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VIET CONG CADRES  
AND THE CADRE SYSTEM:  
A STUDY OF THE MAIN  
AND LOCAL FORCES

Melvin Gurtov

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6 VIET CONG CADRES AND THE CADRE SYSTEM: A STUDY OF THE MAIN AND LOCAL FORCES

10 Melvin Gurtov

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FOREWORD

This report is one of a series of Rand studies that examine the organization, operations, motivation, and morale of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces that fought in South Vietnam.

Between August 1964 and December 1968 The Rand Corporation conducted approximately 2400 interviews with Vietnamese who were familiar with the activities of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army. Reports of those interviews, totaling some 62,000 pages, were reviewed and released to the public in June 1972. They can be obtained from the National Technical Information Service of the Department of Commerce.

The release of the interviews has made possible the declassification and release of some of the classified Rand reports derived from them. To remain consistent with the policy followed in reviewing the interviews, information that could lead to the identification of individual interviewees was deleted, along with a few specific references to sources that remain classified. In most cases, it was necessary to drop or to change only a word or two, and in some cases, a footnote. The meaning of a sentence or the intent of the author was not altered.

The reports contain information and interpretations relating to issues that are still being debated. It should be pointed out that there was substantive disagreement among the Rand researchers involved in Vietnam research at the time, and contrary points of view with totally different implications for U.S. operations can be found in the reports. This internal debate mirrored the debate that was then current throughout the nation.

A complete list of the Rand reports that have been released to the public is contained in the bibliography that follows.

(CRC, BJ: May 1975)

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

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- RM-6131-1 Conversations with Enemy Soldiers in Late 1968/Early 1969: A Study of Motivation and Morale, K. Kellen, September 1970.
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PREFACE

This Memorandum is one in a series of studies on Viet Cong motivation and morale produced primarily on the basis of interviews conducted in the field by The RAND Corporation team. The effort as a whole is sponsored jointly by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and the Advanced Research Projects Agency. The present study complements other work now in preparation on the general subject of cohesion and disintegration in the Viet Cong.

By looking at interviews of prisoners and ralliers in, and captured documents concerning, VC main and local force units operating in III and IV Corps, the Memorandum seeks to offer a clearer image of military cadres -- their selection, promotion, and training; their roles within the cadre system; and the multitude of factors that have accounted for the viability of the system and the commitment of cadres to it. The nature of the cadres' interaction with the system, dominated as it is by the principle of Party control of the army, has led to the conclusion that military cadres in the units under consideration continued to perform effectively, at least through 1966, despite mounting hardships and frustrations.

Other studies in the RAND series relating to cadres and the cadre system are: W. P. Davison and J. J. Zasloff, A Profile of Viet Cong Cadres, The RAND Corporation

RM-4983-1-ISA/ARPA, June 1966, and D. W. P. Elliott

and C. A. H. Thomson, A Look at the VC Cadres: Dinh Tuong Province, 1965-1966, The RAND Corporation, RM-5114-1-ISA/ARPA, March 1967. On the subject of Viet Cong activities in III and IV Corps, the reader may refer to: M. E. Anderson, M. E. Arnster, and Harvey Averch, Insurgent Organization and Operations: A Case Study of the Viet Cong in the Delta, 1964-1966, The RAND Corporation, RM-5239-1-ISA/ARPA, August 1967 and the author's The War in the Delta: Views from Three Viet Cong Battalions, The RAND Corporation, September 1967.

SUMMARY

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Unlike previous Memorandums on the Viet Cong cadres, this study focuses on the nature of the cadre system and the ways in which it operated in main and local force units of III and IV Corps through 1966 to ensure maximum performance of high- and low-ranking military leaders. Based primarily on 63 interviews conducted by the RAND field team in South Vietnam, and augmented by captured documents and other interrogation reports, the study seeks to shed light on some of the reasons why many cadres were effective servants of the system despite the Front's failure to fulfill its ambition of national "liberation" and despite an intensification of the war.

↖  
An examination of the military cadres interviewed, 51 of whom were ralliers to the GVN, and 11 prisoners (there is one civilian cadre attached to a military unit), revealed that since 1965 the Viet Cong have begun to place far more emphasis on the experienced volunteer in their selection of soldiers for cadre rank than on political awareness or personal history. The pressures of war, which almost certainly accounted for this shift, may likewise have been responsible for the preference in the Viet Cong's promotion policy for cadres with battle-field expertise rather than a firm ideological grounding. Apparently, military cadres, including those who became Party members, received less indoctrination than in past years and found it either distasteful or difficult to retain. At the same time, however, their acknowledgment of the Party's leading role in army affairs, their

confidence in the Party, and their capability in acting as mechanisms of control and surveillance in their units were unaffected.

While performance in battle seemed to be the chief avenue to promotion, advance to high cadre rank required membership in the Party. Admission to the Party was a coveted honor, investing the cadre with increased power and prestige no less than added responsibilities and proscriptions on his own freedom.

In carrying out their assigned tasks, cadres generally earned the respect and confidence of their men. It is clear from fighters' comments about their former cadres that, despite expressions of personal like or dislike, there is a fairly widespread conviction -- changed most often only when a cadre performed incompetently in battle -- that cadres have earned the right to lead.

Since the analysis concentrates on platoon- and squad-level cadres, who form about 70 percent of the sample, the focus is on the duties and responsibilities of what are termed the "practitioner" cadres. Placed between the realities of day-to-day army life, which they shared with their troops, and the more removed world of company and battalion officers, these cadres were the main instruments for control and surveillance for morale-boosting before and after battle, and for leadership in combat.

Though they held positions of leadership, cadres were found to have been strictly controlled in their interpersonal relations, their access to vital information, and their general freedom of movement. Yet the

intangible privileges which came with cadre rank -- including prestige and, for Party members, a share in certain Party plans and secrets -- offset these restrictions. Ordinarily cadres were seldom troubled by occurrences beyond their own units. They did not usually respond to the destructive effects of the war on villagers, which they tended to consider the responsibility of local Front agencies; nor did they appear concerned about such larger issues in the war as the bombing of the North or the impact of the Sino-Soviet rift, which they felt were long-range matters properly to be dealt with by high-ranking officers.

In summary, the combination of formal and informal pressures and the varying privileges or benefits accorded cadres contributed to their morale and performance, and thus to the continued resiliency of the military units they served. Most of the cadres who make up the sample had themselves apparently functioned well for the VC; the bases for their desertion and later defection were very often personal grievances unrelated to disaffection for the VC cause. The cadres in the units we observed, then, revealed that the military system of which they were prime components had adapted to changing physical circumstances and would prove exceedingly difficult to disrupt.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express his gratitude for helpful criticisms and suggestions to Michael Arnsten, D. W. P. Elliott, Konrad Kellen, and C. A. H. Thomson.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	iii
PREFACE.....	vii
SUMMARY.....	ix
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	xiii
Section	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN CORPS III AND IV.....	5
III. THE MAKING OF A CADRE: SELECTION, TRAINING, AND PROMOTION.....	11
1. The Sample.....	11
2. The Selection Process.....	15
3. The Training Process.....	17
4. The Promotion Process.....	23
5. Some Cadre "Models".....	27
IV. CADRES AND THE PARTY.....	33
1. The Party's Primacy.....	34
2. Admission to the Party Ranks.....	37
3. Functions of the Party Member.....	41
4. Unit Party Structure.....	43
V. THE VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM: FIGHTERS ON THEIR CADRES.....	47
VI. THE CONSTRAINTS, DUTIES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A LEADER.....	51
1. Surveillance and Controls.....	51
2. Morale-boosting.....	59
3. Battle Leadership.....	64
VII. THE VIEW FROM THE TOP: THE CADRES' WORLD.....	67
1. The Privileges of Cadres.....	67
2. Interpersonal Relations.....	69
3. Operations in the Villages.....	72
4. On the War.....	75
5. Desertion and Defection.....	80
VIII. CADRES AND THE CADRE SYSTEM.....	89
Appendix.....	93

## I. INTRODUCTION

Vietnamese Communist military organization owes a great debt to the theory and practice of the Chinese Communists. The reliance that the Viet Cong place on the cadre for leadership, control, guidance, and inspiration of the fighters in both the theoretical and practical aspects of warfare is one clear example. Yet because no two revolutions, whether Communist-led or not, develop in the same way, the Vietnamese Communists north and south have had to adapt Communist military doctrine to the particular conditions of war in their country. In this they have been largely successful. However much their conviction may have wavered and their original enthusiasm waned, and however much their civilian and guerrilla counterparts may have weakened over the years, the cadres of the main (MF) and local (LF) forces have continued to function efficiently for their superiors. The cadre system and the men in it make up the subject of this paper, which attempts to uncover the strengths no less than the weaknesses of military cadres.\*

The data used in this Memorandum are RAND interviews with military cadres and captured documents from VC main and local force units in the III and IV Corps areas.

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\*The term "cadre" used in this study embraces military personnel with at least the rank of assistant squad leader, regardless of membership or nonmembership in the Party. Party officials attached to military units as political officers are cadres of a different type, superior to military officers of the same level. See Section III.

By type of unit and operational area, the sample\* is as follows:

	<u>Main Force</u>	<u>Local Force</u>
III Corps	7	10
IV Corps	23	23
	—	—
Totals	30	33

First it must be noted that several types of main and local force units and personnel are involved in the study. Comparisons among types of units, ranks of cadres, and detention situations (prisoner vs. rallier) are made only when differences are marked. Second, although quantifications from the data appear throughout the text, the analysis here is essentially impressionistic. Indefinite qualifiers such as "for the most part," "usually," "frequently," "often," "most," and so on are the rule rather than the exception simply because our informants' answers to questions do not admit of a more exact enumeration. Quotations from the interviews are therefore intended as examples of such impressions.

As to interpreting the findings, the reader needs to be cautioned. Although the interviews are of cadres who rallied or were captured as late as December 1966, the sample is quantitatively weighted toward 1965. Moreover,

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\* Some characteristics of the sample used are detailed in the Appendix.

as indicated in the text, over 90 percent of the interviewees cited in the present study rallied to the GVN, thereby possibly creating a strong bias in the sample. A rallier may give responses calculated to convince his captors of his unimportance to the VC, of his sincere repentance for having joined, and of his disdain for VC military power. Every effort has been made to ignore obvious distortions by rallier-respondents. But it should be kept in mind not only that all answers can be considered biased to some extent, but also that even biased answers can have a peculiar value of their own. On this matter, it seemed more helpful to the analysis to treat each respondent as a separate source of evidence than to attempt a psychological assessment of his motivations for saying what he did.

Finally, since the cadres who have come into U.S.-GVN hands to date have been mostly low-echelon officers, the conclusions drawn, unless otherwise indicated, reflect the state of affairs chiefly among squad and platoon cadres. That we have access to few high-ranking cadres signifies in itself the continued cohesion of the VC political-military leadership at all levels of the main and local forces.

This writer has been deeply impressed not so much by individual cadres as by the cadre system as a whole. Even that special breed of cadre who chose to rally was at one time a functioning unit of a complex mechanism which, regardless of the individuality of its parts, operated as intended by its controllers under great stress.

Only a handful of them left their units because of the burdensome demands of military life. The VC cadre, quite unlike the ordinary soldier, has undergone a unique experience which has created in him, if even in only a small degree, an enlarged sense of responsibility to and for others. What that difference has meant to the strength of the Viet Cong military effort can be as useful to us as an awareness of the system's weaknesses.

## II. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN CORPS III AND IV

Essentially, the military experiences undergone by the cadres in our sample were of two kinds: first, extended periods of inaction or, at best, of sporadic fighting -- conditions which have existed in the delta (all of IV Corps) since the fall of 1965; second, increasingly heavy attack by U.S.-GVN artillery and aircraft, but few major VC-initiated ground actions -- the case in Long An, Gia Dinh, Hau Nghia, and Tay Ninh provinces and VC Zone D<sup>\*</sup> of III Corps.

A geophysical and military survey of the delta is contained in a previous Memorandum<sup>\*\*</sup> and need not be repeated here. What needs to be stressed again is that, with the onset during 1965 of VC attention to the central highlands, the delta reverted to its role of principal supplier of men and matériel to VC forces operating in II and III Corps. Since the fall of 1965, VC forces in the delta have seen little major action. Directed to reinforce other units to the north, the delta main and local units found it difficult to mount significant assaults and were reduced instead to guerrilla-style warfare, attacking GVN posts, engaging in hit-and-run assaults,

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\* The interviews and documents used here do not reflect cadre reactions to the most recent U.S. operations in either the delta (DECKHOUSE FIVE) or the provinces under discussion in III Corps (ATTLEBORO, CEDAR FALLS, and JUNCTION CITY).

\*\*M. Gurtov, The War in the Delta: Views from Three Viet Cong Battalion, The RAND Corporation, RM-5353-1-ISA/ARPA, July 1967.

and countering ARVN probes. Indeed, during the last months of 1966, clandestine broadcasts by the insurgents' Liberation Radio played up the importance and consistent successes of guerrilla units in the delta while paying little attention to the role of main and local (province and district) forces.

A captured document representing a report on the delta situation by the VC Regional Party Committee for Western Nam Bo fully bears out the shift to small-scale activities in that area during 1965. The report quite frankly admits to heavier losses in 1965 than the year before, as well as to a large-scale movement of families into GVN territory during daylight hours. Noting the increased size of RVN operations, it lists VC forces as having been involved in only five large-scale battles during the entire year out of 2,964 offensive actions all told. On the other hand, acts of sabotage, mainly along National Highway 1, numbered 29,391. Of particular interest is the disclosure that while recruitment continued to keep pace with losses, initial success in obtaining soldiers for duty in Eastern Nam Bo (which includes III Corps) had fallen off by late 1965.

The battlefield experiences of the cadres in our sample who served with combat units stationed in the various delta provinces were similar to those of the cadres in Tay Ninh (Zone C) and Zone D. For one thing, almost all cadres from both corps areas never encountered U.S. ground forces. Second, neither group was significantly aided by North Vietnamese infiltrators, although a limited number of Northern cadres were present at the

highest levels of leadership in units of both zones. Third, III Corps cadres averaged six major battles in 1965; IV Corps cadres averaged five. Lastly, all the cadres observed a significant increment in the intensity of attack by air and artillery during 1965 and 1966.

The major difference in military experiences of the III Corps cadres examined in this study relates to hardships endured. These cadres generally reported that they had been harder pressed from both ground and air attacks, with resultant heavier casualties, more frequent marches, deteriorating medical care, and lower-quality food. Moreover, even those cadres who enjoyed the relative safety of Zones C and D pointed out the agonizing life they led under constant threat of aerial bombardment. Several of them commented that while the thick canopy provided by the forests offered excellent cover, they felt almost imprisoned under living conditions which made it impossible to distinguish night from day. Where the U Minh Forest and the Plain of Reeds still offer uninhibited freedom of access and concealment for the VC of IV Corps, Zones C and D have long since become priority targets for the U.S-ARVN Command.

