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## **SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE**



**To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture**

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### **The Hue Massacre: A Study of Communist Policies & Tactics in Vietnam**

*Paul Schmehl*

<http://blog.vvfh.org/2015/01/the-hue-massacre-a-study-of-communist-policies-and-tactics-in-vietnam/>

One of the most persistent myths about the Vietnam War is that PAVN (People's Army of Viet Nam) and PLAF (People's Liberation Armed Forces) troops were Vietnamese patriots fighting for their independence. While there is no doubt that some of those who fought on the North Vietnamese side believed that wholeheartedly, that was never the goal of their leadership. The goal of the North from the very beginning was a communist tyranny.<sup>1</sup> They pursued that goal to the exclusion of all else.

PAVN troops were North Vietnamese regulars (known as NVA by American troops). Many were conscripts. Some were chained to their weapons<sup>2, 3</sup> to force them to fight.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps as many as 20% of them succumbed to disease on the Ho Chi Minh trail before they ever fired a shot.

PLAF troops were South Vietnamese "Viet Cong" regulars and National Liberation Front irregulars. Many were volunteers, but some were conscripted. Both forces were under the direct command and control of North Vietnam throughout the war. They followed the policies, strategies and tactics provided to them by the communist leadership.

A massacre occurred in Hue that never received the attention it should have in the US media or in academia. It involved both PAVN and PLAF troops. Unlike the My Lai massacre, which was front-page news for months and is still talked about today,<sup>5</sup> the massacre in Hue, which was ten times larger than My Lai, was covered briefly, inaccurately and then promptly ignored.<sup>6</sup> More to the point, the Hue massacre was symptomatic of a much larger problem that was ignored by the US media.

Apologists for the Vietnamese communists<sup>7</sup> have exploited this silence to argue that a massacre did not occur, that there was no communist policy to murder thousands of people and that what murders did occur were the result of revenge attacks and the passions of battle. Frances Fitzgerald, the author of the Pulitzer Prize winning study of the Vietnam war, *Fire in the Lake*, wrote, "Nothing like this reverse My Lai ever occurred in the recorded history of the war."<sup>8</sup>

Once the graves were unearthed in Hue the evidence was irrefutable. Many of the bodies had their hands, and sometimes legs, tied. More than a few had been buried alive and had no wounds at all. Many had been bludgeoned to death or shot in the back of the head. A few were beheaded. Rather than battle damage, the bodies provided incontrovertible proof that a massacre had occurred.

This didn't stop the apologists, however. They worked hard to minimize the evidence. They argued that the dead civilians were the result of allied bombings, napalm attacks and the heavy shelling that they claimed was excessive. They misrepresented and lied about the evidence in an effort to "prove" that the RVN was lying about the massacre.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, the public was led to believe that the bulk of the civilian casualties in Hue were due to Allied bombings and artillery<sup>10</sup> and Hue was forgotten.<sup>11</sup>

The purpose of this article is to examine the orders, the after action reports and the results of the attack by PAVN and PLAF troops in Hue during the Tet offensive to determine whether the massacre was the result of official communist policy or not and what the magnitude of the massacre was.

The information contained in this article comes from a number of sources. Primarily four were used;

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a book on the Massacre written by Alje Vennema, a Dutch-Canadian doctor who lived in Hue and witnessed the battle and the massacres and interviewed a number of victims' relatives, a report written by Douglas Pike for US AID, a report compiled by the Government of South Vietnam, and a US press release that included map coordinates as well as grave and body counts.

Vennema is an interesting case. D. Gareth Porter cites him (falsely)<sup>12</sup> in his articles claiming the massacre is a myth. Vennema was opposed to the war and believed the communists were the answer to Vietnam's struggles.<sup>13</sup>

*"By 1967 after spending five years in South Vietnam as a medical volunteer running a provincial hospital, I had become so appalled by the war and the American involvement that I longed for its end with ever-increasing speed. To that end I became involved in the war's controversies. At that time I felt that the National Liberation Front offered the only solution to the corruption and incessant warfare."*

Despite his favorable feelings toward the Viet Cong, Vennema could not get the thoughts of what happened out of his head.<sup>14</sup>

*"After leaving Vietnam in April 1968, I was caught up by the anti-war fever, gave public speeches, and was asked question about the city of Hue, as to what exactly happened. When asked to write an article on the city of Hue by the New York Review of Books disclaiming allegations of the South Vietnamese government that an efficient slaughter had taken place, I started to reflect, and more and more incidents and names of friends came to mind. The obsession to find out what really had happened would not let me go, and as a result I returned to Hue several times, again and again looking, searching, tracing contacts, visiting villages and families of the bereaved. Bit by bit I became aware of the real impact of the tragedy that had taken place and felt that the truth about the city of Hue should be made known, to be inscribed in the annals of history alongside the names of Lidice, Putte and Warsaw."*

Vennema's article was never published. Apparently the truth was of no interest to the New York Review of Books. Vennema was forced to self-publish in order to get his story told. Today the book is hard to find, only available in a few libraries, out of print and unavailable for sale anywhere.

The value of Vennema's book cannot be overestimated. It is a clear admission against interest, as he admits in his Preface. There is no more valuable evidence of the truth of a matter. Yet, contra Porter's claims, Vennema's book supports not only Pike's study (which Porter concludes "must be judged unworthy of serious consideration"<sup>15</sup>) but the other studies in many respects as well.<sup>16</sup>

### The Orders

The battle of Hue lasted from Jan 31st, 1968 to Feb 25th, 1968. The PAVN and PLAF had several missions;<sup>17</sup> Conduct a general attack and uprising, overthrow the governmental apparatus in the City of Hue and the Province of Thua Thien, establish a revolutionary administration and continue to pursue and counterattack ARVN and Allied forces to protect the gains that they had made.

These missions were described in tremendous detail in a 3500-page document issued on Jan 26th, 1968 by the Tri-Thien-Hue Political Directorate.<sup>18</sup> The political cadres' job was spelled out as follows:

*'Operating in close support of the regular military and guerrilla elements, the political cadre were to:*

- destroy and disorganize the Republic of Viet-Nam's (RVN) administrative machinery "from province and district levels to the city wards, streets, and wharves;"*
- motivate the people of Hue to take up arms, pursue the enemy, seize power, and establish a revolutionary government;*
- motivate (recruit) local citizens for military and "security" forces .. transportation and supply activities, and to serve wounded soldiers . . . ;"*
- "pursue to the end (and) punish "spies, reactionaries, and "tyrants" — i. e. , government administrators, civil servants, police, and others employed by or notable adherents of the Republic of Viet-Nam; and*

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— “maintain order and security in the city” — i. e. , control the population’

This mission for one area of the city, the Phu Ninh ward, included the following instructions:<sup>19</sup>

**“Annihilate all spies, reactionaries, and foreign teachers (such as Americans and Germans) in the area. Break open prisons. Investigate cadre, soldiers and receptive civilians imprisoned by the enemy. Search for tyrants and reactionaries who are receiving treatment in hospitals.**

The orders for Target Area 2 (“the Phu Vinh ward”) were similar;

**“Annihilate the enemy in the area... Rally the Buddhist force to advance the isolation of reactionaries who exploit the Catholics of Phu Cam”. The orders for Target Area 3 (“the wharves along the An Cuu River and from Truong Sung to the Kho Ren Bridge”) followed the same pattern; “Search for and pursue spies, tyrants and reactionaries hiding near the wharf... Motivate the people in the areas along the River to annihilate the enemy.” For Target Area 4 (the district including Phu Cam and the Binh Anh, Truong Giang, Truong Cuu and An Lang sections) the orders were; “Search for and pursue spies and reactionaries in the area... Destroy the power and influence of reactionary leaders...” For Area 1, Cell 3 was assigned the job of “Annihilation of tyrants and the elimination of traitors.”**

Similar “security” cells would fan out throughout Hue tracking down “spies” and “reactionaries” and “tyrants”. The daughter of the deputy district chief of Trieu Phong in Quang Tri province reported that communist troops first came looking for her father at 2:00 AM on the morning of Feb 1st, mere hours after they had entered Hue. Three days later he was gone, taken away for “10 days of re-education”. His body was never found.<sup>20</sup>

