

*The Halang.*

## CHAPTER 4. THE HALANG

### SECTION I

#### INTRODUCTION

The Halang inhabit the rough, mountainous terrain near the intersection of the borders of Laos, Cambodia, and the Republic of Vietnam. It is estimated that the Halang population in all three countries exceeds 40,000. Of Mon-Khmer ethnic origin, the Halang speak a language closely related to that of their north-eastern neighbors, the Sedang.

Halang society is patriarchal and the autonomous village constitutes the highest level of political organization. Their agrarian economy depends on slash-and-burn agriculture for the primary crop of rice and the secondary crop of corn.

Believing in a host of animistic spirits, the Halang spend their lives appeasing evil spirits, yet they consider the veneration of good spirits unnecessary.

#### **Name and Size of Group**

The Halang, also known as the Selang, are called Saleng by the Laotians.<sup>1</sup> The word *halang* reportedly means "mixed blood."<sup>2</sup> The only reported subgroup of the Halang are the Halang-Doan, most of whom live in Laos. However, the classification of the Halang-Doan is confusing, for they are sometimes treated as a separate group, or even as a subgroup of the Sedang.<sup>3</sup>

The exact number of Halang is unknown. In 1962 it was estimated there were 30,000 Halang in the Republic of Vietnam, 10,000 in Laos, and "some" in Cambodia.<sup>4</sup> During the past 10 years the Halang have evidently been moving continually westward into Laos and Cambodia, so that only a minority may now reside in the Republic of Vietnam.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Location and Terrain Analysis**

In the Republic of Vietnam, the Halang live in the western and southwestern portions of Kontum Province, contiguous to the Laotian and Cambodian borders. The Dak Hodrai, a tributary of the Se San River, traverses this region from north to south. There are no major roads in this area. On the north and northeast the Halang are surrounded by the Sedang; on the east, by the Rengao;

and on the southeast and south, by the Jarai. The Bahnar are located a bit further south and east, around the city of Kontum.

The Halang area consists of heavily forested rolling hills and steep mountains cut by many narrow river valleys. The paucity of roads, trails, and navigable waterways precludes passage through the region, especially during the rainy season from April to mid-September.

The summer monsoon (April-mid-September) and the winter monsoon (mid-September-March) provide a regular seasonal alternation of wind. In the summer, these winds come mainly from the southwest; in the winter, from the northeast.

Agriculture is greatly dependent upon the monsoon-borne rain. Precipitation is high—averaging more than 80 inches in the lower elevation and more than 150 inches in the higher areas. Normally the weather is warm and humid, with frequent cloudiness.

The high and relatively evenly distributed precipitation gives this area rain forest vegetation of two distinct belts. At the higher elevations is the primary rain forest, where the trees, with an average height of 75 to 90 feet, form a continuous canopy. Below this canopy are smaller trees of 45 to 60 feet in height, and below this second layer is a fair abundance of seedlings and saplings. Orchids, other herbaceous plants, epiphytes, and woody climbing plants known as lianas are profuse. Little light penetrates this type of forest and there is not much ground growth. During the dry season, this forest can usually be penetrated on foot with little difficulty.

The second belt or secondary rain forest, which develops after land in the primary rain forest has been cleared and then left uncultivated, is more extensive in this area. In this forest the trees are small and close together, and there is an abundance of ground growth, lianas, and herbaceous climbers. Penetration is difficult without the constant use of the machete.

The Dak Hodrai, the principal river of the region, flows in a north-south direction through the center of the Halang territory. Farther to the west, in Cambodia and Laos, the Halang area gradually becomes a plateau near the Se Kong River. The rugged terrain of the Halang territory and the large forested areas are unfavorable for helicopter and other air operations.<sup>6</sup>

## SECTION II

### TRIBAL BACKGROUND

#### Ethnic and Racial Origin

All the highland groups of the Republic of Vietnam are part of two large ethnic groups: The Malayo-Polynesian and the Mon-Khmer. In terms of language, customs, and physical appearance, the Halang belong to the Mon-Khmer grouping. The Mon-Khmer peoples are generally believed to have originated in the Upper Mekong valleys, from whence they migrated through Indochina,<sup>1</sup> which has been a migratory corridor from time immemorial, and the movement of the Mon-Khmer peoples into what is now the Republic of Vietnam probably started centuries ago.

#### Language

The Halang language, reportedly quite similar to that of the neighboring Sedang,<sup>2</sup> belong to the Bahnaric subgroup of the Mon-Khmer language family. The Halang language is composed primarily of monosyllabic words, like most other Mon-Khmer languages, although some polysyllabic words probably exist.<sup>3</sup>

The Halang have no written language, and there is no information that missionaries or others are currently designing a written language for them.

The similarity of their languages enables the Halang and Sedang tribes to communicate with each other. The Halang probably understand the languages of adjacent tribes such as the Jeh and Rengao;<sup>4</sup> moreover, some Halang may also have a limited knowledge of Vietnamese or French.

