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Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Ngo Quang Le
Conducted by Stephen Maxner
September 27, 2000
Transcribed by Reccia Jobe

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Ngo Quang Le. It
2 is the 27th of September, year 2000 at 2:00 in the afternoon. We are in the Special Collections
3 Library, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. Would you please begin by giving a brief
4 biographical sketch of yourself?

5 Ngo Quang Le: My name is Ngo Quang Le. I was born in 1951 in South Vietnam in [?]
6 Province and I was raised in my father's house so I follow him anywhere because he's Army. So,
7 I go to Doa Soa or Saigon. I go to [?] and Pleiku and we end up in ____ 1969. I joined the Army
8 and ____ for my father.

9 SM: What are your first memories of interacting or seeing Americans, in particular
10 American soldiers in South Vietnam?

11 NQL: That a very good memory for me. In 1968, my father, as a ____ in Tu Qua Pleiku,
12 and in a Tet Mountain in the Tet Offensive, I was a student, high school student. So, I come back
13 from Saigon to play around the New Year. So, midday I play in the Saigon area, you know, and I
14 hear the noise, look like the fire a lot. Say, "Oh, a lot of fireworks." So I come back from nearby
15 the American Embassy. I saw the jeep parked in the middle of street. I said, "What the hell.
16 Maybe they're drunk." So, I got my motorcycle nearby, one soldier came out with a gun, a Colt
17 .45. Point right at me like that. I scream, "No, No! I am student! ____ lucky. "I speak very little
18 English!" "Go home. VC come here anyway, go home!" So, I run quick, go to the house and say,
19 "Oh, the Communists come already. My grandma say, "You lying, you go home, and you come

1 back and made up a story!" I said, "Grandma, listen to me. I know because...I know" and I
2 talked with her, "the soldier point a gun on me." The next day, the radio, you know start talking
3 about and she called someone, took me back to the airport, shipped me back into Pleiku ____
4 where I live with my father. I live with my father and Pleiku back to, because _____. Because this
5 time in Pleiku is very, very big fight. And a couple days later we see a lot Communists die
6 anyway. This first memory, you know. I see American soldier, also I see how [?] die in the war.

7 SM: When you went and met your father, what did he say was happening?

8 NQL: I see my father a couple of day later because I couldn't get out. I let the Cong in
9 my house with the shotgun, we had the shotgun only. So I tried to protect my mom and my, you
10 know, if something come in. We'd stay there a couple week, you know. Finally, you know the
11 Communists tried to overrun because that close to New Year so that they tried to surprise any
12 city. They would come in any city. From that day, that happened a lot in 1972. Even though my
13 father Province Chief and they over us, too. But in time, we pushed them quickly because we had
14 the lesson from 1968.

15 SM: What did you think about the United States being involved in Vietnam, when you
16 were young at that time, in 1968?

17 NQL: You know, it come, I had no fear because I didn't know what was going on. I was
18 too young. When I grow up, I be in the Army and I had the mixed feeling. I feel a little bit bad
19 about the American come to my country and die for my country. They're not supposed to do that
20 because I remember one night, one soldier, he get drunk and he had come and he come over to
21 my house and he cried and said to hide him. He worried that the NVA would get him and he had
22 nowhere to go home. And he take out the money to give to me. He said, "No, no, no, no, no. I
23 take the money." From that time, I feel so sad, because I think he miss his home and also after I
24 join the Army, I have the feeling we are different culture. America and Vietnam different culture.
25 Sometime American come to my country, they throw a tent and they don't know what kind of
26 tree my country. They may grow old [?]. So, when they mad, they go on different sides, you see?
27 And also, wanting good... Americans, they love children. So, they give children chocolate and
28 everywhere, the whole war, they start to give them chocolate and our children, they don't have a
29 lot of candy. So, when they saw the GI like that they jump around them and they give them
30 candy. But that advantage for the communists. They take one guy and say and they will come
31 and kill your families like that. Then ____ going the top. The kid don't know nothing. The kid be

1 do what they like to do and make a big mess. Some kid die, some soldier die, you know or
2 something like that. My feeling about it, I feel bad about that. Also, after 1972 they been all the
3 Americans stop fighting my country. From 1972-1975, I don't know any area, our area, we keep
4 very strong, very good. I think. If America just provide the technology for us and let us fight our
5 own war. We may win. When we were first fighting we wouldn't see no white guy. No white
6 guy there. You see, it funny like that. Americans lives in ones shack, Vietnamese lives in one
7 shack. We had no high tech. And Americans had the sensors to put outside they _____. Even at
8 night time machine gun and bam, bam, bam!, they shoot and would say, "Damn, fucking GI!"
9 They wake you up _____ or something like that. And we have mixed feelings, you know. Like
10 that, it's funny, you know. Because, the sensor I was the guy, I go put the American who put the
11 sensor. The sensor, a small one, he put it right on _____ and it can be detected out very near
12 where it starts detection. But the big one, we put in the _____ in the jungle, after that we had
13 detection which one we pull. We had the one machine gun. So when the animal were walking by,
14 they didn't see them. And if the whole machine gun come up, they did a lot of communist group
15 moving, a big group of animal moving, too.

