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**Please Note: Due to the author's recent death, he was unable to provide edited corrections to this transcript. A more detailed internal audit is currently underway to make this draft as accurate as possible. It is provided here due to recent interest in his interview.**

**Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Dr. Le Cao Dai  
Conducted by Stephen Maxner  
November 14, 1999  
Transcribed by Tammi Mikel**

1           STEPHEN MAXNER: This is Steve Maxner conducting an oral history interview with  
2 Dr. Le Cao Dai. We're at the...his hotel room in Lubbock, Texas on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, 1999  
3 at 3:50 p.m. in the afternoon. Dr. Le Cao Dai, if you would, please begin by telling us about  
4 your early life in Vietnam; where you were born, where you grew up, what your parents did.  
5 Things like that.

6           LE CAO DAI: I born in 7<sup>th</sup> April forty kilometers west of Hanoi so maybe my father was  
7 a teacher during the French time when the revolution broke out, a revolution broke out, I grow  
8 up in Hanoi and stocked medication at the school the college for boys because the French and I  
9 in high school I went to Lycee Protectorat.

10          SM: Uh huh.

11          LCD: I mean, the I get my baccalaureate in '65, no, excuse me, in '45. In '45. So  
12 during the French time the only thing hard to me very much was taught in French all of the test  
13 to pass the baccalaureate, I had to do in French. At that time I had to pass 2 foreign languages.  
14 The first was English, and the second was Vietnamese, so French was Vietnamese was for this  
15 very reason the revolution and I was 17 years old immediately joined the revolution. During  
16 French war after receiving baccalaureate I start my medical school. During the French war  
17 because of a shortage of medical workers so there be more lives Army 1948 and I became head  
18 of the department of a regiment medical dept. of during all of the war of French campaign was  
19 borderline Vietnam and China and later the campaign in of and the northwest and southwest.  
20 The last was the Battle of Dien Bien Phu.

1 SM: Now when...I'm sorry, excuse me. What did you get your bachelor degree, your  
2 baccalaureate degree, in?

3 LCD: I got the baccalaureate in 1949.

4 SM: Okay, and what subject was it in? Was it general arts or science?

5 LCD: It was in mathematics and sciences. So after the French war then I graduated from  
6 medical school and became head of the department of surgery, of surgery at military hospital in  
7 Hanoi. I walked '66 and started the second Indochina war against America. Return to south, I  
8 went to south in '66. I stayed there until '74 only after Paris agreement. I return to Hanoi and  
9 continued to work as a surgeon in Army until '83 posted to committee to study the effects of the  
10 chemicals used during the war to study Vietnam war '95, 1995 after my I move to and work for  
11 the studies. During my service time in the south I wrote after the war early in 1996 I start to  
12 write I wrote a memoir of the life I have in south in 1996 and some people are trying to translate  
13 it into English. I receive an award of leadership of this book my family he submit it to some  
14 publisher in New York I don't know exactly if may continue to translate it or he's waiting for  
15 permission to finish from the publisher, to continue the translation.

16 SM: Let me ask you to clarify a couple of points about your experiences. I guess you  
17 must have been in college until the Lycee at the time that the second World War was occurring  
18 in 1940, 1945. The Japanese occupation of Vietnam, what did you and your family think about  
19 that and the notion of a pan-Asian, an Asia for Asians, the Japanese desires to try to remove  
20 Europeans from Asia and remove the French, the French Indochina, from Vietnam, and did you  
21 think that the Japanese were friendly to Vietnamese, unfriendly? What did you think?

22 LCD: I since the first month of occupation of Japanese in Indochina of Vietnam. You  
23 realize they didn't come to liberate us and after that a few years I must tell you they were so  
24 cruel. I saw them they ask our people our how call it our farmer to remove the rice and to plant  
25 in it in place some plants they call at the time 2 million people were starved to death in '45, the  
26 in late '44 and 1<sup>st</sup> month of '45 and it was very, very sad and it was very, very...how call it?  
27 Make us very angry, all my family. I must tell you that. Even though my father, my father  
28 having some privilege English privilege of class. But very, very angry against Japanese, their act  
29 and our family paying for that. My father had some and later I know later because at that time I  
30 was a young boy, I know that my father contributed something to the movement and at that time

1 his but later only after the revolution and then maybe for this reason my father was fairly  
2 sympathetic to the revolution movement and the Viet Minh.

3 SM: Now after the Second World War ended and Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh  
4 emerged as a powerful political force in Vietnam, did your family support him at that time and  
5 support his bid for power and establishing a separate government and removal of the French?

6 LCD: Yes even so, after the revolution my father because he was a function aire from  
7 French time, he had to been...how call it? He was in the Hoian and he was several high ranking  
8 officers upset but after the war with French, my father and all our family's a big family so all  
9 elaborate and after year the French launched a big attack in the north back to Vietnam. My  
10 father decided that all the boys will stay in the to the fighting in French but all the others went to  
11 Hanoi because my sister at that time was very, very, very young. All the girls went to Hanoi  
12 continue their education and to avoid the fighting and at that time my family was split into two.  
13 The boys went to war and the girls went to Hanoi and my sister grow up in Hanoi and get  
14 married and after the revolution after the French after the my sister to the south so my family was  
15 into 2 and after the second Indochina war, after the liberation in 1955 my sister and my elder  
16 sister and my younger sister went to Australia my family split into so I had now 2 sister in Los  
17 Angeles who live there. I will be visiting them after this visit.

18 SM: Okay, that's wonderful.

19 LCD: Even though I have I don't know where.

20 SM: Really? Wow, okay.

21 LCD: I don't know exactly.

22 SM: Now when it became apparent in 1946 that the French were coming back and they  
23 were going to recolonize Vietnam and they were going to stay in Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh  
24 made his famous declaration of Vietnamese independence, I mean the Declaration of  
25 Independence and announced it, where was your family at that particular time? Were you all in  
26 the north or were you right there in the center of Vietnam?

27 LCD: All in the North Vietnam.

28 SM: All in the North Vietnam okay.

29 LCD: My family grow up, my sons grow up in Hanoi but my family was always in so  
30 from Hanoi. So when family move and the war started and in '47 after the decision my father  
31 the same way sister to Hanoi he to join my eldest brother how call it communication in and live

1 all of us to try and my brother department of communication, in Dien Bai my young brother  
2 continue his education and he become a professor of mathematics in the high school in Hanoi,  
3 the college in Hanoi.

4 SM: When the announcement was made, the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence,  
5 when Ho Chi Minh announced it, a number of historians have looked back at that and seen it  
6 as...Ho Chi Minh very much looks like the American Declaration of Independence, it's very  
7 close, and so some historians have said that this was a message from Ho Chi Minh, that he was  
8 trying to get the United States to support independence for Vietnam. What did you and your  
9 family think of the United States at that time and did you see us as a potential friend and ally to  
10 try to remove the French?

11 LCD: Concerning the United States at that time the feeling family an admiration and we  
12 like very much, we like very much that Americans can do something to push the French or  
13 something like that because the I really at that time but unfortunately nothing happened the  
14 United States support the French first and then the south.

15 SM: Now during the French-Indochina war, you were in the Army and you were already  
16 a physician, you were a doctor. You said you worked in 3 principle areas during the French-  
17 Indochina war, 3 principle campaigns. Could you describe them for me, the campaigns?

18 LCD: I was head of the dept. of, medical dept. of regiment and this regiment belonged to  
19 division 3 I don't know if you ever heard about this, it's the most powerful in Army at that time.  
20 Between '49 to '54 our Army launched seven campaigns the first big campaign was the liberate  
21 the line between China and Vietnam in '49 and the second campaign we call the campaign of  
22 (talks to friend for a while in background)

23 SM: Now during these big campaigns during the French-Indochina war, well actually let  
24 me take a step back first. The medical training you received, what did that...where did you  
25 receive most of your medical training and what was the focus of it? Was it on surgery?

