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A COUNTRY STAYS ALIVE WHEN ITS CULTURE IS ALIVE.

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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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Tran Huynh Duy Khuc: The Path of Vietnam

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

Trần Huỳnh Duy Thức (born 29 November 1966) is a Vietnamese engineer, entrepreneur and human rights activist. He was the founder and president of EIS, an international internet and telephone line provider. He is one of Amnesty International's prisoners of conscience.
Thức opened EIS as a computer shop in 1993 which assembled its own computers, and by 1994 the brand dominated the home PC market in Saigon. Later on it became an internet service provider, and in 1998 became the first Vietnamese ISP to branch out from dial-up to an integrated services digital network.
Thức began blogging under the pen name of Tran Dong Chan after he received no response to letters he had written to senior government officials. In 2008 he started co-writing "The Path of Viet Nam", which assessed the current situation in Vietnam, with a comprehensive set of recommendations for governance reform centered on human rights.

He was arrested in 2009, initially for "theft of telephone wires", and later for "conducting propaganda" against the state. He made a televised confession but later recanted, saying he was coerced. In 2010 he was tried in day-long trial alongside fellow dissidents Lê Công Định, Nguyễn Tiến Trung and Le Thang Long
He was sentenced for 16 years of imprisonment, followed by five years house arrest, for "activities aimed at subverting the people's administration". His sentence was the longest ever passed on a Vietnamese dissident. His imprisonment was condemned by British Foreign Office Minister Ivan Lewis and American ambassador Michael W. Michalak. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights concluded his detention was arbitrary and requested the Vietnamese government to release him and provide compensation. Amnesty International declared him a prisoner of conscience and called for his release.
He is being held at the Xuyen Moc Prison in Bà Rịa–Vũng Tàu Province (Wikipedia).

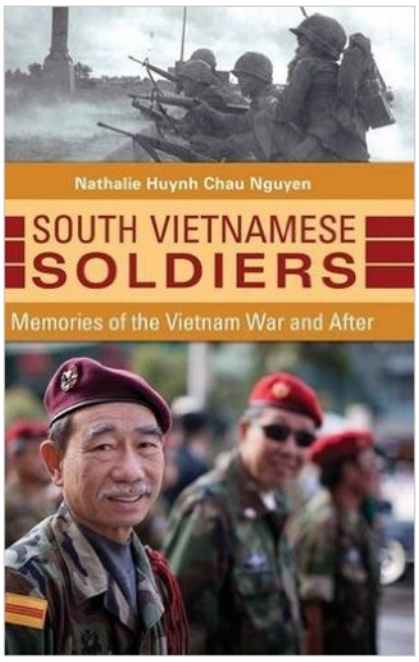
South Vietnamese Soldiers

Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen

Editor: We thank Nathalie Nguyen, the author of *South Vietnamese Soldiers* for having kindly allowed us to re-print the preface of her recently published book.

"Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen has made a major contribution not only to the history of the Vietnam War but also to the history of wars and their aftermath. *South Vietnamese Soldiers* is both a scholarly and an emotive account of those who served in the armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam. Based on extensive interviews with former service personnel, the book recovers an important dimension of the war, too often distorted or completely overlooked in the extensive literature on the war." (Peter Edwards, Official Historian of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948–1975)

"In a powerful and eloquent book, Nguyen rewrites the South Vietnamese back into their own history and gives them back their voices. This is an important and overdue treatment of the missing dimension of the Vietnam War. Drawing on extensive research and interviews with surviving veterans of the Republic of Vietnam's military, Nguyen restores a critical perspective to the study of the war and offers additional dimensions to our understanding. This often deeply moving study should be read by everyone with an interest in the subject." (Jeffrey Grey, Professor of History, UNSW Canberra at the Australian Defence Force Academy)



SOUTH VIETNAMESE PERSPECTIVES

During its twenty years of existence between 1955 and 1975, South Vietnam embodied an alternative vision of Vietnam to the one-party state that existed north of the 17th parallel. North Vietnam sought to impose communism on the whole of Vietnam. South Vietnam resisted for two decades. With a smaller population than North Vietnam, and containing competing factions and different interest groups, South Vietnam was, for all its faults, a far more open society than North Vietnam. The politicization of the war, the presence of a substantial foreign press corps, and opposition to the war in the West led to every flaw in South Vietnam being magnified while a corresponding silence existed on human rights violations in North Vietnam and communist war crimes. As Anthony James Joes writes, South Vietnam was “a wartime society open to scrutiny by the press, whereas North Viet Nam was not. Very few journalists seemed to appreciate the profound importance of this asymmetry.”13

Over two decades from the time of the First Republic (1955–1963) under the presidency of Ngo Dinh Diem through the military coups and instability of the Interregnum Period (1963–1967) to the Second Republic (1967–1975) under the presidency of Nguyen Van Thieu, South Vietnam was confronted with two central tasks: to survive war against communist North Vietnam, and simultaneously work on nation building and democratization. The effects of unrelenting war on an army and country over such an extended period of time lay outside the experience of the allies who fought in the war. None had experienced war over such a lengthy period on home soil. The political ramifications have also been underplayed. Through considerable adversity, the South

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Vietnamese endeavored to build a representative form of constitutional government. South Vietnam, in the words of Keith Taylor, "went through a dynamic wartime trajectory from authoritarianism to chaos to a relatively stable experiment in parliamentary democracy."14 Taylor highlights the achievements of the Second Republic: first, regaining control of the countryside; second, a successful land reform program during which 2,750,000 acres of rice-growing land were distributed to 900,000 rural families or more than six million people15; third, achievements in food production and administrative reform; and fourth, progress toward constitutional government and a relatively independent judiciary.16

These gradual reforms in a country emerging from colonization and engaged in protracted war were in marked contrast to the violence of the 1953–1956 Land Reform campaign in North Vietnam during which "landowners" and "rich peasants"—most of whom had only small holdings— were targeted and executed by the Ho Chi Minh regime. Inspired by its Soviet and Chinese antecedents, the Land Reform campaign was intended as a prelude to the collectivization of agriculture. Official figures from the *Vietnamese Economic History* reveal that the majority of victims were unjustly accused, and that the campaign resulted in 172,008 deaths.17 The attention of the world was on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in Europe, and the crimes of the North Vietnamese Land Reform campaign passed largely unnoticed, as did later atrocities committed by the communists against the South Vietnamese civilian population, most notably in the former imperial city of Hue in 1968.18

