

The History of the Involvement of the Montagnards of the Central Highlands in the Vietnam War



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Montagnard is a French term for people from the mountains applied to the ethnic minorities

who lived in the highlands of then French colonized IndoChina--Vietnam (both North and South), Laos and Cambodia. (The term Montagnard – *La Montagne* - was coined to describe a political group at the time of the French Revolution that sat in the highest benches in the Assembly.) The hill tribes of Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) that the French referred to as Montagnards are mainly of Malayo-Polynesian, Mon-Khmer, and Sino-Tibetan extraction. A pejorative term – *mọi* (savage) - was traditionally used by the Vietnamese when referring to the Montagnards; however, as a conciliatory gesture, in the 1950s the South Vietnamese government instituted use of a more benign term người *thượng* (highlanders) and later *đồng bào thượng* (highland compatriots) in reference to the Montagnards.

Often, the Americans, especially the military, mispronounced Montagnard as Mountain-Yard, but they usually they just used “Yards” for short. Many Americans who worked with the Montagnards mistakenly refer to all Montagnards as Dega, which is the name that the Rhadé call themselves, an abbreviation of Anăk Dega (children of Y-De and H-Ga -- their equivalent of Adam and Eve). Kok Ksor, a Jarai who heads the Montagnard Foundation Inc. (MFI) in the US, bastardized this Rhadé term Dega and refers to all hilltribes people as Degar. Through Kok’s advocacy for human rights in Vietnam and the return of ancestral lands, and his electronic reporting on abuses, many people who know no better have taken to referring to all Montagnards as Degar.

If the tribespeople were to choose a universal name, it would probably be *Anăk Ćr Ćhiăng* (children or Sons of the Mountains).

During the Vietnam War, Americans referred to only those hill-tribes people indigenous to the Central Highlands (*Tây Nguyên*) of South Vietnam as Montagnards, as they still do today.

Other tribal groups that immigrated to the Central Highlands from North Vietnam after the Geneva Agreements in 1954 were referred to by the name of their tribe; for example Nungs.

The present borders of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were established by the French colonialists and have no relationship to the territories hill tribes have lived since ancestral times.

Thus, peoples of the same tribal group may have villages in more than one country (e.g., the Jarai and Mnong in Vietnam and Cambodia, and the Bru in Vietnam and Laos).

The Montagnards in the Central Highlands of Vietnam fall into two groups, those who speak Malayo-Polynesian and those who speak Mon-Khmer – Austroasiatic (see illustrations at the end of this paper). Montagnards evolved in a symbiotic relationship with their surroundings and lived harmoniously with the spirits of the elements and their surrounding environment; e.g., earth, wind, water and fire.¹ They farmed slopes and bottomlands within the never-ending cycle of the rainy season -- clearing, planting, and fallowing their fields until yields decreased; then new fields were cleared and the cycle continued. They drew water, fished, bathed and washed clothes in nearby streams. Forests provided game, wild fruits and vegetables, dyes to color their cotton cloth, medicines and firewood, while recharging aquifers, regulating and sustaining the flow of streams and rivers and the level of lakes that provided potable water and aquatic life for sustenance.

The forests also provided grasses, hardwood, bamboo, and rattan for Montagnard houses and artifacts.

Farming Systems

The Vietnamese lacked an understanding of the Montagnard’s system of agriculture, thus they claimed Montagnards were nomadic. This was not true, for they were sedentary and many villages could trace their permanence for over a hundred years. The only time they moved their residences was because of catastrophic events like fire or epidemics. The Montagnards’ rotational system of swidden agriculture evolved in harmony with the environment, and it is considered by scientists as the most environmentally sound method of "farming these forests" comprised of relatively infertile soils lacking adequate organic matter.

Their system of rotational farming was to clear a given piece of land with the exception of certain representative tree species considered to contain favorable spirits; thus these trees provided seed stock for forest regeneration. Some of the fallen trees were used for firewood and if need be for construction wood, and what remained was burnt; the ashes fertilized the soil. After the rains began, the fields were planted by dibbling seeds into the ash. The duration of the farming period depended on the adjudged fertility of the soil.

About two and a half to three hectares of farmland with relative fertile soil were required to grow enough food to feed a family in an upland rice system. Most of the farmland was rain-fed and upland rice was their main staple crop; however, other crops would be planted among the rice, such as corn, cotton and squash. They also had kitchen gardens where a variety of other vegetables and fruit such as eggplant, beans and pineapple would be grown to add to their diet. The rice fields would be farmed for three to five years, depending upon the fertility of the soil, and then they would be left as a forest fallow; although fruit trees, coffee, bananas, pineapple, and other perennial crops might be planted in the fallowed fields. A year before fallowing a field, another plot of land would be cleared for the next year's crops. The fields were left fallow until a new growth of forest trees had rejuvenated the soil fertility (up to 25 years) -- then cycle began again. When low-lying land with adequate water was available to flood fields, Montagnards would cultivate paddy rice.

The Longhouse

Although for many Americans the longhouse is symbolic of the Montagnards, not all tribespeople built and lived in longhouses. Constructed on pilings, longhouses were primarily built only by those groups belonging to the Austronesian-Malayopolynesian language group with matrilineal decent (e.g., Rhadé, Jarai), differentiated from those belonging to the Mon Khmer language group with patrilineal decent (e.g., Stieng, Bru). The longhouse, decorated with carvings representing their cultural beliefs, was the center of events. There, the Montagnards lived in extended families (as many as 12 or more), and it was there where the younger generation learned by observation and oral presentation the culture, customs, mores, values and history of their people. Occasionally, one could find a few smaller individual or dual family houses interspersed among the longhouses in villages. In societies with matrilineal decent, the longhouse, land and other properties were owned by the women.

Montagnard tribespeople with matrilineal societies and extended families traditionally built the "raised longhouses" with frames of huge hand-hewn hardwood logs. Each log piling was ceremoniously placed in the ground and "blessed" so that the spirits of the house would be in harmony with those of the earth, then assembled much like barn raisings in Amish communities in the US. Smaller logs and poles would be notched, pegged or lashed to the frame with rattan vines as flooring and roofing joists. The floor of the longhouses were usually about three or four feet off the ground and made of flattened bamboo, as were the walls, the thick thatched roofs made of elephant grass, and the front roofless veranda made of small flattened and smoothed logs. Often, there were two ladders leading up from the ground to the veranda, one made from a small log with hewn steps for women and the second hewn from a log, perhaps over four feet wide and ornamented at the top with symbolic carvings, and used by guests. The framed entrance to the longhouse may have been decorated with carvings of animals.

There was one large room at the front of the longhouse with huge long beds, benches and tables hewn from logs along the right side, and where visitors were welcomed and family members, guests and musicians would gather for ceremonies. Here, one might also find antique jars from China dating from centuries past lining the walls and filled with fermenting rice wine, an important element in their religious, cultural and social ceremonies and events. And here is where the brass gongs, some from as far away as India, Burma and China, and a huge drum hollowed out from a log and covered with buffalo hide were kept and used in ceremonies. Here also is where offerings of rice wine and sacrificed animals were made to appease the spirits and to glorify Aê Diê (God).

Records of past events could be found in the rafters of the longhouses, such as carved buffalo sacrifice poles which told not only of how many of these events had taken place, but signified the fact that this family inherited the right to sacrifice buffalos. The poles would also have markings to indicate how many buffalo had been sacrificed at each event. Buffalo sacrifices were the highest honor that could be bestowed on an individual, or to appease spirits in case of sickness, death, or a catastrophic event. Depending upon the situation, such as bestowing a high honor on a person, a series of seven sacrifices might be held, starting with one buffalo and increasing by one each time until seven buffalos were sacrificed at the last event, for a grand total of twenty eight buffalos.