16 SM: Herds.

17 NQL: So, they _____, because the would take us to enemy, so we get a lot of blood so
18 then we have a lot of body, but some kind of yellow animal.

19 SM: What kind of animals usually?

20 NQL: Like, especially, wild hog. Because you know, the wild hog, sometimes they go by
21 water, usually they go 30, 40 hundred together.

22 SM: So the sensors weren't as effective as...?

23 NQL: Technically good, but somehow bad, you know. But especially, it took _____ saw it
24 a little different way. When they saw the sensors they just walk out, they call, they looking
25 another one, look at another one after they saw the direction we would go the sensor already.
26 They used a wire to tie a the can, just tie the can, tie the can, tie the can. Far away up end and
27 they shake it. And they shake it, the long neck, and he saw some machine gun and he run away
28 and we shoot it. That's my experience. Funny.

29 SM: It's disappointing that the sensors were so easily manipulated by the enemy.

30 NQL: Yeah, but you know. Because you know, it is funny; I have some memories, its
31 funny.

1 SM: Are there other things that you thought Americans did, that didn't make any sense?

2 NQL: The typical American...

3 SM: Or American activities.

4 NQL: You know, from the political view, America is very good try to have freedom. But

5 the movements of the soldier, I don't think was a good idea. But then, of course they defend for

6 their freedom, I think it is a very good idea. And also they try to stop the communists. They try

7 to take over the South. Southeast Asia. Because after, Vietnam, probably Laos, Cambodia, and

8 Thailand, Malaysia anyway. But the thing is, I think they stopped the war a little bit too soon.

9 SM: In '70.

10 NQL: '75.

11 SM: But we stopped fighting in '72, '73, but we stopped the war in '75.

12 NQL: You know, they take a little bit longer and everything, maybe we have the chance

13 to turn it over.

14 SM: Did you ever have any negative experiences with Americans soldiers in Vietnam?

15 NQL: No. I had very good relationship with them because the first thing, I have a lot of

16 things because my father is a high-ranking officer. I followed him and the way I do a lot of

17 American advisors, they like me. I still remember the Colonel Wygo. I don't know where he

18 lives now.

19 SM: What's his name?

20 NQL: I think, Wygo, Wygo in engineering, our engineering.

21 SM: How do you spell it, do you remember?

22 NQL: I don't know. I remember him because..

23 SM: Wygo.

24 NGL: Yeah, Wygo. He had help us to build Highway One and his group build Highway

25 One and where my father knew him. And every day we would meet him, every day. We would

26 talk and discuss how we operate some and stuff like that. I remember he always carry the M-79.

27 He hide it here and he showed me all the time and he speak with suddenly we don't need to talk

28 about use _____. And sometimes we'd have to sneak from Communists and we fight by and

29 something like that and he liked me a lot, before he left. "Le, Come to Saigon," and my father

30 say, "Wygo, you my good friend. Before you come back in your country, I would like you to

31 have a good time with me and have a little bit party for him in Saigon." So I can enjoy the party.

1 ____ he says, “____ to leave, you stay right here.” He go up in his room and he give me the .38
2 with the white handle. He give it to me. He say, “Here, before I come back to my country, I give
3 to you.” So, I wear it all the time when I go to protect my father. I wear it all the time. He give to
4 me. I have very good relationship with American people. Also, I always, I try to make my group
5 have more function so after we fight with the Communists, we get the small gun, the Colt 54
6 Communists or CKC and I take it. I trade it with the American. I trade the radio, radio, or the gun
7 so my group I give the gun myself. A M-16, that gun belong to me. I had my M-18 with a ____ I
8 trade with them a Colt 54 for American ____ before ____ they want to come back in the country
9 and it wasn’t a gift. So they came to me. So, for me, I had a good time, we fight together. I had
10 nothing against American people. Especially, my father worked with American all the time.
11 Especially, from 1969-70, we need to go anywhere in our area. We need to have helicopter from
12 American to provide us. Later on, we had our own helicopter.

13 SM: Was that supported by Americans, that helicopter?

14 NQL: Yeah, ____ supply ____ medical supply to a Vietnamese Air Force. So the
15 Vietnamese who fly it.

16 SM: What do you recall about the Operation Lam Son 719? What role did you and your
17 father and your ...?

18 NQL: What operation?

19 SM: Lam Son 719.

20 NQL: Lam Son 719 is not in our area. They are in far North ___. ____ Vietnam. But for
21 me, I listen to what they report and we try to go deeper inside Communist corner, in the corner.
22 But for me, after I listen, I think we were not prepared well enough. So, we lose a lot of
23 equipment because we cannot fix them and we had no parts to fix them. Also, they, for Operation
24 Lam Son, I think both sides they say win. But the Communists lose a lot of soldier. Vietnamese,
25 we lose some soldier, but we lose some people. So we had no power to change [?]. That’s all I
26 can say because I was not involved in the operation.

