

THE MASSACRE IN HUE

A Preview of What a
Viet Cong Victory Would Mean

With a
STATEMENT AND A CHALLENGE
by
THE STUDENT CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE
FOR FREEDOM IN VIETNAM & SOUTHEAST ASIA



Introduction

Americans who believe that a unilateral U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam will serve humane ends do not understand the gruesome and repressive nature of totalitarian communist rule. According to experts, more than 100 million innocent people have been wiped out by the Communists since they seized power in Russia, China, Central Europe, Cuba, North Korea and North Vietnam. It is estimated that more than 500,000 peasants were systematically slaughtered by the Ho Chi Minh regime, or died in forced labor camps, during the infamous Agrarian Reform Campaign in North Vietnam.

Is there any reason to believe that the Viet Cong will act any differently? Since they began their hostilities in the South, their terror campaign has claimed the lives of more than 20,000 civilians, including village chiefs, government officials, teachers, intellectuals and community leaders at every level. Perhaps the most revealing and dramatic instance of the kind of terror which would attend a Communist victory in South Vietnam is what happened when the Communists occupied the ancient imperial city of Hue for 25 days during the Tet offensive.

The following story of what happened has been compiled from many sources, including the eyewitness accounts of numerous civilians.

The Massacre in Hue

James Cary--Copley News Service

Washington--On the night of Jan. 30, 1968, reconnaissance elements of South Vietnam's crack 1st division were on an area surveillance mission in the Viet Cong infested countryside southwest of the old imperial capital city of Hue.

A Regional Forces company was probing the area to their east.

Neither expected to find much evidence of communist activity. The annual Lunar New Year or Tet Truce was under way.

Suddenly, about 10 P.M., a large communist force hit the Regional Forces company hard, brushing it aside and driving straight ahead into the inner walled portion of the city called The Citadel.



Bodies exhumed after three weeks' interment in shallow graves in the Gia Hoi primary school in Hue shrouded with available material await proper burial in background area of school yard that has become a cemetery for the 70 bodies. Reports indicated that communist assassination squads arrested leading citizens, officials, or their families, brought them to the school yard where they were forced to dig their own graves before being tied and shot.

That was the beginning of the battle for Hue, highwater mark of communist strength in the now famous Tet Offensive of 1968.

It was not until 25 days later that the last communist troops were forced out. And it is only now, after months and months of interrogation of prisoners and survivors, and the finding of mass graves, that the world is learning what happened in and around Hue during those 25 days.

The picture that is emerging is one of massacre, mutilation and terror.

Of 3,000 persons missing, bodies of more than 2,200 have been discovered in shallow trenches at more than 25 locations.

Some were buried alive, standing, eyes open. Some were beheaded. Many were bound and shot in the back of the head. Some had dirt or cloth stuffed in their mouths to stifle their screams.

There were at least three death marches. A number of victims were lined up and machine gunned.

Nationality, occupation or political background was no protection. Scores of Buddhists in Hue's strong, anti-government resistance movement were slaughtered. So too were American and German civilians, French priests, South Vietnamese government officials, anyone with relatives in the South Vietnamese Army, village chiefs, political leaders, anyone who worked for the Americans, and particularly anyone who was known for his opposition to the Viet Cong.

The Communists have admitted responsibility for the killings. A communist document, captured in the Delta area last November, instructed Viet Cong units to punish "reactionary" South Vietnamese who fell into their hands, claiming:

"We paralyzed the enemy machinery when we killed 2,000 reactionaries in Hue."

Again on April 27, 1969, a Hanoi radio broadcast boasted that the bodies then being discovered in the Hue area were "hooligan lackeys who had owed blood debts to the . . . Hue compatriots and who were annihilated by the Southern Armed (Viet Cong and North Vietnamese) Forces. . . (last) spring."

The agony of Hue began almost with the first shots that were fired. After the Regional Forces company was shattered by the communist advance guard more and more North Vietnamese battalions, supported by Viet Cong guerrilla and local force units, poured into the city from the south and west.

At 3:40 a.m. two salvos of enemy rockets came shrieking down on the city, setting widespread fires.

By dawn, the Communists controlled all of Hue except their two prime objectives--the 1st South Vietnamese Army Division Headquarters in the northern corner of The Citadel, and the American Military Assistance compound south of the Perfume River. Attempts to capture both were thrown back with heavy communist losses.

For two days after that the Communists left the population alone. Then VC cadres began to move from door to door.

Some confiscated radio receivers. Others, working from prepared lists, sought out South Vietnamese government officials and invited them to political indoctrination meetings. They never returned, but it is now known what happened to some of them.

