

TO MAJ. METZNER
TO REMEMBER THE DAYS WE
LIVED TOGETHER IN THE
TIEN GIANG TACTICAL ZONE

TIEN GIANG
A SPIRITUAL AREA OF RIVERS - MOUNTAINS WHERE THE TALENTED GATHER

The Mekong River is 4400 km long, and one of the largest rivers in the world. Originating in the Himalayas, in the Tibetan Highlands at an elevation of 5000 meters, the roof of the world, the Mekong River running through the various mountain ranges and dense forests of China, thru virgin forests of Burma and falling into Thailand and Laotian borders and arriving at Pnom Penh, the Cambodian capital, it splits into two large rivers which run into South Viet Nam, our country.

The large river in the northeast is called Tien Giang, while the other one is called Hau Giang. Approaching the sea, these two large branches further subdivide into 9 small branches, flowing into the South China Sea. Our elder citizens, believing in the spirit of wind and water, considered each river branch to be a dragon and therefore the Mekong has the name Cuu Long Giang (The River of the Dragon)

The Cuu Long Giang River has a tremendous volume - during the dry season it has a flow of 4000 cubic meters per second, but during the rainy season, this number is increased to 100,000 cubic meters per second. The river water is rich in alluvium. Each cubic meter of water has from 250 grams to 500 grams of alluvium. Each year the river water carries nearly 1 billion cubic meters of alluvium, part of which settles into rice fields bordering the sea and the rest builds up the Ca Mau peninsula from 60 meters to 80 meters into the sea each year. The entire deltas of Cambodia and SVN are the result of this deposit.

The believers in the spirit of wind and waters say: If a river begins from a spiritual land, in a high, unhabitated mountain of thousands of years with unpopulated virgin forests, this majestically flowing eternal river gathering spirits makes a most holy area. Many other believers go still further and say that the River of the Dragons would later become a center of a New Civilization.

Of the nine dragons belonging to Cuu Long Giang, the Tien Giang area has has 6. Is it not for this reason that many heroes are born in this area?

1. Geographic summary:

The Tien Giang River starting from Pnom Penh thru the Cambodian - VN borders, follows the NW-SE direction, passing My Thuan Ferry, is divided into many small rivers ending in 6 river mouths. Starting from North to South, the six rivers are named:

- 1 - Cua Tieu
- 2 - Cua Dai
- 3 - Cua Ba Lai
- 4 - Cua Ham Luong
- 5 - Cua Co Chien
- 6 - Cua Cung Hau (1)

The length from the Cambodian - VN border to Cung Hau Mouth is approximately 220km as the crow flies.

Along the river are many large and fertile islands such as: Cha Va, Long Khanh islands, Cau Vung, Cu Lao Tay, Cu Lao Gieng, Cu Lao Tau Thuan, Cou Gon, Con Lan. The geography of these islands very extraordinary. The islands of Tay and Gieng perfectly correspond to one another, the island group Cha Va, Long Khanh, Cau Vung in Hong Ngu also correspond to the island group of Tan Thuan, Con Gon, Con Lan in the south of Cao Lenh. The Gieng island is in one of these areas where Catholic structures first appeared in our country.

The Tien Giang Zone covers the area from the left bank of Van Co Tay River to the right bank of Van Co Tay River and now includes the provinces of Kien Phuong, Kien Tuong, Kien Hoa, Dinh Tuong, Go Cong, and part of Long An and one very small part of Vinh Long. The whole area covers approximately 10,000 square kilometers inhabited by over a million and a half people, within which the 2 provinces of Kien Hoa and Dinh Tuong each has over half a million people.

The Tien Zone occupies the most important portion on the map of SVN and is the link between the two capitals, Saigon and Can Tho. The traffic on Highway 4 from Saigon to Can Tho and the provinces of the West passes thru the Tien Giang Area from Tau An to My Thuan Ferry. Busses and trucks run continuously in both directions all through the day. At the My Thuan Ferry site, people are always crowded (awaiting transportation) like a baseball stadium on the first day of the World Series. According to statistics each year has _____ people crossing the ferry. Recently a plan was completed by the gov't to construct a bridge across the My Thuan River. This bridge will be _____ meters long with an estimated expenditure of _____ piasters and estimated completion within _____ years. Once completed, this bridge will become the most important one in SVN, as the Long Bien bridge is the most important one of the north.

