5. The Enemy Vietnamese

The official line of the Viet Cong is that Vietnamese who work for the GVN are mercenaries. Though some are treated as victims of circumstance, whose actions are dictated by the need to support their families and who may be re-educated and forgiven, others, especially those in higher positions, are labeled as selfish and cruel. The view of the Rhadé highlander who was quoted earlier, and who tended to respond with slogans he had been taught, reflected the typical line of indoctrination. Asked why Vietnamese worked for the GVN, he said:

They work for the GVN for money and positions. The people who join the Front volunteer to sacrifice their lives to protect the country, to liberate the people, and to give their families a good life.

The people who work for the GVN look forward to the end of the day, so they can get out of the office. They look to the end of the month so they can collect their salaries. They want to kill more VC so they will be given a higher rank such as sergeant or master sergeant. I work for the Front because of my spirit of self-enlightenment. (62.)

The theme that the morale of the Front fighters was superior to that of the GVN forces was frequently repeated among regroupees in the Front, defectors as well as loyal adherents. Most interviewees stressed that they were fighting for "the just cause," while their adversaries served for money and lacked fighting spirit. A representative statement is the following, by a low-level VC soldier who had defected after wearying of his long service with the Front and Resistance:

The Republican army is endowed with greater firepower, adequate food supply, and strong home bases,
and its morale derives from its material advantages. The Viet Cong had higher morale, but was inferior in weapons, food, and rear support and had to be self-sufficient. (52.)

Finally, an uneducated prisoner of poor-peasant background compared ARVN and Front morale as follows:

In the study sessions, we were told that many Nationalist soldiers did not want to be soldiers. In my region, I met men who had left their military service in the Nationalist army; they told me they had been at Pleiku. Carrying cartridges was a heavy job; then at the slightest cause they shot any old place just to empty their load. The liaison agents say that at Binh Duong the guerrillas even captured groups of Nationalist soldiers who only tried to retreat. Among the Nationalists there are brave men, but the Front men are harder, stronger, with few cowards.

The Nationalist army is far behind the Front army. The ARVN can't endure hardships, hunger; their fighting spirit is weak; they depend on airplanes. Soldier against soldier, the Nationalist army will certainly be beaten. The Front has high morale. The political commissar stays with us, raises our morale. (43.)

WHAT THEY ARE FIGHTING FOR

1. "The Just War"

Like their statements on what they were fighting against, the regroupees' responses as to what they were fighting for showed the heavy imprint of VC political indoctrination. A series of themes occurred consistently in answers to the question, "What did you believe you were fighting for?" Those most frequently mentioned were: democracy; reunification; an end to poverty, injustice, and brutality; neutrality; and peace. Repeatedly,
respondents expressed the belief that the Front was fighting a "just war" and had the support of the people.

One of the cadres now working for the Chieu Hoi program assessed the Viet Cong's reasons for fighting as a mixture of motives, among which he singled out the "good cause," fear of the GVN, and the hope of a better life:

The Front combatants believe that they fight for the Good Cause. They are not against the people; they are against the traitors of the people, against the Americans. For them, even if they go to the Nationalist side, their life can no longer be saved; the Nationalists never pardon them. Also, once in the Front, their position is permanent. During the Diem period, there were executions in the villages, in the districts, that added to their fear, their desire to leave and fight for the Front. They talk of being outlaws; thus their sentiments are confirmed and reinforced.

I have met many men in the Front who have told me this and they believe it. Besides, those who are poor think that, after the Front victory, there will no longer be rich people, and that poor people like themselves will have land for planting. (50.)

A 28-year-old assistant platoon leader of a main force unit, a prisoner, whose interviewer described him as "heavily indoctrinated but honest in his own way," said:

The Front leaders and cadres think that the Front will win, not with the help of weapons but because it is fighting for a just cause. (25.)

In some cases, the responses of loyal Viet Cong had the mechanical ring of many slogans incessantly repeated by political officers and reinforced at the frequent kiem thao (criticism) sessions. In others, however, the interviewees stated the goals of their struggle with deep conviction, often with eloquence. Such was the case of a cadre, of simple peasant background, who had spent a good part of his life making sacrifices for
his ideals, first in the Resistance, then by the long separation from his family while living in the North, and subsequently in the more than three years of difficult service with the Front that ended with his capture. In earnest tones he explained why he fought:

I fight for the same reasons I fought in the Resistance, for liberty, democracy, and equality, to stop the oppression of the poor by the rich, to end torturing, beating, and killings, to end all forms of oppression. I fight for my family to be happy, to see my country unified and independent, and not colonized as before.

Q: Do you really believe these themes could be implemented with victory?

I fight for freedom and equality. We are still fighting. How can I know if we will win? But I am always confident that we will obtain our objective. When I was in [the Front], I was quite confident that one day we would get what we were fighting for because everybody wanted the same things I wanted. Everybody wanted to have freedom, to put an end to killing, to war -- unification. I do not want to hold high positions. I just don't want to see any more destruction and sorrow, nor do I want to see oppression and beatings around me. . . .

Q: Do you ever get discouraged in this struggle?

I see many people fighting along with me, suffering along with me. I want to keep on struggling without getting discouraged. I am just like a grain of sand in a sea of people. But it is such a long fight.

After the revolution of August '45, I thought we were getting very near our objective. But no, we had to fight in those nine years of Resistance to get half the country. It was such a long struggle. Then I thought I was just going to regroup to the North to stay there two years, but I had to remain in the North seven years and then join the Liberation Front for three more years, and we still haven't got what we have been
fighting and struggling for. But if I have to struggle all my life for these objectives, I will do it. If I cannot attain them in my lifetime, my children will continue my struggle; and if my children still do not achieve these goals, then my grandchildren will. There is a great solidarity among us. I cannot get discouraged.

Q: You sound as though you had infinite patience.

I must say that what I have said is not an absolute truth. But most people on the other side [the Front] feel the same way I do about the objectives of the war. A few cannot stand the struggle so long. Some eagerly join the ranks of the Front, and then, after a period of hard life, their morale goes down and they look for an opportunity to defect. There are a few of these people, but they are a minority.

If only the "liberation" could be accomplished right away! Most of the men are very aggressive in their struggle. I am old and weak, sometimes I get tired. . . . I was transferred to the production unit to yell at people to produce more. I get discouraged and frustrated sometimes. But when I see the people around me, the morale of the men I work with, I cannot allow myself to get discouraged.

The movement is growing every day, and this encourages me somewhat. But now that I am captured, I join the ranks of those who long for peace. It makes me sad to see my "brothers" suffer and die on the battlefield. I am weak and tired. . . . (24.)

The yearning for peace is particularly strong among the regroupee prisoners, reflecting their desire to be liberated from prison life as well as their battle-weariness. Most of them, it must be remembered, have not been able to return home since they began their fight against the French.

At times, some of our interviewers would point out that, if the Viet Cong had not attacked, there would have been no war. The allegation of Viet Cong responsibility
for the war was generally rejected, sometimes with indignation. To the regroupees, the war was a result of American interference, and would end rapidly if "Vietnamese were permitted to deal with Vietnamese."