Next came the enclosed sleeping quarters, and then the kitchen with its fire pit for the head of the household. Next came the bamboo partitioned quarters and kitchens for the others in the

of the household. Next came the bamboo partitioned quarters and kitchens for the others in the extended family, sometimes as many as 12 families in a longhouse. Baskets filled with seed for the next-year's planting cycle were hung over the fire pits so the smoke from the fires would keep the seed dry and free of insects.

At night cattle and pigs were corralled in pens underneath the longhouse to protect them from predators, and chickens were kept in baskets hung on the pilings framing the house and under the eaves of the roofs of the veranda extending from the front of the house. This veranda is also where the women would husk the rice with a wooden mortar made from a hollowed log and pedestal carved from a pole; the rhythmic thump, thump, thump could be heard throughout the village.

It was in the longhouse where the women wove cloth with intricate patterns on hand back-loom, and the cloth sewn and made into blankets and clothing. The thread for the cloth was spun from cotton grown in their "kitchen gardens" and rice fields, and dyes to color the cloth were gathered from plants found in the forest and fields. It was here also where they wove their baskets and made other artesian craft necessary for their everyday life.

In matrilineal Montagnard groups, women owned all of the family property such as the longhouse, domesticated animals (including elephants), and fruits of the harvest. When a marriage took place, the male would move into the house of his wife's family. All land for the village was under the stewardship of the senior female (*pó lán* of the clan land), and it was her responsibility to allocate parcels of land to each family and ensure that fields were not farmed too long so as to deplete soil nutrients beyond its ability to recover during fallow.

Vietnamese fear of the Highlands

Traditionally, the average Vietnamese viewed the highlands as an abode of evil malevolent spirits (perhaps referring to malaria, among other diseases); as a place where "poisoned water" (*nuóc độc*) flowed in the streams; a region of forested mountains teeming with *moi* (savages - the term Vietnamese used when referring to Montagnards) with poison-tipped arrows; and a region populated huge ferocious tigers and other jungle beasts.

Few Vietnamese ventured into the central highlands prior to and during French colonization; it was an exception rather than the rule; however, a few Vietnamese traders braved the highlands, and the French brought in a few others in administrative positions, and to work their plantations. After the French established rubber, coffee and tea plantations in the highlands, Vietnamese elite began to envy the French and greedily covet the highlands for its potential rich resources of "fertile" soils, minerals, hardwoods, cinnamon and other forest products. After the disastrous defeats of the French in the central highlands and at Dien Bien Phu, the Vietnamese politicians and generals both in the North and the South, as well as some Americans, began to see that strategically, **"Those who control the Tây Nguyên hold the key to all of South Vietnam."**

For all the reasons above, the Vietnamese did not like the Americans arming the Montagnards in the central highlands.

CIA, Special Forces and SOG²

The Mountain Scout Program (MSP -- also called the Commando Program), with backing from the CIA, was launched in November 1961 with the construction of a training center for highlanders near Hue and Montagnards from Quang Tri, Quang Nan, Quang Ngai, Kontum and Pleiku were recruited. A contingent of Special Forces from Detachment A-35 was sent to serve as advisers to the Vietnamese Special Forces (Lực Lượng Đặc Biệt Quân Lực Việt Nam Cộng Hòa or LLDB) counterparts at the Hoa Cam Training Center near Danang and to assist in the training the Montagnards. The training included intelligence gathering techniques, use of radios and map reading, infiltration methods, some psychological warfare principles, civic action ("helping villagers"), and use of weapons.

The highlanders, with advisors were used to carry out paramilitary operations in remote areas. A CIA official claimed that within a short time captured Viet Cong documents indicated that the Mountain Scouts were effectively harassing Vietcong operations and as a result the number of Viet Cong in Kontum province alone dwindled from 5,000 at the beginning of 1962 to 500 by March.¹ Again, Vietnamese officials at the highest levels voiced reluctance to arming highlanders and expand these programs and the program was moved from Hue to Danang.

Also in 1962, the CIA organized a new Mountain Scout training center in Pleiku, and recruits came from all over the highlands, and after training they were sent back to their native areas where they were under the command of both Vietnamese and Montagnard military officers

representing the Bureau for Highlander Affairs in each province. In May 1964, the Bureau for Highlander Affairs was upgraded to a Directorate of Highland Affairs, and later it became a Ministry for Development of Ethnic Minorities (MDEM) headed by Nay Luette, a brilliant Jarai.

The Village Defense Program (CIDG) was also launched about the same time as the MSP at Buon EaNa (called Enao by Americans), a Rhadé village close to Ban Me Thuot, again with backing from the CIA. Approval for the project had to be obtained from President Ngô Đình Diệm and his powerful brother, confidant and close advisor, Ngô Đình Nhu who were particularly sensitive about foreign involvement in the Central Highlands. In December 1961, a six men team of US Special Forces also from Detachment A-35 in Danang, with LLDB counterparts, was sent to assist in the training the Montagnards at Buon Enao.

First referred to as the "Buon Enao Project," it was formally named "The Tribal Area Development Program"; later it was changed to the "Village Defense Program" and finally it morphed into the "Civilian Irregular Defense Group" (CIDG). Soon the CIA was forced out of the program due to a number of reasons including: the ghost of the Cuban Bay of Pigs fiasco still haunted Washington politicians; the Vietnamese government's fear of arming the Montagnards; the project and its support requirements had become too large for the CIA; and the US military "brass" did not want the CIA involved in what they considered as their business, an unconventional effort at that, successful or not, didn't show a more "conventional flag."

Thus, the Village Defense Program was turned over to MACV (Military Assistance Command Viet Nam) in "Operation Switchback" with rules that only military personnel were to thereafter participate in operations at Buon Enao, and it was to be financed only by the military; thus the CIA operative associated with the program departed in October 1962. According to Dr. Gerald Hickey,¹ "One reason the programs were effective was that the Americans participating in them were not bound by bureaucratic restraints. The worst effects were that the takeover resulted in the programs becoming 'military' rather than 'political' and 'offensive' rather than 'defensive' as they had been."

This was the beginning of a much larger Special Forces' presence in the Central Highlands. By September 1962, the CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) program in Darlac province included 200 Montagnard villages with a population of around 60,000, 1,500 trained Montagnard Strike Force personnel and 10,600 village defense militia.

At the end of 1962, the CIDG program had 24 US Special Forces detachments scattered throughout Vietnam and those in the Central Highlands were composed mainly of Montagnard forces. Each A Detachment had 12 US SF men who advised a counterpart team of 12 men from the LLDB. Not only were the A Detachments located in areas where the Rhadé, Mnong, Jarai lived, but they were also established where Bru, Cua, Hre, Banhar, Pacoh, Katu and other tribal groups were located.

Special Forces' A-Teams: At the height of American Special Forces operations in the Central Highlands there were approximately 30,000 Montagnards serving as CIDG and MIKE forces (Mobile Strike Force Command).²

Approximately 50 of the 80 plus A-Team camps in Vietnam had Montagnard troops. Each A-Team had three or more companies averaging 600 troops per camp. At times, camps were ethnically diverse², but the companies were kept ethnically separated; a camp might have two or three companies of Montagnards and one company of Vietnamese.²

The Mobile Strike Force Command (MSF or MIKE Force)²: There were seven MIKE Force battalions in II Corps, each comprised of three companies with a total of 600 Montagnards in each battalion. The 2nd MSF Command in Pleiku controlled five Battalions; three were in Pleiku, one Kontum, and one in Ban Me Thuot. The 5th MSF Command in Nha Trang had two battalions (although it operated throughout the whole country).

Military Assistance Command, Vietnam - Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG)²: Not included in the total number of troops with the Special Forces A-Teams and MIKE forces were three battalions comprising 1,800 Montagnard SOG forces, each battalion had two Hatchet Force companies operating out of CCC-Kontum, CCN-Danang, and CCS-Ban Me Thuot.