Some Top Secret PAVN documents were captured in June 1968 by US 1st Cav troops operating in the mountains west of Hue. Among the documents was a communist directive written two days before the battle began. It read<sup>21</sup>,

*“For the purpose of a lengthy occupation of Hue, we should immediately liberate the rural areas and annihilate the wicked GVN administrative personnel.*

*Specific Mission .... We must attack the enemy key agencies, economic installations, and lines of communications. We must also annihilate the enemy mobile troops, reactionary elements and tyrants.”*

On Feb 1st, the provincial administration, having taken control of Hue, issued a directive that ordered the troops, in part<sup>22</sup>,

*“To wipe out all puppet administrative organs of the puppet Thieu-Ky (President Thieu, Vice President Ky) clique at all levels in the province, city and town down to every single hamlet.”*

On the same day, the Liberation Front radio announced<sup>23</sup>,

*“We tell our compatriots that we are determined to topple the regime of the traitorous Thieu-Ky clique and to punish and annihilate those who have been massacring and oppressing our compatriots...we ask our compatriots to...help us arrest all the U.S.-puppet cruel henchmen.”*

A VC commander who defected in June 1969 and revealed the massacre of 500 people at Da Mai Creek stated that<sup>24</sup>

*“the Viet Cong district chief told him the mass murder was specifically authorized by the South Vietnamese Communist command on grounds that the victims had been traitors to the revolution.”*

It is clear from their orders and the careful planning that went into their attack that along with a military victory, the High Command in Hanoi also expected the PAVN and PALF to “annihilate” and “punish” the city leadership, civil servants and anyone else who supported the RVN. Precisely what that meant in practical terms would be revealed over the next 19 months.

### The After Action Reports

On Feb 4th, Radio Hanoi announced<sup>25</sup>,

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*"After one hour's fighting the Revolutionary Armed Forces occupied the residence of the puppet provincial Governor (in Hue), the prison and the offices of the puppet administration . . . **The Revolutionary Armed Forces punished most cruel agents of the enemy and seized control of the streets . . . rounded up and punished dozens of cruel agents and caused the enemy organs of control and oppression to crumble.**"*

Communist troops, in concert with the local communists, roamed through the city with lists of people who were to be eliminated. A 70-year-old man was summarily executed in the street simply for refusing to obey the troops.<sup>26</sup> Some were executed in front of their families and left lying on the lawn for the family to bury. In some cases the entire family was murdered.<sup>27</sup>

On Feb 14th, the Thua Thien-Hue People's Revolutionary Committee issued a statement that read in part<sup>28</sup>,

*"Concerned over the country's survival and their own fate, on 31 January 1968, the Thua Thien-Hue people rose up holding weapons in their hands, smashed the puppet ruling apparatus from the provincial to the village and hamlet levels, and completely liberated the rural areas and the city of Hue. The enemy has suffered disastrous defeats. **A number of ringleaders of the puppet administration have surrendered to the people or have been arrested and have been detained by the revolutionary forces.** Except for some localities and scattered guard posts which have not yet been liquidated, the Thua Thien-Hue puppet administration has basically disintegrated."*

An entry in a captured communist document dated Feb 22nd stated<sup>29</sup>,

*"Troop proselyting by the VC/NVA forces was not successful because the troops had to devote themselves to combat missions. Moreover, they were afraid of being discovered by the enemy. **It was very difficult for them to handle POW's so they executed the policy of "catch and kill."***

A February 25th captured communist document detailed some of the successes of the Special Action Company of the NVA 6th Regiment.<sup>30</sup>

***"We captured and exterminated thousands of people of the revolutionary network. From province to village we broke the enemy's administrative grip for the people to rise."***

A report written immediately after the battle by a political officer of the People's Revolutionary Party listed 2,826

*"administrative personnel, nationalist political party members, 'tyrants' and policemen that were killed by their troops."<sup>31</sup>*

That would turn out to be less than 50% of the total murdered, abducted and missing. 4062 civilians murdered or abducted were identified<sup>32</sup>, some as young as 1-year-old and others as old as 90-years-old. Approximately 1800 disappeared and were never found. Many bodies were never identified.

Another document, undated but written by a senior political officer and marked "ABSOLUTE SECRET" <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup> reported on the results of the political operation.

***"Huong Thuy District: ...We also killed one member of the Dai Viet Party Committee, one senator of South Vietnam, 50 Quoc Dan Dang Party members, six Dai Viet Party members, 13 Can Lao Nhan Vi Party members, three captains, four first lieutenants, and liberated 35 hamlets with 32,000 people.... Phu Vang District...We eliminated 1,892 administrative personnel, 38 policemen, 790 tyrants, six captains, two first lieutenants, 20 second lieutenants, and many NCOs."**<sup>35</sup>*

The same document contained a passage that read:<sup>36</sup>

*"The people joined our soldiers in their search for tyrants, reactionaries and spies. For instance, Mrs. Xuan followed our soldiers to show the houses of the tyrants she knew, although she had only six days before giving birth to a child."*

In March 1968, in the official Hanoi press, the North reported,<sup>37</sup>

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*"Actively combining their efforts with those of the People's Liberation Armed Forces and population, other self-defense and armed units of the city of Hue arrested and called to surrender the surviving functionaries of the puppet administration and officers and men of the puppet army who were skulking. Die-hard cruel agents were punished."*

A March 13th, 1968 entry in captured documents reviewed the successes of the attack on Hue.<sup>38</sup>

***"Enormous victory: We annihilated more than 3,000 tyrannical puppet army and government administrative personnel, including the Deputy Province Chief of Thua Thien."***

A report written by the commander of the 6th Regiment on March 30 stated that they had captured thousands of:<sup>39</sup>

***"local administrative personnel, puppet troops, and cruel tyrants" and successfully "annihilated members of various reactionary political parties, henchmen, and wicked tyrants."***

It also stated that they had ***"killed 1,000 local administrative personnel, spies and cruel tyrants."***

On April 26, 1968, Hanoi, reacting to the discovery of mass graves in Hue, announced that the people murdered by their troops were,<sup>40</sup>

*"hooligan lackeys who had incurred blood debts of the Hue compatriots and who were annihilated by the Front's Armed Forces in the early spring of 1968."*

This is an official admission by the government of North Vietnam that their troops committed murders in Hue under orders from High Command. In other words, it was the official policy of the communists to murder people.

On April 27, 1969, Radio Hanoi criticized authorities in Hue and South Vietnam, stating,<sup>41</sup>

*"In order to cover up their cruel acts, the puppet administration in Hue recently played the farce of setting up a so-called committee for the search for burial sites of the hooligan lackeys who had owed blood debts to the Tri-Thien-Hue compatriots and who were annihilated by the Southern Armed Forces and people in early Mau Than spring."*

Here the communist command, probably realizing that they had implicated themselves in the murders, attempted to cover up their crimes by blaming them on "the Southern Armed Forces and the people". The subterfuge wouldn't work, however, because it was well known that Hanoi had complete command and control of all Southern forces.