Seeing themselves first of all as patriots and nationalists, most regroupees reject the notion that Vietnam might be permanently divided. To them, it is one nation, with a common history, language, and tradition; its legitimate rulers are the Vietminh, while those now ruling in Saigon are usurpers and foreign puppets. Though the regroupees strongly prefer life in the South to that in the North, their political security lies with Hanoi. The regroupees' desire for reunification arises not only from nationalism and a sense of history but from practical considerations as well. Interviewees frequently pointed out that the war would continue as long as the country remained divided, and many recognized that, until reunification, each half of Vietnam had to rely upon foreign assurance for its security. Some realized, too, that Vietnam's prospects for economic independence depended upon whether the South, with its rich agricultural resources, was re-united with the North and its larger industrial assets.

A recurrent theme in our interviews was neutrality. Prior to the American bombing of the North and the more direct involvement of the United States in the war, the Front had officially favored negotiations to "neutralize" South Vietnam, and the regroupees who spoke of neutrality were largely repeating lessons learned before February 1965. Most likely, the theme of neutrality was principally a communist tactic to get the United States out of Vietnam; however, insofar as it implied peace and the absence of American interference, it had genuine appeal.
"Democracy," a term adopted by most political systems today, has noble connotations for the regroupees who cite it. Here is how a prisoner defined the democratic nation:

A regime of real liberty, a government really elected by the people, a truly egalitarian society, in which there won't be any more exploiters and exploited. (5.)

Another, whom weariness had caused to defect, defined his ideal of a government for Vietnam in terms that would have been acceptable to most of the loyal Viet Cong whom he had left:

I would like Vietnam to have a more practical government. The government should do something for the people. The government must try to win the confidence of the people. The government should listen to the demands of the people, and try to satisfy them if they are reasonable. The government should not be dictatorial, but it does not have to yield to all the demands of the people. The government should simply consider the people's aspirations. (33.)

2. Commitment to Communism

Party Membership. One approach to assessing the regroupees' commitment to communism is to inquire into Party membership and attitudes toward it. Of the 71 regroupees in our sample, 43 were members of either the Lao Dong or the People's Revolutionary Party. The Lao Dong is the Communist Party whose seat of power is now in Hanoi; the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) is its Southern adjunct. Despite the name of the Southern party (an apparent attempt to give it a façade of independence from the Lao Dong), our interviewees saw no effective distinction between the two parties. Most of them spoke of either automatic entrance or a perfunctory admittance procedure from the Lao Dong to the PRP. Seniority in the Party -- the "Party age" that is so important to prestige,
recognition, and promotion in the communist world -- was calculated on the basis of membership in either the Lao Dong or the PRP and was transferable from one to the other.

Our interviews leave no doubt that the Party is the source of authority in the VC movement. One of our respondents called it the "General Staff of the Revolution." (37.) A senior captain, who had been a member of a province Party committee before his defection in June 1964, spoke with authority about the organizational structure of the Front and about the PRP:

The supreme organ of the Front is the People's Revolutionary Party, the new name of the "Central Office of the South."

The People's Revolutionary Party represents the Central Executive Committee of the Party for directing the Front and the whole Party organization in the South. (51.)

On the question of whether the real source of authority for the Southern revolution was in the North or in the South, the regroupees in our sample were divided. Some, following the Hanoi line, maintained that the direction of the insurgency lay with the Front and that the DRV was simply assisting the Front army. Others explained that the DRV directed the Front through the Lao Dong Party.

Several regroupees with superior political training pointed out that a principal difference between the Lao Dong and the PRP lay in their respective tasks: while the Lao Dong Party was consolidating socialism in the North, the present task of the PRP in the South was to
"complete the revolution." This distinction was made by a loyal Communist who had served in the Resistance since 1948:

In the North I was a member of the Lao Dong Party. In the South I became a member of the People's Revolutionary Party. There was only one Party member in my cell -- myself. At that time I wanted to join the Party because the Party had advocated struggle against exploitation and oppression, recovery of happiness, and welfare for the people.

The principal objective of the Lao Dong Party is to build up socialism in the North. The objective of the People's Revolutionary Party is to revolutionize the South for popular democracy. Working toward its objective, the Lao Dong has built up a government, reunified the Army, all tending toward socialism. Means used by the PRP are: "unification of the entire people, including the army of the South Vietnamese Government, in working toward independence." This unification affects all persons who agree on this objective, regardless of whether they have worked for the Government or not. My "cultural level" does not permit me to judge which means were more effective than others. (23.)

Our interviews show that the Party is held in great respect by the regroupees, both in the North and among those serving in the Front. Even defectors who were critical of the communist cause seemed to retain a certain awe of the Party. For the time being, the Party holds out no promise of a soft life or special material privileges in the North, and certainly not in the Front. Rather, joining the Party is looked upon as an assumption of responsibility; it means that the member must work harder and perform more efficiently than ever, and show himself as a model to others. Party membership makes one privy to decisions, affords one the feeling of being on the
inside, and is important for advancement; yet the main emphasis is upon service and sacrifice. Following are examples taken from the statements of several present and past Party members as to their conception of the Party.

One rigidly orthodox communist prisoner described in self-righteous tones the role of the Party member:

The fact of being admitted into the Party shows that one has attained an elevated position. From the point of view of character, one becomes, in a general way, courteous, modest, and courageous before the enemy.

Entrance into the Party gives you a better chance than the non-members to study, to make moral progress, to make political progress, and to improve your thinking. There is an internal struggle [toward self-perfection, dau tranh], a special struggle, for the members. There is education, study of documents, and especially self-criticism for members.

Each Party member must be, himself, a model.

(37.)

Another prisoner, who by comparison with the foregoing was almost flippant in his comments, nevertheless expressed the same view of the Party's important role. (Because he had been "stained politically" by earlier membership in the French Army, he himself did not qualify for Party membership, though he had been admitted to the Workers' Youth Group.)

Party members have prestige. They learn first about what's happening. When they go to study sessions, they are helped. The people respect them; the people also consider non-members as not very advanced. . . . There are some who don't respect Party members; these are Catholics, but only in certain zones.

Party members must be close to the people, report everything. If someone does something stupid, the
Party member criticizes him during the self-criticism session. (43.)

A number of defectors who had turned against the communist movement still betrayed their respect for the Party. For example:

People belonging to the Party have additional rights. They meet in advance and discuss future plans before telling the men. I was not asked to join the Party, because only men of good character are selected. I am rather short-tempered; if my superiors try to use their rank to force me to do something I don't think is right, I tell them right away. That is why I could not become a Party member. (33.)

* * *

A Party member must be an exemplary man. He is the first to make sacrifices. . . . The Party member takes charge of the masses [the non-members]. The Party member never quarrels; if the masses quarrel, he calms them, explains things to them. (50.)