The tactical requirements for the VC in Tay Ninh changed dramatically between 1965 and 1966. In late 1965, the VC command drew a sharp distinction between the delta, where guerrilla warfare was required, and such jungle areas as Zones C and D, where a rapid build-up of main force units was termed "the determining factor in the war." Under cover of thick foliage, large numbers of forces could be concentrated, trained, organized, built

up and effectively deployed with minimum susceptibility to enemy air attack or ground infiltration. Comparing the situation then to the late 1953-early 1954 period of anti-French resistance, the Zone command apparently insisted that the time had come to rely on large-scale operations in an effort to crush the main enemy units. Calling upon some leaders who evidently objected to a build-up, the command said that "We must rid ourselves of the idea of resisting jungle warfare." The zone leaders reasoned:

Guerrilla warfare is a strategic matter and its effect is to wear down the enemy and extend the war. But the determining factor of war is destruction. To destroy more of the enemy force and his morale, we must promptly expedite the strong development of our main force in quantity as well as in quality. This will ensure the decisive blow which will determine the balance of power between us and the enemy. We must also comply with the regulations for the development of the organization from nothing to existence, from small units to large ones, etc.

Not long thereafter, however, a lengthy "top secret" draft resolution of the Tay Ninh Province Party Committee, analyzing an obviously new military situation and the tasks assumed accordingly during the first five months of 1966, apparently reversed the tactical sequence. First, guerrilla warfare became for Tay Ninh, as for the delta, "the main mission" and -- although it had not "been emphasized and promoted" -- had to be stepped up in the face of increasing enemy air and ground power, which could "inflict more losses on our forces than before." Second, manpower shortages had clearly become

serious. The document cites difficulties in recruitment, marked by a decrease in the number of guerrillas and self-defense militiamen; as a result, VC-initiated attacks occurred on an irregular basis, guerrilla warfare could not be properly prosecuted, and certain units were out of combat for periods ranging up to six months. The Party was, therefore, ordering that women be recruited to fill out shortages in noncombat assignments so that men might be assigned to combat roles. In short, the VC indicated they were in real difficulty in Tay Ninh by mid-1966.

With these very general remarks as a backdrop, we may be in a better position to assess the VC cadre's ability, whether under relatively quiescent or oppressive military conditions and even in instances of tactical redirection, to function as a reliable, effective instrument of the Party and the army.

III. THE MAKING OF A CADRE: SELECTION, TRAINING,  
AND PROMOTION

In this section, we shall be concerned with an examination of our cadre sample; with the processes of selection, training, and promotion of cadres; and finally, with a typology which relates to those processes and to cadres' functions.

1. THE SAMPLE

The answers to those questions asked nearly all the 62 military cadres in our interview sample reveal fundamental differences between cadres of different rank.\* By coupling the data (see Appendix) concerning the cadres in our sample with their and fighters' comments about superior and subordinate officers still in the VC, the applicability of the conclusions offered below to a larger body of military cadres in the main and local forces of III and IV Corps is strengthened, although by no means proven.

First, although the VC did place some stress on education, at least to the point that every cadre had to be literate, the rank that a cadre might reach was not uniquely the result of his schooling. Squad-level cadres averaged 3.3 years in school, platoon-level 4.5 years, and company-level 4.5 years; eleven cadres merely indicated

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\* Lower-level (platoon and squad) cadres dominate the sample. There are 11 assistant squad leaders, 16 squad leaders, 10 deputy platoon leaders, 16 platoon leaders, 5 deputy company commanders, 3 company commanders, and 1 battalion chief of staff.

that they were literate. Rigorous political indoctrination after selection of a cadre prospect was more relevant, it would appear, than his education prior to joining.

The traditional notion that Communist cadres are chosen primarily because of class status is only partially borne out by the data. Most (39) military cadres had indeed been classified "poor" or "very poor" by the VC before they joined; but a large number (22) belonged to the "rich" (landlord) or, more usually, "middle farmer" ("well-off") category, 12 of whom rose to deputy platoon leader or higher. Since 20 cadres of the "poor"- "very poor" class also became at least deputy platoon leaders, the conclusion can be drawn that, in reality, so-called "middle farmer" soldiers were not always disadvantaged by class origin when being considered for officer posts.\* In view of the relatively high educational level of this latter group -- the median average was 4-1/2 years -- the VC's interest may have lain in making full use of their abilities regardless of class origin.

Similarly, the fact that a recruit came to the VC from a GVN-controlled or contested village seemingly did not work against his becoming a cadre. Of those cadres who indicated their village (or hamlet) status at the time they joined, 15 came from VC-controlled territory, 15 from homes under GVN authority, and 18 from contested

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\*It may be, however, that "well-off" cadres found promotions and admission to the Party harder to come by than their comrades from poor or very poor backgrounds. And it cannot be dismissed that "well-off" cadres were more disposed to rallying than their poorer counterparts, thereby distorting our findings.

areas. Of course, this classification says nothing about such other conceivably important factors as the cadre's former relationship with GVN officials, relatives working for either side, damage to his home by either side, etc. Yet the background of all our cadres does not indicate any particular experiences or dispositions prior to joining that might have decisively affected the decision of VC authorities either to select and train a man for promotion to cadre rank or to exclude him from it.

It might be thought that the cadres, prior to joining the VC, possessed some above-average awareness of Front doctrine and aims which would have predisposed the VC to select them for further indoctrination. Again, however, the evidence does not point convincingly in that direction. Thirty-six of 56 cadres evinced familiarity with Front aims. But very few of those 36 seemed deeply conscious of, and hence motivated to join the VC because of, the Front Program.\* Like ordinary soldiers, the men who later became cadres had usually joined for reasons unconnected with an allegiance to or specific knowledge of the Front's socio-economic and political platforms. Interviewees who expressed or implied such an allegiance more often spoke of their attraction to the larger Front goals of peace, democracy, reunification,

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\*The disproportion of ralliers to prisoners in the sample should be recalled in this connection. Some ralliers may have purposely denied belief in Front aims as the basis for their decision to join. On the other hand, the conclusions drawn in this paragraph are based as much on ralliers' comments about the Front program as on their responses to direct questions concerning their motivations for joining the VC.

anti-imperialism, and anticolonialism. As we shall attempt to make clearer subsequently, this lack of political awareness,<sup>\*</sup> which belies the traditional conception of a politically highly motivated cadre system, was generally characteristic of the lower-level cadres long after they underwent advanced training

Without necessarily being fully aware of or dedicated to Front aims, an overwhelming majority (54 of 62) of the cadres entered the VC ranks voluntarily. Escape from GVN induction or arrest, desire for adventure, a sense of obligation to perform military service, and hatred of local officials -- in most cases motivations seized upon and channeled into pro-VC attitudes by local Communist recruiters -- were among the many reasons cited by these volunteers. Cadres who volunteered for service apparently enjoyed higher consideration for top leadership posts than their drafted comrades. Of the eight men who said they had been coerced, verbally or forcibly, into joining, only one advanced beyond the rank of squad leader.

The relative emphasis on education and voluntary enlistment over such other considerations as class, status of home village, and initial political awareness may indicate that VC leaders, in looking over new recruits, were more interested in ability, enthusiasm, and maturity than in ideological motivation. The important qualification

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\*"Lack of political awareness" is, however, in no way meant to imply cadres' denigration of the operational supremacy of political over military considerations. As will be observed again later, cadres clearly recognized and accepted Party leadership of the army.

that must be introduced here, however, is that these considerations, while certainly bearing on a recruit's selection or rejection for cadre status, were apparently not determinative; rather, as is about to be discussed, the VC leadership seemed most interested in those practical qualities of attitude and conduct that could make a man into an effective cadre and perhaps groom him for a high-level position.

## 2. THE SELECTION PROCESS

As has just been suggested, the selection of recruits for training and promotion to main and local force officer positions rests, to a far greater extent than seems to be the case for cadres at the village level, on above-average qualities of attitude and performance in the unit. In VC jargon, a man must possess both talent and virtue to aspire to cadre rank -- he must combine the talent to fight with the virtues of calmness and endurance under stress. One platoon leader and party member spoke of talent and virtue in these terms:

A person of talent is a person who fights with enthusiasm, who participates in dangerous and challenging activities, who has initiative in war tactics, who can devise and improvise many schemes and plans to beat the enemy, etc., with the minimum of losses for his own unit. In one word, talent means principally the talent to fight the war. Virtue on the other hand means that a person...must show proof of moderation, endurance, etc.

Another cadre, who had been an acting company commander put more emphasis on talent:

anti-imperialism, and anticolonialism. As we shall attempt to make clearer subsequently, this lack of political awareness,\* which belies the traditional conception of a politically highly motivated cadre system, was generally characteristic of the lower-level cadres long after they underwent advanced training

Without necessarily being fully aware of or dedicated to Front aims, an overwhelming majority (54 of 62) of the cadres entered the VC ranks voluntarily. Escape from GVN induction or arrest, desire for adventure, a sense of obligation to perform military service, and hatred of local officials -- in most cases motivations seized upon and channeled into pro-VC attitudes by local Communist recruiters -- were among the many reasons cited by these volunteers. Cadres who volunteered for service apparently enjoyed higher consideration for top leadership posts than their drafted comrades. Of the eight men who said they had been coerced, verbally or forcibly, into joining, only one advanced beyond the rank of squad leader.

The relative emphasis on education and voluntary enlistment over such other considerations as class, status of home village, and initial political awareness may indicate that VC leaders, in looking over new recruits, were more interested in ability, enthusiasm, and maturity than in ideological motivation. The important qualification

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\*"Lack of political awareness" is, however, in no way meant to imply cadres' denigration of the operational supremacy of political over military considerations. As will be observed again later, cadres clearly recognized and accepted Party leadership of the army.

that must be introduced here, however, is that these considerations, while certainly bearing on a recruit's selection or rejection for cadre status, were apparently not determinative; rather, as is about to be discussed, the VC leadership seemed most interested in those practical qualities of attitude and conduct that could make a man into an effective cadre and perhaps groom him for a high-level position.

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Another cadre, who had been an acting company commander put more emphasis on talent:

In the revolution if you want to become a cadre you not only have to be talented, you have to be virtuous as well. Talents alone don't help you to become a cadre, nor do virtues....A good educational background can't guarantee you a cadre position either....The Front's motto is "You reach maturity in fighting, you reach maturity in smoke and fire." If you want to become a cadre you have to pass through a testing period which includes the sacrifice of your own life. If you pass through that period you may aspire to become a cadre.

While former cadres might naturally be expected to extol their own merits, there seems to be considerable significance in what they say about talent and virtue. In part, talent is a reflection of high morale -- that state of mind which accepts the war situation by suppressing an initial fear of death; virtue indicates confidence-inspiring behavior -- the ability to impart to one's subordinates the same high morale which a cadre himself is expected to reflect as the result of faith in the Front, the Party, and himself. Noteworthy is the fact that both cadres quoted above, who left the VC during the late summer of 1966, placed greater stress on talent, a sign -- supported by other indicators which will be mentioned later -- that the increased intensity of the war has caused the VC to look primarily to effective fighters for leadership assignments.\*

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\* Thus, the platoon leader just mentioned added to his comment: "In the present phase of the war it is essential to have talent first; but that doesn't mean that virtue can be overlooked."

### 3. THE TRAINING PROCESS

The training process for VC recruits seeking promotion to military cadre positions can be the most crucial phase of their careers. Having received limited formal military training and frequently no political training when they first entered their MF or LF units,\* aspirant-cadres often found that the training which they underwent prior to promotion was the first thorough-going and sustained military-political education they ever experienced. Yet in training as in the selection process, particularly during 1966, military expertise seemed to weigh most heavily when an appraisal was made by the training authorities of the trainees' qualifications for cadre status.

An interesting observation on the vital importance of the training process and the emphasis on the military side of it comes from the North Vietnamese. A team of staff members of the NVA newspaper, Quân Đội Nhân Dân (People's Army), after surveying various units in training, concluded:

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\*Of the 37 cadres who provided information on the content of their first training period (i.e., prior to their having become cadres), 19 underwent military training only, 9 political only, 8 both military and political in differing proportions, and 1 a combined military-cultural course. The length of these courses, as indicated in the Appendix, varied considerably in accordance with the intensity of the fighting in the training area and the needs of the MF or LF unit to which they were assigned. In the majority of cases, though, training tended to be superficial; cadres frequently commented that their only real training upon joining the VC derived from actual combat experience.

Although the progressive changes in fighting were rather complex, they always reflected the results achieved in training and the cadres' and fighters' behavior in leadership and fighting. A unit which is lackluster and sloppy in training will not be able to fight well in a real battle. Cadres and fighters who ordinarily cannot carry out an order will be much worse in a real battle, for it will be more difficult and more demanding. All these things depend heavily upon the cadres' way of carrying out their responsibilities.

That the Front shares the same opinion was borne out by its policy of sending cadre-aspirants and all full cadres to specialized training courses as a prerequisite to advancement from one rank to the next. With each planned promotion, the aspirant was sent to a central training school, although important exceptions were apparently made when vacancies caused by deaths in battle created an immediate need which could not await the results of formal training. The actual time consumed in training courses undergone by the cadres in our sample varied considerably, not only from one rank to the next, but also within the same rank. These differences reflected in part the interruption of courses by U.S.-GVN attacks (which accounted for the brief one-month courses of some cadres) but they also manifested the lack of uniformity in the training process itself.

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\* Van Uyen and Le Thu, "How is Military Behavior Formed?" Quân Đội Nhân Dân (Hanoi), September 21-23, 1966, in JPRS, Translations on North Vietnam, No. 64, November 18, 1966, p. 25.

Most relevant to the manner in which cadres performed in their new positions were the character and content of the training program. Much like the ordinary soldier, a new cadre followed a course designed to do more than heighten his military technique and sharpen his political awareness. There was, in addition, a determined effort to control the conduct and thoughts of the aspirant so as to ensure his commitment to his work on and off the battlefield. Politically, such control took the form of attendance of Party member aspirants at special Party chapter meetings headed by an executive committee under the training school's political officer. As in the regular units, party cells enforced discipline and weeded out undesirable elements. Non-Party cadre aspirants, including Youth Group members, were obligated to attend other meetings chaired by a Party-member secretary. Militarily, candidates were closely scrutinized as they underwent specialized training, which ranged from reconnaissance and sapper (demolition) work to artillery and anti-aircraft training. Candidates were subsequently graded on their performance in both areas.

What distinguished the cadre training program from that of the new recruit was basic to the distinction between cadres and ordinary soldiers themselves: The program for cadres sought to perpetuate a commitment already made, however infirm, whereas the program for the new recruits was designed to introduce men to a novel environment. The former either reinforced (politically) or expanded (militarily) upon previous training, while the latter dealt with general military and (although not

always) political instruction. Finally, and more broadly, the former strove to deepen a zeal initially manifested in combat; the latter hoped to inspire an enthusiasm that may not have existed previously. The various control devices apparent in the first training session to which new recruits were shuttled were quite different for cadres, the aim being not close physical control to prevent desertions, but specific mental and manual courses to discover "talent and virtue."

