

a study

when the communists come

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When the Communists Come

This reading is a translation from Vietnamese of a report dated October 14, 1961 made by a delegate to a National Liberation Front inter-district meeting, place unknown, titled Experiences in Turning XB Village in Kien Phong Province into a Combattant Village.

It is an objective account of the efforts of the Viet Cong to convert XB Village into the Communist equivalent of a strategic hamlet. To the careful reader it also offers a clear picture of the operational methods of the Viet Cong in an area where they maintain a relatively high and stable degree of political control, a graphic account of the tribulations experienced by the rank and file Viet Cong, a delineation of the Viet Cong scale of values, a fairly detailed description of the communication factors including the all-important political propaganda program which in the final analysis the Viet Cong hold to be their route to power, and an insight into the mystique of the Viet Cong which those who would counter the Communist effort must have.

We know nothing about the document's author, except that he is a southerner, probably a native of Kien Phong Province and most likely a Cao Daiist. Although he has picked up much of the jargon he is not a doctrinaire communist; much of what he says would be considered highly heretical in orthodox communist circles. He appears to be a man of the people -- simple, direct, dedicated, and probably very effective.

Part One

SITUATION FACING US WHEN WE BEGAN

The village of XB is entirely surrounded by water. It has a population of 6,000 and is a new village, founded during the war (i.e. late 1940's - ed). There were 200 Cao Dai and 100 Hoa Hao.

Land originally was owned by landlords. There was one big landowner and 50 smaller ones. During the resistance the landowners were absent and control of the land was in the hands of the farmers. At the restoration of peace the landowners returned with the troops to retake their land and collect back rent. Since the farmers were dependent on the land for their livelihood, for their survival, they were thus greatly motivated to struggle against the landlords.

XB village had a Diem government administrative office, a security section and a post of militiamen. Mobile troops (APVN - ed) and Civil Guards were active in the area, especially in the two neighboring villages which are on dry land.

During the first few years of peace the Party made several attempts to step up its activities. Three times its organization was destroyed by the enemy. Three Party members were killed, two secretaries arrested, more than 100 cadres and members were taken into custody. Finally only one Party member remained and he was driven onto the beach at Luc Binh. He got no help from the local people.

In 1959, cadres from the higher level arrived to gather the scattered Party members and instruct them in the reestablishment of the destroyed party base. Things were so difficult, at that time, that our comrades were forced to hide in the fields and marshes during the day and only at night could they slip into the village to do propaganda work among the farmers. Several farmers were deeply interested in the struggle to get them land and they let themselves be indoctrinated easily. A base was soon established at a farm. Our cadres went on helping the farmers fight for ownership of certain lands and for the reduction of rent on other pieces of land. Gradually our victories convinced some of the farmers and we were able to bring into being the XB Party, consisting of seven members.

Then the enemy began launching sweep operations. Battalions of troops came by land and water to clear the area. But the Party base and the Party organization were not injured. One Self-Defense Group, a three-man cell was reduced to a one-man cell one bitter day when the two members were killed in action. Now, this self-defense group has become a real force, a platoon of armed men.

At the present time our organizational strength is as follows: the Party totals 26 members, the Lao Dong Youth 30, the Farmers Association 274, the Liberation Youth Group 150, the Liberation Women Group 119; 2,000 people, or two-thirds of the villagers, take part in Party led activities.

Part Two

MEANS AND METHODS OF OUR SUCCESS.

Elimination of Village Elders and Security Agents.

As the first step in establishing a base and fanning the fires of revolution, the Party began agitation of farmers to seek their own interests -- the right of owning land or reduction of land rent. This struggle, however, remained sporadic and weak and did not constitute a mass movement. Better to meet the enemy, which remained strong in the village, the Party began the elimination of influence of the village notables and local security agents. However, it failed to follow this with the development of a mass base. The cadres thought that efforts to end the authority of the village leaders alone would be enough. The enemy succeeded in maintaining the village administration. In the face of such a situation the Party called for a meeting. We explained to the villagers the evil caused by village notables and security agents. We awoke the people to the fact that if the American-Diem clique succeeded in permanently maintaining the organization of village notables and security soon Mister H, the cruel landlord, and others would return to the village to seize land and collect back rent. For that reason, we said, the farmers must eliminate the influence of the village notables and sweep away the security agents. At the same time we sought to win the sympathy of the families of the village notables (while we were urging the masses to rise up and eliminate the influence of the

notables). It was a good method. After awhile certain notables refused to work for the enemy and some took the side of the people.