#### Legendary History

A Halang legend relates that long ago the country in the vicinity of Vientiane in Laos was invaded by giants 14 feet tall. Fleeing from the giants, a powerful magician, *pha-sai*, with his wife and children, journeyed down the Mekong River. Although his wife and children were drowned in a waterfall, the magician miraculously escaped. He continued down the Mekong River and up the Se San River, where he was captured by the tribespeople who lived on the riverbanks.

These tribespeople, united in a single nation and a composite of many tribes (including the Halang), treated the magician as a

slave. One day, to show his power, he transformed all the tribes-children into fruit; a little later he transformed the fruit into children again. Frightened by the supernatural power of their slave, the tribespeople decided to get rid of him.

Fortunately, the wealthy chief of a neighboring village, blessed by the spirits, bought the magician for an exorbitant price. The magician immediately proved his worth by turning water into a solid so that it could be sliced. So impressed was the chief that he freed the magician and gave him his four daughters in marriage. Eventually, the magician became the supreme chief; he established, for all the tribesmen in the area, a common language, residence, and occupation—searching for gold.<sup>5</sup>

There are no known legends concerning the subsequent separation and history of the Halang tribe.

#### **Factual History**

The paucity of available information makes it impossible to present a comprehensive history of the Halang as a separate tribe.

It is known that early in the 18th century the Siamese, or Thai, advanced eastward along the Se San River to the heart of the Halang area. Once military outposts were established there, the Siamese levied taxes and appointed officials to administer the area. From 1827 on, this Siamese influence reportedly led to anarchy and disintegration among the various mountain tribes. During this period, the warlike Jarai attacked the Halang.<sup>6</sup>

In the mid-19th century, French Catholic missionaries came into the Halang area and established a mission in Kontum.

By 1887, from their outposts in the high country to the west of the Annamite Plain, the Siamese threatened all the area which is now Vietnam. To resist the Siamese, the Catholic missionaries helped organize a confederation of the Bahnar and Rengao tribes. In 1893, French gunboats threatened the royal palace at Bangkok, forcing Siam to sign the Treaty of Bangkok. Thus, the Montagnard areas of Annam and Cambodia came under French control.<sup>7</sup>

Although many of these events occurred in Halang areas, there is no available specific information of Halang resistance to the Siamese or the role of the Halang in the tribal federation organized by the French.

#### **Settlement Patterns**

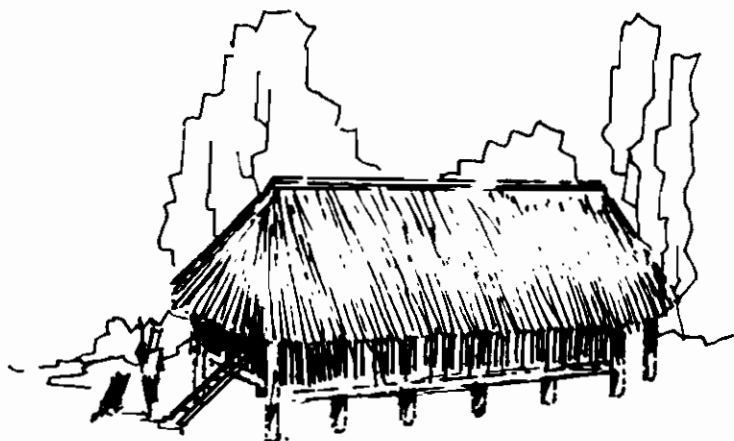
Halang villages are generally located in cleared areas on the slopes of mountains, as close as possible to clean water sources.<sup>8</sup> Individual Halang villages may be close to one another, giving the appearance of a single village.<sup>9</sup>

Like other mountain tribes who practice slash-and-burn cultivation, the Halang move their villages as the land becomes exhausted.

They also move their villages when a taboo is broken, placing an entire village under a ban, or when certain signs or omens indicate the presence of evil spirits that signify the village is no longer safe for habitation.

Reportedly the Halang have been gradually migrating westward into Cambodia and Laos for some time. Beginning prior to the Indochina War, this movement has been increasing because of Viet Cong military actions on the eastern boundaries of the Halang area.<sup>10</sup>

The typical Halang house is a solid comfortable structure built on pilings, with a raised floor approximately 4.5 feet above the ground. The walls on the sides of the house are of braided bamboo, about 4.5 feet in height; the roof is of rain-shedding straw. Entrance is gained through a covered porch-like platform, accessible by means of a notched wooden ladder.



*Figure 9. Halang-Doan house.*

The central area of the house serves as a reception hall and as a site for family discussions and consultations around the traditional hearth. Separate cubicles, located on either side of the long reception hall, are living quarters for the individual nuclear families of the extended family of the longhouse.