At the Gia Hoi High School and in a field behind the Tang Quang Pagoda, 33 mass graves containing 200 bodies have been found.

A monk of the pagoda told South Vietnamese interrogators that during the first two weeks of February he heard communist execution squads at work nightly. The victims cried out, pleading for mercy. A volley of pistol and rifle shots would follow. Then silence.

Nguyen Ngoc Ky, leader of the Vietnam Nationalist Party, was among the victims found here.

Another band of 80 to 100 civilians took refuge in the Redemptorist Church in Hue. On Feb. 8 the Communists forced them to leave and started them marching east, across the Perfume River. Bodies of 20 of the group were found at Ap Lang Xa Con, a hamlet 4 kilometers from the church. National Police said they had been buried alive with hands bound. The body of Tran Dien, one of five elected Senators in the National Assembly from Hue, was among them.

At the University of Hue, three German doctors on the Medical Faculty tried unsuccessfully to wait out the Communist occupation. The Viet Cong arrested them on Feb. 5 at their homes. On April 2, 1968, the bodies of Dr. and Mrs. Horst Gunther Krainick, and Dr. Raimand Discher and Dr. Aloï Altekoester were found buried in a common grave in a potato field behind the Tu Quang Pagoda, two kilometers south of Hue. Their arms had been bound with wire. All had been shot.

Two French priests at the Thien An Mission suffered a similar fate.

Their monastery was located on a hill top surrounded by pines. When fighting engulfed the area 3,000 to 4,000 peasants sought refuge there.

Communist troops suddenly appeared. Many of the peasants attempted to flee. Two pleaded with the Communists to spare the building, but as one Vietnamese priest who escaped said later:

"They took over the whole building, firing from the ground level at first, and then mounting into the upper stories."

The bodies of the two resident French priests, Father Urbain and Father Guy, were among 201 bodies found later on the slope of a scenic overlook above the Perfume River.

Father Urbain, 52, had been bound hand and foot and buried alive with 10 others. His body was identified by a laundry number on his underclothing and by his silver denture and bald head.

Father Guy, 48, was stripped of his cassock by the North Vietnamese, forced to kneel, and shot through the back of the head.

Americans suffered similar fates, a U.S. report to the International Committee of the Red Cross reveals.

Stephen H. Miller's hands were bound behind his back. He was shot in the back of the head.

Kermit J. Krause and Jeffrey S. Lundstedt were cornered by the enemy in the bedroom of their house. They were shot in the face. Their bodies were dumped in bathtubs.

Thomas M. Gompertz, Bourtney Niles and Robert T. Little were shot in the back of the head, apparently executed. Niles' arms were bound.

It went equally hard with the South Vietnamese.

On Feb. 9 Viet Cong came to the home of Maj. Tu Ton Khan, Commanding Officer, Provincial Revolutionary Development (Pacification) cadres. They ordered his wife to tell her husband to report to VC authorities. They threatened to burn the house if she did not do so. Frightened, Mrs. Khan called her husband and two other Revolutionary Development workers who were hiding in the attic. Maj. Khan was tied up and taken away with all his belongings. His body was found Feb. 28, pierced by 200 bullets. There are many similar stories.

Tran-Hy, a Popular Forces member, was arrested by the VC on Feb. 20 and buried alive with 20 others near the An Ninh Ha bridge.

On the night of Feb. 18, a Viet Cong group appeared at the home of Ho Tan Sy, a teacher, and invited him to attend a meeting. He was shot and killed as he left his house.

On Feb. 10 Le Van Tru, Chief of the Thua Thien Program for Communist Defectors, was arrested and shot near the Dong Ba Gate.

Nguyen Van Dong, a resident of the Hue Citadel, was arrested Feb. 17 and buried alive at Gia Hoi.

Viet Cong soldiers broke into the home of Miss Hoang Thitam Tuy on Feb. 22, and led her to Gia Hoi High School with four other persons. They were buried alive in the same grave, arms and legs bound. Of 200 bodies found at the school, Vietnamese authorities estimated more than half were buried alive.

By mid-February, the fighting for Hue had turned decidedly against the Communists. The enemy commander had been killed and his replacement, it was learned later, had asked and been refused permission to withdraw. Now the killing became if anything even more vicious as the Communist grip on the city weakened.

A Vietcong unit assembled more than 200 South Vietnamese civilians and local administrators at the town of Ton Nam Duong. They were marched north along a canal toward the sea. Just outside Ap Tong Gi Tay, nine kilometers east of Hue, 75 of the captives were taken into nearby rice paddies and shot.

Other similar marches began.

