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- **It serves as a LINK between SACEI members and those who are interested in the Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American culture.**

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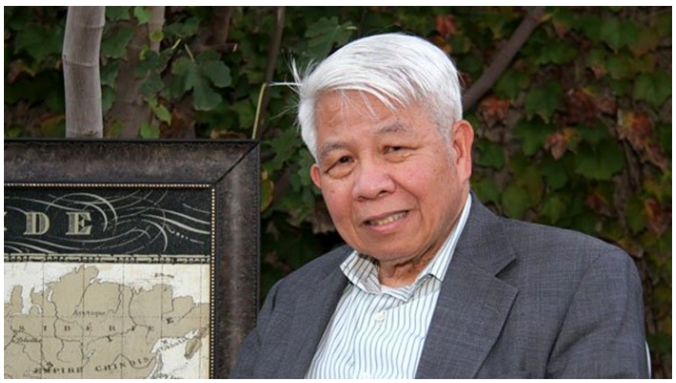
PROFESSOR NGUYỄN NGỌC BÍCH (1937-2016)

A tireless educator, a multi-lingual lecturer, a thoughtful author, a prolific translator, an expert linguist, and a *Renaissance Man*, he was named the 2015 SACEI PERSON OF THE YEAR. http://www.sacei07.org/Newsletter84_2015-10.pdf

To define him would be to limit him. A man of intense energy and immense curiosity, he was everywhere and did everything. He joined—and usually was the leader of—many organizations: from photography club to arts, culture, political, and even religious organizations. His interest knew no bound. Not only could he talk about Japanese, Chinese, American, French, and Vietnamese literature, to name a few, he was also able to converse in these languages. His engaging smile and mild demeanor made him a very likable person. Known to the Vietnamese and American communities for his broad knowledge, deep intellect, and thoughtful analyses, he exemplifies the spirit of the "Sĩ or Scholar."

Schooled in Vĩnh Yên, North Vietnam, he completed his high school degree at Chasseloup Laubat in Saigon. In 1954, he enrolled at Princeton on a Fulbright scholarship where he graduated with a Political Science degree. He did his postgraduate training at Columbia and a fellowship in Japan. After living and working abroad for many years, he returned to Vietnam in 1972 with his wife, Professor Đào Thị Hợi to establish the Cữu Long University in Saigon while holding the position of Director of Communication of the Chiêu Hồi Department.



He immigrated to the U.S. in 1975 where he furthered his studies. He was named Director of the Bilingual Program for the U.S. Health and Education Department and later Director of the Vietnamese section of Radio Free Asia (RFA). Retiring from the RFA, he took over the Presidency of the National Congress of Vietnamese Americans and continued his work of promoting Vietnamese literature and translation.

Among his numerous publications, one could count:

1- 'The Poetry of Vietnam (New York: Asia Society, 1969)
2- North Vietnam: Backtracking on Socialism (1971)
3- An Annotated Atlas of the Republic of Vietnam (1972)
4- A Thousand Years of Vietnamese Poetry (Knopf, 1975).
5- The Trung Sisters Revisited (2015)

Below are just samples of his extensive work.

Translation: *A Thousand Years of Vietnamese Poetry*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1975; *War and Exile: A Vietnamese Anthology*, East Coast Vietnamese Publishers Consortium, 1989; *A Mother's Lullaby* by Truong Anh Thuy, Canh Nam, 1989; *Flowers of Hells* and *Blood Seeds Become Poetry* by Nguyen Chi Thien, East Coast Vietnamese Publishers Consortium, 1996; *From Enemy to Friend* by Bui Tin, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 2004; *Complaints of an Odalisque*, East Coast Vietnamese Publishers Consortium, 2006.

Essays: North Vietnam: Backtracking on Socialism (Vietnam Council on Foreign Relations); An Annotated

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Atlas of the Republic of Vietnam (Embassy of Vietnam, Washington, DC, 1973); *Hồ Xuân Hương: Tác-phẩm* (East Coast Vietnamese Publishers Consortium, 2000); *Tet, The Vietnamese New Year* (East Coast Vietnamese Publishers Consortium, 2004); *Tự Điển Chữ Nôm Trích Dẫn* (1 of 7 editors, Viện Việt Học, 2009).

Architecture and Music: *Vietnamese Architecture* by Nguyễn Năng Đắc và Nguyễn Quang Nhạc (translated from French to English, Embassy of Vietnam, Washington DC, 1970); Fifteen Christmas Songs (National Center for Vietnamese Resettlement, 1975); Prison Songs by Nguyễn Chí Thiện, lyrics by Phạm Duy, translated to English by Nguyễn Ngoc Bich (Vicana, 1982).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHS_eT_fcak&feature=youtu.be

Morality of the Vietnam War

Nguyen Ngoc Bich

In a famous interview given to Dinh Quang Anh Thai of Little Saigon Radio in 1991, Duong Thu Huong, the famed author of *Novel without a Name* and *Paradise of the Blind*, had this to say about the morality of the war in Vietnam:

"Only after I got to South Vietnam did I realize that the Northern regime was a barbarian regime because it punches blind people's eyes, it plugs up people's ears. While in the South people could listen to any international radio they wanted whether it's French, British or American. Such is a civilized society. How bitter it was that a barbaric regime could triumph over a civilized society! That was how ironic and erroneous history could be. That was a most expensive lesson and mistake that the Vietnamese people have ever committed."

She was not alone in her assessment. Bui Tin, the colonel who was present at the surrender of General Duong Van "Big" Minh in Independence Palace on April 30, 1975, also defected to France in September 1990 and the following February, went on BBC to present his famous "Petition of a Citizen" asking for an entire overhaul of the regime.

Even Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet, before his death in 2008, had this to say about the war:

"Whenever we reminisce about [the outcome of] the war, if there were millions who were happy there were also millions who were sad." Belated as his judgment was, Vo Van Kiet was only reflecting a reassessment that millions and millions of Vietnamese have made about the validity of the war effort engaged by Hanoi in launching the second Indochina War, known as the Vietnam War in the United States, in 1959.