Truong Son Cadre Program – Patterned after the Vietnamese armed village cadre program, a training center for Montagnards financed by the CIA was established at the Dam San camp outside of Ban Me Thuot. The idea of the program was to train squads of Montagnard cadre in individual and small unit tactics, intelligence, administration, medicine (and

in basic disciplines, such as military tactics, administration, medicine (medics), education and agriculture to supplement village administrations and militias. The cadre was also responsible for coordinating activities and liaison with the provincial offices of the Ministry for Development of Ethnic Minorities (MDEM), the various provincial service departments and military command.

CIDG and MIKE Forces after Vietnamization: In 1972, all US Special Forces A-Teams and CIDG camps began being turned over to the ARVN (Army of the Republic of South Viet Nam) and became Border Rangers (*Biệt Động Quân Biên Phòng*). Put together with the MIKE forces as battalions within the *Biệt Động Quân* Groups (current and newly formed); they became the mobile reserve forces assigned to each of the military regions playing the same role as the former US Special Forces Mobile Strike (MIKE) forces.³

Montagnards in the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN):

Besides serving in CIDG and MIKE Force units, several thousand Montagnards also served in the South Vietnamese regular and irregular forces; e.g., regular army units, rangers, airborne, regional and popular forces, village defense forces, Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), and Kit Carson Scouts.

Although there was a route of a number of Vietnamese Army units in 1975, accurate reports of what happened to the Border Ranger battalions is hard to come by for so few survived, and less than a handful made it to the US. There are reports of a number of regular Ranger units who fought fiercely in pitched battles with the NVA, where no quarter was given, until the units were virtually annihilated after running out of ammunition; these units included the 82nd, 81st and 63rd Ranger Battalions.⁴

Montagnards with the VC and the NVA:

During the war against the French colonists, there were a number of Montagnards from the South that joined the “Viet Minh” that was comprised of a number of non-communist nationalist groups, as well as Ho Chi Minh’s communists. Although the Montagnards didn’t particularly like the Vietnamese, they disliked many of the French actions taken toward them such as use as *corvée* labor (forced and unpaid) to build roads, conscription into the army, and taxes levied on the villages.

After the 1954 Geneva Accords, most of the Montagnards returned to their home villages in the South. Only about four percent of the estimated 140,000 Montagnards and their families that had joined the Viet Minh went north.¹ Very few believed the tepid lies of Ho that under his form of government the Montagnards in both for the North and the South would be granted self-administered semi-autonomous zones. After the Accords, Ho’s communist cadre kidnapped thousands of young Montagnards and took them north for reeducation/brainwashing in communist ideology to be later returned to the South as VC cadre.

The communist cadre worked hard to propagandize and “convert” the fiercely independent and insular Montagnards in villages throughout the *Tây Nguyên* region. They achieved some success in areas, such as those in the region of the A Chau Valley, where Montagnards became very hostile to both American and South Vietnamese forces. Some Viet Minh communist cadre stayed behind in the South after 1954 and took up residence in remote Montagnard villages, adopted the tribe’s customs, such as filing off their teeth, married local girls and raised families.

According to the noted anthropologist and expert on the Montagnards, Dr. Gerald Hickey¹ and reports from some missionaries, the communist cadre often helped villagers improve their living conditions by introducing such things as irrigation systems and cultivation of paddy rice (vs. growing upland rice in swiddens). Hickey reports that even as early as 1952, “Viet Minh” communist cadre came to live in a Hroy (a subgroup of the Jarai) village in Phu Yen Province and devised a Hroy alphabet, established a school, and taught in their native language.

One Montagnard, Y-Bih Aleo, a Rhadé, rose to be the communist figurehead of the Highlands under the guise of the alleged National Liberation Front (a front for Hanoi). Allegedly Y-Bih joined the communists in the jungle after the French had charged him with the murder of two other Montagnard leaders. Y-Bih was said to have poisoned a jar of Montagnard wine, and invited the leaders to take the traditional first drink from the jars as the guests of honor. Later, Y-Bih headed a mixed battalion made up of different Montagnard tribesmen, called the White Elephant Battalion, tasked with propagandizing the different tribal groups throughout the Central Highlands. After 1975, Y-Bih seemed to have disappeared from the horizon and was said to have been “retired” to his natal village of Buon Aleo in Dak Lak province

Many other Montagnards were forced to perform corvée labor, such as packing supplies, and growing crops for the communists, as occurred with the Stieng in Tay Ninh province (see Footnote, “The Massacre of Dak Son”) and the Arap Jarai in Cheo Reo and Phu Yen provinces. While assigned as the Deputy Provincial Advisor in Phu Yen province, the author had the opportunity to *Chiêu Hồi* over 3,000 Arap Jarai who had been forced by the NVA to serve as pack mules to transport supplies; however, the Region II Deputy Director of USAID refused to provide the necessary support to bring these people back into the fold of the GVN.

Ethnonationalist Movements

FLM and Bajaraka -- The first Montagnard ethnonationalist political movement started by a group of young, educated highlanders in 1955 and called the *Le Front pour la Libération des Montagnards* (FLM) that later in 1958 evolved into “Bajaraka” (a combination of the key letters of Bahnar, Jarai, Rhadé and Koho). These movements were established to raise the sense of ethnic identity among the Montagnards, to counter the Diem government’s policies of forced assimilation under the guise of nation building, and to push for the reinstatement of the *Statut Particulier*, the status of semi-autonomy in the highlands given to the Montagnards by the French. Adding fuel to the fire, the government was relocating large numbers of North Vietnamese refugees and Southern Vietnamese from coastal provinces into the highlands in Land Development Centers that were often established on Montagnard ancestral farmlands without consultations. However in late 1958, President Diem crushed the BAJARAKA, a move that resulted in the death of several Montagnard leaders and the imprisonment of seven others.

Front de Liberation des Hauts-Plateaux Montagnard (FLHPM): After the imprisoned leaders were released 1963, Montagnard leaders again organized a new underground front called, *Front de Liberation des Hauts-Plateaux Montagnard* (FLHPM) -- the Montagnard Highlands Liberation Front -- and Y-Bham Enuol was elected as President. They were approached by two Cambodians, Col. Les Kosem (a Muslim-Cham who was an intelligence officer) with the Front for the Liberation of Champa -- FLC, and Col. Um Savuth with the Struggle Front of the Khmer of Lower Cambodia (i.e., the Mekong Delta) – FLKK, who promised support by the Cambodian government if they were included in the movement. Foolishly, Y-Bham agreed.

Front Unifié de Lutte De La Races Opprimée – FULRO: On August 1, 1964, a new movement was then formed called the *Front Unifié de Lutte De La Races Opprimée* (The United Struggle Front for the Oppressed Races) – FULRO and made its appearance in the first part of September 1964. However, what started out as a strictly Montagnard movement now also included the FLC and the FLKK, and although Y-Bham Enuol was again President, the Cambodians Col. Les Kosem and Col. Um Savuth were included in the leadership. Reportedly, Les Kosem and Um Savuth, with the aid of a Rhadé and a Jarai leader, but not Y-Bham, planned the revolts culminating on September 20, 1964, when an estimated 3,000 Montagnard CIDG revolted in five Special Forces A-Team camps. The revolt mainly comprised the Rhadé, with some Jarai, and a contingent of Mnong; however, many of the latter quickly dropped out. After capturing the Ban Me Thuot radio station, the FULRO forces withdrew to the Buon Sar Pa Special Forces camp and then soon crossed the border seeking sanctuary in Mondulkiri province in Cambodia in fear of retaliatory strikes by the Vietnamese government.

Although the FULRO rebellion was a result of the harsh treatment of and inequities leveled against the Montagnards by the SVN government, most of the animosity was directed against certain Vietnamese within the camps, and some were killed. These included some of the LLDB there who treated the Montagnards badly and with contempt and often refused to go out on patrol against the VC/NVA. Many of these same LLDB, along with their contractors, cheated the Montagnards by providing inferior supplies and food for them and their dependents, as well as stealing payroll money and indemnification funds for families of wounded or killed troops. In the camps where Vietnamese were killed, a number of Montagnards “instigators” were singled out, arrested, jailed or executed.

