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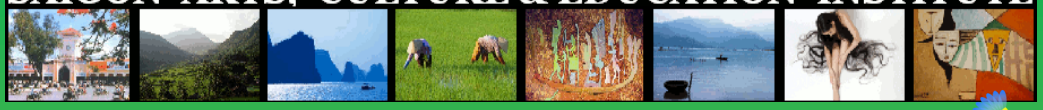

To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Vietnam's Misunderstood Revolution: Tuong vu

June 19, 2017 Wilson Center: Sources and Methods

What both advocates for and critics of the Vietnam War got wrong about North Vietnam: its radical commitment to communist revolution. During the 20th century, anti-Western revolutions swept throughout Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Embracing ideologies from communism to Islamism, these revolutions sought to overthrow or roll back Western domination.

Revolutionary states—whether large like the Soviet Union and China, or small like Cuba and Nicaragua—might have hindered the West, but they were never able to defeat it. Many have collapsed, including the once mighty Soviet Union, and most survivors have made peace with their former Western enemies.

Nevertheless, even small revolutionary states had tremendous impact on world politics in their heydays. This is particularly true of communist North Vietnam, or the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which at one point provoked the United Stated to commit about half a million troops to defending South Vietnam and to fight a long, bitter, and divisive conflict. North Vietnam's war profoundly divided American citizens, seriously damaged American credibility around the world, and lent moral support to many radical movements in Africa and Latin America. Some observers credit the conflict for inspiring "antisystemic movements" in the 1960s and 1970s in North America, Europe, Japan, and Latin America; another source counts at least 14 revolutions that ensued in the seven years following US withdrawal of troops from South Vietnam in 1973.

Revolutionary impact aside, America's failure at hands of North Vietnam also led to changes in US military strategy and caused the US to retreat from nation-building missions abroad in the subsequent two decades—a self-restraint that was only partially lifted with the Al-Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001.

Given their limited military and economic capabilities, the ability and determination of small but radical states like North Vietnam to inflict such humiliation on a superpower poses a significant analytical puzzle: What were the thoughts of revolutionary leaders in those states? How could they even consider challenging those much more powerful than they were?

These questions must be asked of all revolutions, but they hold special importance in the Vietnamese case because the nature of this revolution has been widely misunderstood. During the Vietnam War, Vietnamese revolutionaries were commonly portrayed either as dominoes in the game of big powers or as essentially nationalists who inherited a tradition of patriotism and were motivated by national Independence—but the North Vietnamese were in fact radicals who dedicated their careers to realizing a communist utopia.

In opposing American intervention in Vietnam, contemporary critics and antiwar activists typically claimed that the Vietnamese revolution was aimed at achieving national self-determination. Vietnamese revolutionaries were said to be reenacting the patriotic tradition of their ancestors through the millennia. Because that tradition had historically been directed against China, Vietnam would not be a menace to the US and could even serve as an

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Vietnam: Historians at War...

an American ally to contain Communist China. Senator William Fulbright, an early critic of American policy, stated as much: Ho Chi Minh is not a mere agent of Communist China…He is a bona fide nationalist revolutionary, the leader of his country's rebellion against French colonialism. He is also…a dedicated communist but always a Vietnamese communist…For our purposes, the significance of Ho Chi Minh's nationalism is that it is associated with what Bernard Fall has called "the 2,000-year-old distrust in Vietnam of everything Chinese." Vietnamese communism is therefore a potential bulwark—perhaps the only potential bulwark—against Chinese domination of Vietnam.

Dr. Martin Luther King, in a famous address in 1967, similarly took issue with the US government for rejecting a revolutionary [Vietnamese] government seeking self-determination, and a government that had been established not by China (for whom the Vietnamese have no great love) but by clearly indigenous forces that included some communists. For the peasants, this new government meant real land reform, one of the most important needs in their lives.

While Senator Fulbright and Dr. King were correct that the Vietnamese revolutionary government was led by indigenous forces, they underestimated its internationalist commitments to world revolution. While giving priority to their own revolution, Ho Chi Minh and his comrades did not ignore revolutions elsewhere. They supported them in Indochina, Siam, and Malaya in the 1930s, China in the late 1940s, and Laos and Cambodia in 1975. Vietnam continued to train sappers for, and send surplus weapons to, Algeria, Chile, and El Salvador in service of foreign revolutions even after 1975. The internationalist spirit of the Vietnamese Communist Party is still alive today, a quarter century after the collapse of world communism, as evidenced in Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong's trip across the globe to Cuba in 2012 where he preached the merits of socialism and the evils of capitalism.

Dr. King's characterization that the Vietnamese had "no great love" for China also misses the awe and veneration Vietnamese communists showered on Chinese leaders in the 1950s and the slavish deference the Vietnamese leadership today expresses toward China. North Vietnamese leaders did implement a "real land reform" by redistributing large amounts of land to landless peasants, but they also executed about 15,000 landlords and rich peasants in the process. For all that bloodshed and fanfare, barely five years later most peasants were coerced into giving up their land and joining Maoist-style cooperatives. Forced to stay in cooperatives, the free farmers of North Vietnam were turned into a kind of serfs or indentured workers. They were chronically hungry and occasionally threatened by famines.

Antiwar activists misunderstood the nature of the Vietnamese revolution, but proponents of intervention fared no better. To justify American involvement in the conflict, US leaders frequently put forward an opposite image of the Vietnamese revolutionaries, claiming they were pawns in the hands of Moscow or Beijing. Portrayed in this manner, the Vietnamese communists did not possess their own beliefs nor were they capable of independent action.

Then-Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk testified before a Congressional committee in 1951 that Vietnamese communists were "strongly directed from Moscow and could be counted upon…to tie Indochina into the world communist program." A decade later, when he sent American troops to Vietnam, President Lyndon Johnson pointed to Beijing as the real culprit:

Over this war—and all of Asia—is another reality: the deepening shadow of Communist China. The rulers in Hanoi are urged on by Peking. This is a regime which has destroyed freedom in Tibet, which has attacked India and has been condemned by the United Nations for aggression in Korea. It is a nation which is helping the forces of violence in almost every continent. The contest in Vietnam is part of a wider pattern of aggressive purposes.

This domino theory justified US intervention in Vietnam. As Senator Hubert Humphrey spoke in 1951, "We cannot afford to see southeast Asia fall prey to the Communist onslaught…If Indochina were lost, it would be as severe a blow as if we were to lose Korea. The loss of Indochina would mean the loss of Malaya, the loss of Burma and Thailand, and ultimately the conquest of all the south and southeast Asiatic area."

