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## THE HIGHLANDERS OF SOUTH VIETNAM

A Review of Political Developments and Forces



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INTRODUCTION

"To seize and control the Highlands is to solve the whole problem of South Vietnam."

General Vo Nguyen Giap

The strategic importance of the Highlands of South Vietnam is recognized by military and political authorities on both sides of the current Viet Cong conflict. But what are the political and economic forces, either native or alien, that influence any effort to control this sparsely populated area that encompasses half of South Vietnam? How have the primitive Highlanders who have been propelled into this political struggle at the same time that they are experiencing drastic cultural changes been effected?

It is the intention of this study to bring together a history of the political, economic and social developments in the Highlands, especially since 1954 when the area came under Vietnamese Government direction, so that the area and its problems can be better understood and, in part, answers to the questions raised above suggested. It is also intended to review briefly the numerous Vietnamese and American programs initiated at various times in the Highlands and outline the results. Except as necessary background information so that the reader may better understand how the Highlander lives as opposed to the Vietnamese, a discussion of the culture of the Highlander has been avoided since several recent studies exist on this subject.

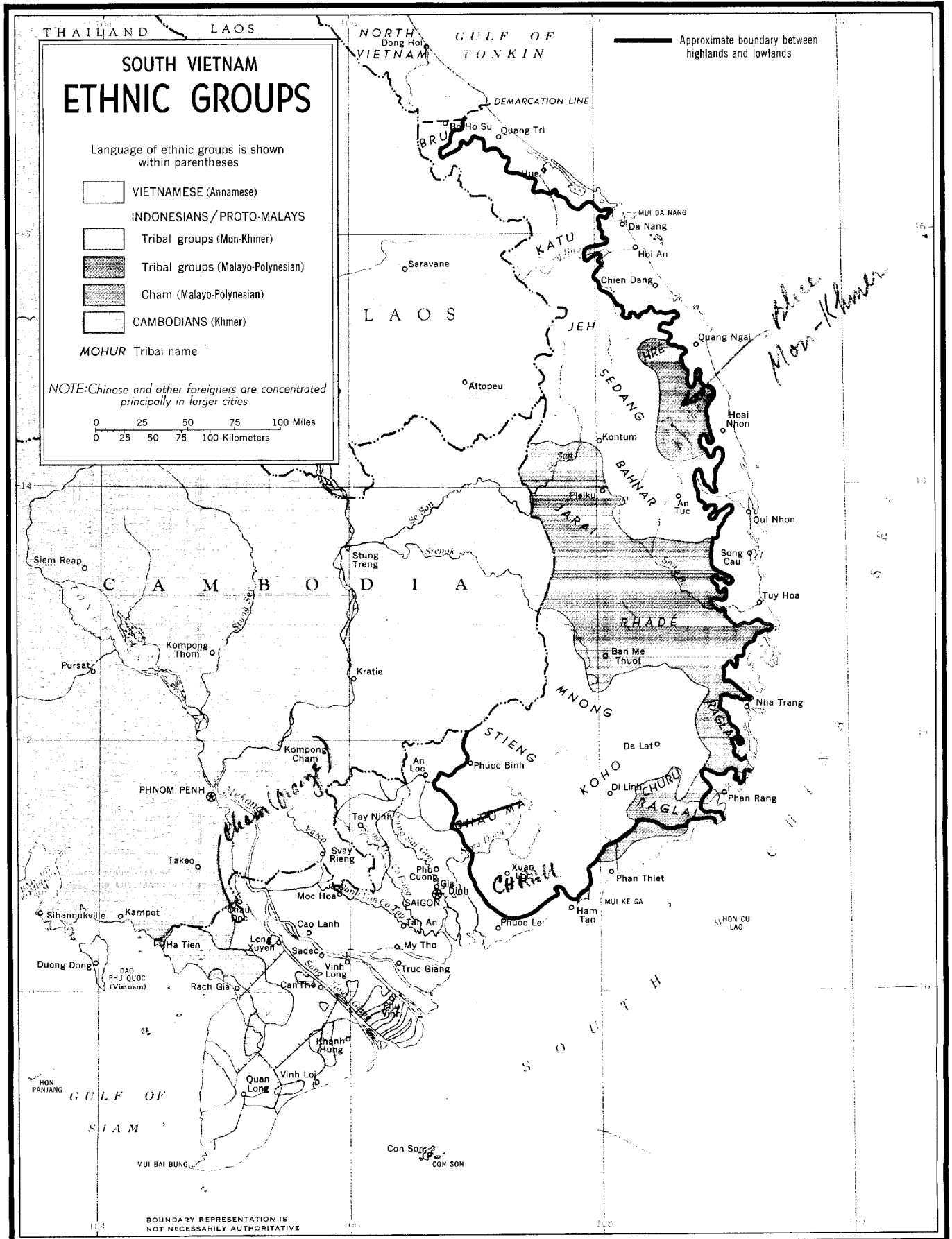
There are few Western authorities or scholars who are knowledgeable in any great depth on the Highlands minorities. Such as exist are primarily French administrators and missionaries who lived in the region, antropologists who have conducted cultural studies, a few American missionaries who have dedicated their lives to working with these primitive peoples, and Dr. Gerald C. Hickey, currently with The RAND Corporation but who has spent the last ten years studying these people. There are no Vietnamese authorities who have come to public attention. Though little is known of some of the tribal groups and further studies are desirable, there exists today sufficient cultural information on the Highlanders to provide adequate background knowledge to civilian and military officials, both Vietnamese and American, involved in this region. There is no known recent publication of any detail on the political history of the Highlanders and the effects Vietnamese, American and Communist programs in the area have had on these people. It is hoped that this study will help fill that gap.

This study has made use of both unclassified and classified reports prepared by various U. S. Government agencies and independent scholars. The most useful information was contained in State Department reporting, U. S. AID memoranda, and CIA information reports. Press reporting on the area is limited and was found to be often inaccurate. The publications of research and educational institutions provided valuable background information. More than one thousand individual reports were consulted of which approximately one-fourth were germane to this study.

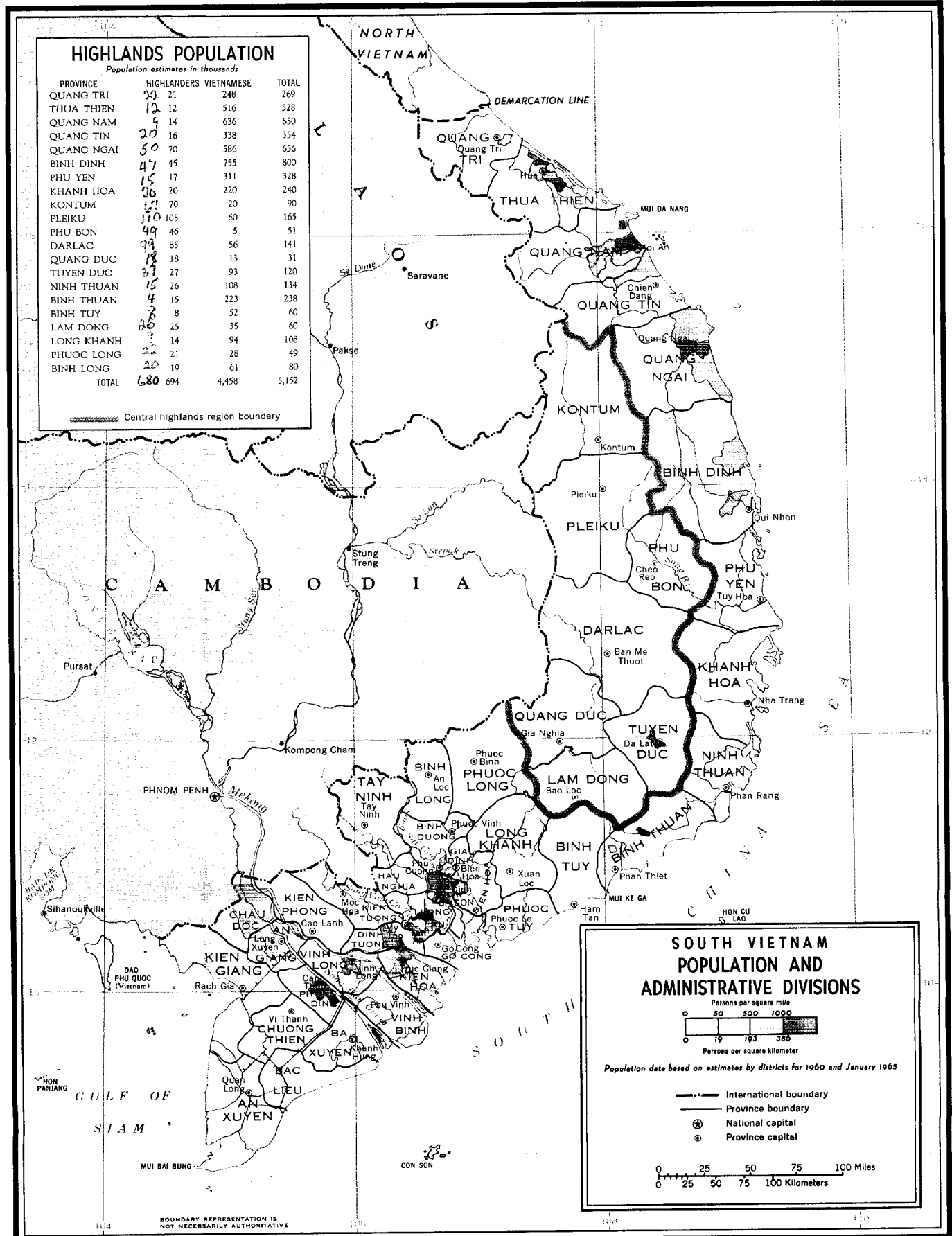
Significant gaps in the information available are to be noted. There are no accurate population figures for the area, with estimates of Highlanders ranging from 500,000 to 1,000,000. The population figures cited in this study are therefore the best judgment of the author, derived from the numerous and conflicting data available, and are used to show magnitude rather than a precise knowledge. Information on Highlander leaders is also sketchy and confusing. Biographic resumes included in the body of this study and found also in the appendix leave much to be desired and are subject to correction and expansion by more knowledgeable persons than the author. In most instances, information available reflects the views expressed by Vietnamese officials to American officials and does not reflect views expressed by Vietnamese among themselves. This leaves a gap in our understanding of Vietnamese intentions in the Highlands which can be filled in part by relating announced programs to the expressed attitudes of the officials charged with conducting the programs and the support provided by the Central Government. There are also gaps in our knowledge of events that occurred and the incidents that led up to these events. In some instances the author, who lived in the Highlands in 1964 and 1965, has attempted to bring the forces at work into cleared focus from his personal observations and conversations with Highlanders and Vietnamese officials.

If this study provides the reader with a better understanding of the political and economic forces at work, the frictions between the Highlander and Vietnamese, the Vietnamese and American programs that have been attempted in the Highlands, and the aspirations of the Highlanders, then it will have served its purpose.

Washington, D. C.  
15 June 1966



*Alise Mon-Khmer*





THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND UNTIL 1955

Nearly half of South Vietnam is composed of the Darlac Plateau and Annamite (Truong Son) Mountain Chain (termed Pays Montagnard du Sud (PMS) by the French), which is inhabited by primitive ethnic groups who are called "Moi" (savages) by the Vietnamese lowlanders and "Montagnards" (mountaineers) by the French. These primitive peoples, numbering about 700,000 and made up of approximately 22 ethnic groups (referred to as tribes), are as individually different from tribe to tribe as the American Indians. They inhabited the area prior to the advent of the Vietnamese and are racially included in the Malayo-Polynesian ethnic group, divided into those tribes who speak Malayo-Polynesian languages learned as a result of the influence of the Chams during the first millenium A.D. and those tribes who speak Mon-Khmer languages. Historically, the Highlands have been a buffer zone in the struggles among Vietnamese, Khmer, Siamese, Lao and colonial powers, with the Highlanders generally resisting outside enroachment and remaining relatively aloof from these currents of history. Though the Highlanders are linguistically and culturally variegated, prior to the establishment of French administration at the end of the 19th century, there was no political super-structure or recognized permanent leadership beyond the village. Today, the village is still the most important political unit.

The culture of the Highlanders is radically different from Vietnamese culture, and the Vietnamese have made little or no real attempt toward understanding these differences; nor were they afforded an opportunity during the days of French control. Slash and burn shifting agriculture is the predominant form practiced by the Highlanders with villages moving only when the productivity of the land becomes exhausted or if a natural catastrophe strikes, such as an epidemic, fire, or if the village is struck by lightning. This primitive technique destroys the forest resources. Hunting, though important, has become more a leisure-time activity, with fishing the important dietary supplement. Domestic animals also play a large role in highland life, with the buffalo being the most important and in many villages a man's wealth is gauged by the number of buffaloes he has sacrificed. In most instances, land is controlled by the family, clan or village; individual ownership is rare. All the ethnic groups in the Highlands have a traditional system of land tenure and definite mechanisms for holding and transferring title or use of land. The kinship system varies among tribes, with the Rhade, Jarai, M'nong Raglai practicing a matrilineal system;

the Koho, Katu, Jeh, Cua and Stieng practicing a patrilineal system; and the Bahnar and Sedang practicing a bilateral system. Religion plays a dominant role in the lives of the Highlanders, who believe in a pantheon of spirits associated with inanimate objects, topographical features, ancestors, birds and animals. Religious observances are characterized for most tribes by periods of ritual sacrifices and heavy drinking. Life is centered in the family and village, with the individual strongly attached to his traditional village lands where dwell the spirits that control his life. Disease, hunger, cold and fear are a constant part of life for these superstitious peoples.

The recorded history of the Highlands is a complicated series of inter-tribal wars and shifting allegiances with the Cham, Khmer and Vietnamese. French penetration into the area during the last half of the 19th century was achieved not without great difficulty; the pacification of the Highlands continued until very recent times. The establishment of French plantations after World War I precipitated considerable unrest among the Highlanders. The allocation of land in Darlac Province to French rubber planters during the 1920's deprived the Rhade and M'nong of land which, even though little of it was cultivated at any one time, yet was traditionally theirs for future use. They considered it an invasion of their lands, and revolts by the Highlanders against the French began occurring in 1928. In 1931, a revolt marked by several ambushes of French troops and attacks on French outposts broke out among the groups in the southern Highlands as a reaction to French settlement and establishment of plantations in that area. It lasted until 1933. In 1936, another wave of unrest lasting until 1938 began in Kontum Province and spread throughout the Highlands. There were instances of armed attacks against French authorities, particularly in the area occupied by the Sedang. The Hre of Kontum Province are said to have mutinied in 1949 under the leadership of their provincial chief, Din Loye, and a former corporal in the Indochina Militia, Dinh Diu, and to have killed as many as 5,000 Vietnamese, but there is no information that would substantiate this figure. Since 1954, when the Vietnamese took over the administration of the Highlands and began extensive movement of Vietnamese into the area, unrest has been constant, with revolts occurring in 1958, 1964 and 1965.

In 1898, a mixed Franco-Vietnamese administration was prescribed for the peoples of the Vietnamese side of the Annamite Chain, but in practice the administration was entirely French. The Court of Hue was allowed to appoint an Imperial Delegate for the area, established as a Crown Domain, but he was the only Vietnamese

official employed there. The area was maintained as a reserve where economic exploitation was carried on exclusively by the French planters and where Vietnamese settlement was carefully controlled almost to the point of non-existence. An estimate of 1953 showed only 6,000 Vietnamese in the Highlands, apparently excluding the Dalat area. Administratively, the Highlands (PMS) was divided into three provinces: Darlac, Pleiku, and Kontum (each larger than today's boundaries); and each with a French resident. The provinces were divided into districts and the districts were divided into cantons. The officials at the district and canton levels, as well as the assistants of the resident, were Highlanders. A medical service was established by the administration throughout the Highlands, and schools were begun by the administration and by the missionaries as well. Corvee labor and military service were required of the Highlanders, constituting the primary source of labor for the French plantations in the Highlands. The missionaries provided the Rhade with a written language which is now taught in the Rhade schools.

When in 1945 the Japanese overthrew the French administration in Indochina, they encouraged the Highlanders as well as the Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians to throw off their French masters. The tribesmen in the French forces, however, remained loyal, and after the Japanese surrender it did not take the French long to re-establish themselves in the Highlands.

Trouble in the Highlands during this period centered on an attempt by Rhade elements to establish their autonomy. Y Bih Alio, a Rhade, was deputy chief of the native Indochinese Guard. In August 1945, he supposedly joined the Viet Minh and organized a militia in Banmethuot which drove the French from Darlac Province. It is likely that Y Bih, representing Highlander opposition to foreign control, was encouraged by the Japanese. In December 1945, Y Bih was arrested by the French and in 1946 sentenced to 20 years hard labor. Bao Dai released him in either 1951 or 1952 but he continued to refuse to support the French. Y Bih continued his efforts to obtain autonomy for his peoples and when his activities were halted by the Vietnamese Government in 1958 and he faced imprisonment he took to the bush. Today he is the best known Highlander with the Viet Cong and besides being Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV), is chairman of the Movement of Highland Autonomous Nationalities

After the French regained control of the Highlands, they revised the administrative system and in May 1946, Admiral

d'Argenlieu, as French High Commissioner, set up a Federal Commission for the Highlands, which in 1947 became the Delegation of the High Commission for the administration of the five provinces of the Highlands; i. e., Darlac, Haut Donnai, Kontum, Langbien and Pleiku. In 1946, the French began organizing the Armed Forces of the Racial Minorities which were directly attached to the Commissioners of the French Republic and were not under Vietnamese Army control because, as the French explained it, the minorities possessed strong individuality and had never been entirely assimilated by the Vietnamese. The French position was that the population which made up these minorities was subordinated directly to the Imperial Crown and must enjoy a special status. In late 1948, the Mountaineer Guard of the Mountain Plateau of South Indochina (PMS) was formed from part of the former Indochinese Guard of South Annam. This unit with a strength of 2,376 in 1950, including 115 French, had the mission to maintain security and participate in pacification operations by the side of French troops in the Highlands.

The exchange of letters of 8 March 1949 between President Auriol and H.M. Bao Dai specified in Article I that "the administration of the non-Vietnamese populations whose historical home is situated on Vietnamese territory" should be defined in a special statute agreed between Bao Dai and the French Government, guaranteeing the free evolution of these peoples in accordance with their traditions and customs. An ordinance issued by Bao Dai on 15 April 1950 placed the provinces involved under his own direct authority as Head of State of Vietnam, thus excluding still the normal Vietnamese administration. Statutes organizing the administration were issued for the Highlands (PMS) in May 1951. Similar arrangements were made for the highland minority areas of Tonkin. As a result, the existing High Commissioner's Delegate in the Highlands (PMS) became an Imperial Delegate, although the post continued to be filled by a French officer. However, a single Delegation for both the Plateaux Montagnard du Sud (PMS) and Plateaux Montagnard du Nord (PMN) was instituted soon thereafter with a Vietnamese as Delegate; but Frenchmen were appointed Secretary-General to both PMS and PMN. In addition, a joint Franco-Vietnamese Economic and Social Council for the Highlands (PMS) was set up.

The exclusion of the new national administration from the Highlands understandably did not sit well with Vietnamese nationalist politicians, especially as under arrangements made in 1951-52, the Vietnamese Government had to contribute to the Highland budget. However, Bao Dai was intent on preserving the Highlands as a private hunting preserve, and the French supported his attitude.

In 1952, a Development Plan for the Highlands was issued. The Plan proposed to convert the Highlanders to a settled life by developing agriculture and ancillary industries, introducing more plantations, and setting up concerns such as tea factories. It was estimated that the area involved was 22,000 square miles with a population of only 25 to the square mile. During this same period the Viet Minh were slowly spreading their control over the tribes in the area, including the Bahnar, Jarai and Rhade. The 325th Viet Minh Division was formed near An Khe in February 1953 (the same division that began infiltrating into the Highlands in 1964 from North Vietnam). Military pressure on the French and local forces in the Highlands increased and effective French administrative control decreased to the area around Banmethuot and Dalat by the end of June 1954.

The defeat of the French and the Geneva Accords of 1954 signaled the beginning of a new epoch for the Highlands as well as other parts of Indochina. Bao Dai announced in July 1954 that he was surrendering his special powers in the Highlands. In March 1955 a new ordinance put the Highlands under the control of the National Government in Vietnam. The Imperial Delegation and the Secretaryships-General were abolished and a new Government Delegate for the Highlands was appointed; all the French province chiefs were displaced. In June 1955, the chiefs of the Highland tribes were summoned to a ceremony at Banmethuot, where following a practice introduced by the French in 1926 they took the oath of allegiance to President Ngo Dinh Diem according to the traditional formula which involved inter alia the sacrifice of buffaloes and the drinking of blood.

The Highlanders have had varying experiences and fortunes in their contact with outsiders. Missionaries and French colonial administrators, for example, have had considerable influence on some of the tribes, while others have resisted French control. The Rhade accepted French authority more readily than did other Highland groups. French influence is therefore more manifest in their area in the form of schools, plantations, and a relatively large number of French-speaking Rhade. The Sedang, Stieng and M'nong resisted French control. By and large, contact with outsiders tended to be more disturbing than beneficial. The Indochina War caused dissension among Highlanders, as some fought for the French and others for the Viet Minh. Today, in the struggle between the Viet Cong and the Vietnamese Government, they are once again divided. Large numbers of Vietnamese settling on tribal lands during the

past ten years have disrupted tribal customs and have had a disturbing effect on village land traditions. Land grabbing by the Vietnamese, or in some cases, the fear of land grabbing, is one of the primary causes of tribal discontent. Resettlement of tribal villages by the Vietnamese Government, in some instances by force, in order to exercise better security and control has resulted in a strong feeling of insecurity and frustration, especially where villages are relocated away from traditional village land.

The intense dislike of the Highlanders for any form of external control was at no time overcome, but so long as the French were a power to be feared, governed the entry of Vietnamese into the area, and were the channel through which these primitive peoples received the few commodities which they needed from the outside world -- notably, salt, cotton goods and scrap iron -- the Highlanders were for the most part reluctantly acquiescent in their overlordship. The French failed to break down the old hostility between the Highlanders and the Vietnamese. Partly out of mistrust of the Vietnamese attitude towards the despised savages, whom the Vietnamese regarded as inferiors, as lowly beings unworthy to be classed as human, certainly not as equals; partly from the desire commonly felt by anthropologists, whether professional or amateur, to preserve archaic ways of life, the French administrators kept the Highlanders in a water-tight compartment, into which the Vietnamese could rarely penetrate except as clerks and servants to French officials or as traders of doubtful honesty. Under a light French control the old traditions were consequently maintained; the village remained the unit of society and government.

Then, with the defeat of the French and their withdrawal from the Highlands, the protective cover was removed, and parental administration disappeared and the Highlanders were exposed. The Vietnamese moved in to administer an area they knew nothing about and a people they did not respect. Whereas the area had previously been denied to the Vietnamese for settlement, they now poured in by the tens of thousands. By 1955 there were 80,000 Vietnamese in the Highlands, primarily around Dalat, Route 20 in Haut Donnai (now the provinces of Lam Dong and Tuyen Duc) and the towns of Banmethuot and Kontum. By the end of 1956 more than 140,000 Vietnamese refugees had settled on tribal lands. In 1959 there were more than 25,000 Vietnamese resettled in Pleiku. By 1960 there were more than 20,000 Vietnamese in Kontum and by 1962 Darlac Province had over 54,000 Vietnamese. By 1963 Vietnamese accounted for more than 40 percent of the population in the seven provinces of Kontum,

Pleiku, Phu Bon, Darlac, Quang Duc, Tuyen Duc and Lam Dong, which made up the Vietnamese Government Central Highlands Region. Where Highlanders had previously participated in local administration, this activity was now undertaken largely by the Vietnamese, who made little or no use of Highlander civil servants. The French had not prepared the Highlanders for this tidal wave of invasion, nor had they prepared the Vietnamese who had assumed the task of governing. There was no place in Vietnamese plans for the old traditional life of the Highlanders, who had so suddenly emerged into the outside world.

VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN THE HIGHLANDS

1954 - 1958

The Vietnamese administrations that came to power in both Hanoi and Saigon because of the defeat of the French and the resulting Geneva Agreements of July 1954 faced serious limitations in handling the Highland minorities in their areas due to their lack of experience, especially in the south. The Hanoi regime had two significant advantages over Saigon, however, in that the Viet Minh had necessarily lived among the Highland minorities for some years during their struggle against the French, which permitted them to establish political structures in minority areas, as they gained a better understanding of the customs of these minorities; and secondly, the Highland minorities of the north were more used to central authority and less likely to express their discontent through armed resistance than their counterparts in the south.