In December, 1965, a second FULRO rebellion was attempted but it soon fizzled out. It began with attacks by FULRO forces against the town of Plieku and attempts to infiltrate some Special Forces camps to entice CIDG forces to join them. The rebellion was reportedly over anger at the Vietnamese government for broken promises made to Montagnard leaders at Plieku in 1964 after the first rebellion. In Gia Nghi, 60 FULRO troops drawn from Regional Forces briefly took

over the town defended by four ARVN battalions, but FULRO forces withdrew the next day. The worst incident took place on the 18th of December when FULRO elements from the Regional Forces attacked the headquarters of Phu Thien District, north of Cheo Reo, Phu Bon Province, and in the fighting, 35 Vietnamese, including civilians, were killed. Some FULRO elements then went to the Mai Linh Special Forces camp seeking support from the CIDG but were arrested instead.

Under orders from the II Corps commander General Vinh Loc, four of the Cheo Reo rebels were shot in a public execution, and 15 others received prison sentences.¹ A number of other FULRO rebels reportedly were secretly killed.

Estimates of the number of FULRO troops who fled to Cambodia ranged from 500 to 6,000 by 1965, mostly Rhadé and Mnong -- this estimate did not include their dependents.

Reportedly, the VC/NVA avoided contact with FULRO in Cambodia because if there was conflict, the Cambodians might cut off Hanoi's resupply routes for communist troops in the South.

FULRO troops crossed the border at will, and whenever VC/NVA forces skirmished with them in Vietnam, FULRO usually emerged as the better of the two.

Just before the TET offensive in 1968, FULRO members reported to US and Vietnamese intelligence of a large buildup of VC and NVA troops, supported by tanks, which was massing just inside Cambodia indicating that an attack on Ban Me Thuot was imminent. These reports were ignored, since they came from the Montagnards. Two or three companies of armed FULRO forces went into the Ban Me Thuot area on R&R and most of them stayed in Buon Ale-A, one of the major points of the TET attack by the VC/NVA forces. FULRO fought fiercely, and largely because of them communist forces were unable to penetrate the defenses of the 23rd Division and link up with other communist forces attacking Ban Me Thuot from other directions, preventing them from completely overrunning the town.

Re-emergence of the *Front de Liberation des Hauts-Plateaux Montagnard (FLHPM)*:

Finally realizing that inclusion of the FLC (advocating the liberation of the old Champa Kingdom, which included most of the coastal lands from just below Hue down to and including Phan Thiet province near Saigon), and of the FLKK (advocating for liberation of what was formerly the Southern part of Cambodia, which was most of the Mekong Delta below Saigon) in the FULRO movement was a mistake, untenable to the Vietnamese government, and impeded any fruitful negotiations, on July 15, 1968, FULRO's President Y-Bham Enuol announced that FULRO was abolished and FLHPM was reestablished, which excluded the FLKK and the FLC.

The split: By 1974, FULRO had split into two factions, one adhering to the FULRO principals established by Y-Bham, while the other faction led by Nay Guh turned rogue and began robbing truckers, Vietnamese loggers who were cutting down the forests, and wealthy Vietnamese who were staking out claims to vast areas of Montagnard ancestral lands and establishing plantations on fallow lands that were part of their traditional swidden farming systems.

Reportedly just before the March 1975 attack on Ban Me Thuot, elements of the North Vietnamese White Elephant highlander propaganda battalion headed by Y-Bih Aleo contacted both FULRO factions and asked them to stand down during the upcoming attack. [FULRO forces had played a major role in defending Ban Me Thuot during the 1968 TET Offensive (Tết Mậu Thân), and helped prevent the communist forces from overrunning the 23rd Division.]

Y-Bih made all sorts of promises to the FULRO representatives including amnesty for their forces, semi-autonomy of the Central Highlands for the Montagnards and positions in the new government. However, many in FULRO recognized these promises as being strikingly similar to those made by Ho Chi Minh to the tribespeople in the North after the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Indochina that never fully materialized. The sole purpose of these negotiations and promises, like those in 1954, was part of the communist divide and conquer strategy designed to blunt any resistance by the ethnic minorities to the communist takeover. As after 1954, the tribespeople would learn they had been once again lied to; just part of a series of broken communist promises.

However, only the rogue unit led by Nay Guh agreed to a stand-down, but after the takeover of Ban Me Thuot, the execution of Montagnards in both FULRO elements began,⁵ **once again they had been betrayed.** Nay Guh was not killed though; instead he was later rewarded with a position of influence in the new regime -- an indication that he had been a communist agent all along.

The Beginning of the End:

After massive staging of troops, tanks and other armament and supplies in Cambodia in March 1975, North Vietnamese troops went across the border into the Central Highlands of

March 1975, North Vietnamese troops swept across the border into the Central Highlands of South Vietnam, reminiscent of a Nazi Blitzkrieg in WWII. Known as Campaign 275, the goal of the communists was to capture the *Tây Nguyên* (Central Highlands) in order to kick-start the first stage of a full-scale offensive on South Vietnam termed the Ho Chi Minh Campaign. The psyche of the Vietnamese and many military straigists was **“Those who control the *Tây Nguyên* hold the key to all of South Vietnam.”** The defeat at Ban Me Thuot and the 10 day battle for the rest of II Corps resulted in a disastrous evacuation from the Central Highlands.

The collapse of the highlands: By March 11, the NVA consolidated their hold on Ban Me Thuot, and on March 12, South Viet Nam’s President, General Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, ordered the 23rd ARVN Division to abandon city and the highlands. This caused a snowball effect and South Viet Nam began imploding and ARVN troops abandoned their positions throughout the Central Highlands. Panicked troops exchanged their uniforms for civilian clothes and fled to the coastal provinces and Saigon in hopes of evacuation.

The Border Rangers fought bravely against overwhelming odds. Lacking air, artillery and reinforcement support from other units because the US had cut off funding, they soon ran out of ammunition. Their positions soon were overrun, and those who weren’t killed outright in battle, but wounded, were often shot on the spot; some Border Ranger units fought to the last man.

Those who were able to flee the carnage were hunted down like animals by the NVA and when captured they too were often executed on the spot. The few that were able to evade the NVA fled to the mountains and the jungle in hopes of eventually joining other Montagnard other resistant fighters and FULRO in Cambodia.

As soon as the word got around that FULRO troops were being executed by the communists, those who were not captured, as well as other Montagnard villagers, men, women and children, headed for the jungles of Cambodia. Unfortunately, the routes they took were often the same as those of the NVA invaders who set up ambushes and used helicopter gunships and other weapons to slaughter thousands of Montagnard men, women and children. Those who survived the gauntlets and made it to Cambodia continued to hunted down like animals by NVA forays into the jungle.

Those Border Rangers who survived the onslaught and subsequent executions and were not able to flee to Cambodia were taken prisoner and sent by the NVA to “reeducation”/concentration camps only to suffer the depravity of lack of food and medicine, torture and executions. These brave defenders became a mere statistic of the tens of thousands of deaths of the peoples of South Vietnam sent to these camps. The very few who survived, suffered this inhumanity for as many as 15 years.

