



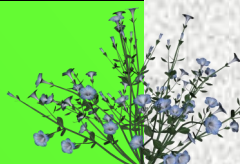
SAIGEON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American

NEWSLETTER # 91

MAY 2016



**A COUNTRY
STAYS ALIVE
WHEN ITS
CULTURE IS
ALIVE.**

**HOPE NEVER DIES
IN THE
INDOMITABLE
VIETNAMESE MIND**

- **SACEI Newsletter** updates you on the latest news about Vietnamese-America.
- It serves as a **LINK** between SACEI members and those who are interested in the Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American culture.

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A Tribute to ARVN Vets

A Tribute to ARVN Vets who had sacrificed their lives and futures to Vietnam; they are always in our mind.

Forty-one years following the end of the war, shunned by the communist government they live neglected, poor, on the margins of the society that despises them; they bear with them the physical scars of the war and old age: loss of pride, vision, memory, limb loss, lack of retirement benefits, etc. This tribute is for them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN45PH4kl1w&feature=youtu.be>



Truth: General Tran Van Minh

Interviewed by Larry Engelman

I can only tell you my truth. It is not the truth of any other Vietnamese general or military officer. It is not the truth for any Vietnamese politician. It is not the truth for my family or for my friends. And above else, it is not God's truth. In time, we will know God's truth. But I'm sure of right now is my truth—what I saw and believed. This is my truth.

The answer to the tragedy of the defeat of South Vietnam is simple. It can be summed up in two words, "not enough." We did not have enough supplies in the last two weeks of the war. And we did not have enough soldiers. That was all. That was the whole problem. Not enough.

The American media said that we lost the war because we were corrupt. I cannot deny that there was corruption in Vietnam. There was. There was corruption in business, in politics, and even in some part of the military. But there was no corruption in the Air Force. My men believed in their country and they had faith in their officers. There was no corruption that I saw in the officers or the men. Our problem was that we did not have enough parts and we did not have enough fuel. We were especially low on fuel at the end of the war. So we could not fly our airplanes. Our forces were grounded. The Americans, though, had computers and long lists of figures. They told us we had enough. They decided we had

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Gen. Tran Van Minh...

enough fuel and spare parts. They decided that on a political basis. They did not decide that on a realistic basis.

All we ever needed was supplies... supplies to fight with. When the supplies were no longer given to us, that hurt the morale of the officers and the troops. Everybody saw the end of the supplies. They knew we would run out. And when they saw that happening, they knew we had been abandoned by our best friends. And then they lost much of their will to fight.

I never dreamed that our friends would betray us and drop us. I thought of Berlin and Korea as the examples of American resolve. And I saw the Americans protected them. I thought that, we too, were one of the outposts of freedom in the world. Ambassador Graham Martin told me again and again that the Americans would never abandon us. He said we could count on that for sure.

What happened in the end is just what some Americans say happened. We lost the war faster that the North could win it. That is true. I supposed that President Thieu's policy of abandoning the highlands after the fall of Ban Me Thuot was a good one. But if we had been supplied properly, then our morale would have been maintained and we could have reorganized, redeployed and fought.

When President Thieu resigned on April 21st, I thought that was a hopeful sign. I thought that perhaps now there would be a new agreement, a new partition. Vice President Huong became President. He was an old and revered teacher. He was an honest man. But then, he turned the presidency over to General Duong Van Minh. Some of us thought that maybe Minh could make a peace agreement. But we also thought that everything that was happening was just a shadow. Everything, we believed, was determined behind the scenes by the superpowers. The Americans, the Russians, and the Chinese had decided the fate of Vietnam. We were waiting day by day to see what they had decided somewhere in secret. We thought part of their agreement must have been for America to stop sending us supplies.

In the last days of the Republic of Vietnam, I spoke with General Nguyen Cao Ky many times. And he asked me to lead a coup. He said, "Be careful. The Americans are protecting President Thieu. Don't let them know your plans." Then I would see him a few days later, and he would ask me, "When are you going to lead the coup? When is the coup?" I told him that I did not want to lead a coup. I asked him if he had a plan for a coup. And he said, "No. He did not." He was so cautious. He said he thought that I did. He wanted me to lead a coup so that he could become the new leader of the country. But what general Ky did not understand was that my officers, my men and I were not loyal to anyone man. We were loyal to our country. We were loyal to Vietnam. We all loved Vietnam. So many of my men died for Vietnam. They fought and died not for any man, but for Vietnam.

In his autobiography, General Ky said I came to his house and said to him that I was loyal to him whatever he did. He said that I told him that people from the American Embassy were trying to bribe me to work for them and to spy on him. None of that was true. No one ever tried to bribe me—especially no one from the American Embassy. And I never had that conversation with General Ky. It was almost funny reading it. Why did he put that in his book anyway? Where did he get that? Maybe he was writing about someone else. He could not have been writing about me.

On April 29th, late in the morning, I got a call from the DAO saying that there was to be a meeting of the Americans and the commanding officers of the Vietnamese Air Force. I went to the Dao with several of my men. We were shown into a room. Then we were left in a room for a long time. We thought that Ambassador Martin or General home Smith (the Defense Attache) or someone else would come in with a new plan for striking back at the North Vietnamese. But they never showed up. No one showed up until the late afternoon. After we had gone into the compound, they had a guard disarm us. That had never happened before.

Then finally someone came into the room, an officer who said, "This is the end, General Minh. A helicopter is outside waiting to take you away." We went outside to the helicopter and were flown out to the Blue Ridge in the South China Sea.

An American Air Force colonel was on the helicopter with us. He sat next to me. He was crying on the way out. He could not even talk. But he wrote something on a slip of paper and handed to me. It read, "General, I am so sorry." I still have that piece of paper. I'll keep it all my life. I'll always remember that sad flight out to the Blue Ridge.