The training of cadres, as reflected in the interviews, encountered two major difficulties. First, because of the pressures of war, priority had to be given to military training at the expense of political indoctrination. Furthermore, the latter, for one reason or another, often failed to capture the cadre's interest. Low-level cadres in particular -- leaders and deputy leaders of platoons and squads -- confessed their inattentiveness to indoctrination, as in the case of a platoon leader who said: "I studied about the rich and the poor classes, and how to die a worthy death. Political training sessions in the Front really gave us a headache and even drove some crazy. I couldn't stand them." A remark of a somewhat different nature was voiced by a deputy platoon leader who, like many cadres in other units, found difficulty in recalling what he had learned in indoctrination sessions. "I think there were twenty-one lessons altogether -- but I don't remember the details. I recall vaguely that in those lessons they told us that the army formed by the people had to sacrifice for the defense of the people." This lack of interest among

lower-level cadres in political matters, it might be noted, was in keeping with the generally nonideological motivations behind a future cadre's initial decision to join the VC.\*

A second difficulty was the deterioration in the quality of cadres available. For this, the changing military situation was undoubtedly responsible. As the attrition rate among VC cadres increased, the time available for training new cadres shortened. One regroupee, an acting platoon leader, noticed that the quality of cadres declined during 1965 and 1966 under the impact of heavier fighting. He said:

The quality of the cadres in the regiment is not as high as it used to be. A lot of good cadres had died over the years, and they were replaced by cadres from lower levels. For example, if a company cadre was killed in action, a platoon cadre would be promoted to take his place. As this platoon cadre didn't go through a special training course for company cadres, he would be less competent than his predecessor. A few years ago, all the platoon cadres were regroupees who had had training and experience. Right now (March 1966), all the platoon cadres are Southerners who joined the Front in 1963 and 1964. In 1965 and 1966 none of the new cadres had any formal training.

A main force instructor for a platoon cadre training school, cited earlier, echoed this assessment when he observed

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\*For similar comments, see W. P. Davison and J. J. Zasloff, A Profile of Viet Cong Cadres, The RAND Corporation, RM-4983-1-ISA/ARPA, June 1966, pp. 21-22.

that, toward the end of his three-year assignment (January 1966), the quality of the trainees declined because they were recently promoted cadres with less experience and less education than previous aspirants. He went on to say that discipline had to be strengthened in order to compensate for the trainees' lower political level.

It may be more than coincidental that the two informants just mentioned were platoon leaders. As we shall attempt to bring out below, the platoon leader may represent the career mid-point between the younger, less experienced squad-level cadres and the older, more ideologically or militarily committed company and battalion officers. For as several cadres of all levels indicated, a sharp distinction could be drawn between the older and younger revolutionaries. The older cadres were for the most part beyond any need for ideological remolding. Having been through thick and thin with the Party over many years, they were not likely to question their long-term commitment to the Front. The newer cadres, represented most clearly by the squad-level cadres having two to three years of service, had not yet -- in the words of one former VC medic -- "come face-to-face with social [military] realities, and they do not have much practical experience." Between these extremes was the platoon cadre who, while young in years, had already endured four to five years of war's hardships and had become committed (by careerist ambitions or by lack of suitable alternatives) to the Front. But before proceeding to reinforce this hint at a cadre typology, we

should investigate a third influence upon cadre behavior, the promotion process.

#### 4. THE PROMOTION PROCESS

Whereas the selection and training processes are designed to obtain new inputs for the cadre system, the promotion process is intended, at least in part, to reward cadres for services rendered. Simultaneously, promotion to ranks above assistant squad leader may also aim at sustaining a cadre's involvement in the Front, pressuring cadres of the same or next highest level to perform more enthusiastically, and, of course, placing the most capable individuals in leadership positions. In this section, we shall examine the qualifications considered by the VC for promoting cadres, the tensions that have arisen over the promotion system, and the serviceability of the promotion process to the VC command.

Battle experience and, at middle and high levels, Party membership are the two main criteria used by the VC in deciding whether or not to promote a cadre. And of the two, the former seems the more important. As early as October 1965, according to a defector from the 514th Battalion, attendance at special training courses was no longer the prerequisite to promotion. He cited the case of three friends who, after two well-fought battles, were made squad leaders though they had previously been jailed for desertion. This emphasis on battle performance is further substantiated in a captured document which carries a complete listing of all the members of an independent Dinh Tuong company.

The distinguishing characteristic of the twenty cadres in the 66-man unit was neither Party membership (only four were admitted) nor educational level; rather, the cadres were the only soldiers to have undergone advanced training and to have participated in at least one major battle. As between platoon and squad cadres in the company, combat experience and overall length of service were likewise the marks of distinction.\*

But capability alone, as in any organization, can only carry one so far. In the VC, where cadres are not necessarily Party members, ascendancy into the middle and upper ranks is best guaranteed by Party membership. As a platoon leader phrased it in commenting on "everybody's" desire to join the Party, membership was "an honor, you are known everywhere....Party membership confers...the right of leadership, the right to know the secrets in advance, and fast promotions." Being a Youth Group member was insufficient because only full Party members were privy to unit plans and Party secrets. Belonging to the Party provided one not only with a better grip on the unit's activities, but also with the key to a successful military career.\*\*

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\* Additionally, an assistant company commander in Kien Phong Province noted that the promotion of cadres in 1966 was based on the "cadre's struggle spirit" rather than on "cultural criteria."

\*\* Nearly 77 percent of all the cadres in our sample were members of the Party or on the road to membership. Thirty-two were full members, five were probates, and nine were with the Labor Youth Group. Only fourteen cadres did not belong to the Party; significantly, nine of them never rose above the rank of squad leader, although one did become a deputy company commander.

Personal relationships, as in the selection process, naturally played their role here too. For aspirants to positions below company level, promotion required good reports from all superior officers through battalion commander; for company and battalion cadres seeking advancement, the provincial or regional commanders sat in judgment. While evidence on the precise influence of personal relationships is slim, they may have been relevant to promotions, although we cannot assess their importance relative to combat capabilities. What is clear is that the failure to obtain a promotion, a matter to which we shall return in a later chapter, constituted an important motivation for cadres to desert or defect.

The importance that cadres attach to promotion is further suggested by the annoyance expressed by several Southerners in our sample at the way in which regroupees and, in a few instances, Northern infiltrators had come South and immediately been given high cadre positions. While almost all cadres who joined the VC after 1954 (the so-called "new" cadres) admitted that the regroupees and Northerners in their units were better trained and educated, they strongly resented the infiltrators' air of superiority. Local cadres were also disgruntled by the fact that they had been making sacrifices over a period of years when regroupees and Northerners were living comfortably in the DRV. As a civilian provincial official responsible for intra-unit cadre relations said: "...the Winter [Southern] cadres often despise the Autumn [regroupee] cadres because they [the former] have fought for over ten years in the South in hardships and now the

Autumn cadres who had lived in peace for a long time in the North come to be their leaders. The Autumn cadres are confident in the education, training and knowledge they'd obtained so they encroached upon the Winter cadres...." An assistant platoon leader found the situation in his MF unit in IV Corps much more serious. He described the regroupee-local Southerner conflict over promotions as a "struggle for position." But what is necessary to point out is that, like so many other cadres who reported on promotion-based conflicts, he was quick to observe the distinction between personal disputes and impersonal common attitudes toward the Front. Neither group, this cadre found, was affected in its work by promotional considerations: "The regroupees were enthusiastic and firmly believed in the Front; the cadres in the South had the same attitude, at least in appearance." Whenever differences over assignments reached serious proportions, we are told by a former LF company commander, the kiem-thao (criticism) sessions ironed them out.\*

For the VC commanders, promotions, while inevitably involving frictions between individuals, are one more in a long list of useful control devices to enhance unit and cadre cohesion. While the data available on the time gaps between promotions are too fragmentary to permit

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\* The VC policy of "reduction of administrative personnel" (gian-chinh), which in part has involved the shifting of civilian cadres into military command positions, has undoubtedly also led to vexation among career military personnel. However, our sample contains no remarks directed specifically at this policy and any disruptions it might have caused among cadres.

firm conclusions, the impression gained from cadres' remarks is that promotions were used by the VC leadership not simply to reward faithful service, but equally to retain the loyalties of cadres, to give them a vested interest in the Front, and to increase their responsibilities and liabilities to their superiors and the recruits under them. It is of some interest that two cadres in our sample (one an LF squad leader, the other an MF squad leader) felt they had been promoted simply to insure their greater dedication to the Front. Said the former: "In my opinion they promoted me to the rank of squad leader because they feared that I would be discouraged and not because of any exploits, because we had lost all three battles to the GVN."\*

5. SOME CADRE 'MODELS'\*\*

Thus far we have sought to underscore the significance attached by the VC military and Party commanders to combat experience and ability in the selection, training, and promotion of cadres. Such factors as Party membership, personal relationships, individual personalities, and certain background characteristics were

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\* Such interesting questions as how widespread the practice of promotion to offset frustrations might be, or whether advancement procedures have quickened during 1966, are not answerable from the data this writer has seen.

\*\* For a different but highly useful presentation of cadre "models," cf., D.W.P. Elliott and C.A.H. Thomson, A Look at the VC Cadres: Dinh Tuong Province, 1965-1966, The RAND Corporation, RM-5115-1-ISA/ARPA, March 1967.

important, but apparently less so than combat capabilities. Yet to judge VC cadres strictly in terms of battle proficiency would not be altogether adequate, primarily because proficiency is not always an accurate indicator of commitment. The extent to which proficiency and commitment interact, it is suggested, may provide the most useful measure for distinguishing one cadre from another as we attempt to construct, on an admittedly impressionistic basis, some cadre "models."\*

Moving, then, beyond combat capability, we can speak of two main groups of cadres: the "drivers" and the "practitioners." Moreover, within each of these main groupings were two subgroups: in the former, the "careerists" and the "devotees"; in the latter, the "implementers" and the "worker-cadres." Military rank was closely but not invariably related to these basically functional classifications.

Drivers is the term chosen to identify those cadres of all ranks (but mainly the high echelons) whose state of mind became conditioned to long-term struggle in strict accordance with the stated objectives of the VC command at any given moment. Older, well-trained, well-indoctrinated, frequently former Viet Minh regroupees or

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\*The purpose of presenting some hypothetical models is merely to project something of the flavor of cadres' distinguishing characteristics. The narrow definitions presented should, of course, be approached with caution inasmuch as they posit the existence of "typical" cadres and implicitly reject individuals who may well embody yet other "types."

Northern infiltrators, they formed the hard core of military and political professionals whose dedication to service and devotion to the Front are beyond question. The careerists among them were more "expert" than "red" (to borrow from the Chinese Communists' lexicon); they were the cadres who considered warfare their special skill and the Viet Cong cause their lifetime work. War was to them a military exercise requiring rigid preparation, mental as well as physical. The gravest sin was failure to fulfill the mission, a failure that could only be attributed to incompetence somewhere down the line, to a breakdown in the control-surveillance system, the training regimen, or the frontline leadership. Promotions in military rank were of especial importance to the careerists as compensation for faithful service -- and only a severe personal crisis, such as the conviction of having been unfairly dealt with regarding a promotion or other privilege of rank, could have compelled them to reassess their commitment to the VC.

Quite different from the careerists, and hence occasionally in conflict with them, were the devotees, the "red" ideologues whose frame of reference was "the cause," not the battle. War to them was not primarily a military struggle but a deep-seated political contest aimed at the achievement of broad political goals (peace, unification, independence, freedom, etc.). Their belief in the justness of the Front's cause was no less than that of the careerists; but their devotion was grounded in unshakable doctrinal faith rather than in career opportunities geared to military successes. Hence, their

belief in, obedience to, and sense of self-importance over membership in the Party, whose directives they were primarily responsible for carrying out, can be detected in their responses. So ingrained was their commitment, by virtue usually of long-time involvement in the Communist movement, that only some dramatic personal crisis, such as being purged from the Party or being unjustly criticized and punished by higher Party officials, could have turned these devotees against the Front.

As is evident from the distribution of cadres by rank in the sample, we are pre-eminently concerned with the lower half of the cadre system, that is, with the platoon and squad cadres who comprise about 70 percent of all our respondents. These so-called practitioners, who were responsible for implementing the directives of the driver cadres, are local Southerners who performed well enough to earn appointment to cadre rank but who, having entered the Front relatively recently (usually from 1960 on), did not experience the same lengthy "trial by fire" as the older revolutionaries above them. The implementers among them (most readily identifiable as the platoon leader and his deputy) were middlemen between the doctrinaire or military professionals above and the low-level cadres and ordinary soldiers below. Probably more than any other cadre group, the implementers were in the best position to grapple with, and also to be convulsed by, the twin pressures of Party-army demands and the realities of military life which they, no less than those below them, daily had to confront. This having been the case, implementers conceived of themselves

as primarily obligated to get the job done; theory was important to them not for its own sake, but as a guide to practical action.

The squad-level or worker cadres responsible to the implementers lived closest to the real world of the soldier; it was only natural that these lowest-ranking cadres should have been more subject than their superiors to the fluctuating fortunes of day-to-day army life. Having been in charge of a small group of men (usually nine to twelve), the worker cadres were more likely than higher-level cadres to be affected by incidents of war -- intensified bombings and shellings, forced marches, low-quality food, high casualties, defeat, etc. What we are saying, then, is that if any cadre group of the four here defined was susceptible to the kinds of pressures which could produce "wavering thoughts," that group would have been the worker cadres.\*

To sum up, the ideal Vietnamese Communist cadres capable of creatively applying theory to the practical conditions of politico-military activities within the unit were most often the drivers. By the nature of their usually high-ranking position, they were least likely to be directly influenced by the fortunes of war. The value they attached to theory and practice, born in no small measure of their long-standing connection with the Front or Viet Minh and of repeated training, does not seem to

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\*The different reasons why members of each group have defected or deserted their units is taken up in Section VII.

have been shared by the entire cadre substructure, for to judge from the backgrounds and testimonies of the cadres (in particular the workers) in our hands, the political theory phase of training lost relevance under the exigencies of actual combat.\* Having in most instances entered the movement late, having participated in few in-depth training courses, and having made no distinguished records for themselves as revolutionaries, the lower-level cadres had to be -- and were -- selected, trained, and eventually promoted on the basis of objective performance and identifiable "positive" attitudes. Practical deeds, ardor, fearlessness (even if dissembled), and clear-headedness were the hallmarks of these cadres rather than a firm grounding in Marxism-Leninism. Yet these cadres, while more effective in the military than the political realm, did perform important functions in both by virtue of the Party's leading role in the army. In the following two sections, the separate impacts of Party and army on the cadre, and his various roles under the authority of each, will be discussed.

