

20 comrades sacrificed their lives in my side. Their dead bodies were lying on the feet of burnt coco trees or near the tattered banana trees. What a tragic scene! At 4.30 PM, the Liberation Force was ordered to withdraw to recover strength and rest to fight again the next day. According to my combat experience, I immediately changed the position of my unit not to be fired by RVN Artillery. I was very hungry and exhausted. I ordered my platoon to temporarily stay in some scattered cottages near the Saigon River Bank to search for rice. After a day of struggle to be continuously menaced by the God of Death, my comrades and I were weakened. Darkness covered the whole battlefield. When waiting for the meeting with other cadres in my unit I walked around some mango trees laden with unripe fruits secretly thought that due to the presence of my unit here tonight, these trees would be mercilessly destroyed and this area would become a level ground. As a man rich in imagination and dream, I enjoyed some short free-minutes to continue my analysis though all that day I had to face with dangerous combat phases, I dreamed that I might have a sweet adoptive mother in SVN and through my lips withered by war smoke and fire I might call the word "Mum!", I might inform her that I am holding gun to liberate the South and herself. But contrary to my dream, wherever my unit came, the regional inhabitants quickly left their houses, gardens, rice-fields to flee to the safety areas. Nobody wanted to stay home to listen to me. No babies were present there to be embraced by me as formerly in the North I always embraced the children of my sister. A deafening grenade explosion coming from a neighbouring house awoke me to lead me back to the present. Alas! Comrade Nguyen Van Thang, an infantry combatant having a serious wound in the abdomen and knowing that he would inevitably die sooner or later killed himself to avoid prolonged pains. I felt extremely sorry for my own fate. I secretly thought that I would possibly follow the example of his if tomorrow after a prolonged period of struggle on the battlefield I had to participate in the monotonous hours of political studies. I would possibly kill myself to avoid pessimist and discouraged feelings that would create confusion in my unit...

Our study meeting that evening was very short and ended at 0900 PM. At that night, my unit and I were unable to cross the Saigon River through this direction. But we might not withdraw immediately at that night. We might send a squad to attack Gò Dứa bridge to baffle the RVNAF and avoid clashes with them the next day so as to safely cross the Saigon River at night on 3 May.

It was 4 AM on 3 May. My unit and I were ordered to widely disperse into smaller cells hidden in muddy bushes of coco trees or in thick bushes of holly trees near the river, carrying only torrefied rice to appease hunger, mind extremely troubled with fear. Only some heloes could annihilate my whole unit. We had no defensive fortifications. We easily lost our lives as if we sat on a fine string. However, we met with good luck. The squad fighting at Gò Dừa bridge could baffle the RVNAF that paid major attention to the National Road No.1. The second night appeared. We could still survive for a day more.

My unit and I crossed the Saigon River, accepted the task of Chief of The Sapper Team in the crossing to land on the Cầu Bông arroyo mouth near the Bình Đa post to reinforce the Liberation Team at Cầu Cỏ bridge. According to Sub-Lieutenant Bùi Xuân Sinh, in the Staff of The Regiment, the river crossing that night was relatively easy because the first team had a very small quantity. In the turn of my unit, we left the other side at about 1.00 AM. Unexpectedly we met with sudden difficulties. To contact the Liberation troops fighting inside the city in the Lấp Thành pagoda, we had to cross this Cầu Bông arroyo and the Đồng Ông Cỏ Rice Field i. e. within the fire-range of RVN Artillery cannons of daily and nightly guards. The greatest obstacle for us was that on the other side of this arroyo, there was a dense and solid defense system of RVN Marines. It was very difficult for us to pierce it. At the same moment, RVN heloes were flying low above the surface of water and the light house of a ship was searching our silhouettes. It seemed that we were sitting on the back of tigers. So we had a desperate decision: using the individual life buoys to open a bloody road to cross this dangerous arroyo. 12 Liberation comrades pushed the buoys just when the current from Saigon rushed down more and more fiercely. Due to the weight of our guns and rounds, many threw back water and were pushed toward the river fork. We were dreadfully menaced by the swift waves. The noise created by comrades that threw back water disclosed the presence of my team. The light machine guns of RVN Marines fired at us from the other tumultuously like a rain. From the high sky, 2 RVN heloes fired continuously at the river fork. One after another my comrades disappeared in the river bottom. Fortunately for me, a benefactor rain began to fall. Those RVN heloes had their effect limited. In despair, I pushed my life buoy to the direction of Thủ Đức. Drops of rain poured fiercely water onto my face to make my breath choked. Seizing my life buoy closely in my armpits, I used one arm to swim and another to stroke water from my face advancing to the direction of Bình Lợi bridge where the mouth of an RVN light machine gun was waiting for me: I shut my eyes, heart totally broken but exhausted legs trying to move to shove off water. Suddenly my feet touched on mud. I did not know what miracle