Nguyen Tan Chau, of the South Vietnamese Armed Medical Corps, was in Hue visiting his family during the Tet holidays when the Communists attacked. He was captured and held with 30 other prisoners. They were started South, bound together in three groups of ten.

He told South Vietnamese investigators later that when the column halted for a rest, he freed his hands and slipped away in the darkness. From a hiding place he witnessed the following scene:

"The larger prisoners were separated into pairs, tied together back to back and shot. The others were shot singly. All were dumped into two shallow graves, including those who had been wounded but were not dead."

Winter and early spring rains washed away the more obvious signs of the slaughter but the bodies were found later in the Phu Thu district about 20 kilometers south of Hue.

A similar story is told by Phan Duy, a key official of Anh hamlet, seven miles east of Hue. He knew his name was on the Viet Cong's execution list after the Communists seized Hue. He slipped away from the hamlet to a small house on the outskirts of Hue, hoping to escape detection. The ruse almost worked.

It wasn't until Hue was virtually recaptured by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces that enemy troops discovered him as they pulled back through the area where he was hidden.

On Feb. 28 five Viet Cong entered Duy's house, bound his hands and marched him seven miles to a row of houses near an area of sand dunes east of the city. He and four other prisoners were locked in one of the houses for seven days. They were allowed outside only to relieve themselves, but this was long enough for Duy to realize that some 100 prisoners in the other houses were being systematically shot:

On the seventh night Duy and nine other men were lashed to a bamboo pole and marched for 300 yards. Their hands were united. They were told to remove all their clothing. As he was undressing Duy heard his guards talking to a group of Viet Cong laborers "Did you dig the trench yet?" they asked. "No, not yet, there are too many people and not enough time," the laborers replied.

Three of the guards left to help dig while the prisoners hands were retied. Duy managed to work his hands free, then made a run for it.

"I ran about 300 meters and I saw a pool," he said. "I fell into the water and covered myself with reeds."

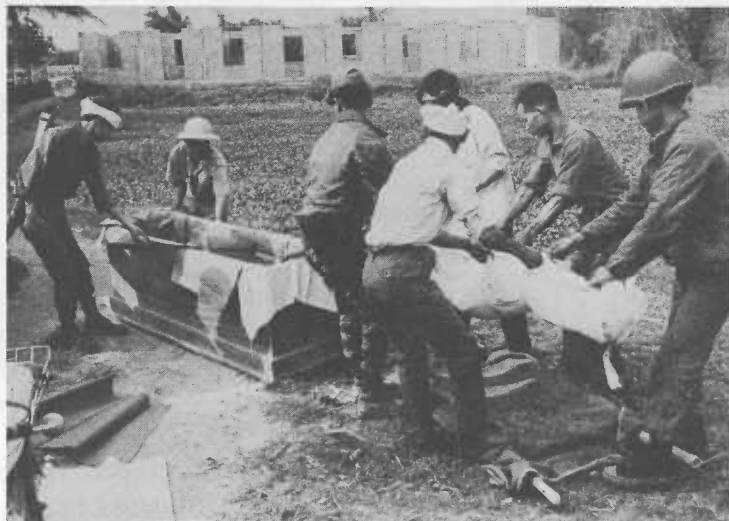
Hours later, half frozen, he emerged and began walking toward the lights of the Hue radio tower beacon. He stumbled into the Phuvang District Headquarters and reported what had happened.

Many others were not so lucky. So far 356 bodies have been found in the sand dune graves that Duy escaped. Investigators have reported the victims were killed in groups of 25 to 40. Cartridges from Russian-made AK47 rifles used by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese were found nearby. Some of those who died had been bludgeoned to death. Others had been shot.

Despite all these accounts the story of the Hue massacres is still not complete. Hundreds of other case histories are already known and reports are still being collected at the combined interrogation center in Hue.

The investigation has pinpointed the location of many still-unopened mass graves. Consequently there is little hope for the 800 citizens of Hue who are still missing.

They, too, are believed to be a part of the grisly record the Communists left behind the one time they have occupied a South Vietnamese city.



Lt. Le Kim Ngoc (left) held paper lining of casket as his father, who was arrested and assassinated by VC forces in Hue February 8, 1968, is laid to rest in proper burial.



NEW CEMETERY - An elder and official of Phu Thu village watches as Rural Development Cadre align caskets for final interment in the new cemetery established five kilometers west of Hue for the nearly 300 recently found unidentified victims of Viet Cong massacres in 1968.



Workers examine one of the many bodies found in mass graves northwest of Hue. The victims were lined up with arms bound, then shot, bludgeoned to death or simply buried alive by their Communist executioners.

