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STAYS ALIVE  
WHEN ITS  
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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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## SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



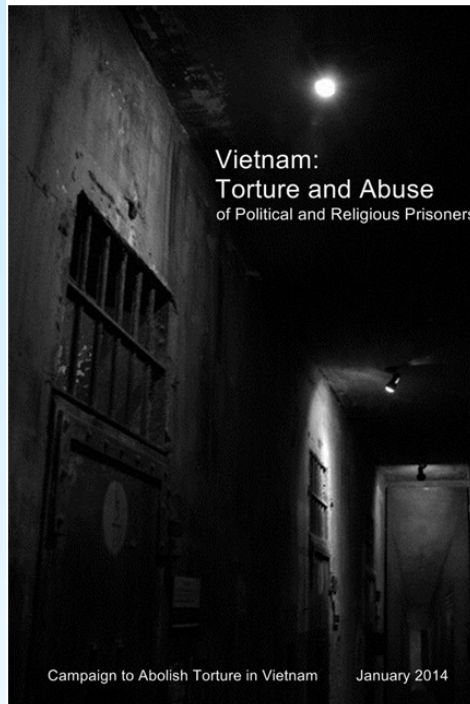
To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture

NEWSLETTER # 97

NOVEMBER 2016



### Torture & Abuse in Vietnam



Vietnam:  
Torture and Abuse  
of Political and Religious Prisoners

Campaign to Abolish Torture in Vietnam January 2014

[http://www.stoptorture-vn.org/uploads/2/5/9/2/25923947/report-torture\\_in\\_vn\\_1-16-2014-final.pdf](http://www.stoptorture-vn.org/uploads/2/5/9/2/25923947/report-torture_in_vn_1-16-2014-final.pdf)

This is what happens in the brutal and oppressive communist Vietnam.

"They blindfolded me during interrogation and severely beat me with a rubber baton and kicked me in the kidneys with their boots until I was bleeding inside and blood was coming out of my mouth. My face was swollen and I could not walk. When I passed out, they poured water on me. Some days before I left the prison they stopped beating me in the face to let the swelling die down.

"When I left, I had to be carried out of the prison."

—Vuong, a Vietnamese democracy activist arrested in Cambodia and forcibly returned to Vietnam, where he was imprisoned and tortured in An Giang Prison

"Sometimes they took my head and pushed it into water until I was unconscious. Two people held my arms on each side and pushed my head down."

—Buddhist monk Kim Muon, describing his torture during interrogation at Soc Trang Prison

"The following methods of torture, which are used both to force a confession from the prisoner and to persecute him or her, are 'made in Vietnam, full of creativity, and not comparable to any other tyrannical regime'. They can be used at any office and do not require any traditional or

outdated torture tool. It is preferable that the 'office' be a bit out of view of other curious victims.

"The torture tools, which are both wildly brutal and elegantly modernized, hard to find but always available, include sunshine, pens, rulers, desks, chairs, floors, ceilings, windows, gloves, slippers, leather boots, keys, key chains, padlocks, iron nails, handcuffs, electric batons, blackjacks...even the long hair of the torturer."

—Democracy activist Nguyen Van Ly, a Catholic priest who is going into his 18th year behind bars

Law enforcement officials carry out torture and other abuses at each stage of a dissident's arrest, detention, and imprisonment, with the harshest abuses taking place during pre-trial detention. The harsh and at times life-threatening conditions in Vietnam's prisons and detention centers also amount to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, and in some cases to torture.

This report is based on detailed interviews that we conducted with 60 former political and religious prisoners and detainees from Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> We found that all of them had been subjected to torture—the deliberate infliction of severe mental and physical pain and suffering—by police or prison officials during their interrogation in police custody or pretrial detention. For the vast majority, the torture and abuse took place while the detainee was being detained incommunicado, and before he or she had access to legal representation, was brought before a judge, or was charged with any crime. The practice of torture by police and security forces in Vietnam is not only pervasive, it is a system-

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**Disclaimer:** The listing in this newsletter of a book title or a film does not mean endorsement or approval by SACEI.