When the Viet Minh came to power in the north, they immediately sought to gain the allegiance of the northern Highlanders, basing their plans on the policy for minorities adopted by Communist China. The Communist goal was to win over the minorities by various methods including promises of autonomy (nominal as it might be), respect for minority languages and cultures, and representation in the affairs of the central government. In May 1955, Hanoi announced the formation of a Thai-Meo Autonomous Region, now called the Tay Bac Autonomous Region, comprising the areas of Tonkin between the Laos border and a line roughly 20 miles west of the Red River. A similar autonomous region for other minority peoples, notably the Tho and the Nung, called the Viet Bac Autonomous Region was announced in June 1956. Though in reality the extent of self-government allowed was certainly nominal, it was not impossible that the local people were conciliated by the gesture.

No such political program for the Highlanders in the south was formulated by the Saigon government, which was in the painful process of establishing a viable central government, controlling the sects in the Delta and handling the hordes of refugees from the north. The transition of the Highlands from a Crown Domain to control by the central government took approximately a year, resulting in overlapping authority and confusion during the period. The ministries in Saigon increasingly contacted the various chiefs of the technical services in the Highlands directly and approached



them with requests. Certain activities, especially refugee affairs, were subject to the direct orders and funds of the central government in Saigon through the person of a Delegate of the Central Government who overlapped with the Imperial Delegate. Refugees from the north were moved into the Highlands before the government had time to formulate a land policy which took into consideration the traditional Highlander land system. When President Diem visited Banmethuot in June 1955, it was for the purpose of accepting an oath of allegiance from the Highland tribes and not to grant autonomy or recognize special status.

It was believed by some Western observers that such loyalty as the Highlanders had toward the French, based, not unnaturally, on self-interest, could be transferred to any other authority which would accord reasonable treatment. Much would depend on the attitude adopted by the central government. The Highlander despised the Vietnamese as effeminate, had no sense of Vietnamese nationalism and was unaccustomed to control by a central government. The Vietnamese disliked life in the Highlands for climatic reasons: few knew the local languages; they detested the general squalor of Highlander life; they despised the Highlanders as backward barbarians; and they had no experience in administering the Highlanders. Thus there was a grave risk that the Highlands would become a dumping ground for the least efficient Vietnamese officials. These Western observers believed that should the Vietnamese take their responsibilities seriously, seek with determination to raise the standard of life in the Highlands without dislocation entirely of the historical ways of life and government, the Highlanders might settle down. But whatever policy might be adopted by the government these observers viewed the outlook of the Highlanders as being so parochial that they would not likely unite to serve their common interests.

From the Vietnamese point of view the Highlands was new territory; settlers, encouraged by the government, moved in at an ever increasing rate. The government program was to develop and stabilize the area through the influx of anti-Communist refugees from the north. The government policy in Saigon toward the Highlanders appears to have been to equate them politically with the Vietnamese, to persuade them to improve their agricultural methods, to ensure that they took part in the economic development of the Highlands and to encourage them to assist in their own administration -- in other words the assimilation of the Highlanders into the Vietnamese culture. This policy was not implemented on the ground. There were numerous instances where government administrators and military forces treated the Highlanders with contempt and even with great brutality. The

Highlanders were exploited by the military and by merchants. Moreover, land was grabbed by the settlers. There developed a deep sense of frustration among the Highlanders at not being able to do anything about the situation. Towns such as Banmethuot and Pleiku doubled in size and the areas surrounding them were dotted with new villages and fields.

The Vietnamese administration of the Highlands, being both mentally and physically remote from a large number of the tribes, failed to make a sufficiently good impression on them. The officials concerned were mostly ignorant of Highlander affairs and took little interest in them. There was a lack of normal government services in the villages, especially schools and medical facilities; there was no economic assistance for the Highlanders; and they were not protected from exploitation of unscrupulous middlemen. The lack of any real knowledge of the Highlanders among government officials was almost universal. In some areas, the authorities insisted that the only tribes in their area were the Moi (savages) and that these Highlanders had no other names for themselves. In mid-1956, the Bureau of Ethnic Minorities in Hue knew practically nothing about Highlanders' habits and customs. There was no clear idea where the Highland villages were, nor was there any accurate picture of the Highlanders' economy. Little accurate information on the Highlanders was available to an administration which badly needed to know the correct nomenclature, distribution and territorial arrangement of the major tribal groups, as well as have at its fingertips information regarding the economy, way of life and needs of the various tribal units and villages. Such information was essential for the proper administration of the Highlands, yet there was no effort being made by the government to obtain this information, nor had any responsible authorities studied the French files in Hue.

The Highlanders resented this lack of interest and general attitude of the Vietnamese and were aware that the government had failed to assist them economically. In fairness to the government it must be remembered that the French had excluded the Vietnamese from the Highlands and that when they became responsible for the area they had little time in which to get to know the Highlanders and appreciate their problems. The government might have sought to retain some of the French administrators on contract to the Crown in the Highlands who had the knowledge and expertise which might have made the transition easier. But it is doubtful that the Vietnamese, who had just gained their freedom from the French, would wish to retain French administrators, especially in an area where the new government's policy of settlement was a complete reversal of the

old French policy of exclusion. Nor is it likely that the French administrators would have been able to adjust to their new role and the new policy.

Added to the administrative problems was the government's firm determination to continue its policy of refugee settlement while disregarding the territorial claims of the Highlanders, the poor communications in the Highlands which hindered the government's ability to contact many Highlander settlements, and the penetration tactics of the Viet Cong who intended to ultimately control and use the Highlanders for their own expansionist purposes.

The Hanoi Government capitalized on the Saigon Government's shortcomings in the Highlands. After the Geneva Agreements approximately 55,000 Nungs and 10,000 Muongs took the opportunity to regroup south, while about 5,000 Rhade and an unknown number of Highlanders from other tribes, perhaps numbering another 5,000, regrouped north including four out of five of the Rhade doctors. The Viet Minh left behind cadre and supply caches. The Hanoi regime established the Central Minorities School in Hanoi to turn out political cadre and there were special schools for the Bahnar, Jarai and Rhade. By 1956 the Hanoi regime was sending agents to penetrate the tribal villages in the south. These agents, although Vietnamese, were said to be so motivated that they came to the villages prepared to live as natives for years at a time. They dyed their skin to resemble the Highlanders, filled their teeth, learned the language. These agents promised reduction of taxes, a good supply of consumer goods, and a system of local autonomy such as was introduced in the north. They stressed the lack of interest by the Saigon Government in the Highlanders and the lack of good faith in failing to keep promises. These agents did not stress Communism, and it is unlikely that Communist ideology would have had much appeal, but the innate dislike felt by the Highlanders towards external control rendered them amenable to any incitement against constituted authority. By 1959 the Highlanders who had regrouped north in 1954 were being infiltrated back to the south in large numbers.

The Viet Cong plan was long term with the objective of subverting the tribes and using them at the opportune moment. The approach was soundly planned. The Highlanders would greet the Viet Cong agents as the first representatives of any authority in their experience who were prepared to learn their ways, treat them as equals, and who were sufficiently interested to give them advice and assistance. Thus, without the introduction of proper countermeasures by the government there was little doubt that the Viet Cong would be successful in winning over the Highlanders and eventually gaining

control of a very large number of them. Countermeasures were not developed until the early 1960's when the Viet Cong nearly accomplished their plan.

The Vietnamese Government began in 1957 to recognize the need to improve its understanding of tribal affairs and implement a program among the Highlanders so that they could be assimilated into the Vietnamese economy. President Diem, in a conversation with an American observer on 9 July 1957, stated that the government was paying attention to tribal problems and that he had appointed Lt. Colonel Huynh Cong Tinh to head an organization in Dalat called "Inspections and Special Studies" which would study tribal affairs and recommend to the government measures to raise the standard of living and level of education. Diem recognized the problem as being special and requiring psychology and patience. He was bitterly critical of the French whom he accused of having exploited the Highlanders while making a show of helping them. Diem believed the Highlanders to be intelligent, responding favorably to the treatment they were receiving, and that they could be assimilated into village type Vietnamese life. Of all the tribes, the Rhade would be the most difficult to convert, in Diem's opinion. They have a considerable amount of Cham blood, and he described them as "tricky" peoples who in their conduct of affairs resembled the Thais. Diem also stated that he had authorized the establishment of two schools in Dalat for training civil guards and civic action cadres of tribal background in order to implement the government program for helping the tribes.

During a meeting with American Ambassador Elbridge Dubrow on 3 August 1957, President Diem discussed at some length the problem of integrating the Highlanders into the Vietnamese economy. He again stated that he had started a school for the Highlanders in Dalat and intended to bring up to 200 selected Highlanders to Dalat for a four-month course in various subjects so that they could return to their villages and carry on civic action community work. He also explained that there are many fertile valleys in the Highlands where, with construction of small dams on the streams, the Highlanders could be taught to raise water-grown, rather than dry rice, and thus raise their standard of living by more abundant crops. Diem said that he had already talked with several tribal chiefs in the Banmethuot and Pleiku areas and had asked them if they would be willing to settle permanently on land to be given to their village group and cleared by the government and had received their agreement. Diem acknowledged Viet Cong agents were working in the Highlands whose efforts he wanted to combat by the methods he described above.

Though Diem's intentions were good, his program was only half-heartedly implemented. The officers responsible for studying the Highlanders and recommending government programs were poorly prepared to undertake such work and accomplished little. Educational programs and the establishment of schools favored the Vietnamese settlers in the Highlands. Diem was still talking of providing land for tribal villages in 1962.

As a missionary described the situation in early 1958, the Vietnamese Government was sincerely trying to penetrate the tribal areas and to integrate the tribal peoples into the structure of Vietnam but lacked funds, roads and personnel to staff administrative posts. Anti-government feeling among the Highlanders was growing and a more nationalistic spirit developing among the tribes, who believed the Vietnamese were determined to take over the best land and might ultimately force the tribes on to reservations. Diem's plans to counter Viet Cong activities in the Highlands were unsuccessful because the people responsible for implementing them did not understand how to go about the job, nor were many in sympathy with the policy to improve the standards of the Highlanders. The government had failed to train a corps of civil servants to handle the special problems faced in the Highlands and continued to rely on individuals not interested in the problems. An administrative assignment to the Highlands was looked upon as unfavorable and in many cases as punishment by government officials.

Four years after the Saigon government came to power, it was still attempting to implement a viable program for the Highlands and was faced with growing unrest among the tribal groups and subversion of these groups by the Viet Cong. Since the government had found itself incapable of implementing a political civic action program it resorted to a military program and oppressive action to control the Highlanders which further aggravated the situation.

III.

U. S. GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS 1956 - 1958

The United States had also been watching developments in the Highlands for some time and had received the reports of two specialists on minorities in Southeast Asia covering the Highlanders' problems and recommending courses of action for the Government of Vietnam. In August 1956 Mr. R. O. D. Noone, Advisor on Aborigines, Federation of Malaya, concluded in his study that the Highlanders "resent outside control and interference in tribal matters, particularly in regard to their territorial rights (and) such interference in the past has resulted in unrest and rebellion. A large number of Montagnards (Highlanders) are outside Government control and a percentage of these are already under some degree of Viet Minh influence. Continued infringement of the territorial claims of the Montagnards . . . will result in unrest which would be exploited by the Viet Minh thus presenting a most serious threat to the security of the central government, entailing an indefinite postponement of the economic development plan. Although inexperience in Montagnard affairs and lack of finance and adequate communications has hampered the carrying out of Government policy towards the Montagnards, such a policy as currently being implemented could not compete with the Viet Minh approach, nor could it successfully counter the threat" of Highlander unrest and revolt. "A new and progressive policy should be introduced aimed at winning over and effectively controlling the Montagnards, to enable them to contribute to the economic development of the country, and that such a policy be implemented by a special authority responsible for the administration, protection and advancement of the tribesmen. Sufficient finance (should) be made available to train officers for the authority envisaged above . . ." Noone then recommended that a specialized central authority with its own budget be set up to be responsible for the administration, protection and advancement of the Montagnard peoples, under the direction of a Director of Montagnard Affairs at Presidency level who would have representatives at Regional, Provincial and District levels with subsidiary field officers." With regards to Government policy, Noone recommended that the Government "accept them as an ethnic minority on an equal basis socially, economically and politically with the other communities in Vietnam, recognize their administrative organization and headmanship system which should be fully integrated with the local administration and accept their traditional territorial claims as inviolable, allow them to continue to practice their traditional mode of life but

to encourage those who are still semi-nomadic to adopt gradually a more settled way of life; to improve their economy by increasing food production and by encouraging them to plant more cash crops; encourage them to participate in the defense and security of the country and to post only Montagnard troops and police in areas in which they form the majority of the population; to provide protective posts for those communities who are currently under Viet Cong influence." In order to carry out this policy Noone recommended that the Government launch a campaign "to re-educate the Vietnamese in their attitude toward the Montagnards . . . that no further resettlement of Vietnamese be permitted in the P.M.S. until such time as the territorial arrangement of the various tribes has been ascertained and then only in areas not claimed by the Montagnards, that suitable Montagnards be trained centrally as school teachers and dressers (sic. possibly first aid) and that in due course further schools and dispensaries be established at the main concentrations of population, and that the basic administrative data required concerning the Montagnard tribes should be collected at the earliest opportunity."

Though these recommendations could have been implemented in 1956 they were contrary to the established Vietnamese policy, a policy of rapid settlement of the Highlands and assimilation of the Highlanders into Vietnamese society.

Dr. Gerald C. Hickey of Michigan State University prepared a preliminary research report on the Highlands in June 1957 in which he made a series of recommendations which would improve relations between the Highlanders and the Vietnamese but not change the overall policy of the Government. "In view of the pressing need to establish in the minds of the Mountaineers the good faith of the Government" programs improving medical services, education, controlling alcohol sales and commodity prices should be established. There should be "joint Vietnamese-Mountaineer committees in each province to act as advisors to province chiefs, Administrators . . . should receive a special course of training in mountaineer customs and traditions and mountaineers should be placed in administrative positions whenever possible. The government (should) adopt a firm policy regarding the land rights of the Mountaineers as soon as possible and to publicize the adopted policy widely."

Half-hearted attempts apparently were made at the Saigon level to implement a select few of the recommendations pertaining to education, medical services, trade and assignment of Highlanders to select positions in the administration, but the basic problems were never attacked.

U. S. Government officials counceled President Diem, his brother Nhu and other senior members of the Vietnamese Government on policies that they believed would bring the Vietnamese and Highlanders together and advance the development of the Highlands. This advice was in conflict with the immediate need the Vietnamese Government believed existed in providing land to the refugees and at the same time improving the security of the Highlands. They could not wait for the development of programs for the Highlanders and did not have officials skilled in undertaking such planning or executing the plans once they were developed. To develop a logical and just land program that would recognize Highlander rights would take time, study, legislation, and an understanding of Highlander life on the part of the officials responsible for implementing the program. The officials in Saigon saw the Highlands as a wide open area for settlement and the Highlanders as an obstruction to this settlement. If the Highlanders would accept the Vietnamese way of life then they would be assimilated, otherwise they would be pushed back further into the hills. The reaction of the Vietnamese to proposals for improving the conditions of the Highlanders was similar to the reaction of Americans during the period of western expansion with regard to the American Indian. The leaders were in agreement that there should be programs that would improve the conditions of the Highlanders but the officials and Vietnamese citizens living in the Highlands could not see spending money, material or time on the Highlander when they themselves could utilize these resources so much better. Besides, the Highlander was a useless savage anyway!

Advice at the Saigon level and support of programs through the ministries in Saigon did not change the attitudes of the administrators in the Highlands. The first requirement, that of developing administrators who were trained to work in the Highlands, if recognized, was not acted upon. The Vietnamese Government assigned administrators to the Highlands who were politically unreliable or possessed less competence than the administrators assigned to lowland areas. To be sent to the Highlands was to receive a sentence of exile.



IV.

THE BAJARAKA AUTONOMY MOVEMENT 1957 - 1958

The Vietnamese settlers and officials in the Highlands would have preferred to have received land or positions in delta areas. The Highlands were alien to them and many feared the Highlanders, whom they thought of as barbaric savages. The Highlands were a long way from Saigon, the area was developing in frontier style, and justice for the Highlander was at the very least difficult and in most instances impossible to obtain. The settlers, protected by police and military forces, held the more powerful hand.

The Highlanders brooded over incidents involving the Vietnamese which became enlarged or exaggerated in the retelling. In 1956, there were several incidents of wanton brutality on the part of the Vietnamese toward the Highlanders. In one instance 40 miles south of Banmethuot, Vietnamese troops were alleged to have slaughtered the buffaloes of Highlanders indiscriminately and even to have shot at Highlander women for sport, wounding at least one seriously. Near Three Frontiers in what is now Quang Duc Province, the Vietnamese Army distrusted the local tribesmen who were formerly with the French military forces and there was considerable nostalgia among the tribes for the French administration. Relations between the Highlanders and the newly settled Vietnamese in Darlac Province were not good. The M'nong had broken off contact with the 2,500 Vietnamese Catholic refugees in Dak Mil within two months after the resettlement camp was built because they believed the Vietnamese refugees were responsible for bringing soldiers who would torture them. At Buon Ho, north of Banmethuot, the Vietnamese Army was greatly disliked by the Highlanders because of the tendency of the troops to loot food from the tribal villages.

The conditions created by the Vietnamese administration became untenable to the Highlanders. In early 1957, Highlander students attending the Lycee in Dalat formed a committee to investigate the possibilities of organizing a Highlander Autonomy Movement. Y Bham, oldest male member of his family and thus by Rhade legend leader of the Highlanders (see page 53), is reported to have called a meeting of the tribes in May 1957. Leaders said to represent most of the tribes went to the village of Buon Trap in Darlac Province (it is more likely that most representatives were from Rhade villages) to air their grievances.

Y Bham, at this stage, apparently realized that the Highlanders needed hospitals, schools and technical assistance from the Vietnamese Government and sought this assistance from the Darlac Province Chief without success.

By 1958, intellectual Highlanders, mainly from the missionary-trained Rhade, were organizing tribal opposition to the Government. The organizers went among the villages soliciting support for their movement. By July 1958, an organization, claiming to have the backing of some 200,000 Highlanders, was formed to defend the interests of the Highlanders. Its members were school teachers, local militiamen, personnel of the regular army, police and local employees of various Government installations who represented the various villages.

Four villages made up a commune which was headed by a council, which in turn appointed provincial delegates, who in turn appointed an overall representative of the Highlanders. There were four provincial committees (Kontum, Pleiku, Dalat and Banmethuot) with nine members each and a Central Committee composed of seven members. Four of the major tribes made up the organization, which was called The Bajaraka Autonomy Movement, a shortening of the tribal names of the Bahnar, Jarai, Rhade and Koho.

The Bajaraka organization's declared purpose was to fight "to the bitter end" to achieve autonomy for the Highlanders. Several tribal leaders talked in terms of using violent means, if necessary, to achieve the ultimate aim of the Highlanders. There were three factions developing in the Bajaraka Autonomous Movement. The first, apparently headed by Y Bham, wanted to work with the Vietnamese Government in gaining equality for the Highlanders. The second supported the French plantation owners and some French missionaries who proposed a neutral Vietnam with the Highlands being autonomous. The third faction supported the Viet Cong plan for complete autonomy of the Highlands as set up in North Vietnam and the unification of Vietnam under control of the Hanoi regime.

The organization listed its grievances:

a. The semi-autonomous status enjoyed by the Highlanders during the days of French administration was lost by them when the Vietnamese replaced the French without consultation on the part of the Vietnamese authorities, which the Highlanders considered contrary to the principles of self-determination.

b. Highlanders had very little representation in the Government administration in the Highlands, which had constantly discriminated against the Highlanders and treated them as second class citizens. There were inequities in the standard of living between Vietnamese and Highlander officials occupying the same grade or rank. Furthermore, no effort had been made to take into consideration the racial origins, customs, and way of life of the Highlander.

c. The main concern of the Government seemed to be to develop the Highlands by bringing in Vietnamese settlers. Some of the new Vietnamese agricultural colonies had been opened on land which belonged to the tribes, which had been dispossessed without compensation and pushed back to less fertile areas.

d. Little had been done to raise the educational level and the standard of living among the tribes.

e. Vietnamese settlers in the Highlands produced large quantities of agricultural products and created unfair competition by underselling the Highlanders in the market.

f. The stealing of food and other commodities by Vietnamese Army personnel and settlers continued and the culprits remained unpunished.

g. The local administrative authorities had fallen far behind in paying for work performed by Highlanders for the Government, and compulsory labor assignments were required by the authorities. Vietnamese workers received higher pay for the same type of work and were paid more regularly.

h. In 1958, some 3,000,000 piastres over and above the regular budget were allocated for social welfare among the tribes, but no part of this sum was used for its intended purpose.

i. The Government had done very little to develop good relations with the Highlanders, aside from the Psychological Welfare Department's project of translating a few books into tribal languages. Vietnamese Army officers stationed in the Highlands knew nothing of the Highlanders' languages or customs, and were incapable of winning the support of the Highlanders even if they had the desire to do so.

The Bajaraka organization sent two representatives who called on the American Ambassador in Saigon on 31 July 1958 to air minority grievances against the Vietnamese Government and to enlist the aid of the United States. The emissaries, Y Ju and Y Nam, were accompanied by Mr. Henry G. Lefever of the Menonite Central Committee who introduced them but did not take part in the conversation with Ambassador Durbrow. Previous letters had been forwarded through Mr. Lefever to the American Embassy. They produced a letter identical to one addressed to the Ambassador on 7 July, outlining tribal grievances and asking the Secretary General of the United Nations to consider the request of the Highlanders for the creation of a fact-finding commission to investigate conditions in the Highlands. The Bajaraka representatives indicated that this was the third letter they had attempted to send to the United Nations, and showed the Ambassador copies of it signed by 45 leading Highlanders and addressed to the British and French Ambassadors in Saigon for transmittal to their respective delegates at the United Nations. Ambassador Durbrow declined to accept the letters but promised unofficially to bring the minority problem to the attention of Vietnamese officials in Saigon.

The Bajaraka leaders apparently received some advice from French personnel living in the Highlands. Father Roger Bianchetti, a Catholic priest in Banmethuot, was approached by Bajaraka representatives in 1958, who showed him a copy of a petition which they proposed to send to President Diem. After studying the document, Bianchetti advised the representatives: "Do not demand independence, because your present state of development does not warrant it. By sending such a demand to the President you would be casting yourselves into a wasp's nest, and the only result might be further hardship for your people and imprisonment for yourselves. What you must do is continue to strive for autonomy. Draw up a petition for autonomy and give five copies to me. I will send one copy to the Secretary General of the United Nations, and one copy each to the Ambassadors of France, Great Britain, the United States and India, in Saigon."

By March 1958, Highlanders in government military units in Pleiku were reported deserting to Laos, one report put the figure at 600. In August 1958, officers and NCO's of Highlander origin in the Vietnamese Army (less than 200) were put under preventive arrest because they were suspected of political unreliability and of plotting to desert to Cambodia and link up with anti-Vietnamese tribal elements. Though these men were subsequently released the incident caused widespread disgruntlement among the Highlanders and increased restiveness.

The situation came to a head in September and October. On 8 September, a group calling itself "The Committee of Liberation" stated its demands for autonomy in a letter addressed to President Diem and signed by Y Bham Enuol, President of the Committee. On 12 October 1958, the leaders of the autonomy movement addressed a petition to President Diem bearing approximately 1,000 signatures requesting the release of the Highlanders who at the time were in prison in Pleiku. When no response was received, demonstrations were staged in Banmethuot, Kontum, Pleiku and Di Linh (Lam Dong Province) on 15 October. It was originally planned that some 800 Rhade from the area of Buon Ale village would participate in the Banmethuot demonstration; however, almost 2,000 persons converged on Banmethuot and carried on a demonstration that lasted for five hours, during which a spokesman enumerated tribal grievances connected with the implementation of the government resettlement program, complained about recent political arrests of Highlanders in Pleiku, and called for autonomy of the Highlands. Vietnamese Army troops in armored vehicles were finally dispatched to break up the demonstration.

On 27 October 1958, the Darlac Province Chief, Nguyen Van Tich, organized a meeting of Vietnamese and Highlander officials at the Lido Cinema in Banmethuot for the purpose of dispelling the idea that there was such a thing as an autonomous movement among the Highlanders. During the meeting Y Wing, a Rhade employed by the provincial administration and not a member of the autonomy movement, stated to the group: "The French used to tell us that 'the French and the Montagnards are brothers!' then along came the Viet Cong who said, 'the Viet Cong and the Montagnards are brothers!' Today, the Vietnamese are telling us, 'the Vietnamese and the Montagnards are brothers!' and this is very good! But what we want to know is, are these fine words true, or are they like those of the French and the Communists? We ask that these be not empty words but words proved by deeds!"