South Vietnam was at war throughout most of its twenty-year history. With a small population of approximately eleven million in 1955, it was able to enjoy a brief interlude of peace at the beginning of the Ngo Dinh Diem government. The Diem government defeated the armed gangs of the Binh Xuyen, dealt with the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects, and successfully resettled a million refugees from North Vietnam. Nguyen Ngoc Phach came from a northern Buddhist family and worked as a journalist for the BBC before joining the RVNAF in 1965. After graduating from Thu Duc Military Academy, he served as press officer for General Cao Van Vien, the chief of the Joint General Staff. In addition to his army duties, Nguyen Ngoc Phach worked freelance for the *Telegraph*, the *Saigon Post*, the *Guardian*, and the *Vietnam Enquirer*, and wrote fortnightly Vietnam Reports for the Vietnam Council on Foreign Relations. He recalls the relative peace of the early years under Diem:

> I remember that period because at the time one of my brothers, my sister and a few of my nephews went to school in Dalat. I would drive to Dalat every Saturday and drive back to Saigon Sunday and I could drive 300 kilometres through the forest at night. Whatever people say, I held President Diem responsible for that peace.
>
> I didn't understand the communists until they killed one of my colleagues. One of my good friends in the press was Mr. Tu Trung Vu Nhat Huy.19 He was assassinated right in front of his wife. He was the editor of the best newspaper in Saigon at the time, *Chinh Luan* [Opinion]. As far as the communists were concerned, if you are a good man and do your job then it can't be good for the revolution. During President Diem's tenure, the communists killed a lot of teachers, especially in the countryside. In faraway provinces like Ca Mau it was very difficult for the government to recruit teachers, and then those who were recruited had a good chance of being killed.20

The communist "campaign of terror" took hold in the southern countryside in 1956, and accounted for the mur-

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der or abduction of more than 25,000 South Vietnamese civilians by 1965.21 Village officials, medical personnel, social workers, and schoolteachers were specially targeted.22 The Diem government responded by killing 2,000 communists and arresting 65,000 communist sympathizers and suspects.23 Southern party membership fell and party historians identified 1958–1959 as "the darkest period."24

As detailed by Lien-Hang Nguyen in *Hanoi's War*, the main architect and strategist of North Vietnam's war effort was Le Duan, who became the first secretary of the Vietnam Workers' Party in 1960 and held the top position until 1986.25 Both Le Duan and Le Duc Tho, the head of the Central Organizing Committee, had as their goal a full-scale war for reunification and worked to achieve that objective.26 Le Duan's Resolution 15 of January 1959 called for the overthrow of the Diem government by political and military means.27 Group 559 was established later that year in May 1959 to maintain the infiltration of arms, matériel, and troops down the Ho Chi Minh Trail into South Vietnam while the foundation for the National Liberation Front (NLF) was laid at the Third Party Congress in Hanoi in September 1960.28 At the Ninth Plenum in December 1963, Le Duan advanced the military strategy of General Offensive and General Uprising, a move that would "elevate the Vietnamese civil war to an international Cold War conflict."29 North Vietnam was fully mobilized behind the campaign for total war by 1964.30

Both North and South Vietnam fought the war with the aid of their allies. While North Vietnam was supported by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China and their satellite states, South Vietnam had the backing of the United States and its allies. Throughout the war, the North Vietnamese were supplied with more sophisticated weapons by their allies. As Nguyen Ngoc Phach notes,

> North Vietnamese soldiers infiltrating into South Vietnam were equipped with AK47s and rockets as early as 1964. The AK47 was equivalent to a submachine gun. At that time South Vietnamese infantrymen, and even the Marines and the Airborne, were equipped with M1 guns, the standard infantrymen weapon from the Second World War. So there was nothing farfetched about a squad of North Vietnamese overrunning a company of South Vietnamese troops. Equipped as they were with AK47s and B40s, the North Vietnamese had ten times the firepower of South Vietnamese troops. It was only after the 1968 Tet Offensive that the South Vietnamese troops were equipped with something similar to the AK47.

During the battles of the 1968 Tet Offensive, the "sharp automatic bursts of the AK47" on the North Vietnamese side contrasted markedly with the "single shots of the Garand M1 or M1 carbine" on the South Vietnamese side.31

It was a sad irony of the war that the precise juncture at which the South Vietnamese population rallied to their government—the 1968 Tet Offensive—was also the point at which the Western allies began to turn away from South Vietnam, and set in train their withdrawal from the country.32 By the time the Paris Peace Accords were signed, nearly all allied troops had left the country. The RVNAF was thinly strung along the entire length of the country trying to protect it from invasion from several different fronts. When North Vietnam launched a full-scale invasion of South Vietnam in 1972, it threw fourteen divisions supported by armor and artillery against the South but the South prevailed. In 1975, the South collapsed. The collapse, as George Veith argues, did not occur as a result of military incompetence or an unjust dictatorship but because the massive scale of the North Vietnamese

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invasion, which was in full abrogation of the Paris Peace Accords, struck a country in severe economic straits and weakened by the vast reduction in U.S. aid.33 President Thieu also made serious military misjudgments in the face of the 1975 Offensive.34 The steep cutbacks in U.S. aid had had a disastrous effect on RVNAF morale as well as firepower and mobility by 1974:

> [A]rtillery batteries in the Central Highlands that had previously been firing 100 rounds daily were reduced to firing 4. By that summer, each ARVN soldier received only 85 bullets per month. In the Delta, the most populous part of the country and the area where the Communists had always been weakest, cutbacks to the navy forced it to deactivate half of its units, thus uncovering that whole strategic area. The shortage of new batteries cut army radio communications by 50 percent. Aircraft flew fewer missions, and many planes ceased to fly at all because they lacked replacement parts. About half of the ARVN's truck force was put in mothballs for lack of fuel and parts. Even the bandages for the wounded had to be washed and used again.35