Reflecting on the disastrous decades after the end of the war in 1975, which saw the country plummet to rock bottom poverty and near astronomical inflation as the country had to face two wars against its former allies, Pol Pot in Cambodia and Deng Xiaoping in China, Nguyen Ho, one of the heroes of the southern revolution since the 1930's, advocated in Viewpoints and Life (1994) that the Communist Party of Vietnam made a clean break of its mistakes, rejected socialism and frankly adopted capitalism as the path to the future. Nguyen Van Tran, another hero of the southern revolution, the man dubbed "the Evil Deity of Cho Dem" ("Hung Than Cho Diem") during the anti-French resistance, wrote in his memoir entitled Letter to Mother and the National Assembly (1995), that Ho Chi Minh himself declared at the Second CPV Congress in 1951 that he "had no thought of his own" because "from the point of view of theory, the Vietnam Workers Party takes Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao as its compass."

This was the final blow to the legitimacy of the Communist regime of Vietnam since, after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (1989-1991) and the overthrow of Mao thought in China, the regime had no ideological anchor left to rely upon except to refer to a mystical "Ho Chi Minh Thought."

But Nguyen Van Tran in Vietnam and Nguyen Minh Can in Moscow, both of whom were present at the 1951 Congress, confirmed Ho Chi Minh's declaration there. Unable to prove the legitimacy of the regime based on the inexistence of "Ho Chi Minh Thought" and unwilling to acknowledge Ho's tutelage in the Vietnamese (Communist) revolution, the communist leaders of Vietnam went so far as to reject any debt to Ho and only recently, on January 19, 2014, when a mausoleum was erected to the memory of Le Duan (1907-1986), they had his most important quote displayed on a panel in large letters saying: "The reason we fought the South was on behalf of the Soviet Union and China," the epitome of treason as far as a Vietnamese patriot is concerned.

The immorality of the Communist cause in Vietnam is thus now an open secret. That immorality is not only due to the fact that a revolution which in the eyes of the Vietnamese population was originally a justifiable cause, i.e. the cause of national independence, had been hijacked to become a mercenary cause in the name of international communism as ordered from Moscow and Beijing. And the enormity of that immorality can be seen in the fact that at least some two million Vietnamese lives had been sacrificed to a struggle that was not theirs, that was not their choice.

In other words, they were hoodwinked into it. The standard interpretation of the war in Vietnam, at least the American phase of that war, is given as something like this:

From 1946 to 1954, the Vietminh under Ho Chi Minh fought a heroic war of resistance against the French who were intent on

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reestablishing their colonial rule in Vietnam. In 1954, the country was "temporarily" divided into two parts at the seventeenth parallel with the promise of a reunification election two years later. However, Ngo Dinh Diem with the help of the U.S. reneged on that promise and ran a rule of terror which forced the southern population into an insurgency that North Vietnam, i.e. Hanoi, reluctantly was drawn into supporting. It is the legitimacy of that struggle from the communist point of view which eventually got the better of the United States and the "puppet regime" in South Vietnam, leading to the "glorious" reunification of 1975.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Born in the years of harsh colonial repression, the communist movement in Vietnam, as well as many other nationalist parties, had to resort to forceful means to resist that repression and win adherents to the cause of independence. But if the nationalist parties only resorted sparingly to acts of terror such as individual assassinations, the communists did everything in a systematic, massive way. For instance, in the so-called "Nghe Tinh Soviet" uprising of late 1930 the communists did not go after individuals, they came up with the slogan "Tri, Phu, Dia, Hao, dao tan goc, troc tan re," which means, "As far as intellectuals, rich people, landlords, and local strong men are concerned, we must radically dig them up and uproot them completely."

With that, they went after these four classes in society en masse, which called for even harsher retaliation by the colonial authorities. More than half a century later, one could still find intellectuals in Hanoi who recalled those days and admitted that "just thinking back about that slogan gave them shudders."

But the Communist Party of Vietnam merely brushes off those considerations claiming that it was due to "leftist infantilism"--a passing phase that would disappear with the maturity of the movement. In 1945, by their own admission, the Indochinese Communist Party only had five thousand members in the entire country. Thus, they were clearly in the minority in the face of nationalist parties such as the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnam Nationalist Party) or Dai Viet Party that counted tens of thousands of adherents throughout the land. Yet when Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong left for France to go to the Fontainebleau conference in the summer of 1946, Vo Nguyen Giap carried out a reign of red terror that in a few months killed at least 10,000 members of the nationalist parties, according to French historian Philippe Devillers in his book, *Histoire du Viet-Nam de 1940 à 1952*. In 1953, in the midst of an intense war against the French, Ho Chi Minh was forced by Stalin and the Chinese to launch the land reform in North Vietnam, described by Ho Chi Minh himself as a social revolution of "sky-shuddering days and earth-shattering nights."

This land reform went through several phases and did not stop until 1956, three years later, even after peace was restored in July 1954. The systematic nature of Communist policies can be seen in the fact in those three years, two of which were spent in peace, the amount of casualties is higher than the total amount of soldiers fallen in nine years of the Resistance War against the French (the French forces, for instance, lost 75,581 dead), and they were unarmed Vietnamese killed by their own compatriots. According to Dang Phong, an economic historian, the number of casualties of the land reform in those three years and in only half of the country (North Vietnam) came to 172,008 persons out of which 123,266, or 71.66%, in other words three out of four, were later found to be wrongly classified). Only such figures could explain why, during the course of the entire war, the civilians always, even in the desperate final years, ran towards the government side and almost never towards the communist ranks. Only such figures could explain something that apparently never could penetrate the thick heads of antiwar elements, professors and all, including their allies in the liberal media.