* * *

After I was admitted to the Party, the others watched me attentively, occupied themselves with my political education, in order to make me a true revolutionary, carrying out Party orders well and doing everything the Executive Committee assigned to me.

My comrades gave me a good impression in general, by their behavior and revolutionary zeal. I don't know exactly what made them join the Party. I guess they, like me, admired the Party and wanted to be members. (51.)

Our interviews indicate that the Party, especially in the North, was vigilant, putting members on probation for certain violations of the rules and expelling those who did not live up to its rigid standards. A senior captain who depicted himself as a playboy -- a most
Although I had been a Party member for nine years, I was expelled from the Party, and this could be considered as a demotion. The reasons for this were: I spent my time not for political training but for my own leisure; I wanted to marry a girl of a different social class; I declined to go to the Highlands of Vietnam to work there at the Bureau of Study of Forest Resources, on the grounds that I was not accustomed to the highlands, I did not know the local languages and customs, etc. (19.)

Another prisoner, who expressed his dislike of the VC movement and its cadres, gave this sour account of his experience in the Party:

I made some declarations, at random, that I had merited membership, and I was accepted. In the beginning, it was an honor, but after that, nothing more.

We had to go to meetings every Sunday, pay dues. I was criticized as being a Party member who did not set an example, arriving late at work, returning late after taking leave . . . . I was criticized when I suggested changing the administrative system in the camp to improve provisions; I was criticized for mentioning this in front of non-members. (47.)

Although the majority of our interviewees agreed that cadres gained respect and prestige through their Party membership, they knew also that they were subject to special controls. A former Party member gave this account of the Party's control mechanisms in the North:

Even among the Party members there is a classification into categories -- a, b, and c -- very good, active, medium or mediocre. The members observe each other, watch each other, make reports. They are themselves the subject of reports from the masses.
whom they must educate. Each member must occupy himself with some non-member among the masses. Those men are also classed as tutors in category a, b, and c. In my P.T.T. (Post, Telephone, and Telegraph) service in Hanoi, 50 per cent of the personnel are Party members. The rest are considered the masses. Categories b and c (members and non-members) were more tightly controlled.

There is a Central Control Committee. The usual means are espionage and information.

Self-criticism is also a means of control, often used and very effective.

I found the control very tight. There is the same control in the other organizations, like the Workers' Federation. (39.)

Political Ideology. Another measure of an individual's commitment to communism can be found in the specific political ideas he professes. Good Communists are more apt than others to cite ideas drawn from the writings of the communist classics which their national movement venerates. The regroupees as a group have a high percentage of Party members and may well be the most communist-oriented segment of the Front forces, the result of their training and service in the North. Even they, however, revealed only shallow acquaintance with the traditional communist literature. One of our Vietnamese interviewers, a doctoral candidate in political science at an American university, was almost incredulous at his first interview with a long-time Party member, a regroupee, who had not read a single communist classic: not Marx, not Mao, nor even Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, or Truong Chinh. With few exceptions, even the middle-level cadres in our sample did not possess the education, the literary inclination, or the access to libraries that
would have familiarized them with the intellectual underpinnings of the communist tradition. The Vietnamese Communist Party member learns his lessons mostly from oral sources, which tend to focus on the current struggle and the objectives of the particular revolution in which he is involved. Moreover, he is likely to see himself as a Vietnamese patriot and nationalist rather than as a communist ideologist. Communism (or "socialism," as they call it) provides the Vietnamese Communists with an orientation which makes them part of the "socialist bloc" in the company of powerful allies.

In the interviews, the specific objectives of the Party, or of "socialism," were generally expressed in noble terms by prisoners as well as defectors. The aims of the Lao Dong Party, according to one defector, were:

To unify the country;
To liberate the people and to provide for their material needs;
To abolish classes, and suppress all exploitation of one class by another;
To give land to the people. (33.)

Another regroupee, a prisoner, made the following distinction between capitalism and the socialism he had fought for:

Socialism wants to abolish all classes. Capitalism lets the classes remain -- some people are rich, some are poor.

After the independence of the country, the socialist regime wants everybody to have the same economic status, everybody to have the same interests, and everybody to enjoy life together equally. (24.)
When we asked respondents about their conception of a desirable future regime, they tended to speak in vague generalities, such as the following:

Communism works always for peace and the independence of the country, and takes the people along the road of happiness in the future. (18.)

Lucian Pye, in his study of the communist guerrillas in Malaya, comments on the fact that the Malayan Chinese Communists also had only a vague conception of the future regime for which they were struggling. He attributes this, in part, to their Confucian background, for Confucianism provides a clear-cut image of the model teacher, the model father, and the model king, but delves little into the model society or model government. The Vietnamese Communist whom we interviewed, rooted as they were in the same tradition, showed the same tendency: they had a clear idea of the ideal communist cadre and could recite his attributes, yet questions about the kind of government or society for which they were fighting elicited only imprecise, though hopeful, statements.¹⁸ A number of the respondents said simply that they wanted a regime like that in the North. A Vietminh veteran (a prisoner), who had served as an adjutant in the Front after infiltrating in February 1963, gave the highest praise to the Northern regime:

I only see the good things in the North: abolition of the rich landlords' land; building of cooperatives in all branches; movement toward socialism. (34.)

¹⁸Lucian Pye made these observations during a conversation with the author in April 1965. For Pye's analysis of the Communists in Malaya see his Guerrilla Communism in Malaya, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1956.
A few of the interviewees were prepared to admit shortcomings in the North, and expected a future communist regime in the South to be an improvement. An economic cadre with long experience in the Vietminh and the Front spoke frankly of the changes he wished to see. Though he did not demean the Party cadres, the respondent, a prisoner, found Party control stifling:

The Northern regime is not perfect and requires many changes. I wish for a regime that is really free, where the people are sovereign, where power is not too much linked to the Party. In the North, the Party involves itself too much in the power of government. (14.)

Although a number of defectors in our sample seemed to share this point of view, it was rare, in our experience, for a prisoner to state so sweeping a criticism of the DRV's political system.
VI. PERCEPTIONS OF THE WAR

THE BOMBING OF THE NORTH

Since our sample includes relatively few regroupees who were still serving in the Front after February 1965, when the continuous bombing of the North began, it is impossible, on the basis of their views, to draw valid conclusions as to the impact of the bombings on regroupees in general. Because of the importance of this question, however, we are presenting below those statements in the most recent interviews which reveal attitudes relevant to this issue. They are not necessarily representative of a broad consensus among the Viet Cong, or even among regroupees. Of the regroupees who had served in the Front after February 1965, four were questioned at some length regarding their reactions to the bombing. Their views will be analyzed here, as will be those of another regroupee, captured in December 1964, who commented on the American bombings of the North in August 1964, after the Tonkin Bay incidents.