brought me to the Thu Duc direction. I firmly seized some coco tree roots on the river bank. I dared not walk on the bank but tried to swim against the stream to return to the floating palace wherefrom I had ordered my team to advance. Though the distance being nearly 2Kms, I met with difficulties in swimming. I usually touched very stinking and fetid floating bodies after advancing some meters. I guessed that those dead bodies were of my comrades in the 7th Communist Work Site Division when they attacked the Highway Bridge. I was nearly unconscious when reaching near the target spot. It was Ba Tuan, Chief of Staff that withdrew me into the bank and the Regiment Doctor had to inject tonic to recover my strength. I feared that other comrades in my team and those in the whole following team were killed. Among them were Sub Lieutenant Sinh, my colleague and comrade Hai Vu, Commander of the Di An Battalion. It was only 0230 A.M. When seeing that the river cross was impossible there, my higher ranking authorities ordered us to withdraw through the National Road No.1 to return to the position of The Regiment Headquarters and also to evacuate Communist wounded combatants to the rear. The darkness covered an immense area full of mournings. We crossed a muddy rice-field in a hamlet whose name I can no longer remember in Thu Duc district. The only thing I need to say is that that hamlet had many aligned rows of custard apple trees laden with fruit. The regional inhabitants escaped when seeing us. I felt sad, ashamed when looking at the discontent reflected in their eyes. It was possible that at that moment I felt my confidence in the Party was partly reduced.

I still remember... when still living in Hanoi, I usually read attractive stories printed in books and dailies. I eagerly wished that I might become one of the heroes mentioned in them to have the honour to struggle among the people, to be affectionately offered by gentle SVN mothers handfuls of cooked sticky rice to eat along with the sweet coco juice. Charming SVN girls will cross the dangerous roads fired by enemies to bring provisions to me busy in combat. Alas! why didn't those imaginary scenes come true at least once in my struggle? Around me, there were only exhausted faces, ragged clothes of my comrades, anxious, troubled by the menaces of The God of Death in the underground fortifications. Our life being in peril to become extremely unstable. At 0800H, from Thu Duc District, roared gun explosions. At that very moment, I was informed that my unit had clashes with the RVNAF. The U.S. and RVN Infantry units pierced 3 points into our position. The combat became more terrible at 0930H. The RVN Infantry unit fought to accurately discover our position then withdrew rapidly to let their artillery and air fire power destroy us.