27 SM: How about the Easter Offensive, the offensive in 1972?

28 NQL: 1972. That was very special for me because I remember big town. Call my father
29 say, “Near.” I have the information from Kissinger. We take your area to be the way to get
30 supplies. You know, because we are out in the oceanfront, the river, the oceanfront, the port. So
31 they would take _____. So they would hit you very badly. So, then my father think how we can

1 protect them and protect the area. So, before the day of the ____, me and my father we fly. Day
2 and night, day and night, we fly, any caller. The small wheeler, we ____ and we had. We fly out
3 of there. We had the artillery officer go with us and we fly for all this _____. The _____ say yes, he
4 _____. So, we told a soldier, "If you see a street like that. And you ask the man how far they
5 come in from left side, right side. Tell us," because the soldier they don't how to point the code
6 artillery to shoot. Only the Lieutenant Colonel or Captain can do that. Because they learned that
7 in the Army. But the soldiers don't know how to do that. We show them how to do it. We expect
8 if the commander he die, who will do it. So we did do that. Because, this area belong to us. We
9 know any corner so we just fly there. And also, we talk with the people. We had 2 million people
10 here. It could commit war yourself, you didn't need help and you don't want to work with them.
11 We are _____ because will protect this area. We may lose 100 people, but we will protect a
12 million people. We need to do it. But we just scaring them like that. Exactly, when the
13 communists coming, get out of the way. Because the commies would try to come in the house
14 and keep the people in the house. So, we cannot shoot them, because we worry about the people.
15 Exactly, I feeling about that in My Lai. Maybe the commies, they mix a lot with the people in the
16 village and they make _____. They sometimes loose their temper, so they're out of control. So,
17 that _____ back in '72, the year _____ 22 village and about together. The North and South in out
18 area, the 22 location run over. But they could not do it . We push them back. We push them
19 back. Especially, before '72. Mr. Wygo help my father. We try to clear the highway, both sides.
20 One kilo this side, one kilo on this side. Make very clear. No, no _____ or nothing. So, the
21 Communists cannot hide. So we protect, we very good. So, keep the communists and move it
22 quickly and also we could see very far away, so the Communists very hot after us.

23 SM: What other ways did Mr. Wygo advise your father and you?

24 NQL: No, he's not an advisor.

25 SM: Excuse me. What was his role?

26 NQL: He is a American Army engineering. His duty is to help Vietnamese build
27 Highway One. His company build with my father every section. So, we need to work everyday,
28 and you know, come up with a friend.

29 SM: Were there American advisors that worked with your father?

30 NQL: Yes.

31 SM: Do you remember them?

1 NQL: Yes, I remember.
2 SM: Any names?
3 NQL: Mr. Robinson.
4 SM: Robinson.
5 NQL: Yes, he is in, I think he in Michigan right now.
6 SM: Michigan?
7 NQL: Yeah. Mr. Leety. He is ____ Mr. Robinson Colonel and the Lieutenant Colonel.
8 SM: The Army?
9 NQL: The Army or Marines whatever. Mr. Stelinger.
10 SM: Stelinger?
11 NQL: Yeah, I think he is right now, a colonel for a I hear from my father my father and
12 one guy. His name is Mr. Curry.
13 SM: Curry? C-U-R-R-Y?
14 NQL: Yes. Mr. Cooper Curry, I don't remember but not very good at remembering some
15 things. Me and him and my father, we get attacked by Communists in a small village.
16 SM: When was it?
17 NQL: I think 1970, '71. I don't remember. We go to try to remove the people from
18 where they live inside the jungle. We had the village, so the commies come and took supply all
19 the time. So, we tried to move them near by the highway. So after they move, we come and
20 inspect the location. So, this time, when my father call me, we go with him ____ and we have
21 not cot, so I just talk with District Chief and say, "Can you loan to me the truck?" He say, "I
22 have no truck. I have only ambulance." So I say, "Well, then just loan me the ambulance." So I
23 put the soldier in there. And he loaned it from my father and me to carry in the back and ____.
24 So when we were in ____ I hear, before they shoot, "Help!!, I saw it." And the kid ____ voom!
25 ____ AK-47 and they broke out the windshield of my car from behind not from in front. So I told
26 my father, I saw the truck I say, "Jump out there!" And I just pull my _____. We have a flat tire
27 on my side right by me. And lucky I am, because behind me is the radio and they have the
28 antenna so when seven holes cannot go through because the iron so thick.
29 SM: That's so lucky.
30 NQL: Yes. So, when we jump out of the car, I don't see my father fight. So, I told the
31 sergeant, protect him. I come back, make the call, glass very thick. Come on. I paid with the Colt

1 .45 like. I take the glass I give to him, see. ____ this way and we stash your bag and the
2 Communists ____ so they hiding somewhere. So after we shoot back and they know , do not take
3 the runaway. We chase a little bit and we had won the war and my jeep you know, have a hole in
4 my jeep.