26 LCD: I focused on war surgery.

27 SM: On war surgery.

28 LCD: On war surgery. I at that time it was so I'm not very good surgeon at all. I just  
29 provide primary health care to the wounded people on the regiment level and after that I have to  
30 take them, to the higher levels, hospitals, the physicians.

31 SM: I see.

1 LCD: Yes. So I just do primary health care to them, provide them.

2 SM: What kinds of equipment did you use?

3 LCD: For equipment? Very simple equipment provided by the Chinese because after the  
4 liberation about the line, you have supplies from China machine and so it small box of medicines  
5 and surgical equipment.

6 SM: And this was from China?

7 LCD: Yes, from China. And very simple I operate bicycle and so it was used in the  
8 second Indochina war.

9 SM: How did you sanitize yourself and your clothing to do surgery? To cut people open  
10 you want to, of course, keep yourself as clean as possible. How would you sanitize yourself?  
11 Just water?

12 LCD: We had equipment to sterilize, but very simple.

13 SM: Boiling water?

14 LCD: Boiling water, and also we have some to sterilize, yes.

15 SM: And did you focus on using I guess what we would call Western medicine, or did  
16 you also use different herbs and different medicinals that were kind of regional?

17 LCD: No, I didn't use at that time. Most of medicine are western medicines to make  
18 anesthesia I use antibiotics and partly from the Chinese side but partly it was brought from  
19 Hanoi. Very few.

20 SM: Okay, what was your primary use of anesthetizing your patients? Was it ether?

21 LCD: It was ether, and then later the how call it, yes anesthetic intravenous anesthetic.

22 SM: Sodium pentathlon?

23 LCD: or something like that. Long time

24 SM: I'm just curious.

25 LCD: and we use chloud form pentathlon.

26 SM: Okay. What were the worst types of wounds that you had to cope with as a  
27 physician, a battlefield physician?

28 LCD: Oh, all kinds of wounds but during the campaign of Hanoi, the first time the  
29 French use a napalm bomb

30 SM: Napalm?

1 LCD: Napalm bomb provided by Americans and it was terrifying for us because so  
2 terrible and very, very

3 SM: How would you treat them? How would you treat napalm burns?

4 LCD: Cannot do the skin graft at that time. You almost have to put a bandage and try to  
5 rehabilitate by fluids and that's all. And I sent them to the field hospital some of them are later  
6 sent to China over there.

7 SM: When they started using napalm, what did you think of that? How did it effect you  
8 in terms of your opinion of the French and your opinion of the war?

9 LCD: I believe very, very terrible weapon and unhumanitarian weapon.

10 SM: So did it increase your resolve to keep on fighting? Did it scare...you said it was  
11 very scary. How did it effect you psychologically?

12 LCD: Only from the 1<sup>st</sup> campaign you were surprised but later our soldiers learned how  
13 to avoid the burning the learned more how to 1<sup>st</sup> time was very quite frightening.

14 SM: Were there any other weapons used that were particularly difficult to treat? The  
15 wounds that resulted from those particular weapons?

16 LCD: I don't think but later they're using also a kind of they call a bomb also but the  
17 phosphorous bomb.

18 SM: Oh, white phosphorous, yes.

19 LCD: yes unusual

20 SM: What were the things you needed most running a field hospital as far as what things  
21 were you short of? Bandages...

22 LCD: Yeah,

23 SM: ...syringes?

24 LCD: Especially antibiotics.

25 SM: Antibiotics?

26 LCD: All kinds of medicine very shortage.

27 SM: Was that the thing that you were short of the most, medicine?

28 LCD: Medicine, yes.

29 SM: And you never turned to alternative or traditional medicines to replace them?

30 LCD: No. Maybe they are used in some of the field hospitals they're using it but in our  
31 field hospital, we didn't use it only later it's time to use.

1 SM: Were there any particular battles that stick out in your memory that were very hard,  
2 that you were helping so many soldiers that were wounded?

3 LCD: The 1<sup>st</sup> campaign are very happy on the borderline with China between in this  
4 campaign (tape flip) campaign but campaign we received the most many of campaign in the  
5 Delta many, many, almost submerged by patients so many patients came

6 SM: Did you ever feel overwhelmed just like there was too much, too many to cope  
7 with? How did it effect you psychologically when you were coping with that kind of situation?

8 LCD: At that time, they came only for a short time because our regiment I didn't take  
9 care of for a long time so how call it?

10 SM: Overwhelmed.

11 LCD: For few days only.

12 SM: I see.

13 LCD: After that carry them to the hospital and we can

14 SM: How many people worked in your field hospital?

15 LCD: Oh, about 200, 300, staff members. But in my own regimen, department regiment  
16 I had only 30 people.

17 SM: Is there anything else that sticks in your mind as far as your experiences during the  
18 first French-Indochina war? Any other important experiences?

19 LCD: No. It seems at that time because after each operation is so we saw a lot of  
20 personal war. Many, many French was captured and our troops, our soldiers, our Army worked  
21 very quickly at first, we had only one division and after 2 or 3 years it developed into 4 or 5  
22 divisions, 5 against French so we are quite very enthusiastic and we are that victory.

23 SM: During the war, I've read a lot of the documents and public statements and letters  
24 and things like that by Ho Chi Minh and Giap and I guess even Lexuyen and Levancai, they were  
25 all very active politically in trying to foster political support and trying to I guess they wrote lots  
26 of letters and speeches that were delivered to the soldiers. Do you remember hearing the  
27 speeches that Ho chi Minh and Giap and other politicians published during the war? Did they  
28 reach you at your hospital?

29 LCD: Yes, many, many speech from Giap and many, many letter from him. Before each  
30 campaign and after each campaign we have meeting of officers to experiences from the  
31 campaign and many time Gaip came to those meetings and speak to us and even during the

1 campaign Ho Chi Minh came to the campaign and he even met with prisoners of war, French  
2 prisoners but he was disguised...how you call it?

3 SM: Disguised.

4 LCD: Disguised, yeah. He'd be...I'm not sure, to hide his Ho Chi Minh so he put and  
5 the disguise he was in. He met some prisoner and ask them about the war.

6 SM: Wow. Did you ever meet him? Did he come to your hospital?

7 LCD: No. But I met him at a meeting, he came to the meeting and after some political  
8 talks at that time and Ho Chi Minh came to talk

9 SM: These speeches and political statements, did they help motivate you? Did they help  
10 you with the war?

11 LCD: Yeah, sure. The speech motivate us very much, very much.

12 SM: So when the war ended after Dien Bien Phu, after the battle of Dien Bien Phu, and  
13 the political settlement that occurs, the Geneva accords 1954, what did your family think of  
14 those, of the accords that were signed?

15 LCD: At first we hope that the agreement could be accepted by both sides and according  
16 to this agreement the ramification must be done after 2 years. But, after 2 years nothing  
17 happened so many people in South Vietnam became quite angry because almost all families are  
18 split into 2 parts and maybe after 6 months or 1 year my parents receive from my sister in the  
19 south to ride in a small cart, in a small cart. My elder sister, she wants to write a letter to us. She  
20 have to send to French, to French because some family members who live in French and from  
21 France they have to send to Hanoi so the separation of the family was very, very, get us very  
22 upset. Very, very upset. Everybody, I must realize, maybe except in the countryside the family  
23 so simple people it didn't do very much to it but in a Christian families and the families that had  
24 member went to south, the south. Very much.