I am alluding to two huge mass movements that are indisputably the largest in Vietnamese history: the flight of nearly one million refugees from the North after the division of Vietnam in 1954 and the movement known as the "boat people" running away from the triumphant Communists after 1975. It was these two exoduses which finally turned world public opinion toward a more realistic assessment of what Communism meant to the Vietnamese people, to the common people on the ground who had to live with it. As early as 1979, Joan Baez and some 73 major intellectuals in the world took a full-page ad in the New York Times to complain that the realities of Vietnam were not what they had thought they fought for in their previous antiwar fervor. In France, Jean-Paul Sartre, the initiator with Bertrand Russell in England of the so-called Stockholm War Crimes tribunal (1966), also came to the realization that he was wrong all along. He shook hands with Raymond Aron, a conservative fellow “Normalien,” and agreed to call on France to come to the rescue of the “boat people.” This was the beginning of the Médecins sans Frontières movement with Alain Kouchner to go and rescue “boat people” in the South China Sea. Also, some 700 Vietnamese intellectuals, mostly in Europe, signed a petition started by Loi Tam in Belgium asking for fundamental changes in policy from Hanoi. After the end of the war (as far as the United States is concerned) there was an intense if subterranean debate inside Vietnam as to “who won over whom.” Of course, the debate could not be carried out in the open considering the nature of the regime in power. But the evidence for such debate can be seen in ridiculous claims like the one made at one point by Mrs. Nguyen Thi Doan, Vice President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, that “Vietnam is a million times more democratic

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than the so-called democracies of the Western world."
That debate, however, is mostly carried out in popular ditties that for the most part are anonymous. Such as this one, reputedly coined by Vu Hoang Chuong, a very famous poet: Nam Ky Khoi Nghia tieu Cong Ly, Dong Khoi len roi mat Tu Do. (Came the Cochinchina Insurrection and Justice is gone! So did Freedom when appeared the General Uprising!) This refers to the fact that Justice and Freedom were the names of major streets in Saigon before the Communist takeover, and they were renamed Cochinchina Insurrection and General Uprising after 1975. Even international relations are described in these ditties. For instance, there is a Lenin Park in Hanoi, which led some bards to comment:
Lenin, your home is in Russia. How come you now stand in one of our parks? Your face turned up, you point out: "Freedom and Happiness? You're still a long way! "Look at the example of Russia: "Even after 70 years, we're still no fucking where near them!" Or with the United States after the resumption of normal relations: You used to cuss the U.S. better than anyone. Now, you sing their praise ten times more than you ever did. You used to fight them like no one else. Now you send all your children there, for an education. You used to say, "U.S. bad, Party number one!" Now, the Party opens wide its arms begging it for alms.
Internally, the situation is succinctly described as follows: Da dao Thieu-Ky! Cai gi cung co! Hoan ho Ho Chi Minh! Cay dinh cung phai dang ky! (Down with Thieu and Ky! One could find anything then! Long Live Ho Chi Minh! Even for a nail one must register [and stay in line].) It's getting to a point that there is the widespread feeling in Vietnam now that the defeat of South Vietnam was a blessing in disguise for the North Vietnamese who, without their victory in 1975, would be kept in the dark forever about what it means to be a civilized society.
Again, one may quote Duong Thu Huong: Duong Thu Huong (sighing): "O I have had moments of craziness in my life, in different guises. But crying? Then I have had two occasions to do so. "The first time when we, as the victorious troops entered Saigon in 1975. While everybody in our ranks was happy and laughing, I cried because I realized that my young years, the springtime of my life, had been wasted. I was not impressed by the tall buildings of the South, I was flabbergasted by the fact that all the works of South Vietnamese authors were freely published. Tons of authors that I have never heard of have works displayed in the bookstores and even on street curbs; and the people had all sorts of access to information such as the television, radio and cassettes galore.
Such apparatuses to the North Vietnamese could only be in dream. In the North, all the media and publications are under government control. The people could listen only to one radio, Radio Hanoi; and only very trustworthy cadres are allowed to listen to the Chinese radio. As for the rest of the population, they had only one source of information, the PA system that broadcast in the street, in other words they are allowed to hear only one source. Only after I got to the South did I realize that the Northern regime was a barbarian regime because it punches blind people's eyes, it plugs up people's ears."
No wonder that when the journalist Huy Duc published his two-volume work entitled *Ben Thang Cuoc* ("The Winning Side") two years ago, it read more like an account of how the South won over the North, in everything except in the military sense. The South won not only because of its economic wealth but also because of the superiority of its culture, music, literature, theater, art and fashion, cuisine, let alone education and even politeness—which the Northerners were the first to notice as they came into contact with the South Vietnamese people.
The recent introduction of the Chinese giant oil rig HY 981 into Vietnamese waters (on May 1, 2014) once again demonstrates the superiority of the South over the North, even in dealings with China. Since at least 2011, because of Hanoi's inability to effectively counter the Chinese moves in the South China Sea—called Eastern Sea by the Vietnamese—more and more the people are resorting to the Republic of Vietnam's arguments to support Vietnamese claims to sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands in opposition to Beijing's flimsy arguments. Whereas the Chinese could adduce Premier Pham Van Dong's official letter of September 14, 1958, acknowledging the Chinese claim to the Paracel and Spratly archipelagoes (among other), the Republic of Vietnam, i.e. South Vietnam, fought a valiant naval battle in January 1974 to repel the Chinese aggression in the Paracels (Hoang Sa to the Vietnamese, Xisha to the Chinese) and therefore the Chinese could not claim that Vietnam acquiesced to the Chinese action, which is not condoned by international law. The 74 navy personnel who were sacrificed in that battle, together with the commanding officer Nguy Van Tha, thus became national heroes and their portraits and names were paraded through the streets of Hanoi in several demonstrations against the Chinese incursions.
In other words, the legitimacy of the southern government, i.e. of the Republic of Vietnam, is now widely recognized, not just by Vietnamese in the Diaspora but even by a large majority of Vietnamese inside Vietnam both in the North and in the South and even by much of the official press inside the country.
Thus, one can put to rest the question of whether the Vietnam War was justified or not. The high moral ground held by the Republic of Vietnam is now demonstrated, and it has become an irrefutable argument in favor of our side—the side of the