5 SM: Flat tire.

6 NQL: Uh-huh, flat tire.

7 SM: But all of you survived?

8 NQL: Yes, all of us survived. And when in '75 I come in Washington D.C., I see him, I
9 see him. He looked at me, the colonel.

10 SM: What was his rank? Do you remember? Colonel?

11 NQL: I don't know. He was in a... State Department.

12 SM: State Department. He was civilian.

13 NQL: Yeah. He retired a Marine too, I think so.

14 SM: Do you remember his first name?

15 NQL: No, he go at that time my English not as bad.

16 SM: Curry is good enough. I'm going to visit a group called Counterparts and they were
17 all advisors in Vietnam. So, I am asking you for names because I'm hoping maybe I can meet
18 some and talk them to about our interview and put them in contact with you if you'd like.

19 NQL: Yeah.

20 SM: What other memorable operations?

21 NQL: Oh, Mr. Robinson is still connected with my father.

22 SM: He still is?

23 NQL: Oh yeah! He send a card every Christmas and a my father send to him also.

24 SM: Okay, where is your father?

25 NQL: My father live in St. Louis.

26 SM: With you? Well, you're at Fetsus.

27 NQL: Yeah, he help in the village. He live in a one hour from me. We see each other all
28 the time.

29 SM: That's great. Now, what's your father's name? What's your father's full name?

30 NQL: My father right now after he go in...

31 SM: In Vietnam.

1 NQL: N-G-O T-A-N N-G-H-I-A.
2 SM: Ngo Tan Nghia?
3 NQL: Uh-huh, you're right.
4 SM: Why don't you go ahead and talk about your brother's rescue mission that you went
5 on?
6 NQL: Okay, my brother died in 1974 in August. It's a memory I never forgot because
7 this day, me and my father, we sit down and we sit at the table, the front table, it looked like
8 Buddhist temples. And we talk with people and I remember we're talking about it, we're talking
9 with people. And I have a duty protect him around and make sure he not far off but he right here.
10 So one call and one talk with me and I come ____ my brother bled now. So I come in, I say,
11 "Okay, your send the helicopter right away here." And I come in and I talk with my father slowly
12 say, "Don't change your face, that's very important." My father get trouble. He get shot down
13 from enemy and even ____ but don't change his face. ____ so the helicopter coming, we get in
14 the helicopter and we fly to Saigon right away. The Air Force Headquarters, my father friend he
15 work in the Air Force headquarters. Meet my father and they tell ____ my father what going on
16 again and then we know it's my brother. My brother get shot down by AK-47. And my father
17 say, "Is he still alive?" and Theo he say, "Oh, we saw two people jump out of the airplane, two,
18 three people jump out of the airplane." Something like that. We stay one night and next day we
19 come down. I remember that ____ and that belong to 25 and 50 ____ and the one that my father
20 commanded too. This ____ my mom knowing so we say, "Don't let me bring any equipment
21 back from my soldiers. Just put my equipment in my trunk." Also, my relative, he retired for the
22 Red Beret during the war in France. After the Red Beret he work for the American Special
23 Force. He retired. He said, "I go with you. Don't let no one know." I said, "Thank you." A quiet
24 operation so you know and another guys, two guys, and when we come down from the 50 ____
25 and they say, "Oh, we go inside and got to get you out." The Air Force come in and had only
26 one body and a half body, _____ in half. Then we get a lot ready for this area only the high
27 grass. So, when the plane down, the fields they burned. So, I say, "Well, if I ____ to send a
28 battalion group in there, get killed." I say, "Well, I told my father, "I go myself, I go with two
29 guys." My father, he think for a few minutes. I say, "Well, dad?" He say, "I don't want to lose
30 another one." I say, "Don't worry. My fortune's told me I live very long." I was joking him with
31 that. Anyway, they send a helicopter in, the one they send me . I say, "No point." Because we

1 just saw three helicopter come in right away. It is not a good situation. If you want to fly me in,
2 you want to fly, fly in but do it a different way. If you fly in the airplane go this way, we go this
3 way. You get very high. So we see the point where you just turn it, just fly it very, very, low and
4 reach out. You go down Phu Bai like that, Phu Bai. It far away. But, I tap your shoulder and we
5 jump. We jump far away so it could fall out. Make sure nobody there first. We take about and
6 hour to shoot around and we start to dig, and we dig. And we see the door, the room for the pilot
7 and there will be something. When I open the door, that memory I don't want to remember. They
8 gave me knew it already because hold the fuse, the bomb. When they shoot the one airman, the
9 window, it broken already, it sound like that. All the ____, they stick together, stick like that.
10 When we pulled him out, if don't go. We don't know who my brother. So, what I do? He don't
11 have no more leg because he burned them off already. His head was so hot and his chest. So,
12 when you pull the hair out you cannot see the face because it burned back and you know it burn
13 already. But, lucky I recognize his watch and he always smoke salad, so I recognize his salad and
14 know it him and another guy, a co-pilot. So I take them to father and I walk and I say, "Get
15 out!" He say, "No!" I know my brother go with five people, four people. And have two and one
16 and another one, now we need the one man. We were looking for him because I don't want my
17 brother carry them with him, now I can't admit. I had the decision to do that. So, I am luck to
18 find his hat. But if I had already all the bodies like that. The helicopter need to land, cannot fly
19 like that. You know. Get killed. So, we need to do, we pulled the body in corner, one very far in
20 corner, one body corner. We just make the _____. So it was _____. It may seem _____. And we stop
21 off _____ take the rest and 15 minutes to a half hour, and helicopter one and come back and
22 different corner, go on back. The third time we hope we get out . _____