A cadre diary captured by 1st US Air Cavalry Division troops contained an entry that read:<sup>42</sup>

***"The entire puppet administrative system from hamlet to province was destroyed or disintegrated. More than 3,000 persons were killed. The enemy could never reorganize or make up for his failure. Although he could immediately use inexperienced elements as replacements, they were good for nothing."***

In December 1968 the Hue City People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee released a summary of the Party's accomplishments during Tet. The summary included the following statement:<sup>43</sup>

***"Thousands of tyrants were killed. Many reactionary factions and organizations were exterminated."***

That same month, Don Oberdorfer reported in the Washington Post,<sup>44</sup>

*"Ho Ty was arrested by the government police on Sept. 4 this year. At the time of his arrest, he was party secretary for a section of Hue city...Ho Ty reported that the part of the plan from higher headquarters was to destroy the government machinery of Hue and the people who made it work.....He said the killings were planned and executed by a separate group in charge of security."*

In January 1970, NLF Liberation Radio, referring to the events in Hue two years previous announced: *"The people of Hue dealt the enemy proper punishing blows, and wicked agents paid for their sins. Many of them were tried by people's courts."* The

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broadcast also criticized the Hue authorities for *"opening up the graves of the wicked agents punished by our people during the Mau Than Tet."*<sup>45</sup>

In 1987, at a Hanoi conference to discuss the history of the Tet offensive, Colonel General Tran Van Quang, one of the commanders for the Hue operation, assessed the strengths and weaknesses of his forces, citing as one of their strengths:<sup>46</sup>

*"We resolutely carried out the orders and fulfilled the requirements set out for us by the High Command. We motivated our cadre, soldiers, and the civilian population through the use of the slogans, 'Tri-Thien fights for Tri-Thien and for the entire nation,' and 'heroically and resolutely conduct attacks and uprisings.'"*

In February 1988 Vietnamese Communist leaders admitted "mistakes" were made in Hue. Col Nguyen Quoc Khanh, commander of part of the forces that took over Hue stated that "There was no case of killing civilians purposefully.....Those civilians who were killed were killed accidentally, in cross fire." But he admitted, "some rank and file soldiers may have committed individual mistakes."<sup>47</sup>

It's doubtful that the Vietnamese Communist leaders will ever admit to the crimes they committed in Hue, but the evidence shows that they not only knew about it, they planned and ordered it and proudly reported it afterwards.

Given the consistent nature of the orders that they were given, the enthusiastic reports of murders contained in the after action reports and the statement from a commander that they fulfilled the requirements set out for them by the High Command, it's hard to come to any other conclusion than that the PAVN and PLAF troops in Hue were doing exactly what they had been ordered to do by Hanoi; murder thousands of civilians.

### The Results

As the manifest evidence shows, eliminating "puppet administrative organs", "reactionary elements", "cruel agents" and "tyrants" was one of the missions of the PAVN and PLAF troops in Hue. They carried it out with discipline and precision. Bernard Weinraub, reporting in the New York Times on March 1st, wrote that 25% of the civil servants had shown up for work. Many of the others would be found in graves.<sup>48</sup>

On Feb 5th, Stephen Miller, a 27-year-old American Quaker serving with the US civil affairs office, was marched to a Catholic seminary at gunpoint and savagely beaten to death along with 4 Vietnamese civilians.<sup>49</sup> Catholic priests buried their bodies in the seminary yard. Six of his co-workers were also killed, and three were abducted. The body of one of them, Thomas W. Ragsdale, was found in a shallow grave in the Au Chau valley more than a year later.<sup>50</sup> The bodies of the other two abductees were never found.

That same day, three German professors from the medical mission of the University of Hue and one of the professor's wives were abducted by communist troops. Their bodies were found in a shallow grave on Apr 2nd. All four bodies had their hands tied behind their backs with barbed wire and a single gunshot wound to the back of the head.<sup>51</sup>

On February 8th Le Van Phu, a 47-year-old policeman was arrested at his home. His wife and children pleaded with the troops to no avail. He was shot in the head. Ngo Thong, a 66-year-old retired civil servant was arrested as well. He was found in a trench with 10 other victims. Some of them had been buried alive.<sup>52</sup>

On February 9th troops entered the house of Major Tu Ton Khan, Chief of the Rural Development Service in Hue. When his wife wouldn't tell the troops where he was they threatened to burn the house down. The Major came out of hiding and was marched out of the house. His body, hands tied behind the back and riddled with bullets, was found on Feb 28th.<sup>53</sup>

On February 17th Nguyen Van Dong, a 42-year-old policeman was rounded up. He was buried alive.<sup>54</sup>

On February 22nd troops came for Hoang Thi Tam Tuy, a 26-year-old market vendor and took her away for "re-education".

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Her body was found with legs and arms tied, a rag in her mouth and no wounds. She had been buried alive.

In one documented case<sup>55</sup>,

*"...a squad with a death order entered the home of a prominent community leader and shot him, his wife, his married son and daughter-in-law, his young unmarried daughter, a male and female servant and their baby. The family cat was strangled; the family dog was clubbed to death; the goldfish scooped out of the fishbowl and tossed on the floor. When the Communists left, no life remained in the house."*

In response to a recent inquiry regarding military eyewitnesses of the massacre, LTC Ronald Bower AUS (ret) told me the following<sup>56</sup>:

*We found another grave not long after the May 5th attack, of four Marines who had been in the City and were playing cards in a house when they were captured by the VC. They had their hands tied behind their backs and had each been shot in the head and buried in a grave not far from this one."*

The area LTC Bower refers to is in the Phu Thu district where about a thousand bodies were found. No record that I have access to refers to the murder of these four Marines. It should not be a surprise, then, to find discrepancies between accounts. It's doubtful that every grave was found or every body uncovered or every person accounted for. It's equally doubtful that any one account would report every grave found, unless it was an official governmental record.

These grisly scenes would be repeated over and over again hundreds of times every day. Once the battle was over, the civilian government of Hue reported that 1214 civilians were determined to be battle casualties; their locations and wounds testified to the fact that artillery shells, bombs, napalm or bullets killed them. 1260 were hospitalized and survived.<sup>57</sup> They also estimated that 5800 civilians were missing.<sup>58 59</sup>

Numerous eyewitness accounts testified to the brutal efficiency and deliberate planning of the murders. Four eyewitnesses escaped from certain death to tell their stories, two of them from the Da Mai creek slaughter.<sup>60</sup> Their story is chilling.

*Suddenly, I overheard two VC cadres talking to each other:*

*"In 15, 20 minutes, we'll kill them all"*

*I was trembling. Reaching close to my friend sitting right in front of me:*

*"Try to get loose and escape! In 15 minutes we'll all be shot dead!"*

*It rains. The wire was slippery, after a while, we managed to free ourselves but stayed still, scared of being found out. I whispered:*

*"When I tap gently on your back, let's run!"*

*The VC woke us up, in a loud voice to make all of us heard, one of them said: "We are arriving to the reform camp. Those who have jewelry, money, watches, cigarette lighters ... give them all to us, you are not allowed to keep them. You will have them back once you have been reformed and completed the learning."*

*So they robbed us of everything and put all into the knapsacks. The one who stood close to me had on him a dozen of radios taken from those in the city (downtown). The rifle on one hand, things taken on the other, he slowed down, walked behind the others by a distance. When we started going downhill, hearing the running water, I tapped gently on the shoulder of my friend. Both of us, pulled out our hands, threw ourselves out of the line. I gave the communist cadre (carrying the radios) a hell kick. He tumbled over! We hurled into the jungle ... It was dark, in the middle of the jungle; the VC did not chase us.*

*Once the group had gone away for a while, we crawled out, walked back to the other direction. In about 15 to 20 minutes, we heard from the creek down below the resounding of AK gunfire, explosions of grenades, which were thundering, flaring up a corner of the jungle. Crying, screaming and howling voices were heard from far away ... horrible! It was around midnight or half past 12, on the 8th day of Tet.*

More than 500 skulls were found at Da Mai Creek. 428 of the victims were identified.

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Another eyewitness escapee recounted the following story<sup>61</sup>:

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

He told South Vietnamese investigators later that when the column halted for a rest, he freed his hands and slipped away in the darkness. From a hiding place he witnessed the following scene: "The larger prisoners were separated into pairs, tied together back to back and shot. The others were shot singly. All were dumped into two shallow graves, including those who had been wounded but were not dead,"

Another escapee, hamlet official Phan Duy, got away at the last possible moment. As his grave was being dug (for himself and nine other men), he managed to slip from his bonds and run away, with one of the guards firing at him as he ran.<sup>62</sup>

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

Asked to recount his experience of being held captive in a house for seven days, Duy responded,

*"I remember on the second day I was held in prison in that house, other people from my hamlet told me the Vietcong had entered my home and killed my mother. When I returned I found her body still in the house. I was her only son."*

Several captured enemy identified grave locations that were unknown at the time, including the horrible slaughter at Da Mai Creek where 500 innocent civilians lost their lives.