The Government's reaction was immediate. A military security unit was dispatched to Banmethuot to arrest the Highlander leaders. Eventually, all members of the Central Committee were arrested. Y Bham Enuol, Rhade and President of Bajaraka; Touneh-Yeh, Chairman of the Dalat (Koho) Committee; Nay Luett, Chairman of the Pleiku (Jarai) Committee; Paul Nur, Chairman of the Kontum (Bahnar) Committee; and Y Ju Ebam and Y Thih Ebam, Rhade and members of the Bajaraka Central Committee, were arrested. Y Bih Alio, Chairman of the Banmethuot (Rhade) Committee, was arrested earlier and held for about a week. The

other six leaders were sentenced to four years in prison but some were not released until 1964. The Government transferred and assigned insignificant duties to several officers and non-commissioned officers of tribal origin in the Vietnamese armed forces as well as a number of Highlanders in the civil service. In all, 35 Rhade officials were reassigned to the lowlands from the Darlac provincial administration. The practice of compiling intelligence dossiers on Highlander officials in provincial administration was resumed. Gatherings of more than three persons were prohibited, and the celebration of tribal feast days were banned.

It is not certain what happened to Y Bih Alio after the other leaders were arrested. One report states that he was not jailed because he was visiting the Viet Cong near his village of Buon Dryling when the Vietnamese Government arrested the other Bajaraka leaders in the fall of 1958, and thus escaped and joined the Viet Cong. Other reports have him joining the Viet Cong in 1960. One interesting report which cannot be confirmed states that Y Bih remained in his native village until 1960. The report states that Y Bham was released from jail in June 1960, returned to his native village of Buon Ta and began conferences with Y Bih and local Bajaraka committee members. Vietnamese National Police agents, learning of the meetings, arrested Y Bham but Y Bih managed to escape and join the Viet Cong. Y Bih continued his efforts to obtain autonomy for his people through association with the Viet Cong. Since 1961, he has been Chairman of the Movement of Highland Autonomous Nationalities and Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam.

The Bajaraka organization may have posed less of a problem than the Government imagined had Vietnamese intelligence on Highlander activity been adequate, but the Government was caught unaware of the strength or plans of the organization. Though the organization had a large number of Highlander leaders, its strength lay primarily with the Rhade. The Highlanders were in no position to use force and it is doubtful that any more than a small minority of the Rhade would have followed the leadership of the organization in resistance against the Government or that the organization had sufficient strength within the various tribes to have created resistance over a wide area.

Ngo Dinh Nhu, in conversations with Ambassador Durbrow, in November 1958, placed the responsibility for the autonomy movement on the Viet Cong as "merely part of the Communist

propaganda technique." He added that though the Communists had made considerable progress in recent months in winning over large numbers of Highlanders by promising autonomy, the Government had taken steps to counteract these developments and had slowed their activity down. Nhu did not believe that the Communists could succeed in making a homogenous group "out of these often antagonistic, aboriginal, ignorant peoples." Nhu claimed the Government was following and would continue to follow policies which would win over the loyalty of the Highlanders but this was a very slow process requiring a great deal of patience. He spoke of the program of granting permanent land to the Highland villages and the limited success the Government had had to date in inducing the Highlanders to remain on the land and utilize Vietnamese agricultural techniques. Nhu believed that gradually as the elders died and were buried in the new villages and the witch doctor and sorcerers found good omens in their new homes, the Highlanders would tend to settle down. Nhu added that the Government must step up its activities in establishing schools for the Highlanders in order to raise their educational level and eventually their standard of living.

President Diem was also preoccupied with the unrest in the Highlands. He visited Banmethuot on 12 January 1959, at which time he discussed the situation with Bui Thuc Duyen, the Darlac Province Chief, who had replaced Nguyen Van Tich. Duyen is said to have proposed that the administration of the Highlands be turned over to the Highlanders but that the administration be granted no funds, be unsupported by the police, Surete, Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps -- in short, be without any substance or power whatsoever. A Vietnamese Provincial Administration working with the Highlander administration would exercise the broadest powers. If Diem reacted favorably toward this proposal he took no action to implement it.

As predicted by Father Bianchetti, the Bajaraka leaders had indeed cast themselves into a wasp's nest, but it was not over the question of independence, it was over the request for autonomy that Bianchetti had advised the leaders to push for. Bianchetti had failed to realize that as far as the Government was concerned, to request autonomy was just as heinous as requesting independence. The result was that the Highlanders found themselves separated from leaders who had either been jailed or transferred, under additional pressure from the Government administration, and defenseless. The Government policy to assimilate the Highlanders as rapidly as possible into the Vietnamese economy continued to be

administered in a half-hearted fashion with the authorities' sensitiveness hurt by the Highlanders' lack of appreciation. And the Viet Cong stepped up their organizational activities, meeting with increased success.



V.

THE HIGHLANDER RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM  
1957 - 1960

The American Consulate in Hue reported in March 1959 that the Viet Cong had launched a campaign of assassination and anti-government propaganda among the Highlanders. Reverend Gordon H. Smith, a missionary with the Highlanders since 1929, felt the situation was critical and reported that a wave of assassinations started in October or November 1958 in the mountain districts of Quang Ngai and Quang Nam provinces. The targets were Vietnamese and Highlander officials. The Viet Cong purpose was to paralyze the administration by murdering officials from the lowest information cadre to the district chief level. Some measure of the gravity of the situation was the admission by virtually all Quang Ngai provincial officials of Viet Cong activities in the mountains and that security was their major problem. An indication of the interest of Ngo Dinh Can, Diem's brother and de facto overlord of Central Vietnam, in the Highland situation was his transfer of the Office of Social Welfare for the Highlands from Dalat to Hue. The Consulate, taking into consideration the missionary reports, the elaborate security precautions taken by the government and the new impetus behind the government program for the Highlanders, concluded that the situation had deteriorated seriously since October 1958. The Viet Cong were considered to have obtained a "foothold" among the Highlanders, organizing in all the provinces from Pleiku northward and establishing secret bases at least in northern Kontum and southern Quang Nam (since then formed into Quang Tin Province).

In discussing the tribal situation, Reverend Smith expressed cautious optimism concerning the government plan to resettle the Highlanders. He believed the Highlanders must change their mode of life if they were to survive; adopting Vietnamese culture was probably, therefore, inevitable. But Reverend Smith also was critical of the government for not training more officials and army officers for duty in Highland areas and for its failure to understand even the simplest elements of Highlander psychology, a lack of comprehension which had frustrated many government efforts and often sent the Highlanders into the arms of the Viet Cong. As an example, Reverend Smith reported that Highlanders were usually frightened and cleared out when troops entered their villages. The Vietnamese as often as

not took this as a sign of Communist sympathies and burned the villages.

The government program for the rapid cultural assimilation of the Highlander utilized both resettlement centers and schools. The Highlander resettlement centers, called "reservations" by the Vietnamese, would provide permanent land for the Highland villages where the Highlanders could be taught to practise Vietnamese agricultural techniques, as Diem had suggested in 1957. These centers were intended to bring the Highlanders out of the hills and into contact with Vietnamese culture. In February 1959, there were 33 "reservations" in existence for the entire Highlands covering some 13,000 hectares and having a population of some 38,000 Highlanders. Plans called for 47 additional "reservations" covering 17,000 hectares and containing a population of some 49,000 Highlanders, of which 20 centers were scheduled to be opened in 1959. The government's complete plan called for a total of 80 centers housing 88,000 Highlanders on 30,000 hectares of land. These plans covered approximately 12 percent of the Highlander population but as Nhu observed, many of the Highlanders left these "reservations"; and it would be some time before permanent populations would be established on them. The Hue Consulate observed that the Highlanders in these centers looked sullen and unhappy, which is not surprising when one considers that these Highlanders were being introduced to a new way of life alien to the one they had known and that the land allotted was inadequate. At the An My "reservation" in Pleiku each family received little more than a third of a hectare of land as was also the case at Son Ha in Quang Ngai. Vietnamese settlers in the Highlands were receiving a hectare per family.

In most cases the resettlement had been forced on the Highlanders by the government in the 1958-59 program. Their tribal life and customs were virtually destroyed and religious beliefs were in some instances ignored. Assistance promised the newly settled villagers failed to continue even in the cases where it did start, owing to an over-extension of the resettlement program in the face of insufficient funds. Several cases occurred where Rhade in the new villages were ordered to build their houses on the ground instead of on poles as was customary with them. In 1959 the government ordered the collection and destruction of Highlander crossbows because of its fear that the Highlanders would turn the crossbows against the government. This action limited hunting, especially in areas close to government installations. All of these problems plus a general lack of

understanding from the Vietnamese caused most of the resettled Highlanders to filter back to the mountains. In two cases entire villages revolted and killed their Vietnamese guards so they could escape. These revolts do not appear to have been Viet Cong-inspired.

By 1960, the Highlander resettlement program had largely come to a halt. In Quang Ngai, the government had given up trying to establish resettlement areas "because there is not good land available for them." Though the resettlement areas at Ba To and Son Ha were still operating, the Director of Highlander Social Welfare, Ngo Van Hung, stated that the land was not really suitable for resettlement. In Quang Nam Province, officials admitted that the resettlement project at Thanh My was a complete failure and that no further effort was being made at the site. In Binh Dinh, eight Highlander resettlement centers had been established but none of them had been given good land, adequate schools, or technical assistance, essential ingredients of progress.

The Highlander schools established by the government were intended to carry Vietnamese ideas and techniques into the mountain villages. The school in Hue had its walls covered with posters showing the roles the students were expected to play upon their return to their villages: teacher, health instructor, Self-Defense Corps leader, agricultural instructor, etc. The government claimed that in 1959 every province in Central Vietnam had a Highlander school offering a short version of the program provided by the Hue school. All of these schools were under the direction of the Hue Office of Social Welfare for the Highlanders.

Yet in 1960 there was no school in Kontum for the 70,000 Highlanders in that province, and the 50 graduates of the Hue school working in Kontum had been absorbed by the Provincial Guard and Surete. In both Quang Ngai and Quang Nam, by early 1960 the program for training Highlander cadre had been dropped because of lack of funds. At the government's experimental farm near Banmethuot there were four Highlanders included among a total student body of 60. At the An Khe (Binh Dinh) weaving school for Highland girls, two-thirds of the student body totalling 25 were Highlanders. In Binh Dinh, there were three Highlander schools with a total of 91 students in the regular provincial school system.

False reporting by the Office of Social Welfare for the Highlands made the government program appear to be advancing more rapidly than it actually was. The Highlander resettlement

center of Buon De, in Cheoreo, was announced to be open and operating in early 1959 when in fact it was still only a plan. The center at Nam Dong, in Thua Thien province, was reported operating in the winter of 1959 when all that could be found in the area in late 1959 was a Vietnamese settlement; nothing had been done for the Highlanders.

The Hue Consulate, after its examination of the government Highlander program, considered it well conceived but concluded that it had produced no important results. "With no training to prepare them (Vietnamese) for the frustrating task of administering a primitive and alien people, under pressure from their superiors, and obliged to place first priority on political control rather than on the social problems of the Montagnards, it is not surprising that the basic attitude of the average Vietnamese administrator is not far removed from that of Gia Long" who rejected the Highlanders even as subjects, saying that among such barbarians, it was impossible to find a notion of social duties. "The chief of Le Trung district (Pleiku) calls the Montagnards parasites; a Pleiku high school teacher says in front of her mixed class that Montagnards have less intelligence than the Vietnamese; the Chief of Province (Pleiku) complains that they are hopelessly improvident and drunkards to boot." Yet the Highlander leaders, looking at the extensive effort going into Vietnamese resettlement projects concluded that their progress must wait until the Vietnamese had taken up the best land. They continued to accuse the Vietnamese of requisitioning the Highlanders' land without compensation. Vietnamese officials invariably replied that the land was vacant and that in any event the land belonged to the government. Corruption also contributed to distrust. One Vietnamese official observed that government aid to the Highlanders, particularly the rice provided in times of scarcity, passed through so many hands that very little ever reached the Highlanders.

The government had failed by 1960 in its attempt to win the loyalty of the Highlanders through a shortage of resources, a more serious shortage of trained personnel and the low priority given the program. Though the government thought the Highlanders' autonomy movement was crushed, it was still alive if not very active. Highlander leaders were still thinking, however, in terms of some sort of autonomy. American residents in Pleiku believed the Highlanders would turn to open revolution if they could get arms. The Viet Cong were infiltrating the tribal villages establishing political cells, organizing guerrillas, propagandizing against the government's resettlement program, and obtaining a greater degree of control over the Highlanders than was even remotely suspected by the government.

VI.

THE VIET CONG OFFENSIVE AND GOVERNMENT REACTION

1960 - 1961

In the fall of 1960, the Viet Cong launched a major offensive in the Highlands. Approximately 1,000 crack Viet Cong troops overran a string of Vietnamese army posts in a series of engagements between 21 October to 11 November. Their agents had penetrated the villages of the Highlanders and had threatened or enticed them into collaboration. The Viet Cong objective was apparently the establishment of an autonomous state for the Highlanders which the Viet Cong would control and thus provide an area from which they could launch further activities directed at the lowlands. The Viet Cong appeared to have achieved considerable success in their efforts to subvert the Rhade of Darlac, the Bahnar of Pleiku, and the Sedang of Kontum.

The government checked the fall 1960 Viet Cong offensive and by April 1961, President Diem expressed his satisfaction with the improvement of the situation in the Highlands and among the Highlanders. He laid the success of the government campaign to his decision to utilize artillery and air forces in the region. In Diem's opinion, the Highlanders, hearing and being subjected to such intense fire, quickly concluded the government was much too strong and ejected the Viet Cong agents from their midst, moving toward the greater force exhibited by the government. Diem reported that while many Highlanders had earlier objected to the government's policy of regroupment of the Highlanders into settled communities, many of them were now coming forward and requesting it because of the protection afforded against the Viet Cong. But what Diem failed to appreciate was that many Highlanders looked upon the bombing and shelling of their villages as attempts by the government to exterminate them and fled largely for this reason; thus these Highlanders were really refugees.

Diem announced that the government had started forming in late March 1961 five-man groups consisting of three Highlanders and two Vietnamese for small-scale operations into the mountain areas to locate and attack the Viet Cong or to report their location to the Army to permit counteraction. Diem said that three years earlier, he had recommended to the Americans the establishment of special Highlander units comparable to the Chasseurs Alpains of France and Italy, but the Americans had counselled against such a corps. Diem now believed the best method of using Highlanders was in smaller units. He disagreed with some of his generals who believed

that the Highlanders should be organized into special companies and larger units, commenting that the Highlanders would never be organized in this manner, as they would flee at the first sound of trouble when en masse and thus could only successfully be used in small groups infiltrating through the mountains. However, the government had created much of its own problem in mobilizing Highlanders for new military programs. Many of the Highlanders who were formerly in the Vietnamese Army had for various reasons been released from active duty and were leading the wave of anti-Vietnamese feeling which was sweeping through the villages of the Highlanders.

Diem also objected to sending any Highlanders to universities. He recalled that several years previously, when he had to remove them because they were lazy and dishonest. Diem remarked that the Highlanders were naturally lazy and that in the past, some of those who had had higher education at the Catholic seminaries, had upon return to their villages, reverted completely to their primitive ways.

Diem discounted reported successes of the Viet Cong to subvert the Rhade, stating that the Rhade were more intelligent and sophisticated than the other tribes and would not be influenced by the Viet Cong. Diem was basically correct. There were numerous indications that the Rhade as well as other tribesmen had no real desire to follow the Viet Cong even in cases where they felt they were being unfairly treated by the government. An example in August 1961 was Cu Piang village, where the Viet Cong made a great show of strength to trick government bombers into making an attack. The Viet Cong deserted the village prior to the attack but forced the villagers to remain. After the attack the Viet Cong returned to assist the villagers and advise them on the evil ways of the government. The Viet Cong offered the villagers a place in the jungle with them; however, all but two of the villagers fled the Viet Cong.

Minority factions in some tribes, opposed to tribal association with the government, did tend to be inclined towards the Viet Cong and later, the Viet Cong conducted a successful propaganda program that convinced many advocates of autonomy that the Viet Cong revolution would create such an autonomous state once the Viet Cong had crushed the government. But still the great majority did not favor the Viet Cong movement and desired to have no more to do with it than with the government. Nevertheless, if the Rhade were not influenced by the Viet Cong, they were certainly fearful of them. Only 20 Rhade voted in the 22 October 1961 special election in Darlac because of threats from the Viet Cong.

If Diem in the spring of 1961 thought he had contained Viet Cong advances on the Highlands, he was certainly not as confident in September. The Viet Cong were indeed gaining control over greater numbers of Highlanders. In August 1961, the Viet Cong had established bases supported by the Highlanders and had begun organizing guerrilla units composed of Highlanders but led by Vietnamese who had infiltrated from North Vietnam. The security situation in Kontum and Pleiku provinces had become much worse. The Chief of Staff for II Corps at Pleiku stated in October 1961 that "we have lost the Highlanders". The majority of the 175,000 Highlanders in both provinces were under Viet Cong control. In Darlac province, Viet Cong activities had increased and they were rapidly gaining control of the Rhade villages. Informed observers as well as some Highlander leaders in the area believed that the only solution, distasteful as it seemed to them, was regrouping the Highlanders into larger communities which would be accessible to government security forces. The Highlanders argued that most of the Highlanders were forced to follow the Viet Cong because the government provided no security to the remote Highland villages.

In Quang Nam and Quang Tin provinces, the situation was no better, with the Viet Cong controlling most of the Highlanders in the western districts. By early 1962, the National Police in Tuyen Duc province believed the Viet Cong controlled all the Highlanders living in the mountains of that province and that there was little chance of the government establishing any effective control over these Highlanders in the near future. Though there are no reliable figures which can be used it is likely that the government exercised control or primary influence over no more than 50 percent of the estimated 700,000 Highlanders living in South Vietnam. In the northern provinces (Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh), where it is estimated 180,000 Highlanders lived, government control was limited to approximately 21,000.

VII.

VIETNAMESE PACIFICATION PROPOSALS, 1961

Diem had ordered the Highlands Social Action Directorate to prepare a pacification plan for the Highlands. The plan, forwarded to Diem in September, reviewed the history of the Highlanders' grievances and Vietnamese programs, which provided Diem, if he had not been so informed before, with a very candid appraisal of the situation and the causes. The plan outlined specific causes for the autonomy movement in some detail:

1. "Resentment by a number of Highlander intellectuals because they were denied equivalent benefits and rights given to the Vietnamese for the equivalent position. After training they were not given equivalent jobs to their Vietnamese counterpart.

2. "In the Army, Highlander soldiers were discontented. Officers and non-commissioned officers were seldom promoted and often were not assigned to administrative units. Vietnamese soldiers did not salute Highlander officers. Highlander soldiers often were treated as coolies.

3. "Highlander members of the Self-Defense Corps were not treated equally with Vietnamese. Highlanders did not receive the same food at training centers as did the Vietnamese. Concerning salary, the National Fund provided only 300 piastres per month -- the remaining 600 piastres were to be supplied from the township budget. However, the township never had sufficient funds and sometimes salaries were not paid for two or three months.

4. "Government officials and men were not close to the people and therefore did not have a grasp of the situation. Some officials were irresponsible, exploited the Highlanders and organized speculation for personal profit. Other officials lacked the spirit, ability and endurance for the hardships and difficulties of the area.

5. "The administrative machine in the Highlands was too weak to control the situation.

6. "In some areas, working procedures were bogged down by bureaucratism and childishness. Only favorable reports were made and the bad things were not reported.



7. "Inexperience, lack of knowledge of the situation, language, customs and traditions of the Highlanders by the Vietnamese created disappointment, suspicion and an apathetic attitude on the part of the Highlanders.

8. "Those in charge of Highlander resettlement centers treated the Highlanders badly. Crowded, harsh and unhealthy conditions contrasted vividly with the free atmosphere of the jungles and mountains. They were watched day and night and, sometimes savagely beaten. Under such conditions the Highlanders' only wish was to run away to the deep jungles.

9. "To persuade and deny the Highlanders any alternative to joining the resettlement centers, some areas went so far as to destroy their villages, damaging their most valuable possessions such as dogs, pottery, etc. Confronted by these acts, the Highlanders became more frightened, suspicious and furious toward the government.

10. "Members of the Tsieng tribe were taken from the Delta area, resettled and integrated with the Die tribe in the Highlands. The Tsieng tribe was disappointed and irritated since they wanted to remain in the Delta area and didn't want to mingle with the Die, who have different customs and traditions.

11. "Highlander community workers were not permitted to work in accordance with tradition and customs. In some areas, Highlander youths who seldom desire to leave their villages, were forced to work in other areas for longer periods than agreed and were not permitted to return even when their food ran out. The workers were paid 30 piastres per day but had no understanding of the value of the money and thus were often cheated by dishonest traders; judging by the cost of the items purchased, the Highlanders resented the low pay scale.

12. "The Vietnamese often showed contempt for the Highlanders by abusing their customs and traditions.

13. "The Vietnamese occupied Highlander planting fields, killed their buffaloes, cut their bamboo, forbade them to hunt and fish, etc.

14. "Because the Central Highlands had been under French rule for a long time, the Highlanders still disliked the Vietnamese and have more confidence in the French.

15. "The Highlanders are still backward and strongly prejudiced. Due to the lack of understanding of the government's policy of development in the Highlands plus a lack of unity and equality between the Vietnamese and Highlanders, the Highlanders are frightened by the idea that someday there would be no land left for them and that they would gradually be eliminated.

16. "Most seriously, the Viet Cong have exploited Highlander discontent, quietly urging them to oppose the government, by blowing up the differences and widening the gap between the Vietnamese and the Highlanders. The Viet Cong objectives, in this instance, are (1) to sabotage the resettlement program, (2) to push the Highlanders into opposition to the government, and (3) to demand an autonomous status for minorities."

The plan proposed that the Highlanders should be allowed to keep the land they were occupying and be assisted by the government in the economic, cultural, social and religious fields; recommended the overhaul of the basic administrative machinery as well as the forces for the protection of the Highlanders' villages; advised on methods of countering Viet Cong activities and getting the Highlanders to protect themselves against the Viet Cong; and suggested engineering the assassination of Viet Cong cadre and their Highlander agents.

In reviewing the Viet Cong program, the report emphasized the Viet Cong training of Highlanders who went north in 1954 and had since been infiltrated back to the south to lead the fight against the government. "The Viet Cong have organized men disguised as traders and members of the government security forces to oppress, to collect taxes and generally create hatred for the government among the Highlanders. Because of the backwardness and narrow-mindedness of the Highlander, they are easy prey for Viet Cong propaganda and distortion of fact. As a result, the movement for Highland autonomy has spread to all Highland groups. The Viet Cong have been quite successful in carrying out their new method of struggle; namely, to organize Highlanders to defend their villages, instigate them to attack government administrative posts, land-development centers, resettlement centers and to join the Viet Cong in their armed activities. More and more Highlander youths are leaving their villages to join the Viet Cong, thus creating a serious security situation in the Highlands. Through the tribes of Toi-Oi in Quang Tri, Rhe in Quang Ngai, Bahnar in the An Khe area, Sedang in Kontum, Jarai in Cheoreo, plus tribes in Darlac, Quang Duc, and Dong Nai Thuong, Viet Cong influence is gaining strength in the southernmost part of the Highlands."

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In December 1961, Captain Ngo Van Hung, Chief of the Highlands Social Action Directorate, presented to President Diem an annex covering subsidies necessary to support his pacification plan which he had presented in September. The annex called for 92.3 million piastres for food, books, and clothing to support 84,445 resettled Highlanders, 21,417 Highlander school children and medical supplies for 105,862 people. Captain Hung listed as the most important aspect of the government's plan to improve the standard of living of the Highlanders and thwart the efforts of the Viet Cong, the establishment of agricultural development centers. He reported 67 centers existed in December 1961; there were 84,445 Highlanders either at or planned for the agricultural development centers and resettlement centers. The Vietnamese were proposing revitalizing the Highlanders resettlement program that had stalled by 1960 for a number of reasons previously cited.