In retrospect, however, it is clear that the Vietnamese communists were no stooges of Moscow or Beijing. At the height of the war, Hanoi's leaders in fact challenged both their Soviet and Chinese comrades for not daring to stand up against US imperialism. After their victory in 1975, they thought of themselves as the vanguard of world revolution and snubbed not only Washington, but also Moscow and Beijing.

Hanoi attempted to defend the international communist camp even when Moscow and Beijing had abandoned it. In

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1989, when Eastern European communist regimes were about to fall, the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party prodded the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to convene a conference of all communist and workers parties to discuss strategies to save the socialist camp from the coming collapse. [1] When Gorbachev turned a deaf ear to the Vietnamese request, Vietnam asked China to create an anti-imperialist alliance (Beijing also said no). [2]

In the end, Vietnamese communism stopped short of exporting revolution beyond Indochina because its radical character had created enemies everywhere around it, from Vietnamese peasants who resisted collectivization, to China and Cambodia which resented Vietnam's arrogance. The pro-intervention camp widely exaggerated the security threat of the Vietnamese revolution to the US. That threat did not materialize—not because the Vietnamese communists were not real communists, as the antiwar camp claimed, but because their fanaticism was self-destructive and engineered their own demise.

Both sides in the Vietnam War debate misunderstood the nature of the Vietnamese revolution because they failed to grasp Vietnamese leaders' profound commitments to communism. As this debate continues today, the same misunderstandings are frequently found in the literature.

[1] Huy Duc, Ben thang cuoc [The winning side], vol. 2 (Osinbook 2012), 63-67.
[2] Tran Quang Co, Hoi uc va suy nghi [Memories and thoughts] (Unpublished, 2003).
Tuong Vu
Tuong Vu is director of Asian Studies and professor of Political Science at the University of Oregon.

Comments: Like the famous Giap-Summers exchange. Prof Thong Vu may be correct, but he's wrong to think it matters. Our challenge was the "paper tiger" image that the PRC ascribed to us. Had we quit in 1965 its impact would have truly fanned many Vietnams. By hanging in there, we made space for capitalist/free societies in Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines and elsewhere. The Vietnamese communists may have modified their ideology to give it a vina-centric aspect, but their internationalist "duties" outweighed the blows that the Vietnamese people unnecessarily absorbed. To give them credit for their unwillingness to accept a divided Vietnam, dismisses our objective which was to protect the independence of the South. We forfeited the game to our detriment and are paying for it because Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden believed if the diminutive Vietnamese could defeat the U.S., they could too. If we were more united and resolved, we might have avoided those and other contests. We can thank the peace movement for that!

Steve Sherman

Asian Boat People, Once Opposed More Than Syrian Refugees

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/asian-boat-people-refugees_us_59443d49e4b01eab7a2dabea

"There are a lot of innocent people who are refugees, and given the opportunity, [they] would give back 100 times more than what was given to them."

By Jessica Prois, Kimberly Yam

COURTESY HOANGCHI TRUONG

More than 40 years ago, the fall of Saigon marked the end of the Vietnam War, prompting hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee the impending communist regime. More people from Laos and Cambodia followed as those countries experienced communist takeovers of their own.

A refugee crisis ensued.

But at the time, most Americans opposed taking in the people who were fleeing Southeast Asia. Polls indicate that the American public was even less accepting of refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam than it is of Syrian refugees today.

When President Jimmy Carter agreed to admit twice as many Southeast Asian refugees in 1979, more than 60 percent of

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Asian Boat People...

Americans said they opposed the move. Today, about 50 percent of Americans polled say they don't want Syrian refugees in the country.

Regardless of public opinion, the U.S. became home to many people fleeing Southeast Asia. The country took in almost 600,000 refugees from the region during the 1980s, according to Pew Research Center.

Meanwhile, many people who remained in Southeast Asia were subject to harsh treatment. An estimated 1 million people in Vietnam were placed in so-called "re-education camps," enduring hard labor and starvation.

A Vietnamese Refugee, Who Endured Slave Labor In The U.S., On Understanding Both Sides

HoangChi Truong fled Vietnam at the age of 13.

HoangChi Truong and her family fled Danang, a coastal city in Vietnam, one day before communists from the North moved into the area. Her father, a South Vietnamese army colonel, packed up the family to head further south by boat on March 28, 1975.

A month later, with help from a relative who worked for the U.S. Embassy in Japan, the family was able to hop a flight to Guam. Truong, who was 13 at the time, said she and her family members were jolted by a new reality: They were refugees aboard a plane.

"I felt like we just renounced our citizenship," Truong told HuffPost from her home in Sacramento, California. "We were no longer Vietnamese citizens to the new communist government once we left Vietnam. We didn't know what would become of us."

They were part of the first wave of Vietnamese refugees greeted at an Air Force base in Guam, where U.S. Marines and the Red Cross were just setting up a refugee camp with tents and outhouses. Staff handed out McDonald's fast food to the newly arrived refugees. Truong — who would eventually go on to work in state government — says it was the first time she had tasted pickles and mustard.

"It was the dawn of a new day — on so many levels. I remember wanting to kiss the ground. To be in a free land," she said.

After spending three months in another refugee camp in San Diego, the family found sponsors in Wyoming, where a lodge owner offered them housing and work.

But the family's one-month stay basically amounted to exploitation, Truong said. They had to cook and clean and were confined to quarters that were essentially a crawl space. They ended up receiving no pay for their work around the lodge.

"All I can say is we were being exploited, taken advantage of and oppressed," she said.

The family was eventually able to move to Fresno with the help of a church and refugee relocation services.

Truong enrolled in school, but says the school district was not sure how to deal with her family. "I was put in elementary school when I was supposed to be in ninth grade. That was how they dealt with ESL," she said.

She was eventually promoted to her proper grade level with the help of her dad and school counselors.

Truong's parents settled into work, with her father finding a position as a janitor. Later, he and some of her siblings worked on a seat belt manufacturing assembly line.

Her mother hadn't received an education beyond elementary school because it hadn't been safe for girls to travel to school in her rural Vietnamese village.

These anecdotes illustrate Truong's belief that most refugees are thankful for opportunities they receive — and that many face unfair biases, she said.

"Refugees are just grateful to be alive," she said. "We didn't take your jobs. We took the jobs you didn't want."

Still, Truong said she understands why some people might be insecure about changing demographics, and she attributes misunderstandings to a lack of awareness.