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\*The possible growth of military over other criteria in the selection of Party members is touched on in the next Section.

#### IV. CADRES AND THE PARTY

In the armed forces of every Communist-led movement, the Party plays the directing role. For General Giap, Party leadership stems from the fact that the Party created the army. And since the army is the Party's instrument, "political work in its ranks is of the first importance. It is the soul of the army."\* For the Viet Cong as for the NVA, the Party ranks as the guide to action. Exercised through an intricate machinery (see the organization table in this section), Party control over the army is exceedingly tight and, we have reason to believe, highly effective in implementing Party decisions, achieving the full cooperation of military cadres, and overseeing the work of non-Party cadres through the military substructure. The political apparatus centers in the Party Committee of COSVN and extends into the military units through the regional, provincial, and district Party committees; here, we are concerned only with the Party-army interrelationship in the main and local forces, particularly as it affects the cadres. Only by being aware of the Party's dominant place in the military units can we fully appreciate the cadre's role as an instrument of Party control in the performance of his military tasks.

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\*Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War People's Army: The Viet Cong Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries Praeger, New York, 1962, p. 55. Emphasis is Giap's.

1. THE PARTY'S PRIMACY

Aside from receiving, disseminating, and implementing Party directives from higher agencies, the Party Committee, which is the highest political authority in a regular military unit, works through its chapters (in a battalion, the company-level branches) to direct every aspect of the unit's performance. The chief operative element is what Giap has called "the principle of collective leadership," with the "Party Committee taking the lead, and the commander allotting the work coupled with the regime of political commissar..."\* A senior lieutenant (regroupee) who, prior to his capture in October 1966, worked as an Assistant for Operations and Training in Phuoc Long Province, provides expert testimony on the Front's operation of the system described by Giap:

In general, the Party Committee Secretary or Battalion Political Officer could decide everything in the Battalion. If the matter was very important the Party Committee Secretary would request an opinion from higher Party Headquarters. Even in the military domain, the final resolutions for combat were also made by the Battalion Political Officer. In comparison with the Battalion Commander [who ranks third in a battalion's Party structure], the Battalion Political Officer had more authority than the former in the Party, because the Political Officer was a Party Committee Secretary, while the Battalion Commander was only a Party Committee member.

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\* Ibid., p. 120.

And a captured "resolution" of unknown authorship directed that Party committees in main force units throughout South Vietnam

are in charge of the leadership of their units in every field and enjoy the same rights as a Party Committee echelon [of the region, province, or district]. All important decisions must be discussed and approved by the Party Committee before the military and political commanders in charge may execute them. In case of emergency, when immediate decisions must be taken, the commanders may take appropriate measures and must be responsible to the Party Committee.

While room is therefore left for military and political cadres to exercise some initiative in extraordinary circumstances, the Party Committee rules supreme in decision-making and decision-judging, either as the leading authority within a unit (in the case of main force battalions)\* or above a unit (in the case of local force battalions or independent local force companies, whose commanders

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\*A company commander who rallied in November 1966 reported, however, on a new organizational device set up nearly a year earlier to control that unit's time, place, and tactics of attack. Called the Section for Intensification of the War (Ban Doc Chien), it consisted of military and political cadres from the regimental, battalion, and company levels. By studying and then moving together from one target to the next, the Section apparently was designed to keep Bn. 261, a leading MF unit of the delta, informed in advance of its assignments so that it could fight frequently "in order to set the good example for the battalions that were newly formed or formed after it." In keeping with Party primacy, according to our informant, the regiment political officer and battalion political officers, as heads of the Section's Party organization, were the Section leaders.

are responsible to and may be members of province or district military affairs committees).

It might be imagined that the concentration of military power in the hands of political commandants would raise the potentiality for conflict between military and Party cadres of equivalent levels (the battalion, company, or platoon). Yet no cadre mentioned any clashes between the two groups over jurisdiction or responsibility for decisions. If such conflicts occurred, they went unreported and were apparently settled quietly, in itself a tribute to the high-level VC control system, which could mute clashes that might have undermined the unit's entire leadership structure. In general, the similarities of background and experience (including training) of military cadres of the same level have led to their acceptance of the principle that political considerations, as determined by a unit's leading Party cadres, are primary in the carrying out of military tasks.\*

The Party's role as the leading organ of the National Liberation Front was not a subject of intense interest for cadres who acknowledged the Party as the source of supreme authority. Without exception, every cadre in our sample believed that the Party in question was closely linked to the Lao Dong in the North, that the Party's public image as one component of a multistrata

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\* See M. E. Anderson, M. E. Arnsten, and H. Averch, Insurgent Organization and Operations: A Case Study of the Viet Cong in the Delta, 1964-1966 The RAND Corporation, RM-5239-1-ISA/ARPA, August 1967, p. 44.

united front was a facade, that the People's Revolutionary Party was a communist party, and that the people who composed its leadership had good reason to remain anonymous (Ngyuen Huu Tho aside) because of the secretive nature of the organization. To cite one of many examples, a deputy company commander said he realized soon after he joined that the Front existed by fiat of the DRV and that the PRP was "merely a wing of the Northern Communist Party. Some party-member cadres told me that when a large area of the country is liberated, the Front will be dissolved to give way to another body with another name." Cadres were far more knowledgeable about the Front's avowed aims -- anti-imperialism, peace, the ousting of foreign influence, and reunification -- than about questions that have attracted foreign interest, such as the nature of the Front leadership and the extent of Front control from Hanoi. Cadres, particularly at the middle strata, were evidently convinced by the training they received that obedience to the Party did not require a personal knowledge of its leadership and structure; that, indeed, these details were matters of the strictest secrecy.

## 2. ADMISSION TO THE PARTY RANKS

Lack of knowledge concerning the Party they served hardly prevented most cadres from strongly desiring to become members. In the Viet Cong, cadre status does not automatically qualify a man for Party membership.\* To

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\* Anderson, Arnsten, and Averch have examined the question of Party membership in military units. Looking at five VC main and local force units that operated in

be a Party member requires qualities of leadership and background beyond those necessary for promotion within the military sphere of Front life. Consequently, a person doesn't simply join the Party; he is admitted, ideally after careful scrutiny of his background, achievements, character, and capabilities.\* To have been selected for

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VC Military Region 5 (all of I Corps and most of II Corps) between 1964 and 1966, they found that Party membership varied from 12 to 21 percent, which compared with 27 percent for all Liberation Army forces in Western Nam Bo (mainly the western sector of III Corps) during 1963. (See their Insurgent Organization and Operations, Tables 2 and 3, p. 22.) As they further indicate, all of the high-ranking cadres in military units must be Party members. This would account for Giap's statement (People's War People's Army, p. 56) that over 90 percent of all NVA officers were Party members (in 1959).

\*Some cadres expressed the belief that, in the past year, new Party members, like (as suggested in the previous section) new cadres, were selected with too much attention to military capability. For example, a deputy company commander in Kien Phong found that the standards for Party members were "not as high as a few years ago [he rallied in January 1966]. More attention has been paid to the men's combat record than to their morale and virtue. Most of them no longer have the proper manner for cadres..." Other cadres, when asked what qualified them for admission to the Party, indicated that performance in combat had been the primary consideration.

Of related interest is the report of a former assistant director of a training school in Tay Ninh (III Corps) for squad and platoon cadres who hoped to become political officers. The informant, himself a political officer with the rank of first lieutenant, said that as late as January 1967 his school's course consisted of three months of military and only one month of political training -- a striking illustration of the primacy given battlefield expertise over indoctrination by the VC in the delta.

Party membership, according to most of the cadres who went through the experience, was a great honor:<sup>\*</sup> Membership represented the right to attend Party meetings, to be privy to Party secrets and the decisions that affect the unit, to enjoy a certain power and prestige, and (for some) to obtain a guarantee of above-normal comfort once the Front was victorious. Very few cadres spoke of material benefits, past or future, as having attracted them to the Party. And only one rejected an offer to join (the Labor Youth Group) -- he felt that membership would have imposed too many leadership responsibilities, the most important of which was that he always had to be at the forefront of the battle. One platoon leader's comments are especially interesting, not only because they are typical, but also because of the light they shed on the meaning of becoming a Party member. Although he "had not asked to join the Party," he "didn't dare to refuse" when designated for admission by his cadres.<sup>\*\*</sup> Yet he did not lightly regard his new status:

I had no material interest, but it was an honor to be a member of the Party. A cadre who is a Party member is much better considered than a simple cadre. He has more authority than the latter and has the right to discuss the Front's affairs at meetings.

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\* For additional comments on the privileges that go with Party membership, see Davison and Zasloff, A Profile of Viet Cong Cadres, pp. 18-19.

\*\* This man's experience may be indicative of C. A. H. Thomson's finding that, in some parts of South Vietnam, cadres are given quotas for recruiting new Party members.

Admission to the Party could be approached from two different directions. Preferably for the VC authorities, a new member would come up the ladder from the so-called "People's Revolutionary Youth Group" (or, simply, Labor Youth or the Group), whose own membership was open to fighters in the 16-27 age bracket. The Group, which had its own infrastructure to parallel that of the Party, would not require a probationary period, but would serve as a proving ground for prospective Party cadres. Having been a Group member meant that a young soldier was already well-indoctrinated and loyal; his probationary period before full admission tended to be brief. On the other hand, for non-Group aspirants, great weight was placed on class background: the probationary period extended from three months for workers to nine months for farmers in moderate circumstances and two years for wealthy farmers or landlords. In addition, a candidate had to be sponsored by two Party members each of whom had been in the Party for at least a year.

It is important to emphasize here the meaning of a soldier's acceptance into the Party or Group. Whether a man was a military cadre or not, his admission acted to increase enormously his commitment to the unit and to the Front as a whole. Basically, Party or Group membership may be seen as yet another control device, one that operates in two ways. First, membership further subordinates the initiate, already under military authority, to the more rigorous discipline of the Party, thereby consolidating the Front's hold on his thoughts and actions. Second, membership acts through the recruit to heighten

control, surveillance, and discipline within the subunit to which the recruit belongs. The presence of a Party man, according to interviewed fighters, invariably strengthened discipline, either because the men knew they were being spied upon or because they admired and wished to emulate the Party member. Some fighters conceded that men admitted to the Party quickly became more enthusiastic, performed better on and off the field than the other troops, and possessed enviable privileges and prestige.

### 3. FUNCTIONS OF THE PARTY MEMBER

Once admitted to full Party status, a cadre immediately took on additional responsibilities. At his platoon cell meeting or at higher level Party get-togethers, he was instructed not only on the importance of Party Committee leadership and plans, but also on his role in "the education [of the troops], and how to raise the men's tactical and technical level." And, according to a veteran battalion chief of staff, cadres were also criticized for any faults of personal behavior or leadership. Mistakes that the cadre committed but which were overlooked during his unit's regular kiem-thao sessions might be uncovered at the Party meeting, which in this sense acted to check and balance his behavior.

The party meetings aimed directly at instilling in the cadres the spirit of sacrifice. Particularly on the battlefield, Party members were supposed to take the lead in assaults. "During combat," said a platoon leader in Vinh Binh, "it was the Party members who led the fight. They were the ones

who were willing to risk their lives to destroy the enemy's firepower. Thus the performance of a unit depended a lot on the number of Party members in it." And a regroupee assistant platoon leader who operated in Zone D put the matter similarly: "The Party members were supposed to set an example for others. We had to be the first to volunteer to do a hard job." The unusual dedication of Party members prompted one deputy company commander, a non-Party regroupee, to comment bitterly:

They [the Party members] were a bunch of brain-washed creatures. If the Party told them to die, they would die. To them the Party was above everything else. They were robots who only did what the Party commanded them to do. They had no brains of their own, and no feelings....

In addition to functioning as a leader in battle, the Party member-cadre was also frequently assigned the duty of keeping specific non-Party individuals within his unit under surveillance. At the behest of either the cell leader or the Party Secretary, the cadre might be responsible for one to five soldiers, but he was also directed to keep an eye on all non-Party people in his unit.\* A senior lieutenant said that the men knew they were being watched, sometimes resented it, but became resigned to it. Most important for the VC was that surveillance, which extended down to the squad level, resulted in fewer

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\*The Party control structure evidently varies as between main and local force units. In the latter, where dispersal rather than concentration is the rule and where the men operate in their native area, political cadres are required at the platoon level (company level in the MF) to satisfy greater need for control.

desertions, the settlement of quarrels, and tighter unit organization and discipline. It also caused the cadres to fear the Party meetings once they became the objects of criticism.\*

Surveillance was also keyed to provoking non-Party cadres into keeping on their guard. In the VC, a cadre who is not a Party member may be outranked by a military subordinate belonging to the Party. The cadre not having access to Party plans about which his subordinate is aware is clearly in an awkward position. Even his military authority may be vulnerable to the criticism of his inferior. While tensions no doubt have resulted from such a relationship, it is probably also true that the non-Party cadre has been spurred on to perform his job well if only because he was under the watchful eye of other Party members above and below him in military rank.

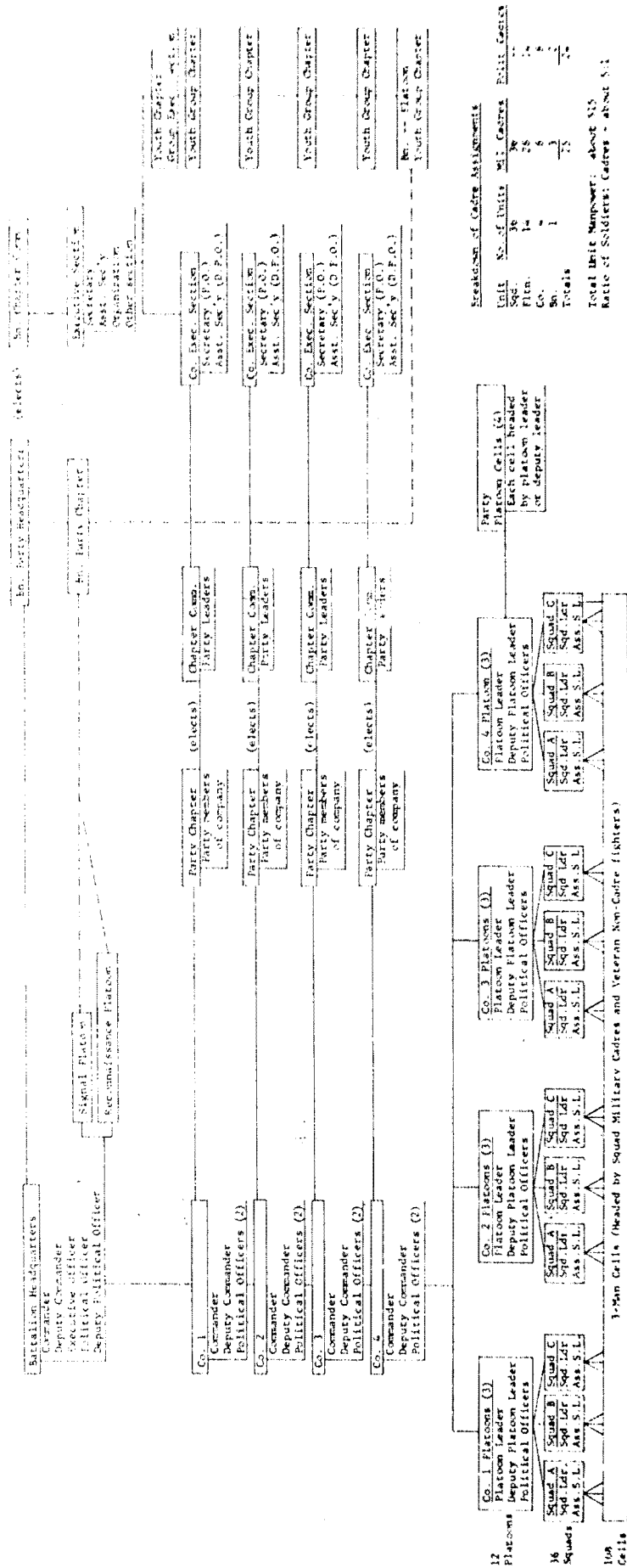
#### 4. UNIT PARTY STRUCTURE

Although the precise structure of the Party organization, including the timing of meetings, seems to have varied from one type of fighting unit to another, the framework outlined for an MF battalion on the following page may be taken as generally valid. It will be noted in the following chart that the Executive section of from nine to eleven members, headed by the battalion's political officer, in fact runs the Party's unit

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\* A Labor Youth Group assistant squad leader formerly with Bn. 514 (Dinh Tuong) recalled that "In each squad there were a number of key Party members. If anyone made a slip of the tongue, he would be reported right away and taken to the security agency...."