Thus, when our enemies tried to begin projects in the village no one would work for them. The US-Diem clique tried to win back the people by distributing drugs in the village. The offer was flatly rejected. Some of the people even debated openly and strongly with the enemy agents. Finally the Diem clique had to abandon the village; no village council could be maintained there.

The Party hailed this great success and urged other villages in the area to follow the example. Since then, in surrounding villages, we have been successful in preventing the influence of the enemy. In the area now there remains only some Diem soldiers who live in a military post.

The Struggle for Land.

As I have noted, the main interest of the farmer of XB village is in land. Before, during and after the elimination of our enemy's influence, the Party in XB village always used the subject of land as a means of propagandizing the people and indoctrinating the masses.

In its political and armed struggle, in its administration of the rural area, and in other revolutionary tasks, the Party knew well how to make use of the farmers' interest in land. On it we built a mass movement. And for that reason the revolutionary movement made great progress and resulted in a great success.

At first this struggle was sporadic and weak. The farmers merely wanted land rent to be reduced and their right to farm the land maintained. Now the farmers cling to their land. The landowners remain in the cities, leaving the task of retaking the land and collecting rent to the soldiers posted in the area. But these troops can do little.

The Party Unit developed and used this slogan: "Kill the Land Robbers." This slogan was welcomed and used by the local people. The farmers now know they have the force to prevent the land owners from retaking their lands and can prevent the US-Dien clique from oppressing the people. Farmers are now free to farm, without paying either land rent or agricultural tax.

With respect to land, the people have scored these successes:

1. All private and public land has been distributed and ownership is now maintained except for land located near enemy army posts.
2. Land rent has been reduced by 16,000 gia of paddy (one gia equals forty liters; this is rice payment on rice producing land but to whom it is paid is not clear - ed.)

Victory came to the farmers and the people then enthusiastically joined the movement and put their confidence in the Party as the leader of the revolution.

However there were some classes of interest, some discord. There was a dispute between two farmers over a small parcel of land and each threatened to kill the other. The Party stepped in and called a meeting of villagers to hear and solve the problem. A cadre pointed out that:

"Land comes as part of the revolution's achievements and as a result of the people's struggle. Farmers must remain united and share the good and bad. Because the American-Diem clique and the landlords plot to come back, farmers must make concessions to each other to insure final victory. Only if these conditions are met will the farmers be able to take permanent possession of the land."

Upon hearing this the two farmers became enlightened, embraced each other and wept.

In administering the rural area, the Party seeks to settle contradictions between people, teach the people Party policy, urge the people to have spite for the Americans and Diem and seek to unite all groups and social classes in the village. If a party member or cadre makes a mistake he will be freely subjected to the criticism of the people. When the people can boldly criticize party members they will then be ready to forgive them.

Since the people are united, and since they have learned how to guard against leakage of secrets and the penetrations of the enemy, security agents and spies cannot survive.

Besides the matter of land, the Party also attends to the other needs of the people, such as public health, sanitation, education, maternity facilities, etc. Moreover, the Party helps farmers market their produce at high prices. Through organization, merchant speculators are avoided.

The Party operates a first aid station run by a public health cadre who also makes visits around to look after the health of people in the area. There is also a midwife who manages confinements. The people pay for these services and they also have a voice in the management of them.

In the matter of schools, the Party called the problem to the attention of the people at a public meeting. The Party guided the people in applying to district officials for aid in building schools and supplying teachers. This failed and the Party led the people into the task of providing a school themselves. At the last moment, the authorities approved the establishment of a school (meaning unclear - ed). A Pupil Parent Association was founded and two schools were built. Maintenance of the school is through money collected from the people. The school is managed by the people under the guidance of the Party. The people take turns observing the operation of the school and prepare to answer the enemies if they come to criticize the school operation.