"Anthropologically, we don't like seeing strange people from other tribes coming in. It's a security threat," she said. "But it's a lack of understanding to feel like you're going to get outcompeted."

Truong, who is now 55, recently left her job working for the California Office of Emergency Services and went on to write a book about growing up in America as a Vietnamese refugee. She said her goal as a writer and advocate is to get refugees and immigrants talking with those who oppose them.

"I'm challenging both sides. You don't have to love someone, and you can disagree," she said. "If you feel like you have to prove yourself, don't take it as personal burden but take it as challenge to reverse opinion that's been perpetuated by erroneous information. People all want the same things for themselves and their children. Everyone wants to live — and live in dignity."

A Vietnamese Refugee On The American Dream

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Asian Boat People...

Andy Bui still remembers the "firecracker" shots he heard when he was 5 years old in his hometown in South Vietnam. Friends and family had been celebrating Tet, the Vietnamese New Year's festival, the night before. To him, loud noises didn't seem like anything out of the ordinary — just another night of a celebration, he told HuffPost.

But as the sounds continued, he saw people taking shelter under their beds. The noises were actually gunfire from the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attack on the South — the Tet Offensive of 1968 that would result in massive casualties on all sides.

Bui said this was his most striking memory from the Vietnam War, which came to symbolize his time in the country. After Saigon fell, Bui's family endured several painful incidents, including his father's forced stay at a re-education camp, and he and some of his siblings decided to leave.

While his mother and a sister stayed behind, Bui and his other siblings fled late one night and eventually piled onto a river boat — a hazardous escape, since they risked falling victim to pirate attacks and death by drowning or dehydration.

Bui, who was 17 at the time, said he knew a life elsewhere could mean a life away from oppression. Still, he felt a profound sadness in the first hours after leaving Vietnam, he told HuffPost.

When the sun rose on the ocean, we still caught a glimpse of Vietnam — of the land. And the feeling was certainly painful to know we might never see that land again in our lives. Andy Bui

"I was leaving the only country I ever loved," Bui said, "So when the sun rose on the ocean, we still caught a glimpse of Vietnam — of the land. And the feeling was certainly painful to know we might never see that land again in our lives."

Bui and the others in his boat were rescued by the German NGO Cap Anamur and brought to a refugee camp in Singapore, where he stayed for three months.

Finally, in the summer of 1980, Bui and his siblings took a plane to the U.S. They settled in Arlington, Virginia, where they started their new lives.

COURTESY OF VIVIEN BUI

Andy Bui and his family.

Bui worked as a dishwasher, stock boy and janitor while attending Northern Virginia Community College. Eventually, he went to the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he majored in electrical engineering and computer science.

Though it wasn't easy, Bui said he and many of his immigrant peers were more than willing to do the work. He understood that as a refugee, he'd encounter many obstacles, but he was simply grateful to live free of fear.

"We knew the sky was the limit, but we looked at the sky one level at a time. The level we could see at that time didn't have home ownership, didn't have opportunities to own your own business," Bui explained. "At that time, the layer we were in included enjoying freedom, enjoying the right that the police couldn't arrest us for no reason like in Vietnam, where it was a constant threat."

Bui made his way up in the tech industry. Today, he is a managing member of Avola Technologies, a website and app development company.

Though Bui said he's achieved his own American dream, the elation he once felt as a proud new American isn't the same as it was once was. Trump's proposed travel ban has stifled the joy that he and so many other immigrants feel in their adopted country, he said.

"When resentment is misdirected toward the immigrants, and when the immigrants are fearful of the suspicions and accusations against them, the country will lose ... all that makes America unique," he said.

Virginia, Dream Trip for Viet Translator

https://pilotonline.com/news/military/local/virginia-beach-part-of-dream-trip-for-vietnam-war-translator/article_7247a1f6-78a2-50f3-b450-10e757609e6b.html

John Donovan stepped out of a taxi in the Vietnamese city of My Tho in 2008, dropped his bags on the street and squinted through midday sun as he scanned a bustling crowd.

He was searching for a ghost.

More than 40 years had passed since he had seen the local interpreter who guided his American riverboat crew as it navigated the winding and murky waters of South Vietnam during the war. For years, Donovan assumed his old friend was dead.

The retired Navy officer had spent part of an earlier trip to Vietnam searching for the translator, known simply as "Minh" by most of the men who served with him. But with no details about what happened to him after the war – and only his memories to guide him – Donovan didn't know where to begin.

Then, about six years ago, he came across Minh's name in a book. That led him to an author who put him in touch with a Vietnamese refugee in Dallas who gave him a phone number. The war buddies recognized each other's voices almost immediately.

A few months later, Nguyen Hoang Minh emerged from the crowd in downtown My Tho, waved to Donovan and wrapped him in a hug. They recalled a few hairy moments during their tour aboard the river patrol boats and laughed as they reminisced about a few wild nights spent drinking together so long ago.

Minh's English had grown rusty, but he still knew enough to tell a decent story. He explained how, after Donovan left the country in 1967, he'd been recruited to work as an interpreter for what was then a little-known group of specially trained commandos – the U.S. Navy SEALs.

For five years, Minh had participated in several missions that helped earn the SEALs a reputation as some of the world's fiercest fighters. Minh had attained a near-mythical status in early SEAL lore, helping establish their unique ability to blend with local cultures in faraway lands.

But the slight man with crooked yellow teeth has hardly lived a hero's life.

Donovan visited Minh's home that trip: a tiny hut with no windows, a leaky roof and a mud floor where he and his wife had been raising two grandchildren.

Now, decades later, the old man is fulfilling a life dream: He's walking on American soil. And he's finally claiming his place among the nation's most celebrated warriors.

Minh cried last week after stepping off an airplane in South Florida. Some of the men he fought alongside were there to meet him, including Rick Woolard, a retired SEAL captain who worked with Minh during the early days of SEAL Team 2.

Woolard was a driving force behind the effort to bring the former interpreter to America for a two-week visit, which has included stops at the National Navy UDT-SEAL Museum in Florida and tours this week of the East Coast SEAL headquarters at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek in Virginia Beach.

The museum, which recorded Minh's stories last week for an oral history project, split the bill for his travel with the Navy SEAL Foundation. The visit will be capped off this weekend when the 74-year-old is recognized as a guest of honor at the annual SEAL reunion at Little Creek.

On Monday, Minh toured the headquarters of SEAL Team 2, where he received a plaque designating him as an honorary SEAL.