Village communal houses are used for village meetings and as residences for widowers and unmarried men.<sup>11</sup> Resting on eight large columns, with walls approximately as high as those of the longhouses, the communal house is identified by the wind-resistant roof peaks 60 feet in height. Where several Halang villages adjoin, here may be as many as four communal houses.<sup>12</sup>

Although normally Halang longhouses are not arranged in any

particular order around the communal house, among the Halang-Doan the houses are located around the communal house like the spokes of a wheel.<sup>13</sup>

In a cleared, square space in the forest near a Halang village is the tribal cemetery, where tombs are arranged in rows according to the status of the individuals.<sup>14</sup>



*Figure 10. Halang communal house.*

### SECTION III

#### INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

##### Physical Characteristics

In general, the Halang tribesmen are sturdy, long-legged, short-waisted individuals with highly developed chests. Their smooth skin is bronze-colored; their hair, coarse and black, is pulled back from the forehead. Moon-faced, gentle-looking people, the average adult male is about 5 feet 4 inches tall. The Halang are a lithe, agile people able to climb trees like monkeys; but their diet does not provide strength for any prolonged muscular effort.<sup>1</sup>

An odd physical characteristic among Halang men is the noticeable separation between the big toe and the other toes. This oddity is the result of clutching the shaft of a knife with the large toe and the second toe while they crouch over their work.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike many of the neighboring tribes, the Halang apparently do not file their incisor teeth.<sup>3</sup>

##### Health

The health of the Halang who reach adulthood may be described as good, since they have survived in spite of a very high infant mortality rate and exposure to many endemic diseases. Village sanitation and the tribesmen's personal hygiene practices are rudimentary.

The principal disease among the Halang is malaria—most tribespeople contract it at least once during their lifetime. Two common types of malaria are found in the tribal area. One, benign tertian malaria, causes high fever with relapses over a period of time but is usually not fatal. The other, malignant tertian malaria, is fatal to both infants and adults.<sup>4</sup>

The three types of typhus found in the Halang area are carried by lice, rat fleas, and mites. Mite-borne typhus is reportedly rampant among all the Montagnard tribes.<sup>5</sup>

Cholera, typhoid, dysentery, yaws, leprosy, venereal disease, tuberculosis, and various parasitic infestations are also found in the Halang area.<sup>6</sup>

Disease in the tribal area is spread by insects, including the anopheles mosquito, rat flea, and louse; some diseases are caused by worms, including hookworms; and some diseases are associated with poor sanitation and sexual hygiene.<sup>7</sup>



The Halang believe evil spirits cause sickness. If a villager has a fever, he makes an offering, *phak-chak*, to the evil spirits by placing bamboo stakes at the village entrance. The basket-shaped stakes, with openings at the top, contain the offering of bamboo tubes, the bottom of a gourd, and eggs pierced with a stick.<sup>8</sup> Buffaloes are also sacrificed to the evil spirit believed responsible for a serious illness.<sup>9</sup>

#### Psychological Characteristics

No specific information about the psychological characteristics of the Halang was available at this writing; however, certain characteristics common to other Montagnard tribes are given here to provide some yardsticks for personal observation. Halang villagers are probably reserved during their encounters with strangers. An outsider is generally trusted by tribespeople only when the most influential villagers have carefully evaluated his intentions and decided that he is friendly. Violation of a taboo, or any other action contrary to tribal customs and beliefs, may agitate the Halang or create hostility, especially if the Halang are stronger than the outsider.

## SECTION IV

### SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Like other Mon-Khmer groups, Halang society is patriarchal, with the extended family the most important social unit and the village the highest social and political unit.

#### **Place of Men, Women, and Children in the Society**

Men, the dominant members of Halang society, are the decision makers. They also perform the heavier tasks of hunting, house construction, and clearing land. Only males can act as sorcerers, officiate at ceremonies, and hold positions of authority. Women, subject to the wishes of their husbands and fathers, perform such domestic tasks as cooking, caring for the children, and tending small garden plots. Halang children are treated permissively and with great affection. Children, according to their sex, will assist each of the parents in the lighter, routine daily tasks.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Marriage**

Until the head of the extended family gives his consent, parents do not approve the marriage of their children.<sup>2</sup> The two families negotiate for marriage arrangements through an intermediary.<sup>3</sup> Wives are not purchased, nor is a marriage dowry paid.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to the marriage, the girl's parents invite the groom's family and friends to share a jar of rice wine. When the family heads have drunk, the prospective groom offers his fiancée the wine jar and the part of a sacrificed chicken.<sup>5</sup> Later the marriage ceremony is held in the home of the groom's parents, who pay for the celebration. Gifts are also exchanged at the marriage celebration.<sup>6</sup> The wealth of the groom's family determines the amount of meat prepared for the marriage celebration. A poor family may have only chicken, while a rich family may kill some pigs, bulls, and even buffaloes for the feast. At any celebration, there is a large quantity of wine.