If the example of resettlement set by Quang Tri Province could have been transmitted to the other provinces, then resettlement of Highlanders might for a change have met with greater success. The American Consulate in Hue reported in September 1961 that 80 percent of the estimated 21,000 Highlanders in Quang Tri had been resettled in 44 villages. Where possible the Highlander resettlement villages were located around Vietnamese resettlement villages. There were instances where the Vietnamese settlers received 2,000 piastres for housing and the Highlanders received nothing, but the Highlanders were provided some fair land and a little other help. Most important in the Consulate's opinion was the fairly sympathetic approach taken by the Vietnamese officials and the relatively minimal amount of harassment of Highlanders by government military units. The Consulate believed that the program in Quang Tri had been more successful than in other provinces because of the interest of officials and reasonably fair treatment.

President Diem, by the fall of 1961, had decided upon a course of action involving the resettlement of Highland villages close to routes of communications which was undertaken by Brigadier General Ton That Dinh, II Corps Commander. U.S. military advisors in early May 1962 evaluated the program favorably but Diem, at this point, began to have second thoughts and decided that the government had neither sufficient rice nor money for the project, nor were the Highlanders worthy of the effort. Ngo Dinh Nhu, Diem's brother, persuaded Diem of the importance of continuing the program, which General Dinh believed was essential in gaining the support of the Highlanders.

Diem also authorized the arming of Highlanders for defense of their villages beginning in the fall of 1961, though it appears that he did so with considerable reluctance and under pressure of events.

VIII.

U.S. SUPPORT IN ARMING THE HIGHLANDERS

1961 - 1963

President Diem's decision to permit the arming of the Highlanders caused considerable concern to groups of Vietnamese military and civilian officers in the Highlands. Some were concerned that the Highlanders would turn the weapons against the Vietnamese. Others thought that the weapons would end up in the hands of the Viet Cong. Still others thought that all armed men should come under the direct control of the military instead of the province chiefs. Finally, there were those who were not satisfied because either they were left out of the command channel or they had no access to the money till.

But the decision to arm the Highlanders was not made until considerable pressure had been built up by the Viet Cong and it appeared that if the Highlanders were to be kept from falling completely under Viet Cong control and won over to the government it was necessary to implement civic action programs and self defense programs. Arming the Highlanders without civic action programs would not succeed. As early as December 1960, the Office of the Special Assistant to the American Ambassador and Combined Studies Division attached to MACV were interested in developing ways to bring the peasant population into the struggle against the Viet Cong. A member of the International Voluntary Service, Mr. David A. Nuttle, who was resident in Banmethuot and working in the Rhade villages, was also concerned by the inroads being made by the Viet Cong among the Rhade. Nuttle's view on how the Rhade could be encouraged to join the government in defending themselves, develop village defenses, and be trained to undertake civic action activities was made known to Combined Studies Division.

By the summer of 1961, the Special Assistant to the Ambassador was recommending to the Country Team the establishment of a U.S.-supported program for the Highlanders designed to reduce Viet Cong influence and attract their loyalty to the government of Vietnam. The Country Team in October 1961 submitted the program to the Vietnamese Government. Apparently Diem approved with reluctance. He authorized the establishment of a training center at Buon Enao, just outside of Banmethuot, to train and arm Rhade in village defense. The project began on 1 November 1961 by Diem's Presidential Survey Office, assisted by American advisors. Also launched at about the same time was the Mountain Scouts program and the arming of Highlanders

in Kontum. In support of President Diem's Highlander resettlement program, the Ambassador instructed USOM in early November 1961 to seek funds for land development to assist in the voluntary resettlement of the Highlanders.

The Kontum project reversed the security situation in that province, which had become very bad by October 1961, when U.S. Military Advisors estimated that the Viet Cong had 5,000 troops in the province opposed by 6,700 government troops. More than 1,200 Highlanders were armed. Para-military, civic action, intelligence and psywar efforts were integrated under the Highland Operations Representative. As government forces demonstrated strength and purpose, the Highlanders began to desert Viet Cong areas and seek government protection and regroupment. Approximately 4,000 Highlanders were regrouped along strategic highways and trails for purposes of denying the population and area to the Viet Cong and permitting reasonable government control. Civic action projects were undertaken, and direct material assistance was provided to these Highlanders, creating a favorable psychological effect in the minds of the Highlanders and discrediting Viet Cong propaganda. By mid-February 1962, 74 villages had been armed and formed into an interlocking village defense system controlling over half of the province and additional villages were being armed. Strategic and tactical areas were being consolidated by the resettlement of the Highlanders. Viet Cong strength had dropped to less than 500. The success of the program supported the view that the Highlanders, if armed and given a minimum of training, would actively oppose the Viet Cong. The Kontum program stimulated a similar effort in Pleiku province.

The American-supported experiment at Buon Enao, involving the training of Rhade in village defense and the regroupment of villages into defensible areas, proceeded with amazing progress. When the program began in November 1961, it was first necessary to persuade the Rhade that they could protect themselves by united action. The first group of 50 Rhade volunteers was issued weapons on 15 December 1961. By the end of May 1962, about 15,000 Rhade from 64 villages had been regrouped into 40 villages and were defending themselves against Viet Cong attack. Patrolling by Rhade reaction teams (Strike Forces) were covering an area 25 miles by 15 miles and plans included the expansion of this area to include another 12,000 Rhade. Major Nguyen Dinh Bang, Darlac province chief, strongly supported the arming of the Rhade through the Buon Enao program and was also attempting to increase the number of Rhade in the province Self-Defense Corps to 1,000.

The Viet Cong attempted to upset the Darlac Village Defense Program by launching company-size attacks against some of the villages. They found that the Rhade intended to withstand them and would put up an effective defense. In order not to lose more Rhade to the village defense system, the Viet Cong on 28 April 1962 issued new regulations including, 1) The Rhade must cooperate in an area control system and not leave their villages without prior approval and knowledge of the Viet Cong cadre; 2) the villages must attend special political meetings; 3) people must be provided from each village for special Viet Cong training courses in politics, intelligence and guerrilla activities; and 4) the villagers must supply rice to the Viet Cong. These regulations tended to force the Rhade to flee more rapidly from Viet Cong-controlled areas.

A Rhade who had regrouped north in 1954 and was infiltrated into South Vietnam in 1962 told his captors in January 1963 that the Viet Cong were training and indoctrinating young Highlanders as key cadre who would follow the Communist line without question in the future. These selected Highlanders were being returned to their villages to become village leaders. In order that the Highlanders might better administer their local governments, the Viet Cong felt it was necessary to train certain of them in special schools in the north. Each village had to send at least one person to attend the six-month medical and three-month first aid courses given by the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong was especially interested in sending Highlanders north because they believed that this was the most effective means of spreading their propaganda. Since 1958, the Viet Cong had been organizing observation trips by groups of about 50 Highlanders to the north which lasted about six months.

During the period of the Buon Enoo experiment mistreatment of the Rhade by government military forces continued, including the murder of villagers and stealing of chickens and goats. By mid-June 1962 several Rhade preachers had joined the Viet Cong because they either believed they would be helping the Rhade gain independence, or out of fear of the Viet Cong or because ARVN and Republican Youth took what they wanted from the Rhade.

A missionary, commenting on the Buon Enoo experiment, believed it saved Darlac province and the Rhade from being completely dominated by the Viet Cong. His view was that the Rhade had turned against the Viet Cong because the Viet Cong had been seizing their meager food supplies, making ineffective propaganda, kidnapping young male Highlanders and forcing them to participate in Viet Cong raids. The Rhade had not had arms to defend themselves against the Viet Cong until Buon Enoo was opened and thus

were in no position to effectively resist Viet Cong control. With the opening of Buon Enao and its staffing by Vietnamese and American personnel, the Rhade accepted the opportunity to arm themselves and because of their distrust of the Vietnamese attached themselves to the Americans whom they believed would protect them and had come to replace the French. The missionary commented that a further reason for continued distrust and hate of the Vietnamese was the indiscriminate bombing of Rhade villages and the taking of food and other items by ARVN as they went through Rhade villages. The missionary suggested that the patrols, instead of taking from the Highlanders, work at building good will by bringing with them needles and salt to be handed out to the villagers as they pass through and that a bounty system be established for Viet Cong that could be shared by the villagers.

In Pleiku province, 20,000 Highlanders, starting in mid-1961, had sought government protection from the Viet Cong, according to province chief Ton That Chu. These Highlanders were also being armed, though more slowly than in Darlac and with older weapons. Three Mountain Scout units composed of 15 men each had been formed to conduct patrols for the sole purpose of obtaining intelligence on the Viet Cong. Twenty-five strategic hamlets had been prepared for the Highlanders. But by July 1963, approximately 40,000 Highlanders out of the estimated 105,000 believed to live in Pleiku remained outside Government control.

A number of irregular bodies of armed Highlanders were formed under the Presidential Survey Office and the Directorate for Social Action in the Highlands to combat Viet Cong propaganda, conduct civic action, collect intelligence and fight the Viet Cong when appropriate. The best known of these bodies were the Mountain Scouts, who were first organized in the fall of 1961. There were 48 teams of 15 men each working throughout the Highlands by the summer of 1962, and by the close of 1962, there were nearly 4,000 armed Mountain Scouts. Ngo Dinh Nhu, who had taken over direction of the government's program in the Highlands in the summer of 1962, was behind the rapid increase of the Mountain Scouts, which he felt was absolutely necessary for the success of the Strategic Hamlet program. The Scouts would fill the vacuum created in the countryside and in the Strategic Hamlets when the civil guard had to be mobilized to meet large operations mounted by the Viet Cong. The combat Viet Cong infiltration from Laos, more than 2,000 Highlanders were trained and armed for border surveillance work by December 1962.



The success of the Buon Enao experiment had caused the expansion of the program to other provinces and by December 1962, there were 15,000 village defenders and 5,000 strike force members trained and armed. Within the Rhade area, 110 villages had been secured by September 1962, with more than 50,000 Rhade benefitting from the program. At least 160 Viet Cong had been killed, 90 wounded and 400 captured or surrendered, with the Rhade losing 15 men killed. By the end of 1962, the Presidential Survey Office and the Directorate for Social Action in the Highlands had trained and armed approximately 21,000 Highlanders under the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Program, which included border surveillance, strike force and village defender groups and 4,000 Mountain Scouts. These programs received, through the Presidential Survey Office, direct material, financial and advisory assistance from the U.S. Government. Training was conducted by U.S. Army Special Forces teams attached to Combined Studies Division.

Besides arming the Highlanders the Buon Enao experiment and the resulting CIDG program worked in the civic field. Each area development center, such as Buon Enao, was provided with a modest, austere dispensary which, as far as the Highlanders were concerned, was a magnificent leap forward over their previous way of life. The Viet Cong had succeeded in crippling the Vietnamese Rural Health Program in some areas, and in other areas no program had existed. Highlanders received training as medics which was geared to standards set by the USOM Rural Health Division. Though the Vietnamese Government failed to support the medical program, approximately one million people received treatment by June 1963.

Highlanders were also taken on orientation visits to other parts of the country in an effort to show them that they were part of a nation. Most Highlanders were unaware that there was a country of Vietnam. On one of the earlier tours, when a group of Highlanders were taken to Danang and saw the ocean for the first time, they asked, "Why have the Gods dumped so much salt in all that water when salt is so badly needed in the Highlands?"

Ngo Dinh Can, who was special representative of the president but in fact ran Central Vietnam, established three key policy points to be followed in the CIDG program:

- 1) Any program for arming the people must be balanced by the strongest emphasis on civic action and political organization.

2) All persons working with the Highlanders must respect their customs and superstitions.

3) Direct command of all Highlanders trained and armed must be exercised by their own people. Operational control and policy direction will be retained by local Vietnamese authorities, working through tribal leaders.

The upsurge of Viet Cong infiltration into the Highlands from Laos in late 1960 and continued heavy infiltration in 1961, which had forced the Vietnamese Government to take up a program of arming the Highlanders, also caused the Viet Cong to increase their demands for support and assistance from the Highlanders to the point where the Highlanders could no longer stand the pressure and the effect it was having on their subsistence economy. By the summer of 1962, they were fleeing their villages to government-controlled areas in such numbers that the government had to initiate crash relief programs. By August 1962 the number of refugees was estimated to range between 100,000 and 150,000, with most observers tending to favor the higher figure. The Vietnamese Government addressed an urgent appeal to the U.S. Government for assistance in helping the Highlander refugees which received an immediate favorable response. The U.S. AID Mission in Saigon signed agreements to release 50 million piastres for Highlander assistance.

In early August 1962 Minister of Interior Bui Van Luong stated that Nhu who, as noted above, had personally taken charge of the government's efforts in the Highlands, was considering granting autonomy to the area. Nhu observed that the development centers created between 1957 and 1962 had incorporated only a small number of Highlanders because the Highlanders believed their freedom of movement was being limited. Nhu recommended that the first task of the government should be to look after the health of the Highlanders and provide them with simple housing and food. The Highlanders should also be made to feel that they were free to leave the centers at any time. Nhu expressed concern that the American program might be too generous and elaborate for the Highlanders and did not wish to see the Highlanders led to expect undue largesse from the government, but only in gauges to meet their simple needs.

In November 1962, Nhu commented that the Highlanders resettled in Strategic Hamlets complained because they expected to be provided with the same emoluments as the resettled Vietnamese, which was not reasonable as they were not on the

same cultural level as the Vietnamese. In their original habitat, Nhu believed, they did without houses and had no regular means of support. Mr. Nhu's understanding of the Highlanders' culture thus did not extend to the variegated housing patterns in the Highlands, ranging from the small mud and thatch Stieng family dwelling similar to a poor Vietnamese peasant's home to the great homes and community centers of the Rhade and Sedang.

The Highlander village was a social unit that developed its own leadership. But in the course of developing the Strategic Hamlets, the government failed to recognize that this was the case. The final six points set forth for establishing a Strategic Hamlet was the democratic election by secret ballot of a governing committee--except in Highlander hamlets which could have an appointed rather than an elected committee, selected more often than not by the Vietnamese.

The refugee program received considerable attention. Twenty-two CIDG camps were established in 13 provinces by January 1963 not only to provide security for the refugees but also to train them in defense and conduct civic action programs. In Khanh Hoa province, which had a small (20,000) Highlander population, 5,000 had been resettled prior to the influx of the refugees. The province reported 3,000 refugees in August 1962 and expected to resettle an additional 10,000 Highlanders after a series of military clear and hold operations planned for February 1963. These operations may have resulted in an additional 3,000 Highlanders being temporarily brought under government control but did not meet with the success anticipated. In April 1963 the American Embassy provincial reporting officer estimated 6,000 Highlanders had been resettled in Khanh Hoa "most of whom could be classified as refugees from Communism."

A CIDG camp built at Dum Pau in Tuyen Duc province in September 1962 provided security and economic assistance to 4,000 Koho refugees who had started coming out of the mountains and settling in the area beginning in April 1962. These refugees were being assisted by local missionaries, members of the International Voluntary Service (IVS) and the U.S. AID provincial officer with medical supplies and training, agricultural programs and material.

Perhaps the most successful Highlander program was among the Stieng in Phuoc Long and Binh Long provinces, where most of the Highlanders were resettled in defensible locations under government control by June 1963. In Binh Long province the number of Highlanders in provincial security forces had increased from 10 in January 1963 to almost 800 by 1 June 1963. On balance, the Highlanders appeared to be responding well to the good treatment afforded them in the two provinces.

IX.

DISARMING THE HIGHLANDERS, 1962 - 1963

Despite all the programs formulated to bring the Highlanders within government controlled areas and negate Viet Cong influence in those areas outside of regular government presence, there continued the same problems that had plagued the Vietnamese since they first entered the Highlands in 1954. The unfortunate history of the relationship between Vietnamese and Highlanders was still the overriding block to winning the latter to the government cause against the Viet Cong. Tribal problems continued to demand more attention than they were receiving. Province officials continued to demonstrate little sympathy for, or little interest in, the Highlanders. Indiscriminate air strikes continued to aggravate the situation in some areas. The involvement of many agencies in tribal programs -- province administration, ARVN, the Presidential Survey Office, the Social Welfare Center, Vietnamese and U.S. Special Forces, USOM, Combined Studies Division MACV, etc. -- resulted in some confusion and working at cross purposes. Moreover, friction began to develop between Vietnamese and Americans, as the latter became increasingly more numerous and active in pushing programs benefiting the Highlanders. Often these Americans were unable to conceal their frustration over the slow, ineffective, and often oppressive approach of Vietnamese officialdom toward Highlander problems. For their part, the Vietnamese came increasingly to distrust American intentions with respect to the Highlands.

The Highlanders looked upon the Americans, who took a very personal interest in their lives, as friends and gave their loyalty to the American Special Forces Teams. There were instances when Highlanders turned Vietnamese officials away from Highlanders' villages stating the Vietnamese would need a pass "from the Americans" to gain entry. There were instances where Americans, in their frustration, commented to Highlanders on the inability or lack of interest of Vietnamese officials, or by their action showed that the Vietnamese did not have the best interest of the Highlanders in mind. In several instances Americans assumed in practice command of Highlander camps, usually due to the limited ability of the Vietnamese camp commander.

The CIDG program had expanded rapidly following its initial successes. Vietnamese Government support of the CIDG program varied in different areas from passive neutrality to active and violent opposition. The Vietnamese considered the programs American-

sponsored and supported and were troubled with thoughts of a Highlander revolt. Official Vietnamese participation via the Presidential Survey Office was to a great extent in the context of watching and reporting on American activities. The Presidential Survey Office assigned personnel to command the various camps, but the Americans usually outnumbered the Vietnamese officials in the camps. American policy and action was to advise and guide, to encourage the development of local leadership and initiative, and in the end make it possible for the Vietnamese and Highlanders to continue the program as the Americans moved to other areas to start new camps. The Highlanders were eager and willing to defend themselves. It was found that with a little understanding, a little help and a strict, but sincere, and friendly leadership, the people would literally fight to the death against the Viet Cong.

There were problems. The Americans believed the Vietnamese were negative in their attitude toward the programs and one American official connected with the CIDG program commented: "Each program has been thrown back and delayed from weeks to months by the ineptness, inefficiency, jealousy, corruptness or subversiveness of vicilian bureaucrats and military commanders on different levels. It is rare to find an official who makes a serious-minded, patriotic, selfless effort to support and assist a program which is designed to serve the overall purpose rather than to benefit the local clique or individual. The hold of the Viet Cong on the population is actually weak and exists mainly because the local officials offer nothing better or even as good. When the average Vietnamese civilian or military official moves into an area that has been restored to the sovereignty of Vietnam, he ordinarily manages to antagonize the population and restore Viet Cong prestige. In short, the Viet Cong as an opponent is a secondary problem. The Vietnamese official is the real obstacle to success."

The Mountain Scouts, operating in 15-man teams attached directly to the districts from which they were recruited and under the direction of the district chief, were not subject to the same problems. Except while the Scouts were in training, the American advisors were usually in touch with the provincial authorities and not the Scouts. There were also fewer Americans involved.

The American policy was to counter the Viet Cong by turning the people away from them and towards support of the Government of Vietnam. But Americans could not do this. They could only help the Vietnamese in this process and many Vietnamese neither understood nor agreed with the techniques being applied. There was no program for training the Vietnamese who must command the camps in the philosophy,

politics, administration or leadership required. No program for educating the Vietnamese on Highlander culture was developed. The Vietnamese had to learn while observing the Americans at work in the camps but they were in no position to compete with the better trained, motivated and educated Americans. Below the Saigon level the Vietnamese officials involved in the CIDG program had at the best a limited understanding of the policy objectives of the American and Vietnamese governments. The Americans at the working level assumed that U.S. policy was the same as the Vietnamese but failed to understand that the program among the Highlanders was creating trained Highlander leaders, an organized military force, and an understanding of political organization, all of which could be viewed by the Vietnamese as running counter to their objective of assimilating the Highlanders into Vietnamese society. Also, the Americans employed as interpreters, oftentimes unwittingly, a number of the former Bajaraka members who had been imprisoned, which caused the Vietnamese to suspect American involvement in the Highlander autonomy aspirations. The Vietnamese could only view the CIDG program in the Highlands as a strengthening of the Highlanders outside of the established Vietnamese political and administrative structure.

The CIDG program had become extremely large and to some officials had the appearance of a regular military formation which might be better controlled through the conventional military forces of Vietnam advised by the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group. Some officials, both Vietnamese and American, failed to recognize that the CIDG strike forces operated as protective forces within their own home areas and if removed from their home areas or redirected to the conventional military effort, the local villagers would be left exposed. The CIDG program was designed to do much more than just provide a protective cover for the villagers. The program psychologically prepared an area for the establishment of a village defense system. Medical, economic and various civic action services were instituted and projects initiated in order to hire refugees and locals for the purpose of improving their standard of living within local capabilities. In short, the program was revolutionary in character and conflicted with the conservative long established systems of officialdom. It was feared that if the military began administering the program, it would revert to the classical military system, and the civic action, local development concepts would drop by the wayside.

The government in Darlac Province began in late 1962 to disarm the Highlanders trained at Buon Enao. This action was taken

in part because a number of villages were secure and no longer required a large number of weapons, in part because the Strategic Hamlet Program called for only 10 weapons per village, and in part because the Vietnamese were still fearful of a Highlander revolt. Thirty-one of the 205 villages trained and equipped under the Buon Enao program were considered relatively secure and turned over to the Darlac province chief. The province chief directed U.S. Special Forces personnel to collect weapons from these 31 villages and by the beginning of 1963, 600 weapons representing 50 percent of the arms held by these villages were collected. The Vietnamese Government argued that since U.S. Special Forces had issued the weapons, they should collect them, for the Highlanders resisted Vietnamese attempts to collect the weapons saying that the Americans had issued the weapons promising the Highlanders that they would be able to keep the weapons for life. This disarming of the villagers disturbed the American Embassy, which urged Ngo Dinh Nhu on 19 January 1963 to review the project. Village chiefs reportedly informed plantation operators that before they would risk a Viet Cong attack against their villages which they could not adequately defend, they would dispose of the relatively few -- 15 or 20 -- weapons they were permitted to retain, tear down their protective fences and assume a position of strict neutrality.

In April 1963 Vietnamese Special Forces (formerly Presidential Survey Office) turned over 800 CIDG personnel to the Darlac province chief for incorporation in the Self Defense Corps and continued to turn over villages armed and trained under the Buon Enao/CIDG program (some 12,000 Highlanders in Darlac trained and armed) with the intention of disarming the Rhade.

Some Rhade leaders believed that Colonel Le Quang Trong, commanding the 23rd Infantry Division in Banmethuot, had removed Major Nguyen Dinh Bang, the Darlac province chief in the summer of 1962, because Bang was helping the Rhade, whereas Trong was attempting to provoke incidents between ARVN and the Rhade and was arresting Rhade he thought favored autonomy. He had obtained several Rhade prisoners and had coerced them into being prepared to make statements on the Rhade autonomy movement, which one high ranking military intelligence officer believed Trong would use as an excuse to enforce strict control measures. In September 1962, 26 Rhade political prisoners who had completed their sentences were released from the Banmethuot jail and immediately sent to a forced labor camp in Krong Kno Valley, Darlac, under direction of the 43rd Regiment. The Rhade feared Colonel Trong and favored Major Bang and the Darlac province chief prior to Major Bang, Major Ngo Nhu Bich.

Both Bang and Bich, who had worked toward improving the conditions of the Rhade, had been removed while Trong who opposed the Rhade was retained. Colonel Trong wanted control over the Buon Enao program and wanted to disarm all Rhade tribesmen except those he could utilize for military operations. Lt. Colonel Le Quang Tung, chief of the Presidential Survey Office, was reported in December 1962 to have wanted to wash his hands of Buon Enao because he believed Colonel Trong would cause a Highlander revolt.

These efforts to disarm the Rhade were not understood by the Highlanders who interpreted them (possibly correctly) as a Vietnamese effort to leave the Highlanders at the mercy of the Viet Cong. To a Rhade his weapon was a very personal and important item. Between 1958 and 1960 the Vietnamese had taken the crossbows and spears from the Highlanders. Now they were taking away the weapons that had just been given to them. What were the Rhade to think? They presented their views to Combined Studies Division in a letter in mid-1963 which is quoted in part:

"... Within the years 1961-1962, there was an American officer named Mr. David A. Nuttle, who saw the distress that came to all Montagnards in the High Plateau Region; so Buon Enao strategic hamlet was specially organized to help the Highland people and us to popular ralliement: Dave made appeal to all Montagnards around to unite for the just cause such as the struggle for insuring order, peace and security for the sakes of both Montagnards and Vietnamese in the Highlands. ... Many people came to Buon Enao to be taught methods of self-defense. ... Dave explained to all the people as follows: 'Do you know whose are these weapons?' Everyone replied: 'These arms are American officers possessions; we are receiving them to protect our property and lives.' 'O.K.', Mr. Nuttle said, 'But these weapons become yours now; you have not contributed your blood for nothing; now you may receive and keep them for your descendants. Nobody will pick them up from you.' Upon hearing these words many people eagerly went to Buon Enao to be taught the use of arms. No Vietnamese was allowed to enter the Buon Enao fence for fear of infiltration of VC agents.