23 SM: That's incredible.

24 NQL: My mom met me outside the airport. I say, "How your brother?" _____. That _____.

25 SM: How old was your brother at the time?

26 NQL: He was only two years. He was born back in '49.

27 SM: What kind of aircraft was he flying? Do you know?

28 NQL: C-47.

29 SM: C-47 transport.

30 NQL: He live in Antonio, Texas. He come here to learn to beat the air fighter, jet fighter.

31 But the people know my father, so if he jet pilot, it be easier to get killed. So, they change his

1 position to C-47, you know, cargo. But he say, "I don't like cargo," and after that he join with
2 the colt dragon group, they have gunship. They have the ship and the C-47 and they go to make
3 the picture. So it was trouble.

4 SM: What was your brother's name?

5 NQL: His name is Ly L-Y and Quang in the middle and the last name.

6 SM: Do you have any other siblings? Any other brothers and sisters?

7 NQL: Yeah. I have my young brother and he used to live with me and I have two sister.
8 My sister in Texas, in Houston in a pharmacy. She work and she have a very good job in a
9 hospital. And my sister and my brother, have my brother, my father 7-11 and myself and I have
10 two small corner store and also I do some business in Vietnam, right now.

11 SM: Why don't we talk about your transition. First, what did you think about the Paris
12 Peace, in '73, the peace accords? Then what were the events surrounding your leaving Vietnam
13 in '75?

14 NQL: You see, after the war 1972, I have a bad feeling around my country because I am
15 in charge for the group for the protection of my father. Escort. So, we have a lot of supply. I saw
16 my supply had been cut a lot. I know right away, because if you are the Army, the gasoline is
17 your blood and the money. If they cut the gasoline you will go nowhere and I know it we
18 finished. But we cannot run away. That my feeling. I am not really high-ranking officer, but I
19 learn a lot from my father and I listen to my father everyday and the another way the war _____ I
20 learn a lot. After '73 I say, "Well, I know when my country finished." I know.

21 SM: What happened in 1974, 1975 in Phan Thien?

22 NQL: In Phan Thien in 1975 we fight very good and we fought, we fought, we fought. _
23 the crew from Ban Me Thout and Pleiku come down by the ocean front and they just run away
24 like that and the men surrender and they are hungry and they just shoot and broke in the house
25 and take and they get away. So, when they go to _____. So when it hit like that, my father he
26 have the idea that we pull all Army jungle. We left the city empty. So when the group, the police
27 group in, they go through, they burn the city, everything. They go by already and we put the
28 concertina, the barbed wire and we tried to not let them come back and we put that big gun, 105,
29 that shoot you. You go up and go inside the big tent to get some same thing one by one. So when
30 they come I say, "Okay, now you come back. Do you want I take you 101. Get out of the car."
31 We shut it. We take over the gun and send them to the boat. Let them go in Saigon. When we

1 saw like that, then the fire crew come in. I saw the general _ F-1 commander in _____ base.
2 They caught me with them and ___ and they say, "Well, what happened? I still not find out why
3 you run." I say, "Oh, I don't know." Because they run and we cannot control it so my father
4 send the one battalion to escort him back to Saigon and somehow in Mr. Foo, General Foo he a
5 commander in II Corps. He saw my father. He and my father, and we talk and _____ my father he
6 small like that. And then General Foo say, "What happened _____? Did you want to do
7 something to me, let me do myself _____?" My father say, "_____. I
8 don't go back. Even one soldier left, you are still my chief commander. You are my commander.
9 You stay here with me." At this time in Saigon, they send General Hill, who die later in 1975 in
10 his office. They say, "Okay, here _____". We took over at Cho Lu, come back and
11 report in Saigon. At the same time they send Mister, Lieutenant General Nguyen Le.
12 _____ be a chief command in the front. After that we have the cook, _____.
13 They put him in the airport with the _____. One hour later, the communists overrun
14 them. They were fighting very hard and I hear that Saigon send the Chinook to come and pick
15 them up and I had the duty to bring the gasoline to a small island outside, near by the coast. We
16 have enough gasoline to fly the helicopter. We try to rescue them and he say, "No, don't let them
17 because we come back tomorrow." But next day we never hear them there because they fight
18 until they have no ammunition and it took them all into one sugar cane plantation. After that, two
19 days later, they over run Phan Thiet. This time I have experience where the group could go past
20 my father area. Mr. General Long Wun Tan, he left his command _____ MMN113 and I get it.
21 After I look, I put my helmet here because usually I a funny guy so I change the gun for ___ and I
22 put 001, number 1, on my car because I was young and a little wild. When they communist saw
23 the white jeep, they know me and they _____ because they seen my father
24 _____. I say, "Then fucking shit!" I told him, "You should attack the tent." It
25 look like a bunker. I put helmet. Usually any reason they know my voice with my father and we
26 do it together. They ask me, "Where you at?" I say, "You don't need to know. I stay here. I stay
27 here." I tell you, that night I left my father alone on the boat, my father get out, I'm still inside no
28 know it. Myself, I stay there. I say, "Okay, now the order. Any troop we withdrawal to the coast.
29 That's have the ship come and pick it up." And that's what he said. Then General Tom call me
30 and say, "Oh, where your father." I say, "General, you remember me? I am his son and I always
31 go with him." "Oh, I know you. Where your father?" I say, "My father on the coast right now,