Those who were not killed by the NVA, soon stripped the jungle of edible roots, leaves, nuts, berries and fruits, and ate all of the animals, birds, insects and aquatic life they could find, in an effort to survive. Thousands suffered and died from malnutrition and disease; and even some died from eating unfamiliar plants that turned out to be toxic.⁵

Some Montagnard troops from Ban Me Thuot and Phu Bon joined up with the Mike Force Montagnards in Nha Trang. The American Consulate General Moncrieff Spear gave assurances that U.S. Navy ships would come to evacuate them; however, the evacuation never materialized and the troops were betrayed and abandoned by the United States Government.⁶

On April 4, 1975, there was an emergency meeting at the Ministry for the Development of Ethnic Minorities between Minister Nay Lurette, his senior staff and US Deputy Ambassador George Jacobson, Ed Sprague, and Mack Prosser, and if not outright promised at that time, it was heavily implied then, and again later, that FULRO and other Montagnards should flee to the jungle and set up a resistance and continue a guerrilla action against the Vietnamese communists and the US would provide support to them. That support also never materialized.^{6,7}

Jacobson also promised Minister Nay Lurette and the others at MDEM that if the communists attacked Saigon, they and their families would be evacuated. Minister Nay Lurette was asked to provide a list of the Ministry personnel and their dependents to be evacuated; later, Nay Lurette amended the list to include almost 100 Montagnard children who were attending school in Saigon. Unfortunately, like the Montagnards in Nha Trang, they too were betrayed, for the Foreign Service Officer (FSO) assigned the responsibility of evacuating the Montagnards from Saigon was said by his assistant to have sold their places on the evacuation planes and helicopters to rich Vietnamese.⁸ Later, this FSO was prosecuted on an unrelated charge and spent a few years in prison. While in prison, he studied law and after release, he passed the Bar and began lobbying for

the Vietnamese communists.

Minister Nay Lurette paid dearly with his life as did others in MDEM; those that survived suffered for many years in communist concentration camps. An exception was one Montagnard working in MDEM who turned out to be a communist agent.

“Shattered World”

“The Vietnam War extracted its toll, and one of the most tragic and little-known consequences was the decimation and destruction it brought to the Highland People. By War’s end in 1975, around 85 percent of their villages were either in ruins or abandoned. Of the estimated one million highlanders, between 200,000 and 220,000 had died or were killed, including around one-half of their adult male population. But a great many were not killed by bullets or bombs. They perished because their world was shattered.”¹

The Montagnard’s misery did not end when the Vietnam War was over and South Viet Nam was no more. An unknown number died in the jungles of Cambodia from malnutrition, disease and fighting the communist Vietnamese. Tens of thousands were sent to communist Vietnamese concentration camps – termed “reeducation camps” in the vernacular of communism – where thousands were killed or died including so many of the Montagnard leaders.

In his recount of life in a reeducation camp, Commander Tran Dinh Tru describes his experience as “...under constant watch and we were not allowed to talk to other prisoners. For three months, I was interrogated twice daily and had to write my ‘daily confession.’” ... “Our schedule was tightly regulated from wakeup time to nightly self-examination sessions. Like buffaloes, we resiliently and obediently worked the fields on a simple diet provided at a subsistence level: a yam for the morning, two yams or two ears of corn for noon, and two more for the evening. We were forced to labor all day from dawn to dusk, day after day.”...Our camp in the southern highlands “was run by animal like hooligans trained in the art of intimidating, beating, and torturing inmates...Days in this camp were the longest ever, and the pain here, the most excruciating.”⁹

The above recount was “reeducation camp 101” by a Vietnamese officer, but for others, especially for some Montagnards because of their ethnicity, it was even more gruesome. Nay Lurette, the Minister for the Development of Ethnic Minorities (MDEM) was suffering from arrested TB when he was taken prisoner and incarcerated in the Ban Me Thuot Prison; then sent to the Mewal Plantation (Buon Tha) re-education camp; and later to the Son Phuróc re-education camp, in Phú Yên Province. At all three locations, Nay Lurette was denied medicine; this coupled with abysmal living conditions and malnutrition caused the TB flare up once again. Despite his illness, Nay Lurette’s courage and extraordinary will to live was remarkable; his wife reported that Nay Lurette survived for eight years and died on February 14, 1984.¹⁰

In an act of unparalleled barbarianism, the communist camp commander put on a “show and tell” to terrorize the other detainees in the camp saying to them “Let’s examine his brain to see why the Minister was so brilliant.” The communist cadre carved open Nay Lurette’s head with a saw and cut out a quarter section of his skull. Later the NVA camp commander sent for Nay Lurette’s wife ordering her to come and take his body with the gaping wound back to her village to bury.¹¹

According to the Documentation Center of Cambodia, when the Khmer Rouge took over Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, and ordered a city-wide evacuation, hundreds of people fled to the French Embassy for refuge. Upon pressure from the Khmer Rouge under the direction of Comrade Nhem, the French Embassy expelled between an estimated 150-300 Montagnards (of mostly Rhadé and Jarai ethnicity), men, women, and children who had fled the communist takeover of the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Among them was Y-Bham Enoul, the President of FULRO, who had been held under house arrest by Col. Les Kosem, a Cambodian intelligence officer, after Y-Bham’s exclusion of the Chams when changing FULRO to the FLHPM. Also at the French Embassy were others in the FULRO leadership, along with a number of FULRO “young Turks,” many were accompanied by their families. Reportedly, they were all trucked to the National Soccer Stadium and summarily executed during the Khmer Rouge’s murderous rampage.¹²

The reemergence of FULRO in the jungle

After the communist takeover of South Vietnam in 1975, thousands of Montagnards were slaughtered by the communist regime while they fled the Central Highlands to the jungles of

Cambodia; yet some survived this ordeal. Later others escaped from the concentration/reeducation camps and joined them in Cambodia. Lacking guns, ammunition, food and medicine, thousands of Montagnards, men, women and children were either hunted down by the NVA and killed, or died from malnutrition and other diseases. At that time, FULRO reemerged as a Montagnard military movement and three battalions of freedom fighters were formed to continue a resistance against the Vietnamese communists; however, none knew that their leader Y-Bham had been executed by the Khmer Rouge, and that promised support from the Americans would never materialize.

Contrary to belief in some sectors, and misinformation printed in a major American news magazine, FULRO never formed an alliance with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. However, one depleted FULRO battalion did negotiate a 'somewhat' right of passage through northern Cambodia in an attempt to make contact with US and other western government representatives in Thailand.

They were seeking the support promised them by US officials in the American Embassy in Saigon just prior to the fall of Vietnam. A few FULRO representatives were finally allowed go into Thailand where they were held by Thai security forces and were rebuffed by US officials who refused to meet with them. They were also prevented from meeting with other western government officials.

The main FULRO unit had been forced to remain behind in Cambodia and held under heavy guard by the Khmer Rouge as hostages. The FULRO representatives who made it to Thailand were forced by the Thai back into Cambodia and immediately taken hostage by the Khmer Rouge and held with the rest of the depleted battalion. There they remained until the invasion of Cambodia by the Vietnamese communists and Vietnamese troops pushed almost to the Thai border. At that time, the FULRO resistance fighters, under the threat of death, were forced by the Khmer Rouge to fight beside them against the Vietnamese. Finally after one battle, the Khmer Rouge fled into nearby mountains leaving the FULRO forces behind who then faded across the border with their wives and children and reached a refugee camp in Thailand where they asked for political asylum. Finally on November 24, 1986, the first group of 212 Montagnard FULRO resistance fighters and dependents were allowed into the US as refugees and resettled in North Carolina.

A second battalion, tried to make it across Southern Laos to Thailand -- never to be heard from again. Evidently they had run into and were annihilated by the North Vietnamese Army who maintained a large base there and occupied the Eastern part of Laos. The third, dubbed "The Lost Battalion," comprised of 400 men women and children, was discovered by the United Nations in Mondulkiri province in Cambodia in 1992, and was soon flown to the US to rejoin the first group.

After arriving in the US, the Montagnard freedom fighters, in a decision marked by language similar to that of Nez Perce Chief Joseph, vowed that "**FULRO would fight no more,**" and it was disbanded.