South Vietnam fought the war at a significant disadvantage and with a gaping wound in its side. North Vietnamese sources reveal that one million troops were infiltrated into South Vietnam between 1959 and 1975.36 The 1973 Paris Peace Accords left 145,000 North Vietnamese soldiers stationed in South Vietnam. In 1973–1974, 150,000 North Vietnamese troops were transferred south, with an additional 110,000 troops sent in the first four months of 1975 alone.37 While South Vietnam was crippled by the lack of fuel, munitions, and spare parts, North Vietnam continued to receive aid from its allies. The supply of arms and matériel down the Ho Chi Minh Trail increased to 140,000 tons between January and September 1973, and reached a staggering 823,146 tons between January 1974 and April 1975.38 As Lewis Sorley writes, "Americans would not have liked hearing it said that two totalitarian states—the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China—had proven more reliable than the American democracy, but that was indeed the fact."39

South Vietnam and its armed forces have been criticized for corruption and factionalism. Former South Vietnamese general Lam Quang Thi acknowledges the extent of both but also argues that corruption is allied with poverty and that this is often a characteristic of emerging nations.40 He adds that this did not prevent his rise to a generalship, even though he was not part of a political faction, and that many South Vietnamese generals were not from wealthy families but from an undefined middle class consisting of small farmers, teachers and low-ranking civil servants.41 Another commonly cited problem in the RVNAF was that of desertion. Between 1965 and 1972, "desertions averaged about 120,000 per year, and the average monthly desertion rate was 12 per thousand."42 Robert Brigham points out, however, that these figures do not take into account three factors: first, the RVNAF had an unusually stringent active-duty classification and many "deserters" were later found to be back in service with their units; second, another 60 percent were subsequently found to be serving in other units; and third, U.S. military advisers estimated that only 20–30 percent of those listed as deserters were actually so.43 The reasons for desertion were social and economic rather than political, and soldiers did not desert to the other side.44 Joes finds it instructive to compare these desertion rates to those in another civil war, the American Civil War, during which desertion rates were ten times higher or more.45

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In spite of the presence of more than a million northern refugees who fled south in 1954, many South Vietnamese were unaware of the extent of repression in a communist state. They found out too late when they experienced the reality of life under a postwar communist regime. When South Vietnam fell to North Vietnamese forces in 1975, and Vietnam was reunified under a postwar communist regime, the ensuing exodus of more than two million people over the following two decades represented a new phenomenon in Vietnamese history. As the following words by Phan Dong Bich convey:

> The Vietnamese people [are] not a migratory people. . . . [I]n 1945, when we had a famine in North Vietnam, two million people died but nobody left the country. We had eighty years under French domination but nobody left the country. We had more than a thousand years of Chinese domination but nobody left the country—because we, as the people of Vietnam, we cling to the soil of our ancestors. We are attached to our villages; we are attached to our cities, our towns; to our friends and relatives. Up until the upheaval of 1975.46

The scale of mass departures following the communist takeover of South Vietnam was unprecedented, and this point needs to be emphasized. The postwar exodus followed widespread state repression in the postwar years, including the internment of more than a million former soldiers, civil servants, and teachers in communist reeducation camps,47 the forced deurbanization of another million to the New Economic Zones,48 the execution of 65,000 citizens,49 curtailment of individual and religious liberties, nationalization of commerce and industries,50 and discrimination against all those associated in any way with the former South Vietnamese government as well as against ethnic Chinese and Amerasians.51 For many southerners, the reality of the communist state was a shock. As a former law student from the University of Saigon recalls, “I have to admit that the communists were very skillful at spreading propaganda. No one could have foreseen the atrocities that they were capable of committing.”52

ORAL HISTORY AND MEMORY

“The most distinctive contribution of oral history,” suggest Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, “has been to include within the historical record the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been ‘hidden from history.’”53 This description is particularly apt in relation to the former soldiers of the Republic of Vietnam. Their histories and perspectives have been “hidden from history” and are only slowly emerging.54 Histories of the Vietnam War have overwhelmingly privileged the American experience, and those who perceived the war to have been an unjustified enterprise have dominated its historiography. While interest has focused on the smaller allies in the conflict, and more recently on North Vietnamese perspectives and the role of the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China in the war, the South Vietnamese experience remains elusive.55 As noted by Jeffrey Grey:

> The Vietnam War impacted primarily and most directly upon the Vietnamese, but the Vietnamese themselves, and especially those former soldiers and citizens of the Republic of Vietnam, are largely invisible in the extensive published literature on the war. The people, the nation, and the cause on whose behalf we

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fought have yet to be consciously and effectively written into the history of their own war.56 In light of the fact that the South Vietnamese were central participants in the war, and the war was largely fought on South Vietnamese soil, this lacuna reflects the partial nature of Vietnam War historiography.

South Vietnam paid a heavy price in the war. More than a quarter of a million South Vietnamese soldiers were killed over the twenty-year period between 1955 and 1975.57 The RVNAF won significant victories against great odds in battles such as An Loc and Quang Tri in 1972. More than sixteen U.S. Presidential Unit Citations were awarded to South Vietnamese units in recognition of their gallantry in the field.58 Le Cau, a highly decorated former colonel in South Vietnam, makes an impassioned defense of those who served in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam: "As a man who spent twelve years in combat, I can honestly say that we had many brave, diligent, and patriotic soldiers in our armed forces. They fought valiantly and selflessly against the communists year after year. Many sacrificed in silence and gave their lives [for] their country."59 RVNAF deaths in the last few years of the war illustrate the extent of losses in the south: 39,587 in 1972; 27,901 in 1973; and 31,219 in 1974.60 South Vietnam had a population of approximately eighteen million. The number of RVNAF wounded in action was between three and five times the number of dead.61 As Neil Jamieson writes, "about one of every five soldiers, perhaps one of every twenty adult males, was killed or seriously wounded while fighting for the government. . . . Since virtually every soldier who was killed or wounded had a wife, parents, children, brothers, sisters, and friends who were affected, there were few people in the society whose lives were not blighted by deep personal loss."62 Despite the scale of these losses, the service of South Vietnamese soldiers has not only been erased from national memory in postwar Vietnam but also suppressed in the wider historiography of the war.63