The marriage is considered official the night after the celebration, when the newly married couple move to the house of one of their families. After 2 years the couple move to the home of the other parents. Only when one parent dies will the couple occupy their own home.<sup>7</sup>

### Birth and Childhood

The Halang near the Laotian border do not often practice abortion, although they are aware of the methods.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the women bear few children, and the tribal population increases very slowly.<sup>10</sup>

Village matrons act as midwives. The birth is accomplished with the woman in a sitting position. Immediately after the child is born, a midwife blows into the child's ear and then names the child. Reportedly, wealthy Halang families celebrate a birth with a ritual feast.<sup>10</sup>

The ritual of naming a child is very important among the Halang. The name itself is regarded as the most important influence on the child's future. All children's names in a single family sound alike, at least to a Westerner. If one child dies, the names of those remaining children must be changed in order to avoid the same fate.<sup>11</sup>

### Death and Burial

As a Halang nears death he is attended by an entourage, who force his jaws shut and close his eyes, for after death they will not be able to do so.

After death, close relatives chant to the deceased person while other Halang play "the music of the dead." The widower's elegy is—

Oh, why have you left me?  
Why didn't you wait for me?  
Who will care for the children?  
Who will feed the pigs and the chickens?  
  
I shall be alone now to weed our field;  
Why have you left me?  
Why didn't you wait for me?<sup>12</sup>

Friends of the deceased bring mats of rushes and animals for the burial feast—each contributes in accordance with his wealth: chickens, a pig, or perhaps a buffalo. The feast includes rice wine.<sup>13</sup>

The deceased Halang is placed outside the house under a canopy, where the body rests for 2 days. However, the corpse of a wealthy Halang may remain under the canopy for as long as 8 days.<sup>14</sup> The body is placed in a casket made from a hollowed tree trunk, with the head on an earthen platter. Covered with mats of rushes, the body is placed on a plank frame for the trip to the cemetery.

The plank frame is placed on top of the grave. On the frame are placed the possessions of the deceased: his weapons, baskets, vases, and pipes. The frame is also covered with statuettes of buffaloes and funeral statuettes (called the *rum*) representing mourning people.

A horizontal roof of bamboo tiles supported on sculptured columns covers the burial mound itself. The columns at each corner

represent human heads on which are mounted two elephant tusks.<sup>15</sup> Surrounding the grave is a row of stakes. Carved into each stake is the crude image of a human face.<sup>16</sup>

The Halang-Doan of Dac Rak village place their caskets on two sculptured columns. A second coverlet of wood, carved to look like the back of a buffalo, is placed on top of the casket. In addition, carved buffalo heads are placed in front of these caskets.<sup>17</sup>

Influential Halang families build roofed grave structures, like a miniature communal house. They surround the structure with carved wooden statues of crouching men with foreheads in their hands and elbows on their knees.

For nearly a year after death the Halang bring rice to the grave, which village dogs quickly eat. Moreover, monthly, when the new moon appears, the family of the deceased spends one night at the grave.

Each year the feast of the cemetery is celebrated by the entire Halang village. All villagers then go to the cemetery to sacrifice buffaloes and pigs and to drink many jars of alcohol.<sup>18</sup>

The Halang believe in an afterlife: those dying a natural death go to another world, to live a life similar to the one led on earth but without cares. Those dying a violent death remain on earth for a while before going to the other world. During this period, they wander about and haunt fellow tribesmen who have not purified themselves in a river immediately after the person's death.<sup>19</sup>

## SECTION V

### CUSTOMS AND TABOOS

Almost all Halang activities are regulated by numerous customs and taboos. Prescribed methods and procedures govern everything from dress to the construction of houses, from the settlement of disputes to patterns of individual behavior. The Halang have passed down these prescriptions from generation to generation until they have attained the force of customary law. Believing that the world around them abounds in both good and evil spirits, the Halang are constantly trying to avoid actions, activities, and contact with objects or animals that they believe might displease the spirits. Those tribesmen who have had contact with outsiders may not observe their customs and taboos as closely as tribesmen living in greater isolation from outside influences.

#### Dress

The Halang dress simply. The men normally wear a loincloth, a basic garment varying with the individual's wealth. A rich man's loincloth may be a strip of blue cotton with beaded fringes, brightened with red designs, and draped several times around the body. For a poor man the loincloth is probably barkcloth, a material made from fibrous bark pounded to a soft texture. Halang women wear a short wraparound skirt barely reaching the knees.<sup>1</sup>

#### Customs Relating to Houses

Formerly, human sacrifices inaugurated the construction of a new communal house, a ceremony climaxed by crushing the victim beneath the main pillar of the house. However, this sacrifice is no longer observed.<sup>2</sup>

#### Eating and Drinking Customs

Rice, supplemented by corn, is the basis of the Halang diet. Other items of the diet are edible fruits and plants gathered from nearby forests and fields, small game, wildfowl, and fish.