The waterways of the Tien Giang are also arteries of SVN. The Tien river is wide and deep, large merchant ships can go from the ocean up to Fnom Penh. In World War II, many Japanese warships sheltered in My Tho River, many of which were sunk by Allied aircraft, the traces of which are still there.

The shortest waterways from Saigon to the west from Ben Luc Cahal, Kinh Moi, Thu Thua canal across the Tien Giang to the Tien and Hau rivers are the Ba Bec, Tong Doc Loc and the Thap Muoi Canals. The Cho Gao canal, although small and short, is presently considered as a pass for all boat traffic coming from the central of VN to Saigon. Sixty or seventy years ago this canal carried over 2 and a half million tons of merchandise, mostly rice, each year.

¹⁵The rainy season (1965), VC have coordinated plans of disrupting the economy of the Highlands and Central VN by cutting main roads such as Nat'l #19 from Quy Nhon to Pleiku, at An Khe, Nat'l Road #21 from Ninh Hoa to Ban Me Thuot at Mi Drak Pass, Nat'l Road #14 (Chon Thanh - Ban Me Thuot) at Dinh Quan. The Viet Cong also had plans of attacking Nat'l Road # 4 thus cutting the supply route between Saigon and the West at the Tan An - My Thuan Ferry road section.

But thanks to continuous successful operations achieved by gov't troops of the Delta, i.e. Operations Tien Giang 19/65 conducted in Thanh Phong, Opn 22/65 at Cai Lay (Dinh Tuong), Opn 24/65 at Xom Dao (Ap Bac), 25/65 at My Hnah Dong, 31/65 opn at Hung Tram and 32/65 Opn at Ca Dam. The aforementioned plans of the VC were completely foiled. If not, the supply of rice and other foodstuffs for the Saigon Capital and the Central Highlands would have been very troublesome.

If we draw a straight line on the map from Binh Tahn (Kien An District, Kien Phong Province) to My Phuoc Tay and link it with the Arroyo Commercial to Van Co Tay River, we will see the Tien Giang Area appear as two areas having completely different countryside. The area to the southeast of the line is a high, alluvial area. Villages have many areas and fruit trees, green coconut plantations followed by rubber plantations are in the Loc Ninh Hon Quan area. Outside the village gardens rich golden rice fields greet the eyes.

The fruit of the Tien Giang Zone is well known and consists of many varieties such as the Pink Man of Trug Luong (Dinh Tuong Prov), Cai Be orange (LT) Douriau, Bon Bon fruit, Cai Mon Letchi (Kien Hoa) Mang Cau Dai fruit of Tan Thanh (Go Cong), pineapple (Long An), Nhan Thuc Nhieu fruit of Quong Dien (Dinh Tuong) and especially Soai Cat (mango) of Cai Be. Normally the price of other types of mango is only from 30\$ to 70\$ for 14 fruits, but the price of the Cai Be mango is 150\$. In case of scarcity and rise of demand, the price increases to 900\$ or 1000\$ (14 fruits).

The coconut plantation in Tien Giang Zone occupies 24,457 hectares and the country's total plantation area only covers 43,420 hectares. Of the 24,457 hectares mentioned above, Kien Hoa Province alone has has 20,000 hectares, i.e. nearly 45% of the total coconut plantation area in the country. The coconut oil of Tien Giang Zone has greatly contributed to the expansive development of soap industry in SVN.

Besides the fruit, this area is well known for many edible birds such as Oc Cao, Mo Nhac, Le Le birds, etc. During the bird season, all the restaurants on the My Thuan Ferry site offer numerous varieties of golden brown roasted birds to travelers which they buy for their families.