He walked the halls and examined framed photos of the team's early days in Vietnam. He paused at a black-and-white photograph showing the silhouettes of four armed men walking toward an enemy-occupied house.

"That could be me," Minh said, pointing to the photo.

He stared at the picture for several seconds. His mind drifted back to 1966.

Minh studied English in high school, but never set out to work for the U.S. military.

As the story goes, an American river patrol boat captain approached a commander in the South Vietnamese navy and asked whether he had anyone who could work as an interpreter. The Vietnamese officer pointed to a cage in the middle of the compound and said, "You can have him."

Minh, who by then had served four years in his country's navy, swears he doesn't remember what he did to be locked in the brig that day. All he knows is that he was released, and soon he was steaming through brown water on one of the small patrol boats

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Dream Trip...

that had been tasked with stopping and searching river traffic in an effort to disrupt Viet Cong weapon and supply shipments. Minh had been on the job for several months by the time John Donovan arrived. The young lieutenant junior grade learned quickly that the 26-year-old interpreter was a valuable asset. He not only served as a translator, but also as a cultural liaison who could identify enemy fighters and defuse dangerous situations.

During a patrol on the Ham Luong River, Minh boarded a crowded water taxi and spotted a Viet Cong tax collector who, with a long white beard and flowing robes, had disguised himself as a Buddhist monk. After studying his papers, Minh grabbed the old man by the arm and led him onto the patrol boat. He tied the man's wrists as Donovan radioed ahead to tell the South Vietnamese operations center they were bringing in a detainee.

Turning to examine their prisoner, Donovan said, he saw a flash of steel. One of his gunner's mates – perhaps harboring thoughts of revenge for an ambush that had claimed the lives of several sailors – pressed his 8-inch Bowie knife to the throat of the old tax collector. With a clenched jaw, the sailor asked Donovan whether he could kill him.

Before he could respond, Minh flashed his notorious grin, ran to the old man's side and put his hand on the sailor's flexed arm.

"Hey man, he too old to bleed," Minh remembers saying. "Why make a big mess here?"

The sailor slowly lowered the knife, appearing embarrassed, and backed away. Minh sat down with the prisoner and offered him a piece of candy.

It wasn't long before Minh was asked to help with more covert operations. He could spend hours telling stories from the years he served with the SEALs. One of his favorites came on a dark night in March of 1968.

His platoon, led by Bob Gallagher, was on a combat mission and had penetrated 5,000 yards into a Viet Cong camp, locating a barracks occupied by about 30 well-armed fighters.

An enemy sentry discovered the commandos. Nearly everyone in the unit was wounded as the outnumbered team engaged in a firefight. As they returned fire, a grenade blast knocked Minh and four SEALs to the ground. Minh looked down: His left leg was full of shrapnel.

A grin crept across Minh's face as he explained what happened next. He said "a big, big guy" named Mikey Boynton scooped him off the ground.

Boynton, a beloved figure in the SEAL community who died in a car accident in Norfolk in 1998, was a tree-trunk of a man. He sprinted away from the compound with the injured Minh riding on his shoulders like a child. Minh said he complained that Boynton's arm was squeezing the shrapnel wound, so Boynton lowered the interpreter into his arms and cradled him as he fled enemy fire.

Boynton was shot three times in the back, but he kept running. When he reached a narrow canal, knowing that he couldn't clear it with Minh in his arms, he tossed him over the ditch and picked him back up on the other side.

A helicopter was waiting nearby to lift the men out of danger. At the base of the chopper, Boynton again tossed Minh, but this time he threw too hard. Minh slid across the bloody floor of the helicopter and out the other side.

"It's true! It's true!" Minh said as he recalled the scene while reminiscing this week with a few of his SEAL buddies. "I'm lucky."

"Damn right, you're lucky," Woolard said. "You're a very lucky guy."

Minh smiled and nodded his head. Surviving the war was one thing. Surviving what came next proved nearly as challenging.

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, Minh was captured by North Vietnamese soldiers and taken to a communist re-education camp.

Minh said he spent 28 months in the camp, where his captors schooled him in the horrors of American imperialism and the value of hard labor. But he didn't wish to talk in detail about his time there or the desperate living conditions that awaited him and his wife once they were free. For the next 45 years, Minh scraped by, laboring in rice fields and fixing shoes and working other odd jobs to provide for his family.

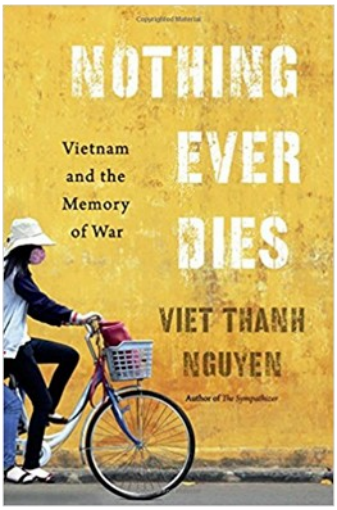
He could count himself among the lucky ones. More than 165,000 others – many who fought alongside U.S. forces – didn't survive the re-education camps, mostly dying from starvation and disease.

After Donovan found Minh in 2008, he told Woolard about the conditions the former interpreter was living in, about his life after the war and his desire to reconnect with the men he served with. Woolard put out the word, and within a few months his SEAL buddies had raised more than $15,000 to help Minh and his family move to the United States.

The State Department denied Minh's immigration request, however, so the money instead was placed in a fund to help Minh modernize his home and care for his adult children and grandchildren.

Nothing Ever Dies: Viet Thanh Nguyen

Review by Gary Kulik, Wilmington, DE



Among the books by acclaimed author Viet Thanh Nguyen (Univ. of Southern California [1]) is the 2015 Pulitzer-Prize winning *The Sympathizer: A Novel*. [2] That book featured as its narrator a half-French, half-Vietnamese communist spy, imprisoned in a reeducation camp. Distrusted by the camp's hard-bitten communist commandant, the narrator, who has spent years in America, has been writing a long confession. He is asked Ho Chi Minh's favorite question "what is more precious than independence and freedom" (364)? He is tortured until he can answer correctly "nothing." In words evocative of Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, [3] the narrator grimly observes that "our revolution had gone from the vanguard of political change to the rearguard of holding power…. When it came to learning the worst habits of our French masters and their American replacements, we quickly proved ourselves the best. We, too, could abuse grand ideals" (360). Critics have hailed Nguyen as an important new Vietnamese–American voice that insists on seeing Vietnam as a *country* not only a *war*.