Domestic animals such as buffaloes, goats, pigs, and chickens are raised by the Halang. These creatures are used as food and for sacrificial offerings. Since the Halang tend to eat meat only during a ceremony, sacrifices are numerous.<sup>3</sup>

The Halang prize the wine from the sap of the coconut palm tree. When the stem bearing the unripened fruit is tapped, the fluid is

collected in a bamboo tube containing the leaves and bark of a tree called *hian*. The resulting wine must be consumed within 2 days or it will become sour.<sup>4</sup>

Like other Montagnard tribes, the Halang devote a portion of their rice crop to wine. The villagers drink great quantities of rice wine which, like the valued palm wine, is an important element of many rituals.<sup>5</sup>

## SECTION VI

### RELIGION

The animistic religion of the Halang, dominating virtually every aspect of their lives, is based on belief in a vast pantheon of spirits, both good and evil, who inhabit every object and creature of the environment. Especially powerful spirits are believed to dwell in old or large trees and in stones or roots of unusual shape and color. The problems of daily life are often attributed to the activities of the spirits.

Continually, the tribesmen attempt to appease and to placate evil spirits by offering sacrifices. The good spirits are not honored, for the Halang consider it unnecessary. For example, if a tribesman brings home an unusual rock and then has nightmares, he will immediately sacrifice at least a chicken to the spirit of the rock; on the other hand, if he has a good night's sleep, he will consider the rock a useless object and throw it away.<sup>1</sup> These religious beliefs are given ritualistic expression in both formal ceremonies and the routine acts of daily life.<sup>2</sup> For instance, since birds are considered intermediaries between man and the spirits, before undertaking almost any activity, a Halang will listen to the birds and postpone action if the songs are unfavorable omens.<sup>3</sup>

#### Religious Practitioners

Among the Halang are sorcerers who are responsible for the various religious ceremonies and who appear to have functions similar to those observed among other Montagnard tribes. For example, when a woman is suspected of hurling invisible arrows and causing illness or death, the sorcerer is called upon to test the truth of the accusation. Proof of guilt may be the bursting of an egg at the mention of the suspect's name. Or the sorcerer might direct both the accused and the accuser (or substitutes of their choosing) to plunge into the river; the person surfacing first is considered guilty.<sup>4</sup>

#### Religious Ceremonies

Little information was available at this writing concerning Halang religious ceremonies. It is known that the Halang celebrate two important agricultural feasts: one during the planting season and the other during the harvest. The Halang probably offer pro-

pitiatory sacrifices to the spirits during these ceremonies. Reportedly wealthy Halang families have a ritual feast to celebrate a birth within the family group.<sup>3</sup>



## SECTION VII

### ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

The Halang have a subsistence economy based on slash-and-burn agriculture. Although rice and corn are the principal crops, the diet is supplemented by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild food-stuffs; some tobacco is also grown. No industry in the Western sense exists in Halang villages, but the villagers do weave baskets and pan gold. Baskets and gold are used in intertribal commerce and in trade with the Vietnamese and Laotians. The limited resources of the Halang undoubtedly restrict trading on a regular and profitable basis.

#### Predominant Occupations

Rice, the main crop, is cultivated by the slash-and-burn (*ray*) method. Briefly, this technique involves cutting down, during the winter months, all vegetation in the new area and burning it to clear the fields. The ashes produced serve as fertilizer which permits crops for 3 to 4 years. When the fields no longer support a crop, the village moves to a new area, allowing the old fields to return to jungle; the tribesmen then repeat the slash-and-burn clearing process in the new area.

Tribal ritual determines the site of a new ricefield. First, the Halang offer sacrifices to spirits who they believe are locked in baskets. Then they move; once on the trail, they are attentive to birdcalls and songs. Only if the bird songs are interpreted as good omens will they continue their journey. If the songs contain bad omens, the Halang will return to the old village and begin again.<sup>1</sup>

Tentatively, the Halang select a new field, clear a small area, and set fire to it. Again, if the bird songs sound favorable, the land is considered suitable. If the crop should later fail, the Halang cultivating the field believe that they are responsible for angering the spirits by having neglected some traditional ritual.<sup>2</sup>

To protect cultivated fields from foraging animals (wild boar and deer), the Halang erect an enclosing palisade of strong bamboo studded with sharp bamboo spikes. In addition, small guard huts serving as watchtowers are constructed.<sup>3</sup>

Reportedly, panning gold is a primary Halang occupation. Large wooden trays filled with river mud are shaken until any gold pres-

ent is left in the bottom. Minute quantities are panned; the average daily take of raw gold is worth only 10 cents, and is used, not to make jewelry, but for trade with the Laotians.<sup>4</sup>

There is a difference of opinion as to whether the Halang engage in ironworking; one source alleges that they do, while another major source specifically denies such activity.<sup>5</sup>

The Halang also weave baskets, make small clay pots, and produce a tough, crude sort of barkcloth by pounding a fibrous tree material until it is soft. As noted, the poorer Halang use this rough barkcloth for loincloths. Better quality cloth is obtained through trade contacts.<sup>6</sup>

Beeswax is another exchange commodity. The Halang collect the wax to trade for salt in Kontum.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Exchange System**

Ordinarily the Halang barter goods among themselves. Because their territory is contiguous to the Republic of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the Halang are familiar with the currencies of all three countries, although they probably do not use these currencies for internal trade.