The Vietnamese state pays tribute to the communist soldiers who died in the war in the form of numerous war memorials throughout the country while remaining silent on the military dead of the former South Vietnam. Heonik Kwon notes,

> The postwar Vietnamese state hierarchy put great emphasis on controlling commemorative practices and propagated a genealogy of heroic resistance wars, linking the death of a soldier in the American War to a line stretching back from the French War to the legendary heroes of ancient victories. Every local administrative unit in Vietnam has a war martyrs' cemetery built at the center of the community's public space, and the reminder, "Our Ancestral Land Remembers Your Merit," is inscribed on the gothic memorial placed at the center of this place.64

This version of the past removes South Vietnam from the national historical narrative along with all those who fought in its armed forces during the war. The military cemeteries of the south were razed after 1975,65 or lay abandoned in the postwar years. South Vietnam's war dead remain unacknowledged in the Vietnamese memorial landscape. "[S]outhern dead," writes Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "absent from national commemoration, often go unmentioned in the collective narrative of their extended families. Condemned to the shadows, they refuse, however, to remain unmourned."66 The war will remain a problematic and contested memory as long as the Vietnamese state refuses to acknowledge the dead and disabled soldiers of the former south. Many severely disabled RVNAF veterans were unable to leave the country after 1975, and have experienced extreme hardship and pov-

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erty in postwar Vietnam.67 Their crippled bodies form loci of memory, and reveal the disjuncture between public or state-sanctioned memories of the war, and private or bodily memory.68 Denied a service or disability pension by the Vietnamese government, the only help these veterans receive often takes the form of charitable donations from overseas, in particular Vietnamese veteran associations based in North America or Australia.69

South Vietnamese servicemen and their families were labeled *nguy* (puppet)70 by the communist regime, and were subjected to political discrimination in postwar Vietnam and harassment on the part of Vietnamese authorities.71 Many veterans experienced years of internment and hard labor in postwar reeducation camps while their families were evicted from their homes and forcibly relocated to the New Economic Zones.72 Those who survived then became refugees or left Vietnam under the Humanitarian Operation Program and resettled overseas. Their avenues for mourning, remembrance and commemoration were to be found away from their homeland, either privately within the context of family and friends or publicly among veteran communities in their new host societies. The firsthand experience of RVNAF veterans is a part of Vietnam's history that for practical reasons can only be recorded at present in the diaspora. The life histories and perspectives of these veterans not only contest state narratives of the war circulating in Vietnam but also interrogate the ways in which the war has been remembered and memorialized internationally. As Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone note,

> [T]o contest the past is also, of course, to pose questions about the present, and what the past means in the present. Our understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences. Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward.73

With their histories silenced and their war dead forgotten in postwar Vietnam, how do South Vietnamese veterans remember the war? What resources of self-reliance or resilience are they able to draw on? How do they commemorate the country and the armed forces that they served?

The oral narratives of these veterans reflect not only on issues of memory and commemoration in the aftermath of war but also on the shaping of stories following state repression and forced migration. Memory, by its very nature, is subjective. As Inga Clendinnen writes, "our stories depend on memory, and memory is unreliable."74 Oral testimonies are therefore problematic, as they rely on memory. However, as oral historians have argued, memory's very unreliability is also its strength, as it provides "clues not only about the historical experience but also about the relationships between past and present, between memory and personal identity, and between individual and collective memory."75 The narratives of these veterans strive to make sense of the past in light of their own experiences as well as their current lives and support structures overseas. "In a dynamic way then," suggests Catherine Kohler Riessman, "narrative constitutes past experience at the same time as it provides ways for the individuals to make sense of the past."76 These former soldiers have had to contend with loss at a personal and communal level. Their individual stories take place amidst the wider tragedy of the collapse of their country. Many have lived hard lives, sustaining injuries in wartime, imprisonment in postwar prison camps, the loss of loved ones, and the stresses of the refugee or migration experience. Their narratives reveal that in spite of successive hardships, tragedies and traumas as well as the considerable challenges posed by the rebuilding of lives

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in a different country and culture, their loyalty to their former army and country remains steadfast, and their memories and processes of commemoration robust and tenacious.

South Vietnam was a militarized society with several generations in a family serving in the forces. Chapter 1 explores the experiences of three veterans from different generations. The oldest was born in 1917 and is one of the oldest surviving veterans of the Vietnam War. He served in France and North Africa during the Second World War, and in Vietnam during the Indochina War and the Vietnam War. The second veteran was born in 1930 and commanded a logistics battalion from 1972 to 1975 while the youngest was born in 1953, served as a junior officer during the war, and twenty years later joined the Australian Army as a direct entry captain. Their stories illustrate the diversity of ages, backgrounds, and motivations of those who served in the RVNAF. The experiences of soldiers in the field are the topic of Chapter 2, which deals with the combat exposure of junior officers from less well-known branches of the armed forces: armor, air force, and navy. The narratives of these veterans reveal a level of fortitude that sustained them through the unique pressures of combat, witnessing death and injury on the battlefield, enduring internment and separation from loved ones after the war, and escaping their country as refugees. Chapter 3 focuses on the narratives of military doctors who served in elite frontline units during the war: the Vietnamese Marine Corps and the Vietnamese Rangers. Their oral histories elucidate not only the commitment of highly educated officers in the RVNAF during the war but also their capacity to rebuild their lives overseas and honor their service in the aftermath of war. The histories and experiences of women who served in the Women's Armed Forces Corps are examined in Chapter 4. Their narratives illustrate their different motivations for enlisting in the forces, and the importance of military service in the shape and structure of their lives. These women volunteered to serve their country in wartime, and this service exacted a heavy toll in terms of the loss and trauma experienced in the postwar years. All, however, have been sustained by the support provided by veterans and veterans' associations overseas. Chapter 5 explores the notion of friendship and sacrifice in war by focusing on the narrative of a former Ranger, and his retelling of the fate of a friend and fellow Ranger in the last days of the war. His narrative reveals the courage of a group of Rangers who chose to follow their commander and fight "to the last bullet" in the final days of the war. The few survivors, along with their commander, became prisoners of war, and were shot by their captors and buried in a mass grave. The chapter examines the uncovering of this war crime and the excavation of the mass grave in 2011, and reflects on the ways in which these events have been reconstructed and memorialized. Chapter 6 contrasts the experiences of Vietnam-based veterans with those of veterans overseas, in particular the consequences of war for RVNAF soldiers who received disabling injuries during the war. Their narratives reveal that life for these veterans worsened considerably after the war. Despite more than thirty years of oblivion and neglect, the former soldiers still reveal their pride in their service, and the validity of the choices that they made. In Chapter 7, Australia's recognition of the formal status of RVNAF veterans is examined, from the political controversies that arose in the Australian parliament over this issue in 1985–1986, to the official recognition of South Vietnamese veterans as allied veterans and their entitlement to an Australian service pension. Finally, Chapter 8 deals with sequelae of war: the children of RVNAF veterans, from those who watched their