## Torture & Abuse in VN...

atic and intrinsic part of the investigation and interrogation phase of detention. It is used by law enforcement officials to force the detainee to sign a confession or provide information, to punish the detainee, or to intimidate the detainee and others from engaging in future acts of peaceful dissent or independent religious activity.

"They used electric rods and batons to beat me from my head to the rest of my body. They kicked me in the stomach and my sides with their boots. I became unconscious. They handcuffed me and four policemen dragged me on the ground while still beating me. They dragged me about 500 meters to the police truck that was waiting there. They lifted me off the ground and threw me into the truck like an animal. They drove me to the police station of Cam Le district. When we arrived, I did not have the strength to walk on my own. They continued to drag me and beat me as they pulled me along. They stepped on my feet which made me stumble and fall down on my knees. They told me that I had to walk even if I could not."

"After arresting him [Montagnard Christian Y Kuot Enuol], police had kicked and broken his ribs and beaten him in the chest. His body was swollen, his arms were bruised, he was very weak. They'd kicked him numerous times in the back. The x-ray showed his lungs were bruised and his ribs were broken."

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/article107407582.html>

HANOI, Vietnam. Police in Vietnam have arrested a blogger for anti-state writings which they said distorted the truth, tarnished the country's leaders and instigated the public to oppose the government.

Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, 37, was accused of conducting propaganda against the Communist state under Article 88 of the Penal Code and taken into custody in south central Khanh Hoa province Monday, the police said on their website Tuesday. If convicted, she could be jailed for up to 12 years.

Quynh, who blogged under the name of Me Nam or Mother Mushroom, has been blogging about the government's human rights abuses.

The police statement called Quynh a "fierce" opponent of the government who had been given warnings but still "has shown contempt for the law."

It said she had posted hundreds of articles online that "distorted the truth, distorted the history, undermined the national unity, (and) tarnished the (Communist) Party and state leaders."

Police in Khanh Hoa were not available for comment.

Her mother, Nguyen Thi Tuyet Lan, was quoted by the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers as saying Quynh did not commit any crime, but was just speaking the truth.

"She just did what the law allowed and the purpose is for the country to change and to enjoy freedom and democracy," she said.

Quynh was detained for nine days in 2009 for printing T-shirts with slogans opposing the construction of a state-owned bauxite mining project.

Last month, a court in Hanoi upheld a five-year sentence for another blogger, Nguyen Huu Vinh, who was convicted of infringing on the interests of the state by posting anti-state writings.



**SACEI Person of the Year**

**BILL LAURIE**  
**2016 SACEI PERSON OF THE YEAR**

For more than 40 years, he fought for the South Vietnamese cause

Born and raised in Waukegon, Illinois, Bill Laurie attended Arizona State University where he graduated in 1968 with a BA in Political Science. (He would later earn a second BA in Economics.) After graduation, he volunteered for the Army. He trained at the Infantry Officer Basic Training at Fort Benning, Georgia, Combat Tactical Intelligence and Southeast Asia Orientation at Fort Holabird, Maryland and Vietnamese Language School at Fort Bliss, Texas.

He was trained as an advisor, but by the time he arrived in Vietnam in late 1971, the advisory role was being phased out. He was assigned as an intelligence analyst in MACV J-2 from 1971 to 1972 when our troops were pulled out. Dissatisfied with leaving Vietnam, Laurie sought ways to return to Vietnam. In 1973 he returned with the Defense Attache Office and served as an advisor to US, RVNAF, Australian, USAID and CIA personnel covering 18 of the 44 provinces of South Vietnam.

He holds a teaching certificate for secondary schools, University of Phoenix. Bill is fluent both in spoken and written Vietnamese.

**October 2016: Republic of Vietnam Month****SCR 165, Nguyen. Republic of Vietnam Month.**

This measure proclaims the month of October 2016 as Republic of Vietnam Month, in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the first Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam, in honor of the lives lost for freedom and democracy during the Vietnam War, and in recognition of the positive contributions of Vietnamese Americans to the State of California.