The area to the northwest of the line, running from the Cambodian - VN border is a low, marshy area covering 800,000 hectares yet undeveloped. It has been said that in Mr. Thien Ho Duong used this area as a base to resist the French. He ordered the construction of 10 watchtowers from Song Lon (large river) (Vam Ba Sao) to his headquarters for the defense. The tower located in his hq was the tenth one, therefore it had the name of Thap Muoi. Later this entire area was called Dong Thap Muoi area (the Plain of Reeds).

Dong Thap Muoi is the least populated area in SVN. Only the dark tram forests and immense plain of green reeds stretching to the horizon are found in this area. Even the poor peasant, having no land of his own and living a Gypsy's life, came to this area to cultivate the land and plant rice, can not stand the desolation and long for their return to their native country, as it is expressed in the following poem:

Blue sky, red canal, green land,
 Leeches and mosquito bites make you remember her.
 When the rice turns golden yellow
 And when the harvest is done I will return to the village to see her.

The area has so many leeches and mosquitoes that the following comparison is made:

Up in the sky the mosquitos buzz like a wind flute,
 Down in the water the swarming of leeches is like noodles in a soup.

The high humidity and poisonous atmosphere along with the extremely hot sun all day long create a suffocating evaporation of the muddy soil. During the dry season, the soil in some areas cracks up and the intense heat comes up from the heart of the earth. The canal waters are murky and as red as bricks and as sour as alum. If soap was dropped in this water it would not dissolve in several days.

During the rainy season, water from overflowing rivers fill the area and make it an immensely flooded area strictly to the horizon.

A large number of Linh fish follow the rushing waters coming from Cambodia. There are so many of these fish that in Hong Ngu area they clog the canals and you only need a basket to catch them. There fore the following song was made:

When the monsoon comes, and strong winds come up and catch the cong crab,
 We go to the marshes to catch fish, and the high fields to catch crabs.

How can you eat all the fish in this Dong Thap area? They are used to make Nuoc Mam and fish sauce but still not using them all. They are so abundant that they have to throw some of them away or use them as fertilizer for tobacco plants.

Since 1954 the Linh fish nuoc mam industry has greatly developed in concurrence with Pham Thiet Nuoc Mam industry. The price of linh fish is much cheaper and it occupies a great part of the SVN market.

The Dong Thap area is very sparsely populated, there are approximately 100,000 people and 3/4 of this number live on the left side of the Tien River and on the right side of the Vam Co Tay River. Only 1/4 of the population live in the plains along the newly dug canals or on small sloped areas, in some areas of 20 square kilometers there is no inhabitants. This is truly an ideal area for establishment of guerrilla bases.

2. Historical summary:

Phu Nam imperialism: (from 1st to 6th Century) The history of the Tien Giang Zone is closely linked with the history of all SVN. In prehistoric times it appeared that natives of this area were of Indonesian origin. Human skulls were found in Vinh Hung (Bac Lieu) and stone tools were found along the Van Co Dong River, Dong Nai Hon Quan River, Rua Island (Bien Hoa) Dinh Thanh (Tay Ninh-Dinh Duong Border), Saigon and so on.

The Cambodian Men-Khmer race apparently came after, chased the natives up to the highlands of central VN or out to the Indonesian Island chain. At this time the Men-Khmer people were still using stone tools.

During the first century A.D., many Indian tradesmen came to this area to do business and fruit for gold and incents, etc. One Indian named Kaurdiuya came from the south of India and married Queen Luu Diep, in the lower part of Cuu Long River. He spread Indian culture, reorganized Men-Khmer society and built the Phu Nam country. This country had been strong from the first to the sixth century and had become the largest imperialist country in Southeast Asia, its territory included SVN, the southern part of central VN, Cambodia, the southern part of Laos, part of Thailand, and probably part of Malaysia also.

The Phu Nam capital was situated in the Bac Nam area of Priyweg Cambodia. One of the most important international ports of Phu Nam was probably Oc Eo, located at the foot of Ba The mountain on the An Giang and Kien Giang border.