Nothing Ever Dies, [4] a nonfiction sequel to *The Sympathizer*, was a finalist for the National Book Award. But readers expecting the same even-handed approach to the meaning of the war in Vietnam will be disappointed. Rather than the sustained cultural history promised in its subtitle, the book is a discursive and tendentious personal essay blending Cultural Studies and Late Marxism. [5] Its strengths include the author's justifiable bitterness over the United States' devastation of his birth-country as well as Laos and Cambodia; Nguyen also has a deep knowledge of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Korean film and literature.

The book's three sections—"Ethics," "Industries," and "Aesthetics"—set out the preconditions for a "just memory" of the Vietnam War based on "equal access" to the "industries of memory"—film, publishing, public memorials—in "a world in which no one would be exiled." Nguyen repeatedly admits that such utopian hopes will go unfulfilled "without a radical transformation, even a revolution, in the distribution of wealth and power" (283), but never clarifies the nature of that revolution.

For Nguyen, a truly "just memory" of the war would recognize the evil inherent in each of us, "our simultaneous humanity and inhumanity," and our complicity in the deeds "our side, our kin, and even we ourselves commit" (283). He makes the case by marshalling anecdotes from novels, films, and war commemorations while stitching it all together by invoking theorists of memory such as Paul Ricoeur, Pierre Nora, and Emmanuel Livinas.

Nguyen was born in Vietnam, "but made in America … a man of two countries, as well as the inheritor of two revolutions" (1). He compares the American Revolution with Ho Chi Minh's seizure of power inspired by Marxist-Leninist doctrine cloaked in nationalist aspiration. Neither country, he writes, lived up to its revolution. The American vision of a "city upon a hill now exists mostly as a sentimental fantasy," while the Vietnamese revolution failed not because it fell short of its purported goals for its people, but because it could not satisfy Che Guevara's wish for "two, three, many Vietnams" (3), a vision of third-world transformation once espoused by some on the 1960s far left.

The author's Catholic family moved from the north to escape Ho Chi Minh's regime in 1954–55 as part of the largest internal migration in Vietnamese history. After the communist victory in 1975, the family fled the country and lived briefly in a refugee camp in Ft. Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, before settling in San Jose, California, where his parents opened a grocery store. Nguyen attended Catholic schools there and then earned his bachelor's and doctoral degrees at the University of California–Berkeley.

Nguyen dedicates *Nothing Ever Dies* to his parents, who, "having lost almost everything, … nearly killed themselves to earn it back" (302). Neither will speak to him of the past. His father grew up minutes from the birthplace of Ho Chi Minh, "a region famous for producing hardcore revolutionaries and hardcore Catholics"(301). This "makes [him] … wonder what a different direction my life might have taken, what a different war I might have inherited" (301), had his family been communists rather than Catholics.

The author distinguishes himself not only from the anti-communists of his parents' generation of exiles, but also from others in the first cohort of Vietnamese-American writers. He criticizes writers like Le Ly Hayslip, Lan Cao, Andrew Lam, Andrew Pham, Aimee Phan, and Monique Troung as exponents of an "anti-communist liberalism" whose polite and reasonable voices differ sharply from the "rabid, demagogic kind found on the streets of Little Saigon" (206). Nguyen cautions that such

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writers, though not silenced altogether, as they would be in communist countries (a fact he rarely mentions), are subject to a censorship he imputes to American culture, "which allows them to speak, so long as they pass over other things in silence," specifically in regard to revolution. But a literature "that has given up on revolution [loses] one of the most important ways to transcend victimization" (205). An authentic Vietnamese–American literature must embrace Nguyen's ill-defined utopian hope of revolution.

The United States' "official memory," the author claims, has failed because it reflects no lessons learned "except … to fight the Forever War more efficiently" (285). Given the ongoing, indecisive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, this is an understandable assertion. But it is too simplistic. The generals who directed the liberation of Kuwait (Operation Desert Storm) in 1990–91 were bent on avoiding the mistakes of the Vietnam war. They went to war with overwhelming force, the support of most Americans, and a clear sense of how the war would end. Within months of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the George W. Bush administration forgot the lessons of Desert Storm.

Nguyen writes that Vietnamese "official memory" is "unable to confront the failure of the revolution in bringing freedom and independence to all of the people" (285). This ambiguous assertion contradicts the author's opening argument that the revolution failed because it could not fulfill Che Guevara's promise of multiple revolutions. Nguyen is notably silent on the core of the Communist Party's official memory—that the revolution was an American war on the Vietnamese people, a position that obscures the reality of a blood-soaked civil war.

Nguyen often indulges in lazy moral equivalencies. He writes, for example, that Thu Huong's 1995 *Novel without a Name*, a strident denunciation of communist party leadership, led to censorship and her house arrest. "Western publishers and readers considered her to be a dissident who spoke for justice …. Banned at home, her novels were published abroad, for the West likes to translate the enemies of its enemies" (62). In the end, he observes, "neither denunciation nor praise is innocent" (62). It is all driven by ideology. This is not just moral equivalency, but moral blindness. Huong's assault on her communist rulers has an integrity quite apart from the views of Western publishers and readers. In his travels in Vietnam, Nguyen seems never to have sought out the country's current dissidents, who write at risk of censorship and incarceration.

The United States lost the Vietnam war on the ground, but "won the war in memory, dominating as it does moviemaking, book publishing, fine art and the production of historical archives" (15). Hollywood is a "component of the military-industrial complex." In a sentence that would embarrass even neo-Leninists, Nguyen claims that "the ultimate goal of this industry is to reproduce power and inequality as well as to fulfill the needs of the war machine" (14).

To say that the United States "won the war in memory" ignores the deep and enduring divisions it produced in both America and Europe. In fact, there is no American consensus on the war, no single memory to justify such a crude conclusion. The anti-war movement resonated deeply in Hollywood films, [6] popular documentaries, [7] and bestsellers. [8] Such cultural artifacts eloquently attest to the complexity of the American memory of the war.

Near the end of his book, the author offers this criticism of Korean writer Chang-Rae Lee's work: "as beautifully written as his novels are, there is something of the anxious student in them, the longing for belonging, the evident desire to never write a bad sentence … which sometimes leads to overwritten sentences and lyrical conclusions that may not be earned" (249). The same can be said of *Nothing Ever Dies*.

[1] Where he is chairman of the English department and professor of American Studies and Ethnicity.

[2] NY: Grove Pr. It received several other prizes, including an Edgar Award for Best First Novel, awarded by the Mystery Writers of America.

