

SAIGON.

One of the biggest puzzles of the Viet Nam war is what makes the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas fight so hard.

"It's fantastic the way the Viet Cong lay it on," a Vietnamese-speaking American provincial representative commented.

"Young kids who fought with them explain it by saying the Viet Cong create a 'new order and a new reality.'"

According to reliable persons who have talked with Viet Cong prisoners and defectors, the Viet Cong man power—composed of 38,000 to 46,000 "hard-core" fighters and 60,000 to 80,000 part-time guerrillas—falls into two main categories: the older-generation troops who fought against the French 15 to 20 years ago and a younger generation recruited in South Viet Nam.

Of the first category, more than 70,000 Viet Minh—as they were called during the French Indochina War—left their homes in South Viet Nam when the country was partitioned in 1954 and went to North Viet Nam, where they continued their training and indoctrination.

INFILTRATION

From 1956 onward, they gradually infiltrated back to their native villages. The most significant aspect of their return was a transfusion of political leadership into the South to organize and recruit younger Southerners. Simultaneously, the Communists began a massive campaign of assassination of village government officials, virtually obliterating the government's local leadership.

The older troops had fought the French for one reason: independence, with its anti-French, anti-colonial, anti-white overtones. They fought and won with guns, but their most effective weapon was hate.

One member of a Viet Minh suicide squad wrapped himself in gasoline-soaked cotton, ran into a French ammunition depot in Saigon and burned himself alive to destroy the installation. The story of the "cotton boy" swept through the countryside.

"My father even wanted me to volunteer to be a cotton boy," a Saigon business man recently recalled.

Young Vietnamese students read French history books referring to "our ancestors, the Gauls." This example of French acculturation was countered by the Viet Minh argument: "Please remember, your ancestors were not the French. You know your ancestors were the dragon and the fairy," a legend commonly accepted by the population.

According to prisoners in the older group, once they returned to South Viet Nam in the late '50s, they were surprised at what they found. They had been told the South must be liberated from its own poverty. One said he was astonished to see the government troopers wearing boots. (Communist troops often wear rubber-tire sandals).

Another said he had been told that two-thirds of South Viet Nam had been liberated. But when he attacked government villages the peasants fought his men. They had been told they must liberate the South from the American imperialists, but soon discovered they were fighting Vietnamese.

But few of these veterans defected to the government side. One old-time propaganda agent captured in the South explained that he listened to the Voice of America and British Broadcasting Corp. to discover the truth. But he listened to the Hanoi radio to find out the correct party line.

He reasoned that if the party lied, there must be a good reason for it. The party knew best.

The younger-generation Viet Cong troops join the Liberation Army for different reasons. Some of them are virtually kidnaped. Others have personal grievances or

are simply bored with life in the villages. The Viet Cong promise them adventure, and a chance to see life and be educated.

There is no sharp overriding national cause which the Viet Cong are pushing throughout the country, such as the anti-French campaign. But there are grievances.

Some unmarried males join to get away from their landowners. Some are fired from their jobs and join. Many prefer serving with the Viet Cong rather than government forces because they believe they can stay closer to their families.

Some young married men join to get away from the in-laws; the Communists in the village promise to take care of the wife and children. (One Viet Cong trooper returned to his village, found his wife and children destitute, picked up a rifle and shot up the Viet Cong village committee.) One was talked into joining when a pretty girl promised to marry him if he did; he became disillusioned when he found she had promised to marry six other recruits also.

Some are simply kidnaped at gunpoint. One was led away with a rope around his neck. One was kidnaped only hours after his wedding.

One reliable source estimated that about 10 to 15 per

cent of the southern-born Viet Cong troops were orphans. About 30 per cent are farm laborers. About 80 per cent came from the rural areas.

In the West, the war in Viet Nam is an ideological confrontation with Communism. In Viet Nam, this is not the way it is regarded by many of the Viet Cong.

The Communists operate behind the mask of the National Liberation Front, which exploits nationalism and xenophobia. It disguises its Communist core philosophy by sloganeering about freedom and democracy.

One Western diplomat explained the Communist appeal in these words: "The Communists have swiped the American ideals. The Communists are promising the peasants a New, Fair, Square Deal—land reform, democratic elections, land courts for justice."

Hence, the appeal of the Communist guerrilla movement is not communism at all. One American official explained that of more than 200 Viet Cong prisoners and returnees he interviewed, not one mentioned anything about Marxism-Leninism, atheism, collective farms.

But the Viet Cong also have a strong appeal for youth. "The Viet Cong promise them fun—that life will be gay," one source said. "Many of those who join believe they get this."

Even if a youth has been forced to join the Viet Cong, a highly effective indoctrination session immediately begins to mold him into an enthusiastic, well-disciplined fighter.

Perhaps, this can be seen in their songs.

Neil Jamieson, 29, a Vietnamese-speaking provincial representative from Gloucester City, N. J., translated a number of Viet Cong songs and talked with incoming Viet Cong defectors.

One of the songs goes:

We are peasants in soldier's clothing

Waging the struggle for a class oppressed for thousands of years.

Our suffering is the suffering of the people.

"Many of their songs are centered on victory," Mr. Jamieson said. "They associate the soldiers with the peasants—fighting oppression, not only against the foreigners, but also the upper classes within society."

"The troops accept—in fact, glorify—hardship because it identifies them with the people. It's almost like old Christianity. It's like little kids' Sunday school hymns—the idea of picking up the Cross for Jesus but instead of a cross it's a pack."

He said most of the Viet Cong songs were "upbeat, emphasizing the positive in a Norman Vincent Peale manner." Government songs were often sad.

A SPARTAN LIFE

"The young troops lived a very spartan life," Mr. Jamieson continued. They were short of medicine, and all suffered attacks of malaria. Many suffered real hardships. It was cold in the jungle, yet they didn't dare light a big fire.

"I talked with many of the Viet Cong about their songs," he said. "After their evening meal, they would break into teams of three and have their self-criticism sessions. Each one would go through his experiences of the day, his life in society and in his three-man combat team. If one of them was wounded in combat, the two buddies would take care of him."

"After supper they would go through this ritual. They are taught to do this immediately after joining the Viet Cong by the older cadre, who told them that sins can be forgiven but to conceal anything is a blow against the group."

"If for example, the young trooper had lost his ammunition or weapon, he'd criticize himself. This psychological aspect is a great Viet Cong strength."

"After the self-criticism session, there would be announcements by the cadre and then would sit around and sing to pass their time in the evening. They would sit around a small campfire, if security permitted—just like the Boy Scouts used to do. These youths were uneducated, but the Communists taught them about the sputnik and Castro and Cuba. They didn't understand it well, but they knew Cuba was a tiny country near America and America was a paper tiger when Cuba stood up to us and we were powerless to do anything to them."

"The troops were short of rice, yet each day they put a few grains from each meal in a bamboo tube. When there was enough they'd take it to a tribal village and have a party for the children."

"One youthful trooper was with the Viet Cong for three years, and was a member of their youth organization, which is the halfway point to becoming a party member. He was recruited at gunpoint, but he didn't hate the Viet Cong."

He told me: "If I told you what I thought about out there in the jungle you'd think I was crazy. The Viet Cong create a new reality; you feel you are in the world and not out of it."

Tomorrow: The failures in U. S. policy.