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WHEREAS, We must teach our children and future generations important lessons from the Vietnam War and the continuing situation in Vietnam, including how the plight of the Vietnamese refugees following the end of the war serves as a powerful example of the values of freedom and democracy and how we can improve the quality of life of the veterans and disabled veterans of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam and draw attention to the plight of the wives of the fallen soldiers who continue to suffer; and

WHEREAS, For their brave resolution to defend freedom around the world, Republic of Vietnam Month seeks to recognize the sacrifice of the more than 58,000 American service members who lost their lives to defend democracy in Vietnam, as well as the more than one million people, including service members, supporting personnel, and their families, who made great sacrifices and contributions to the fight for freedom; and

WHEREAS, Republic of Vietnam Month also honors the members of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam

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October 2016...

and government officials, many of whom perished or were captured and held in communist labor camps where they suffered unspeakable abuses, as well as to recognize the sacrifice of their families, especially the wives who displayed admirable courage in the face of tragedy; and

WHEREAS, To honor the great sacrifices made in the fight for democracy, communities throughout California will dedicate the month of October as a time to reflect on principles of freedom and democracy and the sacrifices that have been made towards the attainment of these ideals, as well as to commemorate the anniversary of the first democracy of the Republic of Vietnam and to thank the millions of veterans around the world who fought during the Vietnam War; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring, That the Legislature hereby proclaims the month of October 2016 as Republic of Vietnam Month, in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the first Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam, in honor of the lives lost for freedom and democracy during the Vietnam War, and in recognition of the positive contributions of Vietnamese Americans to the State of California; and be it further Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.



## Ngo Le Tinh (Engineers) Remembers the Fall of Saigon

We were confident in the Army at that time [1973].

Then came the attack on Ban Me Thuot [1975]. I was in Pleiku at General Phu's headquarters. He tried to solve the problem at first of the attack on Ban Me Thuot.

I was surprised when it fell so quickly. In the TOC, technical operations center for MR II, they followed and studied the enemy situation, and at that time, and I heard the briefing, giving the situation there and the location of the VC. They had some supply problem at Ban Me Thuot. They didn't think they would take over at Ban Me Thuot. We expected them in Pleiku or Kontum. I think they left almost 4 or 6 ranger regiments, up in Kontum. The VC they thought was around there and they would strike there. They thought Ban Me Thuot was not the real attack.

The VC had tanks, we thought, around Pleiku. I heard the briefing at the TOC, with the G2, they had the good information, but they didn't know exactly the point of attack.

About that time General Phu changed his mind about things and sent the 43rd regiment from Pleiku to Ban Me Thuot to try to retake it. So he used helicopters for transportation. They had good air support at Ban Me Thuot, but the counter attack on the VC failed. They dropped the troops too far outside the area where they were supposed to fight.

On the evening of March 13, General Pham Van Phu came and said, "OK let me know the situation of the bridges from Pleiku to Qui Nhon. Are the bridges good or not? Can tanks and equipment go over them or not? And he called me and said, OK, see me right away." That as on the 13th about 8 pm. And after discussing with him, he asked, "Do you still have enough pontoon bridges? I need for the tanks to go through."

"I said right now here I have enough for floating bridges for the bridges."

He wanted to study the situation. And he said, "How long. Why 48 hours?"

And I said, "I can do it no other way. I'll build good standard bridges and bring the floating bridges over there with one company, and it must take 48 bridges. Only one bridge was needed on the Song Ba River near Phu Bon. The other bridges were very good, but the tanks needed special bridges. The bridges would take only 15 tons, but a tank weighed 55 tons."

So he said to me, "OK, I give you 48 hours. But this is secret. Don't tell anybody. We will withdraw the whole corps after you finish the bridge." And he said, "But keep this secret and don't tell anybody. And you must finish in 48 hours."

So I had to bring the bridges and build them in 48 hours, 48 hours!

So I went back and didn't tell anything to anybody. It was a secret. He said, you have all the big equipment and you must take it all with you.

I brought the map and discussed with him. He talked with the Phu Bon province chief about the

*Continue on next page*

## Remembers Fall of Saigon...

bridges. And he said the self-defense and province forces would have to protect the engineers building the bridge.