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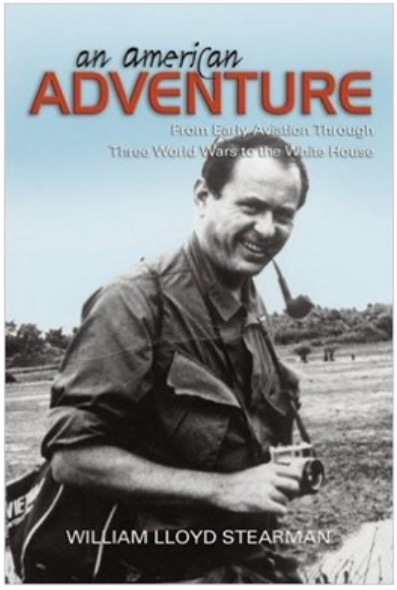
Republic of Vietnam and its allies, even if that alliance in the end was undone by internal American politics.
Vietnam Veterans for Factual History Conference
The National Press Club in DC
August 5, 2014

Vietnam War Ended 40 Years Ago

WILLIAM LLOYD STEARMAN

Forty years after the Vietnam War ended, we are still troubled by the "only U.S. military defeat in history" in an "unwinnable" war. Since then, suggestions of US military intervention have evoked "no more Vietnams." We have, unfortunately, failed to view this war in historic perspective which has clouded our perception of what actually resulted from it. In the 1930s, we somewhat tolerated Japan's rampaging all though China.

However, when, in 1940, Japan invaded what is now Vietnam (then part of French Indochina), we correctly saw this as a threat to Southeast Asia, especially to the resource rich Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), and took the strong measure of promoting a boycott of critical oil, scrap iron and rubber deliveries to Japan. Japan, realized that a now especially hostile US would most probably attempt to block its planned invasion of Southeast Asia. It therefore sought to disable our fleet at Pearl Harbor as a preventative measure. Japan then proceeded to use its new-found base to invade and conquer most of Southeast Asia.



President Eisenhower must surely have had this mind when he was asked, at an April 7, 1954 press conference, about "the strategic importance of Indochina [Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia] for the free world." He then described the "falling domino" principle whereby "the beginning of a disintegration there would have the most profound influences" leading to " the loss of Indochina, of Burma, of Thailand, of the [Malay] Peninsula and Indonesia." He added that Japan, Formosa [Taiwan], the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand "would also be threatened."

Eisenhower's "domino theory" was pooh-poohed by a number of people in the U.S., but, given the perilous, unstable conditions in Southeast Asia, it was taken seriously by leaders there as well as in Australia and India and by leaders in Hanoi and (then) Peking. For example, China's famed Marshal Lin Piao stated in September 1965 that the defeat of "U.S. imperialism" in Vietnam would show the people of the world "that what the Vietnamese people can do, they can do too."

Our introduction of US combat troops (Marines) in March 1965 clearly had a bracing effect in Southeast Asia. For example, in the late 1960s, Indonesian leaders Suharto and Malik (not great friends of the U.S.) told U.S. officials that this first introduction of U.S. combat troops in Vietnam helped embolden them to resist the October 1, 1965 Communist coup supported by China, which came very close to succeeding. (The two later told columnist Robert Novak the same thing.) Had this coup succeeded, the Philippines would have soon been threatened which could well have triggered our intervention under a 1954 treaty. Then we would have been facing a far more threatening adversary than in Vietnam. This bracing effect also encouraged the British defense of Malaysia against a Communist invasion from Indonesia. By the end of the Vietnam War, the victorious Communist side, which lost over two million dead was too weakened to pose a threat to any country save nearby Laos and Cambodia. The war also bought precious time to enable the countries of Southeast Asia to strengthen their positions.

Generally overlooked, we basically got into the war to prevent the toppling of dominoes in Southeast Asia and we succeeded. One could thus say that this was a strategic victory while the loss in Vietnam was a tactical defeat. But also little understood is just how the war was lost, indeed unnecessarily lost.
Critics of the Vietnam War had long insisted that this war was, in any case, "unwinnable" and therefore should never have

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been fought. After "Vietnamization" had removed all U.S. combat troops from Vietnam, Hanoi, on March 30, 1972 launched its "Easter Offensive" with largest conventional attack of the war consisting of the equivalent of 23 divisions equipped with hundreds of Soviet tanks, long range artillery, rockets and surface to air missiles. The brunt of the fighting fell on the South Vietnamese ground forces with massive U.S. air support as well as naval and logistical support. The only American ground forces left were advisors and forward air controllers. South Vietnam forces eventually moved from the defensive to counter offensives and by mid-September 1972 were clearly winning.

On September 15, 1972, South Vietnamese marines retook Quang Tri, the only provincial capital captured during the offensive, which was only 20 miles from North Vietnam and was by far the strongest position of the Communist forces. If they couldn't hold Quang Tri they couldn't hold anything else and were clearly losing. The Communist forces had already lost about 100,000 killed in action, twice as many as the U.S. had lost in the entire war. Sometime after Hanoi's final 1975 victory, a former top commander in the South, General Tran Van Tra stated in the Party organ *Nhan Dan* that, by late 1972, his troops had clearly reached the verge of defeat. Had the war continued some months further, the South with continued US support could have emerged victorious by evicting all enemy forces from Vietnam. Indeed, former CIA Director William Cody, in his 1984 book *Lost Victory*, stated that already "on the ground in South Vietnam the war had been won."

Faced with certain defeat, Hanoi saved the day by offering substantial concessions sought by Henry Kissinger in previous negotiations. With the best of intentions, Kissinger, who was devoted to negotiations, took this bait and the resulting negotiations process brought South Vietnamese military operations to a halt thus snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. We then dragooned our Vietnamese allies into accepting the ill-conceived 1973 Peace Accords. One of its most pernicious features was a "ceasefire in place" which left substantial Communist troops in South Vietnam. The director of the National Security Council's Indochina staff, mid-level Foreign Service officer John Negroponte, courageously went mano a mano with Kissinger over this but to no avail. (I raised my objections in memos to Henry.) (John then left, eventually to go on to a brilliant career.)