A Statement - and a Challenge

The Student Co-ordinating Committee for Freedom in Vietnam and Southeast Asia is disseminating this information in the interest of better understanding of what is at stake in Vietnam. We are committed to peace---but peace with freedom, and not to a peace characterized by Hue massacres on a national scale.

The Student Co-ordinating Committee believes that those, who in the name of peace, urge unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam on President Nixon are---some innocently, some not so innocently---calling for the betrayal of the people of South Vietnam, of the cause of freedom in all Southeast Asia, and of our vital national interests. The Committee believes that President Nixon spoke for the great majority of the American people when he said on May 14, 1969:

We have also ruled out either a one-sided withdrawal from Vietnam, or the acceptance in Paris of terms that would amount to a disguised American defeat.

When we assumed the burden of helping to defend South Vietnam, millions of South Vietnamese men, women and children placed their trust in us. To abandon them now would risk a massacre that would shock and dismay everyone in the world who values human life.

If Hanoi were to succeed in taking over South Vietnam by force--even after the power of the United States had been engaged--it would greatly strengthen those leaders who scorn negotiation, who advocate aggression, who minimize the risks of confrontation with the United States. It would bring peace now but would enormously increase the danger of a bigger war later.

The Student Co-ordinating Committee for Freedom in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, representing groups on various American campuses, pledges its support to the stand taken by President Nixon in the words quoted above, and urges him to ignore the clamor of the vociferous minority whose call for peace at any price, if it were to become policy, would not only pave the way to a frightful massacre of the innocent in South Vietnam, but would lead inevitably to further wars of "national liberation" on the Viet Cong pattern.

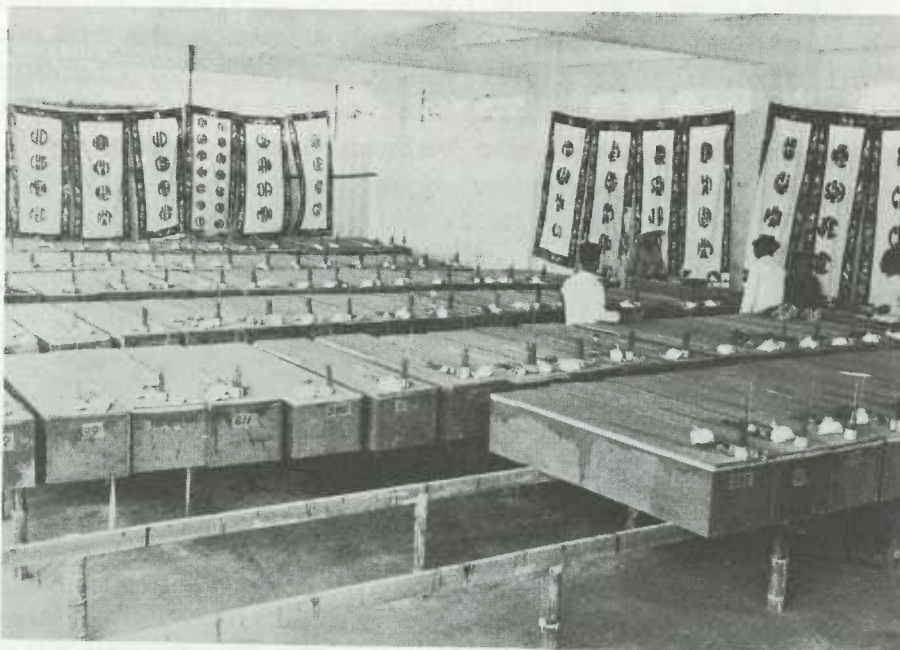
The Student Co-ordinating Committee challenges all the various organizations involved in the so-called peace movement--

SDS, Progressive Labor Party, Sane Nuclear Policy Committee, National Mobilization for Peace, Friends Service Committee,-- to debate the issues involved in the Vietnam War on a nationally televised program.

We also challenge Senators J. William Fulbright, George McGovern, Edward Kennedy, and any of their colleagues who, like Neville Chamberlain, seek peace without regard to the cost; we challenge them to state their views in a two-sided debate rather than from the privileged sanctuary of the Senate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Student Co-ordinating Committee for
Freedom in Vietnam & Southeast Asia
P.O. Box 1451 Main Post Office
Washington, D.C. 20013
Telephone (202) 737-1755



AWAITING BURIAL - Surrounded by Buddhist funeral flags, rows of rough plywood coffins bearing unidentified bodies lie in a school house in Hue. Schools served as collection points throughout Hue for the more than 800 massacre victims found since last March.