I came back and I gave the orders to the battalion and also the company to go there. On the 14th, I had to go from Pleiku to the site of the bridge, on highway 7B to Phu Bon. It was 50 km from Pleiku to Phu Bon and from Phu Bon to the bridge site almost 5 or 6 km. And I spoke with my battalion commander, one, and one officer of my experienced officers to look at the site. And I told them we had only 48 hours. Then I pushed the work and went back to Pleiku to the rest of the unit. And I told every unit that we had to move everything. Unbelievable to them. Unbelievable.

So we abandoned Pleiku for the enemy. And at that time it was very, very quiet. There were some units around there that shot mortars at us. At the corps headquarters, but not too much.

The rangers were still holding a line at Kontum and around Pleiku.

I thought we would then have a new headquarters at Nha Trang. Most of the officers asked me why, why, why. And I said, secret, just get ready with equipment, soldiers and families. All the equipment and don't ask me anything. So then I went up to corps headquarters. And I saw the chief of staff, and General Pham Van Phu had received orders from President Thieu to report to Cam Ranh.

General Ngo Quang Truong was ordered to report but he could not come to Cam Ranh, and I don't know why.

General Phu went to Cam Ranh then to meet with President Thieu. After he came back he called me and gave me the orders for the building of the bridges.

When he gave me the order on the 13th, the chief of G3 and the chief of TOC, didn't know the order to move the units from the headquarters. They didn't know anything until the 14th. Then the whole staff knew.

On the 14 of March the MRII staff prepared to move, to leave Pleiku for Nha Trang. And I heard that they and U.S. advisers were moved by helicopter to go to Nha Trang. There were four of five US advisers up there at that time. And they went to Nha Trang. And I said, "Well, it's for sure we're going away, now, when I saw that."

On the 14th, that night, I heard on the BBC, they didn't say anything, but on VOA I heard, "All the staff from MRII have moved Nha Trang. On the 14th. They moved by plane, C130, C133. There they set up office in Nha Trang."

On the 16<sup>th</sup>, I reported all ready, all set. On the 15th I stayed in Phu Bon outside the province with the one tank regiment led by Col. Dam. And I said right now we can start to move every vehicle. At that time all the civilians knew already knew and they brought their trucks and came out and lined up at Phu Bon. They saw the military preparing to leave and they came with them. And they filled the road with their vehicles.

So I can't stop that. And I said to Col. Dam, "You must say you are commander now and you must tell the province chief to let the military vehicles go first and keep the civilian vehicles off the road. I must go ahead with equipment and prepare the road and the bridges ahead. One ranger regiment was to take care of security for the engineers, and so I went with that regiment." And by that time there was panic I couldn't believe. Every vehicle tried to pass the military vehicles. And I called General Cam and said, "I cannot arrange anything here if you let people come like this, we can't cross any bridges and we will be stuck." He called and gave orders to MP to come and to guard the bridges.

Beyond Phu Bon we arrived to a district, between Cuong Son and Phu Bon. And I stopped there on the 16th and we slept there and made camp. To fix a bridge there and to use our equipment to make a bypass; we didn't have enough material to put the bridge in good condition. So I left the equipment with the ranger battalion and I said, "You keep security, my unit will go ahead. But you must keep the traffic here and the security."

So we left and I followed my men. But sometime I want to go ahead and see what is happening. But now the road was filled with soldiers. And we kept trying to stop the traffic. And I called General Cam again and he ordered the district chief not to let civilian cars or trucks go on the road, only military vehicles.

But the people didn't care. We put wire on the roads and they took the wire off and came through. Civilians and soldiers, they weren't listening to any commands. They were just running. And the enemy wasn't anywhere in sight at that time.

And on the 17th we had a problem. No command any more. But the convoy still keep going. It had to keep going. But nobody could command it or tell it to stop or go. I arrived and one chopper wanted to pick me up and take me out.