By the time the Peace Accords were signed on January 27, 1973, I had become director of the National Security Council's Indochina staff which was the most senior US official who dealt exclusively with Vietnam (and Laos and Cambodia). The Peace Accords were soon massively violated by the Communist side and somewhat by our Vietnamese allies. For example, in one major violation the primitive Ho Chi Minh Trail supporting Communist forces in the South was converted to a super highway. Once our troops and our released POWs had left the country, Washington largely lost interest in Vietnam. I had a very difficult time getting military equipment and supplies for our Vietnamese.

Then Congress reduced military aid from $2,270 billion for fiscal 1973 to $700 million for fiscal 1975. North Vietnamese Chief of Staff General Van Tien Dung in post victory writings stated, "The decrease in American aid made it impossible for Saigon troops to carry their combat and force development lans… Enemy firepower had been reduced by nearly 60 percent … its mobility was reduced by half." The crowning and decisive blow which sealed South Vietnam's fate was the June 4, 1973 Case-Church Amendment which, in effect, banned all US military operations in Indochina. The South Vietnamese then, inter alia, permanently lost the US air support upon which it had very much depended in combat. And we lost the ability to enforce the Peace Accords through military action.

Finally, after three years of recovering from their 1972 losses and well supported by its loyal allies, the Soviet Union and China, Hanoi launched the campaign which resulted in victory on April 30, 1975.

William Lloyd Stearman, PhD, Senior (flag rank) U.S. Foreign Service officer (Ret.), White House National Security Council staff under four presidents, director NSC Indochina staff, Jan. '73 to Jan. '76, Adjunct Professor of International Affairs Georgetown University (1977 to 1993), author of memoir *An American Adventure. From Early Aviation Through Three Wars to the White House* (Naval Institute Press, 2012)

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A memoir of extraordinary scope, William Lloyd Stearman's reminiscences will attract those interested in early aviation, World War II in the Pacific, life as a diplomat behind the Iron Curtain, the Vietnam War, and the ins and outs of national security decision-making in the White House. Stearman begins with a description of childhood as the son of aviation pioneer Lloyd Stear-

man. He then covers his naval combat experiences in the Pacific war and later struggles as one of the Navy's youngest ship captains. Following graduate school, he moved to the front lines of the Cold War and writes about his life as a diplomat who negotiated with the Soviets, spent nine years in Berlin and Vienna, and was director of psychological operations in Vietnam. His reflections on seventeen years with the National Security Council at the White House are of special interest.

An Ancient Battlefield Emerges

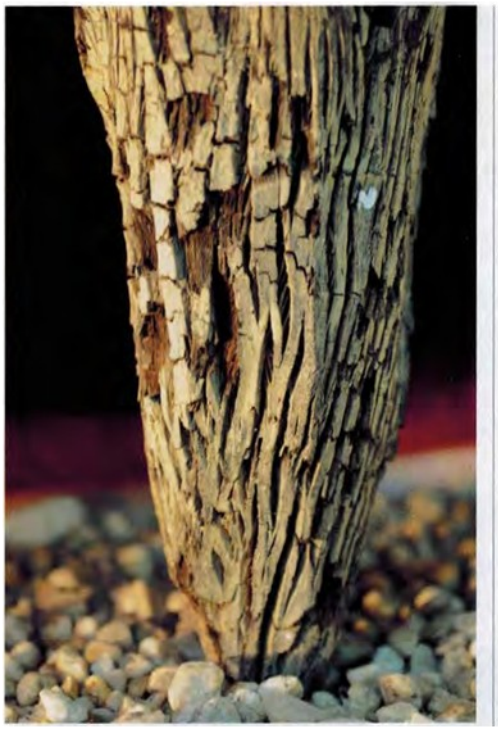
LAUREN HILGERS

Archeology, March/April 2016, pp 48-53.

Today, the area where the Bach Dang River empties into Boc Ba and Ha Long Bays in northern Vietnam is a patchwork of rice paddies, villages, and man-made fishponds. But 700 years ago, before generations of farmers had altered the landscape, it was a coastal mudflat spanning dozen of square miles, a dynamic wetland where the river fanned out into meandering, sediment-rich streams. Islands emerged and disappeared with the tides, sandbars gave way to deep estuaries, and both high ground and navigable channels could be unreliable. The area was sparsely populated, but the Bach Dang was a gateway to Vietnam's center of power. It was a tributary of the Red River, which stretched from southern China to the Gulf of Tonkin. Following the Bach Dang 70 miles or so inland, a merchant ship—or an invading navy—would encounter the city of Thang Long, the seat of Vietnam's Tran dynasty.

More than once, invaders had navigated the Bach Dang to Thang Long, so Vietnamese military leaders had, over the centuries, studied the tributaries and tides that altered the landscape with every ebb and flow. This knowledge was the basis for advanced military tactics and played a crucial part in an epic 1288 conflagration between forces of Vietnamese General Tran hung Dao and an armada commissioned by powerful Chinese emperor Kublai Khan. The Battle of Bach Dang lit up the marshy landscape with flaming, sinking ships, and would earn Tran hung Dao a place of honor in Vietnamese history.

Today, the remains of this battle, one of Vietnam's greatest victories, lie hidden beneath mud and paddy. For the past five years, an international team of archeologists has been trying to piece together the Battle of Bach Dang—from the lay of the landscape to the tactical preparation that went into it—across miles of coastline. "One of the interesting things about where we're working is there were probably no people living there where the battle occurred," says Mark Staniforth, a senior research fellow at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. "People started arriving there in A.D. 1500, they started to build on the islands, and they started to reclaim the land around them." Now the archeologists, building on work from the 1950s, have been searching for evidence of the battle. The project is also working to build capacity for further archeological research and data sharing in Vietnam that they hope will open still more parts of the battle site to investigation.