25 SM: And it appeared between 1954 and 1956 a lot happened in Vietnam. The decision  
26 of the United States to support President Diem. The movement, the mass exodus of Catholics  
27 from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, that massive migration and then of course the decision of  
28 the United States to support Diem not to have national elections. Now the accusation that was  
29 made, that had been made, is that the reason why the United States and Ngo Dinh Diem did not  
30 go for the election, the 1956 national elections to reunify the country was because they said, and  
31 they think, that it wouldn't have been a fair election in North Vietnam. That Ho Chi Minh and

1 the communist party so controlled politics and the elections that there would not be a fair, free  
2 election. What do you think of that statement, that accusation?

3 LCD: There is part of truth to this accusation but if the election was done at that  
4 moment, I'm sure that even in south Vietnam because even in south Vietnam I think that most  
5 people support Ho Chi Minh, support Ho Chi Minh. I do believe that. Maybe some people in  
6 the cities Ngo Dinh Diem, but most of the people in Vietnam support Ho Chi Minh. I believe  
7 that, even a but if the nation was would not be a fair election but even though Ho Chi Minh can  
8 but one thing maybe you know the reform of there in my opinion is a big mistake.

9 SM: The land reform?

10 LCD: The land reform, the land reform was a big mistake. You follow exactly the thing  
11 which was done by China not a good thing for Vietnamese because in our country I believe the  
12 other was not so different from the farmer. Sometimes our family honor and the father and very,  
13 very big mistake and maybe the Communist Party lost popularity because of land reform even  
14 that recognizes the mistake and officially recognizes the mistake and has to resign and but I do  
15 believe that because mistake the committee didn't want that.

16 SM: Were there any other mistakes early on when North Vietnam was trying to establish  
17 itself and get organized?

18 LCD: I don't really, I don't think so. Maybe, but later after the war and we look back.  
19 Maybe some first decision to destroy the cities according to the experience of the Soviet Union  
20 during the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Russia was invaded by Napoleon and the Army of the Russia at that  
21 time

22 SM: Soccorro?

23 LCD: Soccorro, yes, decided to retire and before the march of Napoleon's Army. They  
24 were right at that time because for the French Army to launch the counter attack. Right but in  
25 our country in '45, in my own opinion and decided to destroy the cities, it was wrong because  
26 you make many, many times to rebuild the city like that.

27 SM: Now the, what did you think of the role of Catholics or the effects of the Catholic  
28 exodus to the south and what was your religious affiliation? Were you Buddhist?

29 LCD: I'm Buddhist. Not exactly Buddhist in the meaning. I'm almost never got to the  
30 pagoda but in the family there is culture of the ancestors so it belonged to Buddhism. I don't  
31 think that that's massive evacuation of Catholics to the south had any problems in my feelings,

1 had any problems to our people. Certainly sorry that people leave, but it could be politically I  
2 don't think that had some difficulties on our side.

3 SM: Was Ho Chi Minh or the communist party ever a threat to the Catholics or were  
4 they ever hostile to Catholics or any religion that you're aware of?

5 LCD: I don't think so but because the French use some how call it? The Catholic monks  
6 something like that? The leaders of Catholics.

7 SM: Okay, the priests?

8 LCD: The priests, oh yes, the priests mobilize some troops to fight against us. It led to  
9 before we known this condition between Catholic and Buddhist, but only after the priest had  
10 organized some group that there is something unusual. Even those troops didn't fight very well.  
11 Before in our you know many, many Catholic troops fled, fly away, fly away before our so  
12 Idiecs maybe military speaking I don't think was very from the French.

13 SM: Did the...when President Ngo Dinh Diem took over South Vietnam with his family,  
14 his brother Nhu, his madam Nhu, lived at the presidential palace. They were a very closely-knit  
15 family. A number of his brothers were heads of provinces and areas of South Vietnam. How did  
16 you and your family and your contemporaries in the military, how did you view the Diem  
17 government? Did you see it as any kind of popular government or was it to you an autocracy?  
18 What did you think of that government that developed after...

19 LCD: It's a feeling of Ngo Dinh Diem was an administrator under Bao Dai, Bao Dai and  
20 all under Diem was not loved by population so Ngo Dinh Diem is the government for and also  
21 Bao Dai himself. Bao Dai resign, he resign and he came down from the population and in '46  
22 and Bao Dai start to resign and came to Hanoi government as a consultant and got some  
23 sympathy from the population but when he fled to Hong Kong he lost all, he lost all credibility  
24 and so the same comes to Ngo Dinh Diem. I don't think I don't think so but I mean much later,  
25 much later after the war and I met people in the south and I know more about the Ngo Dinh  
26 Diem family, that himself he resist against the US so it was he never had a good feeling

27 SM: Okay, now politically Ngo Dinh Diem tried to create this image that he was running  
28 South Vietnam like the United States was run. That he had free market capitalism in south  
29 Vietnam, that you had some democratic activity, some elections, although he does after 1956 he  
30 did cancel village elections and started making appointments but he obviously tried to make  
31 himself look like the United States wanted him to look. On the other side, Ho Chi Minh and the

1 role of communism. Was Ho Chi Minh a communist first or a nationalist first? Was  
2 communism just a way of getting the support from China and the Soviet Union?

3 LCD: I believe Ho Chi Minh was first nationalist, first. His policy during '40 to '45 was  
4 if he can reunite from the regime and also the farmer and for this very reason that he can  
5 organize a revolution. But, you know, in my point of view it seems maybe you have to look very  
6 carefully about this problem and some people not that even the Soviet Union is not like Ho Chi  
7 Minh so much was the of the communist party they support Chen Phu.

8 SM: Oh, okay, yes.

9 LCD: And Phu was I think was an extreme leftist his slogan was Vietnamese because  
10 you have to

11 SM: How do you say it in Vietnamese?

12 LCD:

13 SM: A little bit, but we can have Khanh translate it later.

14 LCD: So meaning, Phu meaning, meaning the rich people the owner of land and  
15 meaning people to very simple destroy all owner of lands was related the always of the whole of  
16 to unite and unite everybody to fight that's very good policy but only later when came the  
17 reform, the land reform so he was pushed to follow the policy of Chinese

18 SM: Okay, so he didn't necessarily want to but in order to keep Chinese support he  
19 would have to?

20 LCD: Yes, he have to follow them but fortunately he stopped following the Chinese at  
21 that time, only at that time but he did then follow revolution and all those and I think

22 SM: Would you like to take a break?

23 LCD: Oh that's fine.

24 SM: Do you want to keep going?

25 LCD: Oh, can keep going.

26 SM: Now the after 1956 it became obvious there was not going to be national elections  
27 and the country would not be reunified peacefully. How much support and how much activity  
28 do you know of or do you recall as far as agitation in the south and trying to forment revolution  
29 in the south and when did that start to pick up northern support for southern revolution against  
30 Diem?

1 LCD: I believe, you know, even after the in 1954 to the north even though the political  
2 mass of South Vietnam Communist Party in the south was very strong, very, very strong  
3 especially in the countryside. They had very strong support for the farmer and for many reasons  
4 because the is French a very strong movement in the south the military or the political forces  
5 remain in the south. So I believe that immediately after refuse to do the how call it, the election  
6 immediately there's a movement and no maybe there are some support from the north to send  
7 some weapons but later maybe '60, '65, maybe much later almost insignificant for the south but  
8 the movement in the south is quite very strong cannot this time in south. The United States  
9 cannot value the position.

10 SM: And these, when you say communist party in the south you're talking about  
11 southerners, south Vietnamese people who are from the south, living in the south, and they just  
12 stayed in their homes and they remained loyal and supportive to communists, communists party.

13 LCD: Sure.

14 SM: And between '54 and '60 there was very little support coming from North Vietnam  
15 to south Vietnam.

16 LCD: I don't think so. Only after 1959, 1959 one of cannot reunify country by an  
17 election that is organize the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Ho Chi Minh Trail is a between north and  
18 south and also the Ho Chi Minh Trail is the sea, the ocean only after 1955, between 19, well after  
19 the reform, how call it? The revolution?