In one case, as one of the schools neared completion, soldiers came to ask why. The people answered: "Admission to (nearby) public school requires birth certificates. Our children have none and therefore cannot be admitted. Therefore we establish a special school for them." The soldiers agreed with this view. Consequently the schools established are legal. And children are educated under our guidance.

Display of the Flag.

Seeing that the Party assumes responsibility for education, seeing that Party members in XB village are devoted to the people's cause, especially with regard to land, seeing how the Party looks after the people's living standards, the people of the village became attached to the cadres and Party members and ready to support Party policy.

During a ceremony to welcome the establishment of the National Liberation Front (December 1960 - ed) the inhabitants of XB village enthusiastically prepared. The walls of the houses were whitewashed, flags were made and raised on flagpoles in front of each house. In all, 600 flags were flown throughout the village -- expressing the people's spirit of struggle and their support of the revolution. The Party cadres had indoctrinated the people and prepared them to debate with the enemies. When the soldiers came to take away the flags, the people said to them calmly: "This is a flag of peace. It is not

a Viet Cong flag. This flag means that the people, some of whom are your relatives or even your families, have land to till."

Most of the soldiers agreed with this view and took away only a few flags.

One old man was concerned because his flag was wet. He feared this would lessen the solemnity of the ceremony. This incident proves that if the people understand the Party's goals, and become enlightened, our efforts can never fail.

In summary, the Party in XB village has established a mass movement, has enlightened the people, has made the Party's policies a great force among the villagers.

Forging Weapons and Establishing Defenses.

When we tried to get the people to forge rudimentary weapons we encountered great difficulty, for the people were not accustomed to this sort of thing. At first our own self-defense troops and cadres carried the burden, unsupported by the people.

The laying of naily boards (metal or bamboo spikes set in weeds or in marsh land to pierce the shoe and foot - ed), the forging of rudimentary weapons, the establishment of combat villages requires the cooperation of all. Unless all understand Party policy and contribute to these works, the movement in the village will be weak.

The people thought that the laying of naily boards was illegal and would result in terror and reprisals by the soldiers. In light of this the Party members laid the naily boards themselves, while endeavoring at the same time to educate the people. The Party laid more naily boards than ever. Once, during a terror sweep one of the soldiers was injured by a naily board. This caused the soldiers to withdraw. Party members correctly regarded this as a success and held a mass meeting at which it was explained that laying of naily boards had prevented the entrance of the enemy. The cadres declared that if the people did not lay naily boards the enemies would come to collect land rents, levy taxes, impose corvee labor and draft young men into the army. The Party then introduced the slogan: "One naily board for each square of land."

The people each day were urged to oppose the Americans and Diem in order to keep their land and protect themselves.

The idea of naily boards was eventually supported by the people. Many were laid. Later three enemy soldiers were injured by naily boards. Taking advantage of this event, the Party held a meeting and reported the success to the whole village.

In one hamlet the Party cadre showed the people how to lay a barricade of thorny bamboo across a road and underneath put grenades attached to the branches. When the enemy came, however, the soldiers hooked ropes to the branches and pulled them away, exploding the grenades but not injuring the soldiers. However, the soldiers became fearful and did not do any more mopping up that day.

Encouraged by this success, our comrades urged the people to set up eleven combat gates (barricades - ed) to prevent the entrance of our enemies.

However, the education work was not careful enough. For instance, one old farmer opposed our plan and asked permission to leave the area. But then the soldiers came and the farmer was afraid. The soldiers forced him to remove the combat gates. He removed a few.

The Party began anew its education work to explain away the damage done by the mopping up operation. The cadre explained that fencing the area, laying combat gates, laying naily boards, proselyting the Army and engaging in political struggle all contributed to the defense of the village, protected the lives of the villagers and kept the land intact.

The Party sent its best cadre to reeducate the old farmer and in time he became enlightened, approved the setting up of combat gates and confessed his faults before the people.

The Farmers Association was put in charge of combat gates (each was given a number) and of laying naily boards. Each sub-cell of the Farmers Association is in charge of one combat gate -- and closes the gate when the enemy comes and gives the alarm by means of tocsin. When a tocsin sounds each person knows which gate the enemy is entering and thus how best to cope with the situation.