Unfortunately no precise forensic analysis of the statistics of the murders is extant, to my knowledge. We are left with eyewitness accounts as well as government sponsored reports, news articles and historians' accounts that attempt to provide varying levels of detail regarding the massacre. The reports are disjointed and imprecise, the dates of production vary greatly, the names of locations of graves don't always match, and the actual numbers of bodies discovered are difficult to discern at times. I have attempted to sort them out by matching accounts, as much as possible, on a spreadsheet.<sup>63</sup>

The results show that, at a minimum, about 2,802 bodies were uncovered,<sup>64</sup> possibly as many as 3,500. Since the communists boasted of killing 3000 or more, it seems that would be an appropriate bottom number. The maximum would be the entire 5,800 that were determined to be missing. It's likely that at least a few ended up in prisons in the north, but it's impossible to know with any precision exactly how many were murdered.

It's doubtful that all the graves were ever found. The government identified, by name and place of residence, 4062 individuals who were either murdered or abducted.<sup>65</sup> 1800 were never found, but some of them are almost certainly part of the 4062 that were identified. A significant number of the bodies recovered were unidentifiable due to decomposition or facial damage caused by shots to the head or bludgeoning.

The true extent of the slaughter wasn't known for more than 18 months, as graves filled with bodies continued to be discovered purely by accident. In one case a farmer found a wire sticking up in his field. When he pulled on it, a hand popped out of the ground.<sup>66</sup> In another case, a soldier sitting down for lunch reached for his C-rations and grabbed a foot instead. That's when he realized he was sitting on a gravesite.<sup>67</sup>

An ARVN soldier on patrol south of Hue noticed a wire sticking out of the ground. Thinking it was a booby trap, he very carefully worked to uncover it. He discovered the body of an old man, his hands tied together with the wire. Two days later 130 bodies had been uncovered.<sup>68</sup>

In each of the graves victims were found who had been shot in the back of the head, others who had been buried alive and still others who had been beaten to death. A few may have been battle deaths or dead PAVN or PLAF troops, but most of them were obviously murdered. Some were beheaded. Some were tied up to the Citadel gate and left there to be killed by

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artillery or bombing and strafing runs.<sup>69</sup>

Some have tried to argue that the murders were few in number, that they were committed by rogue troops or that they were understandable given the circumstances. All these arguments fail in the light of the evidence. (A more comprehensive study of the lies told by apologists will be forthcoming.)

Given the numerous eyewitness accounts, the bodies uncovered with hands tied, shot through the head or buried alive, the communist orders issued and the gloating after action reports, the idea that there was not a massacre in Hue of thousands of people defies logic and is soundly refuted by the preponderance of evidence.

The only question that remains is how many were killed. We will never know a specific number, but it seems the minimum must be the 4062 that have been identified plus the more than 800 bodies that were found but never identified.<sup>70</sup> Whether the remaining 1000 were among the unidentified bodies, were murdered, died during the arduous journey through the jungles to North Vietnam or died in prison seems a moot point. They disappeared and were never seen again.<sup>71</sup>

### South Vietnamese Reprisals?

The Italian journalist, Oriana Fallaci, visited Hue in February before the battle was over. In fact, she was shot at by retreating communist troops. She reported that a priest, whom she did not identify, told her that<sup>72</sup>:

*"After the 'Liberation,' at least 200 who were suspected of being Vietcong or of having collaborated with the Vietcong were killed by the South Vietnamese. Without even a summary trial, without any exact accusation. Some machine gun bursts and that was that. The massacre began as soon as the Marines had taken the Imperial Palace, and it's only the corpses of those 200 that have been recovered.. Altogether, there have been 1,100 killed. Mostly students, university teachers, priests. Intellectuals and religious people at Hue have never hidden their sympathy for the NLF."*

The Fallaci story is confusingly worded, it conflates the communist executions with the purported revenge executions, and I found no corroborating news reports. It also makes an impossible claim – that the supposed assassination began several days after authorities had announced that there would be no executions. Furthermore, there were no Catholic priests in Hue who supported the communists. The communists killed four of them and shot two others while they were in Hue.<sup>73</sup>

More importantly, the Marines never took the Imperial Palace as the "priest" claims. It had been decided that the South Vietnamese should do that. The 2nd Battalion 3rd Armored Regiment ARVN took the palace on the 24th of February.<sup>74</sup> By that time the media had already reported that 200 collaborators were in custody, that there would be no executions without trials and that military tribunals would be held to determine guilt or innocence.

Eyewitnesses testified that people were taken away and never seen again within the first few days, long before U.S. Marines were even able to cross the river. Many of those bodies were later disinterred and identified at the Gia Hoi School and the Tang Quang Tu Pagoda. A Buddhist monk stated that he and his fellow monks "listened nightly to the screams for mercy and the sound of pistol and automatic rifle fire as people were executed in a plowed field behind the pagoda."<sup>75</sup> The bodies were identified as those of students, university teachers and priests (among others) as the priest states, but they were killed by the communists, not by revenge squads.

The Fallaci story was apparently the genesis of a rumor that South Vietnamese hit squads were rounding up civilians who had sided with the communists and executing them. Don Oberdorfer, Stanley Karnow and Marilyn Young all reported the executions.

The first to repeat the story was Don Oberdorfer in Tet!. He wrote<sup>76</sup>:

*It was reliably reported that a South Vietnamese intelligence unit employed the confusion to send out "black teams" of assassins to eliminate some of those believed to have aided the enemy. Some of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong suspects who were brought into Hue in those days mysteriously disappeared, with no record available of what happened to them.*

*Continue on next page*

## Hue Massacre...

This is an odd report. First he states that the “black teams” were searching for those who “aided the enemy”. Then he writes about communist military people who supposedly disappeared without a trace. Those were the enemy, not those who aided them. Who were the supposed assassins eliminating? Collaborators? Or the enemy? Why would they need to eliminate the enemy? Wouldn’t they already be fighting the enemy and trying to eliminate them?

Oberdorfer, however, adds something not found in the Fallaci report.

*On March 14 more than twenty prisoners, including three women and some schoolboys, were brought into provincial military headquarters in the devastated city with burlap bags covering their heads and their hands tightly wired behind their backs. Guards began beating some of the captives with sticks and fists. After one man confessed he had been an economic and finance cadre for the Viet Cong, two guards beat him senseless, one kicking him brutally and the other standing on his face. An American who was present was affected particularly by one of the prisoners, who under the burlap bag was a very pretty girl with long, silky black hair and clear complexion. She was described as a Viet Cong nurse. The prisoners were taken into a stone building which served as a temporary house of detention and, according to general belief, a place of execution. There was no trace of them in the morning.*

Oberdorfer provides no source for the information in the first paragraph, nor does he indicate that he personally investigated the story. It appears that he’s referring to Fallaci’s report (“reliably reported”), but he doesn’t state that. The following paragraph appears to be original reporting and likely reports the facts as he was able to ascertain them.

In Stanley Karnow’s *Vietnam A History* he wrote<sup>77</sup>:

*“Clandestine South Vietnamese teams slipped into Hue after the Communist occupation to assassinate suspected enemy collaborators; they threw many of the bodies into common graves with the Vietcong’s victims.”*

Eight years later, Marilyn Young included a similar account in her book, *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990*.<sup>78</sup>

*“At the same time, in the last days of the NLF occupation of Hue, teams of Saigon government assassins fanned out through the city with their own list of targets, underground NLF supporters who had revealed themselves in the course of occupying the city.”*

Neither writer provides any attribution for the source of the aside. Both likely trace their genesis to the Fallaci story and the unnamed priest. (I was not able to find any news accounts other than Fallaci’s that related the story.)

Scott Laderman included it in his book, *Tours of Vietnam: War, Travel Guides and Memory* where he cited Fallaci, Karnow (citing the wrong page) and Young but no other sources.<sup>79</sup>

I reached out through contacts for accounts from anyone who was in Hue during that time. A source that would have reason to know if the ARVN had any assassination squads executing VC in Hue sent me this account:

*The only enemy we captured were VC/NVA snipers firing from the roof of a refugee building (former school house) when someone gave us this information. We captured them and sent them to the Provincial Interrogation Center (PIC).*

*The only atrocities I learned of were those committed by the VC/NVA. Along with a Marine Captain assigned to us by III MAF to assist the RDC Program, we dug up a common grave based upon reports the VC had executed an American at the Catholic Church. We located the body... which we later identified as Steve Miller, a career State Department officer who was visiting Hue. Steve spoke fluent Vietnamese. He had been tortured with his arms tied behind him with barbed wire and shot in the back of his head while on his knees.*

*According to secret reports from personnel in Hue, approximately 5,000 soldiers and civilians were murdered by the VC/NVA while they occupied the city. These reports cite the victims as both male and female, adult and children. Most were civilians and included teachers, civil servants, police, religious leaders, politicians, Hoi Chanhs – and the families of these people. They were all killed without a trial or any attempt to justify their murder. Several US civilians were also killed, as were several Germans. These reports are still classified, unfortunately.*

Given the slaughter the communists committed, it’s certainly possible (and believable) that the South Vietnamese troops would have wanted to take revenge.