20 SM: So after 1954?

21 LCD: Maybe after 1998.

22 SM: 1958?

23 LCD: 1958, excuse me, 1958 when there is of people well but leader

24 SM: In 1958 there was a lot of problems for President Diem, actually from 1958 to 1963  
25 when he is assassinated, when he is killed, he had to deal with the Buddhist uprisings, the Cao  
26 Dai Sect, the Wa Hao, the [?], a lot of conflict in south Vietnam that Diem had to cope with. Did  
27 you hear about that when that was happening in the south? Did you get information from the  
28 south of what was going on?

29 LCD: Yes, we were well informed on this Buddhism and Catholicism, they Diem maybe  
30 because that was his policy, his own policy. He has upset the people but partly because of the  
31 communists I don't know but his own policy is of the reason I think so.

1 SM: Okay. Now when the United States decided to start advising and the American  
2 presence increased incrementally. The United States sent a lot of support, material support,  
3 financial support, and it eventually built up to military advisors and equipment and a lot of other  
4 materials for war. By 1963 when the Diem regime is defeated and the Coup occurs, how much  
5 support was coming from the north at that point down to the south to help fight against this  
6 increasing amount of support that Diem received from the United States?

7 LCD: Yes, I believe at that time we started to send support to movement in south, but  
8 compared to the support for the United States, much, much stronger. You send very, very small  
9 weapons not a big problem, you know, very low traffic, very low and very difficult  
10 communication coming from the north to the south.

11 SM: So the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1963, 1964 wasn't very big?

12 LCD: Was not the

13 SM: It was a path, a footpath.

14 LCD: No, possibility for a car at that time only when came in 1966 we started the from  
15 the north to the but

16 SM: It was in 1966 that the vehicle traffic started?

17 LCD: Started. But very difficult and I can my own hospital go to the south to the south I  
18 have to organize the hospital so I have no idea about how and what at that time my book only 2  
19 people, the exact situation I was my boss he was director, he was a 4 time, he went 4 time during  
20 the French war he was a doctor in Quang Nam and Quang Tri he had the medical from over here  
21 and he had 4 or 5 in Hanoi he told me when we were leaving to have the life and he the only  
22 people who knows. He said, "Prepare yourself to have the life of Robinson Crusoe!"

23 SM: Robinson Crusoe.

24 LCD: Yes. The only difference in Robinson Crusoe was alone you have but in living  
25 peacefully in isolation but here you have to treat patients, we have to construct our own houses,  
26 you have to plant to have food, you have to do the hunting to have meat, we are surrounded by  
27 bombing everywhere and I came to the place prepare to I took a sample of the hospitals in North  
28 Vietnam at that time and everything that was necessary for a hospital in the south so all  
29 equipment our was put in 100 boxes and but when I came supervised me to ask the of the  
30 hospital, the boss of the hospital to provide a car to go from the north to the south but in the  
31 middle of the road when I only from Hanoi to maybe to and came into 19.. somewhere in here I

1 have to give me one month to and all the but all the equipment arrive 1 year later, but in box  
2 came only 100 left 90% and those 1900 or 100 box didn't want came a big in big lamp of maybe  
3 15 bulb like this of it was maybe 1 or 200 kilograms. You have no place to put this lamp  
4 because everything is so heavy it would crash and you had no power to use this lamp so it came  
5 to us and some had no it came to me maybe even 1 box filled with for clothes children and there  
6 are no children in this place for people have to walk maybe one day long hamlet of maybe 2 to 3  
7 families.

8 SM: So very isolated...

9 LCD: Isolated completely from the north and from all part of country

10 SM: Now 1965 when the United States...the Gulf of Tonkin incident, 1964 when there's  
11 the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the United States decides to bomb Vietnam and the war really picks  
12 up speed and the United States starts sending soldiers in 1965. What did you think of the  
13 bombing and all the incidents that occurred in 1964 leading up to the beginning of the war?

14 LCD: I thought that it was so when they start bombing the first time I flew in a  
15 helicopter we go to bay to rescue some wounded people over there and when I returned from this  
16 trip I'm asked to go to Tan Hoa. I have an idea about I asked to to rescue wounded people over  
17 there all the of Vietnam was quite upset and this mobilized us to go to south.

18 SM: Uh huh, it did.

19 LCD: All our people are mobilized, move to go to the south to fight so people  
20 enthusiastic are ask to go I didn't know how long will you stay there after tist of this year of '66  
21 I stay in Hanoi maybe a few years after the Tet we started to leave Hanoi but during the Tet a  
22 friend, a close friend came to me he's also a member of my hospital came into my home with his  
23 wife. His wife asked me how long you in the south I decide to go there after 6 months, I be back  
24 after 6 months. Oh so she started to cry, cry, I'm astonished, why she cry? And she told me and  
25 my husband he stays there for 1 year I for 6 months, I come back only 8 years later and my  
26 friend who turned be back after 1 year, he never returned. He died. Nobody understand how  
27 long you are and because when you prepare to go to the south, it was between '65 and '66 after  
28 the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem many, many months government last maybe a few months and then it  
29 fall so this give us the feeling that the victory would be very, very, very easy but I must  
30 recognize that the massive intervention of the U.S.A made south Vietnam and much, much  
31 longer.

1 SM: So in 1966 you were asked to organize your field hospital which was an  
2 underground military hospital?

3 LCD: At the time I didn't know that it would be in the ground.

4 SM: You didn't know?

5 LCD: Yes, at that time according to the declaration they have of the land only one-third  
6 was occupied and our commander he had never been in the south at the time for you and hospital  
7 the south running water and because a section of to have oxygen to do the anesthesia and  
8 everything for wounded people said they promise to send to me factory to produce oxygen but at  
9 that time nobody, the only reason because so we could produce 100s of these how call it? The  
10 contents of...

11 SM: The canisters?

12 LCD: No. Oxygen, the, in French it's look like a abelisk?

13 SM: Okay.

14 LCD: Yeah? It can produce 100s of oxygen but maybe one of two how we using the  
15 many for and I didn't

16 SM: Too much.

17 LCD: how to work underground hospital

18 SM: It became an underground hospital because of the bombing and the napalming?

19 LCD: The bombing, mostly the bombing. Not exactly underground because you have to  
20 split my hospital so bombing no need for and the hole was each house must up to 6 people and  
21 each house must be far away from the center at least 50 meters, 50 meters so my hospital was ½  
22 and was dispensed in this very large area of front if I wanted to go from one part and to the  
23 beginning and to the end of it would take me maybe 3 days to walk. It was dispensed.