## SECTION VIII

### POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

#### General Political Organization

Currently, the highest order of political organization in Halang society is the autonomous village under leadership of a headman and a council of elders. The basic political unit is the extended family led by a family headman. A village may consist of a single, large, extended family or a group of extended families, the extended family consisting of separate nuclear families (husband, wife, and children). Even though Halang legends allude to an overall tribal political organization in the past,\* the Halang are not known, nor have they been known in recent history, to have any overall tribal organization.<sup>1</sup>

Each Halang village is independent and has its own headman and council of elders. Several villages may form loose alliances, but such organization is weak, for each village is free to negotiate or act separately at will. Although several villages may appear to be one large village with several communal houses, each village is a separate political unit and must be treated as such.<sup>2</sup>

The headman is generally the richest, most influential, and most reputable man in the village, yet he lacks absolute authority, being obeyed only when he has the support of the village elders. The headman is expected to be knowledgeable about tribal law and merits respect for his ability in war, hunting, and counsel.<sup>3</sup>

Wealthy and respected men, the village elders are almost without exception the heads of the extended families; as such, they must be consulted on all matters concerning members of their own family and the village as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Specific information concerning the selection of the village chief—whether he is elected from the council of elders by the villagers or whether he inherits the position—is not available. Probably the process is a combination of factors in which the sons of former chiefs or of wealthy powerful families succeed to the position with the consent of the elders and the villagers.<sup>5</sup>

With the Geneva Agreement of 1954 and the creation of the Republic of Vietnam, the problems of establishing a rapprochement

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\* See "Tribal Background," p. 127.

between the Montagnards in the highlands and the more culturally advanced Vietnamese in the coastal areas became acute. The French Government had supported a policy of permitting the Halang and other tribes to be separate administrative entities. Now, however, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam has taken measures to incorporate the highlanders into the political organization of the nation.

In 1965, very limited relations existed between the Vietnamese Government and the Halang, due largely to the heavy concentration of Viet Cong in the Halang area. Moreover, because of their proximity to the Laotian and Cambodian borders, the Halang have been migrating westward across the frontiers for several years.

#### **Legal System**

The Halang have no written language or written code of laws. Yet nearly all Halang behavior is strictly governed by unwritten tribal laws expressed as taboos, customs, and sanctions. Failure to adhere to the traditional code may result in severe punishment.

The gravity of the violation determines the authority to punish. An offense affecting only the culprit's immediate nuclear family is settled within the family itself. If the culprit's actions are deemed harmful to the entire extended family, then the family head will, with reference to the unwritten traditional code, determine the punishment. An offense affecting a whole village, such as the breaking of a major taboo, requires general consultation by the headman and the elders of the extended families; the offender's entire family perhaps being held responsible for his actions.

Punishments are economic in nature, rather than corporal, and require payment of fines with gongs, buffaloes, and other livestock or possessions. Usually a propitiating sacrifice to the spirits is also required. However, in the past, punishment included banishment from a village, trials by fire and water, and even death.<sup>6</sup> As late as 1913, culprits were sold into slavery in distant villages. Since the entire village imposed such punishments and never reported the offenses, the French colonial administration knew nothing of such cases.<sup>7</sup>

During the French occupation, the tribesmen were allowed to follow most of their traditional legal practices. On the village, district, and provincial levels, a special system of courts was established to adjudicate matters concerning the various tribal groups. In the village, a village court decided the sentences, but these decisions could be reviewed on the district level. Three district court members were assigned to each ethnic group in a district jurisdiction and these members handled only tribal matters. The district court officials selected a president to preside over the district court, which met in the house of the district chief.<sup>8</sup>

Under the French, those cases that could not be resolved on the village level were sent to the Tribunal Coutumier, which convened for the first 7 days of every month. In judging the cases brought before the tribunal, the chief judge relied on traditional tribal law and customs.<sup>9</sup> The tribunal dealt only with cases in which both parties were tribespeople. Cases involving Vietnamese and tribespeople were the responsibility of the province chief, but provincial authorities tried not to interfere with the operation of the tribunal.

The legal system instituted by the French still governs the Montagnard tribes, but steps have been taken by the Vietnamese Government to revise the legislative code in the tribal areas. Under the Diem regime, an attempt was made to substitute Vietnamese laws for the tribal practices. This attempt was connected with Vietnamese efforts to integrate the tribespeople politically into the Republic of Vietnam.