*Continue on next page*

## Hue Massacre...

Contemporaneous reports, however, indicate that they did not, with the exception of the March 14 report by Oberdorfer.

On February 21, while the battle still raged, the Mayor of Hue, Lt. Col. Phan Van Khoa ordered that looters should be shot on sight and announced that there would be “public executions within two days of some Communist agents arrested recently.”<sup>80</sup>

The next day the New York Times reported<sup>81</sup> that a military tribunal was planned to try the collaborators, that authorities were holding 200 prisoners and that 30 of them were believed to be high-ranking communists. It also reported that

*“...on the basis of an order from General Lam, that there would be no executions in the city without military trials. He said yesterday that public executions would be necessary to restore order.”*

So while summary executions had been planned and announced by the Mayor of Hue, a higher-ranking official countermanded the order. The following day the Times reported that:<sup>82</sup>

*“...sources said he [Brig. Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan, Chief of South Vietnam Police] would interrogate a former Hue police chief, who is alleged to be one of the leaders of a Vietcong attack on the city, and politicians and militant Buddhists suspected of aiding or sympathizing with the Vietcong.”*

In late March, Stewart Harris, a London Times correspondent writing in the New York Times discussed the current situation.<sup>83</sup>

*According to the police chief, Doan Cong Lap, the Government has 477 Vietcong and North Vietnamese soldiers in custody. “What about suspects?” he was asked. “What about officials and civilians who should have supported the Government and either went over to the enemy or went into hiding until they saw the Government would win? How many of these have you taken?”*

*After three visits to the police chief and one to the new provincial chief, Colonel Than, the figure was given: “Nearly 300.” They also said that none of these people had been executed and that none had been brought to trial. Colonel Khoa, the provincial chief until two weeks ago, had been given temporary power to execute summarily any traitor holding a senior position. Moreover, six weeks ago the South Vietnamese promised to set up immediately a military tribunal in Hue. Yet no one has been tried.*

It’s difficult to imagine how 200 to 1100 prisoners would have been executed by hit squads yet 200 or “nearly 300” would be arrested and detained. Why wouldn’t they have killed them all? And why would 30 high-ranking communists be spared? Why were there no other news reports? Given Col. Than’s obvious desire to kill some of the prisoners, why weren’t some of them publicly executed?

There are several possible explanations for the Fallaci report. Perhaps there was a language barrier between Fallaci and the priest that caused her to write this confusing account. The priest could have been mistaken, basing his belief on the Mayor’s Feb. 21 announcement and then embellishing his account. The priest could have been a communist propagandist. Or the story could be true. If it’s true, there is no evidence supporting it, and there were no other news reports confirming it. It certainly seems there would have been, had it been true.

It seems clear that all the later reports with the exception of Oberdorfer’s account of March 14 relied on Fallaci’s report, but that report has issues that make it questionable at best. The report is at odds with all the other known evidence and, in my opinion, can be discounted as false. The March 14 account appears to be true and may indicate that more than those twenty were executed. Without more evidence, it’s difficult to say how many that could have been. It’s doubtful the number rose to 200 much less 1,100.

### Conclusions

The idea that there was no massacre in Hue doesn’t withstand a careful examination of the facts.

1. There were detailed orders given pre-battle that included eliminating pro-RVN people with detailed lists provided.
2. Multiple captured after action reports listed the numbers of people killed, in some cases even who they were by position and stated that the orders had been followed correctly.

*Continue on next page*

## Hue Massacre...

3. The numerous eyewitness accounts, both local Vietnamese and journalists, confirm that many people were executed. The manner of their deaths corresponds to the manner of death of the found bodies. Many of the dead also match the captured communist reports of who was killed.

4. Finally, the detailed reports of graves uncovered and bodies counted, corroborated by Pike's report, the US News release, the GVN report and Vennema's account confirm that a massacre did take place and provide evidence of its size.

In comparing accounts in Appendix A, it's clear that at least 3,000 bodies were found. The number of graves and gravesites is less clear for several reasons. Pike's report is in the form of a summary rather than providing needed detail. Vennema's account is incomplete, having concluded before all the bodies had been found. The GVN report varies significantly from the others in some sites yet matches others closely. It's difficult to know if it is more precise or inflated.

For example, in the Gia Hoi area, Vennema reports 203 bodies, Pike 170, the US News Release 200 and the GVN 425. Either the GVN number is incorrect or more bodies were discovered, but the report lists 22 graves, which matches the US News Release. I think it's likely the number was somewhere around 200. The GVN report may have conflated two different sites.

At the Tang Quang Tu Pagoda, Vennema has 43 bodies, Pike and the US report agree on 77 and the GVN report has 299. Given the other numbers the 299 is probably too high.

However, the GVN report agrees with every other report regarding the Imperial Tombs; 201 bodies were found (Vennema lists 203.) The reports also agree on the number of bodies at the Van Chi School (9) and the Cho Thuong marketplace (100).

Strangely, at Ap Dong Gi Tay, Vennema reports 110, Pike reports 100 and the GVN report has 75.

Given the numbers in these reports, it's impossible to say much with any certainty except in certain locations. The totals for each report do display an agreement that indicates that about 3,000 bodies were found.

Vennema has 2397 but is missing the November 1969 finds. Those would increase his total to at least 2637 and perhaps 3047. Pike has 2802 but there's a problem with his report. He states that 1200 bodies were found in the first phase (Feb-Apr) yet his total is only 915. (The US News Release that only covers the first phase has 1143.) Somehow Pike failed to account for about 240 bodies. Adding those to his total would push his total to 3047, agreeing with Vennema almost exactly on the first three phases (2397 vs 2392). The GVN report has 3373, just 1.4 times higher than Vennema's lowest possible number (2397 + 240 for the 4th phase — 2637).

Porter's claim that Vennema's report "found that the number of victims in the grave sites he examined were inflated in the U.S.-Saigon count by over seven-fold" is obviously false.<sup>84</sup> The greatest variance is the GVN report, and the others essentially agree with Vennema in the finds they list.

In the final analysis, it appears that about 5,000 people were murdered; about 3,000 bodies were found and about 2000 of those were identified. The rest were never found. 4,062 of the victims were eventually identified, and about another 1,000 disappeared into history without a trace.

Atrocities are a part of war. Every nation commits them. However, there is something decidedly perverse about elevating the My Lai story to a heightened level while ignoring the massacre in Tet, which was at least ten times as large. If My Lai was a massacre (and it certainly was), then Tet was a mega-massacre. Yet the media ignored it and so have historians.

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5. A search for "Hue Massacre" in the Internet TV News Archive returns zero relevant hits. A search for "My Lai Massacre" returns 21 relevant hits.
6. There are around 20 published books on My Lai. There is one on the Hue Massacre. Among the 41 newspaper articles that I was able to locate, most were 1 or 2 column inch articles buried pages deep in the paper. Very few were front-page news.
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13. Vennema, Alje The Viet Cong Massacre at Hue (New York: Vantage Press 1976) iii
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15. Porter
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Jan 24, 2015

## The Battle for Hue Nghia M. Vo

This is the chronology of the battle of Hue viewed by the communists as reported by Le Minh, NVA Battlefield commander. The battle was a three-pronged attack on the city of Hue on 31 January, 1968.

## Hue attacks

The attacks came from three different directions.