[3] NY: Macmillan, 1941.

[4] The title comes from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (NY: Knopf, 1987) 36.

[5] See Tony Judt, "Freedom and Fredonia," *When the Facts Change: Essays, 1995–2010*, ed. Jennifer Homans (NY: Penguin, 2015) 91.

[6] E.g., *Coming Home*, dir. Hal Ashby (1978), *Platoon*, dir. Oliver Stone (1986), *Born on the Fourth of July*, dir. Oliver Stone (1989), and *Casualties of War*, dir. Brian De Palma (1989).

[7] E.g., *In the Year of the Pig*, dir. Emile de Antonio (1968), *Interviews with My Lai Veterans*, dir. Joseph Strick (1970), and *Hearts and Minds*, dir. Peter Davis (1974).

[8] E.g., Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1977), Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (NY: Knopf, 1977), Lynda Van Devanter, *Home before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (NY: Beaufort Books, 1983), and Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990).

Are PBS & Ken Burns About to Rewrite History Again?

By STEPHEN SHERMAN

PBS is planning to run a new documentary series this September on the Vietnam War, produced and written by Ken Burns. Burns is a left-wing "historian" and documentary film producer with a history of having his politics shape the narrative of the story he is telling, with a number of resulting inaccuracies.
Ken Burns correctly identifies the Vietnam War as being the point at which our society split into two diametrically opposed camps. He is also correct in identifying a need for us to discuss this aspect of our history in a civil and reflective manner. The problem is that the radical political and cultural divisions of that war have created alternate perceptions of reality, if not alternate universes of discourse. The myths and propaganda of each side make rational discourse based on intellectual honesty and goodwill difficult or impossible. The smoothly impressive visual story Burns will undoubtedly deliver will likely increase that difficulty. He has done many popular works in the past, some of which have been seriously criticized for inaccuracies and significant omissions, but we welcome the chance of a balanced treatment of the full history of that conflict. We can only wait and watch closely when it goes public.

The term "Vietnam War" itself, although accepted in common parlance, would more accurately be called "The American Phase of the Second Indochina War" (1965 to 1973). The U.S. strategic objectives in Vietnam must also be accurately defined. There were two inter-related goals: 1) to counter the Soviet and Red Chinese strategy of fostering and supporting "Wars of National Liberation" (i.e., violent Communist takeovers) in third-world nations, and 2) to defend the government of the Republic of (South) Vietnam from the military aggression directed by its Communist neighbor, the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam.
Arguments offered by the so-called "anti-war" movement in the United States were predominantly derived from Communist propaganda. Most of them have been discredited by subsequent information, but they still influence the debate. They include the nonfactual claims that:

1. the war in South Vietnam was an indigenous civil war,
2. the U.S. effort in South Vietnam was a form of neo-colonialism, and
3. the real U.S. objective in South Vietnam was the economic exploitation of the region.

The antiwar movement was not at all monolithic. Supporters covered a wide range, from total pacifist Quakers at one end to passionate supporters of Communism at the other. There were many idealists in it who thought the war was unjust and our conduct of it objectionable, as well as students who were terrified of the draft, and some who just found it the cause of the day. But some of the primary figures leading the movement were not so much opposed to the war as they were in favor of Hanoi succeeding in the war it had started.

The key question is whether the U.S. opposition to Communism during the Cold War (1947 to 1989) was justifiable. The answer is that Communism (Marxism) on a national level is a utopian ideal that can function only with the enforcement of a police state (Leninism) or a genocidal criminal regime (Stalinism). It always requires an external enemy to justify the continuous hardships and repression of its population and always claims that its international duty is to spread Communism. When Ho Chi Minh established the Vietnam Communist Party in 1930, there was no intention of limiting its expansionist ambitions to Vietnam, and he subsequently changed the name to the Indochinese Communist Party at the request of the Comintern in Moscow.

The people of Vietnam today live in one of the most corrupt and despotic regimes in the world, with one of the worst records in upholding basic human rights, as documented by several international agencies. Laos and Cambodia are vassal states of Vietnam, and Hanoi has many powerful agents in each, with enormous influence on events there. When the tanks of the North Vietnamese Army rolled into Saigon in 1975, the "anti-war" movement congratulated itself on facilitating that victory. In the U.S. cultural media and academia, that same self-congratulatory mental-

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PBS Rewrite History Again...

ity is reinforced despite the fact that more people were killed in the ten years following the North Vietnamese takeover of South Vietnam than in the preceding fifteen years of war. Infant and maternal mortality doubled under Communist rule, and well over a million people went into concentration camps, some for up to 18 years. Under the Saigon government, despite corruption and favoritism, there was a free press, with many publications thriving. All that stopped dead in April '75.

Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden both expressed their belief that if the diminutive Vietnamese could defeat the Americans, they could do so as well. The antiwar faction should take responsibility for the wars we have had to fight since Vietnam because of their encouragement of our enemies.

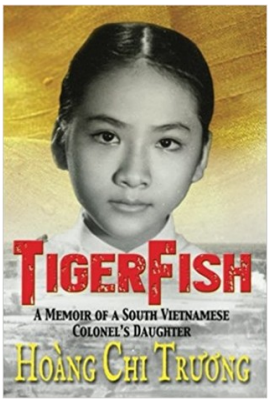
There is a profound difference between being defeated and forfeiting a game. That is what happened after Kissinger brought back a less than ideal, but politically acceptable, peace accord in 1973. It was fundamentally flawed in several ways, such as allowing 150,000 NVA to remain in South Vietnamese territory, but its main valid points were the promise of the North to never invade the South and the promise of the USA to support the South as needed to offset Communist strengths. In 1972, the North trashed their promise and invaded with multiple divisions in fully conventional warfare, and the USA kept its promise by supplying the air power that gave the ARVN an even chance to defeat the invaders – which they did, in larger battles than any ever fought by U.S. forces. Vietnamization had worked.

But then Congress undermined the agreement by cutting the replacement material promised to our ally and codified in the agreement. That same Congress further nullified the accords by forbidding the use of any U.S. air power to punish egregious North Vietnamese violations of the agreements. Those members of Congress should have known what the result of their actions would be but never acknowledged it. Thus, the North Vietnamese leader boasted then that "the Americans will not come back now even if we offer them candy." With massive support from Moscow and two years of very detailed preparations, the fate of South Vietnam was sealed.