A 34-year-old senior sergeant, a Party member who had served with the K-105 Independent Company operating in Thua Thien Province in Central Vietnam, was interviewed at the National Interrogation Center in Saigon on May 13, 1965. Having been captured in December 1964, he was no longer with the Front when the bombings of the North began; but he had heard from his company cadres in September and October 1964 about the August bombings of the North, and later had learned -- apparently from prison officials and perhaps from other prisoners -- of the bombings that began in February 1965. Though he could not
speak about the later events with the personal knowledge of one who had still been with his unit at the time, his views on the August 1964 bombings are revealing of the reasoning of a "hard core," loyal communist cadre. While he recognized the power represented in these bombings, he gave the impression that they had not discouraged him; his opinion was that they would only serve to reinforce the fighting morale of the Front and of the people of the North. His interviewer described him as arrogant at the outset, but "friendly and cooperative" as the interview progressed. Asked what the cadres had told him about the bombings, he said:

They said the Americans bombed North Vietnam not because they were strong but because they wanted to strengthen the morale and the confidence of the ARVN officers and soldiers. The Americans had to bomb the North because the South was falling apart in the face of the people's strong opposition and struggle, and because the GVN was disintegrating. They did so to maintain the confidence of the ARVN's soldiers and officers. After the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem, the GVN administrative machinery from hamlet to district level disintegrated. Many officials resigned, and in many areas the people themselves arose, beat up the GVN officials, and prevented them from carrying on their administrative work. For this reason, the GVN officials no longer believed in the strength of the Americans, and the Americans had to bomb the North. . . . (64.)

To a question on his comrades' reactions to the bombings, he answered that they had not commented on them. Defiantly, he added that he wished the Americans would bomb the North more extensively and land troops there; "we'll then use the strength of the North to crush the landing troops and at the same time liberate the South." When
the interviewer pointed out that the United States was a powerful country and not easily crushed, he said:

The U.S.A. is a large and powerful nation, and possesses a large array and quantity of weapons. If they lose their weapons here, more will be brought in. There are two camps in the world: the socialist camp and the capitalist camp. So, if the GVN and the Americans use force to attack the North, the North will use its strength to counterattack. This means that the Resistance will become general. We'll be fighting both in the North and in the South, and we will thus be able to solve the problem more speedily. The two regions will protect each other, and if the North is annihilated by the capitalist bloc, the socialist bloc will be threatened, Red China most of all. For this reason the socialist bloc will not allow the North to be taken over.

The sergeant claimed that the bombings had had "no effect on the morale of the liberation troops." Nor did he believe that they would end the fighting: "The liberation troops in the South are under the command of the Front, and are fighting in the South," he said. "If they just bomb the North, how could they put an end to the fighting here?" Asked whether the Front would continue the war if the bombing stopped the North from sending men and supplies to the Front, he said:

How could the bombings cut off the supply routes to the South? They won't cut off the supply routes. This is a fact. Now that the North is at war, the North Vietnamese people won't bother to rebuild bridges and roads, so the energy will not be diverted from aiding the Front, and the North will continue to help the Front just as before.

Q: Let us suppose anyway that the supplies were cut off. Would the Front be strong enough to defeat the GVN?
I don't know. The war is being fought not by the Front but by the entire population of South Vietnam. Even though the war is deadly, the numerical strength will be the decisive factor. Equipment is important, but it cannot annihilate the Front, which has the support of the people. If the ARVN can win the war with equipment alone, why hasn't it been able to annihilate the Front within the last six or seven years?

Regarding the effect of the bombings on the outcome of the war, the respondent said, "I don't know." Then he conceded that "the bombings do boost the morale of the ARVN officers. They are confident in the strength of the Americans who are helping them fight the VC in the South." He added that this was an opinion of his superiors and that he himself had no views on this question.

As to whether and in what way the attacks would affect Russia's and Red China's support of the North and the Front, he said:

I have been in the South for four years now, and so, frankly speaking, I don't know anything about the assistance given by Russia and Communist China to the North. I think air attacks on North Vietnam will inflict heavy damage on the North, but they would not destroy the morale of either North or South Vietnam. The more the Americans bomb the North, the more the North Vietnamese people will hate them. It is clear that the Americans have used their strength to attack a small country. The Front and the GVN are fighting each other in the South, and the Americans themselves have declared that they are only helping the GVN in a disinterested manner. If this is so, why have they bombed the North? This only shows that the Americans are aggressors in both North and South Vietnam. This will lead the nations in the world to debate the war in Vietnam. They will debate whether this is a civil war or an aggression by the U.S.A.
Another loyal Party member professed to be equally certain that the bombings of the North would not shake the confidence of the Front fighting forces. He had been ordered from the DRV to the South as late as December 12, 1964, and was captured on April 25, 1965. While still in the North, he had personally witnessed the American air attack of August 5, 1964; afterward, he had seen one American captive being led away, and also two American jets that had been shot down and retrieved. After moving to the South, he served as a cadre of an armed propaganda unit in January-February, and from then until his capture as a proselyting cadre. During this time, he had heard the current bombings discussed over the Hanoi radio as well as among the cadres of his unit. Asked about the reaction of people in the North to the earlier air attack, he said:

The Northerners had long experience with bombing and strafing while fighting the French. Now the Americans are resorting to the same means used by the French. This incited the people to great hatred. The people organized spontaneous demonstrations and requested the International Commission to condemn the Americans, and at the same time they prepared shelters. The government incited the people to hate the Americans on the radio and in the newspapers, and there was a production emulation movement to make up for the time loss due to the damage done by the air attacks. The people do not know what the American policy will be, but they have had the experience of eight or nine years of fighting the French. (67.)

Further fragments of the interview relating to the air attacks are cited below:

Q: What did the government say about these attacks?
The Americans were warmongers. They have been defeated by the people in the South. The North was the rear; therefore the Americans wished to cause confusion and destruction to the economy of the North. Thus they want to cut off the supplies to the South and force the South to its knees, for the South depends on the North for direction and supplies in its struggle. The people in the North understand the objectives of the Americans in these attacks. They hated the Americans and, at the same time, made plans to protect their property; they hid their valuable things in underground shelters lest they be burned or destroyed by the attacks.

Q: What did you think about these attacks?

I had no idea about these attacks. I knew only that in their effort to take over South Vietnam the Americans had been defeated by the people. The Americans had sent spies into the North, but all these had been captured as soon as they arrived in the North. We will stop the Americans from carrying out such sabotage acts in the North. We will do our best to bring about reunification of the country. I was not afraid of these attacks, and my duty was to propagandize and explain to the people the objectives of these attacks.

Q: What did the people in the South think about these attacks?

Some of us knew that the Americans were using force to destroy the North; others felt that their labor for the past ten years had been for nothing because of these attacks. They were concerned about their families and relatives in the North and about their personal property which they left in the North when they came south. We all felt uneasy when we heard of the bombing and strafing. When I was living in the plains, I did not get to listen to the radio, but when I went back to the jungle where I could listen to the radio, I felt very enthusiastic when I was informed of the number of airplanes the North has shot down and the capture of the Americans.

Q: What did the Front tell people?
They said these attacks were being carried out by the Americans and the GVN because these two had been defeated in their endeavor in the South. Therefore they attacked the North, hoping to cut off the line of supplies to the South. The Americans were warmongers.