1 cannot contact with you.” I am right here. But he tried to _____ in the car. So, later on,
2 I had to very, very bad and I don’t know how to swim; I don’t know how to swim! So when
3 _____ the boat come in to get me and we try to fill the tank with water. “Le, le, le, le!” I know it
4 and I shot it they hold the tooth and it would pull me at left and I shot it back and I had
5 _____ with me. _____, but I no jump. I let that guy jump first
6 and I jump later. When we jumping, the way he taught me to _____ to bring it over
7 the small cord and you go. _____ I mean, come on! We go by and we
8 _____ come back at river. And we had a small, very small boat with no engine. And two
9 guys, we buy _____ and moved the _____ and let then go
10 the ocean. It a lot of work picking up. And I saw my father next day in the Navy ship.

11 SM: Who picked you up? What boat picked you up?

12 NQL: They were my soldiers, my unit, because they know.

13 SM: No, I mean, when you got out to the ocean?

14 NQL: Ocean is the Navy.

15 SM: Do you remember the ship?

16 NQL: The ship, the big ship. I think it _____ the big ship. When we get
17 ship, I told you I don’t know how to swim. A lot of things I get sick, seasick. So, when I went
18 out there, I lay in the ship. And they go, “What are you doing?” I say, “Cause I will vomit on it.”
19 I duck down because until the ship go to Vung Tau and helicopter come pick my father and me
20 up to Vung Tau. And we regroup and in the town, we still have five thousand soldiers with us.
21 Any man they had caught that they had _____, only _____
22 with my family.

23 SM: When was this now? What time period is this?

24 NQL: I think it town is around 20th.

25 SM: 20th of April of ’75?

26 NQL: Yes. Me and my father come back in Saigon and we go in headquarter and my
27 father say, “Okay, we have 5,000 people. So, give us the supplies and we will make the one-
28 quarter in the Saigon ring. But we just discussed like that and _____ and _____
29 say, “Hey. We finished.” So, me and my father we get out the headquarter and go home. I told
30 my father, I said, “Look, you and me. You know me already. I am your son and don’t go to the
31 port today because they kill you. But we fight very hard. And last minute or lost many? And if

1 you stay, I go. And if you go, I will let my son know because you are my father
2 _____.” My children, they look like my father. We are stay together very, very, close.
3 I say, “So that one to go so you got to _____.” “Okay, bye-bye,” just say like that. Me
4 and my father go to Cho Lon. We hiding in the one soldier house. We help them a lot. From that
5 they bring me _____ and one from Cambodia. And we get out of that and
6 we saw _____ from _____. _____ no
7 go nowhere. I come back from Saigon to make another trip right near the water, Vietnam. So we
8 try to escape and we get caught. They come to get in the water at night. One more time they held
9 a gun to my ear, an AK-47 “Don’t move!” _____ I’m running and turn over to
10 communists. The guy. We thought to bring the American money, dollars a lot. So when they get
11 us in the office, and the communists saw a lot of money. So they took the guy to question us
12 quickly. I say, “Why you have two people go?” He say, “Oh, I know you _____ victory and
13 you will change the money later, so the _____. So I go into _____ looking for my
14 mom.” “Ah, ah, okay.” The next day they leave me and my father. We lucky. I say well, I come
15 back. I report another location. I say, “Oh, I am a defect soldier. I want to do some little bit
16 business.” So I wanted to go in Saigon to visit my relative. They said, “Okay.” I use 15 day.
17 After I come back to go to study. I said, “Okay, thank you.” I go to Saigon, I do the same thing.
18 After they stamp it I make the fake stamp. Kind of like so. I know they _____.
19 So I stay for Saigon, go to Ha Tien. I use the Ha Tien paper. I use the Saigon paper. Then I
20 return. So, I move slowly. I move my old sister, my mom, my sister, my young sister. My auntie
21 come back that day. We ran the _____ the victory office. We stay there. They
22 come in and talk to us every day. I say, “How have you been?” _____ my father the
23 old man. I say, “We’ve been very good.” We talk and they eat with us and then they drink with
24 us, my father right there. The communists, they came a lot. He don’t know what he do, if they
25 will catch him, okay. But we try to talk with some people so they take us by the small boat to the
26 _____. No and didn’t show no make no noise. So we have another ship fishing
27 boat, we go first. We were outside. In that town, my father meet me. We go to the river, get in
28 the boat and we go to small island and Thailand people pick us in the island three days later. We
29 hungry. No water, no food for three days. After that they take us go to the border of
30 _____ in Thailand _____. Form that, they take both of us go to Bangkok. We
31 take the taxi to the Embassy. American Embassy. From that, the American Embassy, they know