PARTY-ARMY ORGANIZATION AND INTERRELATIONSHIP IN A TYPICAL VIET CONG BATTALION



**Breakdown of Cadre Assignments**

Unit	No. of Units	Military Cadres	Political Cadres
Squad	36	28	74
Platoon	12	1	1
Co.	4	1	1
Totals		29	76

Total Unit Manpower: about 109  
Ratio of Soldiers: Cadres - about 5:1

organization. Under a typically hierarchical format, Party chapters, chapter committees, smaller executive sections, and special youth group chapters lead outward from the center, culminating in platoon Party cells which parallel the three-man cells in the military sphere. Every Party member belongs to at least one such organ, and every Party cadre is responsible to, if not directly associated with, a higher organ. This overriding concept of participation, which may be easily observed on the military side also, is a primary cohesive force even as it may also be an encumbrance to decision-making.

The manner in which directives of the Executive Section are to be implemented is determined in Party meetings. Cells, at least in early 1966, met once a week, under the direction of the platoon leader or his deputy, for a review of discipline, training, and all matters requiring criticism or self-criticism. On the following day or soon thereafter, the entire platoon would be convened to be advised of the unit's strengths and weaknesses, a process that involved singling out individual soldiers for praise and condemnation. Party member platoon and company cadres would subsequently meet once a month in the chapters; their reports would go before the chapter committees (headed by the company political officers), which also convened once monthly, and ultimately for review at the battalion Party level. The battalion Party Headquarters and its Executive Section would meet only at nine-month intervals to review past work, to set up new plans, and to elect another Party Committee.\*

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\*The Youth Group functioned along similar lines; its Chapter Group Executive Section, however, met weekly.

What is relevant here to cadre behavior and performance is, of course, the intricate, closely coordinated chain of command. Military cadres, whether or not Party members, had to be responsive to Party directives inasmuch as their military assignments flowed directly from Party meetings. It is not difficult to imagine why a number of cadres interviewed felt they had been taught not to fail, for failure meant criticism and perhaps punishment by Party authorities. It also meant humiliation in the eyes of non-Party members, who looked to the member as an example of self-discipline and conduct worthy of emulation in all fields of work.\* The remark by a platoon leader that "As Party members we were all expected to act rightly and never fail in our duties," whether or not the comment of a "true believer," reflected the self-importance which rigorous Party training, indoctrination, and inflexible organization had ingrained.

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\* One platoon leader told the story of a deputy company commander in his outfit who was expelled from the Party for a second offense in consorting with women. Although he retained his military rank, he was forbidden to attend Party meetings and thus to learn of advance plans for operations. He felt so ashamed of his expulsion that he asked for a transfer to another battalion, presumably where the men would not know of his purge.

V. THE VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM: FIGHTERS ON THEIR CADRES

Although interviewed soldiers were not often asked to remark on the confidence and trust they had in their cadres, sufficient responses have been obtained to justify some impressions about the ways in which fighters have reacted to their leaders. In much the same way as lower-level cadres assessed their superiors, so fighters judged their subunit cadres. As the North Vietnamese survey team cited previously found,

the saying "like cadre like fighter" was very true, for each reflects the attitude, comportment and even the language of the other. Sometimes one only needs to make a study of the cadre to arrive at a preliminary knowledge of the unit under his responsibility, and the same goes the other way, namely, by talking to the fighters we will be able to find out about the way the cadre had conducted himself....\*

Frequently in our data, fighters either implicitly or explicitly distinguished their leaders' character traits from leadership qualities. The usual response was to describe the cadre in personal terms related to the soldier's liking for or dislike of his superior. Cadres were thus depicted as "kind to the troops" or too strict, egalitarian or condescending, fun-loving or aloof. As in any army, superior officers were judged (but as men, not as leaders) in terms of a fighter's ability to achieve

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\* JPRS, Translations on North Vietnam, No. 64 (November 18, 1966), p. 24.

a working relationship with his superior, free from harsh criticism.\*

With notable uniformity, fighters who went beyond personal descriptions to comment on their trust of or confidence in cadres indicated genuine respect. Cadres were viewed as having earned their superior status through hard work, extensive training, and earnest devotion to duty in and out of battle.\*\* In a few instances, fighters were a bit incredulous that they had been asked whether they trusted their leaders: How could their leaders have attained cadre status unless they had proven themselves worthy of the honor? The general feeling, in short, seems to have been that while the cadre's personal conduct was subject to criticism, his right to lead was beyond question unless he happened to fail miserably during combat. The simple comment of a local force

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\*Typical was the comment of this local force soldier of an independent III Corps company: "As far as I know the cadres in my company were very nice to the fighters. They treated the fighters in a most friendly manner. I can say that most of the fighters liked their cadres. Of course, a minority disliked the cadres because the latter offended them in some way. When the fighters successfully carried out the orders, they were praised and commended, but there were those who got criticized because they didn't do their work well, and they resented being criticized."

\*\*Recalling his feelings as a fighter, a platoon leader observed that he and his comrades "all felt they [the cadres] deserved to be our leaders and we had therefore great confidence and trust in them." And: "They [the fighters] felt that the cadres must have proved themselves worthy before being appointed to the position they were holding."

fighter who thought "these cadres were talented people because they knew how to do many things" typified a commonly held notion that talent and virtue were inherent qualities of cadres.

Soldiers proved to be very critical of cadres who were ineffective leaders. In some cases, like their cadres, they resented the regroupees who, despite their political know-how, were unfamiliar with southern battle-field conditions. As reported by a platoon leader in Vinh Binh: "In reality, the fighters only admired those who had good combat records and were clever in leadership. These regroupees were so inexperienced that after a few times, the fighters refused to accept them as leaders. The men kept demanding that a Southern cadre lead the combat unit." Yet even in cases where the men adopted (or were said to have adopted) their cadres' biases, they had no choice but to accept the existence of disputes among leaders and to follow whoever gave the orders. Once in battle, the question of confidence was determined not by a cadre's origin or personality, but by his ability to get the unit through the ordeal safely and successfully. In only one case was the soldier's animosity toward his cadre so strong as to bring about his transfer to another unit. And in no case was a cadre's orders not followed. Personal feelings simply were not translated, where antagonistic, into disobedience.

The North Vietnamese opinion that fighters were sometimes no better than their cadres is, therefore, very much to the point. If a cadre proved negligent in the performance of his duties, the soldiers could hardly

be expected to do any better. And, conversely, "If the cadres believed in the revolution, the fighters would believe in the revolution too....If the revolution is to be successful there should be a communication of knowledge between the cadres and fighters. The cadres alone wouldn't be able to do much" (an acting company commander in Dinh Tuong Province). Just how a cadre "communicates" his knowledge to the fighters, as well as how the unit leadership "communicates" its desires to the cadre, is, therefore, vital to our understanding of the cadre system.

VI. THE CONSTRAINTS, DUTIES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES  
OF A LEADER

As Party members, cadres enjoyed increased power and prestige, but they were also aware of the responsibilities and controls that membership entailed. Indeed, the VC leadership, having chosen its cadres principally on the basis of combat performance, has sought to ensure the proper channeling of their skills as leaders in battle by subjecting them to the same kinds of controls which they in turn were expected to impose upon their men.

1. SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROLS

One of the cadre's main assignments is to implement the control and surveillance system upon which the VC heavily relies to effect cohesion in the ranks. Adhering to General Giap's definition of "democratic centralism" -- "inner democracy" together with firm discipline -- the VC have coupled the Party's hierarchical structure and dual command system with an omnipresent network of trusted Party and non-Party informants extending down to the cell level. Our interest here is in how the cadres were affected by and themselves carried out this discipline which Giap has said "is built upon the basis of political consciousness of the officers and men, and [whose] most important method...is education and persuasion..."\*

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\* Giap, People's War People's Army, p. 129.

Controls have been built into the cadre system, for instance, to prevent -- although clearly with less than perfect results -- inaccurate reporting by lower-level cadres on disciplinary matters affecting their subunits. Cadres were not, of course, required to report every disciplinary case. As a platoon leader said, "There were certain things in the platoon I could solve without having to refer them to the company leader. For instance, if I knew that some of the new recruits were homesick and wanted to leave, I would try to persuade them not to [leave]. If they persisted, I would have to report to the company leader." Yet a few cadres admitted to having acted as "good guys" by permitting their squads or cells greater freedom to voice opinions than was usually the rule. While these cadres may never have reported, others who abided by the VC's rules may have done so out of awareness of the controls around them. For one thing, a cadre could never be certain that his superiors didn't already know of his unit's deficiencies. More importantly, the presence of political officers at the platoon level in local force units, complementing the platoon and deputy platoon leaders, acted as constraints upon independent conduct. Third, every cadre had his deputy, and he could never be certain what the latter might think or report in the event of a breach in discipline, especially if the deputy were a careerist. Finally, unless the cadre himself were a Party member, he was always subject to scrutiny by all his Party-member subordinates and superiors, who held over him the threat of demotion in the military ranks or purge from the Party.

Criticism of cadres, both at regular kiem-thao sessions and at Party chapter meetings, constituted another form of control over conduct. Interestingly, our interviewees said that an individual's "immoral" conduct was the most frequent cause for reprimand (rarely for demotion or purge). In few cases was a cadre reported to have been criticized for poor leadership in battle; more often, he had been guilty of illicit relations with women, drinking and smoking, or using his free time to wander from camp.

Another type of control, but one about which most cadres were keenly aware, was a restriction on the flow of information. This control was not uniformly successful since a large majority of the cadres in our sample had access, though sometimes deviously, to sources other than Front news or Radio Hanoi. News and music from Radio Saigon, gossip of villagers, and occasionally broadcasts of the B.B.C. were the most common non-Communist sources. Cadres tended to form independent judgments of the veracity of all information; but, as we might expect, their judgments were almost always in keeping with the Communist line unless their own experience -- as by participation in the battle reported or contact with villagers -- indicated otherwise. Yet even where cadres were aware that Front information was palpably false, they either accepted the misinformation as a necessary component of VC psychological warfare or feared to reveal their discovery to other cadres. As leaders, they felt that biased Front or DRV news helped them in their efforts to sustain high morale and firm up confidence. As small cogs

in a massive machine, they usually attributed biased reporting to human error, for their superiors, having better knowledge of the facts, "often told us that Radio Hanoi always told the truth" (a deputy platoon leader).

Perhaps the most pervasive control over cadres was the fear induced by the system itself. The mutual surveillance among Party members and within the military, the criticism and self-criticism which cadres had to undertake, and the known biases in the information flow were all designed so that those cadres who deviated from the ground rules would either eventually be discovered or be unable to spread their dissatisfaction to others. The cadre system imposed a kind of isolation built on fear -- the fear of expressing disenchantment, of indicating to others a desire to desert, of confiding in a comrade, of opposing an order, of objecting to criticism, or of stating a hostile truth. It is hence manifest why so many of the ralliers reported that while they worked for the Front they kept their desire to escape to themselves and continued to perform ably. A deputy platoon leader and Party member summed up the feelings of many cadres when he reported a general dissatisfaction coupled with the fact that "we didn't dare say anything. We still had to pretend to be zealous in our service to the Front, but deep in our hearts we all wanted to go home." While his own dissatisfaction may well have prompted him to attribute dissatisfaction to his comrades, it is more important to recognize here that fear has acted to maintain an effective level of cadre performance.

Whatever his personal feelings, then, the cadre found it necessary to act out his assigned role with appropriate zeal. Vital to his performance was an ability to become sufficiently close to his men to assess their strengths and fallibilities, especially their frame of mind. As Giap has emphasized, and as the VC have long believed, the officer

must not only guide [the men] in their work and studies, but take an interest in their life and take into consideration their desires and initiatives....[He] must set a good example from all points of view: to show himself to be resolute, brave, to ensure discipline and internal democracy, to know how to achieve perfect unity among his men. He must behave like a chief, a leader, vis-à-vis the masses in his unit. The basis of these relations between army men and officers, like those between officers or between soldiers is solidarity in the fight, and mutual affection of brothers-in-arms, love at the same time pure \* and sublime, tested and forged in the battle....

While the officer-soldier relationship in the VC has in actuality been far from "pure and sublime," it has been conducive to the soldier's effective performance of his duties. In part this has been due to the cadres' general faith in the value of close surveillance through the criticism sessions. The same cadre who could express anger at being criticized could also admit to the sessions' effectiveness at uncovering his unit's weak points. Almost without exception, cadres voiced approval at the way in which kiem-thao sparked morale, notably following the exhaustion and self-questioning of defeat. As one deputy

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\* Ibid., pp. 57-58.

platoon leader theorized,

If there had been no self-criticism sessions, the fighters would not have followed their line and policy so closely. Because they were constantly educated during these self-criticism sessions, the fighters executed the VC policy more and more faithfully....

Another cadre, a platoon leader who had been criticized for drinking and smoking when he was a fighter, found after his promotion that the sessions were justified by their usefulness in correcting mistakes that one could not see for himself. He said he came to realize the importance of kiem-thao and even to like the idea.