In March 1965, the Vietnamese Government promulgated a decree restoring the legal status of the tribal laws and tribunals. Under this new decree, there will be courts at the village, district, and province levels which will be responsible for civil affairs, Montagnard affairs, and penal offenses when all parties involved are Montagnards.<sup>10</sup>

Village customs law courts, consisting of the village administrative committee chief aided by two Montagnard assistants, will conduct weekly court sessions.<sup>11</sup> When a case is reviewed and a decision reached by this court, it will be recorded and signed by the parties involved. This procedure will eliminate the right of appeal to another court. If settlement cannot be determined, the case can be referred to a higher court.<sup>12</sup>

District courts, governed by the president of the court (the district chief) aided by two Montagnard assistants, will hold bimonthly court sessions. Cases to be tried by the district court include those appealed by the village court and cases which are adjudged serious according to tribal customs.<sup>13</sup>

At the national level, a Montagnard Affairs Section will be established as part of the National Court. This section, under the jurisdiction of a Montagnard presiding judge and two assistants, will handle cases appealed from the Montagnard district courts and cases beyond the jurisdiction of the village or district courts. It will convene once or twice a month, depending upon the requirements.<sup>14</sup>

#### **Subversive Influences**

The primary objective of the Viet Cong is to win allegiance of the Halang and to turn the tribesmen into an active, hostile force against the Republic of Vietnam.

Generally, the subversive elements infiltrate a village and work to

win the confidence of either the whole village or its key individuals. Usually a slow process, this is achieved by providing community services and medical aid and by adopting tribal mores and customs.

Once the villagers' suspicions are allayed and their confidence won, the next phase is an intensive propaganda program directed against the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. Then individuals are recruited, trained, and assigned to various Viet Cong support or combat units.<sup>15</sup>

When propaganda and cajolery are not effective, the Viet Cong resort to extortion and terror, which usually results in passive resistance to the Government or active support for the Viet Cong.

## SECTION IX

### COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES

The principal means of disseminating information in the Halang area is by word of mouth. No information was available at this writing concerning Halang familiarity with or access to radios. Any radios in operation in the Halang area were probably brought in by military personnel.

Where feasible, short movies covering simple subjects and using the Halang language might be effective in communicating with the tribesmen.

Written communication might have some effect on the Halang. Although most Halang are illiterate, some of the tribesmen can read Vietnamese. The literate tribesmen could be expected to communicate information in written materials to the rest of the tribespeople. Data about the successful use of printed materials are not available at this time. Information themes to be used among the Halang should be oriented around the principle of improving conditions in the tribal villages. The control of disease, the improvement of agriculture, and protection against harassment from the Viet Cong are some possible themes for information programs.

## SECTION X

### CIVIC ACTION CONSIDERATIONS

Any proposed civic action should take into account the religious, social, and cultural traditions of the Halang. Initial contacts in villages should be made only with the tribal elders in order to show respect for the tribal political structure. The tribespeople should also be psychologically prepared to accept the proposed changes. This requires detailed consultation with village leaders, careful assurance of results, and a relatively slow pace in implementing programs.

Most Halang tribesmen would probably respond favorably to ideas for change presented in terms of local community betterment. Civic action proposals should stress improvement of village life rather than emphasize ethnic or cultural pride, nationalism, or political ideology. The reasons for innovations should be thoroughly explained; the Halang resent interference in their normal routine if they do not understand the reason for it.

Civic action programs of the Vietnamese Government have included the resettlement of some Halang tribespeople into new and larger villages, the control of malaria, medical aid programs, agricultural assistance, and the provision of educational facilities.<sup>1</sup>

The following civic action guidelines may be useful in the planning and implementation of projects or programs.

1. Projects originating in the local village are more desirable than suggestions imposed by a remote Central Government or by outsiders.
2. Projects should be designed to be challenging, but should not be on such a scale as to intimidate the villagers by size or strangeness.
3. Projects should have fairly short completion dates or should have phases that provide frequent opportunities to evaluate effectiveness.
4. Results should, as far as possible, be observable, measurable, or tangible.
5. Projects should ideally lend themselves to emulation by other villages or groups.



### **Civic Action Projects**

The civic action possibilities for personnel working with the Ha-lang encompass all aspects of tribal life. Examples of possible projects are listed below. They should be considered representative but not all inclusive and not in the order of priority.