Historians and serious viewers of Burns's narrative should study the factual history of the Second Indochina War to detect any misleading implications and factual omissions that may be found in his visual narrative. PBS would do well to offer more than a token effort to promote Burns's wish for open discourse on this important and extremely relevant subject.

Stephen Sherman is the series editor for the VVFH publications on the Second Indochina War. He served as a civil affairs/psy-ops officer with 5th Special Forces Group (Abn) in Pleiku and Nha Trang, Vietnam, 1967-1968.

Tiger Fish: Hoang Chi Truong



A memoir of a South Vietnamese Colonel's daughter, chronicling the tumultuous years growing up in the war-torn country of Vietnam, and the abrupt and brutal regime change that forced her disruptive and disorienting coming of age between two vastly different cultures.

Available on Amazon:
https://www.amazon.com/TigerFish-Vietnamese-Colonels-Daughter-America/dp/1544054319/

Blogger "Mother Mushroom" Sentenced to 10 Years in Jail

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/vietnam-puts-prominent-blogger-on-trial-for-anti-state-acts/2017/06/29/cbce8546-5c95-11e7-aa69-3964a7d55207_story.html?utm_term=.149987d0790e

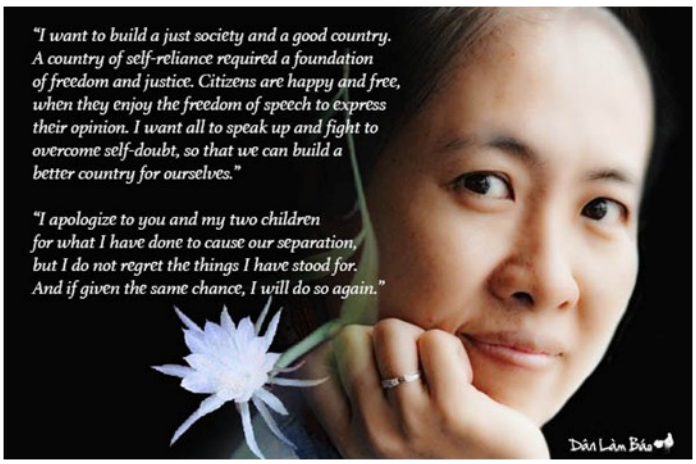
A prominent Vietnamese blogger was sentenced Thursday June 29, 2017 to 10 years in prison after being found guilty of distorting government policies and defaming the Communist regime in Facebook posts and in interviews with foreign media, her lawyer said.

Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, also known as "Mother Mushroom," was sentenced at the end of a one-day trial in the south-central province of Khanh Hoa, lawyer Vo An Don said. Her conviction related to the content of 18 articles on her Facebook page and interviews with foreign news outlets such as Voice of America and Radio Free Asia, Don said.

Quynh, 37, co-founded a network of bloggers and is very popular in Vietnam. She has written about human rights, civilian deaths in police custody and the release of toxic chemicals by a Taiwanese-owned factory that killed thousands of fish in one of Vietnam's worst environmental disasters.

Quynh, the single mother of two young children, maintained her innocence throughout the trial, her lawyer said.

1. The sentence of 10-year imprisonment that the regime imposed upon Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh once again reaffirmed that such moderate activities - to improve human rights, environmental protection, public health; to end torture, abuses at correction facilities; to protect national sovereignty, build democracy, foster freedom in Vietnam - are against the policies and guidelines of the Vietnamese Communist Party and its Government. This sentencing once again illustrates that the Communist Vietnam Government has repeatedly despised the public opinion of the international community and continued to violate international treaties on human rights.
2. The heavy-handed verdict for a human rights activist, who is a mother of two young children, clearly demonstrated the inhumane nature of the government. Under the domination and direction of the communist party, security officials and judges - who are members of the communist party - had exceed their legal authority, abused their power, and leveraged national institutions as instruments of terror and vengeance against those citizens of dissent.



3. The 10-year sentence is not only a verdict against Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh, but it is also a terrorizing message designed by the regime to threaten its patriotic citizens as well as current human rights activists in Vietnam. All activities to improve society, human life, and human conditions are allegedly considered "leverage" for propaganda against the regime and are to be punished severely.
4. The true victims of this 10-year sentence are not only Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh - a person of heroic conviction and courage - who will no doubt suffer tragic consequences to her spirit and ways of life; but also, her 11-year-old daughter Nguyễn Bảo Nguyên (Nấm), her five-year-old son Nguyễn Nhật Minh (Gấu), and her mother Nguyễn Tuyết Lan. Members of the Vietnamese Bloggers' Network (MLBVN) pledge to do all they can to help the Quỳnh family including providing assistance in raising Nấm và Gấu, as they have done in the past eight months since Quỳnh was imprisoned, and as they have done for other members of the MLBVN family.

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Blogger "Mother Mushroom"...

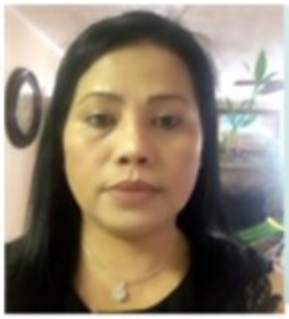
5. Violence, imprisonment, and unjust sentences cannot curtail the aspiration for freedom and the desire to serve the fatherland of patriotic citizens. The spirit and will of Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh cannot be contained, *"I want to build a just society and a good country. A country of self-reliance required a foundation of freedom and justice. Citizens are happy and free, when they enjoy the freedom of speech to express their opinion. I want all to speak up and fight to overcome self-doubt, so that we can build a better country for ourselves."* Quỳnh told her mother, *"I apologize to you and my two children for what I have done to cause our separation, but I do not regret the things I have stood for. And if given the same chance, I will do so again."* Members of the Vietnamese Bloggers' Network will keep the burning flames and undaunted ways of Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh going. The co-founders as well as brothers and sisters of the Network would like to express profound gratitude and pledge of unity with you.
6. The Vietnamese Bloggers' Network pledges to continue the impassioned spirit and dedicated commitment of Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh and call out to all Vietnamese citizens to overcome fear and work together to build a Country of Vietnam, in which no citizen will suffer unjust trial and undue sentences such as Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh and other dissidents. The verdict the regime imposed upon Mẹ Nấm - Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh did not kill her spirit and will, and it will not stop our desire and aspiration.

