

## BRUSH FIRE WARS

### I. Background

#### A. Introduction

Khrushchev has promised that Communism "will bury" us and that our grandchildren will be Communists. How does he hope to achieve this; mainly by starting and winning "brush fire" wars (called "wars of Liberation" in Communist jargon). War has always been viewed by the Communists as an inevitable step to world domination. But the Communists could lose an all-out atomic war so another tactic, the "brush fire" war, seems to them less risky and surer of success.

This information and education pamphlet examines Communist "brush fire" wars - their history, how and why the Communists start them and how we can and have defeated them.

#### B. Definition of A "Brush Fire" War

A "brush fire" war is a guerrilla war carried out against the existing government of a country with the objective of overthrowing this government and putting the guerrilla force into power.

#### C. Communist Objectives in "Brush Fire" Wars

The ultimate purpose of every Communist inspired "brush fire" is to gain control over the country in which the war is started. The Communists believe that through a series of "brush fire" wars in under-developed countries they can take over these countries and by taking them over, isolate the United States.

D. United States Policy

American policy is to help nations under "brush fire" attack defend themselves; and at the same time, to help them develop into strong, free nations where Communism can have no support.

E. General History of "Brush Fire" Wars

The Communists have engaged in "brush fire" wars since 1945 with varying degrees of success. In China and part of Vietnam they won but in Greece, the Philippines and Malaya they lost and now always where the local government has been firmly supported by the United States, they have lost. Today we are helping South Vietnam and Laos to defend themselves against this same kind of war. This is not an entirely new kind of war for us but it resembles the wars of our <sup>more</sup> distant past, the Indian wars and the Revolutionary War, than it does the mechanized combat of World Wars I and II.

1. Ingredients of a "Brush Fire" War. The basic ingredients of a Communist inspired brush fire war are always the same. The Communists create a pretext for attacking the local government by force using local organizations which have disguised themselves as patriotic "nationalists" or "reformers" in order to gain popular support.

2. In Greece, the Philippines, Malaya and China these groups were originally a part of guerrilla movements organized during World War II to fight the Germans or the Japanese. Within these overall guerrilla movements, the Communists carefully organized and controlled their own forces. After the war, these forces tried to take over each country. To do this they used a variety of tactics. Under the banner of "nationalism", "justice", "people's democracy", "agrarian reform", they at first tried to gain power through semi-legal or legal means. When this failed they resorted to guerrilla

war, screaming that their legitimate rights had been denied. And always they played upon the emotions of their people, destroying confidence in the legitimate government and at the same time making the people believe that they, the Communists, sincerely wanted to bring a more decent life to the people.

F. Laos - A Case in Point

1. A typical case in point of how the "brush fire" war can be used by the Communists, temporarily exchanged for relatively peaceful tactics and then used again is the recent history of Laos.

2. During the war for Indochina, the Communist Vietminh did not only fight the French in Vietnam they also recruited and trained a local Communist controlled movement in Laos to fight the French there. This movement, called the Pathet Lao, was supposed to disarm and disband at the end of the war in 1954, after being regrouped in two northern provinces. Instead of submitting to elections, they demanded participation in the Government without elections. When this was not acceptable, they began guerrilla warfare against the legitimate Government. At the same time they started a campaign of propaganda and terror to frighten the population of the two northern provinces into submission, while concurrently they received training and weapons from the Vietminh just across the border.

3. By 1957, just three years after the Indochina War had stopped they had built up their forces to about 15,000 men from 8,000 during the war. While harrassing the Government, they played upon the general wish for peace after so many years of war. Gradually they wore down Government resistance to a political compromise which would give them the important parts in the Government which they had demanded in the beginning.

4. Finally at the end of 1957 the Government signed an agreement with the Communists whereby the Communists would lay down their arms and disband their forces in return for which the Government would give them positions in the Government and would hold a supplementary election for additional seats in parliament for which no Communists could put up candidates as a legal political party.