"But while the people were learning these military arts, in February 1962, the province chief of Darlac came to Buon Enao and hardily reproached the population for having accepted American weapons. He said: 'Why are you coming here? Will you receive weapons and maybe eat them; I order you to come back home. If ever I see you again here I will put everybody in jail! It is not worthwhile taking of these guns!' And, periodically for three times he prevented people



from taking rifles. The last time he gathered weapons in the magazine of Buon Enao. People feared him and scattered at his presence but came back to receive guns from the American officer.

"At that moment danger appeared; Lac Thien district was occupied by a VC force. When the people returned to defend their villages some of them were killed and many were maimed; they became lame or one-armed. But all with the same consent tried to clear out Communist influence from the High Plateau Region. And we waited to see whether peace and order would be found and quiet and moral-comfort take place. But between these silences internal trouble appeared from time to time and this came not from the Communist side but often was caused by armed bandits who tried to jump over some hamlet fence.

"Since April 30, 1963 Buon Enao organization has been completely under province control and 300 men of strike force have become Dan Ve (SDC). Weapons are gathered in storage and these men remain without arms. So these 800 combatants and the population alike deeply regret this change. The reason is the before, in doing their duty they were all well paid; in respect to the danger they are now risking, they enjoyed a quick and peaceful life with their families. The 1200\$VN for each combatant is a minimum rate which can assure his standard of living. This plus one or two sets of military clothing makes them 'safe' from having to spend money. But when they become Vietnamese soldiers they are underpaid. The above minimum wage of 1200\$VN is reduced to 900\$VN (for strike force) and to 600\$VN (for popular militant); plus they have to buy their own military clothes. So a choice is given them whether to remain on the job or to depart from Buon Enao and return home. The torment is not yet over in the general opinion of the population.

"This event points out the great difference between the American financial organization and the Vietnamese as there is a difference of influence. So the intent of the majority of the people is to invite the kind authorities of the American Army to examine the case and to settle the problem in an orderly way. The danger is that Communist propaganda is more seductive. They always hope to take advantage of discouraged, comfortless, unregarded people to try to overthrow our clean-up plan."

Reorganization or American advisory and technical support to Highlander programs resulted in changes in the conceptual approach guiding American efforts. On 1 July 1963, support of the CIDG program including village defense and strike force was transferred

from Combined Studies Division to U.S. Special Forces, and greater attention was placed on the military than on the civic action role of the CIDG program. In October, the Mountain Scouts and Border Surveillance units trained by the Directorate of Social Action for the Highlands and under the direct command of the province and district chiefs, advised by Combined Studies Division, were assigned to Vietnamese Special Forces with U.S. Special Forces advisors and absorbed within the CIDG camps. The province chiefs in Kontum, Pleiku and Quang Duc resisted orders to turn over their Scouts but failed to obtain a change. The Mountain Scouts, who had proven extremely effective working in 15-man units, ceased to exist. In the year preceding their demise they killed 251 Viet Cong, wounded 78 and captured 103 while sustaining losses of 18 killed, 22 wounded and two missing. They also provided nearly 1400 information reports to local and national Vietnamese authorities. The Strike Forces originally conceived under the CIDG program to protect groups of hamlets, now began working in more of a conventional military manner, with fewer small unit patrols. Civic action programs received less attention. An indication of the effectiveness of the CIDG program prior to July 1963 was that "several hundred villages, about 300,000 civilians and several thousand square miles of land were recovered from the Viet Cong and secured." But these gains were only temporary, for the Viet Cong increased their activities and were taking advantage of government weaknesses and Highlander discontent, and steadily regaining the areas they had previously lost.

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X.

THE RESURGENCE OF BATAKA 1962-1963

During the period beginning in November 1961, when the Highlanders were being armed, they saw little evidence that the Vietnamese Government was assigning civil servants to the Highlands who understood the problems there or were interested in the Highlanders. In most instances the attitude of the Vietnamese civil servant and the Vietnamese settlers remained as it had been in previous years. There were only two province chiefs who were sincerely interested in helping the Highlanders and in both cases lesser officials under these officials continued to display hostility toward the Highlanders and took advantage of them whenever possible. Major Ngo Nhu Bich who had been chief of Darlac Province and in April 1963 was chief of Tuyen Duc Province, and Major Hoang Van Dinh, chief of Kontum Province, were the only province chiefs who had the confidence of the Highlanders. The Rhade and Jarai tribes in Darlac and Pleiku provinces still desired autonomy. It was felt by Jean Fune, a French Protestant missionary who had lived in the Highlands for many years, that this desire would probably become a serious issue in the future. Fune reported that Highlander leaders had stated that they were cooperating with the Americans against the Viet Cong with the full understanding that the Americans had refused to support their aspirations for autonomy but in the hope that they might still win over the Americans.

In mid-October 1962, four junior Rhade officials contacted a young Rhade speaking American civilian official in Banmethuot and talked with him about autonomy for the Highlanders, asking for help from the Americans. They believed the Vietnamese planned to exterminate the Highlanders and based this opinion on their belief that the Hole of Drung was closing, which in Rhade legend would mean the end of the Rhade.\* One of the four Rhade

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\* According to tribal legends, the Chams were the first people to inhabit the area known today as Vietnam. The Chams occupied and farmed the lowlands of Vietnam until the Vietnamese from the north drove them into the hills. Fearing possible annihilation, the Chams fled to a cave near Dalat. Though tribal legends do not say how long the Chams were in the cave, legends do tell us that all the tribes that now make up the Highlanders of Vietnam originated in

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was Y Thih Eban who was employed at the time as a translator at the Buon Enao CIDG camp. Y Thih had been imprisoned in 1958 for his part in the Bajaraka Autonomy Movement and released about May 1962. He was in 1962 the General Secretary of the Bajaraka Central Committee. A second meeting was scheduled with the American for the latter part of October, but only Y Thih appeared because the other three Rhade were afraid of Vietnamese surveillance. In the conversations that occurred, it appeared that the Bajaraka Central Committee, which claimed to represent four provincial autonomy committees and 586,000 Highlanders, was reconsidering its position on autonomy and willing to accept equal status with the Vietnamese. The Committee wished to work with the Vietnamese in overcoming misunderstandings and to correct grievances. The Banmethuot Bajaraka Committee, because of the Buon Enao Program, went as far as requesting that "autonomy" be dropped from the name of the organization and "equality" put in its place. Y Thih also brought up the possibility of encouraging Y Bih to return from the Viet Cong and, as the Chairman of the Banmethuot Bajaraka Committee, work with the Government in obtaining equal status for the Highlanders. It was believed that if Y Bih rallied to the Government, the Viet Cong would suffer a severe blow and that many Highlanders working with the Viet Cong would also rally.

Ngo Dinh Nhu and Colonel Le Quang Tung, Chief of the Presidential Survey Office, were informed by Combined Studies Division of these meetings on 29 October 1962. Colonel Tung advised Combined Studies Division on 13 December 1962 that authority had been received to contact Y Bih and offer amnesty. The Americans could attempt the contact, provided an officer of the Presidential Survey Office was present and worked with the Americans. Colonel Tung also informed Combined Studies Division that President Diem and Mr. Nhu expressed the desire

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this cave. An underground migration from Dalat to the Hole of Drung (between Banmethuot and Lac Thien at AP865825) is said to have taken place. Since the Hole of Drung has a very small opening only one man at a time could emerge. The tribes emerged by families, the bravest family and the bravest tribe going first. The Rhade tribe was considered to be the bravest, and the bravest family of the Rhade, according to legend, was the family of Y Bham. The legend concludes with the prediction that when the Hole of Drung closes the Rhade will come to an end.

that Combined Studies Division and the Presidential Survey Office "try to organize the Highlanders, especially the armed youth, into Republican Youth, Women's Relationship Movement and other political organizations, so that they may have a better opportunity to learn the history, the political and social life of Vietnam, and to improve their notions of the Fatherland and of social progress . . . I have requested the province chief to invite all educated Highlanders and Lowlanders who are serving in our camps and their wives to join the above political organizations. They shall be trained so they will be able to set up those organizations among the Highlanders."

A concentrated effort was made by the Americans to meet with Y Bih. Y Bham, Chairman of the Bajaraka Central Committee, was still being held in Banmethuot jail, but he agreed to work with the Vietnamese Government to resolve differences. Like Y Thih, Y Bham believed that Y Bih was the only man who could bring about rapprochement between the Highlanders and the Vietnamese. Attempts were made through Y Bham to contact Y Bih; Y Bham wrote several letters to Y Bih urging him to surrender. On 1 February 1963, word was received from Y Bih that he was willing to meet with Vietnamese officials provided Y Bham was released from jail. Y Bham was released from jail for a short time in February to meet General Nguyen Khanh, Commanding II Corps; but he was returned to jail in late February. Members of the Banmethuot Bajaraka Committee attempting to cooperate with the Vietnamese may have informed Colonel Le Quang Trong, commanding the 23rd Division, where Y Bih was located, for on 15 March elements of the Division attempted to capture Y Bih. Y Bih broke off contact and sent word that faith had been broken by the Bajaraka organization and the Vietnamese Government. Some observers were of the opinion that Colonel Trong would have killed Y Bih had he been successful in capturing him.

By February, the Vietnamese Government seemed to have been having second thoughts about working with the Bajaraka Central Committee. Colonel Tung informed Combined Studies Division that Y Bih and Y Bham wanted to reorganize their autonomy committee using American facilities and support, such as cash and airplanes, and suggested that further contacts by Combined Studies Division personnel with the Rhade be made in company with Vietnamese officers. Some Vietnamese officials thought the Americans were being used by the Highlanders and accused Americans of providing the Highlanders with derogatory information on the Vietnamese Government. In one recorded instance, the American Special Forces Commander at the Bandon CIDG camp west of Banmethuot told Lt. Nam, the Vietnamese Special Forces Camp

Commander and a member of the Banmethuot Bajaraka Committee, that if Y Bih surrendered and felt his life was in danger he could be given asylum at the American Embassy in Saigon. Then, in April 1963, the Vietnamese Government decided to withdraw its offer of amnesty to Y Bih.

Combined Studies Division was strongly encouraging the Vietnamese Government to utilize the Bajaraka committees. In February 1963, the Division believed that the Vietnamese Government should form complaints and action committees within the Bajaraka organization for investigating incidents involving Vietnamese and Highlanders and presenting Highlanders' grievances; that the Bajaraka organization could counter Viet Cong propaganda; inform the Highlanders of Government programs to assist them; conduct intelligence collection activities; and generally improve Vietnamese-Highlander relations. In further discussions with Vietnamese officials in late March 1963, Combined Studies Division suggested that selected Highlanders be given a political indoctrination tour, following which would be used to indoctrinate Highlander village chiefs and councils on Government programs, study Viet Cong propaganda and develop counter-propaganda, assist in killing rumors which effected Vietnamese-Highlander relations, and conduct intelligence activities and induce Viet Cong Highlanders to rally.

There is little doubt that the attention the Bajaraka organization began to receive from interested Vietnamese and American officials encouraged increased activity at least in Darlac Province. Until January 1963 there was no contact with the committees in Pleiku and Kontum, but in mid-January contact was urgently required. A Rhade, Y Preh, associated with the Banmethuot Bajaraka Committee, informed an officer of Combined Studies Division that an oral message had been received from the Pleiku and Kontum committees urging Banmethuot to join in a general uprising against the Government and join up with the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong had apparently prompted the message but it does not appear by subsequent events that they had control of either the Kontum or Pleiku Bajaraka Committees.

The Combined Studies Division officer in contact with the Bajaraka members informed the Banmethuot Committee that Y Bham, who was still in jail, would not support any form of revolt. The Committee decided to reject the request of Kontum and Pleiku. The next day the American, accompanied by a Vietnamese, visited Y Bham in prison and informed him of the message and what he had said in Y Bham's name. Y Bham approved of the action taken;

whether because he agreed with the course of action or because a Vietnamese official was present is not easy to judge.

The commander of Combined Studies Division addressed a letter to the Pleiku Bajaraka Committee on 18 January 1963 suggesting that the Highlanders join with the Vietnamese Government and meet with General Nguyen Khanh, Commander of II Corps. On 22 January, two members of Combined Studies Division visited General Khanh and asked him to meet with the Pleiku Bajaraka Committee. On 6 February, the commander and two other members of Combined Studies Division took Y Thih and Y Preh to meet with General Khanh and to persuade the members of the Pleiku and Kontum Bajaraka Committees to meet with Khanh. On 14 February, General Khanh met with the Pleiku Bajaraka representative and had Y Bham brought from Banmethuot jail by Combined Studies Division aircraft to attend the meeting. The presence of Y Bham had an excellent psychological effect on the Bajaraka members present. General Khanh was successful in gaining Highlander support against the Viet Cong. The prospective revolt was thwarted.

The Pleiku Highlander leaders who had met with General Khanh in February 1963 had been promised that no action would be taken against them. There was apparently some police surveillance conducted. In November 1963, Sui Sip, the acting Chairman of the Pleiku Bajaraka Committee, was murdered in the village of Plei Brang by an unidentified assassin. Rmah Liu, the Secretary of the Pleiku Committee, who had also met with Khanh, became Chairman of the Committee.

On 3 April, the Special Assistant to the American Ambassador in Saigon addressed a letter to Ngo Dinh Nhu in which he stated, "I believe that the autonomy movement is declining or dying among the tribes." But the Vietnamese Government was not in agreement. Senior officials suspected that because of the attention the Highlanders were receiving from the Americans that the movement was gaining strength, that the authority of the Government was being undermined, and that the Highlanders were using the Americans as a buffer between them and the Vietnamese to gain their demands. And add to these general beliefs the Saigon Government's awakening to the fact that the Combined Studies Division had acted as a go-between in arranging interviews of autonomy committee members with General Khanh and attempted to keep the Highlanders in Pleiku and Kontum from revolting and there developed if not distrust at least doubt in American intentions. General Khanh was

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reprimanded for his activities. The Special Assistant to the Ambassador was informed on 13 April by Minister of Defense Nguyen Thuan that Thuan desired that all Americans desist from having anything further to do with autonomy matters. On 17 April the commander of Combined Studies Division, in a meeting with Colonel Tung and Captain Tran Van Minh of Special Forces High Command Vietnam; General Ton That Dinh, Commander of III Corps; and Minister of Interior Bui Van Luong, informed them that he was withdrawing his principal officer in contact with autonomy groups from Banmethuot and that the Division would discontinue all advice, suggestions, efforts and contacts until such time as guidance was received from the Vietnamese Government.

During May, members of the Bajaraka Committees moved from Banmethuot to their native villages. This was apparently done so they could have a running start should the Vietnamese begin arresting the committee members. The Buon Enao complex was turned over to the province chief. Weapons pickup continued. The Bajaraka organization continued to operate, and seeing their American contacts withdrawn and no apparent improvement in their relations with the Vietnamese, some individuals planned a new revolt. Information received in May 1963 indicated that the Highlanders intended to revolt in late May or early June when the Dak Mil (Buon Sarpa) CIDG camp was established. The plan called for all Strike Force personnel trained by U. S. Special Forces to participate in the revolt. It was also reported that 2,000 French Army Highlanders from Laos who had gone to Laos in 1954 would participate in the revolt. The revolt did not occur as planned but it is interesting that in September 1964 the Highlanders in the CIDG camps in Darlac and Quang Duc Provinces did revolt, with the Dak Mil camp being the most active.



XI.

STEADY DETERIORATION IN THE HIGHLANDS  
1963 - 1964

Alleged mistreatment of Highlanders continued. In at least one instance the mistreatment was spelled out in detail. The Jarai in Le Thanh district, Pleiku Province, submitted a document to district officials in April 1963 claiming that 5,000 Highlanders had been killed by ARVN in Le Thanh. The document cited six incidents between 7 November 1962 and 17 April 1963 in which 39 Jarai were killed and 35 wounded. It also listed a series of general complaints:

1. When Highlanders return from their fields, ARVN shoots them.
2. When the Viet Cong capture male villagers, the government puts their wives and sons in jail.
3. ARVN kills livestock indiscriminately in and around rubber plantations and burns crop areas.
4. The Vietnamese take over fields after the Highlanders have cleared them.
5. The Vietnamese kill elephants working on plantations.

In Pleiku, the province chief, Ton That Chu, dragged his feet in issuing weapons to Highlanders trained at Plei Mrong. Interior Minister Bui Van Luong in June 1963 finally had to order Chu to issue weapons, stating that government policy specified ten weapons per strategic hamlet, but this did not preclude the training of 20 to 30 defenders per hamlet. He also wanted the Bahnar in Plei Lim trained and the Jarai strike force stationed there to be returned to Phu Bon Province.

During the summer of 1963, the Buddhist crisis and the efforts of the Diem Government to maintain power absorbed most of the attention of the Vietnamese. Government programs in the Highlands came to almost a standstill, and the situation steadily deteriorated.

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The overthrow of Diem on 1 November 1963 resulted in extensive changes of military commanders, province and district chiefs, and police and other intermediate officials throughout the country including the Highlands.

Lt. Colonel Le Dinh Hien, Director of Social Action for the Highlands in Hue, in March 1964 said that the deterioration in the Highlands began when Colonel Le Quang Tung's Vietnamese Special Forces conventionalized the Mountain Scout program. This resulted in low morale and high desertion rates among the Scouts, who were taken from their natural environment and used in situations with which they were totally unfamiliar.

Lt. Colonel Hien believed that tribal elements became increasingly more apathetic toward the Vietnamese Government after Diem was overthrown because (1) there continued to be an absence of a central program for the Highlanders; (2) changes of district and province chiefs brought in new officials ignorant of the Highlanders and activities concerning them; (3) the Highlanders traditionally were loyal to district chiefs rather than to the central government, and the changes in the district chiefs left the Highlanders with no one to trust; (4) broad promises made to the Highlanders by the government were not kept; and, (5) Highlanders regrouped to defended villages were not receiving the basic necessities.

When General Nguyen Khanh took over the Vietnamese Government on 30 January 1964, he attempted to improve the situation in the Highlands and correct some of the Highlanders' grievances. On 10 February 1964 the Minister of Interior released Y Bham from prison. General Khanh named a number of Highlander leaders, including Y Bham, to government positions in the Highlands. The major leaders of the 1958 Bajaraka committees who had been imprisoned were now holding positions which put them in contact with organized groups of Highlanders. Y Bham became Deputy Chief of Darlac Province for Highlander Affairs. Paul Nur received the same position in Kontum Province. Y Ju Ebam was interpreter for the USOM representative in Darlac Province. Y Thih Eban was an interpreter at the CIDG camp of Buon Sarpa and was to become an administrative assistant in the Ministry of Interior, first in Lam Dong and then in Quang Duc Province. Nay Luett was the interpreter for the USOM representative in Phu Bon Province and later became liaison officer for the Directorate of Highlander Affairs in Saigon. Touneh Yoh was interpreter for U. S. Special Forces and also became an administrative assistant for the Ministry of Interior in Lam Dong Province.

Y Bih remained with the Viet Cong. But all the leaders jailed in 1958 were now in positions from which they could influence Highlander action if not the Vietnamese Government attitude.

With the encouragement of General Khanh, some Vietnamese authorities in the Highlands began thinking of new programs for assimilating the Highlanders. The Kontum province chief drafted a plan that called for each Vietnamese family and each official living in Kontum city to house a Highlander selected for cadre training. The purpose was to destroy the concept that Vietnamese were well treated and Highlanders ill-treated, develop friendship between the Highlanders and the Vietnamese, raise Highlanders' standard of living, raise their anti-Communist spirit and see how the Vietnamese lived. The plan does not appear to have taken into consideration the prejudice of the Vietnamese toward the Highlanders, which would have had to have been broken down and would take considerable time, but on a small scale with careful selection of Vietnamese families and close observation, the plan was pointed in the right direction.

General Do Cao Tri, commanding II Corps, apparently was a moving force behind the assignment of former Bajaraka leaders to government positions. He called for the release and acceptance of imprisoned and self-exiled leaders of the Bajaraka Autonomy Movement, the assignment of these leaders to government positions at their former civil service grades, and the creation of a school of public administration for Highlanders to train them for civil service positions in their own areas. The government policy was to assign a Highlander as deputy district chief where more than 50 percent of the population was Highlander; as of April 1964 there were five Highlanders assigned as deputy province chiefs.

But if the government in Saigon was attempting to assign more Highlanders to responsible positions, the prejudice of local Vietnamese officials led to continued injustices. In March 1964, a meeting was held with ARVN representatives from the three divisions in II Corps, the II Corps staff and certain Highlander leaders. The meeting was of short duration because one of the ARVN representatives stated that the solution to the Highlander problem was: ". . . I feel that we can solve the Highlander problem the same way the Americans solved their Indian problem. We should form Highlander reservations as the Americans formed Indian reservations." This statement alienated the Highlander leaders. An American Embassy officer reporting on Phu Bon

Province in July 1964, stated that many of the Vietnamese provincial staff treated the Highlanders rather unsympathetically. Refugees had not always received their required food supplies, due only in part to the lack of adequate transportation. Care for Highlanders at the outpatient dispensary in Cheoreo (there was no hospital) was often given grudgingly, if at all. "Coupled with the discrimination the Highlanders suffer at the hands of the local Vietnamese civilian population, these acts of provincial neglect continue to alienate the Highlanders from the Vietnamese and the government." Another factor in Phu Bon seriously disturbing the Highlander-Vietnamese relations was the seizure of weapons from the Highlander combat youth. "Since this move aroused strong resentment and has given substance to VC propaganda, speedy rearming of the Highlander hamlets seems essential . . ." The same problems existed in Pleiku, where it was reported that the seizure of "almost all the weapons from the Highlander combat youth had caused some Highlander resentment against the Vietnamese and the government." In Lam Dong "the daily discrimination that the individual Highlanders often suffer in their dealings with the Vietnamese" worked against government efforts to improve relations. "In Lam Dong, as in the other Highland provinces, Highlanders often get paid less for their labors and pay more for their purchases in the market than do the Vietnamese." Some of the newly appointed civil servants were dissatisfied with their jobs, including Y Bham. They believed the Vietnamese officials did not wish their advice and they were assigned very little responsibility and no authority.

In Phuoc Long Province, it appeared that the government program was having greater success among the Stieng, who made up about one third of the total population in the province. The leaders of the 36 Stieng hamlets had been briefed by the province chief on the Strategic Hamlet Program and slowly but steadily more Highlanders were being brought into the provincial administration.

The government continued to try and improve relations. On 25 and 26 August 1964, a conference of Highlander leaders was held in Pleiku to determine the aspirations of the Highlanders, to formulate recommendations for improvement and to cement Highlander-Vietnamese relations. Forty-five Highlander leaders attended as well as representatives from all Vietnamese and U. S. Government agencies.

The Bajaraka organization, or at least some of its members, was still planning a revolt against the Vietnamese Government, to

take place in 1964. A group of Highlander interpreters at Buon Beng CIDG camp in Phu Bon, in conversations with U.S. Special Forces advisors during the spring of 1964, discussed the aspirations of the Highlanders and their grievances. They named several known Bajaraka members, including Y Bham, Nay Luett and Paul Nur, as being active in the Bajaraka organization but did not indicate that these individuals would support open rebellion. The commander of the U.S. Special Forces B Team in Pleiku met with several key Highlander leaders in April 1964. During this meeting, the Highlanders stated that General Khanh was only the leader of the Vietnamese; the Highlanders had their own leader. They wanted all village, district and province chiefs in the Highlands to be Highlanders; a Highlander army of 50,000 with its own Highlander officers and men and advised by U.S. Special Forces; representation in the Vietnamese legislature; and direct aid from the U.S.. The Buon Beng interpreters said that they would not ask for aid from France but hoped the Americans would help if they revolted. It was also reported that at least some Highlander leaders were in contact with leaders of the autonomous Highland areas in North Vietnam. U.S. Special Forces informed Vietnamese Special Forces of the possibility of a revolt and the Vietnamese sent security personnel to investigate the situation at Buon Beng.

In May 1964, the U.S. Special Forces B Team commander at Pleiku visited Banmethuot, where he talked with Y Bham about setting up a Jarai and Rhade intelligence net and then flew Y Bham to Cheoreo, where then met with Nay Mul, deputy chief of Phu Bon province for Highlander Affairs and chief of the Jarai. Nay Mul was not prepared to undertake any such activity and apparently no agreement was reached.