Vietnam Today for the Montagnards

A French census in 1943 reported a highlander population of one million. Other surveys in the 60s and 70s indicated that the Montagnard population in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam may have been as high as 1.5 million people. Noted anthropologist Dr. Gerald Hickey reported that a survey during the war indicated the highlander population to be close to one million.¹ However, the census takers did not go into many areas that contained significant populations of Montagnards because they were insecure and not under the control of the RSVN. Now the communist regime publicizes the population as being only 750,000.

The communist regime admits that PRIVATE Montagnards are among the "poorest of the poor" in Vietnam, and their children suffer the highest percentage of malnutrition and infant mortality. If not treated with outright hostility, Montagnards are at best treated with benign neglect; and evidence suggests that ethnic cleansing, cultural leveling and environmental genocide is taking place.

Those Montagnards who fought for the South Vietnamese government and for the Americans during the war and the relatives of those living the U.S. suffer the most. They, their children and grandchildren are not granted the same amenities as Vietnamese families receive. Montagnards are required to pay for medical assistance and schooling, which of course they cannot afford. Thus, few have the opportunity to achieve the secondary level of schooling much less any higher education.

The Montagnards are being deprived of their cultural heritage. The communist government

took away the Montagnard's ancestral lands, and their longhouses have been burnt, and they have been forced to build their houses on the ground -- Vietnamese style. There are no more "Montagnard villages;" thus, their culture is being destroyed. Government policy requires all villages to be integrated, with every other house occupied by an ethnic Vietnamese family. The communist regime has a policy to assimilate the hill tribes into their culture through forced inter-racial relationships and marriages.

The Montagnard's extended family structure has been destroyed. Elders, "keepers" of the Montagnard culture and traditions, have been forcibly relocated to "retirement villages" far from their families and relatives, where they have little or no means of support, access to medicine, etc., and have to fend for themselves. Montagnards are no longer permitted to make rice wine for their cultural ceremonies, conduct sacrificial ceremonies, or own buffaloes. Now their harmony with the spirits and the environment is in turmoil, and their world has been turned upside down.

Traditionally a great share of the Montagnards practiced swidden farming, however, their ancestral lands have been taken from them by the government, and much of it is now used for the establishment of vast parastatal plantations of cash crops. Montagnard families have been regulated to small plots of land (about 1.5 acres) insufficient to grow enough food to adequately feed their families. There are little or no employment opportunities for the Montagnards in the Central highlands other than working as cheap laborers on parastatal plantations of coffee, rubber and other cash crops or on the larger farms of the Vietnamese. Thus, although it is not an openly stated policy, the Vietnamese communist government is reducing the Montagnards to a status of servitude not too dissimilar to the slave culture in early American history.

When the topography allowed, some groups cultivated dry rice in permanent fields, such as the vast area along the Bla River near Kontum town. These rain-fed fields were farmed by the Bahnar, Jolong, Rengao and some Jarai. However, the Vietnamese communists constructed a dam on the river and flooded the area of these fields, thousands Montagnards were relocated and forced to clear fields on infertile and rocky hillsides. This is not an isolated incident.

Several million Vietnamese have also been resettled in the Central Highlands and given plots of land with the government stipulation that they must plant half of it in cash crops. Thus, the jungles and mountains that used to provide food and other resources for the Montagnards have been denuded, erosion is rampant and waterways are polluted with sediment, fertilizers and pesticides killing off the aquatic life. As a result Montagnards have little or no clean potable water to drink and bathe. Montagnards who "go to the mountains" without governmental permission are accused of being rebels and FULRO supporters, and whatever food they have is taken and the people frequently are killed outright.

When Montagnard males flee the Central Highlands and are finally allowed to immigrate to the US, what little land the family had is often taken away from them by the government as form of punishment, leaving the wives and children with no means of support. Additionally, in a maneuver by the government of Vietnam designed to exercise a form of control of the Montagnards in the US, those family members still in Vietnam are not allowed to immigrate. They are outright denied both passports and exit visas or have so many obstacles and costs thrown in their path that families are separated for years, if not forever. A few are allowed to leave but only after Vietnamese officials are able to exact huge ransoms from their relatives in the US. This practice further fractures the Montagnard traditional family structure. Those Montagnards living in freedom that choose to speak out against abuses by the communist run the risk of subjecting their families to even more mistreatment, such as confiscation of all or part of remunerations sent by relatives in the US. Unfortunately the United States plays into the communist programs vis à vis restricting Montagnards resettlement by not extending any recognition to their past alliance to the US and by paying only lip service to the ongoing human rights violations and violations of religious freedoms.

Hundreds of Montagnard political prisoners are languishing in jails and prisons throughout Vietnam, mainly because they adhere to the Protestant or Catholic religions and refuse to join communist controlled churches. Some had sought sanctuary in Cambodia from human rights abuses in Vietnam only to then be forcibly returned to the Central Highlands by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR).

Montagnards who have converted to Christianity are not allowed to construct their own churches without government approval. If a church is sanctioned, all sermons have to be approved by the communist religious police. Sermons are monitored by Vietnamese secret police to insure compliance. Montagnards cannot even worship in their own language; only in Vietnamese. If they

violate these policies, they are often beaten, heavily fined (which they cannot afford), and imprisoned, and some tortured and killed while there. Now if they refuse to join the communist-controlled churches, the regime has instigated a policy of attempting to force Montagnards to abandon Christianity and revert to their old pagan ways.

More Betrayals

In 2001, the Montagnards staged a massive protest in the Central Highlands over the lack of land to farm and grow enough food for their families, racial discrimination and other human rights abuses, and lack of religious freedom. The communist regime reacted with extreme force; killing and imprisoning thousands, while many others were “disappeared.” Over two thousand fled to Cambodia and sought refuge in the UNHCR camps in Cambodia. About half of them were eventually allowed to immigrate to the US and other countries, while the UNHCR forced a thousand others to return to Vietnam after receiving false promises of no repercussions from the brutal communist regime.

During a trip to Hanoi in February 2007, Ellen Sauerbrey, Assistant Secretary of State for population, refugees and migration, stated at a press conference in Hanoi that Montagnards fleeing perceived oppression in the Central Highlands should stay in Vietnam and not seek asylum in Cambodia. Her proclamation was based on assurances by communist Vietnamese officials that Montagnards were not being abused. She then traveled to Cambodia and met with Cambodian officials and again held a press conference stating that Montagnards who seek asylum in Cambodia should be sent back to Vietnam.

Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey also said that the Vietnamese communists assured her that those Montagnards forced to return to the Central Highlands were not being mistreated and international monitors had verified this by visiting nearly 80 percent of the Montagnards forced back from Cambodia to Vietnam; when in fact less than 10 percent were ever visited. She forgot to say that communist government “minders” and police accompanied all international monitors and the interviews were staged, and that neither independent press nor human rights personnel were allowed to accompany them. Without non-fettered free access, how could anyone conduct independent and honest interviews? The principal monitor for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) was Vu Anh Son, a citizen of communist Vietnam thus his independence was compromised. A second UNHCR representative who also serves as monitor is married to a communist North Vietnamese. Metaphorically, this is “putting foxes in the henhouse.”

These statements by this high-ranking State Department representative were taken by the Vietnamese and Cambodian communist regimes, and UNHCR as official US policy. As a result, the UNHCR personnel abrogated their mandate and relegated the refugee status decision making process for Montagnards to the corrupt communist Cambodian regime that is strongly influenced by communist Vietnam. Although not an officially stated policy of the State Department, this unofficial policy remains in place to this date. The Cambodian regime has now closed the camps.

In true Neville Chamberlin fashion, some Americans and third country nationals in both the private and public sectors with close ties to the communists “worship at the alter of trade.” Both they and other self-interest individuals and groups of religious faith parrot Hanoi and espouse that the Montagnards are not being mistreated or suffer from religious persecution. Hundreds of Montagnard political prisoners including many religious leaders languish in prisons under inhumane conditions, while reports continue to eke out of the Central Highlands of their torture and murder by communist officials –facts that belie these charlatans.