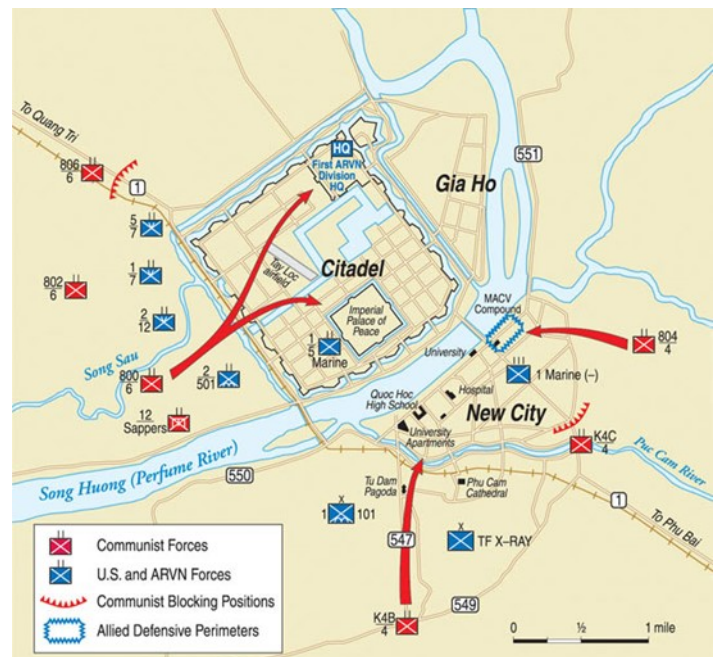
## 1. Attacks from the West and Northwest

At 0200, 31 January, the communists fired mortars and 122mm rockets at the command posts (CP) of the ARVN First Division, the Thua Thien Military District, the Dong Da Training Center, and the ARVN 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Battalion in An Cuu.

At 0233, a 4-man sapper unit in ARVN uniforms arrived at the West Gate, killed the guards, and opened the doors allowing Col. Nguyen Trong Tan's Sixth NVA Regiment to enter the Old City or Citadel. The 800<sup>th</sup> and 802<sup>nd</sup> Battalions that came from the Ashau Valley, moved in in an attempt to take control of the Tay Loc Airfield, the First Division headquarters at Mang Ca Fort, and the Imperial Palace.

A total of three NVA battalions (K-1, K-2, K-6) with elements of the 12<sup>th</sup> Sapper Battalion were involved on this front with local militia acting as guides.

At Tay Loc Airfield, they faced tough resistance from ARVN's Hac Bao (Black Panther) Company, reinforced by the First Division 1<sup>st</sup> Ordnance Company. "The heavy enemy [ARVN] fire enveloped the entire airfield. By dawn our troops were still unable to make headway."



## Battle for Hue...

While the fighting for the airfield raged on, the 802<sup>nd</sup> Battalion struck the First ARVN Division at Mang Ca Fort and managed to penetrate the compound. However, the 200-man defensive force of staff officers and clerks staved off enemy assaults. General Ngo Quang Truong was forced to call back most of Black Panther Company from Tay Loc Airfield to bolster the headquarters' defenses.

Around 0230 a battalion of NVA ninth Regiment (E9) moved to An Hoa village to engage ARVN's 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. Not finding the latter, which had been ordered elsewhere, the NVA battalion took hold of the Bach Ho Bridge, blasted a span to prevent reinforcements to cross the river.

Attacks from the Southeast

Two NVA battalions 416 and 418 took possession of the Dong Ba Gate.

An NVA force known as "Route 12" came from Phu Tu and Dap Da crossed the Truong Tien Bridge and took hold of the Thuong Tu Gate.

Attack from the South

At 0340, the NVA hit the US-MACV compound with mortars and rocket rounds before the assault by the 804<sup>th</sup> and K4B battalions of the NVA Fourth Regiment. After the Americans repulsed the initial attack, the NVA decided to maintain the siege of the compound.

On 31 January, the NVA attacked the Tam Thai military base in An Cuu village by sending three sapper units to overrun it. The two sapper units at the foot and on the flank of the base were repulsed but the one on the top managed to get inside the base. On 2 February, the ARVN mounted repeated assaults in order to retake the top of the hill. Many of the sappers fled, those who remained were eliminated.

On 31 January profiting of the attack on the Tam Thai Hill, Than Trong Mot, one of the two communist battlefield commanders led the NVA Fourth Regiment across the An Cuu River to go into Hue City itself. By around 0700, the first communist units were already in town. By 0800, the NVA raised the red-and-blue VC banner with its gold star over the Citadel flag tower.

The ARVN troops fought back hard. The NVA took four full days to occupy the 81<sup>st</sup> Ordnance Company, the Treasury, the Thua Thien Province Administrative Hall, and the Thua Thu Prison where they liberated 2,000 prisoners many of whom later joined the battle. The ARVN managed to hold on the Thua Thien Provincial Headquarters, Hue Radio station and the Navy Wharves.

### Resistance and Counterattacks

On 1 February, Tran Ngoc Hue and his Hac Bao (Black Panthers) joined forces with the 2<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Airborne Battalion to counterattack in the Citadel. They succeeded in recapturing Tay Loc Airfield after securing An Hoa and the North (Cua Hau) Gates two days later.

Pham Van Dinh's 2/3 fought house to house in an attempt to take back the New City (outside the Citadel). The NVA pulled back inside the Citadel to plan for a prolonged stand.

On 2 February, ARVN 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force Battalion commanded by Major Nha was helilifted to Mang Ca to help bolster the defense there.

On 3 February, the battle seesawed with no significant movements on either side. The NVA with an injection of two fresh battalions counterattacked and caused heavy casualties to ARVN's 4/3 Battalion.

On 4 February, both sides were exhausted after five days of intense fighting. Airborne forces overran NVA troops at An Hoa Gate before handing it over to the 1<sup>st</sup> Division troops.

NVA troops ran out of ammunition. Over 300 wounded troops could not be evacuated. Colonel Le Minh, one of the NVAS battlefield commander sent a cable to Hanoi saying that they "were out of ammunition." Hanoi cabled back ordering them to fight to the death and promising reinforcement soon.

On 6 February, the Americans finally entered the fight.

"Practically all the enemy positions have been destroyed, except for the puppet 1<sup>st</sup> Division in Mang Ca and isolated pockets of resistance. Thus, if our intention was to occupy the city, cause damage and boost up our political image then we have made it. But if we intend to reach a decisive victory then it's clear we are in difficulty... We decided to propose withdrawing from the city... I ordered the removal of war booty to our bases in the countryside and in the forest... We had to take our wounded and prisoners out of the city during the night of the seventh day going into the eighth."

*Continue on next page*



## Battle for Hue...

In the night of 7 February, the communists blew up one span of the Truong Tien Bridge on the Huong River. ARVN General Truong brought in the three battalions of the 3rd Regiment to join the fight for Hue.

On 8 February, ARVN 9<sup>th</sup> Airborne Battalion was ordered to take back the Thuong Tu Gate, the main south gate leading to the Imperial Palace.

On 9 February, the Americans threw a floating bridge across the Huong River to replace the Trang Tien and Bach Ho bridges that had been blown up.

The NVA attacked Mang Ca fort, but were pushed back incurring heavy casualties but no result. "We cabled Headquarters: 'We're out of ammunitions. Can now plan only for one day at a time.' Signed: Bay—Tin—Minh (e.g. Comrade Quang, Comrade Chuong, political commissar and me). About five hours later, we received a cable from Hanoi: 'Higher up will send you enough reinforcements to complete the mission.' Signed: Van—Dung—Thao (e.g. Comrades Vo Nguyen Giap, Van Tien Dung and Song Hao). Another cable followed from the Joint General Staff informing us that 2 infantry regiments and 1 artillery support regiment [were on the way] and that the 559 route will bring the supplies of ammo and other equipment to us; also will signal when to bomb Mang Ca. The last cable was signed by Comrade Van Tien Dung."

On 10 February, ARVN General Headquarters recalled the severely bloodied airborne battalions to Saigon. General Truong demanded that they be replaced by units of similar strength. GH relented by promising two battalions of Marines. Realizing the retaking of the Imperial City would be tough, Truong insisted on more help. MACV decided to send a US marine infantry battalion to take part in the battle of the citadel.