The mass movement to lay naily boards, set up gates and establish a combat village and had good results and illustrates how our comrades know correct propaganda techniques. They know how to make efficient propaganda that reflects the real interests of the people; they also know how to stimulate the rancor of the people.

The Party constantly studies not only the interests of each social class, but also the attitudes of each family.

In rural areas, they found it necessary to propagandize in the following way: "To keep your land and prevent landowners from collecting rent, you must lay naily boards."

With families who have youths of military age it is necessary to propagandize as follows: "The laying of naily boards prevents the Americans and Diem from recruiting soldiers by force. Soldiers taken into the Army will die, as did A and B, from this village. Those who become soldiers will be forced to participate in mopping up operations and will die of naily boards injuries as we have seen here."

In a family whose members are from North Vietnam it is necessary to say: "Please lay naily boards to fight against the Americans and Diem for the restoration of peace, and for the unification of our country. When the revolution is successful you and your relatives will be reunited."

Before the start of a recent series of mopping up operations the Party worked to educate the people. They prepared by designating people to lay naily boards, engage in legal struggles against our enemies, carry on Army proselyting efforts, etc. During the operation our enemies encountered naily boards everywhere. They tried to force the villagers to guide them but no one would accept this task. People told them that the day before, the Liberation Army forbade the inhabitants to go out so they did not know the location of naily boards and grenades. The people also urged the troops not to advance. Some persons, designated to guide our enemies, led them into swamp-land. Tired, after many hours, our enemies had to withdraw.

After each mopping up operation the people review the failure or the success of the resistance effort in each hamlet. A meeting is held and each hamlet makes a report in the presence of a cadre, who then points out the experience gained. At this meeting the hamlet which showed initiative or which achieved some outstanding victory in fighting with rudimentary weapons occupies a place of honor in the front ranks. Although one group is not encouraged to outdo the other, the various groups sometimes compete with one another in laying naily boards.

One farmer even competed with his wife in laying naily boards. The husband said: "Your duty is in attending to the children. You do not have time to lay naily boards. Let me fight our enemies." "You fight against our enemies," answered the wife, "it is your duty. But as a woman I also have the task of annihilating them." So they both participated.

During one operation some of the villagers did not fight and were captured. Later they were released and when they came home, the villagers met them and berated them and told them only by fighting could the people protect their lives and property.

After each mopping up operation, various groups review the actions of each hamlet and indulge in mutual criticism. This serves to increase devotion, bring out the strong points and the shortcomings of the effort. This enables the people to convert experience into an improved organization.

In mopping up operations in mid-July our enemies sent in 600 soldiers, in motor boats, to attack XB village. The leadership of the Party was stable, however, and had prepared well the political and military struggle, so the efforts of the enemy came to nothing. Seven enemy soldiers were wounded by naily boards. The enemy soldiers withdrew before the united resistance of the people.

During this same operation it was discovered that some of the naily boards had become warped and unusable. Afterwards the people held a meeting attended by the cadre in charge of laying naily boards. It was decided that round naily boards were better than the ordinary one, also that the barbed naily boards were more dangerous for our enemies.

One farmer had invented a kind of bottle grenade using a cartridge. It was tested on a dog and the explosion disemboweled him. Now people are busy making the new bottle grenade.

It should be noted that whereas the laying of naily boards was at first done by the cadres, now everyone, especially the Farmers Association, participate in the effort, under the guidance of cadres.

The people now even say to the cadres: "Take care of the documents and avoid encountering the enemy." This proves that the people place full confidence in the cadres, are devoted to them and want to protect them.

XB village is still not yet well known. But local soldiers are fearful of it. The soldiers camped at LH and TH villages (nearby) say: "If you wish to meet your loved ones again, don't attack XB."

Part Three

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM XB

The Party at XB has scored some outstanding successes. These are due to the following:

1. Party members were determined correctly to carry out Party's policies. When the village bases were dispersed and the situation worsened, these comrades took increased resolve to surmount their difficulties. They strived at all times to get closer to the poor farmers, to keep a firm hold on, and at the same time keep a deep faith in the masses. By so taking this approach they were able to re-kindle the people's spirit and reorganize the mass movement.