The content of the criticism meetings varied a great deal from one unit to the next because each unit encountered different military and "ideological" problems. In units which had not engaged in combat, for instance, the cadres concentrated on general propaganda themes, whereas the men whose units had come under fire attended sessions on the anti-imperialist struggle and their duty to sacrifice for the revolution. Special problems, such as a noticeable increase in defections resulting from the Chieu-Hoi program, led kiem-thao agendas to be revised.\* Cadres were always particularly attentive to those individuals who failed to respond to criticism; it was then their job to have "heart-to-heart" talks with these laggards. In extreme cases,

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\* A directive of a province Party committee, captured in III Corps and dated August 5, 1966, urged unit leaders to conduct daily indoctrination sessions to "heighten the vigilance of cadre and soldiers, make them hate the Americans and puppet army...", and thereby combat recent increases in desertions and defections.

the miscreant might be denounced before the entire company and then, if necessary, dispatched to a district security section for re-education.

Quite aside from their primary role as persuaders during criticism meetings, cadres were responsible for preventing desertions. Clearly, a desertion is an indication that a cadre has performed poorly either in propagandizing his men or in ascertaining who in his unit changed his attitude toward the Front. To guard against desertions, cadres for the most part relied on the negative approach. Rather than threaten the recruits with death if they strayed from the unit, the cadres told their men that rallying or deserting would lead to arrest, torture, and probable liquidation at the hands of GVN troops. Ralliers were especially despicable, cadres said, because their morality had dropped so low that the GVN could lure them away with false promises of material gain. Thus, it appears that only persons who rallied and agreed to work for the GVN became subject to execution by the VC if caught. Since the desertion of an ordinary soldier was not likely to harm the unit, the usual punishment meted out by cadres was arrest and re-education, together with additional kiem-thao sessions for the escapee's unit. Having been taught to rely on education and persuasion, cadres generally preferred to warn their men of GVN-U.S. maltreatment of prisoners rather than threaten retaliation.\*

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\* In some units the higher cadres directed that increased desertions be counteracted by strengthening the rules governing a soldier's absence from his unit and visitation privileges. An assistant squad leader of Bn. 514, the Dinh Tuong Province local force, reported following his rally in

Cadres were also generally in control of the information that reached their troops. The prohibitions they have imposed on listening to non-Communist broadcasts and reading Chieu-Hoi literature are well known. But in addition, cadres saw to it that the fighters remained in the dark about the fate of officers and men missing in action. Fighters were always told that the Front would provide every man with a decent burial. Casualty figures, however, were never given, especially if a cadre were involved. "It often happened," said an MF deputy platoon leader, "that when a military cadre was killed in combat, the men under his command were not told of his death. They were told instead that the cadre had been assigned to another unit. Everybody was forbidden to talk about the loss borne by his unit, not even with other soldiers." Lower-level cadres themselves were unclear about the casualties in their units. A platoon leader told why:

You see, the VC were very careful about any of their activities. Sometimes we didn't even know about our own unit. For example, if our unit suffered a few dead, we wouldn't even know about it because the [higher] cadres would claim that the absent soldiers had been sent on a mission the night before. They never told us the soldiers were killed...we were not always in-

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June 1966: "I noticed that for more than a year now the cadres have been stricter when it comes to allowing the fighters to go out or to visit the people's houses. Our freedom of movement was more restricted. Whenever we left our squad to visit another squad in the same platoon, we had to report to the cell leaders....If we wanted to visit the people or go home when our unit was stationed near our houses, we had to have permission from the Company Commander, and we weren't allowed to be absent for more than three hours...."

formed of the number of dead even inside our unit...before everyone knew, he [the dead soldier] was already buried deep in the ground.

This accent on secrecy and dissembling, which extended up through lower-cadre rank, further regulated information concerning the place and time for the burial of officers. An informed assistant squad leader asserted that ordinary soldiers never knew of the burial, and that even the family of a deceased high-ranking officer was not informed until six months after the death. Similar obstacles applied to officers who were found to be anti-VC. When a company commander in Vinh Binh Province was taken away by authorities after having been accused as a GVN spy, said a platoon leader, "The fighters weren't told about his crime. The cadres were afraid they might be demoralized if they knew their leader was a spy." Thus, the educative process which cadres direct has comprehended a skillful manipulation or deprivation of information with the aim, as in kiem-thao, of narrowing the external influences upon the ordinary soldier's frame of mind. Where persuasion has failed, silence frequently has proved an equally formidable device.

## 2. MORALE-BOOSTING

Since the primary task of a cadre is to lead the successful mission, his ability to mobilize a favorable outlook toward the coming battle, and a positive attitude in the aftermath of defeat, is crucial both to the unit's existence and to his own career. At the same time, the cadre must also be prepared to deal with changing developments in the war, such as the bombing of the North, when such developments

are questioned by his men. It is the degree to which a cadre exudes confidence, both in the Party and in himself, that more often than not determines whether his efforts to boost morale will succeed or fail.

To boost the morale of their troops, VC cadres ordinarily place great emphasis on pre- as well as post-battle indoctrination in addition to regular criticism sessions when the unit is recuperating. Nevertheless, it appears that the lower-level cadres in our sample, having been more attuned to (as well as directly responsible for) the attitudes of their fighters, did not always adopt the same methods of achieving "high morale" as did their company- and battalion-level superiors. To illustrate, an assistant platoon leader and political officer of a IV Corps MF battalion chose to appeal to his men's instinct for survival rather than their patriotism:

I gathered all the men in the platoon to talk to them. But I made propaganda under all forms, such as consoling the troops when they were ill, telling them to make an effort when the constant moving of the unit started to wear them down. Before a battle, I gathered the platoon to mobilize their fighting spirit and encouraged them to fight as well as one could, because if not, one would get killed by the enemy.

Quite to the contrary was the approach taken by the ranking Party officials who convened another battalion in the same military zone. Here, as reported by a member of the Battalion's staff office, the exhortation called to mind patriotic devotion to the revolution:

They [the political officers] would mention the advantages and disadvantages of the VC,

but, of course, the advantages always outweighed the disadvantages. They talked about the duty and responsibility of the liberation fighters. They said that the people needed them badly at this particular time, and that if any of the men were killed in action, they could be sure that their sacrifice was not a waste, and that their families and the people would benefit from it. The [Labor Youth] group members and the Party members were called upon to set an example for the others....The cadres would think of all sorts of memorial days to urge the men to make special efforts....Everybody was urged to take Nguyen Van Troi [the soldier who planned to assassinate Secretary McNamara]...as an example....

As in any army, the immediately apparent success or failure of the mission determined the men's outlook. Cadres took special precautions when the unit suffered a defeat, attempting to persuade their downtrodden forces that sacrifice was a necessary phase of any victorious struggle. If victorious, there was praise and exultation. The platoon leader attached to the battalion office just quoted contrasted the cadres' reactions in victory and defeat:

After each big battle, the battalion had to withdraw to the seacoast district for reorientation. If the battle had been won, the cadres would praise the men and celebrate the victory. If the battle had been lost, ... the men had to be educated for two months in military training as well as in political training. The leading cadres had to attend kiem thao sessions which lasted for three weeks, especially if there was a dispute between the cadres as to whose fault had caused the failure ....Before a session ended, the Province Party Committee would send two representatives, one from the administrative staff and one from the

military section, to ... motivate the men's spirit. The session ended with some kind of celebration, and the men were allowed to have a good time before getting back to work.

Other cadres likewise reported that, in defeat, criticism cell meetings were immediately organized at all levels and both cadres and fighters took several weeks out to refurbish their depleted moral and physical strength. And cadres were usually quick to point out to all complainers that they, themselves, had gone through much worse when they were recruits; hardships were always present, cadres said, and simply had to be overcome.

As much as cadres tried to lessen the anxieties of their men over individual battles, soldiers were inevitably aware of such larger issues as the bombing of North Vietnam, the presence (in III Corps) of U.S. forces, the dispatch of Viet Cong soldiers from the delta to bitter fighting conditions elsewhere, the greater firepower in GVN-U.S. hands, and so on. If cadres had the men's confidence, they could at least allay openly expressed fears. Thus, Americans were "playboys" who could not, despite their weapons, stand up under Vietnam's rigorous battlefield conditions; men, not weapons, were the "decisive factor" in war (an MF platoon leader). As to the bombings, some cadres chose to remain silent; others, regardless of their personal concern, told the troops the U.S. bombers had been shot down (two deputy company commanders). How might the bombings affect supplies to the South? All respondents believed that the VC war effort was entirely dependent upon Northern assistance; but to the troops,

they replied that the Front always had to rely on its own efforts, that while the socialist bloc stood ready to provide all-out aid, the VC's strength was still sufficient (an LF platoon leader). And finally, the movement of VC delta troops into II and III Corps naturally raised fears. In at least one local force unit, the cadres told the fighters that they should build up their strength for duty there, yet reassured them that VC victories in central Vietnam would draw off ARVN forces from the delta, thereby giving the VC in IV Corps an easier time (a deputy platoon leader).

What emerges from all this is simply that cadres, notably at the lower echelons, have been prepared to deal with any morale-related contingency, whether a crisis of confidence brought about by defeat or concern over events in the North. On the crucial question -- whether or not the troops believed the cadres -- the impression gained from comments by both cadres and fighters is that the troops, if not convinced, were at least forced to quell their open anxieties under threat of criticism. Cadres themselves felt that their men had no alternative but to believe what they were told. In the VC, where soldiers tend to respect their cadres (sometimes in spite of personal dislike), the information provided by officers has been accepted until, by direct personal experience, the fighters found otherwise. On questions as physically and intellectually remote as the bombings of the North, the morale and steadfastness of U.S. forces, and the continuance of DRV aid, cadres, in the eyes of their men, are presumed to know the answers because of their experience and insight.

### 3. BATTLE LEADERSHIP

The degree of difficulty for a cadre in stirring the enthusiasm of his troops before the battle and in mollifying the effects of defeat afterward was dependent upon his combat leadership. Indeed, "Bravery and resolution in combat, eagerness to overcome the difficulties in order to accomplish the mission" were placed first among the five criteria of good cadres listed by one province unit command committee. As skilled a persuader as a cadre might have been, his performance in battle counted most in rousing the confidence of his troops.

For the cadre about to lead his men into battle, the Party-army interrelationship was of paramount importance. Particularly if he was a Party member, he was made doubly aware of his duty to stand at the forefront, run risks, and make the supreme sacrifice if necessary. The possibility of dying, however unpleasant a thought, had to be accepted. One platoon leader recalled his first confrontation with death. Though scared, he and his comrades

were left with no choice, and whether we wanted it or not, we had to accept it [the possibility of death]. Why did we do so? Because of top level orders. We could only obey...the fact was the order didn't come from the [higher] cadres, but from the Central Committee, and we couldn't therefore discuss it. Moreover, they [the higher cadres] said we were not the only ones, but the cadres themselves also had to obey the orders, and they too had to face death if that was the order.

While the Party demanded courageous leadership of its cadres, it also bolstered their confidence in the mission's favorable outcome. Since most cadres in our sample were

Party members, they were privy to the unit's intelligence studies. One of the most important reasons why cadres, notably at the lower levels, trusted their superior officers was the confidence they had in the quality of intelligence provided them prior to missions.

The subject of intelligence merits additional commentary. Cadres, depending upon their rank, the target, and the number of troops involved, were advised of the attack plans anywhere from a few days to a month in advance. Additionally, as a battalion officer with the VC Fifth division reported in March 1966, large units received daily situation reports which listed "operations in progress, completed, or about to commence; the probable forces in the operation, where the operation will take place, the type of operation, and the strength of the operational forces; and the identification, location and status of reserve forces." After familiarizing themselves with the battle plans, cadres usually had two to three days in which to train and prepare their men for the mission. In almost every instance, the cadres in our sample indicated their complete faith in the accuracy of intelligence; several implied that their confidence stemmed from the knowledge that the Front fought only when certain of success. Cadres thus readily acknowledged that on occasion their commanders postponed attacks when the enemy order-of-battle changed or when intelligence proved faulty. But such delays were understood as indicating the timeliness of intelligence and the unwillingness of high-ranking cadres to undertake needless risks. At least through 1966, there were no indications from cadres that the quality of intelligence, which might have affected their confidence,

had declined. Still having considerable time in which to plan and prepare, the cadres, whatever their personal disposition toward their superiors, apparently retained a sanguine outlook toward battles based on the continued receipt of valuable intelligence from villagers, reconnaissance patrols, and military headquarters. And while this situation held, the confidence of cadres was likely to be transmitted to their troops.

## VII. THE VIEW FROM THE TOP: THE CADRES' WORLD

The emphasis in previous sections has been on the cadre as a functioning mechanism within the cadre system. We have also briefly sketched the fighters' perceptions of the cadres. What has emerged is a many-sided picture of the cadre as an instrument of a larger Party-military apparatus which controls and directs him, but which simultaneously offers him rank, prestige, and authority -- in sum, a vested interest in the system itself. With all this, the cadre remains an individual whose reactions to events and other people, while shaped by the indoctrination and role-playing assigned him, form an integral, independent part of the overall portrait. In this section, we shall be looking at the ways in which our cadres responded to the more personal aspects of army life as well as to the larger issues of the war.

### 1. THE PRIVILEGES OF CADRES

The effectiveness of Viet Cong training and indoctrination may be gauged by the extent to which cadres valued the intangible benefits of their position over the tangible ones. It has already been remarked that cadres aspired to Party membership in order to enhance their prestige, gain access to Party plans and secrets, and earn postwar comfort. Just as they rarely viewed admission to the Party in material terms, so did they treat their status as military officers. The substantive privileges of rank were incidental to the more important psychological bonuses inherent in advancement.

That material incentives have not been important in the VC's effort to sustain the cadres' dedication to their work may be seen in their home leave and pay policies. Permission to return home seems not only to have been granted less frequently to cadres than to soldiers, but also to have been cut back sharply over the past year. Few cadres interviewed during 1966 stated that they had been allowed to visit home. Although almost all cadres served the VC in their home province, and some in their home district, most got to see their families only when they were visited while on duty or when their families lived in a nearby, VC-controlled village. Main Force cadres in particular were too often on the move to have the occasion, much less permission, to return home. As importantly, Front policy was based on the apparent conviction that a cadre's dedication to the VC had to outweigh his longing for home. As a general rule, a cadre acceded to this policy, becoming hostile to it (and sometimes deserting) only when an emergency arose at home which required his presence but which the unit commander refused to acknowledge as a legitimate excuse for a leave.

Cadres fared better with regard to pay and related privileges. As observed by a platoon leader, cadres, depending on the type of unit (his was an MF battalion), might have received the same or slightly higher monthly salaries than fighters. The differential usually took the form of special additional allowances to cadres -- in accordance with rank -- for travel and entertainment expenses over and above the basic salary. A slightly different situation prevailed in the main and local force

battalions of Kien Phong Province where, according to one of the former unit's deputy company commanders, squad-level cadres received the same 20 piasters monthly as ordinary soldiers. As of January 1966, he reported, platoon cadres received 30 piasters a month, company cadres 50 piasters, and battalion cadres 70 piasters. In any event, cadres were not provided with such substantially higher pay as would have made their positions envied, by fighters or other cadres, on material grounds. Cadres simply did not attribute much significance to monetary allowances when they talked of the rewards of their jobs.