We Vietnamese who are Buddhists, we believe that God disposes of all things. We believe that in this life we suffer many things because in a former life we did something wrong. I believe that in some former life that I cannot remember I must have done something very wrong. That is why this happened to me and to my country. Sometime we may be able to modify fate if we live right and do what our hearts tell us to do. That is what I have always tried to do. I have always tried to do what is right and to do what my heart tells me to do.

But since the fall of my country, my heart has been broken. For twenty years I have felt a great emptiness and a great sadness inside me. It will never go away. Every day, I feel it. Not a day passes in my life that I do not think of Vietnam.

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Gen. Tran Van Minh...

The Seattle Times
 Tuesday Sept 2, 1997
 Death of Vietnam General: Kristin Huckshorn

San Jose, Calif. One by one, the old soldiers approached the flag draped casket and paused. In an instant, the years fell away and they clicked their heels together, stood for a moment ramrod straight and snapped a farewell salute to the general they once served.

"He was my idol," said one soldier, An Quoc Lai, as families and friends gathered yesterday at a funeral home in San Jose. "He was like John Wayne to me."

Tran Van Minh, three star general who commanded the South Vietnamese Air Force until the end of the Vietnam War, died last Wednesday of kidney failure and complications from a stroke. He was 66.

Minh was among the dozen highest-ranking officers of the former South Vietnamese military who resettled in the United States after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. But it was his war time reputation as an honest and incorruptible leader and his postwar efforts to organize Vietnamese Air Force veterans—not his prominent rank—that drew more than 600 people from across the country to the service yesterday.

"There are many old Vietnamese generals who die in America, but people do not go to their funerals," said a former Air Force officer who did not want his name used. "Today, there are people here from Texas, Washington D.C., Colorado, Southern California. General Minh had everyone's respect."

Yesterday, mourners bowed in prayer and then handed glowing incensed sticks to Minh's son, Tran Thanh Phong. He placed them in urns on an elaborate altar laden with fruit and burning candles. Twenty Buddhist monks and nuns surrounded the altar to offer prayers and chants. Minh's body lay nearby in an open casket, draped with the red and yellow flag of South Vietnam. An honor guard marched into the hall behind another South Vietnamese flag and the congregation rose to haltingly sing the old national anthem.

Along one wall, 20 middle aged men in camouflage fatigues, red felt berets and polished boots stood at attention, trying to sing along while wiping away tears.

Minh's widow, Vu Ngoc Thinh, sat to the side of the altar with her two daughters, crying quietly. "a lot of women take care of their husbands out of duty," said Minh's daughter, Ngoc Chan Tran. "But she was still in love with him."

The couple would have soon celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary, she said.

Her father was born in the Mekong delta, joined the military at 19 and entered the Air Force two years later. An educated man, he spoke both English and French.

Said a veteran named Thanh who did not want his last name used: "He kept politics out of the Air Force. He lived modestly and acted modestly. He set an example."

<http://ide421.blogspot.com/2012/12/gen-tran-van-minh-remembers-fall-of.html>

“What Do You Do When It’s the End?”

Bill Laurie

I left Vietnam about three days after Kissinger said, “Peace is at hand.” I laughed.

I knew there was not going to be any peace until there was a military victory, until either the North won in the South, or until the South had got its shit together to the point where being sent to the South was a death sentence, and by virtue of that Hanoi would decide that they had best pursue other things other than trying to take over the South militarily. But there would be no peace. And I can't say I've got documents, and I can't say I've got proof, but when you're over there that amount of time, you start smelling things. You rely much more on your intuitive sense rather than the old western logic. You really develop strong reliance on your feelings and your guts.

And so I, to my own satisfaction, knew that there would not be any end to any war after that peace treaty was signed. When I came back to the states and people were talking about peace, I was astounded. People were saying well now the war is over. And having been over there I was not plugged into the wave of thought here. I'd gone into it too much. My thought patterns weren't cognizant of what was going on here. And people were saying, “Well the war's over now”, and I said, “You're out of your mind! You really, seriously think the war is over?” They'd go “Well, they signed the peace treaty” and I say, “That's bullshit. There's no end to any war. That's just a way for us to get out. It's not going to stop. It's not going to end.”

And people said, “Well what do you mean? All this Paris peace treaty stuff.”

“Well it's bullshit, or it's invalid, or whatever you want to call it. It is not an end to any war. It is, if nothing else, just part of a “decent interval”. We want to get out. That all it means.

So I came home in November, 1972. But I was not happy to leave Vietnam. I would gladly have stayed longer. If they said, “Do you want to extend for two years?” I would have said, “Absolutely! Right now! Where do I sign? But I couldn't. Nobody could. At that time it was just “get out!” I had to fight like hell to stay there as long as I did because once I got there they were saying, “Hey we got too many people, everybody's getting an early out”. And I didn't want that.

Fortunately they miscounted and sent too many people home, so they cancelled the early out. But I was scrambling like a mad man to get an extension, or be released from military duty in the country. By that time I was just grafted on to South Vietnam. I did not want to leave. I did not want to come back to the States. I still had things to do in South Vietnam. I came back here and they dropped me off at Travis AFB and sent me down one end of a building and when I came out the other end I was a civilian. I found that when I tried to talk to Americans back here, I just had nothing in common with them. I was in the same situation as one who comes to a party late and one know ahead of time that it's not the kind of people he really likes to associate with anyhow, but he's going to the party. He gets there late and everybody else is already drunk or stoned. And if you ever walk into a party where everybody is drunk or stoned and you're not, that's the way I felt. I had nothing in common with them. I did the whole archetypal Vietnam Vet syndrome thing.