A chopper came to pick me up to Song Ba to make another bridge, a very important bridge. If it not fixed no vehicle can get across the river, near Cung Son district. We had to cross that bridge and go on route 7

After that I called the ranger commander and said, "You must solve this problem for me, I must go up ahead and see the bridge

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## Remembers Fall of Saigon...

situation but I cannot pass anymore because the convoy is stopped here."

And they couldn't control the traffic to let me go through and go ahead to the bridges.

The rangers finally had to threaten to shoot people if they wouldn't stop their cars and let me through. I finally got on the chopper to go ahead to see the bridge situation. And the rangers and the MPs got in a fight and shot each other at the road block. It was unbelievable at that time.

Then we had wounded people to bring out. I then had to walk, I could not drive anymore and I left my jeep and walked to the bridge and went to the other side of the bridge. And I arrived at Cung Son and there were still many, many problems. Nobody cared about anybody else. There was still no command. I had to walk some more. And I went to Cung Son. I reached my battalion and that night I went to the Song Ba River and looked at the site to determine what type of bridge could best go across the river. That night I slept there with my men. The next morning, General Nguyen Van Chuc was chief of the engineers at the time, and we discussed and asked how many bridges and what sizes and I discussed it with him. And we decided to make a pontoon bridge of 130 meters, he decided this. And after this I walked over and talked about it with my company and battalion commanders.

They brought the supplies to us from Tuy Hoa. And they brought materials to us by Chinook and we started to build the bridge as fast as we could.

While we were putting up the bridge, I used a bulldozer and towed all we could across the river, trucks, GMCs, jeeps, everything. The river was low at the time because the tide was down, low tide.

We used a cable and a bulldozer to tow things across the river. About 400 vehicles. Then we put in the bridge. On the 17th, I tried to finish the bridge. Then I called General Cam. On the next day the water was high and the current was very fast.

I asked for materials that the use for airport landing strips BSB they call it, black steel box, they put it together and make it into an airfield landing.

Then we finished the bridge and we were ready to go. At that time, the 5th column, the rangers and the MPs were on the other side and everybody wanted to cross the bridge first. The rangers said they would go first, this car would go and this truck would go, and the MPs just stood aside. I had one squad of MPs and sent them to the other side to take care of security and to direct the traffic across the river. And they said, *"Please, don't send me over there, they will kill me right away."*

And there were fifth columnists with the people and the convoy now. And they had a LOD7, a truck with a big frame and they put a cable on it and they can lift up another truck with it, and the civilians used that truck. And they asked the soldiers to let them go, and when they got on the bridge, they slid sideways and stopped and nobody else could cross on the bridge. When I saw that, nobody anymore could use the bridge.

And then the VC saw the bridge and started shelling it, they fired about 15 rounds and a round then hit the bridge, then they stopped firing because they had the range. It was a mortar round, and then they waited for the next truck to try to cross the river.

The next truck came out and pushed the first truck off the bridge. Then the VC shoot the mortar at the truck and hit it.

There were thousands of vehicles on the other side of the river at that time.

And I asked General Cam over there, all right, my mission is finished, now pick me up. The bridge is built and they can cross, now I have no more duty and so pick me up. And he said, *OK, you stay over there and tomorrow I will send a truck to pick you up.* General Cam was in Tuy Hoa at the time.

But I was supposed to stay with the trucks at the bridge.

I was very, very tired by this time.

<http://lde421.blogspot.com/2012/12/ngo-le-tinh-remembers-fall-of-saigon.html>



## Col. Danielle J. Ngo, Commander of 130th Engineer Brigade

(Submitted by Bill Laurie)



On July 30, 2016, the colors were passed from the Col. Albert to Maj. Gen. Davidson to Col. Ngo and back to Command Sgt. Maj. Toussaint signaling the passing of authority and responsibility for the unit. The 130th Engineer Brigade traces its lineage back to the 1303rd Engineer General Support Regiment, which was activated in July 1943 and was shortly thereafter deployed in support of both the European and Pacific Theaters in World War II. The unit also served in Operations Joint Endeavor, Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

As the premier engineer unit in U.S. Army Pacific, the 130th Engineer Brigade is comprised of two battalions: The 84th Engineer Battalion (Construction

Effects) and the 8th Special Troops Battalion, which are called upon consistently for engineering and logistic support across the Pacific Theater.