On 12 February, Vietnamese Marine Brigade A was helilifted to the Imperial City to replace the ARVN 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Brigade. Major Robert Thompson's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines (1/5) accompanied by five tanks and several ONTOS tracked vehicles, each with four 106mm recoilless rifles reached Truong's headquarters ready for battle.

Truong tasked the Third Regiment with retaking the southwestern portion of the Citadel now that he had two freshly arrived Marine reinforcement battalions.

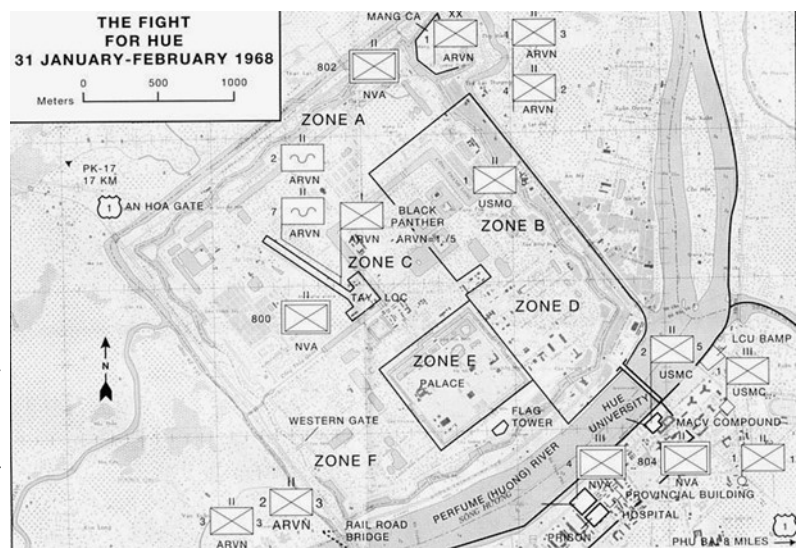
From 14 to 18 February, realizing that the ARVN advance in the southwest would cut critical logistic lines, the NVA reacted with violence. They threw fresh reinforcements and cut off 1/3 ARVN resulting in a very slow advance. The fighting was so bitter and confused that at one point Hue had to call in an air strike on his own parameter. Finally, on 16 February, the ARVN broke through and two days later reached the Chanh Tay Gate and the northwestern corner of the Citadel.

From 18 to 20 February, Gen. Truong sent Hue's Hac Bao to help the US marines and Dinh's 2/3 who had by then taken quite a few casualties.

On 21 February, the 1/5 Marines, the 2/3 ARVN, and the Hac Bao reached the southeastern wall of the Citadel. On the opposite flank, ARVN Marines pushed nearer to the Huu Gate, the last entrance to the Citadel remaining in NVA hands.

"On the 21<sup>st</sup> day, we reported the situation to the Ministry [of Defense in Hanoi], but got no response. We decided to withdraw because even if reinforcements arrived, they would not change the situation one bit."

On 22 February, 1968 at 0630, the NVA launched a surprised attack through the southwest wall aimed at exhausted elements of ARVN 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment and Vietnamese Marines. Hue and his 1/3 called for airstrikes and artillery support against the exposed NVA, then charged forward with bayonets fixed to discover amidst the smoldering wreckage piles of NVA bodies in fresh uniforms. Prisoner interrogations revealed that they had been told that the citadel was in communist hands and that they should go in to celebrate the victory.



*Continue on next page*

### Battel for Hue...

Gen. Truong gave the last and dangerous assignment to Dinh's 2/3 and Hue's 1/3 to assault the flag tower and take down the VC flag. Dinh and his American adviser chose to do a night raid to avoid the communist sharp shooters. At 0530 on 24 February, a volunteer climbed up the battered flag pole to raise the yellow and three red striped flag of the Republic.

**NB:** This summary is based on Nguyen Ngoc Bich's Chronology of the Battle of Hue published *Truyen Thong*, Winter-Spring 2008 with the quoted passages from an article by Le Minh (NVA battlefield commander), Hue trong Chien dich Mau Than ("Hue in the Tet Campaign") in *Song Huong* No 29, Mau Thin 1988.

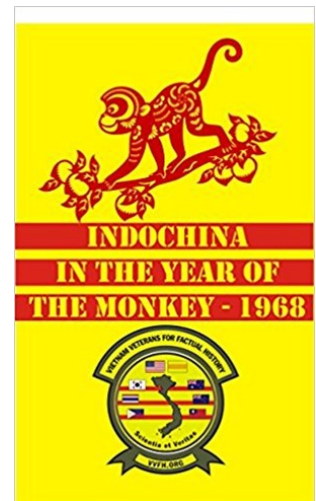
## Indochina in the Year of the Monkey—1968

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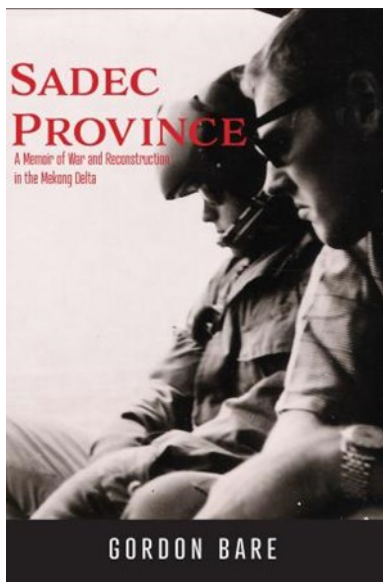
### Café Da in Chicago

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/vietnamese-cafe-pilsen-serves-sophisticated-044014364.html>

Many Vietnamese restaurants in Chicago are on Argyle Street in the Uptown neighborhood, but Ca Phe Dá in Pilsen offers Vietnamese food served at a slightly higher level. Vietnamese restaurants are on Argyle St in the Uptown Chicago neighborhood but Café Da in Pilsen offers Vietnamese food at a slightly higher level.

## Sadec Province *Gordon Bare*

VIETNAM WAS A THOUSAND DIFFERENT WARS over time and geography. This book is about one of them. Sadec province in the central Mekong Delta is a classic rural



Asian rice growing area and was a small part of the American war in Vietnam with a limited U.S. military and civilian advisory presence. Gordon Bare served there as an Army Lieutenant in 1969 and 1970 engaged in both intelligence advisory programs and in economic development assistance and participated in the entire scope of military and reconstruction efforts. He traces the history of the province and relates his own experiences and those of other Americans who served there. The counterinsurgency and nation-building effort in Sadec and throughout Vietnam enjoyed considerable success and a real hope for substantial prosperity and a measure of responsive government existed when the United States drew down its involvement in the early 1970s. Bare writes that American abandonment of Vietnam after 1972 was replayed in Iraq in 2011 and may yet occur in Afghanistan to the great detriment of the peoples of these war torn lands.

### Praise for SADEC PROVINCE

“My MACV Advisory Team 65 fellow team member and State Department colleague Gordon Bare’s memoir of Sadec is a veritable trip in a time machine back to the post-TET Offensive Mekong Delta of 1969. There, through his prodigious research and interviews, he has created a virtual reunion of scores of military (and a few civilians like me) participants in the struggle to counter and defeat the Viet Cong, each of whom has a vivid story to tell. The author relates lessons learned in Vietnam that were not always applied in subsequent struggles like Iraq and Afghanistan. Five decades later, his conclusions about America abandoning an ally with whom he and I formed bonds while serving in Sadec, will resonate with many who were part of MACV in all 44 provinces of South Vietnam.

*Ambassador Kenneth Quinn*

### A word from the author Gordon Bare

Those interested may obtain the book for a donation of \$40.00 dollars or more to Team River Runner, a veterans service organization I have been working with for years which promotes health and healing through river recreation. All proceeds go to TRR and 30.50 is tax deductible for which donors will receive a receipt. I have worked with Marine triple amputees and guided blind Army men and women in kayaks on the Potomac River. We do good stuff and now have over fifty chapters around the country.

See our web site [teamriverrunner.org](http://teamriverrunner.org) for some inspiring stories. The link <https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/TeamRiverRunner/BookDonation.html> will take you directly to a secure donation page for the book.



