

Cornell Author Disputes North Vietnam Bloodbath

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By George C. Wilson \*

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A charge by President Nixon and others that the North Vietnamese murdered up to 500,000 of their own people when they took over the country in the 1950s is a "myth," according to a study circulated yesterday by Cornell University.

The charges are dispatched in a 59-page essay by D. Gareth Porter, a 30-year-old research associate at Cornell's international relations of East Asia project. Cornell's project office, in sending out the report, said it deserves "immediate, widespread public attention" because of Mr. Nixon's frequent references to the alleged bloodbath in North Vietnam.

"This bloodbath myth is the result of a deliberate propaganda campaign by the South Vietnamese and U.S. governments to discredit" North Vietnam, Porter says in summarizing the paper he researched in South Vietnam and at Cornell. Porter has been a critic of the Vietnam war.

The prime source for President Nixon, author Bernard Fall and others in describing the alleged massacre during the North Vietnamese land reform from 1953 to 1956 is a book guilty of "gross misquotation" and "fraudulent documentation," Porter alleges.

The book Porter cites is entitled, "From Colonialism to Communism," by Hoang Van Chi. Chi's book—published in 1964—was financed and promoted by such U.S. agencies as the Central Intelligence Agency, according to Porter.

Chi himself, now a course chairman in Southeast Asia orientation at the State Department's Washington Training Center, was at Ft. Bragg, N.C., lecturing and could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The National Security Council cited Chi's book as one of President Nixon's sources for declaring on April 16, 1971, "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 . . ."

The President added at that same news conference that "if the United States were to fail

in Vietnam, if the Communists were to take over, the bloodbath that would follow would be a blot on this nation's history from which we would find it very difficult to return . . ."

Asked by Porter to document the President's "half a million" figure, the National Security Council quoted Chi as writing the following: "The guilt complex which haunted the peasants' minds after the massacre of about 5 per cent of the total population . . ." The National Security Council added on its own that "5 per cent of the total population of North Vietnam at that time would be about 700,000."

"Mr. Chi offers no justification for this allegation" that 5 per cent of the North Vietnamese population was murdered, asserts Porter, "but he suggests at one point that most of the deaths were those of children who starved 'owing to the isolation policy.'"

Charges Porter: "This is yet another of the many wholly unsubstantiated charges put forth by Mr. Chi, for there was no such policy of isolating families, even of those landlords sentenced for serious crimes during the land reform . . ."

"Yet it is mainly on the basis of Mr. Chi's totally unreliable account, the intention of which was plainly not historical accuracy but propaganda against" North Vietnam, says Porter, "that the President of the United States himself has told the American people that 'a half a million' people were exterminated."

In contrast to CIA's description of Chi as a "former Vietminh cadre" who could thus be expected to have firsthand knowledge of the land reform program, Porter asserts that Chi was never a party member before leaving the North for South Vietnam in 1955.

"Mr. Chi was himself a rela-

tively wealthy landowner," Porter claims on the basis of an interview with Chi. Thus, he argues, Chi could not be expected to give an unbiased account of the land reform program.

Western authors like Fall, says Porter, suffered a "critical" shortcoming because they could not read Vietnamese and thus could not research the original documents the North Vietnamese used to communicate with their own cadre. Fall and others, therefore, had to rely on Saigon and U.S. government summaries of the North Vietnamese material or on authors like Chi. (Porter reads Vietnamese and said in an interview that this enabled him to study documents that went to North Vietnamese cadre from party leaders.)

In an attempt to show the danger relying on summaries and other secondary sources, Porter charges Chi distorted a North Vietnamese party (Laodong Party) slogan by saying it included the phrase, "liquidate the landlords." There was no such phrase, Porter asserts. Instead, he alleges, the slogan said: "Abolish the feudal regime of land ownership in a manner that is discriminating, methodical and under sound leadership."

He charges Chi also mistranslated Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap's speech of Oct. 29, 1956, on land reform. Giap, according to the Chi's translation, said the party "executed too many honest people" and came to regard torture as normal practice.

Comparing the Vietnamese original text of Giap's speech with the Chi and Porter translations (which Porter said other scholars and Vietnamese corroborated), Porter alleges that "Mr. Chi's translation is one of his most flagrant abuses of documentary evidence."

Donald Brewster is the National Security Council staffer (on loan there from AID) who discussed the source of Mr. Nixon's bloodbath figures with Porter. Brewster told The Washington Post yesterday that real and literal meanings of Communist statements are sometimes two different things.

Brewster added that the sources he cited for Porter "are not the totality" of the material the White House relied upon. Also, said Brewster, it is the trend that is most important, not specific figures. In that sense, he said, the trend of Communist actions, such as North Vietnamese assassinations in Hue, shows fears of a bloodbath in South Vietnam are indeed well founded, just as President Nixon has stated.

Porter himself said in an interview that he has filed for conscientious objector status and would decline to serve in the military in the Vietnam war. He is on a year-long fellowship, \$5,000 for the academic year, in pursuit of his doctorate at Cornell's East Asia research center.

Memo on other comments  
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