Vietnamese Upper Class

The official propaganda of the Front holds that the war in South Vietnam is a war of "national liberation" in which members of all classes are welcome on the revolutionary side. The Party's policy, however, shows it to be a class war as well. Regroupes found ample evidence of this fact in the difficulties that those with upper-class origins faced in gaining admission to the Party or promotions, in the execution of landlords during the agrarian reforms, and in the propaganda against the "feudalists" and "plutocrats" who have "exploited the people." Some
regroupees said frankly that the enemy to them was the upper class: the Saigon bourgeoisie, the landlords, and the higher government officials; the people supporting their cause were the poor. One prisoner, the son of poor peasants and a Party member, told his interviewer:

On your [GVN] side, as far as I know, the army does not fight for the people -- I mean the large majority of the people in the country, the poor people. Instead, they fight for a small number of the privileged class. In South Vietnam there is no freedom. The newspapers I have read here give evidence of this. The people are not allowed to travel from one region to another. There are people who are too rich and people who are too poor. You are living in Saigon and you are well off, so you cannot understand the poverty of the people in the countryside. They suffer too much.

There is a big distinction between the government and the people. I will give you an example from the Cong Hoa hospital, where I received medical care after my capture. The sergeant in the hospital behaved like a prince; he was too haughty. In North Vietnam, there is nothing like this. Generals and soldiers are equal. The generals and commanders are very nice, and they mix with their comrades in eating and drinking. We shared joys as well as sorrows. (46.)

Another Party member, with a similar background, explained the resistance of the Vietnamese upper classes to the Front as follows:

When the Communists take over, the privileges and interests of the rich, the capitalists and the landlords, will be abolished. For this reason, they fight against the Communists. (64.)

The regroupees' view of the war as a class war was reinforced by their observation in areas under Front control, where many of the landowners and richer elements had fled to the towns and cities, leaving behind mostly the poor peasants.