## A Defiant Map Hunter Stakes Vietnam's Claims in South China Sea

By MIKE IVES; NOV. 25, 2017

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/world/asia/vietnam-south-china-sea.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=second-column-region&region=top-news&WT.nav=top-news>

Tran Duc Anh Son, a historian in Danang, Vietnam, says his government is afraid to use the records he uncovered to challenge Beijing. "That's why we have many documents that are kept in the dark." Credit Quinn Ryan Mattingly for The New York Times  
DANANG, Vietnam — Eight years ago, officials in [Danang](#) asked Tran Duc Anh Son to travel the world in search of documents and maps that support Vietnam's territorial claims in the South China Sea.

He did, and he concluded that Vietnam should challenge China's activities in waters around some of the sea's disputed islands, as the Philippines [successfully did](#) in a case that ended last year. But his bosses would not be moved.

"They always say to me, 'Mr. Son, please keep calm,'" he said during an interview at his home in Danang, the coastal city where he is the deputy director of a state-run research institute. "'Don't talk badly about China.'"

Vietnam's top leaders are "slaves" to Beijing, he added bitterly, as torrential rain beat against his windows. "That's why we have many documents that are kept in the dark."

Dr. Son's mission, and his bosses' demurrals, are signs of the times in Vietnam, which has always [lived in China's shadow](#) but also harbors a fierce independent streak.

China's assertiveness in the sea has caused deep anxiety for Vietnam, which regards territorial sovereignty as a sacred principle, and emboldened the government to promote claims over the disputed Spratly and Paracel archipelagos more aggressively.

Yet even as evidence for such claims piles up, analysts say that Hanoi has been reluctant to weaponize it. China, after all, is Vietnam's next-door neighbor and largest [trading partner](#), as well as an increasingly assertive hegemon that is [building a string of military outposts](#) on reclaimed land in the sea.

Everyone in Vietnam, "government and nongovernment, has the same sense that the Chinese should stay away from those islands," said [Liam C. Kelley](#), a professor of history at the University of Hawaii at Manoa who has studied the roots of the relationship between the two countries.

But he said the recent surge of nationalism over China's expansive vision raises a thorny question: "How do you position yourself as defending Vietnam from China when China is basically your backbone?"



Dr. Son in his office with a historical map of the South China Sea — or the East Vietnam Sea, as his government calls it. Credit Quinn Ryan Mattingly for The New York Times

Chinese dynasties ruled present-day Vietnam for a millennium, leaving positive cultural legacies but also a trail of resentment. Beijing helped Hanoi defeat the French to win independence in 1954 but also invaded northern Vietnam in 1979, setting off a [brief border war](#).

In 2014, anti-China sentiment flared when a state-owned Chinese oil company [towed an oil rig](#) to waters near Danang, provoking a tense maritime standoff and anti-Chinese riots at several Vietnamese industrial parks.

Interest in territorial sovereignty has long been "in the heart" of the Vietnamese people, said a senior Vietnamese legal expert in Hanoi, who insisted on anonymity to discuss a sensitive political matter. But the oil rig crisis has greatly magnified the interest.

China has controlled the Paracels since 1974, when it seized them from the former government of South Vietnam in a naval clash. It has bolstered its foothold in the Spratlys recently through an island-building campaign.



## Defiant Map Hunter...

Chinese officials and scholars seek to justify Beijing's claim to sovereignty over waters that encircle both archipelagos — represented by what they now call the [nine-dash line](#) — by citing maps and other evidence from the 1940s and '50s.

But some in Vietnam, like Dr. Son, are trying to marshal their own historical records — even if they may have little power to dissuade China.

Dr. Son, 50, and other Vietnamese scholars say the Nguyen dynasty, which ruled present-day Vietnam from 1802 to 1945, wielded clear administrative control over the Paracels by sending survey parties and even planting trees on them as a warning against shipwrecks. This happened decades before imperial or post-revolutionary China showed any interest in the islands, they say.

"The Chinese know very clearly they never mentioned the Hoang Sa or the Truong Sa in their history books or historical maps," Dr. Son said, using the Vietnamese terms for the Paracels and Spratlys.

By contrast, he said, he found evidence in more than 50 books — in English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese — that a Nguyen-era Vietnamese explorer planted the royal flag in the Paracels in the 1850s.



International arbitration over territorial sovereignty can only proceed if both parties agree, analysts say, and China has shown no interest in that.

Still, the frenzy of interest in Vietnam's maritime history since about 2012 has produced a buzz in the state-run news media — and a few unexpected heroes. One is Tran Thang, a Vietnamese-American mechanical engineer who lives in Connecticut. He said by telephone that he had donated 153 maps and atlases to the Danang government in 2012 after ordering them on eBay for about \$30,000.

Among Vietnamese academics who study the government's territorial claims in what it calls the East Vietnam Sea, Dr. Son is among the most prominent.

He was born in 1967 in Hue, about 50 miles northwest of Danang, and his father was killed in 1970 while fighting for South Vietnam. "I only remember the funeral," he said.

He grew up poor, he said, but excelled at Hue University, where his history thesis explored Nguyen-era porcelain. He later directed Hue's fine arts museum and led a successful bid to make its [imperial citadel](#) a Unesco World Heritage site.

As a student poking around dusty archives, Dr. Son said, he would photocopy maps that highlighted Vietnamese territorial claims in the South China Sea. So when top officials in Danang asked him in 2009 to pursue the same research on the government's behalf, he said, he leapt at the chance.

"I'm always against the Chinese," he said by way of explanation. Chinese scholars have been conducting rival research for years with support from Beijing, he added, and he sees his own work as payback.

Danang officials allowed Dr. Son to recruit a seven-member support team, he said, but did not fund his international travel. He said he paid for some of the research that he has conducted since 2013 across Europe and the United States, where he was a Fulbright scholar at Yale University, out of pocket.

Dr. Son, the deputy director at the Danang Institute for Socio-Economic Development, said he still held out hope that Vietnam would take China to court.

But he also said he was not holding his breath and had little say in the outcome.

"I'm not political," he added. "I'm a scientist."

## Vietnamese Blogger Gets 7 Years in Jail for Reporting Toxic Spill

Richard Paddock, NY Times, Nov 27, 2017

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/27/world/asia/vietnam-nguyen-van-hoa-blogger.html?>

BANGKOK — A chemical spill that devastated the coast of central Vietnam last year (2016) claimed another casualty on Monday when a 22-year-old blogger was sentenced to seven years in prison for posting reports on the disaster.

After a brief, closed trial in Ha Tinh Province, the blogger, Nguyen Van Hoa, was found guilty of spreading anti-state propaganda for producing videos and writing about protests over the toxic spill, news agencies reported.

The discharge, which occurred when a new Taiwan-owned steel factory flushed cyanide and other chemicals through its waste pipeline, [killed marine life and sickened people](#) along a 120-mile stretch of coastline. It is one of Vietnam's largest environmental disasters.

Phil Robertson, deputy director of [Human Rights Watch's Asia division](#), denounced the verdict. "The sentencing of Nguyen Van Hoa shows how profoundly the government's paranoid desire to maintain political control trumps notions of justice and human rights," he said.

He added: "How else can one explain that executives of an international firm that poisoned the ocean, ruining the coastal economy in four provinces, are free to go about their business while this idealistic young journalist is heading to prison for helping expose their misdeeds?"

In June, a court sentenced another blogger, Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, better known as [Mother Mushroom](#), to 10 years in prison, also for blogging about the fish kill.

Initially, the government provided little information about the spill, withholding the names of the toxic agents even from poisoning victims and the doctors who were treating them.

The company, Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation, a subsidiary of the giant Formosa Plastics Group, was eventually [found to be responsible](#) for the spill. It was ordered to pay \$500 million for causing the catastrophe, and company officials apologized.

Critics accused the government of attempting to protect the company, which they said had received a special deal from officials when acquiring prime coastal property for the factory.

The toxic spill deprived coastal fishermen of their livelihoods and set off major protests along the central coast, which is unusual in tightly controlled Vietnam.

Mr. Hoa, who was arrested in April, is one of a growing number of activists in Vietnam who use Facebook and other online platforms to post videos, photographs and commentary that are contrary to the government's official position.