1. Agriculture and animal husbandry
  - a. Improvement of quality of livestock through introduction of better breeds.
  - b. Instruction in elementary veterinary techniques to improve health of animals.
  - c. Introduction of improved seeds and new vegetables.
  - d. Introduction of techniques to improve quality and yields of farmland.
  - e. Insect and rodent control.
  - f. Construction of simple irrigation and drainage systems.
2. Transportation and communication
  - a. Roadbuilding and clearing of trails.
  - b. Installation, operation, and maintenance of electric power generators and village electric-light systems.
  - c. Construction of motion-picture facilities.
  - d. Construction of radio broadcasting and receiving stations and public-speaker systems.
3. Health and sanitation
  - a. Improve village sanitation.
  - b. Provide safe water-supply systems.
  - c. Eradicate disease-carrying insects.
  - d. Organize dispensary facilities for outpatient treatment.
  - e. Teach sanitation, personal hygiene, and first aid.
4. Education
  - a. Provide basic literacy training.
  - b. Provide basic citizenship education.
  - c. Provide information about the outside world of interest to the tribesmen.

## **SECTION XI**

### **PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES**

Given the incentive and motivation and provided with the necessary training, leadership, and support, the Halang could possibly become an effective force against the Viet Cong. The tribesmen could serve as informers, trackers and guides, intelligence agents, interpreters, and translators. With intensive training and support, the Halang could be organized to defend their villages against the Viet Cong.

Consideration should be given, however, to the Halang tendency to avoid the conflict between the Vietnamese Government and the Viet Cong. The westward migration of the Halang into Laos and Cambodia should also be examined before making plans for the military use of the tribesmen.

The Halang military experience appears to be limited to the traditional tribal raiding, involving weapons such as the crossbow, lance, and knife. There are no reports in the available literature that Halang tribesmen have received modern military training from the French, Vietnamese, or Americans.

## **SECTION XII**

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONNEL WORKING WITH THE HALANG**

Every action of the Halang tribesman has specific significance in terms of his culture. One must be careful to realize that the Halang may not react as outsiders do. The outsider should remember that a relatively simple course of action may, for the tribesman, require family consultation, divination, or a sacrifice.

A few suggestions for personnel working with the Halang are listed below.

#### **Official Activities**

1. The initial visit to a Halang village should be formal. A visitor should speak first to the village chief and elders, who will then introduce him to other principal village figures.
2. Sincerity, honesty, and truthfulness are essential in dealing with the Halang. Promises and predictions should not be made unless the result is assured. The tribespeople usually expect a new group of personnel to fulfill the promises of the previous group.
3. Outsiders cannot gain the confidence of Halang tribesmen quickly. Developing a sense of trust is a slow process requiring great understanding, tact, patience, and personal integrity.
4. An attitude of good-natured willingness and limitless patience must be maintained, even when confronted with resentment or apathy.
5. Whenever possible, avoid projects or operations which give the tribesmen the impression that they are being forced to change their ways.
6. Tribal elders and the village chief should receive some credit for civic action projects and for improved administration. Efforts should never undermine or discredit the position or influence of the local leaders.

#### **Social Relationships**

1. The Halang should be treated with respect and courtesy at all times.

2. The term *moi* should not be used because it means savage and is offensive to the tribesmen.
3. Outside personnel should not refuse an offer of food or drink, especially at a religious ceremony. Once involved in a ceremony, one must eat or drink whatever is offered.
4. A gift, an invitation to a ceremony, or an invitation to enter a house may be refused by an outsider, as long as consistency and impartiality are shown. However, receiving gifts, participating in ceremonies, and visiting houses will serve to establish good relations with the tribespeople.
5. Outsiders should request permission to attend a Halang ceremony, festival, or meeting from the village elders or other responsible persons.
6. An outsider should never enter a Halang house unless accompanied by a member of that house; this is a matter of good taste and cautious behavior. If anything is later missing from the house, unpleasant and unnecessary complications may arise.
7. Outsiders should not get involved with Halang women.
8. Teachers should be careful to avoid seriously disrupting cultural patterns.

#### **Religious Beliefs and Practices**

1. Do not mock Halang religious beliefs in any way; these beliefs are the cornerstone of Halang life.
2. Do not enter a village where a religious ceremony is taking place or a religious taboo is in effect. Watch for the warning signs placed at the village entrances; when in doubt, do not enter.

#### **Living Standards and Routines**

1. Outsiders should treat all Halang property and village animals with respect. Any damage to property or fields should be promptly repaired and/or paid for. An outsider should avoid borrowing from the tribesmen. Animals should not be treated brutally or taken without the owner's permission.
2. Learn simple phrases in the Halang language. A desire to learn and speak their language creates a favorable impression on the tribespeople.

#### **Health and Welfare**

1. The Halang are becoming aware of the benefits of medical care and will request medical assistance. Outside groups in

**Halang areas should try to provide medical assistance whenever possible.**

- 2. Medical teams should be prepared to handle and should have adequate supplies for extensive treatment of malaria, dysentery, yaws, trachoma, venereal diseases, intestinal parasites, and various skin diseases.**

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 429.
4. *Ibid.*; Lavallée, *op. cit.*, p. 301.
5. Baudenne, *op. cit.*, p. 429.
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### XI. PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES

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No footnotes.



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