One of the stakes excavated in the 1950s is displayed in a small historical museum

The Tran dynasty was established in Dai Viet (as Vietnam was then known) in 1226, when a wealthy family conspired against the elderly patriarch of the Ly Dynasty to place an eight-year old, Tran Thai Tong, on the throne. During Tran Thai Tong's 30 year reign, the Mongol empire to the North was expanding across Eurasia under the descendants of Genghis Khan. In their effort to flank and conquer the Song Dynasty in southern China, the Mongols first invaded Vietnam overland in 1257, just aft Tran Thai Tong's death. Despite initially taking the capital city of Thang Long, near what is now Hanoi, the invaders were turned away, though the Tran Dynasty did agree to pay tribute.

Battle-hardened warrior Kublai Khan had, by 1260, fought his way up through the ranks of Genghis Khan's grandchildren to become the fifth khan of the Mongol Empire and the founder of the Yuan Dynasty. In 1276 he defeated the Song and reunified China for the first time in 300 years. He undertook huge construction projects, rebuilt China's Grand Canal, expanded Beijing's lavish Summer Palace, and introduced the use of paper money. He also sent his son, Toghan, to try to claim Vietnam again, by then under the leadership of Tran Nhan tong, the third Tran emperor. In 1284, the Mongols were able to retake Thang Long, but were once again turned away by Vietnamese generals employing guerilla and scorched-earth tactics. Burned again, Kublai Khan shifted his strategy and eyed a southern route by water. "In hindsight, whenever the Mongols went on dry land, they pretty much won," Staniforth says. "What they weren't good on—they weren't good ships."

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An Ancient Battlefield Emerges...

Jun Kimura, one of the members of the archeological team working at Bach Dang, has spent much of his career studying Kublai Khan's maritime efforts, the earliest of which were against Japan. In 1274 and again in 1281, Mongolian fleet were bested by Japanese defenses and fierce storms. (In 1281, a two-day typhoon known as *kamikaze*, or "divine wind," wiped them out.) At a site off the coast of Japan, Kimura has helped excavate anchors, helmets, iron arrows, and a set of hollow ceramic objects that archeologists believe might have been early grenades from one of the failed invasions.

From his third attempt to conquer Vietnam, Kublai Khan devised a strategy based on sending overwhelming numbers of soldiers—by land and by sea—to close in on its center of government from multiple directions, like a vise. His fleet, commanded by Mongol general Omar Khan, conquered the trading post of Van Don and moved west up the Bach Dang together, likely sticking to the widest, most welcoming part of the river. They descended on Thang Long with little resistance from either the Vietnamese forces or the landscape itself.. This time, the Mongol army considered itself prepared for Vietnam's scorched earth tactics. A fleet carrying food and supplies was expected to arrive soon after their forces took the city. The supply ships, however, would never reach the river.

In 2008, Kimura, then a Ph.D. student at Texas A& M University, and fellow graduate student Randy Sasaki received an email from Le Thi Lien, an archeologist at Vietnam's Institute of Archeology, who had learned of their interest in Kublai Khan's maritime campaigns. In the home of a local collector, she had come across a pair of huge wooden anchors that had been uncovered in the Red River. The collector thought they could have something to do with Kublai khan's fleet.

"Jun cameto me and said, 'This is an opportunity to go out and have a look and see if we can do any more work on the Vietnamese side,"' Staniforth, who was then at Flinders University in Adelaide, recalls. But Kimura also pointed out that "Ph.D. students don't have any money," so Staniforth and James Delgado, then President of the Institute of Nautical Archeology at Texas A & M, set about helping to form an exploratory, collaborative expedition. Vietnam, owing to its recent history, had long been a difficult country for Western archeologists to study. Although Vietnamese researchers had worked on a handful of sites over the years, their findings were published primarily in Vietnamese. Staniforth and Delgado had found a local collaborator in Lien.

On their first visit in 2008, Kimura and Sasaki found that the anchors actually dated to sometime during the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries—but Lien directed the team to a new target. East of Hanoi, Vietnamese archeologists in the 1950s had uncovered a set of river defenses in a field near where the Bach Dang meets the sea. They had found a cluster of thick wooden stakes, buried in the mud, pointing up at various angles. Historical records indicate that such defenses—fields of stakes driven into the riverbed and banks—were part of the Vietnamese naval defense plan at the Battle of Bach Dang in 1288, and were also used during two earlier battles in the same area against invaders from the Han and Song dynasties in 938 and 981, respectively. But it is unclear how the stakes were used in each battle, or the military tactics they allowed. The Vietnamese archeologists in the 1950shad assumed the ones they found dated to the Mongol invasion, but they were many unanswered questions and there was no way then for them to be dated definitively. "They had pretty good evidence, historical evidence," Staniforth says, "but they did not have scientific proof." Official reports recorded the discovery of more such examples at construction sites in the area, and locals had reported stumbling on wooden stakes in their fields. Before 2010, however, no archeologists had responded to these other reports.

"The previous Vietnamese researchers couldn't really explain how the stakes were distributed," says Kimura, who is now at Tokai University in Tokyo. "In the 1950s people couldn't use radiocarbon dating or GPS," he adds. "We were lucky that in 2009 a local farmer reported that he had found some unique features in a fishpond. First, we did test excavations there and revealed a concentration of wooden stakes—it wasn't just isolated ones." This discovery came as a surprise, in large part because it was not connected with where they had first been found. This was a new distinct stake yard.

Similarities between the two sites were hard to ignore. The types of wood and the manner in which the stakes were driven into the ground were the same. "We carefully recorded their diameters and we found there was consistency between the two sites," Kimura says. He and Staniforth returned to Vietnam in 2010, 2011, and 2013 to excavate the Bach Dang fishpond, search for additional sites, and train Vietnamese archeologists to begin searching for the remains of Mongol boats in the river itself. The archeologists brought in a water pump and excavated muddy trenches that they eventually expanded into a one stake-filled expanse. They uncovered 55 stakes in all, along with pieces of ceramic and wood. Perhaps most importantly, samples from the stakes dated to approximately 700 years ago, meaning that they almost certainly were related to the Mongol invasion.