I went back to my folks place in Waukegan, Illinois. I was very diligent in not even thinking about resumes or jobs or anything else, and thank God my parents put up with it. My dad had been in World War II. He, I guess, figured I was having some problems and just figured, “He'll be all right.” I know my mother thought I had malaria because I had no ambition. I'd get up at eleven o'clock, go down to the woods -- we had fifteen square miles of woods right across the street from my folks house, swamps, and I'd go down with my cameras, walk, take pictures, come home around six or seven, drink a six pack, watch a late-night movie, wake up at eleven o'clock the next day. I don't know what it was, it was just like I was in a hole and I had to stay in my hole, stay in my little tunnel and think things out before I came back out again. And I was very distraught over the news coverage of the peace. I would sit there and be watching TV with my folks, and they'd say, “Now with luck we'll have peace in Southeast Asia”. And I'd say, “That's a bunch of bullshit. It's a lie.”

The insult at being lied to by that electric tube is overwhelming. You want to reach in there and grab the news guy and throttle him right there on the spot. Tell him to quit lying to you. I kind of figured I was going back. I'd been planning on it. I wanted to work with USAID because I wanted to be doing something constructive. I wanted to go out in the villages and work with the people. I knew there'd be a USAID presence over there. I was very stupid. I thought, well I speak Vietnamese, I just fill out a form and send it in and they'll call me up. It doesn't work that way. Your form goes on the bottom with everybody else. Basically it's who do you know, and not in terms of the unfairness of it all, it's just that, hey, this guy speaks Vietnamese very well, let's get him over here. I didn't know anybody that knew me that could have put me in that position.

By then I had drifted back down to Arizona. One of the guys that had been over there who I had been in the military with had found out about all this stuff, the residual American presence and the Defense Attach Office -- the DAO. And for whatever reasons, he decided he wanted to stay and he got hold of me, and at first I declined by not responding because I wanted to work

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What Do You Do...

for USAID. I was upset over the imperceptiveness and clumsiness of our military and I personally wanted to go do something constructive, get away from all the crap, get out in the villages. But that didn't pan out. So the second time I heard from him, I thought about it one day and I sent a telegram saying start the paper-work. So I was the Defense Attache Office which was funded strictly out of the Defense Department. I flew out of Travis, in July '73.

Back in Vietnam the immediate impression I gained -- and it was something I hadn't thought of, and it shows how ignorant I was of what was working and why it was working over there -- was the tremendous economic suffering, the unemployment, inflation. You had a depression. We talk about how bad our depression was. When we pulled out, we let go thousands and thousands of people who were working. The economic effect of our departure should have been foreseen, should have been planned for. I question whether these people gave it any thought at all. You cannot hope to all of a sudden manufacture, if you will, twenty-five percent unemployment, and expect to have a growing viable society with any strength to it. It was terrible. God it was poor. There was nothing. I knew ARVN officers who worked in Saigon. Right away if you're an officer and you work in Saigon, you're four cuts above the rest. You can moonlight because you can work in Saigon, and you're an officer so you get paid a little bit more money. Your wife works, so she can get some money. You both live in one place. That makes it four, five, six times easier than if you live out in the boonies.

This guy, a captain, could not afford to eat breakfast. He did not eat breakfast. He was too poor. This guy was in a good position to maintain himself and he was hungry all the time. Corruption got worse as the economy went to hell. And as the economy worsened there was more of the tendency to look at the corruption and to say "I don't have mine, now I'm twice as mad as I was before." If you were doing all right, you can say "Ah well, he's making his money. He's corrupt. He should be shot. But I'm still doing o.k. and I'm going to go home and see my kids tonight". But when it got to the economy's being as ravished as it was-- I think about twenty-five percent unemployment and forty percent inflation--what the hell do you do? You have people with no hope. Nothing, there are no jobs, inflation is going bananas, and then without having any hope for yourself, the focus of your hatred is even more applied toward the government and Thieu. Yet, when I arrived I think the attitude of the DAO was guardedly positive. You have to remember that Hanoi got the shit knocked out of it in '72. I'm convinced, and I have no way of knowing, but I am convinced that one of the reasons they did attack was first one they figured they could pull another presidential election upset in 1972 as they did in 1968 because the American people were tired of the war. And secondly I suspect they were getting a little antsy about Vietnamization. And I suspect that they also felt like "we'd better get in there and shatter some of ARVN's gains so we can get our people in there for the cease fire. In other words, it was almost maybe roughly speaking an act of "we'd better do something, we're backsliding". And in conducting that '72 offensive they got their butts kicked, I mean hammered. They lost a lot of people. They were in no way shape or form ready or able or intending to try it again at that point in time. They were licking their wounds. So at that point without an aggressive posture, a heightened capability on the part of the other side, and with ARVN having matured, we were optimistic.

I was based by the DAO in Saigon and I would go down to the Delta and go to Ca Mau or go to Rach Gia and then I'd take off on little side jaunts or do a USAID dedication of a school, or we'd hop in a jeep and drive up to some school out in the middle of nowhere, do this, do that. It was a very unique position because I was given pretty much carte blanche, as it were, in what I wanted to do and who I should talk to, and I would have requirements of the things we need to know about.

The attack on Ban Me Thuot came in March and was a surprise to me because I was really looking at the Delta and observing the enemy's forces there. Also I had gone beyond just the intelligence aspect of it to look at what the ARVN was really capable of. So I was following details such as typical battalion strength in the different divisions and this and that. From what I understand, we expected the NVA to attack in Kontum or Pleiku. It was one or the other and then all of a sudden, Bingo! It was Ban Me Thuot. I wasn't surprised that it fell so quickly. On the other hand had they stood their ground, I wouldn't have been surprised either.