## 2. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Viet Cong control and surveillance system operated as much to isolate personalities as to keep units of the same battalion or company physically apart. Cadres were no more exempt from this isolation than fighters, not simply by the mutual surveillance enforced through Party cells and chapters, but in addition by an atmosphere of suspicion adverse to the formation of genuine friendships. As in the Chinese People's Liberation (PLA) before and during the Korean War, the Viet Cong in the units under consideration here encouraged the development of comradely relations through small group ties (as in the three-man cells), but, like the Chinese Communists,

did not permit these ties to have an autonomous basis, for it felt threatened by informal group ties and loyalties that were essentially apolitical in character. Interpersonal relations within combat units that were cemented by human

considerations and to which men gave priority over political values would be regarded as potentially threatening....\*

The goal in both armies was and has been to deny fighters and military cadres alike "the possibility of close, informal relations with others or participation in a small group except within the prescribed political framework."\*\*

The cadres available to us did speak of their "friends" in the VC; but they really meant "comrades." For at crucial times, such as when a cadre reached the decision to desert or defect, he rarely found it possible to confide in someone else. Typical is the case of a squad leader who recounted the story of his and his assertedly close friend's rallies. Asked if that friend confided in him before rallying, the squad leader answered:

No, he wouldn't dare. How did he know I would not report him to the VC? In the Front, people keep their thoughts to themselves; you don't know what the next person is thinking. Before I left the Front, I tried to be as casual as I could when we talked about the GVN Chieu-Hoi Program. I told the new recruits that it was all propaganda; it was a GVN tactic to lure them out of the movement, to weaken the movement. I said nothing to anyone; even to my wife I said nothing.

Likewise, a platoon leader with "six or seven good friends" in his unit, said: "I wouldn't dare tell my most intimate friend about my decision" to rally. "The only persons I

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\* Alexander L. George, The Chinese Communist Army in Action: The Korean War and Its Aftermath, Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1967, p. 29.

\*\* Ibid., p. 34.

may have discussed it with were my parents." Accounts such as these cropped up regularly. Mutual suspicion imposed by the control system was such that cadres, like fighters, couldn't trust anyone.

In social situations within the unit, moreover, even comradeship had its limitations. Regroupees, Northerners, and local Southern cadres tended to remain aloof from one another, a few interviewees have stated, as did political from military officers. The formation of closed social cliques was common if not widespread. Such cliques influenced cadres' behavior as well as re-enforced the regroupee-Northerner-Southerner separation. A squad leader, disturbed during his tenure in the VC by cliquism, commented: "They [the other cadres] formed their own clique; they would overlook each other's mistakes. But if an ordinary fighter made a mistake, they would make sure that the poor fellow was criticized mercilessly, that his shortcomings were publicized."

The narrow range of interpersonal relationships, extending to a few comrades of the same rank, meant too that cadres of the platoon and squad levels had only slightly better appreciation of the goings-on in other subunits than the lowly fighters. Although cadres who were part of small cliques discussed some "business" along with "pleasure," they naturally shied away from relating their personal thoughts on the war and, out of dearth of knowledge, talked only of their immediate subunit. Illustrative was the remark of an assistant squad leader who could describe his squad leader but not his platoon leader. "Since my coming

to Thu Duc District [Gia Dinh Province, four months previously], I have never seen a platoon of my regiment camp together." Like another cadre whose remarks were mentioned previously, he was forbidden to visit other units of the regiment in different encampments. For all the prestige they may have enjoyed vis-à-vis the fighters, cadres were similarly restricted in their movements and thoughts.

### 3. OPERATIONS IN THE VILLAGES

A cadre's major source of personal contact beyond his unit was the villagers he met, mostly during operations. In the villages, cadres encountered the war in a way not possible within the confines of the Party-dominated unit. They could talk to peasants of their own province, quickly familiarize themselves with how the war had affected families like their own, and see firsthand the growing destructiveness of the protracted struggle. Yet it is interesting that cadres generally felt no sense of guilt -- although with important distinctions by rank and unit -- despite their ability to empathize with the struggling villagers.

Emblematic of the distinction between low- and high-ranking cadres, village operations produced different reactions among officers of each group. Company and battalion cadres, if we may judge from the few remarks available to us, had long since become inured to the suffering which war brought to the villages. Damage and deaths caused by the bombings and shellings, whether or not due to the VC presence in the village, were treated routinely. The VC could no more avoid stationing themselves in the villages, reasoned a company commander, than

the GVN could avoid using aircraft and artillery to attack them there. In either case, the VC was hardly to blame: "If we thought such damage had been caused by us," asked a battalion chief of staff, "how could we remain in the Front ranks?"

Platoon and squad cadres were clearly more conscious of the difficulties being borne by the villagers, as well as of the long-term implications for the Front in the large-scale movement of villagers from their homes to safer surroundings. When the Front's promise of liberation for one Vinh Long district changed to talk of long-term war, recalled a deputy platoon leader, "there was such an uproar in the villages that we heard of the people's comments [on moving to the cities]. Nobody likes to suffer long-term hardships." Another low-echelon cadre, a squad leader, "felt sad and unhappy when I realized that the people hated us and desired to avoid us." Still a third, a platoon leader, found it "depressing" to see families who had to play host to VC troops once too often move into shacks in the ricefields. "Although they didn't say it, we knew they were silently protesting against our presence in their village."

Touched by the villagers' plight, cadres, especially if they happened to be members of the local forces (as was true of the three above-quoted), nevertheless seldom took upon themselves the blame for conditions in the villages. Far from having been deeply shaken by villagers' hostility or passivity, cadres adopted the view that, however unfortunate the situation, it could be rectified by the responsible authorities -- the local Front military and

civilian cadres. It was the job of the village (VC) committees and the local guerrilla cadres to re-educate those villagers who showed signs of flagging in their support of the liberation forces. Legitimate complaints by the villagers were likewise to be met by local authorities. Thus, any disaffection for the incoming Front troops revealed to the cadres not popular revulsion against the VC but a deficiency in the local VC organization's educational mission of persuading villagers of their moral and patriotic duty to assist the Front in every possible way.\* "We realized," said a deputy company commander, "that a number of [local] Front cadres didn't treat the people right, which was why these people were dissatisfied and preferred to take refuge elsewhere." For this reason, he continued, cadres sought to neutralize the soldiers' disappointment by arguing that the answer was not to be disconsolate but further to educate the people.\*\*

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\*As one deputy company commander explained, his main force battalion acted in an auxiliary capacity to the district propaganda cadres on political matters related to the population.

\*\*In the same vein, cadres exhibited a certain élitism by blaming guerrillas not only for failing to educate the local populace toward a more positive view of the VC, but equally for carelessly instigating the attacks on villages and committing damaging acts of terrorism. Declaring the guerrillas responsible for air attacks, a platoon leader said: "The Main Forces are under stricter regulations and have to report the loss of every bullet." And almost all cadres disclaimed knowledge of, or at least responsibility for, terrorism that claimed the lives of innocent civilians. Only the guerrillas, they said, could have committed such deeds; the main forces were too disciplined to have engaged in terrorism or sabotage.

4. ON THE WAR

The cadre's detachment from events and personalities beyond his immediate subunit inevitably affected his disposition toward the larger issues of the war, overall VC strategy, and the peace that would some day follow. Cut off from or oblivious to the outer world, the cadre -- by which we mean, again, the platoon or squad leader -- often-times proved unable to comprehend these larger problems despite his exposure to more detailed indoctrination. In this as in other contexts, the lower cadres revealed the characteristic that distinguished them from their high-echelon superiors: less concern over political theory, more involvement with immediate military requirements.

As shown in one of the tables in the Appendix, of the 54 cadres asked which side would win the war, only 33 percent chose the GVN. With ralliers dominating the sample, so few prognostications of a GVN victory are surprising. Fully one-half of these responses showed indecision about the eventual outcome, while only nine favored the VC. What these ralliers were saying, in effect, was that whoever won could not do so in the immediate future, that the war (as their leaders had told them) would be a long-term struggle. Illustrative of this indecision were the comments of two squad leaders and ralliers. One felt "it is not likely that this war will end by agreements in the near future." With the Chinese backing the North and the Americans behind the GVN, "it's very difficult to make an accurate judgment about the issue of this war. I can only say that the side that enjoys the people's support will win the war." The other also could

not pick a winner even though he gave the GVN the edge in weapons: "Both sides are losing men. I don't know who is winning."

Uncertainty over the war's outcome seems to have been grounded in confusion among low-level cadres about the implications of "protracted struggle," the goals of recent Front planning, and the importance of outside assistance -- all matters which, it should be added, were quite clear in the minds of company and battalion officers. Judging from the more recent (1966) interviews, low-ranking cadres in both III and IV Corps were conscious of the Front's shift in position from talk of a coming "general counteroffensive" to predictions of a long-term struggle of indefinite duration. The higher cadres "have stopped talking about the time when national reunification will be achieved," said an assistant platoon leader of an LF platoon. "They only talked about long-term hardships and long-term war." With that switch, as the acting company commander (a prisoner) of an LF battalion admitted, some cadres began to reassess their commitment to the VC. They

wonder why it is that the war lasts so long. At first it was a special war but now it has turned into a regional war and yet the end isn't in sight. They wonder when the war will be over. They begin to wonder and among the cadres some value their lives too much and are afraid of getting killed. But their number is small. It isn't a widespread situation [in August 1966] because if it were so the revolution would have failed.

Apparently, only the higher cadres evinced unconcern about the need to revise estimates of V-Day. For them, according to several lower cadres, the war could go on for many years

and still find them in it. "They said this is a long-lasting war, and the VC were going to fight until the end. It didn't matter to them whether the war went on for 20 or 30 years."

Significantly, however much some low-ranking cadres were disturbed about the shift in propaganda to an emphasis on long-term war, this and related matters were deemed of such long-range importance and immeasurable scope as to keep them from expressing an opinion. Protracted struggle, in other words, represented one aspect of the larger picture of the Front's general war strategy; as such, lower cadres frequently proved incapable of commenting cogently on it because it was felt to have been a matter for higher echelons. In common with other armies, strategic planning in the VC is felt by all properly to be the exclusive jurisdiction of superior officers, for whom the "long view" is the dominant concern. Conversely, day-to-day fighting, while subject to higher directives, is regarded as the principal responsibility of lower cadres, and hence a subject with which they could be conversant. For the lower cadres, there was a real cutoff point between strategic and tactical knowledge.

For cadres of IV Corps and the lower fringes of III Corps, the hope has always been held out that, if the going became exceedingly tough, manpower no less than material assistance could be expected from the "socialist bloc," especially North Vietnam. Perhaps because they saw evidence of DRV aid, nearly every cadre in our sample who was asked to comment on the importance of the North as a rear area for Front forces declared that without Northern aid

the Front would fast disappear. Only a few higher cadres, such as the company commander of a training school, indicated that the Front could overcome a lack of outside support.\* For others, however, outside assistance was vital to the Front's very survival; yet, although they had been using weapons and ammunition shipped from the DRV, they had not come across full-fledged Northern units. The hope was therefore always held out that, if worse came to worst, the NVA and volunteers from the bloc would be prepared to enter the war in force.

The general feeling of cadres who gave some attention to this matter (there were those lower cadres who agreed with a platoon leader that Northern manpower was a matter which "belongs to the long-term tactics of the high echelons") was that, with increasing "enemy" military pressure, additional manpower support was badly needed. On the other hand, they were also conscious of the political impact of such aid. Presumably unaware that Northern forces had already infiltrated south in great numbers, some cadres expressed concern about a violation of the Geneva Agreements, the future presence of Chinese troops, the unfamiliarity of non-Southerners with the local terrain, or the possibility of a larger war. It is also conceivable that cadres interested in furthering their military careers

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\*An exception is the assistant chief of staff and operations officer of the VC Fifth Division who rallied in August 1966. Months later he told a news conference: "If the North Vietnamese cut off their supply, their direction, their supervision, the Vietcong would not be able to continue their fight successfully. Impossible!" New York Times, November 29, 1966, p. 2.

would have been concerned about having even more regroupees and Northerners take over the highest unit positions. While there was at least one indication from a cadre of Front insistence, early in 1966, that it would have to rely primarily on its own efforts, cadres have apparently remained caught on the horns of a dilemma which argues for militarily desirable outside aid that has not been forthcoming despite repeated assurances that it is readily available.

The desirability of outside aid further meant that cadres would side with the Chinese in the "dispute" which had become known to them. On this score, cadres of all ranks were in agreement. Although the Soviets were helping the North, they were failing to counteract U.S. air attacks despite their capability for doing so, whereas the Chinese were consistently providing aid to both North and South. The Russians, concluded an acting company commander, "aren't courageous. They aren't as brave as the Chinese. When China says something, it does it. But Russia is different. It may say something that may sound very courageous but when the time comes for action, it retreats." And a deputy platoon leader chimed in: "We decided that without Red China, we wouldn't be able to win this war, and the situation might drag on for ten or twenty years."

In criticizing the Soviet Union for being reluctant to go all-out in its assistance, cadres were primarily concerned, not with defense of the DRV, but with the effects of the air war there on aid to the Viet Cong. Not being Northerners, the cadres in our sample could hardly have been expected to be demoralized over the U.S. bombardment of the DRV. Even concern for the future effects on the VC

never bordered on real anxiety if for no other reason than that, as low-ranking cadres, they were never told the full extent of the damage to the North. While not doubting that the bombings must have caused destruction, these cadres proved incapable of evaluating the long-range impact of air attacks against the North on supply shipments for the war effort in the south.

#### 5. DESERTION AND DEFECTION

As we have seen, the Viet Cong command has structured a cadre system in which officers have been invested with authority and prestige but divested of any real freedom of action or thought. The superior-inferior relationship has been as strongly enforced between low- and high-level cadres as between cadres and fighters. That relationship is apparent to everyone and can be flouted only with trepidation. Consequently, squad and platoon cadres, for all the rights and privileges they possessed within their subunits, remained virtually in the dark about matters pertinent to the war as a whole. This enforced limitation to their proper "sphere of influence" or realm of knowledge not only accounted for their limited insight into questions of strategy; it also provided the basis for these cadres' hesitation to leave the VC. At the same time as they were indoctrinated into believing that long-range problems were for their leaders to resolve, low-echelon cadres, particularly in concentrated main force units, were also prevented from investigating the realities of the outside world, from discovering and

assessing for themselves the pros and cons of deserting or defecting.