The stakes were similar to those found in the 1950s in layout and orientation. They had been driven into the earth at

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shallow angles. Some were planted in two columns running east-west, along what would have been the rising slope of a riverbank. Others were grouped in dense clusters, as if to form focused barriers. And still others were planted in pairs with their tips crossing. By studying the placement and orientation of the defenses, the international team began to just see how Tran Hung Dao conceived, planned, and executed a strategy that would make the Yuan Dynasty reluctant to ever return to Vietnam.

Toghan's Mongol soldiers, who had marched to Thang Long with so little resistance, found an abandoned city burned by the Vietnamese. The Mongols found little of substance to conquer—and even less to eat. The invading army had little to do but wait for the enormous supply fleet to make its way slowly up the river.

As soon as this fleet entered the Bach Dang, Vietnamese forces sprang into action. They only had a matter of months to lay their elaborate trap. Tran Hung Dao had studied previous military engagements against the Chinese at Bach Dang, specifically the battle against the Han Dynasty in 938, and he and his officers knew the landscape intimately. The inconsistency of the river itself would serve as their primary weapon. He used the shape of the landscape as a framework for his defenses, incorporating rock formations and natural bottlenecks. He mobilized a large work force that began cutting down enough trees to make an enormous trap that would allow Vietnamese forces to go from defense to offense. This labor force needed to work fast—the trees had to be brought in from forests some distance away fashioned into stakes, and then set in place. "This was a huge logistical exercise," Staniforth says. "It must have taken thousands, perhaps more, of the local Vietnamese people."

Previous theories of the Battle of Bach Dang, Kimura says, posited that the Vietnamese used stakes to simply block the entire river mouth—some 200 yards across—and then rowed out to attack the blockaded Mongol soldiers or attacked them as they tried to flee to the shore. The archeological team brought modern tools to map the landscape and the way that it has changed since 1288, and they saw a different battle entirely. "We realized," Staniford says, "that the rivers are too deep and too difficult," for the Vietnamese to have simply blocked them completely with stakes.

Staniforth and Kimura used satellite imagery and aerial photographs, along with extensive core samples which, in their layering, held evidence of how the area had changed over time. They observed a different, more dynamic landscape, one that provided opportunities for Tran Hung Dao to structure his defense and deploy the stakes strategically. "It was a series of small islands that, at high tide, were covered with water. There were probably five channels then and now there are only three. Two of them have essentially disappeared under the rice paddies," Staniforth says. "The stake fields were simply there to channel the ships into a narrower gap, which was then plugged with something else, perhaps rafts."

Once it was drained, the Bach Dang fishpond revealed 55 stakes In three different sizes. Some were used to stop ships, while others prevented Mongol soldiers from escaping to dry land.

Historical records state that the Mongol supply fleet—around 400 ships—was defeated by Vietnamese forces somewhere near the ancient city of Van Don, though archeologists have yet to find the site. Without the expected supplies, Toghan decided to withdraw his troops from the city. They boarded ships and moved down the river. Vietnamese forces were waiting for them, and baited the retreating fleet—either slowing them down or speeding them up—to make sure Toghan was in the right place at the right time, caught between stake yards as the tide went out.

The archeologists found stakes made of three different species of wood: mahogany, wood from citrus trees, and iron-

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wood. They were delicate and had been damaged by shipworms. The stakes fell into groups of three different sizes—approximately two, five, and eight inches in diameter. The smallest of them would have been of little use in stopping the Mongol ships.

"If you look at the fields where they put the stakes, you realized that, yes, part of their point was to stop the ships," Staniforth says. "But at least part of it was to stop the Mongol army from getting off the ships onto dry land." The Vietnamese had taken up positions on some of the small islands in the river, and then fortified them with the slimmer stakes to prevent escaping soldiers from swimming to dry land. "They are essentially anti-personnel systems," Staniforth says. "If you have a lace work of small stakes, a three- or four-inch-diameter stake is a pretty major obstacle for men."

Barred from escape by water by the larger stakes, sandbars, rafts, and Vietnamese ships, and pinned into their boats by the smaller stakes, the Mongol army was spectacularly doomed. From the safety of the islands and marshy high ground, Tran Hung Dao and the Vietnamese army sent smoldering rafts out toward enemy vessels. The ships went up in flames, and the Mongol army was decimated. Omar Khan was captured and executed, while Toghan had narrowly escaped with his life, only to be banished by his furious father, Kublai Khan. The two sides exchanged prisoners and while the Tran Dynasty acknowledged the supremacy of the Yuan Dynasty, China would not return to Vietnam until a more successful Ming invasion in the early fifteenth century.

The discovery and analysis of the stake fields near the mouth of the Bch Dang reveal some of the tactics used by the Vietnamese to defeat the Mongols, but there is potentially much, much more beneath the paddies and ponds. In the excavation, Kimura, Staniforth, and their colleagues found that flat wooden fragments that could be manufactured woodwork, as well as fragments of wood that show processing marks, such as rope holes for transportation. These could be the scattered remains of some of the burned Mongol ships, but so far, the researchers have found no hulls or further ship remains.

But they think the ships are likely down there. "When a ship burns, it does not burn completely," says Delgado, who is now director of maritime heritage at the National Marine Sanctuaries program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration." The upper parts of the ship burn very hot, but the ship will break up and sink. The hull usually stays intact." He believes they are somewhere under the rice paddies, perhaps located under local burial grounds, which are largely off limits to archeological exploration.