Q: What effect did the attacks have on your unit's morale?

As I have told you before, the attacks have no effect on the Front members, for they have realized that the stronger the Front is, the more attacks the North will have to endure. We became more enthusiastic when we heard that the North had used its own planes to counterattack. There is nothing that could lower the morale of the Front members. We are somewhat concerned about the fruits of ten years of labor. We have had to live on an austerity program, supporting ourselves with rice mixed with manioc. These attacks will destroy all our labor; and we have not yet had the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of our labor. This thought pushed us to fight harder so the South would soon be entirely liberated and the North would thus be spared further destruction.

Q: What effects do you think the attacks had or may have on the war and its outcome?

When the attacks began, we knew the war would not last long. The reason for this attack is that our strength has grown. When the Front was still weak, only spies were sent to the North. Now our operations in the South have expanded. The stronger the Front grows, the more attacks the North will have to suffer. However, we are not concerned about the defense of the North, for the North has its own defense units.

Q: What will the outcome of the war be?

I am not in a position to assess the situation and outcome. If the Americans continue to attack the North and to send troops into the South, the war will become much more intense. The North will be forced to call for help from other socialist countries. We
have been informed that many people in the socialist countries have volunteered to come to our aid, but the Front has not accepted. The Front does not want this war to turn into a regional war, but if the air attacks on the North become more ravaging, the Front will have to ask for more help. The Front will ask not only for cadres to be sent south but for the return of all the regroupees and the formation of the Northern Youth who will come south, and it will request troops from other socialist countries. On March 22, 1965, the Front declared that it does not want the war to turn into a holocaust.

Q: What effects do you think the attacks have had or may have on the support given by Hanoi to the Front?

This is the policy of the Central Committee. I am not a high-echelon cadre able to understand it. But I know for sure that the North will never be defeated. The North has a plan, although it is known that the more intense the attacks, the more the people in the North will have to suffer and the more the economy in the North will deteriorate. We wish that peace would come soon.

A different line on the current bombings was taken by the defector who had described his unpleasant job as a porter of supplies across the Ben Hai River to the South. Before his defection on May 26, 1965, he stated, he had repeatedly watched sorties against Vinh Linh in the North and heard the bomb explosions, since Vinh Linh was only ten kilometers from Trieu-Van village in the northernmost part of South Vietnam, where he was a guerrilla squad leader and deputy village chief. In contrast to the hard-core Communists, he spoke in a style more typical of the anti-Viet Cong defector, as the following excerpts from his interview show. Asked to recall his reactions to the air attacks while he was still serving in Trieu-Van village, he replied:
The VC claim that they observe the Geneva Agreements. But by infiltrating and sabotaging in the South, they have started it. They have caused people to be killed by gunfire and bombing. The Americans have thought it necessary to retaliate to devastate the North. This is what I have thought because, when I was in Vinh Linh, the VC had organized the infiltration of South Vietnam before the aircraft attacked. They initiated it first. (65.)

Other parts of the interview relating to the bombings went as follows:

Q: Was the morale of the cadres and VC troops boosted by the news of American planes being shot down?

Especially recently, the cadres have been much bewildered. In the beginning, they claimed that the Soviet Union and China would attack South Vietnam with atomic bombs. But several months have passed and these two countries have done nothing to help. The troops are also bewildered; in the operations they have been gradually decimated and have lost quantities of weapons. The population is fed up because they have been exploited too much and have seen no successful operations on the part of the VC. . . .

Q: In your opinion, how do you think the air attacks will affect North Vietnam?

When I was in the North, I was told that the North had been building up an army for ten years, with sufficient strength to crush the Americans if they were foolish enough to attack the North. Having so heard, and having seen huge amounts of ordnance covered with canvas, I was convinced that they [the North] had enough power to shoot down airplanes. Now, I have seen that aircraft has gone north constantly without meeting any resistance. If the factories and the cooperatives, built with the people's sweat, are now destroyed, imagine how discouraged the people there will be. The effect of it will be that the economy cannot develop. Near the Ben Hai River, people on the northern side only a few hundred meters away can see that people on this side
have been able to build their houses, can move freely for their occupational needs, and are well dressed; while they, on the other side, cannot go out to work for fear of aircraft. [In the South] only those who have relatives in the North feared for their safety and were worried.

Q: As you see it, do you think air attacks on North Vietnam will have any effects on the war in the South?

While nobody mentions it, I have been thinking about it myself. The cooperatives and factories in the North being destroyed by air attacks and being no longer productive, such air attacks will have a disastrous effect on the war in South Vietnam. If the economy of the North collapses, supplies to its troops in the South are limited and the [GVN] government will win the war more promptly.

On June 9, 1965, at a Danang prison, we interviewed a master sergeant who had served as a platoon leader in a main force unit operating in Thua Thien until his capture on April 1, 1965. The interviewer, who was particularly sensitive to anything that might bias the prisoner's account, described him as inhibited by the presence of a GVN prison official and, at the time, "anxious to paint an overly gloomy picture of the situation." He had learned about the air attacks on North Vietnam from Radio Hanoi and from the newspapers, he said. Asked what the cadres thought and said about these attacks, he replied:

I know that what they said did not reflect their thinking. In front of their men, they said that the aircraft were ineffective in the North because they were shot down. But, among close friends, they said the North alone was taking care of Laos and of the South and had much to worry about now that the North itself was bombed. (66.)
As to the effect of air attacks upon the morale of his unit, he said:

They had little effect upon the morale of the cadres. But enlisted men were very much worried, not knowing how their folks were doing in the North.

A part of the interview was concerned with the effect of the attacks upon the course of the war in the South, and with the reactions of the Southern cadres to the position taken by North Vietnam and Communist China:

They [the bombings] have a direct effect. The South is the battle front while the North is the rear. All the supplies come from the North. The supply of resources to the war in the South would be limited if every-day life in the North should be impeded.

Q: How did the cadres explain the air attacks on the North to their men?

They usually said that the South had gone mad and had to retaliate in the North because they were losing in the South; that the South could drop as many bombs as they wished, but the Front would continue to fight fiercely and finally get the prize.

Q: Did the cadres try to explain why the North and China have been standing still in the face of the air attacks?

Once, when the political officer was answering the men's questions, one of the men asked why the North and China had aircraft and yet did not intercept the South's aircraft. He answered, "Comrade, you should not worry about that. They don't do it today, they may not do it tomorrow even. The present intensity of the bombing is not sufficient to cause their response; but if the bombing should get tougher, they may respond."

Q: Were the men satisfied with that explanation?

When the battalion political officer talked, the men just listened to him. I don't know how they felt
about that explanation. [After a pause:] At that time, I did not agree with the political officer. I thought that the North was clever and waited until the world "raised its voice" in order to counteract violently and gain prestige.

Q: Do you mean to say you thought the North would react when the United States was criticized by world opinion?