In 1943 traces of an old, square fort, each side measuring 1500 meters, and surrounded by traces of houses on 225 hectares of land were found in Oc Eo by the archaeologist Malberet. He dug in 22 places and discovered traces of old architecture. Part of these ancient things were exhibited in the national museum in Saigon, a larger part were transported to France for exhibition in the museum Guimet - Paris. Recently the truck returned these ancient things to the Saigon museum. There is a total of 622 priceless items, among which are a statue of Ba La Mon religion, statue of Buddha of Mu U wood, a brass mirror of Han dynasty, medal on which pictures of Roman emperor Antonius-Le-Pieus (138-161). These indicate that Oc Eo was a place where the Indians, Chinese and western countries along the Mediterranean conducted business.

In the Tien Giang Zone many unlinked canals were dug in the Dong Thap area, probably dug in the fifth century during the domination of Prince Phu Nam, but due to lack of maintenance and floods, muddy water has filled the canals and traces of them has been lost.

Chan Lap country: (from 7th to 17th century) At the beginning of the 7th century (610) a small nation in Phu Nam, originating in Khmer on the west side of Phu Nam had invaded Phu Nam and extended its influence to the China Sea. Thru the 8th century, Chan Lap had civil war, the Java people in the Indonesian island chain had occupied Chan Lap and spread Buddhism. In the next century Chan Lap regained power and moved its capital deep into the mainland in Angkor. In the 12th and 13th centuries, Chan Lap became powerful and prosperous and built numerous huge constructions. Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat are considered one of the 7 wonders of the world.

Chan Lap declined because of excessive construction of temples, because of the war with Siam in the West, and because of the war with Chun Thanh in the east. Chan Lap moved Angkor capital to Nan Vang due to the pressure of the Siamese.

The majority of ancient things found in Menh island, Baa Islands (Kien Hoa) around Go Cong, My Tho, Tan An provincial towns and Dong Thap belonged

to Angkor Thom, Angkor Wat times.

The Thap Muoi hill had never been submerged. There had been a Cham Lap pagoda called Fraset Fram Louen (five town pagoda). Ancient things found in this area were similar to that of Siam and India in the 7th century. This was probably an important center of religious belief. There had been a road from the outside into Dong Thap thru the above mentioned pagoda in the NE and SW direction.

Viets come to the South: (17th century) At the beginning of the 17th century (1611) the Vietnam border only extended to Phu Yen. When Prince Chey Chetta II (1618-1626) of Cham Lap came back from Siam as a king, he had many bad memories of the Siamese. In order to relieve the pressure of the Siamese, Chey Chetta II proposed marriage to the daughter of Sai Vuong, Princess Ngoc Van.

In 1623 a diplomatic mission of the Hue dynasty came to Cham Lap to ask King Chey Chetta II to permit the Viets to come and work in Mo Xoai (Ba Ria) and Dong Nai (Bien Hoa). Queen Ngoc Van had earnestly requested approval of the request of the diplomats. King Chey Chetta II concurred out of consideration for his wife's request.

In 1658 King Nac Ong Chan of Cham Lap killed the father and son of his uncle in order to seize the king's throne. Because Ong Chan was Hoi Hoi religious sect believer, the people disliked him and appealed for the intervention of the Vietnamese king. King Hieu Vuong used his troops to capture Nac Ong Chan and forced him to pay tribute and offer Mo Xoai (Ba Ria) and Dong Nai (Bien Hoa)

In 1679, a number of generals from the Minh dynasty of Quang Tay of China, General Duong Ngan Dich, Deputy Haong Tien, General Tran Thuong Xuyen, Deputy Thanh An Binh did not want to submit to the the Thanh dynasty. so they brought 3000 troops in 50 boats to our countries and asked King Nguyen for asylum. The king let them till the Dong Nai, Ban Lam (Bien Hoa), Dong Pho (Gia Dinh) and My Tho (Dinh Tuong). They cultivated the land and built houses with all their efforts. Before long this area became a prosperous and busy center of business of occidental countries, such as Japan, China, Malaya, etc, Nine years after General Haong Tien with his troops betrayed the central authority, they killed General Duong Ngan Dich, manufactured weapons and recruited more troops in an attempt to conquer Cham Lap. The king of Cham Lap became angry and fought against them and ceased to pay tribute to the Vietnamese king. King Nguyen sent troops in and used trickery to kill Haong Tien, at the same time forced the king of Cham Lap to continue paying tribute.