5. When the time came for the Communists army to disband, their commander told them that although they were going to be sent back to their home villages they were still in the army and once they returned home they must await further order. The Communist troops went back to their villages and the orders came to campaign for Communist and pro-communist candidates. The "ex-soldiers" received complete orders on what to do and say including how to frighten people into voting for their side. The Communist army had been converted into a Communist political machine simply by taking off its uniform.

6. The legitimate Government was slow to react, there were splinter parties who split the pro-Government vote and there was corruption in Government. The result - a Communists victory gaining most of the supplementary seats in Parliament.

7. That election woke up the Lao Government. New and younger politicians and military officers were put into key Government positions so that it could oil effectively to win the support of the population. Corruption was cleaned up and ~~program~~ of naval aid to the villages should. Six man teams were created in the Lao Army to give civil assistance to the people in the

form of building schools, novels, etc. as well as to provide security in the naval areas. Gradually this effort began to win the population away from the Pathet - Lao.

8. Seeing that they were losing popular support, the Communists went back to the "brush fire" war tactic but this time they called in supporting troops from North Vietnam. Using this support they were able to push the Lao Army out of several provinces in Laos. Now negotiations are again underway while "brush fire" skirmishing continuing.

9. The important point to remember from this description is that the ultimate purpose of all Communist tactics is to gain power and that they may shift and have shifted from one tactic, the "peaceful" struggle, to another, the "brush fire" now and then back again. However, the so-called "peaceful" tactic is always used to gain time, to wear down the resistance and morale of the government to win popular support, or for some other gain so that the "brush fire" war can be started again with a better chance of success. The "brush fire" war is the night uppercut of the Communists - their knockout blow. By studying some of the communists inspired "brush fire" wars which have occurred in various countries since the Second World War, we can see how this communist knockout blow was not only blocked but in some instances used by us to destroy the communist movement.

## II. A Study of Communist Inspired "Brush Fire" Wars.

### A. Greece

B. Malaya

C. The Philippines.

1. Before World War II there was a small Communist Party in the Philippines. After the Japanese conquest of the Philippines, this party formed a resistance movement against the Japanese which called itself the Hubbuliahup (or ) and which came to be known as the Huks. This was only one among many Filipino guerrilla groups which fought the Japanese. However, the Communists were skillful at hiding their two purposes and were therefore able to enlist the support of many Filipinos who wanted a chance to fight the Japanese. As in other countries the U. S. parachuted in arms to anyone willing to fight and by the end of the war the Huks had 10,000 men under arms.

2. When peace came the other guerrilla movements turned in their arms and disbanded into civilian life. Independence was granted in 1946, as the U. S. had promised ten years before, and President ~~Roxas~~ was democratically elected. However, the Huks were not willing to return to normal political life. They hung on to their arms, demanded positions in the new government and threatened revolt if their demands were not met. The government attempted to negotiate on the basis that the Huks must stand the democratic test of elections if they wanted to govern. They refused, the negotiations failed and the Huks started a "brush fire" war.

3. Exploiting popular dissatisfaction with a corrupt government, often dishonest elections and an unfair, almost fidal, system of land ownership, the Huks rapidly developed an effective guerrilla army. By 1950, the Huks had some men under arms with over a million and a half active sympathizers and they held large areas of the main island of Luzon, practically cutting off the capital, Manila, from the rest of the country. The 1949 Presidential elections were widely believed to have been rigged and this added to popular dissatisfaction.

4. In 1950, the then newly elected President Quirino turned in desperation to a little known Congressman, Ramon Magsaysay, and asked him to take over the Department of Defense and win the war against the Huks. Magsaysay, a former guerrilla leader against the Japanese, had his hands full. The Philippine Army and the Constabulary (a combination national guard-national police force) were demoralized. The Constabulary had the responsibility for fighting the Huks but neither the will nor the means, so Magsaysay gave the job to the Army.

5. But the Army was also ill suited to the task. It had done little training after the War, discipline was disliked by the people because it did not respect their rights and it was not organized for fighting the kind of guerrilla war which the Huks were winning.