24 SM: But that was very wise so that if one area was bombed not many...

25 LCD: Yes, not be bombed.

26 SM: Yes.

27 LCD: So for each house you have to dig a hole and have to keep inside the house must  
28 be lower than the level of the ontoudo said so if you're above explode I would not be I would  
29 have enough time to run we call it an underground but below was

30 SM: Were there problems with not just artillery but aerial bombardment? Planes?

1 LCD: The U.S. have the high speed artillery so in you can hear the stopping point, hear  
2 the noise stopped and after that came to us, that would be close to us but the high speed we  
3 didn't hear the first fire don't know how call it, okay,  
4 SM: It hit you before you heard it?  
5 LCD: Yes, it hit us before we heard you know.  
6 SM: Wow, that's fast. Well the size of your hospital in terms of staff, how big was it?  
7 You say you had 1,000 beds. How many nurses and doctors?  
8 LCD: Total it had 450 but later we have to diminish to 350.  
9 SM: When was that? About what year was that that you had the smaller?  
10 LCD: Because of the shortage of food.  
11 SM: Shortage of food?  
12 LCD: You have to diminish you have I almost have no rice for 8 years mostly you know  
13 SM: No, what is that?  
14 LCD: is a plant you use...  
15 SM: Oh, manioe, yes, yes, [?].  
16 LCD: Yes,  
17 SM: Yes, I know what it is.  
18 LCD: We were almost out of. You can put some rice in it, but the rice is very small.  
19 Only have rice on days in Tet and so on and only if in principle the supple of rice is only for the  
20 patient staff had to plan himself to provide so we have to every 3 people we have to plant 2  
21 Hectors of rice so each year for my hospital the most important, most I had to plant, I had to  
22 plant almost 300 Hectors of Manioe and vegetables oh many, many thing I have to describe. My  
23 book, you can read Vietnamese?  
24 SM: I can't read it well enough yet. I'm working on it, though.  
25 LCD: But my friend, my friend,  
26 SM: In Boston?  
27 LCD: Over in Boston, he's Vietnamese, he told me that if Americans want why they lost  
28 the war, they should read your book!  
29 SM: Why we lost the war, we should read your book?  
30 LCD: Yes.  
31 SM: Does he say anything in particular in your book that's so revealing?

1 LCD: I describe mostly life about the hospital, the Army in general, but also the supply  
2 and everything.

3 SM: So you didn't receive many supplies from the north?

4 LCD: Very few.

5 SM: From the Army, from [?].

6 LCD: I receive medicine.

7 SM: So you receive medical supplies?

8 LCD: Medical supplies, normally from but you can buy from service of supply.

9 SM: You bought from the south?

10 LCD: No, supply, supply of the because it was the highland was the department of  
11 supply and they went to a paddy of rice came from but not

12 SM: Were you able to buy American medical supplies that were on the black market?

13 LCD: No, I don't think so. We buy everything from so after the of but you know, in  
14 1969 in 1969 when Sihanovk by you drove by we sent a regimen to Cambodia we sent a  
15 regiment and in 2 months push almost the whole part of Cambodia and only at that time Pol Pot  
16 receives it from the beginning and his he organize also a but they had nothing and they because  
17 you must be I mean, very condition but you know history the 3 countries have the same and after  
18 the authorization country the leader of Cambodia was very friendly to Ho Chi Minh and very  
19 good friend to Ho Chi Minh. He know nothing about and about but because they belong to the  
20 party so you have in 1969, 1969 when they are sick they are sent to my hospital many time my  
21 people have to treat him and their family

22 SM: Pol Pot?

23 LCD: Pol Pot and their family and many time when we came to Hanoi he was old and  
24 sick to leave China so sometimes he would have to go to Hanoi you have to send my physician  
25 and take care after the liberation from was sent to help liberate this part to push of and after  
26 liberation and he say for many reasons the limit to buy the limit of the attack the French the  
27 Vietnamese people live in Cambodia

28 SM: And this was in 1968, 1969?

29 LCD: '68, '69, '70, '71 and I must it was a very big mistake from Hanoi everything I  
30 know because in 1970 I was asked to return to Hanoi to assist meeting in Hanoi, have a meeting  
31 in Hanoi, just for one month in Hanoi and I have to return to the I recommend my commander of

1 the warehouse to inform that there is something wrong with Pol Pot but they didn't trust us they  
2 believe that it is maybe some part of not but only later after the liberation of Vietnam, you know,  
3 the how you call it, they push away all the population out of our country and so only then maybe  
4 our leaders recognized their mistake.

5 SM: Someone's at your door. So 1966 you start your hospital, in 1967 you finally  
6 receive your equipment because you had to leave it to get to the hospital area. What were the  
7 biggest problems that you encountered when running this hospital.

8 LCD: Oh many, many big problems. At that time I have to do maybe 4 major problems.  
9 First to have food and vegetables because had to take vegetables from the forest and because too  
10 many soldiers and even in the forest you don't have enough so the first objective for my hospital  
11 is to for all our staff and to our patients. Second thing is transportation, we have to do because  
12 even I mean the some food, we have to go to take it from the house and hospital and sometimes  
13 one of our staff wanted to do the transportation of food and transportation of wounded. You  
14 have to do the third thing to do is do the fighting to protect our because all the and all the was  
15 occupied to fighting nobody protect us you have to protect us the regime very often small stuff  
16 they called they dropped this commandos by helicopter, mostly by helicopter so you have to  
17 defend ourselves. The forth problem, you have to all the house and the fifth all of the problem  
18 you have to treat your people so you have problem our own people, our own staff

19 SM: Now the fighting, did you ever have to fight against ARVN and American forces?

20 LCD: Yes, because you know and that may be people American people who belonged to  
21 the team to for the search of MIA, MIA they came to my office in Hanoi because before coming  
22 to me you have many, many people in my staff to know about the news of the MIA and he came  
23 to me and asked me about hospital you receive some wounded or sick prisoner, American  
24 prisoner, in fact because my hospital is the only hospital in the place so prisoner, American  
25 prisoner, when they sick, they are wounded, they sent to be treated and second ask me have you  
26 ever someone die in your hospital in fact there were, there were. Not many, but one or two. Not  
27 many but maybe one or two die in my hospital. Ask me about his name, whether he was black or  
28 white, why and everything, you know I can not remember for so long time but later I was  
29 surprised because Vietnamese ask him did you your Vietnamese or did you then he it's very  
30 funny so I shook his hand and tell him oh its very happy I met you today 20 years after the war if  
31 I met you in 1970 maybe you become MIA or myself would become MIA so very a I mean

1 because they do how call it? They collect the information in the because you cannot see the from  
2 the air so they drop and all those commando people and one or two or three Americans mostly  
3 for communication if plane if helicopter in a plane that I move to I have to put a man in the top  
4 of trees and for him to stay there and look around. If he heard the noise of a helicopter and he's  
5 had a telephone line to my plane and they hear helicopter somewhere around if he never but if I  
6 have to maybe 10 towards the place to find if they met American or the most job is to find and  
7 make them a not to push them away in fact maybe 15 minutes later there are many, many fight,  
8 how you call it, the aircraft that are fighter, fighter came around, bombing very violent battle and  
9 after that helicopter came and dropped [?] to the people on the ground came a because they failed  
10 to land because they can be hit by our people so the top of the trees and the to the people and the  
11 I hurry to many time I saw a 4, 5 people balancing like this and many time we saw some crushed  
12 through the bunches of trees and they rushed and maybe some people drop again and died stabo  
13 extraction.

14 SM: Now the people that you sent out to meet the commandos, would you send just men  
15 or men and women?

16 LCD: Just men.

17 SM: Just men.

18 LCD: have to organize a team to defend us only men. I have a few now I with we have  
19 80 for but later on she become smaller

20 SM: Did women perform admirably? Did they perform well when they were working  
21 with you?

22 LCD: Yes. They do everything men can do. Very brave women.

23 SM: Now for the tenure that you were in South Vietnam in that area around the tri border  
24 between Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam what were the most horrible experiences as far as  
25 American bombardments? Was it just artillery and bombing, small bombing? Did you ever  
26 have an arc light?