In 1698 King Nguyen Phuc Chu sent Mr. Nguyen Huu Dinh, as his representative to Cham Lap and he divided the Dong Nai delta and Tien Giang area into two provinces: Bien Dinh Province (Binh Hoa) and Phieu Tran Dinh (GianDinh). The Minh's who came to the cultivate the land here, because Vietnamese who farmed Thanh Ha village at Tran Bien Dinh, Minh Huong village at Phieu Tran Dinh. Our people came to develop this area in 1623 and since then more and more people have come. The Cham Lap people silently moved out and resettled in the Trung Giang and Ham Giang areas, consequently this area has come under the Vietnamese influence.

So the entire piece of land from the right side of Tien Giang up toward the NE completely belonged to the Vietnamese authorities, We had to wait another 60 years before SVN was integrated into our country.

To remember the first merit accomplishments by Princess Ngoc Van and Ngoc Khoa, the 2 daughters of King Sai Vuong, who made use of their beauty to expand the country, a poem was composed as follows:
Ngoc Van, Ngoc Khoa both have a strong confidence
For whom do they beautify this fairy land
The older helps maintaining an instant and good Cambodian-Vietnamese relationship
The younger one fulfills her obligations between the Chieus and Viets
Ba Ria, Bien Hoa are expanded to thousands of miles
The new Phan Rang, Phan Ro provinces are developed
The country now becomes much larger than O and Ly Provinces
The successful march for the South provinces, no one would dare forgetting.

3. The talented continue to appear: Not nearly 100 years after, with the industrious hands and patience of the Vietnamese, the Tien Giang has become a new fertile area, where numerous talents are born:

King Nguyen Anh had successfully resisted the Tay Son troops, unified the country and become a hope. This success was greatly dependent on the brilliant services rendered by the General officer of Tien Giang origin such as: General Le Van Duyet of Rach Gam, My Tho (Dinh Tuong) is presently venerated as a saint. General Vo Tanh (1801) of Go Cong and Mr. Nguyen Huynh Duc, of Tan An. They were considered to be the three Heroes of Gia Dinh Group. The old popular boy-girl song is still sung in our ears:

Question: I hear that you know our history very well
I would like to pose a question with regard to the Central of VN
Who are the three heroes of Gia Dinh
And who was the most devoted and loyal man?

Answer: Mr. Tanh, Mr. Nhan and Mr. Huynh Duc
All the three contributed greatly to the help of our country
The 3 heroes of Gia Dinh are well known of their reputation
Mr. Vo Tanh was known for his loyalty, his talents, his strength
He had been totally devoted for the country
As evidenced by the fact that he stepped up the Octagon tower and bravely burned himself.

Also at Go Cong, Mr. Pham Dang Hung (1765-1825), a powerful official of the Nguyen dynasty, was the father of Queen Tu Du whose virtue was an exemplary one for all Vietnamese women. In 1859, the French invaded Viet Nam. French Navy troops attacked Gia Dinh Fort, destroyed the 12 km long Ky Hoa Fortress of Mr. Nguyen Tri Phuong at Chi Hoa.

The French thereafter moved forward south by two routes. One element followed the Vam Co Tay River to Tan An and entered Bao Dinh Ha Canal (Arroyo de la Poste) and go down to Tan Huong. The other element used the sea route and secretly went up the My Tho River to Dinh Tuong. On 13 April 1861. Dinh Tuong Province was seized by the French. The famous scholar Tran Xuan Hoa (Thi Doc Hoc Si) committed suicide by biting off his tongue.

After Dinh Tuong was taken, the French moved toward North and took Bien Hoa on 16 Feb 1861. The Viet Nam dynasty authorities were forced by the French to sign a peace treaty according to the three eastern provinces must be completely ceded to them: Bien Hoa Gia Dinh, and Dinh Tuong.

Before the shame of losing the country, the entire learned people were very dissatisfied and rose up to fight with the calls:
- Movement of King Support and country salvation
- Movements of Binh Tay, Sai Ta, etc.

