

How North Viet POWs See the War



Jack Anderson

IT IS enlightening, if somewhat frightening, to look at the Vietnam War through the eyes of enemy prisoners.

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

The Rand Corporation conducted exhaustive, 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 way would have to continue through future generations if they themselves should be unable to achieve their aims."

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

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 . . ."

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PLEADED Nguyen Ngoc Dung, a student who had fought in South Vietnam for a year as a private before his capture: "We North Vietnamese people never did anything to hurt the Americans in their country. We never dropped bombs on America, so why would the Americans bomb our country, killing our people and damaging our factories?"

Another private, Phan Van Nhanh, said simply: "I primarily fought for my family." Why? "Because my house had been destroyed by American bombs."

The same defiance of American power, the same determination to fight on was expressed by all the prisoners. The bombing, in particular, seemed to stiffen, not weaken their resolute to continue the war.

At first, Washington paid little attention to the Nguyen Ngoc Dungs and Phan Van Nhanhs. But now, Washington is beginning to listen.