Apparently the Cambodians were encouraging the Chams in Vietnam to join with the Highlanders in working for autonomy. In May 1964, an organization called the National Movement for the Liberation of the Chams, led by a Major Les Kosem, a Cambodian Army officer of Cham origin, had cadres operating in South Vietnam to recruit persons of Vietnamese-Cham origin and Highlanders. The Cham movement was reported to be conducting a military school in the jungles of Cambodia, where 5,000 to 6,000 Chams and Highlanders were concentrated for future use as advance forces for strikes in the Central Vietnam Highlands. A second organization called the National Liberation Front, also led by Kosem, with a provisional command in Cambodia, was active in the Central Vietnam Highlands with the objective of unifying all ethnic minority groups, and was making plans to establish a joint

headquarters, at which each Highlander tribe would be represented, to train political and military cadre, and to organize cells in each township.

In April 1964, Y Bham sent a letter to a member of Combined Studies Division through Y Preh in which he reviewed the political history of the Highlanders' grievances since the Vietnamese established administration in the Highlands in 1954, including colonization by the Vietnamese, land rights, representation in the government, education, etc. "For this reason in 1958 we asked the U.S. to support us as a free world power. It is certain that we cannot exist alone, but we want to have a just settlement. We want to have a good leader capable of maintaining and teaching us. We want to be Highlanders forever. There is no reason why our race should die out under the very eyes of American and the U.N. We count on the Americans to help us and to give us our liberty. We will always be loyal to them. Life or death with the Americans for the common cause and common interests. If our plan is realized we will do everything possible to pacify our territory. We will pacify our country first and if possible we will later help our Vietnamese friends. With the help of the Americans and the Vietnamese we will do our best to liberate our compatriots held by the Viet Minh in the north. Our enemies are those who seize our territory; our friends are those who save us. We hope that the Americans will form our government and truly help us from every point of view. We are proud to be friends of the American nation and to join it to exterminate the enemies of peace. Here is what our people hope. We want to be friends of free Vietnam and not a protectorate."

In contacts with American officials during May, Y Bham indicated he desired some type of autonomy for the Highlanders and said that if he were in charge of the Highlands, the war against the Viet Cong would be over in six months. He wanted to encourage Highlanders to consolidate into larger hamlets for better protection and to have more weapons and U.S. Special Forces personnel to help defend the hamlets. In July, Y Bo, Rhade commanding officer of CIDG at Buon Brieng camp in Darlac Province, voiced the same ideas as Y Bham, proposing a special status for the Highlanders, a separate governmental structure, separate military forces under Highlander leadership and an increase in the number of Highlanders in the CIDG. Y Bham had proposed to a member of Combined Studies Division in late May the formation of a 50,000-man Highlander army supported by the U.S.

Viet Cong activity among Highlander villages was on the upsurge. Quietly, the Viet Cong infiltrated the hamlets, conducted

propaganda lectures, recruited supporters, and set the stage for taking control of the hamlets and increasing military operations. With the overthrow of Diem, what little contact with Highlander villages that had been conducted by Vietnamese authorities came to a halt. The Vietnamese more and more remained in the province and district capitals. Contact with the Highlanders in their villages ceased to exist. The Vietnamese by default had relinquished control of the villages. By May and June 1964 the Viet Cong were mounting an increasing number of attacks on Highlander hamlets and with the coming of the rainy season in July, started effectively collecting all weapons in outlying hamlets. Darlac Province lost nearly 500 in one month. The Viet Cong began pressing closer and closer to the district towns and provincial capitals, slowly cutting them off from road communications with the other towns and the lowlands. The Highlands were being effectively isolated.

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XII.

THE FULRO REVOLT OF SEPTEMBER 1964

In early September 1964, the Americans obtained unsubstantiated information that a Highlander revolt supported by Y Bih was scheduled to occur that month and that Banmethuot would be attacked. The Vietnamese Government and local military commanders were informed and their reaction was to doubt the validity of the information. Though dates were provided, the information was incomplete and misleading. The report claimed that Y Bih's Viet Cong forces would be available to aid the Highlanders in the revolt but it provided no indication of Y Bih's whereabouts. It set Y Bih's strength at a highly inflated 12,000. It was not known just how the revolt would be conducted but the Highlander source of the report said Americans would be protected, thus further discrediting Y Bih's supposed involvement. There was no indication that any CIDG camps would be involved, though U.S. Special Forces had received information earlier in the year that the camps would be involved. It was doubtful that the Highlanders could be organized effectively to mount a revolt throughout the Highlands. Local U.S. Special Forces advisors in CIDG camps were not officially notified of the possibility of a revolt by U.S. military advisors who received the report. On the morning of 19 September, further information was that a revolt would occur that night and that at least the Truong Son forces at Buon Enao were aware of the details.

On the night of 19 September, the CIDG camps at Bu Prang and Buon Sarpa in Quang Duc Province and Bandon and Buon Miga in Darlac Province revolted and marched on Banmethuot with approximately 2,000 men in a coordinated effort. They murdered approximately 73 Vietnamese, including Vietnamese Special Forces personnel in Buon Sarpa and Buon Miga and Vietnamese Regional Force members at Three Frontiers, and took 61 Vietnamese as hostages from the district town of Dak Mil in Quang Duc Province. The CIDG camp of Buon Brieng and the Truong Son camp at Buon Enao were supposed to join the other camps but failed to support them. By the morning of 20 September the troops of the revolting camps, primarily Rhade but including some M'nong, had surrounded Banmethuot and were in control of the radio station and marching on the 23rd Division ammunition dump.

Y Bham, who may not have been aware that an armed revolt was planned, was with the Darlac Province chief during the morning

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of 20 September at the Banmethuot radio station attempting to talk the CIDG troops into returning to their camp. Y Ton, leader of the Truong Son Forces at Buon Enao felt that Y Bham was close to gaining concessions from the Vietnamese Government prior to the revolt and that the actions by more radical elements had upset these negotiations, tarnished the Rhade image and caused the Rhade to lose face. About noon on 20 September, two or three jeeps of CIDG troops from Buon Sarpa entered Banmethuot and took Y Bham away to the rebel headquarters south of Banmethuot. This was the last time Y Bham has been seen by either Vietnamese or American officials. Whether he left willingly or under duress is not known, but he apparently believed that his place was with the people and that possibly under his influence, he could avoid further bloodshed and at the same time gain advantages for the Highlanders. To this day he has remained with the rebels as president of FULRO (Front Unifie de Lutte de la Race Opprimee - United Front for the Struggle of the Oppressed Race).

But if Buon Enao did not take part in the actual revolt and Y Bham did not realize an armed revolt was to occur (which is hard to believe), both Buon Enao personnel and Y Bham knew a strong movement was afoot. Buon Enao apparently served as the operational planning base and liaison point for the revolt and Y Bham held a meeting there on the evening of 19 September, whether for the purpose of final coordination of plans or to talk the Buon Enao forces out of supporting the revolt, is not known. The Rhade had not told the Americans of their intentions and in fact, when the revolt occurred, took the U.S. Special Forces advisors under "protective custody". The Vietnamese had lost touch with the Highlanders beginning in early 1964 and thus had little idea of Highlander plans or intentions and were caught unaware. The Vietnamese Government believes Y Bham organized FULRO on 1 August 1964 but it appears that FULRO was in fact a reorganization of the Bajaraka. If Y Bham did not plot the revolt, and his previous history and recent remarks show he strongly supported autonomy for the Highlanders, he certainly did not stop the revolt. Either he did not exercise the control over the Rhade he was said to exercise, or he was sitting back planning to capitalize on what he may have assumed would only be a strong but peaceful demonstration to obtain improvements for the Highlanders from the Vietnamese. What might have been Y Bham's plans no longer mattered for the young militants had gained at least temporary control of the Autonomy Movement, an armed and bloody revolt had begun, and Y Bham had joined the rebels.

U.S. Special Forces advisors converged on Banmethuot and soon had the revolting CIDG troops moving away from Banmethuot

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and back toward their camps. The camps at Buon Eno and Buon Brieng remained neutral. Banmethuot was not attacked and the bloodletting of the night of 19-20 September was not repeated, but the situation remained tense for a week until finally the Vietnamese hostages and U.S. Special Forces personnel at Buon Sarpa were released through a show of American airpower and individual courage; the camp was occupied on 27 September by elements of ARVN. The revolt had been put down without ARVN firing a shot, but the Highlanders' grievances continued.

The Vietnamese Government's reaction to the revolt can best be exemplified by the reaction of General Nguyen Huu Co, commanding II Corps, who told the Americans in Banmethuot on the night of 20 September, "I told the Montagnards that the CIDG is not controlled by me. They are armed by America, trained and paid by Americans. Their grievances should be directed against their camp commanders not the Vietnamese Government." The Vietnamese eagerness at the time for American advisors to take direct action to alleviate the situation again lent credence to the fact that the Vietnamese considered the CIDG basically an American sponsored and controlled program. One American agency's estimate at the time was that "while the Vietnamese Government in the past had shown a tolerant attitude re the United States involvement with the Highlanders, the Vietnamese Government in the future would undoubtedly become much more rigid. The feeling expressed by General Dinh in 1961 re the CIDG program exemplified by Buon Eno, namely that 'You have armed a division at my back,' is probably the feeling still shared by a number of top ARVN leaders, and is reinforced by recent events. Thus the overall effect of recent events is that relationships have been further strained between the Highlanders and the Vietnamese Government, which will probably tend to reinforce doubts the Vietnamese have previously had on the wisdom of re-arming the Highlanders. The revolt has also tended to make the United States appear less trustworthy in the eyes of the Highlanders, evidenced by the fact that they uniformly failed to inform their American counterparts of their intentions, and showed extreme irritation at American actions on behalf of the Vietnamese Special Forces officers held hostages by the Rhade group."

The Vietnamese officials attempted to determine Highlander demands and negotiate with the rebels but no Highlander leader with authority to speak for the rebels was forthcoming. Conversations were conducted with Rhade leaders from Buon Eno on 20 September, but though they listed a series of Highlanders' grievances,

they stated they were not representatives of the rebels and had not taken part in the revolt. The rebels were demanding autonomy for the Highlands and appeared unwilling to discuss any lesser terms.

A handbill in both French and Rhade issued by the rebel Highlanders on 20 September stated the Highlanders had been pushed around by the Vietnamese for 10 years, the Vietnamese had been aided by U.S. imperialists, and the Highlanders wanted autonomy. Subsequently, two FULRO declarations passed out in the CIDG camps, and two letters supposedly from Y Bham, insisted on autonomy, contained phrases such as "genocide", "anti-imperialistic", and attacked SEATO. Indications are that the Viet Cong may have sought to influence the organization of the revolt. Apparently the Viet Cong had agreed not to attack the CIDG camps during the revolt preferring to sit back and let disintegrating forces go to work. Limited information indicates that the Viet Cong hoped that CIDG and ARVN elements would engage in combat destroying the effectiveness of each other and then the Viet Cong could move in and destroy the remaining elements of both ARVN and the CIDG. Lastly, Y Bih's supposed forces never appeared. It is possible that the rapid action on the part of U.S. Special Forces to get the revolting CIDG troops back to their camps and the restraint of ARVN commanders not to engage the rebels in combat negated Viet Cong plans.

There were unsubstantiated reports that French priests and other Frenchmen were aiding the rebels. There were also reports that several members of the CIDG from Bu Prang had been meeting with a Cambodian army officer near Camp Le Rolland. The FULRO declarations were issued in the name of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom (Cambodians in South Vietnam) as well as those of the Highlander tribes and the Chams. The declaration was also printed in Neak Cheat Niyum, the semi-official Cambodian Government newspaper, and later carried on Phnom Penh radio. It appears that Major Les Kosem's Cham Movement did have at least strong ties with the FULRO organization and may have been a moving force behind the revolt.

Y Dhon Adrong, a Rhade intellectual and militant, is acknowledged as the primary military leader of the revolt. He was treasurer of the Bajaraka Central Committee in 1962 and attended a meeting at Buon Ea Ana in January 1963, at which time he suggested an overall revolt to drive the Vietnamese from the Highlands. He attended the February 1963 meeting with General Khanh in Pleiku. In early September 1964, he supposedly left his

position as a school teacher in Lac Thien district, Darlac Province, and went to Cambodia for "Neutralist Orientation". Just prior to the revolt he appeared at Buon Sarpa and was one of the Highlanders who met with General Co during the evening of 20 September. General Co believed Y Dhon to be the real force in the rebel group rather than Y Bham. Y Dhon was listed as First Vice-President of FULRO which indicates his importance in the autonomy movement.

With the bloodless defeat of the Rhade rebels, the FULRO organization set up headquarters in Cambodia, announced the formation of a Provisional Government for the High Plateau on 17 October, and named 28 members holding various offices under the "Council of Ministers". Very few of these individuals could be identified. There was no indication that the Viet Cong of Y Bih were represented. FULRO also issued a proclamation reviewing the events of the uprising, recalling General Nguyen Khanh's verbal promises made to the Highlanders on 24 and 28 September, and calling on the Highlanders to rise up again if their demands were not met. For several months there was a continuous series of reports predicting new revolts which did not occur.

XIII.

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO APPEASE THE HIGHLANDERS  
1964 - 1965

The Vietnamese Government under General Khanh was encouraged by American officials to make every effort to meet Highlander grievances with constructive programs and to improve Vietnamese-Highlander relations. The Vietnamese recognized the need for making some concrete efforts but were not inclined to be forced by FULRO into accepting its demand for autonomy. Highlander assimilation into Vietnamese society was still the policy.

General Khanh had support from several Highlander leaders. Paul Nur, Deputy Chief of Kontum Province for Highlander Affairs, held a meeting for Highlander civil servants in that province on 13 October, during which he stated that there was no longer a need to demand autonomy, but rather to ask for democracy and equality between the Vietnamese and the Highlanders. He listed a number of aspirations designed to give the Highlanders representation at high government levels, a separate administrative system, the return of confiscated land, employment of Highlander military officers, cessation of corruption among officials and improved military, educational, and medical facilities.

The Vietnamese Government attempted to determine what could be done to improve Highlander-Vietnamese relations. It called a conference of Highlander leaders in Pleiku from 15 through 17 October. General Khanh addressed the final session of the conference, outlining Government policy toward the Highlanders and signing a document specifying actions which would be implemented by Government decree. Khanh stated that the Government's policy was based on equality and solidarity, the need to help the Highlanders catch up with the Vietnamese, and the need to respect Highlanders' traditions and habits. In the political and administrative fields, the Highlanders would choose their own representatives in the National Assembly, Provincial People's Councils and Village Councils and hold positions in the Central Government and local administrative offices. The traditional Highlander court system would be reconstituted and reorganized. Highlanders who met educational requirements would be admitted to officers' and NCO schools, and Highlander officers and NCO's would be selected to command units. A pre-military school for children of Highlanders

would be established. In the economic field, the Government would recognize Highlanders' ownership of their lands, establish agricultural and rural development programs, and improve communications and commerce. Additional schools for Highlanders would be built, scholarships would be granted for Highlanders to attend high schools and universities in Vietnam and overseas, and Highlanders would be admitted to technical schools. New public health programs would be initiated to meet Highlander needs. Except for autonomy, most of the Highlander grievances were acknowledged by Khanh and he was proposing corrective action.

General Co, enthusiastic over the success of the conference, announced that he intended to build immediately a pre-military service school in Pleiku for teenage Highlanders, approach USOM with the proposal to construct guest houses for Highlanders in some of the cities of the Highlands, and accept any number of eligible Highlanders in the Thu Duc reserve officer training course. He did not plan to set up a committee to study the question of land and land titles, believing this was a simple problem. He thought the Highlanders would be able to apply to the province authorities for titles to their land and appeared not to understand, or did not wish to consider, the many complexities of the land question in the Highlands. General Co thought that the recognition of Highlander tribunals would have to be studied by the Ministry of Justice in Saigon before any changes along the line promised by General Khanh could be made.

Following the September revolt, the Directorate of Highlander Affairs, formerly a part of the Ministry of Defense, was attached directly to the office of the Prime Minister. As a result of the October Highlander conference in Pleiku, Lt. Col. Ya Ba (Truong Can Ba), one of the two Highlander officers receiving promotions following the revolt, was appointed director, replacing Colonel Nguyen Phi Phung. The Ministry of Justice was holding conferences with Highlander delegates from eight provinces in early December for the purpose of re-establishing the traditional Highlander court system, thus following through on General Khanh's promise that the traditional courts would be "reconsidered and reorganized with suggestions from tribal representatives." In the administrative field, by December there were seven Highlanders as deputy province chiefs, three Highlanders as district chiefs, eighteen Highlanders as assistant district chiefs, thirteen Highlanders as sub-service chiefs, eleven Highlanders as schoolmasters, and two Highlanders as service chiefs, plus a number of Highlander civil servants reassigned to their native provinces. Thirty-six Highlanders were chosen from several CIDG camps in November

to attend the Thu Duc Reserve Officers Training School and twenty-two actually reported on 14 November. Forty-six Highlanders were selected for NCO training at Nha Trang.

Some Highlander leaders in the CIDG camps looked upon the assignment of Highlanders to officers and NCO schools with suspicion. They believed that the government was trying to get the rebel leaders out of the camps in order to destroy the organization; CIDG members in at least one camp refused to let any of their men attend the training courses. In another camp, the Highlander officers informed U.S. Special Forces advisors that they were appointing other Highlanders to act for them in their absence.

On 22 and 23 December, further meetings were held with Highlander leaders, this time in Saigon. The proposals presented by the Highlanders were received sympathetically, but the government would not agree to a separate flag for the Highlanders because they feared other minority and religious groups would make the same demand. On 28 December, the government announced that all decisions made during the Pleiku conference in October had been implemented and that practically all Highlander aspirations had been met except (1) reserving seats in the National Assembly for Highlanders; (2) renaming administrative units (provinces, districts, and villages) with local names; (3) expanding fighting and defense systems of New Life Hamlets; (4) creating cooperatives and establishing loans to Highlander farmers; and (5) free medical service, new hospitals and maternity wards. The demand for autonomy was rejected by the government on the basis that if the demand was agreed to or a special status was accorded the Highlands, then the 450,000 Cambodians living in Vietnam and who in part supported the Kampuchea Krom (free Cambodians) Front would also wish the same privilege, thus creating a problem extremely difficult for the government to solve.

The U.S. Government had developed plans and received the approval of the Vietnamese government to construct a Highlander training center in Banmethuot prior to the September revolt. The center was to provide courses in crafts, civic action, political, and paramilitary activities, thus creating teams of Highlanders who could organize the Highlander "village structure, organize the youth, women, veterans, etc. This institutionalizing should help to build a future political base in the Highlands." With the revolt, plans were changed to build a center in Pleiku, for it was believed by General Co that there had already been too much

emphasis on the Rhade area; more attention should be directed toward the Jarai and Bahnar. There would also be less of a chance for political unrest to ferment in Pleiku than in Banmethuot. Under the supervision of the Directorate for Highlander Affairs the center was opened in April 1965 for 300 students. But by January 1965, the government program appeared to be slacking in effort. The follow-through required was not taking place, and the people responsible for its day to day operations in many cases were ineffective. The provincial representatives for the Directorate for Highlander Affairs were almost completely ineffective because they were usually very junior ARVN Highlander officers who were assigned because they were unable to command Vietnamese troops. Their Highlander background made them reluctant to approach the Vietnamese province chief concerning Highlander problems, while lack of government support to the overall Highlander program influenced the province chief's support, and lack of adequate transportation severely curtailed visits to districts and villages. Highlander leaders, including the deputy province chiefs were, by January 1965, not in the least convinced that the Vietnamese really desired anything approaching the equality of the two races.

The Vietnamese plans for 1965 included (1) the building of five Highlander boarding schools in addition to the 35 already existing, (2) building two orphanages for Highlanders in Pleiku and Banmethuot, (3) a new law reinstating Highlander tribunals at four levels, and (4) creation of seven new Highlander agricultural training centers in addition to the five already in operation. By September 1965, none of these plans had been implemented. The law reinstating the tribunals had been approved, but the tribunals had not been formed. The law denying Highlanders the right to own land had been rescinded, but no program had been established for registering land or handling land distribution. The Government had promised the Highlanders more than it either could or wished to fulfill.

An American official working with the Vietnamese Government on Highlander problems commented in March 1965 that there was no coordinated Vietnamese Government Highlander program, even though the Government "has come a long way since October 1964 in recognizing in principle the legitimate demands of the tribesmen." (By September 1965 this same official would be reporting that little had been accomplished.) He believed that the Government land tenure policy for the Highlanders was directed toward establishing Highlander reservations and summed up by stating that many problems existed in implementing the 17 October



1964 Government decree. Among the problems he listed was the lack of an effective Government agency to initiate and coordinate Highlander programs, and he observed that the Directorate of Highlander Affairs as constituted had neither the authority nor the competence to do the job. A U. S. Mission Council sub-committee had been established in 1964 to assist the Vietnamese Government but he believed joint planning and substantial U. S. technical and material support were necessary if the Highlander program was not to fall far short of expectations. In his opinion, the Highlanders would have to be permitted to participate more fully in the formulation of programs and a more concerted effort made to inform the Highlanders of the measures being taken to meet their legitimate aspirations. It was felt that the Vietnamese attitude toward the Highlander, though highly enlightened at the top, still opposed special treatment of the Highlanders and would have to change or it would sabotage the program. There was only a small pool of Highlanders and Vietnamese capable of implementing the program, thus requiring special training efforts. Finally, U. S. support of Highlander aspirations might be misinterpreted by the Vietnamese; thus any program would have to be the result of a joint Vietnamese/U. S. planning group with complete approval and agreement by the Prime Minister. By September 1965, suspicion of the U. S. role held by a number of top Vietnamese Governmental officials, who irrationally and without foundation considered U. S. officials to have supported or even fomented FULRO, had made it difficult for the U. S. to press upon the Vietnamese Government the need for action among the Highlanders.

XIV.

FULRO AND VIET CONG ACTIVITIES  
1964 - 1965

During this period FULRO was not sitting by quietly. On 31 October 1964, Y Bham submitted FULRO's demands to the Highlander Representatives Provisional Committee for transmittal to the government. FULRO called for the granting of a special charter providing for the designation of a chairman of the Highlands with offices in Banmethuot, a Highlander flag, a 50,000-man Highlander armed forces, public services, schools, the right to levy taxes and to vote for a special budget, special courts, and authority to receive foreign aid directly. In return, the Highlanders would fight the Viet Cong successfully.

In late October 1964, FULRO sent letters to the American Embassy in Saigon which declared that the struggle would be continued if the Vietnamese Government did not satisfy the demands of the Highlanders and requested that the U.S. intervene with the Vietnamese Government in order to help the Highlanders win concessions. The letters also stated that if the Highlanders attained their objectives, they would ask for American advisors in various branches of their administration. The letters went unanswered by the Embassy. In an open letter dated 1 November 1964, Y Bham spoke of requesting assistance from foreign countries and the United Nations and concluded that if the Americans would not help, there were many other countries which would take care of the Highlanders. Another letter of 27 November addressed to all Highlander officers called for an independent Highlander state, predicting that if the revolution was not carried out, the Highlanders would be destroyed in less than 10 years because the Vietnamese would kill them, or force them to become Vietnamese citizens and give up the traditions of their ancestors. The letter stated that the Highlander officers would be told of the date of attack 15 days in advance and that any absent during the attack would be severely punished. On 4 December, Y Bham instructed all Highlanders in another letter to make preparations for an offensive which he said would take place in January 1965, "if the Americans gave their permission". He asked that all units submit their opinion of his plan but emphasized throughout the letter that anyone who did not take part in the uprising would be severely punished. He gave the Highlanders permission to kill their commanding officers if the officers would not go along with the revolt, or to kill Vietnamese

if they so desired, but he particularly instructed them to keep the Americans with them, for fear the Americans would be killed by "the others".

Since FULRO headquarters was located in Cambodia, it was not surprising that Y Bham, representing FULRO, attended the Indochinese People's Conference in March 1965 at Phnom Penh. He was elected Vice-President of the Administrative Committee of the Association of the Austrian People (People of Khmer-Mon-Polynesian stock) in September 1965. FULRO was receiving at least a limited volume of supplies from the Cambodian Government. A Cham courier for Y Bham reported in May 1965 that Y Bham had met with Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who had not given FULRO money and supplies but had agreed to permit FULRO to operate on Cambodian soil. The courier thought FULRO was receiving assistance from the French. Les Kosem, the Cambodian Army Major heading the Cham Front, was reported to be closely working with Y Bham. FULRO continued to send letters to the American Embassy, and finally, in late April, the American Ambassador through his First Secretary of Embassy, with the knowledge and approval of the Vietnamese, sent a response to Y Bham encouraging him to join forces with the Vietnamese Government against the Viet Cong.