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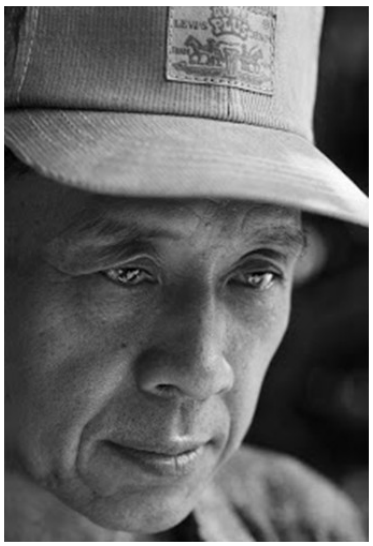
fathers serve in the war and then saw them disappear into the gulag only to return years later as gaunt strangers to those who were born after 1975 and have no memories of the war. It explores the intergenerational transmission of war memories and the damage woven into some lives while others have been able to focus on futures overseas.

The oral histories and testimonies gathered here are valuable precisely because history has so far neglected them. The narratives of these former soldiers form a part of Vietnam's history that can be preserved for a time when Vietnam can finally acknowledge them. In the absence of history, as Vieda Skultans suggests in *The Testimony of Lives*,

> memory acquires a central importance for the preservation of authenticity and truth as well as a peculiar poignancy. The role of memory has certain similarities in all totalitarian societies where the state has claimed a monopoly of truth. Under such conditions, individual lives bear witness against the state.77

By "bearing witness," these veterans make an essential contribution to the recorded history of the war.

Gen. Ly Tong Ba Remembers the Fall of Saigon



I was commander of the ARVN 25th Division in Cu Chi. I was chief commander of ARVN armor before then. Then at the end of 1974, they asked me to take command of the 25th Division; I replaced Col. Toan, who had been commander of the Division. I was five months, then, with the 25th Division.

When the attack came on Ban Me Thuot, I was directed to the Northern Part of Tay Ninh Province to stabilize the situation. The communist forces tried to block us there, in Tay Ninh, to hold us there.

We received reports of what was happening in other areas. And we were reinforced in our area, I thought, but there was no movement, no redeployment. But I didn't know what happened to those forces.

When I heard that the Central Highlands were being abandoned, I knew that would create a very big problem. I thought that maybe later on they would stabilize and turn around. I know that we had the forces to form a front somewhere. But nothing happened. They never turned around and fight. I don't know what happened.

Meanwhile, we were fighting them near Cu Chi. They [communists] were trying to push their way to Saigon. And my men fought against them.

I heard that other generals were abandoning their forces. I wasn't surprised at all, because I knew my men, I knew my army, I knew my leader. I had confidence in my men and they had confidence in me. I knew who the enemy was and who they were and what they were trying to do.

I tried to contact my chiefs, Nguyen Van Thieu, Cao Van Vien, to tell them what was happening. I wanted to tell them that we couldn't do it and that everything was going wrong. The 25th Division was fighting one full division, but after several days we were facing three divisions with armor.

The 18th Division was fighting at Xuan Loc under Le Minh Dao. We were blocking the highway from Saigon to Tay Ninh. On the morning of the 28th of April, the early morning, on the 29th I led my last task force in Ben Tre, but I had no more troops, nothing more to do, the rest of my men were spread out. I wanted to group my remaining forces together. I wanted to put what was left of my division together and continue to fight. I asked

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General Toan to let me put my Division back together, give it back to me, and the Communists continued to attack us. But our ARVN soldiers they didn't worry about the jungle, we continued to fall back and to fight them. We continued to fight them as we backed up.
One tactic I applied, I just moved back, I said don't worry about it, just do it, and make them pay dearly for everything.

My men continued to try to maneuver and fight and counterattack. But the soldiers were finally infected by the lying and psychologically they were worn down in the fighting. The soldiers had a kind of sickness, a mental sickness. They were infected by the idea, the soldiers of ARVN, they had been lied to. They were in a bad situation. To fight a good war, they could not be led by a man like General Thieu. Americans were not helping them anymore and their own government was not helping them either.
Some of my soldiers finally started to run. The sickness got them. And when I saw that I could not do anything else, that my army was gone, I decided to walk back on foot from Cu Chi to Saigon.
I wanted to find my soldiers and to regroup them at Hoc Mon, and to draw a defense line there. But before I could do that, I was captured by the communist forces, who had already occupied everywhere between Cu Chi and Saigon.
The mentality of the Vietnamese Army. The society of Vietnam had become corrupted and chaotic, and that kind of attitude got into the Vietnamese army and soldiers, too. The commanders, the high ranking officers, their mentality was not a fighting one. When the fight became tough, they didn't want to fight any more. They wanted to depend on America and when they could not depend on America they ran away. That was the sickness that they had caught.
I am a fighter. My leaders had their own problems. But I had been fighting since I was a young soldier. And now I find that the Army leaders weren't doing their job. I was doing my job, but they weren't doing their job. That is the wrong kind of man to be a leader.