6. Magsaysay changed all that. Remembering lessons learned from his guerrilla days, he converted the Army into a friend of the

people while fighting the Huks with their own guerrilla tactics. Towards the Huks he adopted a policy of "all-out friendship or all-out force". If a Huk surrendered voluntarily he had the choice of being resettled with Government assistance on new land or of returning to normal life. For those unwilling to surrender voluntarily, all-out force was applied.

7. To make it capable of applying the necessary force, the Philippine Army was reorganized into Battalion Combat Teams stationed in key areas. Morale was boosted by cashiering dishonest officers and by battlefield promotions. Magsaysay was everywhere, inspecting units, going into combat with them and most of all seeing they got the support they needed. Intensive combat training was given. At the same time the entire Army was educated to respect the civilian population.

8. Special squad-size units called Scout-Rangers were formed to operate independently in Huk controlled areas, much the way Rodgers Rangers operated during our Revolution or Merrill's Marauders in Burma during World War II. These units would locate the Huks, harrass them and often drive them into ambushes staged by larger units from the Battalion Combat Teams. While part of the Battalion Combat Team was engaged in combat, the rest would be helping the local population. Village wells were drilled (the pumps came from the U. S.), medical help was given and the Army engineers were brought in to build roads and school houses. Many soldiers taught in these schools when they weren't fighting.

9. The result was that the sympathy of the civilian population shifted away from the Huks and to the Army. Suddenly people who before would not tell where the Huks were began to volunteer this information to the Army. As a result, instead of being perpetually ambushed, the Army became able to ambush the Huks.

10. Under Magsaysay's direction the Army did other things as well which helped defeat the Huks. Lawyers from the Judge Advocate General's office were assigned to assist in court cases where tenant farmers had no legal representation. But the most effective use of the Army, outside of its traditional combat role, was in ensuring free elections.

11. The Huks were exploiting the belief which was substantially true that most elections were rigged in the Philippines and the people couldn't hope to get the leaders they wanted into office by the ballot. The Army felt that if by guarding political rallies and the polls against intimidation and trickery, they could show that elections were free, faith would be restored in democratic government and support for the Huk rebellion would cease.

12. The test came in the 1951 elections. The Army used ROTC cadets to police the precincts and regular troops to protect candidates and their audiences from thugs as well as to protect the polls. The result was an obviously free election - because many of the administrations opponents won. The effect of that election is perhaps best

illustrated by a story told by an American officer who helped advise and support the Philippine Army during its campaign against the Huks.

13. Right after the election returns were in, he was visiting Philippine Army units in Central Luzon where the major Huk strength was then, and stopped by the Philippine Army station hospital in the town of San Fernando. In one ward, there was a group of people around a bed in which lay an old man. Hospital personnel came up and said that the old man wanted to talk to the American. He was reluctant to intrude, but the old man insisted. The old man said that he had a son with the Huks, and had been proud until just now that this son was fighting to get a people's government. Yet, on the Tuesday before, he had voted for some men and every man he voted for had been elected. A man then knew that this was the way to get his own government. His candidates had won. It was his own government. So, when a Huk squadron came last night to collect food and money, everyone locked their doors against them. The man shouted to the Huks to go away, that the people would help them no more. He also shouted that he wanted the Huks to send his son home. The Huks broke down the door and bayoneted him. He then said he knew he was dying -- but wanted an American to know that what had happened was worth doing. He died a few moments later.

14. As that election was a turning point in the mind of that one old man so was it a turning point in the minds of many Filipinos. Afterwards the Huks themselves more and more cut off from their own people. They made increasing use of terrorism to try to intimidate

the people into supporting them but it didn't work. The Army's combat operations were too successful in protecting the safety of the people, while the people themselves became braver, like the old man, because they now had a system of government they believed in. The Huk movement which seemed ready to conquer the Philippines only two years before, largely disappeared. The brush fire had been snuffed out.

15. During that "brush Fire" war members of the American military advisory group helped train and advise the Philippine Army and supplied it with weapons. American volunteer agencies like CARE furnished needed items such as school books for the civil assistance program carried out by the Army. In giving this assistance, we helped the Filipinos to successfully defend principles of democracy which are at the heart of our own way of life.