27 LCD: The most horrible was the B-52.

28 SM: The B-52 bombing? Okay, so you did have that happen to you.

29 LCD: Oh, many, many times.

30 SM: Really? Wow.

1 LCD: and it's the B-52 when they mostly bomb at night mainly because I don't know  
2 and they always came regularly, we were only surprised for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> raid. Then after the I  
3 look at my watch to see and the second raid and which if it happened after half an hour so all the  
4 night exactly half an hour arrived if it happened after 45 minutes, exactly 45 minutes. I don't  
5 know why. Maybe because the airbase is in Thailand or in Guam, at first it was in Guam. It was  
6 so exactly so it becomes familiar. You have to hide after the raid came bombing you hear the  
7 bombers far away approaching and then it was the other side so but the most important thing is  
8 not the direct bombing but the indirect because the soil covered us and people died because some  
9 bomb explode and goes through you and the soil came and covered your tunnel so after each  
10 bombing we have to get out of the and ask the you have to call are you still alive if they go  
11 "okay" so you can be but he didn't so we have to rescue them by trying to use how you call it

12 SM: Shovels?

13 LCD: Yeah, and to try to rescue them. But while rescuing them I have to watch my  
14 watch. If the raid was half an hour so after 25 minutes I have to call rush back to your tunnel and  
15 close our because sometimes they kill not by the but by the

16 SM: The trembling?

17 LCD: The trembling.

18 SM: The percussion? Does it pop your ears?

19 LCD: A way to say that and not our backs against the wall you can be killed because the  
20 trembling is the crush injury is something not exactly by will kill you and after the bombing you  
21 to the house and funny stories and so on and so on and all the night long, all the night long.

22 SM: How often would that happen?

23 LCD: It happened to us maybe 3 or 4 times.

24 SM: 3 or 4 times the whole war?

25 LCD: The whole war. It was not very often.

26 SM: No, that's not fortunately, but I'm sure those 3 or 4 times were very frightening.

27 LCD: Yes, frightening, yeah, sure, frightening.

28 SM: Now did they ever drop napalm in your area?

29 LCD: Yes after the spray, the spraying

30 SM: Agent Orange?

1 LCD: Agent Orange, they drop napalm and this yet to the to my understand only twice  
2 time. The first time when I was doing operation they came and a fighter who you call first an  
3 aircraft who do reconnaissance.

4 SM: An observation aircraft?

5 LCD: Observation, yes, an observation aircraft came. It dropped first a smoke grenade,  
6 how call it?

7 SM: Smoke grenade.

8 LCD: Smoke grenade at the time I'm operating the operation room because in 1969 my  
9 operation to avoid the humidity in our operation room in the over pressure room to avoid  
10 humidity and to avoid to keep acidic and they have the printout I have but the doctor had me  
11 doing the operation oh let me ask very soon in fact a few minutes later bomb we are operating, it  
12 was an operation his belly was open I cannot run away, I have to put a piece of how you call it?  
13 The inside the bellybut the next time when I saw outside I saw a real close to us so I decide we  
14 have to go and I have to put my hand with my glove inside to keep the skin and all to keep all the  
15 table the operation table and the patient to underground and to keep

16 SM: Now you didn't have your building marked as a hospital did you? There wasn't  
17 like a red cross or there was no marking distinguishing it as a hospital?

18 LCD: No, you be very dangerous if you put a mark. You would be more dangerous than  
19 hiding yourself. That's the first time. The second time they attack our place was in 1968. At  
20 that time our men was able to shot down a helicopter. It had a beside helicopter because shot  
21 down but it not at all they are landing maybe to take some man and then shut and so only a small  
22 hole of the bullet maybe how call it, from downstairs to upstairs and maybe it hit a electricity or  
23 something like that because that's why landed but everybody was and there's a helicopter. But  
24 the pilot and everybody was evacuated by another helicopter.

25 SM: So this helicopter only had the one hole going through it?

26 LCD: Yes, only one hole.

27 SM: So you have a picture of yourself with it.

28 LCD: I send letter to my hospital is to put the picture into a museum.

29 SM: Now did you...what kind of weapons did you have to help you fight?

30 LCD: Only the AK...

31 SM: AK-47s? That was it?

1 LCD: Yes, AK...

2 SM: No RPGs, rocket propelled grenades or anything like that?

3 LCD: No. Much later I have the how call it,

4 SM: No bigger machine guns?

5 LCD: No. Only AK. Mostly AK.

6 SM: And that's how you shot down...that's how she shot down the helicopter?

7 LCD: Yes.

8 SM: With an AK?

9 LCD: Yes, AK.

10 SM: What other equipment shortages did you have with this hospital? You mentioned of  
11 course in the French-Indochina war that you had shortages of medicine, in particular bandages.  
12 Did you have the same kinds of shortages during the American war?

13 LCD: I my men have to for or I cannot walk at that time my men wanted to a salvage an  
14 unexploded bomb to have some metal and also some planes to have some metal from a crashed  
15 plane to make the thing to make small things and how to lose a plane but for the year all the staff  
16 the doctors we have to go to other hospitals to help them because we are for Hanoi so we have to  
17 teach them to do something and at the same time to only after receiving a coming from Hanoi

18 SM: Now what unit did you...you supported all of the units that were fighting in the  
19 south?

20 LCD: Only the war zone units.

21 SM: Oh, the war zone units.

22 LCD: You know, the south did once divide into a civil war zone.

23 SM: Was it...so your hospital operated in this area here?

24 LCD: Yes, in this area. It is highland, and this part was called the 5<sup>th</sup> war zone before  
25 the war zone belonged to the 5<sup>th</sup> war zone, but after that they divide to the 5<sup>th</sup> war zone and from  
26 the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel to this they call it

27 SM: So your hospital took care of the units that fought in the south?

28 LCD: but sometimes wounded people who are evacuated from the south they pass  
29 through Avea.

30 SM: So you're in the prime area of traffic coming through the Ho Chi Minh trail so if  
31 people needed to be transported up this way they'd come straight into your war zone?

1 LCD: Yeah, sure.

2 SM: And that's where they would go for help?

3 LCD: Yeah.

4 SM: And this is the only area you worked in for 8 years? You worked here for 8 years?

5 LCD: Yes, just working. I keep moving sometimes up and down area and most of the  
6 time and in fact in the of Cambodia because it's safer over there.

7 SM: The Agent Orange, when that was first starting to be used by Americans, how long  
8 was it until you started to see some of the effects that was having?

9 LCD: I saw the first spray operation when we were going to the place. When we were  
10 going it was a of I saw the first operation at 3 aircraft, they flew very, very high in the sky  
11 because maybe 1 or 2 on my side so they flew very close to the top of the trees and push the very  
12 quickly and they push the cloudy smoke I had been 2 or 3 times sprayed from over head it came  
13 like you know smell of chemical we didn't know what kind of chemical it was took out my and  
14 every time you went to the it provide to protect so you have to cover ourselves and to take into  
15 the and then to protect or nose. Why not only 1 or 2 days later the leaves start to fall, but later  
16 problem I recognized a sharp increase of malaria.

17 SM: Malaria?

18 LCD: Malaria. I thought but when I talk to the people these one soldiers who fight in  
19 this place since, so since 1963, '64. '64 this area so they come to me and say before this  
20 operation malaria seldom very, very malaria. Most of the people that died were malaria, not  
21 from the bombing, maybe sometimes 70 to 80 percent of our patients sick from medical  
22 problems, not from surgical not from the wounds.

23 SM: So about 20 to 30 percent were war wounds?

24 LCD: War wounds.

25 SM: Bullets, shrapnel, the rest were ill?

26 LCD: didn't recognize that it is you I don't know but I know that it cause very severe  
27 increase of malaria between '66 and '69 and then after '69 in 1970, '71 the so later, much later I  
28 believe that maybe it is used cause the immune deficiency we began to see in our people and we  
29 started to see I never saw it in Hanoi

30 SM: Dysentery?

1 LCD: Dysentery, yeah. But you had resist medicine, no medicine can treat them. They  
2 had many died from malaria and I had to make a autopsy of some people who died from this  
3 kind of malaria and so there intestines is the similar to the of wrapped sausage.