June 30, 2017
The Vietnamese Bloggers' Network
http://mangluoiblogger.blogspot.com/

Nguyen Huu Tan's Death in Police Jail

https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Vietnam-Death-in-custody-Advocacy-Open-letters-2017-ENG.pdf
https://www.voatiengviet.com/a/dieu-tran-tai-ha-van-my-ve-nguyen-huu-tan-chet-trong-khi-bi-cau-luu-o-vinh-long/3867276.html

Nguyen Huu Tan was arrested by officials from the provincial Office of Police Investigation on the morning of 2 May 2017 in Binh Minh township, Vinh Long province. His home was searched and he was accused of breaching Article 88 of the Vietnamese Penal Code by allegedly "disseminating documents with contents against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam". However, authorities have not provided any information regarding the specific materials alleged to be in the possession of Nguyen Huu Tan or distributed by him. Nor is it clear what, if any, evidence was found during the search of the house. In any event, peaceful criticism of State institutions or authorities is protected by the human right to freedom of expression and must not be criminalised. Nevertheless, Nguyen Huu Tan's family say an arrest warrant was read and he was taken away and detained at the temporary detention centre of Vinh Long Provincial Police in the early hours of 3 May, where he later died the same day.


Tan's sister

Nguyen Huu Tan

On 20 June 2017, the parents of Nguyen Huu Tan received a 1.5-page notice, dated 8 June, summarizing the conclusions from an investigation into the death carried out by the Office of Police Investigation, Vinh Long Provincial Police – that is, the same police force that was responsible for his arrest. According to the notice, the investigation concluded that Nguyen Huu Tan committed suicide by cutting his own throat with a "knife" obtained from the briefcase of an investigator, an act which the investigation determined had been committed "without any influence or assistance by another individual". The same explanation regarding the act of suicide was provided verbally to Nguyen Huu Quang, the father of Nguyen Huu Tan, when he was shown his son's body shortly after noon on 3 May. Without further explanation, the notice also stated that two officials had been "partially responsible" for the death and had therefore been demoted.

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Nguyen Huu Tan's Death...

According to Nguyen Huu Quang, the injuries he saw on his son's body suggest that he may have been tortured and killed in police custody. He believes the explanation provided by police, and the conclusion of the investigation, are inconsistent and contradictory. When he was shown Nguyen Huu Tan's body he was lying on his back in a pool of
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blood. He had a cut across his throat that ran almost from ear to ear and was about 5 cm wide. His windpipe was severed and his neck bone exposed. His forehead was bruised and the skull around the forehead and the side of his head was soft. However, despite the claim that he had committed suicide by cutting his own throat, Nguyen Huu Quang observed no blood on his son's hands. Also, the length, width and depth of the cut, including severance of the windpipe, made it seem unlikely that the wound was self-inflicted.

After the death of his son, Nguyen Huu Quang was shown two different video clips by the police, which purported to show his son committing suicide. The face(s) of the man or men in the videos who were alleged to be his son could not be seen. In the first, shorter video clip the man shown allegedly cutting his own throat used a knife in his left hand, while Nguyen Huu Tan was right-handed. Nguyen Huu Quang stated that he was later shown a longer video recording that showed a man cutting his throat in a different manner to the man in the first video. He has voiced suspicions that both videos were staged.

The family of Nguyen Huu Tan wished to take his body home after his death and to have an independent autopsy performed. However, according to the family, the police did not release the body for several hours. During that time, the body was cleaned and the cut on Nguyen Huu Tan's throat was stitched up. His body was placed in a coffin which was then screwed shut. The police brought the coffin to the family's house, which was surrounded by police. According to the family, when they opened the coffin and attempted to take photographs of the body, police confiscated or destroyed their phones. Local officials then pressured them to bury or cremate the body as soon as possible. The body was therefore buried before any medical evidence could be obtained.

Nguyen Huu Quang says that his family have previously been harassed and intimidated by the authorities, including being followed and visitors being obstructed. He believes that his family has been targeted by authorities because they refuse to join the local branch of the Hoa Hao Administrative Council, a government-aligned body that is believed to monitor the activities of Hoa Hao Buddhists.

Army Illegally Appropriating & Building on Saigon Airport Land

http://www.nguoi-viet.com/tin-trong-ngay/quan-doi-lam-quyen-pha-dat-phi-truong-tan-son-nhat/

With land being scarce in and around Saigon, the Army of communist Vietnam appropriated land reserved for the Saigon Tan Son Nhat Airport and built for itself a fancy golf course preventing future expansion of the airport. According to the Worker Journal, the administrative committee of Tan Binh Province urgently sent to the Administrative Committee of the City asking for guidance about dealing with the many illegal constructions being raised on airport land.
Once again the communist Party put itself above the law.

Illegal Deforestation in Lam Dong

In Lam Dong Province, central highland of Vietnam, in the commune of Da The, about 7 hectares (17 acres) of land on three hills had been illegally deforested in early June 2017. About 1,400 huge trees, large and small had been taken down, some with a circumference of a few meters.
Local people mentioned that the forests here are so dense that "ants could not get through, but elephants could."
Local translation: poor people could not do it, only well-connected people could.

http://www.nguoi-viet.com/viet-nam/rung-da-teh-bi-tan-pha-nghiem-trong/

Reader's Comments

With reference to Newsletter #105:

The Bruton Summary of TTU Conference: discussion of Gawthorpe Paper makes one awful error. Tran Ngoc Chau was NOT a VC deserter. He was former Viet Minh who left that organization in 1949, subsequently took important positions during the 1st Republic, was twice Privince Chief in Kien Hoa, and an elected member of the Lower House until arrested and jailed for having contact with his brother who was in fact a member of the communist party. Read Chau's biographical account.

2. The Gawthorpe paper itself, but I hope not forthcoming book, is vacuum with respect to examination of some CORDS deficiencies and anomalies.

a. As an example: the CORDS Pacification Research Teams although not accompanied by Americans, were directed by Americans, and the core was pretty much composed of the cadre with whom I had worked in a variety of projects, including one with Special Forces from late 1963 into the spring of 1967.

b. There was no American CORDS presence within the RVN Presidency. There was an American presence within the Prime Ministry.

c. Due to RVN organizational problems, then the 1968 Tet Offensive, CORDS with the RVN did not really get "cooking" until late 1968.

d. An important advisory issue was that Phung Hoang (Phoenix) at Region and Province was only partially integrated with CORDS.

e. A significant conceptual anomaly is that planning and resources were based on village government whereas for rural Vietnamese village was often regarded as (tax collector and police) intrusive; and recognizing same, the measurement of attitude and progress was not by village, but by hamlets.

Frank Scotton: field operations officer VN 1962-1967, and special assistant for William Colby 1970-1971; thereafter some other duties.