Colonel Danielle Ngo was prior enlisted and then commissioned as Second Lieutenant in 1994 and awarded a Bachelor of Science Degree in Finance from the University of Massachusetts. She holds a distinguished graduate Military Master of Arts and Sciences (MMAS) in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College (USAWC), an MMAS in Theater Studies from the Command and General Staff College (CGSC), and a Master in Public Policy from Georgetown University.

[https://www.army.mil/article/172423/engineers\\_change\\_leadership\\_welcomes\\_new\\_command\\_team](https://www.army.mil/article/172423/engineers_change_leadership_welcomes_new_command_team)

## Formosa Fish Killing Plant

On October 2, 2016, four months after the Taiwanese-Chinese steel plant Formosa located in central Vietnam discharged toxic materials into the South China Sea killing millions of fish within the 140 mile-range along the coastline and causing an environmental disaster, and without resolution in sight, the people of Ha Tinh Province finally had enough. They rose against the corrupt Hanoi government (see September newsletter).

More than 10,000 fishermen and their families demonstrated in front of the plant. The regional priest, Father Lai asked them to only demonstrate peacefully. During the protest, the Cong An (secret police) suddenly attacked the demonstrators, but were in turn overwhelmed by them. The Cong An took off their shirts in order not to be identified and ran away.

Victorious demonstrators climbed on the wall of the plant and unfurled their banners, which read:

**"DO NOT, BECAUSE OF FORMOSA, BETRAY THE PEOPLE."**

**"FORMOSA, GET OUT OF VIETNAM."**

**"COMMUNIST PARTY, LOVE THE PEOPLE. GET RID OF FORMOSA."**

This is the first time that people had chased away the Cong An during a non-violent demonstration.

<http://danlambaovn.blogspot.com/>

This is a brief timeline of the Formosa disaster:

Phase 1: June 2016: Dead fish washed to shore in Ha Tinh Province following a discharge from Formosa plant. Plant director denied culpability: **"Dead fish are related to people urinating in the sea."** Hanoi stayed mum.

Phase 2: July-August: As millions of fish washed to shore, people and birds got sick when they ate dead fish; scattered protests broke out. Fishermen went financially broke because they could no longer go fishing. Hanoi continued to look for the cause. Vietnamese-Americans were among the first to protest against Formosa.

*Continue on next page*



## Formosa Fish Killing Plant..

Phase 3: September: As more violent protests broke out, demonstrators were beaten and dispersed.

Hanoi again sided with Formosa by preventing people to protest. Formosa admitted to discharging toxins and agreed to pay \$US 500 million; fishermen continued to receive mildewed rice while waiting for their compensation.

Phase 4: October: Demonstrators chased away Cong An and demanded the eviction of Formosa.

Thousands of people filed suit against Formosa. Hanoi returned all the complaints asking for more details.

Phase 5: People are waiting for justice and economic compensation from communist Hanoi on empty stomachs. It has been said that officials pocketed money from Formosa to let the latter build the plant without supervision and control. The resulting environmental disaster caught officials by surprise. They then had to protect the plant for personal reasons by controlling the protests and beating the poor fishermen. Entered the Church which was not happy with the government dealings so far. It is now a fight between the people supported by the Church vs. the corrupt government.





## Lien Tri Pagoda Seized & Razed by Communists



Authorities in Ho Chi Minh City, the biggest economic hub in Vietnam, on September 8, 2016 seized Lien Tri Pagoda, evicting all monks despite their strong objection, social networks reported Thursday.

In the early morning of Thursday, the local authorities deployed hundreds of police officers and militia to An Khanh ward, District 2 to evict all the monks of the pagoda. They blocked all the roads leading to the Buddhist facility, not allowing a single individual to enter the areas.

Local authorities entered the pagoda and demanded its leadership to move to another place and when Venerable Thich Khong Tanh, head of the pagoda and other monks rejected, they detained them.