I tried to escape and found that they had surrounded me and my men. So many of my soldiers surrendered. So I told my aide, who was by my side, I said you see me, you do what I do. Everything I do, you do. So when the enemy asked us to lay down our weapons, many of men just put down their weapons. But when the communist soldiers told the men to stand together. I just went into a rice paddy and went into the water and stayed under the water with my nose up above the water. Then they thought we were dead. So my bodyguard and I, we stayed for three hours in the water. From three in the afternoon until six that night. Then we went to a stream that leads to the Hoc Mon Bridge, a small stream. So I tried to get there in the darkness. I got into the stream. I tried to swim down to the bridge, from there I knew I could get on the road to Saigon. But when I got to the stream, swimming, I heard a lot of noise on both sides of the stream. I swam down the stream and could hear men on both sides of the stream, and they were North Vietnamese soldiers. By then it was dark. When I got there, there were soldiers all over. So I got out of the stream and tried to make my way back to Cu Chi. In the night I just walked around in a big triangle and I didn't know where I was or where Saigon was because it was dark and it rained.

So in the morning, I was still with my body guard, but I could not move any more. I had been wounded in my leg. I told my bodyguard to go to try to find a doctor. But before we could find a doctor we walked into the midst of 50 or 60 North Vietnamese soldiers. I thought they were South Vietnamese soldiers, from the distance. And so I said to my bodyguard, I think we will be captured now. We can't run anymore.
My uniform was all muddy by this time and they could not see that I was a general. They did not know who I was. But one old woman saw me and she came over and said, “General, what happened to you. Why are you so dirty?” And several of the soldiers around they heard her and they came over and they asked me about that. Before that time they just thought I was a Lt. Col., they had no idea that I was the Binh Duong Province Chief.

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Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

Then they put me in a kitchen with barbed wire around it. And I just sat there. And they kept me there. I was thinking that they would probably kill me when they knew who I was. So my soldiers asked me if I wanted to write a letter to my wife. And I said, no. I don't want to write a letter to anybody.
Of course, the soldiers who captured me, they belonged to some of the three divisions that had fought against the 25th Division. They said that their commander was coming to see me, because he was the man who had been fighting against me. They said that he wanted to meet the man he was fighting against.
And I said you can do what you want. I lost my Army and you can do what you want.

And when the commander came to see me I said to him,
"You see how I treated your soldiers when I captured them. And all I ask of you is that you treat my soldiers the same way I treated your soldiers. I treated my prisoners better than you treat your prisoners."
So he said,
"We have nothing against you, General. But at first our troops were still very excited and maybe they didn't treat you well. But they have nothing against you."
They had us sleep on the ground behind the barbed wire.
And the treatment they were giving my men I didn't like. I wasn't worried about me. I stayed one week separated from the other men. Then day by day and month and month.
By the 3rd of May my wife heard a rumor that I had been killed at Cu Chi, so she left Saigon and went to the Delta. There she found a wooden boat and they went to Malaysia. There some Americans found out who she was and brought her to America. But I didn't know about that for one year. And my wife, when she left Saigon, she thought I was dead.
I thought I would be killed, that is why I didn't write a letter. I thought if I wrote a letter she would stay and wait for me and I thought that they were going to kill me anyway. But then they didn't kill me and my wife left the country.

The soldiers that they captured, they finally released them, but held the officers. All of us.
They took me back to Cu Chi with my staff officers. Again, they kept us behind barbed wire. That was for one month. Then they sent me back to Saigon, where they had me report for reeducation. And then they sent me to a reeducation camp. Then I thought I would be alive, my life would be spared and I would stay alive. Then they sent me to North Vietnam to a reeducation camp. I was sent north in July of 1975 and I was released from a reeducation camp in December of 1987. I was there for 12 years.
[General] Le Minh Dao was in my reeducation camp. In the camp they brought me a letter from my wife.
Now I am in Saigon and I have nothing to do. I have applied to go the United States and wanted to join my wife and my daughter in Nevada. And my son is now a student in San Diego at the University. My youngest boy is now a football star in the United States.
I was born in 1931. I was born in the South. I attended the Dalat Military Academy.
I was commissioned as an officer in 1952. I served one year in the Red River Delta as a Second Lieutenant.

The role of the American Army in Vietnam, I was born in a very poor country, and sometimes I don't know who is wrong or who is right. I fought for my country. I did my duty. I did the best I could. And I lost. And I am proud, still. When I could not perform my job any more I still tried to fight. I lost my army, but I was never defeated. I just did my job for Vietnam. And when the NVA General said to me, "What do you think now?" And I said, I am Vietnamese. I want to see Vietnam, rich and the people happy and free. And I think that Vietnam is still fighting for freedom. The war isn't over. Still now the people want freedom.
From the time I was a second lieutenant until now, I think that is true. How about Vietnam? We Vietnamese try to decide our problems through war. And what was decided? Now the North has won and we hoped then that Vietnam would be a very good country. Vietnam lost many good citizens in the war and now look at the country. I must

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say that we got nothing from the war. The war is still on. And I still say to the leaders of the country, "I finished my role. I did my part. You won and I lost. And now you do what you wanted to do. If you do good, if the people become free and prosperous, then I have nothing against you. Nothing at all. That would be good. But now look what has happened to the country? What does your victory mean now? I am no longer a general. Now I am just a citizen. Now you have won. What are you going to do?
We are a poor country. We are a small country. We need help from outside now. Maybe we need new leaders now.