1 my father. They ran...we don't stay in the camp. We stay in small hotel. After _____
2 walked out, we see a couple more people get out of country. We put this money together, we
3 have a house. I try to come back to get my mom out. We go with the black market people. But
4 somehow the police, they know. They catch me. Police come, "How you catch me?"
5 _____ "Your not supposed to be leaving."
6 SM: What happened?
7 NQL: We try to bring the sugar. Black Market would try to bring the sugar back in
8 Vietnam to sell it. I would try to go get my mom and take them out.
9 SM: When they caught you what happened?
10 NQL: We just talk. We're from talking. They nice, say "Okay, don't do that again. It's
11 against the law here."
12 SM: Don't do it again.
13 NQL: "I will catch you and you get in trouble. I know you have bad feeling about your
14 family, but usually, I follow the law. I need to put you in jail." But, they released me and we fly
15 in USA in November 1975 and we _____. We study in _____ in a Harrisburg,
16 Pennsylvania one month. After we get the _____ my father, advisor in Washington D.C. to
17 try to force from me and my father. We say, "We come here. We no looking for nothing. We
18 looking for freedom. We want to let you know how we are and whatever we need to have a
19 shoulder to cry on. We come back looking for you. But I let you go." We fly to Sacramento and
20 come and see my father friend, General Chip and we stay with him about a week. My father and
21 his friend, first we buy the car. A big four door. I the driver. We drive from Sacramento to New
22 York. Six days, six nights. We were looking somewhere to live. After that we go down in
23 Columbia, South Carolina where have a very good cheap apartment. 150-200 per month. So I
24 stay there and we go to work and we go to school. Learned English, but I haven't time to learn
25 too because I so tired, I had to do work. In the class, I always sleep.
26 SM: What kind of work did you do?
27 NQL: My first job, I work in a restaurant and _____ restaurant. I am the
28 guy that pick up the trays and put them up and clean the restaurant for two dollar twenty cents
29 per hour. It not that bad, you know. After that I work in Fruit of the Loom factory, make the
30 underwear about a couple of months. My father friend he go in St. Louis. He saw the business,
31 called Chop Suey, Chinese carry out. He know I feel very good, we stay in

1 _____ or leave. He had the opportunity for you. And we moved here in St.
2 Louis so we joined with him and opened the Chinese restaurant carryout in the low-income
3 neighborhood. Welfare people. I bought our house. I stay there that year, make some money, get
4 out.

5 SM: Did it work?

6 NQL: Yeah. Make some money and then get out of there because I don't want to stay
7 there. After that, now I have two convenience stores, one in a small town called Festus; about
8 10,000 people and I stay there 11 year already.

9 SM: What do you think about American policy towards Vietnam since you've been in
10 the United States? In particular, the reluctance on some American administrations, Presidents,
11 the reluctance of them to normalize relations? And what do you think about the current
12 administration's desires and the fact that we have reestablished trade relations, President
13 Clinton's plan of going to Vietnam in November? How do you feel about that?

14 NQL: I feel very good. I feel if we do it a little sooner, better, because we never go,
15 American ever go to Vietnam almost 20 year. In 20 year, the Vietnam, even the poorest country,
16 they suffer in economy but they still growing. Why? Because during the war, they fight every
17 day. The business cannot function. _____ too far. After the war, they _____ a lot
18 of people _____. '75, have no food to eat and '77, '78. I think '89 they have
19 the new concept called Doi Moi; new rice. They opened the door a little bit. And from that day,
20 they ate close to 2 million tons of rice and now they export over 4 million metric tons of rice.
21 The coffee, they are number 8 in the world and number second inside Asia.

22 SM: I didn't know that.

23 NQL: Yeah. I go down there. I concerned. I read _____. I know a lot. My
24 family, I came to Vietnam. I told them, "Vietnam, we don't need to do the _____ next
25 year. Because look at the map; Vietnam a big country with 1,000 kilometer oceanfront. We are
26 very good at farming already. So if we concentrate on fishing and farming, we would be set.
27 Because right now, the war not the war no more because there no war. The next step, the war is
28 food. Looking for food. If the country concentrate on agriculture and if they work very good,
29 then we supply very well. Right now, Mr. Clinton coming in Vietnam, I think, maybe already
30 make the Vietnam open more a little bit you know about the situation before. I believe so.

