

Figure on N. Vietnam's Killing 'Just a Guess,' Author Says

By George C. Wilson *
Washington Post Staff Writer

"It was just a guess, an estimate that nobody could figure," said the author of a book the White House has cited in documenting President Nixon's charge that the North Vietnamese massacred "half a million" people while imposing land reform in the 1950s.

Hoang Van Chi, author of "From Colonialism to Communism," said in an interview yesterday that he arrived at a figure in that range by projecting countrywide the experience in his own North Vietnamese village of about 200 persons. He said about 10 people died there from Communist persecution, one from execution and the rest by such "other means" as imposed starvation.

He said he used that 5 per cent rate in his village, plus what he learned from others in North Vietnam, as the basis for declaring in his 1964 book that there was a "massacre of about five per cent of the total population" in North Vietnam.

President Nixon's National Security Council, in listing Chi's book as one source for Mr. Nixon's massacre figures, said that 5 per cent of the North Vietnamese population when Chi made his estimate "would be about 700,000" people.

Mr. Nixon has cited the massacre figure of "half a million" in making the case for continued United States support of the South Vietnamese government. On April 16, 1971, he said: "I think of a half a million by conservative estimates in North Vietnam who were murdered or otherwise exterminated by the North Vietnamese after they took over from the South . . ."

More recently, on July 27, President Nixon said from 1954 to 1956 in the North Vietnamese Communists' "so-called land reform program 50,000 were murdered, assassinated." Mr. Nixon added that the Catholic Bishop of Danang told him in 1956 that "there were at least a half million who died in slave labor camps in North Vietnam."

D. Gareth Porter, a research associate at Cornell University's International Relations of East Asia Project, charged in a paper distributed by the university on Monday that "careful investigation" showed such bloodbath charges were "a myth." Chi's book was "the central piece" in "a deliberate propaganda campaign by the South Vietnamese and U.S. governments to discredit" the North Vietnamese government, Porter claimed.

Donald Brewster of the National Security Council staff said Chi's book was only one of several sources used in making the "half a million" estimate. Porter claimed some of the other sources cited by the council appeared to drawn from Chi's work.

Chi himself, a course chairman at the State Department's Washington Training Center and lecturer in Asian affairs, made these points yesterday in responding to Porter's attacks on his credentials and scholarship:

• CIA sponsorship. Chi said he thanked the Congress for Cultural

Freedom in the foreword to his book for its financial assistance but had no way of knowing back then that Central Intelligence Agency money went to the organization. "Porter tried to link me to the CIA," complained Chi.

• "Wealthy" landowner charge. Porter charged that Chi could not be impartial in discussing land reform in North Vietnam because he was a "relatively wealthy landowner" before leaving there for the South in 1955. Chi said he had sold off the acreage he had inherited and was down to 2.7 acres in the North in 1953.

A man with that little land, said Chi, is not a wealthy landowner. Besides, he said, Communist Party members all the way up to and including Ho Chi Minh owned more land than he did in North Vietnam at the time of land reform.

"I'm for redistribution of land," said Chi, "but against the method that was applied" in North Vietnam. He said he was considered a revolutionary in the Vietminh resistance against the

French but was not a formal member of any Communist Party.

• Translations. Porter accused Chi of distorting North Vietnamese policy statements and slogans by inaccurately translating them into English for his book. Chi conceded he had not stuck to the literal translation in all cases because he was trying to impart the true meaning—the one that mattered. "I should have added a footnote" explaining that, Chi said.

His experience on the ground in North Vietnam influenced his translations, and, he argued, made them more meaningful to the reader trying to perceive what was really going on.

"I deplore the case of many scholars who try to understand communism by reading documents," Chi said. "You cannot read books on communism and know it. You have to live under a communist regime to know it."

Declaring that his book was printed in both Vietnamese and English, Chi said Vietnamese who have read both versions would have complained if his

translations were inaccurate. He said he had received no such complaints.

Porter in his paper charged Chi had mistranslated a basic Communist slogan in discussing the party's takeover of North Vietnam. "I report what I hear," said Chi, "not what they put in documents."

"I stick to my view," said Chi, "that land reform (in North Vietnam) was a pretext for a mass purge. I'm for land reform for South Vietnam. I left North Vietnam for the way land reform is practiced."

"Some of my family died from starvation," he said in discussing the persecution in North Vietnam during land reform. "I'm not very firm about the figure" of how many were purged "because it was only an estimate." Chi said since his book came out, a defector has estimated 300,000 North Vietnamese were purged during the land reform campaign.

Memo on other comments
on bloodbath filed
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* ALSO (2 SEP 72)