The Vietnamese people are hard-working and good. And the people are ready for freedom and for prosperity. They are ready to become part of the world again. The potential is there. But again they have this sickness, the new regime has it in the way that the old regime had. Corruption, a sickness that eats away at the people. If you don't like someone, or if you don't like what he says, then put him in prison.
This society is corrupted. The people become corrupted because the leaders are corrupted.
My soldiers ran away because they had a sickness that they caught from the leaders and from the society. The society was not worth dying for. The sick soul of the society had frightened him. But if you shoot that soldier, you kill him but you do not kill the sickness. And here, when they punish people for corruption, they punish the individual but the sickness continues. The soldier does not want to run away and the common citizen does not want to be corrupt. But the leaders are corrupt and so the society is corrupt.
Suicide. Why should I commit suicide? That is very egotistical. Suicide. Who would I do that? My duty is to fight. I should fight until I die or am captured. A soldier should do his job. What am I, a Mandarin who is going to die for the Emperor?
I fight with my men. I didn't die. I wasn't killed. I was just defeated on the battle field. I was defeated. I am still alive.

Comment:
John Heslin said...

> Yesterday I lost my good friend and hero General Ba --
> General Ly Tong Ba died Sunday morning 2/22/2015, at Southern Hill Hospital, Las Vegas, Nevada. He was 85 years old. I am thankful I knew him and that he called me his friend. He was an extraordinary man by any measure. We are all diminished with his passing. He will be missed.
> Jack Heslin – The Scribe
> www.thebattleofknotum.com

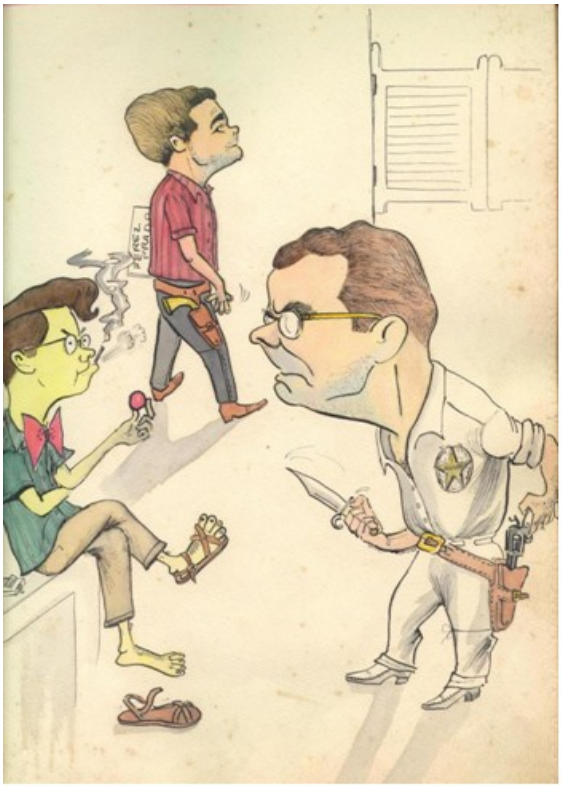
http://lde421.blogspot.com/2012/12/gen-ly-tong-ba-remembers-fall-of-saigon.html

Nguyen Hoang Minh

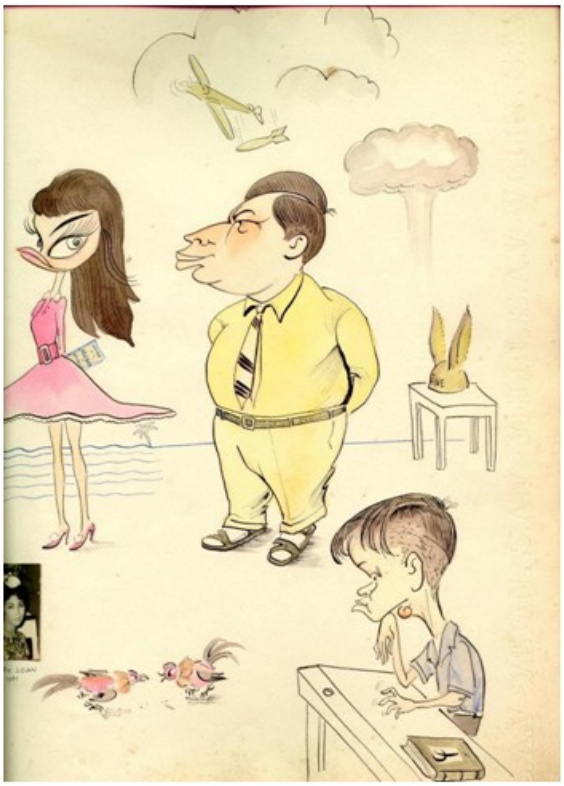
https://us.yahoo.com/gma/video/one-man-helped-keep-many-234009965.html

Nguyen Hoang Minh, an ARVN intelligence soldier in the 1970's helped keep countless servicemen and Navy SEALS alive. He was not heard from after the war until one American GI located him in the Mekong delta four decades later. After 1975, he was sent to reeducation camp for two years and lived in poverty since. The GIs built him a house and gave him $300 a month for him to send his granddaughter to college.

Caricatures of Teachers of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Saigon



BU`LET (Mr. Giuntini (Surveillant Général))



Mr. Le Van Hai (Philosophy)

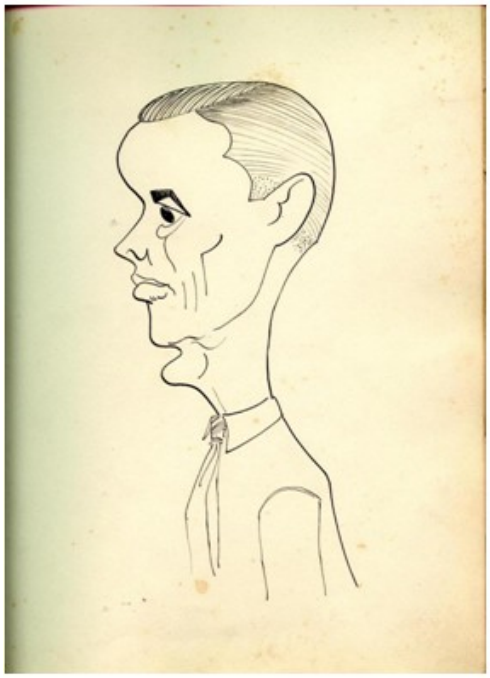
Mr. Pouvatchy (Mathematics)

Ms. Moulin (Sciences)

Caricatures of Teachers of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Saigon

Mr. Tissier (French)

M. Kléber (Physics Chemistry)



Mr. Cao Van Cuu (Vietnamese)

Mr. Bachet (Physical Education)

Caricatures of Teachers of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Saigon

Mr. & Mrs. Nguyen Van Nghia (Arts)

Vancouver's Little Saigon

http://www.insidevancouver.ca/2013/06/06/604-neighbourhoods-little-saigon/

The Little Saigon business district was only recently given this title, distinguishing it as a unique part of the Kensington-Cedar Cottage neighbourhood. Back in 2011, Vancouver City Council approved the name, as did a large portion of the city's Vietnamese community members, however some controversy lingered.