31 SM: You've been back to Vietnam.

1 NQL: All the time.

2 SM: When was your first trip back?

3 NQL: 1992.

4 SM: 1992. How were you received when you went there?

5 NQL: A little bit scary. Because they stop me in the airport because they cannot find my
6 Visa. So, they try took me in special hotel to wait for the American Visa for me. But finally, they
7 leave me because we have to two copies of the Visa and I stayed down there and over New Year.
8 I run around, happy place. After that I _____ and said to civil servants come see
9 me. I think what reason they come back and who I am and what I do before. I say okay, "I am
10 (my name)," what I do before, "And I come back here because I hear the country need to open
11 for business and forget everything. So I wanted to if its true or not. I am American citizen. You
12 cannot touch me. If you don't like it, I come back to America." He say, "No, no, no. Just stay." I
13 stay a couple of months and I come back to, I collect some information, I come back to America.
14 We founded the company called the New World Economy, the corporation. I do consulting. I
15 bring a lot of companies from Canada. And America go down there. We try to do and I bring
16 some couple companies, the oil made in Vietnam. It take about a couple of years but until the
17 final agreement and the group from Canada, they back out. They cannot find enough people to
18 put together. So, I say, "Well, I get burned again." After that, I go around the country _____.
19 After the long, long war, 100 years with the French. For five year with Japan and 30 years with
20 America, The Vietnam is very rich with natural resources because nobody touch it. So, I go
21 looking for iron, mining, stuff like that. I look around. I say, "Well, a lot of time. I see country
22 very good. Because Vietnam, that the one thing they grow. So I _____. I
23 bring back to Vietnam at 2000, root of orange tree. The citrus from Florida. Each one we can
24 multiply, after one year we can multiply the one to 25 of the them. The second year we can
25 multiply 250. So last year, we have already. So now, in Hanoi, I think we have a couple of
26 hundred thousand if they multiply. Also, right now, I have several roots myself in Hanoi. I give
27 to Plant Protection Division to take care. They take care. I know I will share with them. I've
28 plant a lot different kind of seed for vegetables. I test in my country. Also, the melon. I want to
29 see how they grow. Also, I try testing two kind of fertilizer in my country. I make fertilizer. The
30 fish I got because fish have no chemical. Another one, they called gully berry. They chase the
31 insect away. Because they smell too strong. I told the company, "I will be the representative in

1 Vietnam if you want to send me there.” They say, “No, I don’t think they will give us the license.
2 So I say, “Well, If I get a license, I will be _____ to try the _____.” “Yes.” So I
3 spent my money that time in Vietnam, I get the license. I didn’t know. We’d come
4 _____. I had a lot of picture in my room right now where we tested the tea plantation.
5 How we test, vegetable and everything and how to _____ bought by Vietnam
6 Agriculture Department. After that, they _____ to give me the license. So now I have to
7 _____. Actually, a _____ in Vietnam right now. I want to negotiate to
8 make a little bit of business.

9 SM: Sounds like you’ve been successful.

10 NQL: No, not yet, until we make some business, then we successful. No, I just in the
11 first part. I happy. At least, we bring something build the trust with the people. Because I come
12 back and forgive now. We go to Vietnam, we need to know like that. Here, the farm from 1,000
13 acre. If you do grow here. The government will pay you because they don’t want you to grow too
14 much. But in Vietnam, the land any farmer, only 600 square feet. If they grow something,
15 survive whole family for one year. If they do well, they get in trouble. So, they don’t want to
16 change from what they have. Also, because they worry too much about the product in itself
17 because they have insects and worms, so they spray too strong chemical, so some have to eat to
18 get the extra. _____ I try to protect. Of course, I got to make a living. Also, I try
19 to help them. The reason why I bring two products to here, not one they _____ eat. They
20 don’t want to eat. Any animal they cannot eat and also the ground in Vietnam have a lot of
21 insects under the ground. So we try to spray the garlic. The garlic cannot go nowhere. They stay
22 in the tree. If you mix garlic together for each other. The fish are _____ the fertilizer for the
23 _____. Fertilizer. So when you spray it out, the _____ peck the garlic, go down the root. So the
24 second in the root, under the ground. Cannot hurt the roots of the tree. So protect the tree, its
25 stronger.

26 SM: Garlic?

27 NQL: Yeah, garlic. Garlic berry because the people, they make the garlic. They say the
28 garlic, it very strong. And our nose smell less than animal, 30%. Sometimes we cannot smell no
29 more. But the animal get this smell.

30 SM: That’s really good.

31 NQL: I know something funny [laughs].

1 SM: It sounds like you've got quit a business started here. Well, thank you very much
2 for spending some time with us today and we'll end the interview.