The cadres who eventually decided to rally to the GVN are, of course, a special breed; they made a decision of unusual courage (or cowardice) which, to date, few of their comrades have seen fit to emulate.\* Even as they rallied, however, they revealed some of the dangers inherent in their decision as well as the reasons why others like them have refrained from following suit. As a whole, they regarded their superior officers of company and battalion rank as ideologically irredeemable. These higher cadres' lengthy experience, deep-seated commitment, indoctrination, and physical separation from the daily hardships of combat endured both by their cadre subordinates and the ordinary soldiers were some of the factors that accounted for their devotion, as has already been noted. Said an assistant squad leader:

They have high morale because they have been well indoctrinated. They have attended one training course after another. They attended conferences frequently...Many of them follow their families' tradition. Their fathers, brothers or sisters fought during the Resistance and they themselves are just following the examples of their relatives. The cadres from the company level upward don't have to

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\* Joseph Carrier's compilation of statistics on roughly 80 percent of all cadres who rallied to Chieu-Hoi centers between July 1965 and September 1966 reveals that the number of such cadres represented small fractions of all cadres in the VC main and local forces -- .96 percent and 3.55 percent respectively. (The author is indebted for this point to Michael Arnsten.)

endure as many hardships as the cadres from the platoon level downward. They don't have to carry weapons, rice, and so on. What's more, the higher ranking cadres live and eat better than we do....

For the lower cadres, physical dangers and uncertainties were equally, if not more, relevant to their commitment than background or indoctrination. Unlike the ordinary soldier, the cadre who contemplated desertion faced a decision of far greater magnitude. He had a serious obligation to the VC to be a leader, a symbol of authority, an object of emulation. He was entrusted with responsibilities not readily dismissable. And, whereas the soldier was replaceable, the cadre, representing an investment by the VC of time and specialized training, would, by deserting, take with him not only that investment but also a knowledge of vital unit plans and locations exploitable by the enemy. He and his family would become vulnerable to reprisals.

Indoctrination has also ingrained in the cadre a genuine fear of what might await him should he rally. He tended to believe the same warnings of GVN torture which he imparted to his men. As phrased by a platoon leader:

In my opinion, the cadres have been well indoctrinated and, like me at that time [summer 1965], they believed that if they rallied they would be killed. It meant then that they would die either way, therefore, they should die for the right cause. The cadres have learned that the Front is for the good cause and the GVN is for the bad cause. At that time I believed that this was so and the cadres believed it also. Therefore, when the airplanes dropped leaflets, the cadres tore them up and said: "We know too well how the GVN acts. Why does it bother to keep lying?"

Another of the same rank also "never thought of defecting to the GVN." He was told he would be killed; when he obtained some Chieu-Hoi leaflets, he "partly believed it and partly doubted it. Would the government make good their promises?" The passage of time has not significantly diminished this anxiety. "I saw leaflets about the Chieu-Hoi program several times while I was in the Front," said a platoon leader captured in July 1966, "but the [political] cadres' propaganda was so convincing that I didn't think of rallying. I was afraid of being arrested and liquidated by the GVN."

Why, in view of these fears, have some cadres rallied? The data in the Appendix provide interesting clues. Of 69 responses (some men gave two or more reasons for having deserted and rallied) to the question, "Why did you leave the VC?" 20 dealt with personal grievances against the VC command and 6 with avoiding reassignment to a more difficult military area. "Personal grievances" included harsh, unjustified (from the cadre's viewpoint) criticism; a demotion, purge, or failure to obtain a promotion thought forthcoming; the discovery that a wife or other family member was being maltreated by a VC official; rejection of a request for home leave in an emergency. Reassignments though a separate category in the table, often involve personal grievances because the dispatch from one military zone to another uproots the cadre from his home province and threatens to place him in possibly greater physical danger. Noteworthy is the fact that personal grievances and reassignments were more important causes for rallying among higher than lower cadres, particularly -- as we

would expect -- on the subject of promotions. Thus, grievances and reassignments constituted five of nine responses given by the five company and battalion cadres who rallied; they were cited 11 times in 29 responses by 19 platoon cadre ralliers, and 9 times in 31 responses by 22 squad ralliers.

Second in importance were rallies based on the personal finding that the VC were not fulfilling their promises made to the cadre before he joined (e.g., that they would care for his family or give his family land), or were proving unable to realize their stated aims as the war dragged inconclusively onward. The increased limitations on home leave for cadres may have been brought about in some instances by the consideration that it is while at home that the cadre measures the extent to which the VC have complied with their promises of assistance and economic betterment for Front members.\*

Of special relevance to military measures and their effectiveness on VC elements is the indication in the data

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\* A VC captured document seems to indicate that Front authorities had been made conscious of this danger by complaints from both cadres and soldiers. The document, dated August 5, 1966, requested local Party chapters "to realistically help and improve the spiritual and material life of needy and lonely dependents of our cadre and soldiers. Letters will be frequently sent to cadre and soldiers to inform them of good news from their families so that they can have peace of mind and stimulation to perform their duty." The document does not mention who will be writing the letters.

A cutback on home leave for cadres may also have been prompted by the practical assessment that cadres could not be spared away from their units.

that the usual hardships of army life, in severest form the fear of death in combat, were not a major ground for a cadre's decision to desert and rally. Combined, hardships and fear of death were offered only 14 times by all cadres as reasons for their having left their units. One platoon leader, a regroupee and Party member, has provided an eloquent testimonial to the relative insignificance of hardships for cadres. Noting that "we weren't in the Front to enjoy life," and that "the food was to keep us alive," he continued:

All of us lived in the jungles. We all bore the same kinds of hardships and we all ate the same kind of food. When I thought I wasn't alone in bearing these hardships, I felt life wasn't hard at all. When [after being captured] I compared our lives with the outside, or with people in the GVN armed forces, I found we led a much harder life than they did. But in the Front there was no difference between one unit and another; this helped me to bear my hardships. When everyone leads the same kind of life, then you won't have anything to envy others about. You feel you've been cheated by life only when people around you have a better life than yours. If you've been using gas lamps all along, you don't find that the light they give out is weak until someone brings in electricity.

Much the same idea could be found expressed in cadres' comments about the types of weapons they most feared or their attitude toward death. After a while, death, weapons of all kinds, and hardships of every description surely became more fearsome and imposing; but the Front had never attempted to hide these tribulations from them, and in fact had chosen them as cadres because they had evinced a capacity to bear all such temporary inconveniences for the

sake of a glorious future. Whether a cadre was like one platoon leader who "wanted to defect, but outwardly I still had to pretend that my morale was high," or was of the type who had come to believe that hardships were a necessary evil and that defectors were the "security-minded" types who couldn't "take it," the end result was the same: Cadres of III and IV Corps main and local force units, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, apparently felt obligated to carry out their assigned military and political tasks. While our sample has revealed that hardships and fear of death were more common grounds for deserting among squad leaders than among either platoon or company cadres, these were on the whole much less important reasons than grievances or unfulfilled expectations.

Acting as a final barrier against desertions or defections for cadres of all levels was the conviction that they could not depart from the path they had chosen. For better or worse, these men had staked their future on advancement with the VC; under normal circumstances, for them to have backed down by rallying to the GVN after years of service to the Front simply was unthinkable. "I'm sure," a platoon leader and rallier said of his unit, "that all the cadres and fighters had had enough of the war, but there was no way to escape. Theirs was the attitude [dilemma?] of people aboard a ship in the middle of the sea; they couldn't get back to shore even if they wanted to." For another, "getting back to shore" meant becoming a "turncoat" (the chief of staff of Bn. T80, a prisoner); to still others it meant an impossible personal situation too full of uncertainties to contemplate. The

years of dedication had themselves posed insuperable obstacles to consideration of alternatives; having become members of the VC, they were enemies of the GVN state and could hardly have been expected suddenly to surrender.

VIII. CADRES AND THE CADRE SYSTEM

For the main and local force units we have been looking at, the cadres were quite clearly the vital components upon whom the Viet Cong command depended for military and political guidance and control. Although their functions varied with rank, all cadres to some extent were responsible for "political" as well as military tasks and were responsible ultimately to a higher political authority, the Party. The cadre system, therefore, embraced complementary principles of authority, participation, and responsibility which bound all cadres regardless of rank or Party affiliation. In this manner, the environment in which cadres operated, especially at the platoon and squad levels, was never isolated from the mainstream of superior control vested in company and battalion commanders. In adopting the Party-army structural relationship of the Chinese Communist armed forces, the Viet Cong, like the NVA, have successfully harmonized the roles of political and military cadres by imposing over all cadres the principle of Party supremacy.

In training cadre-aspirants and subsequently making them part of the unit command system, the Viet Cong by late 1966 had apparently moved toward a relaxation of earlier criteria governing the selection process. As the demands of the war began to have an effect on cadre attrition and training programs, the trend seems to have been toward choosing and promoting men on the basis more of military expertise than ideological "awareness." Experience, actual deeds, and courage seemingly became of greater immediate interest to VC commanders than a potential cadre's background. Yet, as we also observed, the emphasis on battlefield know-how

and technique did not appear to have weakened the Party's line of control over military officers. Nor did the disinterest in and decrease of political training revealed by lower cadres appear to have affected their morale-boosting and control functions. While it is possible that, over the long run, neglected or infrequent indoctrination might produce a reaction by cadres against any major shift in the VC timetable of victory -- as for example in the event guerrilla warfare loomed as a task of indefinite duration -- there is no evidence that "talent," as defined here, has been allowed by the VC to undermine the "virtue" which springs from confidence in the Front and Party.

The picture that emerges is one of overall strength in the cadre system. The commitment which cadres have made to the VC by acceptance of added military responsibilities and, in most instances, by admission to the Party; the controls placed over and around them through the intricate Party-army machinery; the vested interest in the movement given them through the bestowal of prestige and limited power inherent in rank -- all these elements, in combination, apparently give the vast majority of cadres still in the VC incentives to perform their tasks in accordance with the dictates of the Party command. The fact that most of the cadres in our sample who eventually rallied to the GVN from III and IV Corps likewise performed effectively must be considered a significant indicator of the continued cohesion which has marked the cadre organization in the main and local forces of those areas through 1966.

Weaknesses in the cadre system were, then, not damaging to overall performance. As we have seen, tensions existed between Southerners and regroupees over promotional oppor-

tunities and jurisdiction. Some cadres were concerned about protracted war and unfulfilled Front promises to families in Communist-controlled areas; others averred that they stepped back from the brink of a decision to rally only because they feared the consequences once in "enemy" hands. But these imperfections in the system were usually irrelevant to cadres' obedience to directives and fulfillment of assigned tasks. Except in instances of severe conflict of interest, based usually on some personal disappointment, cadres in the VC ranks apparently do not debate seriously the usefulness of further service. Conscious of the controls around them, confident in the intelligence provided them, shielded from disaffected comrades by a closely regulated system governing interpersonal relationships, educated in a closed informational world, and inured to villagers' suffering, cadres seem to have found "riding the tiger" the wiser course even when alternatives were weighed. A dissipation of initial zeal and a certain erosion of early confidence have undoubtedly occurred; but, to judge even from the possibly distorted comments of our overwhelmingly rallier-cadre sample, there is little evidence to demonstrate other than that military cadres have accepted the burden of additional hardships and remained determined, perhaps even emboldened, to fight on.

APPENDIX

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

1. Year of Birth

pre-1930: 2  
1930-32 : 6  
1933-35 : 7  
1936-39 : 17  
1940-42 : 15  
1943-45 : 5  
1946-49 : 4  
1950 - : 1

(No. responses: 57)

2. Place of Birth and Principal Operating Area

Same or Inclusive : 38  
Not Same or Inclusive: 21

(No. responses: 59)

3. Education

Literate : 11  
1-2 yrs. : 9  
3-4 yrs. : 19  
5-6 yrs. : 9  
7-11 yrs.: 5

(No. responses: 53)

4. VC Economic Classification

Very Poor : 6  
Poor : 33  
Middle ("Well-off"): 19  
Rich (Landlord) : 3  
(No. responses: 61)

5. Date Joined VC

pre-1955 : 9  
1955-57 : 4  
1958-60 : 19  
1961-63 : 17  
post-1963: 11  
(No. responses: 60)

6. Status of Home Village/Hamlet When Joined

VC-controlled : 15  
GVN-controlled: 15  
Contested : 18  
(No. responses: 48)

7. Manner in which Joined

Voluntarily : 54  
Drafted forcibly: 3  
Drafted : 5  
(No. responses: 62)

8. Previous Experience

Former Viet Minh: 12 [of whom 10 regrouped to DRV]

Neither Viet Minh nor Regroupee: 51

(No. responses: 63)

9. Formal Initial Training Period

1 Month or Less : 7

2 Months or Less : 6

3 Months or Less : 7

4 - 5 Months : 5

6 or More Months : 6

Trained in Unit : 2

Trained; Period Unreported: 11

(No. responses: 44)

10. Type of Initial Training

Military Only : 19

Political Only : 9

Military-Political: 8

Cultural-Military : 1

(No. responses: 37)

11. Party Status

Party Members : 32

Probationary Members: 5

Labor Youth : 9

Non-Party : 14

(No. responses: 60)

12. Period of Service

<u>In Front</u>	<u>In MF/LF Unit</u>
6 - 12 Months: 5	1 - 6 Months: 5
13 - 24 Months: 10	7 - 12 Months: 10
25 - 36 Months: 8	13 - 18 Months: 5
37 - 48 Months: 10	19 - 24 Months: 3
49 - 60 Months: 12	25 - 36 Months: 12
Over 60 Months: 15	37 - 48 Months: 11
(No. responses: 60)	49 - 60 Months: 3
	Over 60 Months: 11
	(No. responses: 60)

13. Assessment of the War

<u>Who Will Win?</u>	<u>When Will War End?</u>	<u>Which Side Stronger?</u>
GVN: 18	Within Year: : 3	GVN: 17
VC : 8	In Next Few Yrs: 3	VC : 10
Undecided/ Cannot Answer: 27	Undecided/ Cannot Tell: 27	Undecided/ Cannot Answer: 16
(No. responses: 53)	(No. responses: 33)	(No. responses: 43)

14. Date Left VC

1963	:	1
1964	:	7
Jan. - June 1965:		18
July - Dec. 1965:		18
Jan. - June 1966:		14
July - Dec. 1966:		5
(No. responses: 63)		

15. Rank Last Held

Assistant Squad Leader	: 11
Squad Leader	: 16
Deputy Platoon Leader	: 10
Platoon Leader	: 16
Deputy Company Commander:	5
Company Commander	: 3
Chief of Staff	: 1
Civilian	: 1

16. Reason for Leaving VC (of Ralliers)

Hardships of Army Life	: 9
Fear of Death or Combat	: 5
Loss of Belief in VC Aims, Promises	: 16
GVN Propaganda	: 0
Urging of Family	: 8
Personal Grievance against VC Command:	20
Lack of Further Personal Benefits	: 4
Fear of Arrest by VC	: 1
Avoidance of New Assignment	: 6

(No. responses: 69)

17. Detention Status

Ralliers : 52  
    (Rallied directly : 32)  
    (Rallied indirectly: 17)  
    (No indication : 3)

Prisoners: 11