The South Vietnamese soldiers were in a very tenuous position. They did not have enough to eat. They were poor. For example, ARVN soldiers never bought a pack of cigarettes. They bought one or two at a time. That's how poor they were. The poverty was just overwhelming. You can understand Vietnam if you start at one end of a hot Kansas county with sixty pounds on your back and walk the rest of the week and have three sandwiches. Hunger does real bad things to you. I don't know if you've ever been hungry for long periods of time, but hunger does terrible things to you. The guys were hungry, poor, with no hope. There was no hope for any of them. They weren't stupid. They knew what the United States was doing to them with the aid cutback. Let's face it, what did they have hope for, a renegotiated settlement? Paris peace accords? Nixon? Obviously they're cut adrift. I don't understand how they fought the two years they did. There's no R and R, there's no this, there's no that, no rotation back

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What Do You Do... to the States. You've got a life of fighting. I don't think the normal person here in the states would have endured that. I think they would have quit. I think they would have shot themselves. But these guys fought on. But you get hungry, you get tired, you feel overwhelmed, and you're playing numbers games. The NVA can come in out of Laos or Cambodia and hit Kontum or Pleiku whenever they want. And they apply massive force, overwhelming force at a target of their choosing. And pick it off. I knew what was coming down the Ho Chi Minh trail. We all did. It was obscene. It was really obscene, this war machine --the blood lust these people had in Hanoi. I'm convinced they're absolutely pathological. I'm saying they were just getting this psycho orgasm over it. It was just disgusting. Stuart Herrington went to Hanoi a couple of times and he came back shaking his head. He said, "It's just incredible. It's like the Romans cheering the lions. Sick." This stuff was coming down the Ho Chi Minh trail in tons and tons. The Ho Chi Minh trail was no longer a bicycle path in the jungle. The Ho Chi Minh trail was an all-weather highway with a parallel oil pipeline. And they were beefing it up and you'd get the readout on the intelligence on what was coming down and you'd just shake your head and say, "Oh, God, no." It sent chills down your spine. "When this cuts loose, look out."

After Phuoc Long fell and then after Ban Me Thuot fell, there was this pause by the NVA. I think part of it was they were asking themselves, "What are the Americans going to do?" I'm convinced to the end they were wondering about that, because Saigon and Tan Son Nhut were well within range of their 130mm guns. They could have blown that place apart. You'd go around and try and gather up people here and there, and just look at the sky and ask, "What if they really decide to just cut loose?" You're buried, you'll never get out. Well, you might get out, they might end the war and you get to go home after prisoner release. I'm convinced that they had --just like the witch in the Wizard of Oz who was deathly afraid of water --a deathly fear of B-52s. When America really decides to hit you, like Nixon did in '72, it's going to hit you. We boxed their ears real bad in '72. And they're afraid of that.

So I think there was partially the question of "What's going to happen now?" And I also think some of it began to happen faster than they had planned for it. I know they didn't plan on winning until '76. So it's probably a combination of logistics and "see what happens here" and so forth. Or it may just have been poor planning. They're not all that good at planning. I remember a conversation he and I had about the NVA Third NVA division in MR II in the An Lao Valley, and the ARVN 22nd Division was up against them. And our DAO MR II man, Doug Dearth, told me, "Those guys assigned to that Third Division stand a 50/50 chance of being dead in a month."

"That's because ARVN 22nd Division was slugging it out with them. ARVN was not the best army in the world, but I'll tell you, they were fighting not the brilliant massive sweeping cinematic battles of glorious you see in movies, but it was one of these bloody rotten shitty meat grinder battles and you're hungry and tired, scared shitless and everything else. And they were staying in that stuff. They weren't deserting. They weren't breaking and running. They were right there in the thick of it. I think part of the reason for the route in MR2 is because those guys had put up with an existence of hell, you had no hope, you're hungry, tired, worried about your family, nothing positive in your life, just day in and day out misery. And they had one thing to show for it, they held."

And then Thieu gives it up. Knowing how other people hated Thieu, I can just imagine these guys thinking, "Oh, that fucking does it. We bought this land, we bought what we have, the area we control." A soldier that has busted his butt, buried his friends, and he's still got his dirt, that's his, he's earned it. And then Thieu gives it up. You start thinking, these guys all died and suffered for nothing. Leaving the Central Highlands was insanity. You could become insane real quick with something like that. It was an unfortunate situation. I'm sure the awareness was there of the possibility they couldn't hold it. But the fact was that up to that point they had. And to get actually pushed out militarily is one thing. To have it given up, just say okay now we don't need this anymore, anybody in their right mind knows if you give up the central highlands, you are not going to defend the coastal plain. It's gone. Then all your logistics just come pouring in.

I heard about the withdrawal from the Highlands at DAO one day, and I just figured, "Oh shit, it's just getting worse at an exponential rate." I had no idea what the outcome would be or when, but I didn't think it would be much longer. Some of the guys thought something could be done about it and I was with them in my heart, but in my mind I said, "This is it. You're not going to put Humpty Dumpty back together again." I figured it was over on the basis of several factors.

ARVN had been through too much. People have limits. I don't care how brave you are, how good you are, you have limits. If you've been hungry, had the shit beat out of you, tired, scared, no hope, sooner or later, armies collapse. It's happened before in Asia. Look at China. Divisions left Chiang Kai-shek and went to the other side. Plus as far as I was concerned, standing in front of the North Vietnamese at that point in time was a weakened societal structure, and weakened economy, the social fabric was

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What Do You Do...