Footnote: The Massacre of Dak Son¹³

Dak Son was the new home and sanctuary of some 800 Montagnard refugees, mostly women and children, who had fled from life under the VC and NVA; however, many of the other 20,000 Montagnards in Phuoc Long province remained as serfs/slaves of the communists. Lest the others should get the idea of seeking protection from SVN’s government, the communists decided to make an example of the refugees of Dak Son in December 1967. Six hundred VC and NVA from the 88th Regiment of the 1st PAVN Division¹⁴ assembled outside Dak Son and they began their attack at midnight, pouring machine-gun, mortar and rocket fire into the village; however, this attack was different from the others for the VC and NVA were also armed with 60 flamethrowers.

The Viet Cong and NVA were not intent on a military victory but on the cold-blooded,

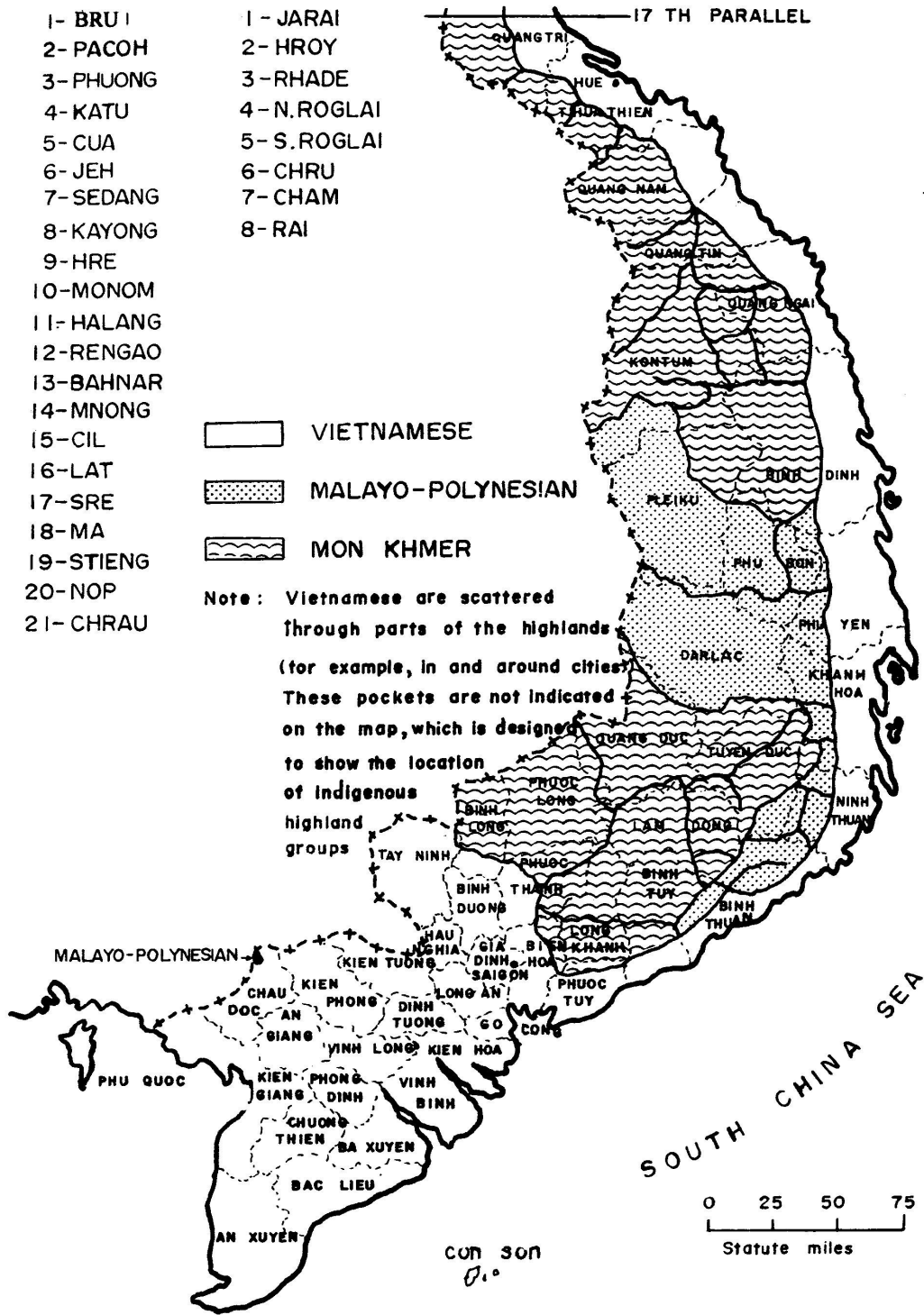
monumental massacre of the helpless Montagnards. To that end, long ugly belches of flame lashed out from every direction, garishly illuminating the refugee hamlet and searing and scorching everything in their path. Spraying fire about in great whooshing arcs, the VC and NVA set the whole village on fire. The shrieking refugees still inside their houses were incinerated. At dawn, relief forces only found burnt remnants of Dak Son strewn with charred corpses of women, children, and "infants welded to their mothers' breasts." All told, 252 of the unarmed Montagnards had been murdered, 33 wounded with third-degree burns over up to 20% of their bodies, and another 100 kidnapped.

- 1- BRUI
- 2- PACOH
- 3- PHUONG
- 4- KATU
- 5- CUA
- 6- JEH
- 7- SEDANG
- 8- KAYONG
- 9- HRE
- 10- MONOM
- 11- HALANG
- 12- RENGAO
- 13- BAHNAR
- 14- MNONG
- 15- CIL
- 16- LAT
- 17- SRE
- 18- MA
- 19- STIENG
- 20- NOP
- 21- CHRAU

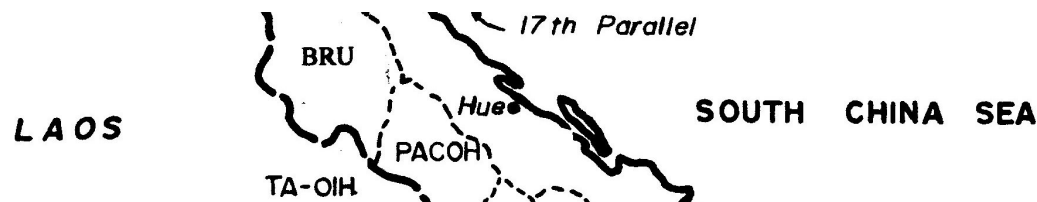
- 1- JARAI
- 2- HROY
- 3- RHADE
- 4- N.ROGLAI
- 5- S.ROGLAI
- 6- CHRU
- 7- CHAM
- 8- RAI