D. Vietnam.

1. Vietnam was once part of French Indochina. The Japanese occupied it during the Second World War and after the war the French tried to take it back. In the meantime several nationalist groups had proclaimed the country's independence from France. Among these groups but not the largest was the Communist controlled Vietminh (which means ).

2. When the French returned to Vietnam in 1946, they were opposed by all nationalist groups. After some initial fighting the French negotiated with one group, the Vietminh. A deal was made to eliminate the largest nationalist party, which the French and the Vietminh did together. Then they turned on each other and the "brush fire" war for Vietnam began.

3. So strong was Vietnamese feeling against the French that the Communist controlled Vietminh were able to rally widespread support despite the murdering of other nationalist leaders. The guerrilla war dragged on with the French steadily losing ground. The people supported the Communist controlled Vietminh because there was no alternative and the Vietminh had its Communist care behind a cloak of nationalism. They were fighting for independence and independence only they said and most of the people believed them.

4. In 1950 the French changed tactics. They gave Vietnam its independence, on paper, and set up a Vietnamese Army and Government. Unfortunately, they never gave the Vietnamese Government sufficient independence for it to gain enough popular support to win.

5. Communist "brush fire" war tactics against the French consisted initially of guerrilla harassment. Without the friendship and support of the Vietnamese people, the French were unable to locate their Communist enemy while the Communist Vietminh always knew where the French were and ambushed French units at will. The French tried to fight a mechanized war and found most of their equipment useless in Vietnamese rice paddies. Often they fired on villagers at random, not knowing which were Vietminh, and this only increased the hostility of the people against them. In some areas under wise commanders the French established bonds with the local civilian population but this was the exception rather than the rule.

6. The Vietnamese Army troops were not very well received either because they had not been taught to respect their own people. And because they were still openly dominated by the French, their morale was low and they did not fight well.

7. Gradually the Communist Vietminh increased the size of their army and won larger and larger areas of Vietnam. The French fought a static war, operating mostly out of a system of fixed forts where they were immobilized. This left the Communists free to move their forces through the countryside at will and to concentrate for an attack on the French. The Communists began eliminating these strong points in pitched battles one by one. French resistance faded, culminating in the loss of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, which in turn resulted in the Geneva Treaty cutting the country in half and giving the north to the Communists.

8. The United States had an advisory mission in Vietnam after 1950 which pleaded for a chance to train the Vietnamese Army but never got it until the war was over. Some members of this mission were in the capital city of Hanoi in North Vietnam when the French turned it over to the Communist Vietminh. They say they will never forget the sight of divisions of French troops pulling out of Hanoi in tanks, jeeps, half tracks and trucks towing batteries of artillery, while the Communist troops entered on foot single file clad in faded, torn kacki, wearing pith helmets and carrying hand weapons and home-made recoilless rifles on bamboo slings.

9. By the end of the war in Vietnam, the Vietminh had identified themselves more and more as real Communists in their propaganda and by such measures as Communist Chinese style land reform. They lost much of their popular support and when Vietnam was partitioned, over a million refugees fled south because they feared Communism.

10. After Geneva, the "brush fire" war stopped temporarily but the struggle for power for what was left of Vietnam went on. In the south when President Diem took office in August 1954 all bets were that South Vietnam would go Communist within a year. Most of the countryside was either in Communist Vietminh hands or sympathetic to it. The rest was controlled by religious sects with their own private armies. These sects were also hostile to Diem's government, although anti-Communist.

11. To give his Government popular support and to undermine the Communists, Diem moved energetically. The Vietnamese Army was given the mission of entering and re-establishing government in those areas which had been occupied by the Communist Vietminh. Regular Vietnamese units were assembled in task forces to occupy these areas. They were given special training, stressing respect for the civilian population. Their motto became "the Army is the brother of the people". Americans from our military advisory group assisted in these preparations and at the same time made logistical support available. Food, medicine and clothing were stockpiled and Filipino doctors and nurses from "Operation Brotherhood", a medical mission sponsored by the International , volunteered to accompany the march in.