torn to shit. It would be like trying to stop a cement truck by standing in front of it. Just awesome power. Massive fire power. You look at the stuff they had, and they knew how to use it. They are probably some of the world's premier artillery gunners. And probably some of the world's premier anti-aircraft people. They had a superb light infantry until they diluted it with these undertrained little kids, seventeen year old kids. They are very worthy adversaries. You are dealing with pros. They are not going to cut you any slack at all. Given the will and drive behind them, the Hanoi leadership, it was almost chilling to think of the awesome power that they had and that they were going to commit. As I read the situation, they finally saw they had as hot for all the marbles and this time it's not going to be taken away from us. They threw everything out of North Vietnam, training divisions, everything, and sent it South. They didn't expect to win until '76. But they figured winning in time was inevitable. All the captured documents say, "Now we've got ARVN where we want them. They don't have anything to fight with. They're fighting a poor man's war." And they were. You tell your troops if you get in contact, you have two rounds on call. That's totally worthless. That's enough to register fire and adjust fire for effect. Two rounds is nothing. The other side had overwhelming and massive fire superiority. Big stuff. There wasn't any of these little guerilla guys anymore, farmer by day, soldier by night. This was regular well-armed, incredibly sophisticated anti-aircraft. Incredibly awesome artillery. And the guns that they had, 130mm guns, you can't fire counter battery, the 155mm or the 105mm. If I have a squirt gun that shoots twenty-five feet and you have a squirt gun that shoots ten feet, you lose. The guns they had, the 130mm and 122mm guns shoot farther than 155s and 105s. ARVN had some 175s but they're difficult to move around. In effect what we gave them was useless against what Moscow gave Hanoi. Those 130 guns are incredibly nasty and relatively speaking, rather portable. You can pull those things behind a truck. Relatively small carriage, big bore. What are they going to do? There was so much stuff going on I couldn't keep track. I had to cover my own butt and make sure I could get out of there and the people that I wanted to get out of there could get out.

So other than doing my job, which at that point--what are you going to do, after all? Say "things are fine in the Delta?" So what? Any talk of moving the government south to the Delta was just dreaming. It wouldn't work. It becomes a matter of geography. The smaller the area becomes, the greater the concentration of forces. It's just simple mathematics. They can pour all their divisions in a smaller area and then how are we going to resupply? My thoughts were that once the highlands went that was it, it was just a matter of time. I could not get married to a local under the terms of my contract because of my exposure to classified material. But we did not live together. She was standard-issue girl from standard-issue Vietnamese family. Worked at the bank. And then when I realized that time was really short, let's get that paperwork going. Finally we just gave up on all that crap too. Just had a civil ceremony. You just get a certificate from the Vietnamese government that you're married, which is fully legal and everything else. I know some people in D.C. to this day think that I'm not legally married, because I didn't tell anybody. Getting married was just a commercial in the entire tragic program, just a brief interlude, take a couple hours off work, get papers signed, get back to business. No, I just felt miserable at the time -- ironically.

By the time there was a front established at Xuan Loc, the NVA had so much to fight with and the South Vietnamese had so little to fight with--let's face it, who was going to come to the South Vietnam's assistance? If only in the diplomatic field, if only to get them something to fight with? Switzerland? No, that's over with. They have no benefactors. Hanoi had a benefactor who loaded them up to the gills with everything they wanted to shoot. That's Moscow. I have a security clearance. They are not going to leave me behind. And I wasn't going to leave my wife behind. I wasn't going to leave till I got the people I wanted to, and there wasn't a damn thing they could have done except say okay. And by that time, the belligerence of having your entire world, psyche trashed and violated, you just say I'm drawing my line here. These are my terms. In my mind at that point in time, I said I'm either getting my wife out of here, and whoever else I deem worthy of getting out of here, or I'm not going. I've got clearance that you want to get out of here. I had that as an option. I never really worried about it. I wasn't being a brave guy, I was just being someone who just flat didn't give a shit anymore. What are you going to do? Cut my hair and send me to Vietnam? You do get that way. You insist on your terms. I wasn't worried about that. I suspected that the odds were very slim the NVA would come loose. My gut feeling was they're going to let the evacuation go. And many other people felt the same way. If you harm one American head, Ford can come in on the war powers act. He's got sixty days and he can have B52s flying in about three. So I'm sure Hanoi was always thinking in the back of their mind, we better not harm an American or at least look as if we're going to jeopardize the success of the evacuation. They are paranoid almost in a clinical sense of the B52. The B52 is a devastating thing. On top of the fact that they had just the plumpest B52 targets you could ever imagine. It's tough to bomb guerrillas from thirty thousand feet in the air. It is not tough to bomb a divisional logistics base. That's just tailor made for a B52 target. So they were very, very vulnerable to American air power. I wasn't worried about that.

The only fear that did enter my mind was a berserk South Vietnamese. Which I never saw happen then. I had seen berserk

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ARVN before and they are berserk. A case in point I saw I was out in a village and there was some old dumpy little bus and some ARVN came down the street and he was drunk and -- the syndrome was not new to me -- just fed up. As I found out later his brother had been killed and he was still having problems with a stomach wound he had sustained years before, and he had no hope. Fight for nothing, die for what? No life, no nothing. He climbed up on the hood of this bus, barefoot, and started kicking windows out and smashing the windows out with his hands. He had blood dripping down his arms and hands and everything else. His feet were all bleeding. He was a mad man. I felt that I knew these people well enough that if the South Vietnamese put away a lot of alcohol I knew that it was a distinct possibility, maybe not a probability, but if it was in the wrong time in the wrong place with the wrong ARVN, any one of the Americans there could have been shot and drilled right on the street and just left. It was probably very remote, but it was in the back of your mind. By leaving the way we did we were in effect telling them you lived and died for nothing. It's a cosmic insult. Out of the whole universe you are worth squat. And they were fed up.

The whole culmination of Thieu and corruption, and the fact that they were willing to fight but couldn't. All they asked was for a reorganization, somebody who would tell them what to do. They didn't get any commands. They were ARVN units and they wanted to fight. No orders, no nothing. It's as low as you can be right at the threshold of killing themselves. Total despair, no hope. I know for a fact some didn't give a rat's ass whether they lived or died. But as far as they were concerned, as Hollywoodish as it sounds, their big hope was just take as many NVA with them as they could. I know they lived that, that wasn't words, that's what they did. I remember one fellow I knew that had a little refreshment stand and of course in Vietnam that's the equivalent to a neighborhood bar or restaurant. It's neat, you scrounge up two tables and an umbrella and a little soup stove and you got yourself a restaurant, you're in business. I ate at his place many many times. Very nice individual. He was approximately mid-40s, kind, warm, friendly human being, a neat guy. One day I was sitting there and he just looked over and he said, "If the north Vietnamese communist takeover, this is all gone. I can't refreshment to them. It's all over with." I don't know if it's understandable for an American that has not been here, but it is THE END in giant letters-- the end of everything. Your life, the hopes for your children, it's gone, evaporated, destroyed. They only thing equivalent is something that we see vicariously like in "Star Wars," when Darth Vader destroyed an entire planet. What you have in Vietnam is destruction of a total way of life, not just a government, not just an army. And these people knew what the other side was and they weren't up there debating communism. They knew them for what they did as communists. And hell, none of these people read Karl Marx, or any other political or economic philosopher or anything else. When they saw what the people did, they knew. The fear. The chill.