4 SM: Sausage?

5 LCD: Sausage, yes, similar to that yet no layer of muscular is almost and many people  
6 have perforation of the intestines after due to the many other problems the lack of Vitamin A  
7 leading to blindness, Vitamin A, 100s of people but maybe it is linked to the lack of vegetables  
8 and maybe it is lack of Vitamin B1 or so. Many people died from many people a of the second  
9 hit the first floor and the top fall above the died

10 SM: All three soldiers died?

11 LCD: Yes, all three people died. And many people drop and paralyzed because they  
12 shortage of Vitamin D. I had some people problems and so they have

13 SM: And this was caused by deficiency of Vitamin B?

14 LCD: I believe that could be one because after that I had Vitamin B and gave to  
15 everybody and

16 SM: Were there any other major problems with the diseases other than the malaria and  
17 dysentery like yellow fever, cholera?

18 LCD: Cholera, no.

19 SM: No cholera?

20 LCD: Dengue fever

21 SM: Dengue fever?

22 LCD: But one kind to believe also a kind of abscess of malaria many, many kinds many,  
23 many people die from this but a special kind of abscess it was the fever the black urine fever you  
24 know, the is urine becomes black

25 SM: The urine becomes black? Black urine fever?

26 LCD: Black urine fever. Many people die from this.

27 SM: Now you said pernicious? What was it?

28 LCD: Pernicious malaria.

29 SM: Pernicious malaria.

30 LCD: Pernicious malaria. It became high fever, comatose...

31 SM: And then death?

1 LCD: And then death.

2 SM: Wow. What about plague? Any incidents of the Bubonic plague?

3 LCD: What is it?

4 SM: Bubonic plague, plague.

5 LCD: Plague?

6 SM: Uh huh.

7 LCD: What's the

8 SM: Black death, the swelling of the lymph nodes, black [?]?

9 LCD: No, no.

10 SM: None of that?

11 LCD: We didn't have that. But problems you know

12 SM: I'm sorry?

13 LCD: BB, it is kind of throw away a small piece of metal, like a...

14 SM: Oh, cluster bombs? The small cluster bombs that had the beads?

15 LCD: Beads, small, and it hit it was very small, very small but it could enter here and it

16 hits several hole through

17 SM: Now these were the small canisters that would explode?

18 LCD: Yes, it explode

19 SM: In a small little like...

20 LCD: Small, there be 100s of it drop it close to you hit cause hundreds of small beads

21 can hit you.

22 SM: Cluster bombing.

23 LCD: you know, when they come close to the they the officer who is they teach us if you

24 ever step on a land mine, keep your feet on it, the land mine won't explode. But a piece of your

25 feet. But if you remove your feet, the landmine would jump and explode and cut you into parts!

26 SM: The bouncing betty.

27 LCD: The first lesson they gave to me.

28 SM: Did you ever have, did you ever...

29 LCD: No, I never

30 SM: I mean people in your unit, in your hospital, did you ever encounter those?

31 LCD: No, fortunately they didn't put those mines on my place maybe

1 SM: So you never had any land mine incidents?

2 LCD: Nobody in my hospital had a land mine but very terrible land mine, you know, the  
3 land mine who throw the very small, very thin how you call it?

4 SM: Wire?

5 LCD: Wire, yes, wire and if you run and you hit this wire, it explodes and also the land  
6 mine they call magnetic landmine, it explode when carrying something metallic came close to  
7 you. They put it in the car

8 SM: Were those...did you have a lot of soldiers coming up from the south from any  
9 region that you had to treat for injuries from those types of weapons?

10 LCD: Yes. I have to treat them I might have and to the car later, much later when the  
11 south so in '74, '75 after I left the car, the route came close to our hospital and

12 SM: Now in your hospital, where your hospital was, you said you were isolated and not  
13 very close to villages?

14 LCD: No. you know, the villages of the place was very, very, very few people you  
15 know, the Montagnards, you know, the Montagnards who have you know or the and they had to  
16 very you know they didn't use money and didn't use money, just they can or some rice or a of  
17 for a chicken and later a vegetable

18 SM: Watches?

19 LCD: Watches, because in the first year I publish, I publish a magazine every 3 months.  
20 I have to how call it, a magazine, a newspaper, but initially it put our experiences. So every 3  
21 months I had to give these experiences everybody in the Army and all those and it was very nice  
22 and so when I came in the 1970 I receive the money from our publication I have to but I know  
23 money is useless. So I bought maybe some and a watch to take their place, to exchange with  
24 Montagnards to have some chicken, some baked rice, but to my surprise when I the man I asked  
25 to take the watch to exchange he come back and he tell me that he didn't accept the watch. I ask  
26 him why he did not accept because a watch cannot catch fish. I was very surprised, a watch  
27 cannot catch fish because they wanted to wear the watch while going to the stream to the river to  
28 catch fish. If they put the watch on the side of the river, maybe someone can steal so how to  
29 wear the watch and to go do that and watch was not waterproof and they are so clever

30 SM: They knew that the watch was not waterproof? Wow. Russian watches?

1 LCD: Yes, Russian watches. So funny. And then we can and when they come back one  
2 day when I came to exchange tongues to have a chicken the lady gave me a small chicken and  
3 then I said to her I want this chicken, a bigger chicken. Well, she answered me, oh if only we  
4 can have bigger

5 SM: It will become after you feed it, after you feed it.

6 LCD: That is funny.

7 SM: That is. What other one sticks out in your mind? Other funny stories? Anything  
8 else?

9 LCD: Many, many funny stories.

10 SM: Well you bring up the Russian watches. Was there a lot of other stuff that you were  
11 getting from the Soviet Union, from Russia later in the war?

12 LCD: Maybe, no, maybe only some machines and I have to show you heavy cannot  
13 carry into the place so Russia all the cars come from Russia

14 SM: The cars?

15 LCD: The cars, yes, all the cars come from Russia.

16 SM: Trucks?

17 LCD: Trucks, maybe and also maybe heavy stuff, I don't know.

18 SM: And were you getting many supplies from China during the American war?

19 LCD: Oh yeah, from China? From China, buy it

20 SM: So there wasn't a lot, even to the end. You left...when did you leave the hospital,  
21 in 1974?

22 LCD: I left back in 1973 after the agreements in Paris, after the Paris agreements so only  
23 then maybe a few months later

24 SM: So March, April, early spring?

25 LCD: No, I received a decision on June or July because it was rainy season.

26 SM: So even as late as that even '73, June of '73, you didn't receive at your hospital  
27 from China or from Russia?

28 LCD: No. Even then. The priorities were for ammunition, for weapons.

29 SM: Let me ask you a specific question about Tet Mao Tan, Tet 1968. What did...how  
30 aware were you of what was happening in your hospital and what did you think of Tet Mao Tan.

1 LCD: Tet Mao Tan I receive I know about the attack only 1 day before it, only 1 day  
2 before it and our place was quite calm because it was far away maybe 1 month later the wounded  
3 people started to return from Pleiku, from the attack of Pleiku and Kontum so and at that time no  
4 plane at all. We are very happy, we have no plane, we have no worry and we had received the  
5 order to prepare to go ahead closer to Pleiku in case we attack Pleiku but they didn't attack  
6 Pleiku, only small attack maybe Kontum was attacked but we didn't very much in Kontum  
7 maybe liberate a part of the city and after we have to withdrawal that but received information  
8 through radio

9 SM: And so you didn't have a lot of injured soldiers coming through until a month later?

10 LCD: Much later, much later when the wounded people was sent from the south to the  
11 north, they pass through my hospital.

12 SM: How many people would you estimate came through your hospital as patients? How  
13 many total from the time you started to the time you left? How many patients came through your  
14 hospital?