The Tien Giang (upper delta) region is well known with the anti-French resistance conducted by Truong Cong Dinh in Go Cong from 1860 to 1864. Popular Forces from 3 eastern provinces venerated him as their leader. The Royal Court awarded him the title Binh Tay (West pacification) great generalissimo.

At Tan An Nguyen Trung Truc was famous for burning the French ship "Esperance" at Nhat Tao village. His long resistance lasted from 1860 thru 1868. His limit of resistance was from Tan An to Rach Gia Ha Tien. When being captured and seduced to surrender by the French, he obstinately replied: "Give me the rank with which to kill the French I'll accept, I don't want th title of Pho Soai (Assistant Commandant)"

At last he was sentenced to death. Mr. Huynh Man Dat Praised him by 2 following verses:
"Obstinated Hero lives forever with his reputation
How shameful it is for men to bow themselves to others."

At Cai Lay, My Tho, in 1863, another hero at the age of 23, Mr. Thu Khoa Huan (Top Graduate Huan) rose up. His reputation was well known to Chan Doc, Ha Tien. His resistance lasted for 12 years. He was killed by the French at Con Rang My Tho (My Tho Dragon Island) at the age of 35.

Another anti-French hero whose name is Vo Duy Dung alias Than Ho Duong used Dong Thap Muoi (Plain of Reeds) as his base to rise up and fight against the French since 1862 to 1865. After that he died of sickness but his been with the area forever. In the book "7 Days in Dong Thap Muoi" the author Nguyen Hien Le wrote that from Cao Lanh to Hong Ngh, any village has some patriots.

In the same period, parallel with the famous heroes, writers or learned persons in the Tien Giang region also had many shining examples. Mr. Phan Thanh Gian at Ben Tre (Kien Hoa) was an administrator who was incharge of of 6 SVN provinces. He was the first Vietnamese who was an ambassador for VN in Western countries. After 3 remaining Western provinces were occuppies by the French he poisoned himself dead to show his loyalty to his country.

Mr. Truong Vinh K (1835) at Cai Mon (Don Nhon, Kien Hoa) was known as a Number 1 Vietnamese Erudite in the 19th Century. He didn't join the anti-French rank but he used his intelligence and knowledge to negotiate for peace between the French and Hue Royal Court. Furthermore his works also greatly contributed to the development of Vietnamese culture by our present Latin language. His achievements were indeed lasting forever.

Afterwards, at My Tho, Mr. Nguyen Van Lac, alias Hoc Lac was known as a humorous writer in SVN. His talent was not less than that of those in North VN, such as Mr. Tu Xuong, Nguyen Khuyen.

Different from the above mentioned heroes who used their strength and talents to help their country, many others in Tien Giang region were as famous and talented as them but they served the aggressors to kill their own people for their fame and wealth. Among them, Tran Ba Loc, alias Governor Loc, must be the first one to be listed. He was a soldier in the French army. Later he was appointed as District Chief in Kien Phong Cai Be then promoted Governor by his very savage, inhuman, brutal and cruel atrocities to repress the Popular Forces of the Anti-French heroes.

Another guy in Go Cong, Huynh Cong Tan alias Sgt Tan, was a staff of Mr. Truong Cong Dinh. He betrayed him to join the French Army and lead the French troops to his master's house to catch and kill him. Afterwards he caught Mr. Nguyen Trung Truc at Rach Gia and was promoted to General.

Today, being served in the Tien Giang Tactical Area, anytime returning back to the old history or in the the early mornings participating in the combat operations along the Mekong River to drink a glass of nutritious coconut milk, or at sunset, stopping in the wood of Tram Trees in the Plain of Reeds to eat a bowl of Snake "Rice Pottage" and fried tortoise meat and locking up at the horizon covered with the evening dew, we wonder if the soldiers of the Tien Giang Tactical Area admire their forefathers or feel hatred with the dirty examples of the betrayed Vietnamese in the French domination as well as before the brutal inhuman actions of the Viet Communists who have destroyed our beloved country.

And later, among you, among us, the heroes who for the sake of the country will appear to destroy the communist aggressors to build the South and liberate the North and to unify the country like the heroes of the Tien Giang Region in the previous 19th century.