It is not correct to say the North only. We should say the North and China. However, China would react only when the U.S. went wild, attacking with land, naval, and air forces at the same time.

Q: Why has China not done anything while she has threatened, as you may have heard on the radio, "to punish" the United States?

The cadres' worry at the present time is the disagreement between Communist China and Soviet Russia. As they said it often there, the Soviet Union is acting perfunctorily just to prevent the socialist countries from blaming her for doing nothing in behalf of her camp. She may have given a few missiles in aid, but that is just perfunctory aid. (66.)

On this last point of China's inaction, a senior sergeant derided China's false promises in regard to the bombing of North Vietnam. He had infiltrated to the South in August 1964, served there as a political officer in a regional force unit, and rallied to the GVN in May 1965. By the time of his interview, in July 1965, he was working for the Chieu Hoi organization. He said:

Each side has a strong supporter. They have Communist China and the GVN has the U.S. But Communist China is no match for the U.S. Communist China has told the North Vietnamese that the first time American aircraft flew into their country they would bring them down as a warning and, on the second time, they would capture the pilots alive.
But I see that the South has sent hundreds of aircraft on hundreds of missions to the North and the Chinese have done nothing. I realize that they have lied for propaganda purposes.

On the other hand, they said all the North Vietnamese youths should go and liberate the South and leave the North for them to defend. What are the results? Hundreds of bridges have been destroyed. That is why I did not believe in what they said. (69.)

THE COURSE OF THE WAR AND ITS FUTURE

The models of the two "extreme" categories of VC respondents described in the Introduction are especially relevant to a discussion of the regroupees' views on the course and probable outcome of the war. In one model, the disaffected defector or prisoner tends to stress the dislike of villagers for the Viet Cong, the GVN's superiority in weapons and men, the weakening morale of the Viet Cong, and other factors that he sees as spelling defeat for the communist cause. He is likely to hedge his predictions of a Front defeat by stating that the GVN will win "if it can win the support of the people." (This attitude was encountered particularly among defectors who had been in GVN hands for months and felt safe, though disillusioned and unhappy, as they vegetated in Chieu Hoi centers.) In the second model, the hard-core, loyal Viet Cong is sustained in his belief in victory by his ideological training and strong convictions. He asserts that the Front is fighting for the "just cause" and that it has the "support of the people," the two conditions necessary to eventual victory. Between the two extremes lies a third and very broad category; it includes the confused, the
weary, the doubtful, and those who will not predict a Front victory for fear of offending their interviewers but who cannot bring themselves to predict a Front defeat. Many in this category state that the war must soon be brought to a conclusion by negotiation, that each side must give way, and that the killing of Vietnamese by Vietnamese must stop. In discussing the further course of the war they will often stress their own weariness.

The interview with a 32-year-old sergeant, who had served as a propaganda cadre in Quang Tri, South Vietnam's northernmost province, affords an example of the style of the disaffected prisoner. He was captured on March 12, 1965, and was thus one of the few respondents in our sample who were still in the Front when the more recent bombings of North Vietnam began. Wishing to rally, but fearful of VC reprisals against his family, he claimed to have put himself in a situation in which the ARVN would arrest him. According to his interviewer, he was extremely tense, "shaking with fear," and startled by every footstep throughout the interview. He told the interviewer, a gentle, soft-spoken young Vietnamese woman, that previous interrogations had shattered his nerves. She recorded that he "was obsequious, and he kowtowed every time the interviewer posed a question." Though older than the interviewer, he referred to himself as either "young son" or "younger brother," and called her "my superior."

Asked how he thought the war was going and whether the Front was winning or losing, he said:

I am not well educated enough to understand this question. But I think the Front cannot win the war, because the Front forces are not strong enough.
The ARVN has airplanes, tanks, a large army. What could the VC do? I myself would like to see the GVN and the North Vietnamese Government negotiate so that people could work in peace. (63.)

He made a number of statements on the villagers' relations with the Viet Cong and the GVN, respectively. At one point he commented on the reaction to a GVN order forbidding villagers under its control to buy large quantities of rice at the market, because of the suspicion that they were buying it to feed the Viet Cong:

The villagers said that they had two ropes tied around their necks. The GVN and the VC are both armed, so the people have to do whatever either side asks them to. For example, the GVN tells them that they should concern themselves with their work only, and so the villagers work hard. The VC come and tell the villagers to dig trenches to protect themselves against air bombardments, and the villagers comply with their orders. (63.)

He was questioned also on the villagers' feelings about the presence of cadres and troops:

The majority of the villagers said that they were living in peace before the Front members came to their village. Now the Liberation Forces come and go through the village so often that the GVN suspects the villagers and takes all the young people away. As a consequence there are only old people left in the village to go fishing.

Q: Whom did the villagers blame for this state of things?

The Viet Cong. The people asked one of my relatives to talk to me about the VC movements in the village. They wanted me to ask the VC to stop coming to stay in the village, because if they came in large numbers and information leaked to the GVN, the ARVN would shell the village. If the village were shelled, all the villagers would be killed. The people thought
I was a Front cadre. That was why they talked to me. They were afraid they would all be killed if the ARVN attacked the village when the VC were there.

Asked whether the villagers liked the Front, he said:

They liked to see the country independent, but they didn't like the VC because the latter lied to them. The villagers told me frankly that the VC were liars. The villagers said, for example: "The VC talked about their victories in nobody knows what areas. We did not understand what they said. They told us that the GVN and Americans are exploiting the people. But for ten years now, nobody has exploited us. We have been able to work and trade in peace." So I told the villagers that life in the hamlet is very good, and that life in the North is miserable.

The sergeant's report of what the villagers said about the Americans was unusually mild:

They said that, if the Americans were exploiting them, why did they come to the village to distribute American rice and corn to the people? I told the villagers that the VC and the Americans are both saying bad things about each other. The VC said the Americans are exploiting the people and transporting the country's resources to the U.S.A.; therefore, we should drive the Americans out of the country, because if we let them stay here too long they will dominate us like the French.

The Americans said that the VC are exploiting the people. I told the villagers that, since both sides are saying bad things about each other, the people are lost and don't know whom they should believe.

The aforementioned unhappy porter, who had defected from Trieu-Van village in Quang Tri, gave a similar account of the villagers' distaste for the Viet Cong, and added that this unfavorable popular attitude was taking a toll of the cadres' morale:
In the North, we were told that if the Americans chose to violate the territory of the North, the Soviet Union and China would provide all necessary armament to attack South Vietnam. "Please be gone," we were told, "you must not hesitate at this stage." Having come South, after staying in the plains for nearly a year, we have seen no change in the situation. The [VC] troops continue to destroy hamlet fences, call together meetings, and ask for rice; but the VC have never been able to establish a government. It is true that the coastal area has become less secure, but the population sees that, every time government forces advance, the VC have to retreat. The VC never deploy for a battle; they have never been able to shoot and kill any government soldiers or capture any weapons. They just fire a few random shots and run. They dig underground passages, with the claim of fighting the nationalists.

