

Prisoners from Hanoi say they expect sons to fight

WASHINGTON — It is enlightening, if somewhat frightening, to look at the Vietnam war through the eyes of enemy prisoners.

Captured officers, noncoms and privates alike have been telling their American interrogators that they are willing to die and let their sons fight on after them for a Communist victory.

The RAND Corporation conducted ex-

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haustive, in-depth interviews with 22 typical prisoners in 1970. The findings have been corroborated by hundreds of prisoner interrogations over the years.

"Of those interviewed . . .," reported the RAND researchers in a study intended for Pentagon eyes only, "all said that the sacrifices had been worthwhile, and all said that in one way or another the war would have to continue through future generations if they themselves should be unable to achieve their aims."

World War II lesson

The RAND study drew a lesson from World War II: "Toward the end of World War II, there were many men in the Wehrmacht on various levels who, no matter how great the urging on the part of Propaganda Minister Goebbels, did not think that an American victory over Germany was the end of the world . . .

"Thus, next to the question 'Will we win the war?' the question 'Is this war really necessary?' will play a great role in the psychological makeup and fighting capacity of a man."

In Vietnam, the Communist troops believe their cause is right and worth any sacrifice. It's the Americans who have been asking, "Is this war really necessary?"

Duffae's defiance

Ha Tam, for instance, was a simple farmer with a sixth grade education when he was drafted into the North Vietnamese Army in April 1963. A resourceful soldier, he rose in rank to first lieutenant and became commander of the Third Company, 14th Battalion.

His company infiltrated into South Vietnam on May 4, 1968. He was captured five months later after a furious firefight.

"I would rather die in the struggle for

independence than live under the domination of foreigners," he told the RAND researchers without emotion. "We still have to fight even if the war is prolonged for five more years, 10 more years or 20 more years. If fathers cannot achieve victories, sons will succeed them."

Commented the RAND study: "What seems noteworthy in this statement from a man, who was a draftee rather than a volunteer, is the clarity and simplicity with which he enunciates the line as imposed by his side. Anyone who has listened to the aimless ramblings of captured Nazi soldiers in World War II cannot but be impressed by the difference."

Least belligerent statement

The least belligerent statement came from a private, Nguyen Van An, barely literate, who said he didn't care whether Saigon or Hanoi won the war. If the South Vietnamese should triumph, he said, "I will join the GVN (Saigon government), and my family will enjoy happiness . . . There would be no more bombs and shells . . . Whether the GVN or the Front gains victory, my family will enjoy a peaceful and happy life."

But his indifference over the outcome of the war, significantly, didn't extend to the Americans. "The Americans came here to cause death and destruction, wretchedness to all the country," he said. "Therefore, those who fight for the Front will keep on fighting till the end . . . If the Americans are still present, our children must also continue to fight this war."

Big fish

A tough North Vietnamese cadre, Pham Bang Cu, who fought for three years in the South Vietnamese jungles before he was captured, told his interrogators what had kept him going.

"Regardless of how many more years the war will go on," he said, "the Vietnamese people will keep on fighting till all the Americans leave. The war has been going on for many years. The United States has been using all kinds of modern weapons — airplanes, jets, tanks and has sent a great number of troops to Vietnam. But it always suffered defeats . . .

"Unless all the Vietnamese people die, the Americans will never win . . . The big fish can eat up the small fish, but the (American) people cannot use strong arms to eliminate weak people if they have no just cause."