In late November 1964, Y Blieng, an old Rhade conservative member of the Darlac Highlander Committee and long-time civil servant supporting the Vietnamese Government, said that the Committee had been able to maintain contact with FULRO until early November but had since lost contact. Paul Nur, Deputy Chief of Province for Kontum, a liberal, who claimed not to have been in contact with FULRO either before or after the revolt, defended Y Bham as anti-Communist, as had most other Highlander leaders, but he did not believe that Y Bham would return to the government until his demands were met. But both Y Blieng and Paul Nur agreed that the Viet Cong were attempting to capitalize on the political instability that had increased since the revolt.

In Kontum, the Viet Cong were praising the revolt leaders and attempting to encourage Highlander leaders in Kontum to revolt. In Darlac, the security situation was rapidly deteriorating. Several Rhade village chiefs around Banmethuot reported that every Highlander family was required to provide food for five Viet Cong. It appeared that the truce obtained by the Highlanders from the Viet Cong during the revolt was still in force in December, for CIDG units were discovered raising the autonomy flag during halts and admitted that this insured immunity from attack by Viet Cong

Highlanders. Also, there were instances of Highlander units firing in the air after perfect ambushes had been set. There were reports of meetings between Highlander officials and Viet Cong Highlander leaders, of more Rhade leaders going to join FULRO in Cambodia, and plans for another Rhade uprising. There was considerable concern among Vietnamese officials that another Rhade revolt would occur during late December. By February 1965, the Viet Cong had subverted many of the hamlet schoolteachers in Darlac Province, while others had been forced to leave their schools to avoid contact with the Viet Cong. Y Blieng claimed Y Char, the director of primary schools in the province and a highly respected Rhade leader, was in contact with the Viet Cong.

General Co decided that it was necessary to break up the well-coordinated, unified Rhade groups in Darlac and Quang Duc provinces and recommended that all CIDG camps in the two provinces with the exception of Buon Brieng be closed in early 1965. Buon Sarpa had been closed immediately after the revolt, Bu Prang was closed during the first week of January 1965 and its CIDG forces moved to An Khe in Binh Dinh Province. Bandon was closed a little later and its personnel sent to Pleiku Province, but it was decided to keep Buon Miga open along with Buon Brieng. When Bu Prang was closed, 22 CIDG members with six weapons deserted. In all the camps, 166 CIDG members deserted with 47 weapons. By March 1965, the Rhade CIDG previously moved to Pleiku and Binh Dinh were resigning and returning to Darlac where many were being recruited into the Darlac Regional Force and 23rd Division Scout companies.

The government had been holding open for Y Bham his position as Deputy Chief of Darlac Province, but in January it was decided that that position could remain vacant no longer; a long-time civil servant from the Banmethuot area, Y Dhuat Nie Kdam, was appointed. Y Dhuat could be expected to follow government rules. About the only change in government leaders the average Rhade was aware of was the replacement in October of Major Bui Huy Gia, the Darlac Province chief, a Highlander from North Vietnam popular with the Rhade.

XV.

NEGOTIATIONS AND FULRO ACTIVITIES, 1965

The U.S. Government attempted to keep open communications with Y Bham for the purpose of encouraging his return to Vietnamese Government control and of determining his plans and intentions. These communications were maintained through and by the Directorate of Highlander Affairs and not as an unilateral activity. The Vietnamese Government also maintained lines of communications with Y Bham and FULRO through its intelligence channels, including the National Police, ARVN, province officials and the Directorate for Highlander Affairs. In May 1965, Y Bham sent to Bandon a group of Highlanders to negotiate with the Vietnamese Government. On 21 May, they were met by the then Darlac province chief, Lt. Colonel Vinh, accompanied by his deputy, Y Dhuat. Earlier, the Vietnamese Government had sent a letter to Y Bham in which it said it would welcome the return of Y Bham and his followers, who would not be punished in any manner. Y Dhuat said that the FULRO representatives on 21 May asked for a safe return for Y Bham and 100 of his followers as well as a guarantee that they could keep their flag.

On 5 June, Lt. Colonel Le Van Thanh, who had just replaced Lt. Colonel Vinh as Darlac province chief, met in Bandon with a second group of FULRO representatives headed by Y Dhun. At this meeting, American officers from the Embassy and Military Assistance Command accompanied Lt. Colonel Thanh and participated in the discussions. The FULRO representatives addressed their remarks as much to the Americans as to the Vietnamese. Y Dhun reviewed FULRO contacts with the U.S. Government, stating that numerous letters had been addressed to U.S. officials asking for assistance and the creation of two CIDG camps at Buon Sarpa and Dak Nam La. Y Dhun stated that FULRO had expected to receive rifles, carbines, food and other supplies from the United States and concluded that if the United States would provide the Highlanders what they require, FULRO would return immediately. From the Vietnamese, Y Dhun demanded autonomy, a 50,000-man army, the closing of all Vietnamese land development centers (and presumably the movement of the Vietnamese from the Highlands), and authority to fly the FULRO flag. Lt. Colonel Thanh asked that FULRO leave a courier at Bandon to relay the answer of the Vietnamese Government to Y Bham, since Thanh was not authorized either to approve or disapprove FULRO's requests. The American Embassy officer "felt obliged" to explain to the FULRO representatives "in rather strong, blunt terms" that the United States Govern-

ment supported and aided the Vietnamese Government and that the only way the Highlanders and FULRO could obtain aid was through the Vietnamese Government. Throughout the entire meeting, Y Dhun emphasized that FULRO was not supporting the Viet Cong and if it joined the Vietnamese Government, it would fight the Viet Cong.

On 19 July, FULRO representatives approached an Australian advisor to the Truong Son Force, composed of several hundred Rhade operating out of Buon Enao, and stated that they had approximately 1,000 men located about five miles from Banmethuot and that they wanted to talk with the Americans about support for these troops. The Australian informed the FULRO representatives that this was a matter to be discussed with the Vietnamese Government and not the Americans. The FULRO representatives finally agreed to meet with General Lan, commanding the 23rd Division; during the Australian's meeting with the FULRO representatives, a member of the Directorate of Highlander Affairs was present. General Lan met with the FULRO representatives on 20 July and again on 21 July. On the evening of 20 July American military and civilian advisors concerned met in Banmethuot with Lt. Colonel Ya Ba, Director of the Directorate of Highlander Affairs, his deputy, Major Hung, and Nay Luett of the Directorate. The group drew up four requests for FULRO to present to General Lan which included (1) a separate operations area for FULRO units, (2) liaison officers from both sides, (3) establishment of a communications link, and (4) provision of a limited rice supply for the FULRO units. The senior American Military Advisor to General Lan presented these "demands" to General Lan.

General Lan sent a message to General Vinh Loc, commanding II Corps, expressing displeasure with what he described as interference on the part of the Americans in dealing with FULRO. At the meeting between FULRO and General Lan on 21 July, no Americans were present. General Vinh Loc asked that the Australian advisor and three or four American advisors, including the senior military advisor to the 23rd Division, be reassigned to areas outside the Highlands. Again the doubts as to the intentions of the Americans had come to a near breaking point. Recognizing the situation, the American Government withdrew the Embassy officer in the area, who had in any event completed his tour, reassigned a civilian advisor to the Directorate of Highlander Affairs, and arranged the transfer of the Australian advisor. The senior military advisor was not reassigned, but the military advisor to Darlac Province was reassigned during the period, though his involvement had been slight.

Then, on 29 July, when the government negotiators were late in arriving at Buon Brieng CIDG camp, FULRO assumed control of the camp. When the government negotiators finally arrived the camp was returned to government control. On 31 July FULRO again took control of Buon Brieng and this time disarmed the U.S. Special Forces A Team there. Again the camp was returned to government control, but more than 200 CIDG members joined an estimated 200 FULRO near the camp. FULRO units in Darlac Province were short of supplies and rice and asked the Vietnamese Government to provide them. General Co, now Minister of War in the Ky Government, accompanied by General Westmoreland and Mr. Manfull of the American Embassy, met with FULRO representatives in Banmethuot on 30 July. General Co took a soft position but would not supply rice until the number of FULRO members to be fed was determined. The negotiators agreed to a one-week truce so that Vietnamese Government terms could be made known to Y Bham. During this one week, the government would provide rice to FULRO units, but neither side was to take any action inimical to the other. On 5 August, General Co reported on his negotiations with FULRO to the Cabinet in Saigon, indicating skepticism that Y Bham would return with his men at the end of a week as had been tentatively agreed.

On 9 August, Y Bham sent two letters to General Vien Loc, commanding II Corps. In these letters, which were in response to General Nguyen Cao Ky's letter of 2 August, Y Bham claimed to be speaking for the Free Country of DEGA, composed of all Highlanders and Chams. The country encompassed the provinces of Lam Dong, Tuyen Duc, Quang Duc, Darlac, Phu Bon, Pleiku, and Kontum plus all other mountain areas from the 17th parallel to Dong Xoai in Phuoc Long Province for the Highlanders. In addition, Y Bham claimed the provinces of Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan for the Chams. Y Bham said the Government of Vietnam must send no reinforcements to the Highlands and must stop the Vietnamese press from publishing "lies" concerning FULRO as conditions for a meeting in Banmethuot with General Ky. Also, the Vietnamese Government must accept (1) recognition of the DEGA Federal State, (2) a separate flag, (3) a Highlander army, and (4) the reduction of Vietnamese living in the Highlands to the 1954 level (a reduction of at least 150,000 persons). Y Bham also requested the return of the Australian advisor to the Darlac Truong Son Force.

These letters strengthened General Vinh Loc's suspicion of the U.S. role with the Highlanders as well as his long standing desire to take strong action against FULRO. Bui Diem, Special Assistant to Prime Minister Ky, asked the American Embassy in

late August for advice on the Highlander problem in light of the latest letters. The Embassy replied that the policy followed to date by the Vietnamese Government was sound in regard to Y Bham; it should continue to negotiate and not close any doors. Bui Diem also wanted to know what the U. S. could do to help bring FULRO units in Darlac over to the Government of Vietnam peacefully. The Embassy assured Bui Diem that the U. S. was prepared to consider financial support for any "sweeteners" that the Vietnamese Government might devise, but was not in a position to act more directly with FULRO since the U. S. was avoiding contacts in accordance with the Vietnamese Government's expressed desires. Bui Diem asked if it was true that the U. S. was broadcasting programs in Highlander languages from Pleiku. In response the Embassy stated that though U. S. Special Forces had planned to make some broadcasts, they had been postponed because of the Vietnamese Government's objections. Finally, Bui Diem asked what U. S. intentions were regarding the Australian advisor who had been transferred from Darlac Province. The Embassy replied that there was no intention of returning the Australian to the Highlands.

The U. S. Government's position in August was to (1) minimize to the extent possible Vietnamese Government suspicions of its role, (2) urge the Vietnamese Government to avoid violent confrontation and to keep the doors open to possible conciliation with FULRO, and (3) support positive programs by which the Vietnamese Government might gain allegiance among the Highlanders. The 17 October 1964 decrees signed by General Nguyen Khanh had not been implemented. Subsequent governments, although reaffirming in principle the commitments of the Khanh government to the Highlanders, had neither budgeted for nor implemented the provincial programs and the Highlanders knew it.

But past history did not indicate the U. S. efforts would be successful. Negotiations between the Government of Vietnam and FULRO representatives continued. On 25 August, Lt. Colonel Ya Ba, Lt. Nguyen Van Phien, and Nay Luett of the Directorate of Highlander Affairs; Vu Duc Hai from the Office of the Prime Minister; Colonel Phuoc and Mr. Thieu of II Corps; Lt. Nguyen Viet Dan of 23rd Division; and Lt. Colonel Le Van Thanh, chief of Darlac Province met with FULRO representatives Y Ngo, Y Sen and Y Nhiam. The FULRO representatives continued to repeat the demands made in the 9 August letter of Y Bham. Bickering went on for three days. The demands were unacceptable to the Vietnamese Government.



On 25 August, General Nguyen Huu Co held a press conference during which he took a hard line re the Highlanders, accused the United States of aiding the Highlanders and appeared to close the door to further negotiations. He was at odds with Vu Duc Hai, Special Assistant in the Office of the President, who had once been in charge of Highlander Affairs, over the Government of Vietnam's policy toward the Highlanders. Hai had a deep interest in the Highlanders while Co had the rather typical Vietnamese military view of the Highlander problem and showed little interest or understanding. Co feared that arming the Highlanders to fight the Viet Cong would end sooner or later with those arms being used against the government.

On 28 August Y Wick made six demands which were quite different in tone and character from the original FULRO demands. These called for a final and decisive meeting between the Vietnamese Government and Highlander representatives, special status for the Highlanders, a special administration and military force for the Highlands, appointment of a Highlander representative to advise the government, return of all Highlander civil servants to the Highlands, and establishment of an economic and health service for the Highlands. Vu Duc Hai suggested that he take these proposals to Saigon for discussion with Prime Minister Ky and that no further FULRO-Vietnamese Government meetings be set until after 6 September, so that the FULRO proposals could be examined and replies prepared.

The government made no reply. Lt. Colonel Le Van Thanh, Darlac province chief, who was the sole Vietnamese official designated to negotiate with the FULRO delegation, admitted in early September that he had resorted to subtle bribery and delaying tactics in his dealings with the delegation. Thanh had in a sense attempted to buy off the delegates by furnishing their quarters comfortably and providing them with large supplies of whiskey, cigarettes, food, and money in the hope that they would not break off negotiations because of reluctance to return to an uncomfortable life. Thanh was also attempting to prolong the discussions indefinitely by pretending, each time the delegation returned to Banmethuot, that he had submitted the FULRO demands to Saigon for consideration, then tentatively agreeing to some of the demands, and imposing new Vietnamese demands so that the delegation would be forced to return to Cambodia before reaching complete agreement.

FULRO was continuing its attempts to build strength among the Highlanders. In early August, two of its representatives

contacted Captain Y Mip, a Highlander in ARVN assigned to Gia Nghia, the capital of Quang Duc Province, and asked him what he would do if FULRO attacked Gia Nghia. His reply was that he was subject to ARVN orders. In Darlac Province, Rhade villagers near Banmethuot showed a high level of interest and knowledge about FULRO and claimed that a Regional Force company in early August had stolen all their belongings and food. In mid-October a FULRO group attempted to contact Truong Son Forces in Lac Thien without success. FULRO representatives in Tuyen Duc Province were also active among Koho villages. The Deputy Chief of Highlander Affairs admitted that he and most Highlanders in the province were in complete agreement with the aims of FULRO, but he stressed that they disapproved of independent action because of the need for unity against the Viet Cong. In the early fall of 1965, two FULRO cadre were arrested and jailed in Khanh Duong district, Khanh Hoa Province, and others had tried to contact Truong Son Forces in Kontum Province. In Phu Nhon district, Pleiku Province, anti-government sentiment was growing in August among the Jarai as a result of air strikes against Jarai villages. The Jarai believed they were being discriminated against, asserting that land development centers or Vietnamese villages where main Viet Cong forces were located had been spared from government bombing. Most of the Jarai were not sympathetic toward the Viet Cong, however; they had heard of Y Bham's activities in Darlac Province from Rhade in Phu Nhon and considered Y Bham a possible alternative to both the Vietnamese Government and the Viet Cong.

On 20 August, General Vinh Loc stated that Y Bham was not acting in good faith and that all FULRO military units must put themselves under ARVN control by 5 September or take the consequences of being regarded as Viet Cong. On 7 September, ARVN entered the Buon Brieng CIDG camp and disarmed the Highlanders, giving them the option of integration with other military units or relocation of themselves and family. It was General Vinh Loc's intention to close all CIDG camps in Darlac because of FULRO influence, notably the new CIDG camps at Lac Thien and Buon Ea Yang. On 9 September, however, he agreed to keep the camps open since the troops appeared loyal. On 11 September, FULRO kidnapped and then released Captain Y Hupp, an ARVN officer named by General Vinh Loc to command the Truong Son Force operating out of Dam Son.

On 8 September, FULRO representatives were given a letter by the Vietnamese addressed to Y Gun Nay, commander of

the FULRO force in Buon Ho district near Buon Brieng. The letter asked Y Gun to either rally or retire to a designated safe area in the vicinity of Bandon. Discussions about this offer were inconclusive. On 9 September, FULRO requested weapons and medical supplies from the CIDG camp at Buon Ea Yang for four companies it said were near the camp. This information was turned over to the ARVN commander. During the morning of 10 September, two Vietnamese Marine battalions departed Banmethuot on an operation into Buon Ho district, along with three groups of National Police personnel. This force surrounded the FULRO 28th Battalion, which numbered about 485 men. The FULRO commander decided to rally to the Vietnamese Government with his men and weapons, which included four 60mm mortars, six light machine guns, one bazooka and 282 individual weapons. The 28th FULRO Battalion was sent to Banmethuot on 12 September, following which 365 of the men were sent on to Duc My training camp in Khanh Hoa Province for retraining.

The FULRO leaders of the battalion, in agreeing to go to Duc My, had been promised that they would be issued new clothing and equipment, that they would train as a Highlander battalion, that they would keep their FULRO ranks and that they would be given a short four-week refresher training course. However, no preparations had been made at Duc My, and for the first two weeks they were idle. They received no clothing or equipment, no pay and were broken up into three Regional Force companies or units. On 1 October they rebelled. The Vietnamese were finally forced to take remedial steps to calm a potentially explosive situation. The units were paid, training began, and equipment, clothing and other supplies were flown in. But the Vietnamese Government did not keep its promises. The promised reduced period of training, confirmation of ranks, and maintenance of the group as a unit were not carried out. The training that should have ended about 1 November was extended to 8 December, then extended again. On 14 December, the Darlac province chief stated that the government would extend the training since the government could not trust them back in Darlac Province. The training was extended indefinitely, and the troops were refused authorization to return to Darlac Province. Finally, in late January 1966, General Vinh Loc, disregarding past promises and possible consequences, ordered the group split into six units and sent to six coastal provinces. Once again, by breaking past promises, the Vietnamese were providing proof of bad faith in dealing with the Highlanders, further alienating the moderate elements and strengthening the extremists. The force could have made a substantial contribution

operating in Darlac, for U. S. advisors at Duc My evaluated them as the best trained men ever to go through the camp.

After the surrender of the FULRO battalion in September, the Vietnamese Government commenced a series of meetings beginning in Pleiku on 18 September and intended to cover the entire Highland provinces for the purpose of ascertaining from Highlander leaders their objectives, so that the government might satisfy them. It was questionable whether or not new meetings would achieve any benefit since there had been no real success during previous meetings and the government had not complied with its promises. The Pleiku province chief and his deputy emphasized the necessity for the development of national unity by fostering a spirit of equality and cooperation, but in conversations with an Embassy officer they also evinced no real concern regarding the troublemaking potential of an unappeased FULRO movement. On the contrary, they stressed their intention to strike hard and quickly against any Highlanders who got out of line. The deputy province chief stated, "We must give the Highlanders equality . . . But if they are against us, I will kill them. Like that!", pounding his fist on the table. If the Pleiku authorities meant equality, they did not show it, for when 300 refugees arrived at a CIDG camp in August, the province chief accepted responsibility for the 150 Vietnamese but refused to accept responsibility for the 150 Highlanders.

In Kontum Province, the Chairman of the Provincial Council informed the Embassy reporting officer "that the Highlanders in this province are desperate." He attributed this desperation to the tendency of the provincial authorities to grant the "form" of action and reform, while refraining from giving any "content" to this form. There had been an influx of over 10,000 Highlander refugees in Dak To district, but the province officials had ignored the need for rice to feed them until some Highlanders had been without rice for several days. Though rice had been arriving regularly in Kontum, the province chief had concentrated on the refugees around Kontum City. The authorities had hoped military operations would make it possible for the Highlanders to return to their villages for the October-November harvest. It did not appear that the province chief was ignoring the refugees because they were Highlanders, but simply because he was relatively unconcerned with the refugee problem itself. Whatever the reason, there was a heightening of Vietnamese-Highlander tensions in Kontum, a province where relations had been relatively smooth.

In spite of the 25 August press conference of General Co, the Vietnamese did continue negotiations with FULRO. In a letter to his negotiating team in Banmethuot on 23 September, Y Bham listed eight points to be made to the Vietnamese, which were supposedly approved by Vinh Loc with the single exception of a Highlander flag. The eight points modified even further the six points made on 28 August. Y Bham asked for (1) a special policy for the Highlanders; (2) organization of a commissariat general of Highlander affairs in Banmethuot under the leadership of a Rhade with Vietnamese, American and Highlander advisors; (3) a Rhade military force with Vietnamese and American Advisors; (4) all Highlander civil servants serving outside the Highlands to be reassigned to the Highlands; (5) special programs for Rhade and Vietnamese -- especially foreign aid; (6) a Highlander flag to be flown alongside the Vietnamese flag; (7) Highlanders to have the right to send their representatives to Geneva to discuss unification of Vietnam in the future; and, (8) he withdrew his demand for Highland territory. But if Vinh Loc approved these points, the government did nothing that would indicate it had approved, and negotiations continued. It appeared that the Vietnamese Government would agree only to the unconditional return of Y Bham and the disbanding of FULRO.

On 29 September, Major Ngo Van Hung, Deputy Director for Highlander Affairs, said he had been authorized by Prime Minister Ky, Defense Minister Co, and II Corps Commander Loc to go to Banmethuot and handle the FULRO problem. He said he would attempt to make direct contact with Y Bham and intended to send such reliable and respected Highlander leaders as Paul Nur of Kontum and Nay Luett to contact other Highlander leaders in an attempt to obtain signatures on a letter requesting Y Bham to return to the Government of Vietnam. It appears Major Hung never was able to implement his idea.

In early November, Vu Duc Hai reported that the Vietnamese Government had received a letter from Y Bham going back to the original unacceptable demands that had been made on 25 August, but Hai thought that the letter had been drafted by Y Bham's "pro-Communist advisors" and that Y Bham actually wished to return to Vietnam from Cambodia. He laid much of the blame on Major Les Kosem, the Cham in the Cambodian Army, and was of the opinion that Y Bham had lost control of FULRO.

Some of what Hai believed might not have been without foundation, for in early October, there were reports that two

FULRO units in Cambodia wished to rally to the Vietnamese Government in Quang Duc Province. The Viet Cong were also attempting to gain control of the Highlanders in Quang Duc. In October 1965, they began a three-phased program in Khiem Duc district, first to isolate the Highlanders from the government, then to move them to their former hamlets away from the highway which was nearly completed in December 1965, and to begin political indoctrination and organization in January 1966.

During the fall of 1965, FULRO agitators and recruiters were apparently operating independently of the FULRO negotiators in Banmethuot. These FULRO cadre working throughout the Highlands were contacting or attempting to contact Highlander units assigned to provincial forces, CIDG camps, ARVN units, and the Pleiku Highlander Training Center. A FULRO battalion was reported attempting contact with CIDG and Truong Son units in the Lac Thien area of Darlac Province on 1 November. Negotiators had produced no results, Highlander civil servants who had long been regarded as stooges of the Vietnamese were speaking more favorably of FULRO.

In late November, a FULRO representative requested a member of the International Volunteer Service in Banmethuot who was leaving Vietnam to deliver several envelopes to the American Ambassador in Saigon. Unaware of U. S. policy not to accept any communications from FULRO, he accepted the letters which were turned over to the Vietnamese Government by the Embassy. The letters, addressed to the presidents of France, the United States and the United Nations Security Council, explained the creation of a "Federal State of the Highlander-Cham Peoples" and requested that the South Vietnamese Highlands be placed under a temporary United Nations trusteeship, administered jointly by France and the United States, until the Highlanders were ready for full independence. Also enclosed was a provisional constitution.

XVI.

FULRO UPRISING OF DECEMBER 1965

By mid December, most Highlanders remained unconvinced of the Vietnamese Government's willingness to carry out its promises, or even of its good faith in engaging in negotiations. There was ample evidence to support this skepticism. The Vietnamese representatives claimed that they had agreed to six of the eight points by the FULRO negotiators at Banmethout and maintained that they had been unable to obtain a clear response from FULRO. FULRO representatives, on the other hand, stated that the Vietnamese had agreed to nothing and had refused to meet with FULRO representatives since 12 November. Vietnamese official sources privately confirmed FULRO's contentions and Vietnamese duplicity in the negotiations. During the 15 months since the Highlander revolt in September 1964, where the Vietnamese had issued decrees or promised programs, the decrees had never been implemented and the promised programs had never materialized.