The population is disgusted and too miserable; they say that the VC should fight a battle once and for all. The cadres have been saying that they will fight, but they never have. The cadres themselves are discouraged because the population will not listen to them. The population is afraid; they do not say a word but they don't do what the cadres tell them to do. They even want to re-establish "Hoi-te" (village authorities loyal to the government) as in times of old, in order to be able to move around for their daily work. The cadres coming back from work sigh in despair because the population no longer listens to them. They ask villagers to cook meals for them, and the latter invariably decline with such excuses as being busy with farming or fishing. Only a few families cook for them out of fear, but they are really very few. (65.)

Regroupees of the "hard-core" loyal Viet Cong type often gave responses which bespoke a tenacious belief in a Front victory. A 46-year-old propaganda specialist, who had joined the Resistance in 1945 and lived in a communist environment until his capture in August 1964, made the following statement:
The Front is on the way up. It will certainly achieve victory. From 1955 to 1960, the revolution was still in infancy. From 1960 onward, it kept growing and now has become extremely strong, in spite of the fact that the GVN has better weapons now and in spite of the Staley-Taylor Plan. The Front now has larger areas under its control. The people support it in larger numbers. It has a larger army. More countries in the world support it, and even the American people and intellectuals are supporting the Front. (30.)

A lieutenant who had served as an intelligence officer in the Front until his capture in September 1964 showed the same confidence. He asserted that the Vietnamese people supported the Front, because it meant their country's liberation from the foreigners. When challenged with the argument that, if this were so, the war should have been over long ago, he shot back at his interviewer:

If this revolution did not come from the people, it would have been dead ten years ago. In 1958, it was the GVN year; there was peace everywhere. And what do you find now? If this revolution did not originate from the people, how could it have survived until now? If it had no support from the people, how could it have been so widely known and progress to this point? The revolution started out very poorly armed in many areas; it was the people who armed their soldiers. We have the people's support, but the revolution has not yet come to its successful ending. Why? Because there are still mighty weapons and lots of prisons on this side. If it were the GVN that had the support of the people, you would not have to fear defeat, because you would possess every means to bring the revolution to an end.

Q: Why do you think the revolution is making progress?

If I did not know, I would not be a revolutionist. Look at the map. What area was under the Front control in 1964? Every year the GVN loses some areas.
At the beginning, we had only guerrillas at the village level who carried troubles to the GVN; now we have regiment-sized forces. A few years ago we lived in the mountain areas. Now we come down to the delta.

The GVN had its officials at the village level to conduct its business; now they are no more. The government's machinery has broken down completely at the village level. There is no one to carry out its programs such as the strategic hamlet program or rural improvement program. The areas under Front control expand every year while the areas under GVN control shrink. (25.)

The 34-year-old Party member and senior sergeant whose hard-line communist views on the bombings of the North were quoted earlier was confident of victory despite the increased U.S. involvement in the war, a confidence in keeping with his general attitude. Questioned about the impact of the presence of American troops on Front morale and on the further course of the war, he said:

If the Front cadres and fighters don't understand which of the two factors [men or weapons] will determine final victory or defeat, they will be demoralized by the presence of American combat forces here.

Q: In your opinion, which one is the decisive factor?

I think the decisive factor is men. Weapons are important also, but numerical strength will decide the outcome of the war.

Q: Do you think then that, if the Americans keep sending their troops here to increase the numerical strength of the ARVN, the GVN will win the war?
It depends on what kinds of men are on your side. If the entire Vietnamese nation, from North to South, did not agree to the Americans' sending their troops over here to fight, if the world did not approve of their presence in Vietnam, could they live here? (64.)

The sergeant then was asked whether he wished that Russia and Red China would send troops to help the Front. He answered:

In a war, it is not good for us to bring outside forces into the country to help us. If these outside forces were brought in, the war would either become general or would turn into a world war. If this happens, nuclear warhead missiles will be used. The interrogators here [at the National Interrogation Center] asked me if I was afraid of having Chinese Communist troops in Vietnam, and they talked to me about Chinese domination in the ancient times. I told them feudalist China is different from socialist China. Red China at the present time is a brother of North Vietnam, which also belongs to the socialist camp. China helps us in a disinterested manner. Anyway, compared to China, Vietnam is so small, what use would Vietnam be to China?

The interviewer, aware that twenty-five North Vietnamese troops had been assigned to the sergeant's unit in October 1964, then asked what effect the bombings had had on the morale of these Northern infiltrators. The answer:

If they were scared of fighting, they wouldn't have come here. They were even more eager to fight because the Americans had destroyed and burnt down their houses and disturbed their peaceful lives. They were the young elements of society, they had to put an end to the aggressive actions of the Americans.

You asked me earlier what effect the landing of American combat forces in Vietnam would have on the outcome of the war, and I gave you my answer. But I
would like to have you add the following. If the Americans land more troops here, the war will become general. The U.S.A. has a population of 200 million (not quite, but let's put it at 200 million), Russia also has a 200 million population, and Red China has 700 million people. If the Americans carry out a general war, could they defeat the socialist camp? If the Americans resort to nuclear warhead missiles and H-bombs, Russia and Red China also have them. Have the Americans thought of this? If in this general war the Americans employ only their troops, how long will it take them to defeat the VC supported by the socialist camp?

As to what it would take to end the war, the sergeant said:

Negotiations. Only when the two sides agree to negotiate will the war be ended. All my friends and I wish the two sides would negotiate, because the war brings so much grief to the country. The fighters of both sides get killed, and the innocent people also get killed. Nobody wants war. The Front is always ready to negotiate with the GVN on the basis of peace, neutrality, and the people's happiness.

Q: Does the expectation of negotiations make the fighters and cadres willing to wait passively?

No. On the contrary, the cadres and fighters have to fight hard because the other side will only negotiate when they cannot defeat the VC. We have to use war to solve this problem. (64.)

Another, intensely loyal Party member, who had left the DRV in December 1964 and been captured on April 25, 1965, gave an assessment of the situation and of the outlook for the future that read like an official communist document:

a. The success of this war will not depend on the strength of the forces each side possesses. The success of this war is the result of the will of the people to fight. Once almost bare-handed, with the cadres in hiding in the jungles or in the mountains,
the Front can now boast of having battalions and regiments who have engaged in many battles with the ARVN and the Americans.

b. The government is not united. There are too many coups, this leader takes over and later is toppled by another, and so on; the army is divided.

c. The soldiers are more concerned about their salaries and their own life than about fighting. In the Front I have seen a Front squad rout an entire GVN company accompanied by armored cars. The GVN is well armed but it has not destroyed the Front.

d. The world situation. In 1963, during their meeting in Hanoi, the World Labor Unions, and in 1964 the World Peace Conference, both voiced their support for Vietnam.

e. The Front is conducting its foreign relations with other countries, and the world now knows that there exists a Liberation Front in South Vietnam. Although some members of the Front have been captured, the Front is against defeatism.