15 LCD: Mean both injured and the sick people?

16 SM: Yes.

17 LCD: Each year I receive between 8,000 to 10,000.

18 SM: For each year? So anywhere between about 64,000 to almost 800,000?

19 LCD: Maybe. But most of them are sick people. They recovered and can return to the  
20 battlefield. They are only injured people have to return to the north

21 SM: Most of the people, after you treated them, they went back to their units?

22 LCD: Went back to their units, yes after the

23 SM: How long would it usually take your patients to recover? Did it vary from wound to  
24 wound?

25 LCD: Oh, depends. Depends what kind of wound but about 1 month to 1 and half and 2  
26 month some people stay for several month or

27 SM: So 1973 you went back to Hanoi?

28 LCD: Went to Hanoi.

29 SM: And what did you do then for the rest of the war, for the 2 years?

30 LCD: I have a rest of maybe 3 or 4 months and after that I Romania.

31 SM: Romania?

1 LCD: Romania.

2 SM: What did you do there?

3 LCD: To have some training for

4 SM: Medical training?

5 LCD: Medical training and because I am so far away from the modern knowledge I went  
6 to Romania for 6 months and I receive the news of the liberation of Saigon in Romania.

7 SM: So you were in Romania in April of 1975?

8 LCD: Yes and after that I went down and worked in my former hospital in 1983 I wanted  
9 to because at that time I had an operation on my eye, I can no longer work as a surgeon so I  
10 asked to do the research on Agent Orange since 1984

11 SM: What, you must have been elated, happy when you heard of the liberation of south  
12 Vietnam?

13 LCD: I cried, I cried. It's just so funny that the news come to us on the BBC

14 SM: Really? BBC?

15 LCD: BBC. I talked that day I finished my operation because we are very, very unsure  
16 because we know the attack for almost one month so hospital we hurry to

17 SM: Budapest? Bucharest?

18 LCD: Bucharest, the library well see they received a newspaper from France came  
19 maybe be 2 to 3 days later so very quick I cannot hear very well the news when I have to hurry  
20 only this morning and I start finish my operation still to come arrest me and tell me in french  
21 many people in Romania you have victory now! I so we rushed to the embassy and we first saw  
22 of BBC and "long war of Vietnam has ended this morning!"

23 SM: After that, in 19...you're going from Budapest back to Vietnam and working on the  
24 Agent Orange victims and the problems with Agent Orange and the patients that are dealing with  
25 some of the difficulties that we think are the result of Agent Orange. Looking back, do you still  
26 think that the war was worth fighting? That everything was worth what you sacrificed?

27 LCD: You know, there's so many sacrifices and even now the even now it continues the  
28 problems of Agent Orange. I have maybe a few days ago and the 2 categories of people.

29 SM: The Agent Orange?

30 LCD: 2 categories of people sprayed over during war time between '61 to '71 but now I  
31 found that it still remains there's still you know, the chemical was inside the former airbases can

1 wash up inside the study done by back in and the soil is up to roughly 900 PPT but I'm afraid  
2 that the airbase in Bien Hao in the soil and it keep because what if in June and living close and  
3 those people living close to the airbase during war time came from recently, not after the war and  
4 their children were born in '80 and '81 the blood so that contamination at in

5 SM: And the people who have the higher level of dioxin in their blood, in their fat  
6 tissues, do they display any particular ailments? The chlor acne?

7 LCD: They have...

8 SM: Soft tissue sarcoma?

9 LCD: No, study for health problems is still very suggestive. Cannot conclude exactly  
10 because lack of funding for study so we are not able to choose most people expected to of these  
11 people because tests for Dioxin because are so expensive so these studies but statistical data so  
12 you're not able to prove exactly but the fact, the reality is so suggest many have to be clear

13 SM: So you do think that the sacrifices made during the war were worth it?

14 LCD: I'm continuing now.

15 SM: But was it more? Was it too much?

16 LCD: No, much less than there was, much less and it went down. Most people were  
17 exposed in war time for 2 reasons because they have no more children and so that number of  
18 may run out but you see now children, the second generation and the second generation you're  
19 starting to see that but it's very difficult to the relationship between many, many things happen.

20 SM: In terms of politics and life in Vietnam after '75, what did you think of, what do  
21 you think of renovation, [?]? what do you think of that change, that attempt to renovate the  
22 economy in Vietnam?

23 LCD: I think that the opening policy is quite good, very good.

24 SM: Do you think it's helped?

25 LCD: Yes it has, very much. The economy of the country after living standards  
26 increased very clearly, very clearly if you come to Hanoi before maybe because see now most  
27 motorcycles you many people own house and life is much better now even though there are still  
28 many problems.

29 SM: Now that seems different or contrary to the initial desire to create a communist state  
30 in Vietnam because of course what I've witnessed in going to Vietnam is that many people are  
31 very, they're their own business people, they own their own homes, they do own property, their

1 mopeds or their motorcycles and sometimes cars, mini vans. There's obvious private property  
2 ownership and also for lack of a better expression, a capitalistic nature. It's free market, free  
3 market economic activities and it just seems interesting that that's where Vietnam seems to be  
4 heading. Do you think that's the case? It seems kind of contrary to communism.

5 LCD: Yeah in fact to the is movement to the private section is growing but you need  
6 some equality in the society.

7 SM: And that's the role of the communist party, to help protect that equality?

8 LCD: I think we must think of something new about communism no longer the former,  
9 the classical communist when we have to find some new finding

10 SM: A balance between them.

11 LCD: A balance, yeah, a balance.

12 SM: I wish I could have gotten a copy of your book and I hope it gets translated so I can  
13 read it but it raises in my mind some interesting questions. I'm sure you've read other authors,  
14 Vietnamese authors who have written autobiographical accounts and memoirs of the Vietnam  
15 war and I was wondering if you'd read Bao Ninh and what do you think of his book and his  
16 portrayal?

17 LCD: There are many kinds of people who saw the war. Some people are so sad about  
18 the war. I think it is good but then he describes war in a way so sad to other people the other side  
19 so everything is right and other people saw everything black and white so in my I want to  
20 describe the things as I saw it. I didn't want to make it but in a I don't know if I hope very  
21 much that the whole book can be translated he wanted to be published in New York I can be  
22 published in Hanoi if I had an English version

23 SM: You could publish it in Hanoi if you had an English version?

24 LCD: Publish in Hanoi and much cheaper you can pay for it and sell it and get back  
25 some money but to publish in America maybe take long time and more different so I just wanted  
26 because maybe I for the publisher.

27 SM: Any other Vietnamese authors that you think do a good job of depicting the war  
28 time experiences?

29 LCD: Have you read the book from Vo Nguyen Giap?

30 SM: Oh, Giap's book on the war?

31 LCD: War, in French time

1 SM: Yes, I have looked at those.

2 LCD: Oh, is it

3 SM: Oh yes sir, we have a lot of Giap's works translated. How about post Vietnam war  
4 writers say writing in the 1990's? people writing in the last 10 years?

5 LCD: It seems fairly few and maybe also about who translated the works of Giap?

6 SM: I don't know who translated it, I don't know.

7 LCD: but he describe very much about the war.

8 SM: Is there in terms of the Agent Orange activity that you're engaged in now, is there a  
9 desire to get American support for this?

10 LCD: Want very much, want very much support to clean them so yeah they are not so  
11 big maybe small area to my about very, very in the airbase's priest you call it was landing in how  
12 call it,

13 SM: A runway, for landing and taking off?

14 LCD: Yes, taking off.

15 SM: The runway.

16 LCD: The run?

17 SM: Runway.

18 LCD: Runway? The runway is about 8 kilometers in Ben Hoa but is almost maybe so  
19 and it still because very highly contaminated expensive, it would cost millions and also it should  
20 need very sophisticated equipment we like very much to have Americans and best way to the like  
21 very much to make you know the history, you know perhaps our story America every century we  
22 had a war, every century the best way is to have friends.

23 SM: That sounds like a good place to end things. You have to get ready for dinner.

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