12. The Vietminh, feeling that South Vietnam would eventually collapse into their hands, decided against violent resistance. They expected the Vietnamese Army to act as it had under the French, so they told the people that the incoming troops would pillage and burn.

13. When the Vietnamese did march in it was a new arm. They were met at first with hostility and fear; and although polite and correct, the troops were hesitant to approach the population and offer help. But as medicines were distributed, roads repaired and individual acts of kindness performed, the people saw that the Vietminh had lied. Word of mouth of the new Army spread, and as the Army pushed on into other villages they were met by enthusiasm. The people cast off their fear of the Vietminh and before the Vietminh knew what had happened their support was gone. Within a short time villagers began to point out Vietminh arms left behind for eventual war and to identify secret Vietminh leaders.

14. Then President Diem applied similar tactics to winning the areas held by the religious sects while using force against the sect's private armies in much the same way that Magsaysay used force against the Huks in the Philippines.

15. By 1956, Vietnam was relatively peaceful. The country was developing with American aid while in North Vietnam conditions were becoming more and more oppressive. The Communists, having lost out in their efforts to win South Vietnam by relatively legal and peaceful means, decided to return to violent tactics before the population in the north revolted, spurred by the example of a free South Vietnam.

16. Communist Vietminh soldiers who originally came from South Vietnam were infiltrated from the north back into their home areas. There they contacted remnants of the secret organization the Communists left behind when they evacuated. Since the population was no longer sympathetic in most areas, a campaign of terror was started to force their cooperation. Village chiefs and other officials who refused to cooperate were systematically murdered.

17. The Vietnamese Army in the meantime had been organized in divisions and trained to defend against a possible invasion from the North; while the Civil Guard (Vietnamese equivalent of the Philippine Constabulary) was small in size and insufficiently armed and equipped. For these reasons, neither force has been able until recently to cope with the growing Communist guerrilla attacks. Now, however, with increased American assistance the Vietnamese Army is on the offensive. The same mobile guerrilla tactics are being used against the Communists which were used successfully in the Philippines and at the same time the Army is beginning to carry out civil assistance or "civic action" programs to improve the well-being of the villagers and win their loyalty.

18. As in any guerrilla war this is a battle of ideas as well as bullets, and in order to win the South Vietnamese must show, with our help, that our ideas are more than words. These ideas must be translated into real security, better opportunity and tangible improvements in the well-being of the people. It is the job of the officers and men in our military advisory group to help the Vietnamese do these things.

E. Lessons Learned from "Brush Fire" Wars

1. One of the lessons we have learned in Greece, in the Philippines and once before in Vietnam is that if our friends are to win "brush fire" wars we must train them to do more than fire a gun. We must give them effective training, effective advice and effective assistance in beating a local enemy on his home grounds not on ours.

2. Much of our recent experience from World War II and Korea is not applicable, so we must be prepared to learn as well as teach. Above all we must remember that the brush fire war is primarily a struggle for men's minds. Villagers are shot by the enemy not to be merely eliminated but to persuade others to cooperate. Troops are ambushed not only to kill but also to demoralize the living.

3. A guerrilla enemy is never superior in numbers. What wins for him is the support of the people and his ability to demoralize the forces against him. The only way to beat him is to win the people to our side, not by his tactics but by our own which are based on such concepts as the "Army and the people are brothers" and "Government of the people, by the people and for the people".

4. By making the Army respect the people and by using it to meet the needs of the people, we make these concepts and principles come true. Once the people believe that the Army is their Army and the Government is their Government they will risk their lives to defend it.

And in time the individual soldier will risk his life to defend his people because they have placed their trust in him.

5. Where this spirit is created, the Communists can never win a "brush fire" war. Where this spirit does not exist Communism is likely to win its "brush fire" wars, endangering our country and our free way of life.

6. Every American soldier should keep these principles in mind and should remember the lessons we have learned through hard experience. As part of a military advisory group to a friendly nation he may be called upon to put these lessons and these principles to use. Upon the results of how we apply these lessons and these principles may well depend our future and the future of our children, for the communists are out to conquer us by winning "brush fire" wars.