What do you do when it is the end? You just take your whole life and erase it. Everything, your childhood, what you are brought up to believe, and what you want to do with your life, however feeble it may have been, whatever miserable little hopes you may have had for somehow, some way getting along. But here's a guy on the lowest rung of society's ladder, a damn soup vendor, and his life is going to be over with. He can't even sell soup as capitalism is not allowed. Which has materialism. They crack down on all this stuff. By the time he resigned, Nguyen Van Thieu was irrelevant. If I had any thoughts toward the matter at all I was hoping he'd get shot. I had contempt for what he represented, and when you've been in Vietnam and Asia and you understand how arrogant the so-called intellectuals can be, they just look down on the peasants. We don't even have equivalent snobs here like some of their jerks who said "dirty peasants." They're just such effete pricks. You could not care less if they were shot or run over, it makes no difference whatsoever. It sounds very cruel in the context here. But here is a guy and he's your friend, Lieutenant So and So, or Colonel So and So, and he's just a simple guy in the South Vietnamese army, doesn't really care for his government, but he's doing his best because he knows pretty much what's going to happen to him and the country and the lives of his children if the other side takes over, which is, they'll end up being in Cambodia, which came true. If it were to come down to take an APC and run over Nguyen Van Thieu, or keep these other people out, he'd gladly run of Thieu or anybody else just as you would remove a cancerous tumor. That's what it came down to. You don't have the luxury of debating whether it's right or wrong, or is capital punishment right or wrong. In your own mind you would have done anything. There was never a time during those days when you could sit down and think. There were just things you had to do from day to day. But you never knew exactly how it was going to go down. And then you had these nice little interludes like hauling babies out of helicopters from that C5A. Stuff was happening, it happens to an extent and at a velocity which exceeds, I think, the capacity of the human mind to digest and absorb it. You're walking around in a fucking daze. What else could possibly happen? I must emphasize it's not a matter of "Gee, we've lost politically".

To me personally, in the long run my Vietnam came down to very simply, "Why am I here?" And it just seemed that I knew sixty or eighty people fairly well, they're Vietnamese, and that's my Vietnam. I'll save my Vietnam. I had to get those people out. The bond of friendship and your word becomes more important when everything else is trash. Treaties are garbage. Everything else is a lie, and there's a compensatory action, you can say I'm going to make this work. There are some absolutes in the universe, if

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it's only what I say. And that is exactly what I did. Then I left. I'm not saying I'm a saint, but I came out of there and I brought those people out and others, and if there is a judgment day and let's assume there is a God and he says, "What the hell are you worth?" I'm saying, you saw it in Vietnam, Lord. You ought to know." So for myself, personal redemption, I don't give a shit. This country, or the fates, my universe is turned inside out. It ain't going to judge me. My challenge to this country and the universe is, Are you capable of judging me or anybody else that hauled their freight in Vietnam. This country cannot judge me. They're incapable of it, speaking broadly. Hell, I was instrumental in saving some kids lives over there, and stuff like that, I feel good about that.

I was instrumental in helping save an old woman's foot one time. That means a lot to me. These old village people come up to us once out in the field because they knew American medics were there. This woman came up with this foot that was the most disgusting putrid thing I had ever seen. It stunk, it was running, it was pus and goo and ooze. She spilled a cauldron of hot water on her foot and it was enough to make you gag. It wasn't just regular blood. Well we didn't have much medicine at this orphanage. It was tough to come by. So we didn't have the balls to tell her to go to hell. And I was the only one who spoke Vietnamese. I said okay we'll give you a little Bactrian, which is an antiseptic, Vaseline type stuff. Vaseline is not good because it is a culture for bacteria. Bactrian is bactericidal and does kill germs. We put some other shit on there and it was just disgusting. She shuffled off. And then a decision was made, next week when she comes back, if she is still alive, we are just going to tell her "Lady we don't have enough. Kids have long lives. You don't. Go." So sure enough she comes back next week. And the medic looked up at me and said, "Well here it comes". And how do you do that? And I'm just standing there, I didn't know how I could force the words out of my throat. "I'm sorry but we don't have enough medicine". And she comes up and I didn't even look at her foot. I was just looking in her face, and she starts saying "Thank you Mr. American doctor." And it didn't register. She kept on saying it. And it dawned on me she wasn't asking for more medicine. I looked at her foot, I'm not saying I believe in miracles, but I've never seen anything as unexpected as that. Her foot was obviously on the way to recovery. And I looked at the medic. I do not believe it. And she just thanked us both, turned around and went home. To me that old woman's foot and her taking the time to walk down that dirty old road to come and say thank you, there is nothing that has more meaning to me.

<http://lde421.blogspot.com/2012/12/bill-lauries-vietnam.html>

For One Man, War's End was Trivial Next to His Travails

Cameron W. Barr, *The Christian Science Monitor* April 27, 1995

(Submitted by Bill Laurie)

HANOI, VIETNAM — ALMOST 40 years ago, a Vietnamese lawyer and academic named Nguyen Manh Tuong stepped forward to criticize the mistakes of his government.

Dr. Tuong was an important figure at the time -- he was chosen by Ho Chi Minh, the founder of Vietnam's Communist Party, to argue the case for Vietnamese sovereignty to their French colonizers just after World War II.