Ven. Tanh and some monks were taken out of the pagoda by medical ambulances while other monks were forced into a car which brought them to a resettlement site in Cat Lai, a remote area on the outskirts of the city.

After detaining the monks, workers with tractors came to demolish the pagoda which still hosts the remains of 500 deceased followers.

Due to the police brutality, Ven. Tanh was reported to have fallen ill.

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/-Ho-Chi-Minh-City-police-raid-pagoda%2C-evict-monks-38538.html>

<http://www.vietnamhumanrightsdefenders.net/2016/09/08/hcmc-authorities-seize-lien-tri-pagoda-evicting-monks-despite-strong-protest/>

## Lee's Sandwiches Co-Founder Dies

<https://www.mercurynews.com/2016/10/06/lees-sandwiches-co-founder-henry-le-dies/>

When Henry Huang Le and his family arrived in San Jose in the late 70s seeking refuge from the war in Vietnam, they had little to their name. But the purchase of a modest catering truck in 1981 would change that for generations to follow.

Le, who helped grow the popularity of traditional Vietnamese sandwiches into a multimillion-dollar empire that revolutionized the local Vietnamese food industry, died Thursday (Oct 6-2016) in San Jose.

The community leader, human rights advocate, philanthropist and co-founder of San Jose-based Lee's Sandwiches lost a short battle with stage four liver cancer. He died just four days before his 59th birthday.

Within the Vietnamese community in Santa Clara County, Le was not only a symbol of "rags-to-riches" success but someone who touched others with his genuine warmth and extensive acts of charity.

"He would've wanted people to know that he was a humble man that did the best that he could and gave of himself as much as he could. Really, that's his legacy," said Ryan Hubris, a close friend of Le's for more than 40 years and a former employee of Lee's Sandwiches.

Hubris said Le didn't know he had cancer until a few months ago when he became ill during a vacation cruise. Originally, doctors gave Le a year to live, but he died about three months after his diagnosis, Hubris said.

"He was still so strong and active. The bulk of his days were spent outdoors. Nobody thought that he was sick," Hubris added.

Le was born in Thot Not, An Giang, Vietnam, to parents Le Van Ba and Nguyen Thi Hanh. He was the second eldest of nine children.

Like many others in San Jose's large Vietnamese community, the family fled their homeland by boat and came to California after the war. Le's brother, Chieu Le, worked on a catering truck before buying his own truck in 1981. That investment led to Lee Bros. Foodservice, Inc., which Henry and Chieu established the following year. They grew that into the largest industrial catering company in Northern California.

On weekends, their parents used the catering truck to sell Vietnamese-style sandwiches to students and residents near San Jose State. Those weekend sales led to the creation of Lee's, now the world's largest chain of *banh mi* sandwich

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## Lee's Sandwiches...

shops. (In naming the shop, the brothers added a second "e" to their last name so that customers would know how to pronounce it.) The family now owns more than 60 shops throughout the U.S. and recently expanded into Taiwan. A devout Buddhist, he often donated to temples throughout San Jose, according to friends. He served as president of the Vietnamese Heritage Society and was a founding member of the Vietnamese-American National Gala, an organization aimed at uniting Vietnamese-Americans and creating greater visibility for the community. But it was Le's work in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that many community members point to. Le opened his office in Biloxi, Mississippi, to displaced victims of the storm even though he too had lost many properties in the devastating 2005 hurricane.

"He was literally empty-handed," said Hubris. "But instead of being bitter or devastated by the loss, what he did was reach out to the community and recognize how fortunate he was. It wasn't about his needs, it was about the needs of others. It really formulated a lot of life lessons for me as I moved forward in my life," he added.



Henry Le in Biloxi after Hurricane Katrina. (Gary Reyes, Staff—Mercury News)

*Le is survived by his wife, Dep Nguyen, and three children, Diana, Brian and Cindy. He also leaves behind his mother, Nguyen Thi Hanh, eight siblings, and 19 nieces and nephews.*

Happy  
Thanksgiving

A colorful illustration of a cornucopia, a horn-shaped basket overflowing with various autumn fruits and vegetables, including pumpkins, apples, and corn cobs, set against a green background.