[As to how the war was going],

I think the war is getting hotter and is becoming a holocaust. It will not be simpler. The GVN possess all kinds of powerful weapons; so does the Front. If the two sides cannot come to the negotiation table, I am sure the war will be much more destructive. This is a special war, for in this war the Vietnamese kill the Vietnamese. If the war is not ended soon, it will turn into a regional war -- it will not be a world war -- and many countries will take part in it. Take for instance right now: the GVN is aided by the Americans, the South Koreans, and the Australians. If the Front cannot withstand this combined force, the Front will be obliged to call in soldiers from the socialist countries to its aid. The war will then become devastating and deadly, and the Vietnamese will be the ones who have to endure all the sufferings if there is no negotiation soon.

Q: Which side do you think is winning?
Looking at the situation, I have to concede that the GVN soldiers are better equipped than the Front's. The GVN has the air force, the marines, the navy, which the Front does not have. However, the Front has the support of the people. If the Front had the strength the GVN has, the Front would have won a long time ago. At the present time, the majority of the people are for the Front, and the side that has the people will win the war in the end. It is difficult to say which side will win in the end. Right now the two sides are equal. The GVN is strong but it cannot destroy the Front. As for the Front, it is becoming more powerful every day. The Front only engages in combat if the Front knows that it will win. Otherwise the Front members will retreat to their bases.

Q: How many stages are there in this war?

This is the equilibrium phase. This phase will prepare for the general insurrection. In order to bring about the general insurrection, the Front is building an equivalent force. The Front has to have the support of the people and an equivalent force. The year 1965 is the year of preparation for the coming years. (67.)

Following are the statements of other Front members who have maintained their faith in victory. Except for one of them, who has been a prisoner since late 1963, they were captured in the summer or fall of 1964.

I am confident that the Front will achieve final victory, but I don't know when. We will have achieved victory when there are no foreigners left in the South.

While we were in the North, and also during my stay in the Front, we were taught that the revolution would be long and arduous. The cadres would have to endure hardships, hunger and cold, difficulties, sacrifices of their own personal lives and their families. Even though the revolution is long and difficult, its duration is limited. We still believe in the final victory of the Front.
I know that the revolution will last very long, but I am confident that I'll see my country independent before I die, unless I am struck by sudden death. (36.)

* * *

One knows that, to make a revolution, one must put up with material difficulties . . . that's something one expects in advance. Difficulties do not diminish my belief in final victory. (12.)

* * *

I believe [in victory] always. That's the reason why I participate and work. All of the people of the South detest the imperialist invaders. Generally speaking, the Front has as its goal to chase out the foreigners. That's the aspiration of the people, and the force of the people shall conquer. (18.)

* * *

I have always believed that we will win. I am a member of that political system, and therefore I believe in that system. (10.)

* * *

Our people would suffer and many people would be killed as a result of the war. But anyway we would win. That was my conviction. (1.)

* * *

I believe in the victory of the Front because, at present, the Front is in an advantageous position compared to the Resistance during the war against the French in 1950. Today we have a Front organization, an army, and radio communications to make known our struggle to the entire world. (13.)

In contrast to the foregoing are comments by the third category of respondents, who speak of neither a
Front nor a GVN victory but stress the problems entailed in resolving the war. Some of these statements are cited below.

A defector who rallied in March 1963, spoke in January 1965 quite frankly about his estimate of the length of the war -- and in so doing, revealed a remarkable sense of personal security:

I think the war will never end. When I was with the Front, I had to believe that the Front was winning.

(1) This is the people's war. Any side that has the support of the people will win the war. If the people do not care whether a side wins or not, this is an indicator that that side will lose. As I see it, the Front has the support of many people because it follows a flexible policy.

(2) During all those nine years of fighting against the French, the Vietminh fought almost empty-handed, and at the end they won half the country from the French.

(3) The VC has strong support -- the North. If the GVN wants to win this war, it first has to have the support of the people and modern weapons. During the mopping-up operations, the soldiers should refrain from taking people's belongings. (48.)

A prisoner who had been an adjutant in the Front from November 1962 until his capture in April 1964 expressed this view on the future of the war:

It will be prolonged. I don't know up until what point. The Front becomes stronger and stronger, the GVN gets well furnished with arms but cannot win, but neither can the Front be victorious then. (2.)
A senior captain, who had served the Front from 1960 until his defection in June 1964, said on the same subject:

We believe almost unanimously that this war will not finish easily, and might be transformed into a second Korean war, because there are two opposing camps.

I believe that reunification of the country is in the very distant future, because it will be necessary for one of the two camps to gain a final victory, and at the present time each camp has its own ideology, its power, and its strategy to maintain the equilibrium. (51.)

A second lieutenant, who had been captured in January 1963, made this declaration:

Formerly, I wished only for victory over the GVN and to achieve that victory rapidly. Now that I have been in the South I am beginning to reflect. I find that the government of the South also has a policy aiming at bringing happiness to the people, just like the North. The difference is that both sides don't follow the same road, nor the same methods. (40.)

A 33-year-old infantry platoon leader, a prisoner since December 1964, expressed the view of those who were weary of the war. Though he was not asked what he thought of the future of the war, his attitude suggested fatigue. He had married while serving in the Front, and apparently, had conditions permitted, would have been glad to give up the revolutionary struggle in which he had been caught up since he joined the Vietminh in 1945. He told the interviewer:

Personally, after I got married I did not feel like being in combat, but I would not dare tell that to my wife. In the Front, the women were mobilized
to encourage their men in combat. Had I known the whereabouts of my sister's family, I would have found a way to visit them. Sometimes I felt very sad. Many Front members got homesick and they began to smoke and drink tea and wine. Had I known that, if I gave myself up, my safety would be guaranteed, I would have done that a long time ago. We are all fed up with the war. During the Resistance the French did not have an abundance of bombs and ammunition; but now, with the help of the Americans, bombs and ammunition are plentiful. We are all very weary and hate to fight. (58.)

The next two statements also belong in the third category of responses:

The majority believed in final victory on the side of the North. But that wasn't my opinion. There can be no peace if mutual concessions are not made by both sides. On that single condition there is a possibility for peace between the two regions and reunification would be possible. (32.)

* * *

As for me, I don't care if it's one side or the other which governs. The essential thing is that the Vietnamese live as brothers. When there are no longer any foreigners in our affairs, Vietnam will be unified. (34.)

The platoon leader who was thought to have felt inhibited by the presence of a GVN prison official was asked what had been his expectation as to the length of the war when he was still in the Front. He said:

I was able to look at it from only one angle. Because of treacherous propaganda, I believed the war would come to an end in 1965. (66.)

As asked whether his views had changed between the time of his infiltration, in 1962, and his capture, in April 1965, he answered:
In early 1963, I saw that main force units were spreading on the plains. The VC in their propaganda capitalized on the situation of various areas and induced me to believe that the end of the war was near.

Q: At the present time, when do you judge the war will end?

It is impossible to judge. Now I have realized that I had judged wrongly. (66.)