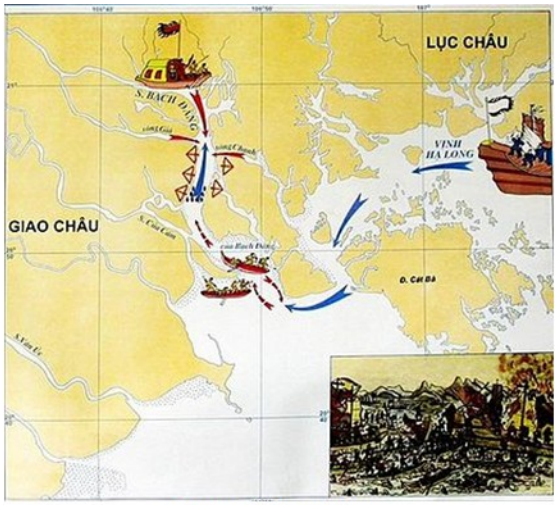
The search for the ships continues, including underwater in the river itself. Kimura would like to expand the investigation and hopes to find more evidence of the Mongol side of the battle, such as examples of the ceramic grenades and other artifacts from the invasions of Japan. As they did for this project, the researchers from the United States, Australia, and Japan will work closely with their counterparts and help build Vietnam's capacity for larger, more complex archeological projects, even as they search for more answers themselves. Vietnam's Institute of Archeology has created its own department of underwater archeology and Kimura, Staniforth, and other archeologists run a field school every summer to help train Vietnamese archeologists on sites south of Bach Dang, where the underwater visibility is better than it is in the area of the battle. "I'm a firm believer in not driving the research agenda from the outside," Staniforth says. "We are bringing this project to the world, as opposed to bringing the project to Vietnam."

The Two Bach Dang Battles (938 & 1288)

The Vietnamese defeated the Chinese troops on the Bach Dang River ON TWO OCCASIONS.

With the first victory in 938 CE by Ngo Quyen, they reclaimed their independence from the Chinese who had controlled them since 111 ACE. During this 10-century domination (111 ACE-938 CE), there were two successful revolts: 1) by the Trung Sisters (38-42 CE) and 2) the early Ly (544-602 CE) during which they claimed temporary independence.

Tran Hung Dao in 1288, using the same strategy as Ngo Quyen three centuries earlier, was able to ambush and destroy the Toghan-led Mongolian fleet at the Bach Dang estuary close to Ha Long Bay. The Chinese would not return until 1407.



Trận Bạch Đằng- 938

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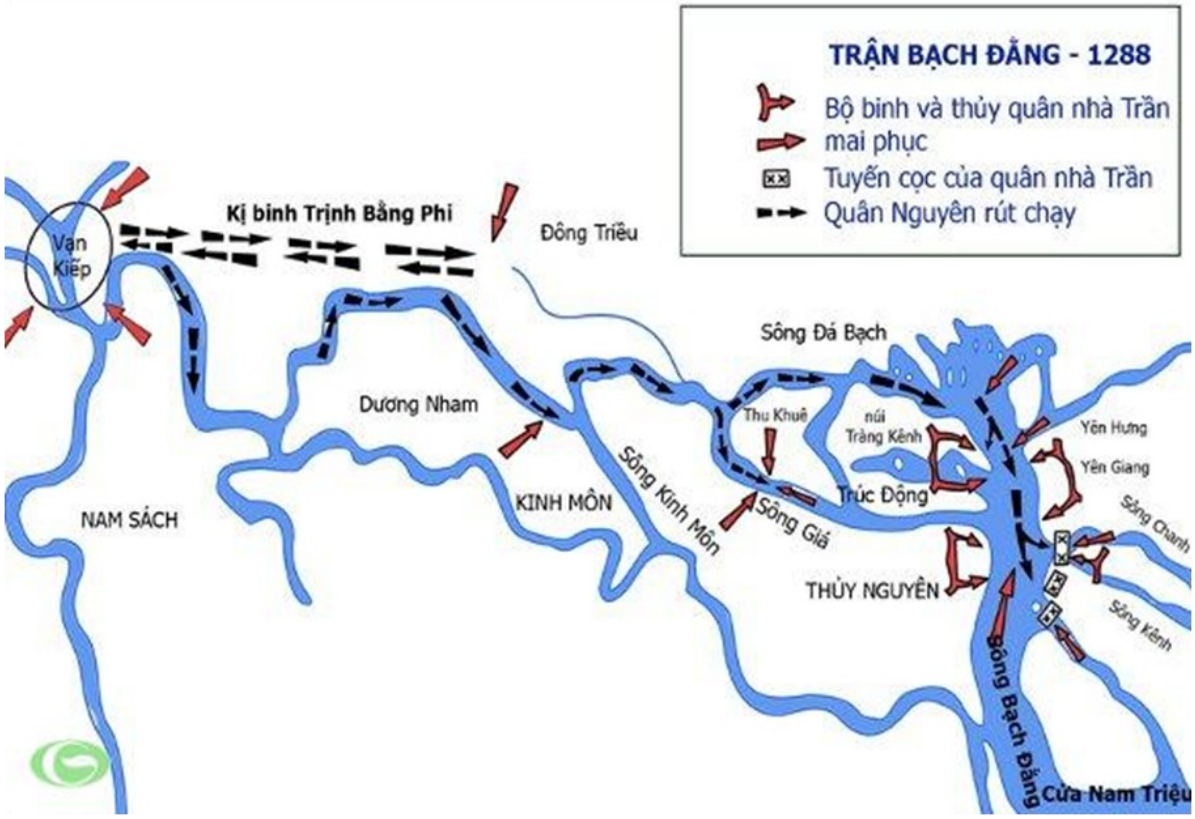

Another Blogger Jailed

Nguyen Huu Vinh and his assistant, Nguyen Thi Minh Thuy, are accused of abusing democratic freedoms to infringe on the interests of the state, an offense punishable by up to seven years in prison, said the lawyer, Ha Huy Son. Vinh, 59, and Thuy, 35, will stand trial Wednesday in Hanoi, Vietnam's capital. They have been in jail since they were arrested in May 2014.

Vinh, better known as Anh Ba Sam, was a police officer with the Ministry of Public Security in Hanoi. He quit in 1999 and set up a private investigation firm. His father was a government minister and Vietnam's ambassador to the former Soviet Union.

In 2007, Vinh set up the Ba Sam blog. He later launched two others — Dan Quyen, or Citizens' Rights, in 2013, and Chep Su Viet, or Writing Vietnamese History, in early 2014. The blogs provided links to news on political, social, economic and cultural issues from state media as well as activists.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/vietnam-puts-prominent-blogger-on-trial-for-anti-state-posts/2016/03/22/78126d72-effa-11e5-a2a3-d4e9697917d1_story.html