

Speech on the death of Nguyen Ngoc Anh

r

March 21, 1999

GOOD MORNING: I have been privileged to say a few words about one of the finest men I have known in my life.

I met him when he was appointed a Cabinet Minister in the South Vietnamese Government, in 1968, in charge of the Chieu Hoi program for the reception of former Viet Cong escaping from communist control.

I had been placed in charge of U.S support to this program, and was thus privileged to meet and work with Nguyen Ngoc Anh on almost a daily basis. In him I found a most remarkable man and a lifelong friend whom I shall never forget.

As you know, Nguyen Ngoc Anh and his family had owned and directed ~~██████████~~ a renowned school, located north of Saigon. When French forces reentered Vietnam after the collapse of the Japanese in World War II, the young Nguyen Ngoc Anh joined the Viet Minh against the French and fought as a Company Commander in the Delta in active combat.

With the emergence of the new Republic of Vietnam after 1964, Nguyen Ngoc Anh at first returned to the management of his school until the time came for his elevation to the cabinet in south Vietnam, where I had the honor of meeting him. We traveled together to all of the 42 provinces of the Republic, in a professional association which soon became much more - a real and inseparable friendship.

Years later, when disaster was looming in South Vietnam and I had returned to Saigon on my own, as a private citizen, I met with him again, and he said to me in words I have never forgotten, expressed in his impeccable French, "I am not concerned for myself. At my age a bullet in the head is not a big thing. But I am concerned for my children. As you know, the communists are very interested in genealogy, and my children will suffer at their hands."

I left South Vietnam on a refugee plane a few days before Saigon fell, and did not know what had happened to Nguyen Ngoc Anh until much later - how he had been kept in a pit in the ground, then transferred to the North for long imprisonment, and then finally released when it was thought he was dying of disease.

Then one day a letter came to me from an Indonesian island, from his daughters Chi and Lan who had escaped from Vietnam by boat after great hardships. I had never met them until they finally reached the United States.

I had known Nguyen Ngoc Anh as an important official and as a close friend, but came to appreciate him even more when I met his daughters in Arlington. We located a small apartment for Chi and Lan. Within a few days - entirely on their own - they had found jobs at National

Airport and were already self-supporting. Next thing, they had enrolled in college and were on their way to new lives.

I was amazed, astonished. But then I realized they were their father's daughters, with years of good training and example behind them. They were, and are indeed, among the greatest tributes to the wonderful man we remember today - Nguyen Ngoc Anh, Vietnamese patriot, warrior, leader, teacher, man of learning and wisdom, father, and unforgettable friend. He now returns to his ancestors, but will never be forgotten by those who were so privileged to know him.

*Eden Wilkins*