"…Not everyone in the community [agreed] with the choice. Some feel it would re-open wounds left from the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. When the conflict ended, the capital, once called Saigon, was renamed Ho Chi Minh City by the Communists. Vancouver's first Vietnamese immigrants left to escape that regime."

Supporters pushed through, even presenting city staff with a petition with 3,000 signatures, and after consultations with the community the name was approved for the district. On Sunday, May 12, 2013 there was a parade along Kingsway leading up to an opening ceremony for Little Saigon.

Kingsway (called "Vancouver Road" until 1913) is historically a major thoroughfare for travel between New Westminster and Vancouver. It has several distinct business districts that range from Caribbean, Russian, and Filipino communities to East Asian and French as well. Little Saigon is packed with delis, restaurants,

Vancouver's Little Saigon...

beauty salons, coffee shops, and bakeries.
Whether you're looking for a crispy Banh Mi baguette sandwich with shredded chicken and pickled veggies or a wildly flavourful bowl of pho (Vietnamese noodle soup) your cravings will be satisfied in Little Saigon. The highlight of the neighbourhood is definitely its dining options and as Sherman Chan from Sherman's Food Adventures wrote: "If Robson can be declared the Ramen corridor, then Kingsway should really be known as the street of Banh Mi."

A Communist Fish's Story (part 2)

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/09/world/asia/vietnam-fish-kill.html?module=WatchingPortal&region=c-column-middle-span-region&pgType=Homepage&action=click&mediaId=wide&state=standard&contentPlacement=8&version=internal&contentCollection=www.nytimes.com&contentId=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2F2016%2F06%2F09%2Fworld%2Fasia%2Fvietnam-fish-kill.html&eventName=Watching-article-click

Dead fish on a beach in the central province of Quang Binh, Vietnam. Pollution from a nearby steel plant is suspected in the die-off, and protests across the country are testing the government. Credit Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

NHAN TRACH, Vietnam — Since a devastating fish kill blighted the waters along 120 miles of coastline in central Vietnam, hundreds of people are believed to have fallen ill from eating poisoned fish.
Here in the fishing village of Nhan Trach, the squid that sustain the local economy have virtually disappeared. And a fishing ban has left hundreds of traps sitting unused on the beach and dozens of small fishing boats idle.
"We are so angry," said Pham Thi Phi, 65, who operates a fishing boat in Nhan Trach with her husband and three grown sons. "If we knew who put the poison in the ocean, we would like to kill them. We really need to have an answer from the government on whether the ocean is totally clean and the fish are safe to eat."
"Some of the fish were dead; some were dying," said Ho Huu Sia, 67, who buys and dries fish for a living. "We ate the fish that were still alive. We ate the fish for two weeks."
His daughter, Ho Thi Dao, 32, said she became ill, experiencing vomiting, diarrhea and dizziness. She went to the local clinic and received intravenous fluids. She said she met others there who also suffered poisoning.
According to news reports, the fish kill happened after the factory washed unspecified cleaning chemicals through its wastewater pipeline. A company representative seemed to confirm the suspicions in April when he said it would not be surprising if the factory's wastewater harmed marine life.

Communist Fish's Story...

"You have to decide whether to catch fish and shrimp or to build a modern steel industry," he told reporters. "Even if you are the prime minister, you cannot choose both."
At first, it suggested a toxic algae bloom was responsible. In mid-May, Pham Cong Tac, deputy science and technology minister, told Vietnamese news outlets that the ministry had a "convincing scientific basis" to explain the fish deaths, but he did not disclose what it was.
Last week, Mai Tien Dung, minister and head of the government office, said that the authorities had identified the cause but indicated that they could not tell the public because an investigation was continuing.
The lack of information has only fueled the protesters' anger.

Editor: This is how one artist pictorially described the whole fish story: a typical story of Hanoi's lack of transparency coupled with governmental abuse and disregard of human rights. As a result of the toxic discharge of wastewater into the sea by the Taiwanese plant, corals and fish, small and large had died in an area more than 120 miles along the central coast of Vietnam. As fishermen and local people, now deprived of their fishing livelihood, protested and demanded to know the result of the investigation, the government dragged its feet and protesters were harassed, beaten, and jailed.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPXfrhll9I0&sns=em

THỦ TƯỚNG CHÍNH PHỦ
Số: 1010 /QĐ-TTg

CỘNG HOÀ XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM
Độc lập - Tự do - Hạnh phúc

Hà Nội, ngày 02 tháng 06 năm 2016

THÔNG BÁO NGUYÊN NHÂN CÁ CHẾT

Sau 60 ngày tìm kiếm nguyên nhân, nay Chính Phủ trân trọng thông báo là chưa có gì để thông báo, khi nào chính phủ có thông báo thì sẽ sớm thông báo cho nhân dân được rõ.

Hiện nay các ban ngành chính phủ đang tìm cách làm rõ để kịp thông báo tới nhân dân cả nước. Chính phủ kêu gọi nhân dân an tâm chờ thông báo.

Thông báo nầy có hiệu lực cho tới khi có thông báo mới.

THỦ TƯỚNG

Nguyễn Xuân Phúc

A disturbing message from the government: After two months of investigation, Communist Vietnam's Prime Minister officially announced that he had "nothing to announce" about the fish kill. As soon as he knows something, he will announce it. He asked that people stay calm while waiting for the announcement.