The communists did not jail or execute Tuong for his opinions, but he was barred from his two professions. He was allowed to live, but only in silence.

As the US and Vietnam mark the 20th anniversary of the end of the war they fought, Tuong's story suggests what may be the strongest legacy of Vietnam's struggle for a unified and independent country: the authoritarian rule of its communist masters. In terms of the oppression felt by Vietnam's intellectuals, Tuong says, the war's end had "no significance."

Recently the party has tried to appear more tolerant of criticism, in part to ease the concerns of the Western countries that are a major source of the foreign investment necessary to Vietnam's ongoing economic "renovation." Last year Do Muoi, the secretary-general of the party, visited Tuong in a gesture of reconciliation. Tuong says the meeting was a courtesy call devoid of substance.

Tuong's 1992 memoir, published in France, is banned in Vietnam, although copies of the book have circulated in secret. To this day, he says, a public speech critical of the party would result in arrest.

Tuong agreed to an interview last month, the first he has given to a US newspaper. He could not have appeared more the intellectual, a label he wears as proudly as the silk foulard around his neck. His manners are elegant, his French is courtly, and his eyes do not mask a sadness caused by what he calls "the black years."

Born in Hanoi in 1909, Tuong quickly distinguished himself academically. Sent to France for higher education, he was awarded twin doctorates in law and letters at the age of 22.

In 1946, Tuong was back in Hanoi, practicing law and teaching, when he was called to Ho's office. "He asked me to formulate ...

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For One Man... the official argument that the Vietnamese delegation would present" to French negotiators at a bilateral conference, he says. The French rejected the argument, but Tuong was subsequently asked to represent Vietnam at three international conferences and named to the board of several leading organizations.

"Unfortunately," he says, "these good times did not last."

A decade after he assisted Ho, Tuong was part of what is known in China and Vietnam as the "hundred-flowers" movement, a period when the communist parties in the two nations allowed opponents to voice criticism. In both countries the communists soon backtracked -- silencing, imprisoning, and sometimes executing those who had spoken out.

Tuong criticized the government's brutal land-reform campaign in which thousands of people, many of them innocent, were executed in the name of redistributing land and wealth in the countryside.

In an October 1956 speech, Tuong declared: "We have let die, in a horrible way, old people and children whom we did not want to suppress," according to an account later published by the South Vietnamese government.

Tuong says he wanted to press for more freedom of speech and for the communists to listen to the country's intellectuals. He says he was not against the party itself -- he praises the "formidable successes" of Vietnam's communists in education, the fight against hunger, and other areas -- but against its mistakes and injustices.

Nonetheless, he was suddenly barred from teaching, publishing, and practicing law, and put under police surveillance. What of his acquaintance with Ho? "All the members of the Communist Party," Tuong replies, "from the president down to the lowest cadres ... could never voice an opinion contrary to that of the party. That's why they let me starve."

For decades, acquaintances and former students crossed the street to avoid meeting him publicly. To stay alive, Tuong sold the books in his library for what the paper they were printed on was worth. He still depends, he says, on the "charity of friends."

What would he say to the world about Vietnam today? "Despite the economic reforms now under way and the emergence of a business class that can afford to throw money from the window, there is still a majority who are unhappy."

Viet Thanh Nguyen: 2016 Pulitzer Prize Winner for Fiction



Viet Thanh Nguyen: "The Sympathizer" (Grove Press)

Viet Thanh Nguyen, 45, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for his debut novel, "The Sympathizer," which opens in 1975 in Saigon and is narrated by "the captain," a Communist sympathizer who escapes to Los Angeles and spies on a South Vietnamese group he has infiltrated.

Part satire, part espionage thriller and part historical novel, "The Sympathizer" grew out of Mr. Nguyen's desire to "write a novel that would allow me to explore the complexity of the Vietnam War, through all eyes; it's meant to be entertaining and provocative."

Paris Breakfast Run: April 2, 2016

Submitted by Duong Thiet



South Vietnamese flags flew during the 5K run in Paris on April 2, 2016 ...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_VCKFXCwIE

Comment: Vietnam War Ended 40 Years Ago

William Stearman

SACEI:

I have previously commented on Dr. Stearman's essay http://sacei07.org/Newsletter90_2016_4.pdf in a different forum. I think it will be useful for your readers to consider some of those points raised last year. He, having been a Senior (Flag Rank) U.S. Foreign Service Officer with impressive National Security Council and academic resume, authored a thought-provoking paper that SACEI shared with readers. Here follows my comments and a few points of non-concurrence, as circulated several months ago.

1. Japan did not exactly invade French Indo-China, but the threat to do that was real and so intimidated the Vichy anointed colonial authorities that they allowed Japanese presence and activity so long as French colonial officers, civil, military, and police could continue to strut in place. That marriage of strange bed-fellows lasted until 1945 when the Japanese took full control.

2. In a strange iteration of domino principle, decades later Poland was the crumbling keystone of the Warsaw Pact because when that country succeeded in becoming more Polish than communist, other East European countries asked themselves why they could not do as well as the Polish people.

3. Despite the testimony of Suharto and Malik, with endorsement by Robert Novick, Indonesian friends later told me that the spur-of-the-moment (with emphasis on spur) decision to resist the communist coup was a matter of personal survival, unconnected to US Marines in Danang. Also, the British in Malaysia were at that point already doing pretty well against the (communist supported) Indonesian trouble-making...even in Borneo. So debate over whether prolonged US effort in Viet Nam actually had the effect of buying precious time for other countries will continue.

4. The war against the Viet Nam Communist Party, given historic conditions on the ground and within Vietnamese society countrywide, was going to be very very difficult; but a Republic of Viet Nam with assistance from the United States could have prevailed if proper military and political strategy had been applied from 1954 onward. Damming the damn Lao Corridor was essential. And the optimum time for doing so, I think, was summer of 1967 not 1972. The strategic military move would have been to isolate the North from the South by occupying a defensible line from Lao Bao to the Mekong, thereby preventing reinforcement and resupply for major communist military formations.