VIETNAMESE
 MALAYO-POLYNESIAN
 MON KHMER

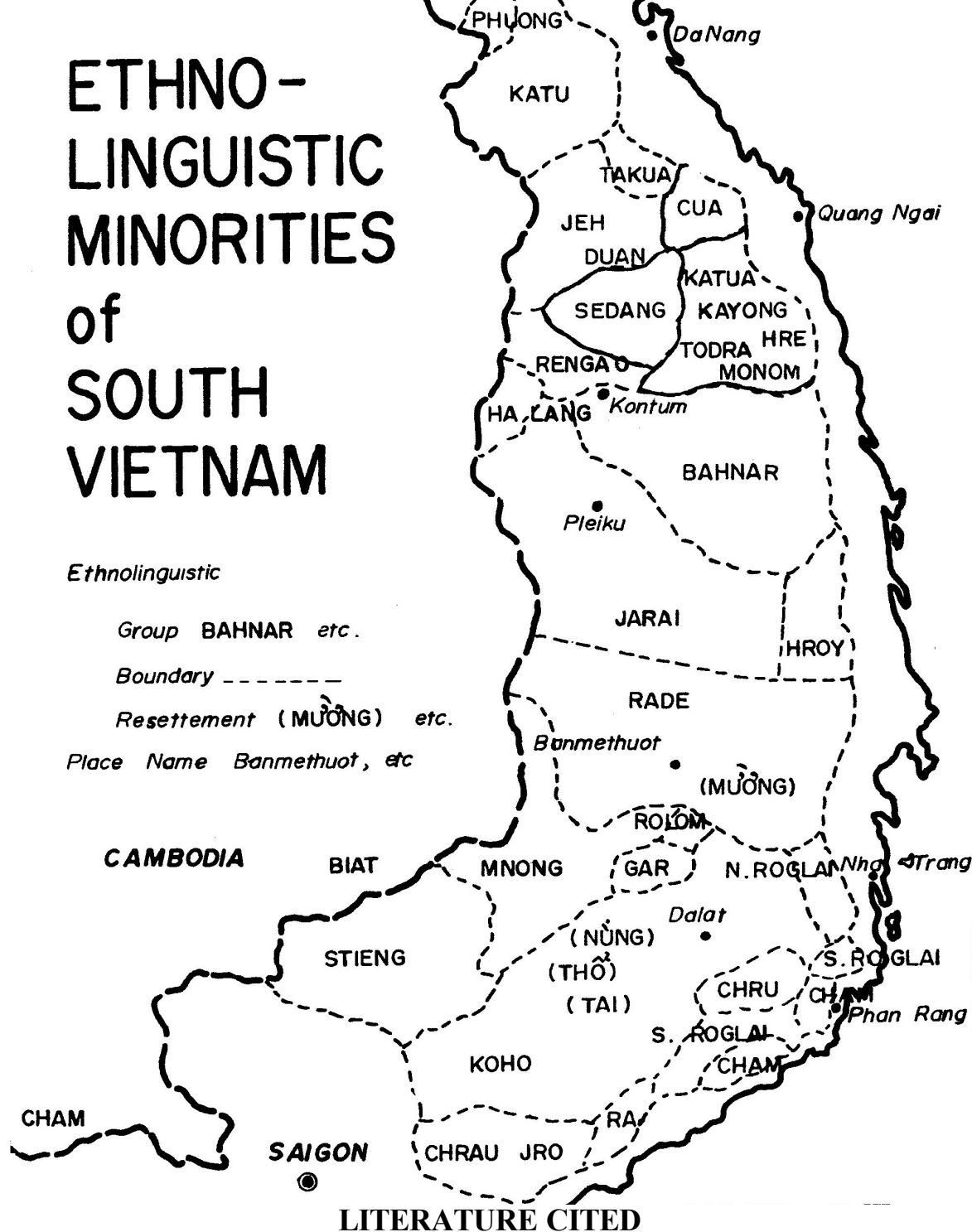
Note: Vietnamese are scattered through parts of the highlands (for example, in and around cities). These pockets are not indicated on the map, which is designed to show the location of indigenous highland groups.



ETHNO-LINGUISTIC GROUPS OF SOUTH VIETNAM



ETHNO-LINGUISTIC MINORITIES of SOUTH VIETNAM



¹Much of the information in this paper was drawn from Dr. Gerald Cannon Hickey's books: *Free in the Forest*. Yale University Press. 1982; *Sons of the Mountains*. Yale University. 1982; and *Shattered World*. University of Pennsylvania Press. 1993.

²Personal communication. The information regarding the total numbers Montagnard troops attached to the various Special Forces A-Teams (CIDG forces), and MIKE and SOG/Hatchet forces was provided by Steve Sherman and John Plaster, Special Forces Vietnam.

³Personal communication. The information regarding the former CIDG and MIKE forces after Vietnamization was provided by former Vietnamese Special Forces (Lực Lượng Đặc Biệt Quân Lực Việt Nam Cộng Hòa or LLDB) Colonel Dinh Doan.

⁴*End of the Road: Memoir*. Vuong Mong Long. Ranger Magazine, Issue 20, May 2007.

⁵Author's interviews with EUI BO resistance fighters upon arrival in the U.S. in 1986.

⁶Letter for the Record. Edmund Sprague. May 20, 1998.

⁷Memorandum for the Record. Ministry for the Development of Ethnic Minorities, April 4, 1975.

⁸Personal communication with the former assistant of the Foreign Service Officer in question.

⁹*My Missteps and Mishap under the Cyclops*. Tran Dinh Tru and To Hong Duc. (In Press). as related by Dr. Nghia M. Vo. Guam and the *Thuong Tin* Saga. Second Annual SACEI Conference (2010) The Fall of Saigon. 09.25.2010

¹⁰*Surviving War, Surviving Peace*. Joseph Carrier. Forum: The Central Highlands of Vietnam. UC Irvine Library. Spring 2007.

¹¹Author's interviews with reeducation camp survivors and friends of Minister Nay Luette's family.

¹²Personal communication with Youk Chhang, Director, Documentation Center of Cambodia. June 7, 2010.

¹³*The Massacre of Dak Son*. Time Magazine. Dec. 15, 1967.

¹⁴History of the Resistance War Against the Americans to Save the Nation, 1954-1975, Volume V: The 1968 General Offensive and Uprising. Lich Su Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc, 1954-1975, Tap V: Tong Tien Cong Va Noi Day Nam 1968. Military History Institute of Vietnam; Editor: Senior Colonel Nguyen Van Minh; Authors: Senior Colonel Nguyen Van Minh, Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Xuan Nang, Colonel Tran Tien Hoat, Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Huy Thuc, Senior Colonel Do Xuan Huy; National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2001. as cited by EBV. TET 68 Historian: ***The Dak Son massacre: 6 Dec 67***. 09 Dec 09. Weider History Group Online. <http://www.armchairgeneral.com/forums/showthread.php?p=1375189>

¹⁵Illustrations from *Peoples of Tribes of South Vietnam, Volume I*. CDR. Robert L. Mole, ChC, USN, COMNAVSUPPACT Saigon. Summer 1968.

Dedicated to the memory of the late Dr. Gerald Cannon Hickey, renowned and astute anthropologist and author whose scholarly work had a positive influence on many policies, both American and Government of Vietnam, on the treatment of the Montagnards. Dr. Hickey authored several books on the Montagnards including *Free in the Forest*, *Sons of the Mountains*; *Shattered World* and *Kingdom in the Morning Mist*, but ironically, he was perhaps better known for his book *A Village in Vietnam*; required reading for anyone going to Vietnam. Gerry was a close friend of mine, the Montagnards and many others whose lives were greatly influenced by his friendship, advice and guidance throughout the years. He will be missed by all of us; **MAY HE REST IN PEACE.**

About the Author

The author, Michael Bengé, spent 11 years in Vietnam, first with IVS (International Voluntary Services '63-64), then as a USAID Rural Affairs Provincial Development Officer. Mr. Bengé served in Darlac (Đắk Lắk), Kon Tum, and Phú Yên provinces, the first two with large populations of Montagnards. The majority of his service was in Darlac province, which was the nerve center of political activity of the FULRO, and populated by the largest Montagnard tribe -- the Rhadé. The author is fluent in the Rhadé language, and had been adopted by a Rhadé notable while in Vietnam. Prior to his capture by the North Vietnamese during the TET offensive in 1968, Mr. Bengé was the senior civilian in the CORDS program (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) in Darlac province. During his service Mr. Bengé worked closely with the Ministry for the Development of Ethnic Minorities and after his Hanoi release in 1973 from five years of captivity, returned to Vietnam and served as an advisor to the Minister of Ethnic Minorities until the fall of Vietnam in 1975. To this day Mr. Bengé maintains many close friendships in the Montagnard community worldwide where he is widely respected. Mr. Bengé

friendships in the Montagnard community worldwide where he is widely respected. Mr. Bengé assists in refugee issues, often being called upon to provide expert testimony in immigration cases. He is an avid student of the politics and the culture of SE Asia and has authored numerous articles on these subjects. Contact: **bengemike@aol.com**

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