By mid December, at least the militant faction of the FULRO leadership had developed a plan for a general uprising throughout the Highlands, but there is some doubt that Y Bham either approved or was aware of the plan. The plan envisaged uprisings of a number of CIDG camps, with Highlander strike forces of these camps defecting to join other FULRO units, as well as defections of Highlander units in the Regional Forces and ARVN. These combined forces were to mount attacks on the province capitals of Kontum, Pleiku, Chereo, Banmethout and Gia Nghia. Vietnamese authorities became aware of at least portions of FULRO's plans by 16 December; that evening the National Police, aided by the Military Security Service, arrested ten Highlander civilians and three Highlander ARVN officers for attempting to incite Highlanders to revolt. Weapons, flags and documents were also confiscated. It was determined that FULRO was planning simultaneous uprisings in the provincial capitals of the Highlands and Y Bham was said to be concentrating his forces at Bokeo in Cambodia, and allegedly with the support of Cambodia, France and other countries. Some members of FULRO professed the belief that the United States Government had promised to support the uprising and prevent the Vietnamese air force from interfering.

General Vinh Loc, Commanding II Corps, and the Pleiku Province Chief, Lt. Colonel Ho Vinh had the impression that the

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United States Government was involved and instructed their officers not to discuss the anticipated uprising with American advisers. But by 18 December, Vinh Loc said his suspicions were wrong.

Advanced warning limited the effectiveness of FULRO's plans. On the afternoon of 17 December, further arrests were made in Pleiku of 15 Highlander officers, NCO's and civilians. FULRO initiated uprisings in Pleiku, Phu Bon, Darlac and Quang Duc provinces beginning the night of 17-18 December. In Pleiku town 20 Highlanders armed with knives and grenades were captured attempting to enter the town. There was Highlander unrest in the CIDG camps of Plei Djereng and Plei Mrong and by late in the evening of 17 December, all CIDG camps in Pleiku Province were ordered to send their men on operations in order to get the men out of the camps and split up. By 18 December, 76 Highlanders had been arrested in Pleiku. On 20 December, 10 instructors at the Pleiku Highlander Center were also arrested and charged with supporting the revolt. The total number of arrests reached 92 in Pleiku Province where FULRO had been unable to mount any attacks.

The events in Phu Bon Province initially were considerably more favorable for FULRO. The district capital of Phu Thien, where the 296th Regional Force company revolted, was occupied on the morning of 18 December by FULRO. The district chief was among 32 Vietnamese killed and 22 were wounded. By 1500 hours, regular forces from Cheoreo had retaken Phu Thien and the rebels fled into the hills. One hundred ten members of the 296th Regional Force Company surrendered, including the company commander and three platoon leaders. By the evening of 18 December, the FULRO units reported around Cheoreo were withdrawing.

In Darlac Province, communications were lost with the CIDG camp at Lac Thien early on 18 December. Ten FULRO organizers who had won the temporary acquiescence if not the whole hearted support of the strike force, had taken a number of Vietnamese Special Forces personnel as hostages. Highlander leaders in the camp spoke out against the FULRO agitators, won over the strike force and caused the FULRO agitators to leave the camp. The hostages were released and the camps returned to Vietnamese control the same day. The FULRO troops led by a Colonel Y Nam dispatched to attack Banmethout were held at bay by alerted 23rd Division units and by 21 December had withdrawn, probably toward Cambodia, after being advised by the FULRO negotiators in Banmethout that the revolt had failed.

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Early on the morning of 18 December, a FULRO unit under the command of ARVN Captain Y Mip (the same captain who had been approached by FULRO in October) took Gia Nghia, the capital of Quang Duc Province. The Deputy Chief of Province for Security was killed. By 100 hours the Chief of Province with two ARVN companies retook Gia Nghia, capturing two FULRO captains, including Y Mip, and 120 FULRO troops.

There was no revolt in Kontum, where Paul Nur, the Highlander Deputy Chief of Province, best known Highlander next to Y Bham and admitted member of FULRO, stated that there were good FULRO and bad FULRO, and it was the bad FULRO who organized the revolt. General Vinh Loc had ordered the Kontum Province Chief on 17 December to arrest several Highlander leaders including Paul Nur because of their alleged involvement in the plans for the uprising, but the Province Chief chose to inform the individuals that he had been ordered to arrest them and hoped that he would not have to carry out the order.

FULRO had greater political and military potential than either the Vietnamese or Americans previously believed. For the first time Jarai were involved to a significant degree in the FULRO movement. The improved security and coordination of the FULRO 17-18 December effort impressed Vietnamese officials. The Vietnamese reaction to the uprising was swift and firm. General Vinh Loc was going to have some heads. Prime Minister Ky attended graduation ceremonies at the Pleiku Highlander Training Center on 18 December, and his aide said Ky's presence kept Vietnamese retaliation from getting out of hand. Major General Le Nguyen Khang, Commanding the Capital Military District, favored treating the Highlanders fairly and believed Ky had the same attitude. General Loc and others wanted to take a hard line. Khang thought the Vietnamese should meet legitimate Highlander demands, that General Loc should have a Highlander deputy and the Directorate of Highlander Affairs should have a knowledgeable, sympathetic head -- possibly exiled Lt. General Do Cao Tri who had once been II Corps Commander.

General Co said the Vietnamese Government would try the leaders of the revolt, if they were found guilty they would be executed. General Vinh Loc published a communique on 19 December stating that any illegal arms or information on FULRO must be turned over to the Vietnamese authorities, those aiding FULRO must stop doing so, and any person violating this order after 20 December would be shot.

General Nguyen Chanh Thi, I Corps Commander, believed that the government's handling of the revolt was completely wrong. He did not believe that the allegiance of the Highlanders could be secured by force or through open negotiations widely reported by the press. He favored secret negotiations with Highlander leaders, granting some concessions such as permitting their own flag but with emphasis on the long-range goal of integrating the Highlanders into the Vietnamese society on equal basis. He blamed the handling of the 17-18 December revolt on generals Co and Loc. The Darlac Province Chief reported that negotiations with FULRO were finished but that trouble was not yet over with FULRO.

The American Government was also advising moderation. In an instruction to the American Ambassador in Saigon, the State Department expressed the opinion that execution of the ringleaders of the revolt might set back Vietnamese-Highlander relations to a point where the possibility of reconciliation was reduced to the vanishing point. The Vietnamese Government was reaping the harvest of inaction and temporizing vis-a-vis the Highlanders. The Ambassador was instructed to inform Prime Minister Ky that the United States Government was even more acutely concerned than before over the Vietnamese Government's lack of progress with a Highlander solution. The situation could constitute an immediate threat to the large number of U.S. forces in the Highlands, and as the U.S. commitment and casualties grew, the American public and Congressional opinion would focus on the Highlander problem and question Vietnamese intentions. The American Ambassador replied to Washington that the Embassy was bringing pressure on Vinh Loc, who was the principal advocate of harsh action, and that the American Senior Military Advisor to Loc had already made a direct appeal to Loc urging restraint. The Ambassador pointed out, however, that the Vietnamese Government had the right to bring the rebellious Highlanders to trial.

The Vietnamese Government proceeded with its plans to try the ringleaders. The National Police were of the opinion that the FULRO personnel who surrendered at Gia Nghia would be treated with leniency but those who surrendered at Phu Thien would be punished. The 296th Regional Force Company commander and his three platoon leaders were tried and executed on 27 December. Sixteen other members of the company were also tried, with one receiving a life sentence, 14 exiled for five years, and one acquitted. The remaining 86 members of the company would most likely be retrained rather than tried. Of the 92 Highlanders arrested in Pleiku, three were sentenced to 20 years hard labor: Ksor Kham,

former director of the Pleiku Highlander primary boys school; Y Ba Ya, a Highlander ranger sergeant; and Nay Bhon, the former vice principal of the boys school. Two, including Regional Forces Highlander Captain Nay Beo, received sentences of 15 years hard labor. Five received five years at hard labor, one was imprisoned for two years and four for one year, and four were acquitted. Of the 19 Highlanders tried, seven were civil servants and eleven were in the military. The remaining 73 were not tried and most likely would be released. In March 1966 they were still being held. Three members of the FULRO unit that surrendered in Gia Nghia were held for trial and the remaining sent to Duc My for retraining.

The majority of the Highlanders were indignant at the Vietnamese execution of the four Highlanders involved in the Phu Thien massacre, and a Catholic Priest in Banmethout reported that unrest among the Rhade was acute. The Highlanders believed that the Vietnamese were deliberately stalling in answering the eight-point FULRO petition in an attempt to deceive the Highlanders and gradually exterminate them. The Highlanders were living in fear of the Vietnamese Government which was continuing arrests, and in fear of the Viet Cong, who had begun kidnapping Highlanders. The Viet Cong were using anti-FULRO slogans in their propaganda and were taking entire Highlander families to remote areas for indoctrination, later returning them to their homes. Between 18-20 December, the Viet Cong were reported to have kidnapped almost 1,000 Highlanders in Darlac Province. As a result a great many Highlanders living in outlying areas were moving into Banmethout and hamlets in its immediate vicinity.

The CIDG camp at Lac Thien, which had been the only camp to temporarily come under the control of FULRO during the December revolt, suffered the consequences on 4 January 1966. The Vietnamese Government ordered the arrest of 19 members of the camp named by the Vietnamese Special Forces as FULRO leaders. The 19 included all the leaders of the camp, including those who had led the opposition to the FULRO agitators. Special Forces personnel in the camp had identified four other members of the strike force who had supported FULRO. All 23 surrendered peacefully, partially as the result of the intervention of U.S. Special Forces personnel, and were taken to Banmethout jail. By arresting these men, it would appear that Vinh Loc had removed the elements which had stymied the revolt. It now appeared that to support the Government of Vietnam was even more dangerous than supporting FULRO.

The FULRO delegation in Banmethout had repudiated the

revolt on 18 December as the work of inexperienced, hot-headed FULRO youths who had become impatient with Vietnamese vacillation. There were divergent views held by two opposing factions in FULRO. One of these, led by Y Bham, advocated moderation and struggle through political rather than military means, and sincerely desired to cooperate with the Vietnamese Government. The second faction, led by Y Dhon, Y Bham's deputy and military leader of the September 1964 revolt, advocated the use of force to accomplish FULRO's aims for the Highlanders and complete separation from the Vietnamese Government. This faction had been used by the Chams and may have been infiltrated by the Viet Cong.

Y Dhe, the FULRO delegation leader in Banmethout, sent a letter to General Vinh Loc on 28 December 1965 asking that Vinh Loc excuse and show understanding toward the impetuous FULRO members, that he quickly investigate and release the many civil servants and military personnel who had been arrested in Pleiku and Quang Duc because of FULRO connections, and that the Government of Vietnam speedily decide on the eight points presented by the delegation in order to restore Vietnam's anti-Communist potential in the Highlands.

Vinh Loc believed in late December that events had proven that the soft line towards the Highlanders advocated by the United States and some Vietnamese was wrong and that the revolt vindicated his policy of crushing FULRO and taking "no more nonsense from the Highlanders." There seemed to be little likelihood at the moment of the Vietnamese throwing their weight behind any new program for the Highlander, especially those programs backed by the United States, until radical changes were made among the Vietnamese leadership directly responsible for handling the Highlander problem. Vinh Loc was not listening to the advice provided by Ya Ba or Vu Duc Hai. He believed Ya Ba was supporting FULRO and could not be trusted. He accused Hai of involvement in the revolt and ordered his arrest which did not take place.

The suspicion of American involvement in the revolt still existed. On 6 January, General Co asked Ya Ba if Americans had pushed the Highlanders to launch the revolt. He seemed convinced that the Americans had supported the revolt and wanted the Highlands for themselves. A number of senior province officials believed the United States policy for the Highlands included granting autonomy to the Highlanders and then taking control of the Highlands via United States Special Forces. They also believed the United States was supporting FULRO.

But if General Co was suspicious of American intentions and involvement, he also recognized he needed assistance. He asked General Westmoreland, Commander of U.S. Forces in Vietnam, for advice on handling the Highlander problem. Dr. Gerald Hickey of RAND and the leading American authority on the Highlanders accompanied General Westmoreland to a meeting with General Co on 6 January. During the meeting, Co gave the impression of being sincerely concerned about the Highlander problem, possibly to the point of desperation. He said that past Vietnamese actions had been inadequate and the intensification of the war made things still more difficult. Co was planning a Highlander conference in Pleiku after TET and wanted to be able to present a program at that conference. Dr. Hickey advised Co that the U.S. Mission had done some work on a short-term impact program for the Highlanders, which could be reviewed and updated if Co was interested. The program covered economic, social and administrative matters but did not encompass the political aspects of the problem.

On 19 January, the Political Counselor of the Embassy presented to Co a package of proposals prepared by the Mission Highlander Sub-Committee, designed for maximum favorable psychological impact, but which did not touch the political problem. Co was of the opinion that proposals for social, economic and administrative action should be integrated into a political framework which would show the Highlanders the advantage of remaining a part of Vietnam. Co said the two biggest obstacles were the lack of policy guidance from Saigon and the personality of Vinh Loc. Prime Minister Ky did not take a personal interest in the Highlander problem and did not understand the seriousness of potential disloyalty of some 500,000 people in the Highlands. Co commented that one of the reasons the Highlanders continued to demand autonomy was the mistake in 1960-61 of creating Highlander military and paramilitary units directly under American control. This had been misunderstood by the Highlanders, who believed the United States was building a Highlander army and supported autonomy for the Highlanders, just as the French had done prior to 1954. The establishment of the CIDG program under the direct command of U.S. Special Forces in 1962 also led to some misinterpretation. The Vietnamese Government had created 14 Highlander scout companies in 1962 under ARVN, and there had never been any political difficulties with these units. (Interestingly it was the ARVN commanders of the scout companies in Quang Duc that led the December FULRO uprising in Gia Nghia and the Regional Force Companies that revolted in Phu Thien.) Co promised to study the American proposals and discuss them after TET. Priority projects proposed by the Embassy concerned

refugees, granting land titles, increasing the number of Highlanders civil servants, expanding the educational system, and constructing guest houses in provincial capitals. More long-range programs included scholarships for Highlanders, acceleration of the Highlander teacher training program, reinstatement of the Tribal Law Courts at an accelerated rate, revitalization of the Agricultural Extension Service to Highlanders and establishment of Highlander Agricultural Training Centers in each of eight Highland provinces.

TET passed without any reaction from General Co to the U. S. Mission's Highlander proposals. Relations between the Highlanders and the Vietnamese Government continued to deteriorate.

In early January, Y Bham was reported to have held a conference at FULRO headquarters in Cambodia to pinpoint the FULRO member responsible for giving orders for the December uprising. FULRO Major Y Nam, a former ARVN second lieutenant, was found to be guilty but he deserted before he could be apprehended.

On 7 January, Vinh Loc instructed the Darlac Province Chief to make no further contacts with FULRO representatives in Banmethout since these representatives claimed they had no prior knowledge of the uprising and thus did not truly represent FULRO. The Banmethout representatives sent a letter to Prime Minister Ky on 25 January requesting that special consideration be given to three of the eight FULRO demands presented the previous August. Particular emphasis was placed on the demands for a "special policy" for the Highlanders to allow them to "come abreast of the Vietnamese," for establishment of a Commissariat General for Highlander Affairs which would give the Highlanders a say in the conduct of state affairs, and for the formation of Highlander military units led by Highlander commanders. The letter thanked the Government for the concessions it had already granted, but warned that it would be to the advantage of the Viet Cong if some of the eight demands were not acted upon soon. In late January, Vinh Loc ordered the FULRO delegation in Banmethout to return to FULRO headquarters in Cambodia. The delegation sent a letter to Vinh Loc on 3 February in which it asked if the Government of Vietnam sincerely wanted to accept the Highlanders as Vietnamese citizens and have their cooperation in opposing the Viet Cong, or must the delegation return to FULRO empty handed? In March, six delegates were still in Banmethout. If Vinh Loc persisted he would be cutting off an important link to the moderate FULRO dissidents. His activities appeared designed to aggravate rather than improve Highlander-Vietnamese relations.

On 10 February, the military court in Banmethout sentenced 12 FULRO prisoners from Quang Duc and Phu Bon. Y Gran, who was accused of killing an ARVN soldier during the occupation of Gia Nghia by FULRO, was sentenced to hard labor for life. Y Yoh-Nie, a regional force soldier who guided FULRO troops into Gia Nghia, was sentenced to 15 years at hard labor. Y Klou, executive officer of the 64th FULRO battalion captured in Gia Nghia was sentenced to 10 years at hard labor. Y Thih Eban, a member of the Bajaraka Central Committee who had been imprisoned in 1958 and most recently was an employee of the Quang Duc Administration Office, was sentenced to five years at hard labor, along with Y Met, technician employed by the Highlander Agriculture-Husbandry Center in Quang Duc. Captain Y Kuon, Commander of the 411th ARVN Scout Company in Quang Duc, was imprisoned for two years and Captain Y Mip, commander of the 409th Scout Company in Quang Duc, was imprisoned for one year. Four other Highlanders from Quang Duc and Phu Bon received suspended sentences while two Highlanders were sentenced in absentia.

There had been numerous rumors of further revolts by FULRO. Five members of a Regional Force company in Phu Bon were arrested on 24 January on charges of plotting another FULRO uprising. The Pleiku National Police Chief had received reports setting 17 March and 17 April as dates for Highlander revolts and accused Rahlan Beo, Deputy Chief of Pleiku Province, and Paul Nur of being supporters of FULRO. FULRO organizers remained active in the Highlands, and some of their activities were coming to the attention of government authorities, especially in Phu Bon and Pleiku Provinces. Supposedly the scheduled revolt was postponed until July because FULRO cadre had been careless and had been identified by the government.

XVII.

CONSTRUCTIVE MOVES BY THE COMMISSION OF  
HIGHLANDER AFFAIRS

Vinh Loc's efforts to dictate policy toward the Highlanders had begun earlier than the December revolt. In October 1965, he had requested that the Directorate for Highlander Affairs be moved to the Highlands and placed under his direct command. He repeated his request in mid-January and recommended that he be made Director of Highlander Affairs. It appeared by mid-February that the Directorate would actually move to Pleiku. But then, the government announced the elevation of the Directorate to a Commission and the appointment of Paul Nur, the deputy chief of Kontum Province and moderate Highlander leader, as commissioner; Lt. Col. Ya Ba became Paul Nur's deputy for operational matters. By April, it appeared the Commission would not move to Pleiku though its office there would be strengthened.

In a broadcast of 26 February to the Highlanders, Paul Nur stated his new position testified to the response of the Vietnamese Government to Highlander aspirations. "Racial equality and solidarity, respect for the Highlander ways and customs, and special help to enable the Highlanders to catch up with the national pace of progress are the elements of the present government policy toward the Highlanders, based on the principle of racial harmony and common development," Nur told his audience. He listed the main points of the program the War Cabinet had decided to carry out for the advancement of the Highlanders: creation of a training center in Pleiku to form Highlander cadres; creation of a school for the Highlander combatants' children in Pleiku; reactivation of the Highlands customs court; and a range of more or less major projects for the betterment of the Highlanders' living conditions. He appealed to the Highlanders to forge closer unity with the lowland people and to give up any suspicions in order to help a new Vietnamese society in which racial groups would merge into a single nationality - the Vietnamese people. He also appealed to the dissident Highlanders to rally to the greater national family. Much of what Nur said had been promised before but he apparently believed that there was no logical place outside the Vietnamese community for the Highlanders and had received at least sufficient personal assurances to persuade him that the Government did intend to improve the situation.



In late March 1966, both Vinh Loc and Paul Nur announced extensive programs for the Highlanders. But whether the Government could carry through on this program in a constructive manner in view of the very poor security conditions existing in the Highlands was doubtful even if the Government for once was determined to honor its promises. Limited programs around the major province capitals might be implemented as evidence of good faith. The appointment of Paul Nur as Commissioner of Highlander Affairs had met one of the eight demands of FULRO. The Government in announcing its program for the Highlands met in part a second FULRO demand. It also appeared likely that the Government would approve a pennant to be flown by Highlander military units which would partially meet a third demand.

In early May it was reported that Nur had obtained approval from General Vinh Loc to offer Y Bham the position of Director-General for Highlander Affairs for the II Corps area working directly under Vinh Loc if Y Bham agreed to return and could persuade his followers to rally. Consideration was also being given to incorporating Y Bham's followers into the Truong Son political action forces sponsored by the Commission for Highlander Affairs. Apparently the offer of Director-General was conveyed to Y Bham.

Nur undertook negotiations with the FULRO representatives in Banmethuot and by June appeared to be making some progress in reaching agreement on the various demands of FULRO. General Ky was near agreement, at least in principle, to a special statute for the Highlanders. Though it appeared that Nur had a better chance than previous officials to negotiate the return of Y Bham and/or some elements of FULRO the demands FULRO decided upon during a meeting chaired by Y Bham in mid-May at FULRO headquarters appeared to preclude any early settlement. FULRO decided that its demands must be agreed to and respected by any successor government of South Vietnam and recognized and guaranteed by the U. S. Government or at least the American Embassy in Saigon. FULRO demanded the creation of a commissariat general to be located in Banmethuot and delegation by the Government and FULRO of all powers to a group of representatives who would organize and guide the commissariat general until the arrival of Y Bham. The actual commissariat and all the men of the region would be invited to cooperate closely with the FULRO delegation to assure the realization of those points already agreed to by the government. An organization committee would submit a detailed plan for the organization of the commissariat general for study and

modification. A flag would be adopted symbolizing the existence of the ethnic minorities of South Vietnam. Local Highlanders' forces would be formed without limit as to number, depending upon the situation in each region. Political prisoners would be released and the 468 members of Buon Drao would be returned. (These were the FULRO forces that had been disarmed in the fall of 1965 and sent to Duc My for training.) There would be a gradual return of soldiers' families and FULRO cadres to their homes as soon as the work of the group organizers is half completed.

Commissioner Nur believed that Prime Minister Ky's approval of a special statute "in principle" would be all that was necessary to persuade the first group of FULRO to return to the government and that details of a more complete statute could be worked out at a conference with the newly returned delegates. But it appeared that the points listed by FULRO in its May meeting would leave Nur with a number of difficult problems. If FULRO continued to insist on a guarantee by the U.S. Government of any agreement then Nur's chances of a settlement decreased. It is unlikely that the U.S. would make such a guarantee or that the Vietnamese Government would wish such a guarantee from the U.S. If Y Bham intends that FULRO exercise control over Highlander affairs it is doubtful that he can obtain agreement from the Vietnamese Government. It is not known how much authority Y Bham will be permitted if he does accept the position as Director-General of Highlander Affairs for II Corps. He will be subordinate to both Vinh Loc and Paul Nur. He and Paul Nur have been associated in the past and will probably work closely on programs for the Highlanders. Y Bham is committed to autonomy for the Highlanders while Paul Nur appears to believe the only course is assimilation within the Vietnamese society. Some autonomy might be obtained through the special statute proposed for the Highlands but if Y Bham uses his position to continue to press for autonomy then he will probably run into opposition from Paul Nur and will definitely be opposed by Vietnamese authorities.

While Paul Nur faces serious difficulties in his negotiations with FULRO, the government faces equally serious security problems in the Highlands. As of the spring of 1966 it appeared that about three quarters of the 700,000 estimated Highlanders were outside of Vietnamese Government control. Probably 350,000 Highlanders were under some form of Viet Cong control. There were approximately 280,000 Vietnamese living in the seven provinces between Kontum and Lam Dong which make up the Central Highlands Region. Approximately three quarters of these Vietnamese appeared

to be under some form of government control. But the Viet Cong political infrastructure had become more firmly established within the Vietnamese resettlement centers. With National Route 14, the main north-south route through the Highlands, cut to through traffic and the two major roads from the coast into the Highlands, Routes 19 and 21, harassed and traffic moved by convoy, surface communications to and within the Highlands is limited. The government probably controlled less than one quarter of the terrain of the Highlands. There were approximately 11 regular North Vietnamese army regiments operating in the Highlands along with Viet Cong main and local force units. The Viet Cong had successfully decreased the perimeters of government control around district and provincial chief towns making land communications between these centers difficult and in many instances close to impossible. The population centers in the Central Highlands region had been virtually cut off from normal communications.

Besides a very difficult security situation in the Highlands which limits the effectiveness of any program implemented for improving relations with the Highlanders, the Government has also been faced with internal political weaknesses and demands by Buddhists and students for a return to civilian rule. The political situation has absorbed the full-time attention of the military directorate in Saigon which has been able to withstand Buddhist efforts to bring it down. There are internal frictions in the local and national administration. Though the Vietnamese Government appears to be more determined to improve its relations with the Highlanders, the attitude of local Vietnamese officials toward the Highlanders remains unchanged. These factors appear to preclude the forceful initiation and follow-through of a Highlander program and discourage speculation for an early improvement in Highlander-Vietnamese relations.

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