We decided not to take that step. At each point thereafter, 1968 and 1972, when communist offensives were beaten back, the party leadership maintained resolve to persist even at great cost; while our own determination to "bear any burden" was flagging.

5. The communist 23 division equivalency suggested by Dr. Stearman for 1972 offensive is debatable. Is that country-wide, or on the four fronts where the offensive was conducted? The concept of military unit equivalents is complex and requires definition. Are the units equivalent to full strength, or at least foxhole strength, US divisions?

My own impression of the field situation in mid-September 1972, observing in each of the four military regions, is that in I Corps...not only at Quang Tri, but also in the Ashau Valley approaches, and even in parts of Quang Ngai, RVNAF accomplishments (supported by US Liaison Officers and US air strikes) was impressive. II Corps represented more of a "draw" in that (repetitious of 1966 and 1968) communist main force units withdrew to Laos or Viet Nam interior valleys (like An Lao) to lick their wounds...but no one was going after them. In Central Viet Nam the reality was always, whether 1965 or 1975, that RVNAF was short-handed. III Corps was an instance where RVNAF maneuvered tactically and in some areas took the initiative, but the balance of forces allowed communist forces to pose a continuing threat and hold much of what was seized. In IV Corps RVNAF seemed to be maintaining what was obtained in part through active CORDS support.

6. Retaking Quang Tri City and much of the eastern portion of the province was a stellar feat of arms for the Republic of Viet Nam. But it should be equally remarkable that pretty close to Saigon, the encirclement of An Loc was never broken and Loc Ninh could not be recovered. Tran Van Tra fell out of favor with party leadership and his statements after 1975 have to be understood within that context. I

am a skeptic concerning Dr. Stearman's belief that had the war continued some months further, with continued US support, the South could have emerged victorious by evicting all communist forces from the Republic. I believe that the key was always the Lao transit corridor, and only by blocking that could we win. Bill Colby, for whom I worked, and who I still hold in a higher state of grace than most senior officials, discussed the problem with me years later at Fort Bragg. We disagreed whether in 1972 the war was substantially "won" or not; but we both understood that securing victory would have been

dependent on whether the US maintained a very high level of support. He thought that could have been done, and I thought

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that it proved unworkable for American political leadership of the day.

7. I doubt that Hanoi felt "certain defeat," but northern Viet Nam was definitely feeling enormous pain. Party leaders were able to seize the occasion of a weakened President Nixon, weary American public, and Kissinger ambition, to tap dance a few steps from absolute intransigence and lure HAK (who did not have the best of intent with respect to RVN...read the White House tape transcripts...he wanted the albatross gone so that other interests could be pursued) into a Nobel Prize corner. John Negroponte and David Engel behaved with honor but not enough others in Washington joined them.

8. By winter of 1972-73 the trail system through Laos, and fuel delivery pipeline, (as SOG discovered and later NHA KY THUAT confirmed) was already revitalized and pretty sophisticated. Meanwhile, in Washington, one senior...even very senior...foreign service officer attempting to wrest congressional funding for Viet Nam, simply demonstrates that jesting Pontius Pilate (Kissinger) had already turned away to wash his hands.

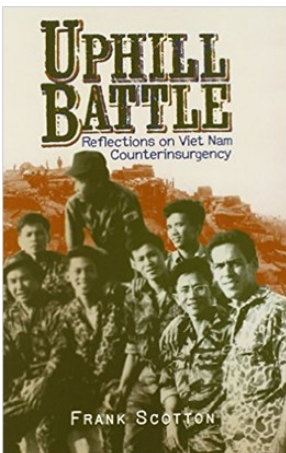
All the foregoing is expression of difference in opinion; but one certain corrective detail is that Dr. Stearman was not Director of Psychological Operations in Viet Nam. To the extent that there was a Director, that was Barry Zorthian during Dr. Stearman's roughly twenty months in Saigon. Dr. Stearman was Director of the North Vietnamese Affairs Division within Zorthian's organization, an important position, but not overall director.

From a flag rank (only by military courtesy) senior (maybe by mistake) foreign service officer, who was a sort of maverick/mongrel field operations guy,

Frank Scotton.

Uphill Battle

Frank Scotton



Learning the Vietnamese language, carrying a carbine, and living out of a rucksack, he proved that small teams, correctly trained and led, could compete with communist units.

In 1964, Scotton organized mobile platoons to emphasize political aspects of the conflict. Those special teams, adopted by the CIA, became models for the national pacification program. He prepared units in some provinces at the request of General Westmoreland, and in 1965 and 1966 worked with Special Forces. While organizational assistant and trouble-shooter for Robert Komer in 1967, and subsequently with William Colby in the military headquarters (MACV), Scotton reluctantly concluded that improved counter-insurgency techniques could not beat back the challenges posed by North Viet Nam resolve, lack of political energy in South Viet Nam, and the dissolving American commitment.

Available on Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/Uphill-Battle-Reflections-Counterinsurgency-Southeast/dp/0896728676/>

Irony of Ironies: DHL Flies to Communist Vietnam



DHL is a division the German logistics company Deutsche Post DHL providing international express mail services. Deutsche Post is the world's largest logistics company operating around the world, particularly in sea and air mail.

Founded in 1969 by Larry Hillblom, a Berkeley law student, it was acquired by Deutsche Post in 2001.

In December 2002, it introduces red and yellow new color scheme and logo, the colors of the South Vietnamese flag.

It has been flying to communist countries that could not be served by any other delivery service, including Cuba, the Soviet Union, Eastern Bloc, Iraq, Iran, China, Vietnam, and North Korea since the 1980s.

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Old Vietnam Photos

Submitted by Bill Laurie

<http://belleindochine.free.fr/sommaire.htm>