Hundreds of cannon rounds exploded noisily in the gardens where the Liberation troops were hiding themselves. Smoke and fire covered the whole area. Trees cut off by rounds were lying pell mell. Around me, grape-fruit covered the ground. An arm of a comrade cut off from his trunk by a round particle was fiercely thrown to the door of my shelter, blood still hot impregnating the green cover of a grape fruit. In this dangerous case, our unit could no longer stay on the spot to be destroyed by the RVN fire. Our radio was spoiled by another round particle. Our only liaison means was sending an agent to receive new order. I selected a SVN combatant relatively alert. In a distance of about 100m between my shelter and the house of Ba Tuấn, that agent was unable to reach the target area. He fell dead nearly half way when a round from an RVN helo killed him. I decided to let my platoon leave the shelter, take advantage of the topography, disperse thinly to avoid enemy rounds. But the RVN L19 discovered the troubled rank of ours. The enemy artillery attacked more and more terribly when the evening came gradually. I embraced the coco tree foot and turned on myself to avoid helo rounds, thinking that I should die inevitably this time. But fortunately for me at 0500 PM the situation became less tense. Enemies withdrew to their post. In our side, we gathered dead bodies to bury them rapidly to continue displacement. During 3 first days of combat, we were unable to advance but obliged to stay around our activity sphere within 4 square kilometers. We were not able to cross the Saigon River when our 2 battalions lost more than 100 combatants in Thủ Đức District. The survivors looked very exhausted due to insomnia and loss of morale caused by extremely terrible massacres in recent combat scenes.

We had to overcome series of difficulties when crossing the Road No. 13 to return to the Saigon River bank. The other bank was An Phú Đông. Lying in the gardens of sugar cane in this side we heard the ceaseless gun explosions there. At night enemy artillery roared continuously. According to the guidance operation map, I knew that our Quyét Thang Regiment being there. On 15 May, we were ordered to cross the river to reach An Phú Đông. This time we had no great difficulties because this point was relatively far from Saigon.

In that morning, we could finish the construction of our fortification. The An Phú Đông area was very low. We met with obstacles in digging anti-artillery shelters. Hardly could we dig about 1 meter deep when water covered the whole shelter. Rice was going to end. We had to cook the old

bananas to consume as supplementary provision. At night on 16 May, my unit advanced to Rach Cát direction to reach Saigon. Many, most of them were born in SVN; deserted; we were unable to cross the Rach Cat area because we were pushed back by regional forces. When walking through the muddy, I saw the stinking and fetid dead bodies of my comrades massacred in the recent combat. Sleepy, I staggered forward, nervous system extremely tense. My unit had to return to An Phú Đông to be gradually annihilated by RVN artillery fire and fighter planes. RVN L19 freely controlled this area all day and night. We were unable to advance one step more. On 20 May, we returned to the river bank of Thu Duc, strength being weaker. We could not evacuate our wounded combatants. Our trail to return to our war zone was strictly checked by the RVN 5th Infantry Division and the U.S. Armored Tanks. We were ordered to risk our lives to cross the river once again, in a point in the middle of Binh Loi Bridge and Rach Cat. This time we luckily and safely reached our target area. Our two battalions advanced to the Gia Dinh Railways direction. We came to Gò Vấp District. My unit walked through the muddy area along the operation road. Enemy artillery continuously fired at us. Many comrades of mine fell dead, bodies lying on the rice fields, unburied. At 0400 AM on 26 May my vanguard platoon reached the railways, dogs barked terribly and enemy light machine guns M79, small guns from defense posts fired at us tumultuously to stop our advance. The situation became more dangerous. Advancing we'd be massacred; Staying we'd be killed. I was ordered to roll myself through the railway along with 3 suicide-combatants. We touched on the RVN defense system line. Immediately electric lamps on both road sides shone brilliantly. We used our explosives to completely destroy barrage. My unit rushed forward through the railway though enemy light machine guns fired at us tumultuously. We were at last in the other side: more twenty comrades sacrificed their lives. We tried to reorganize the formation to go through the Gia Dinh Service of Garbage, the Gò Mả and the crowded civilian areas with numerous houses on both sides. At 0600 AM my unit reached Cây Thị Cross Road.

Another bloody day came. Enemy light machine guns from high buildings began to fire at our formation. My comrades were still very very young from 16 to 17 years, newly coming to replenish my unit at An Phu Dong. They looked handsome and rosy. They knew nothing about the combat. They ran great disorder when menaced by gun explosions. They fell dead after fiercely touched on by rounds. In such a manner the blood of NVN youths poured out. A youth coming from Thanh Hoa asked me: "Dear Comrade Leader, I am fearful. After I came here from Cambodia, our cadres said that I should go to receive Saigon. Now, is there anybody here to warmly welcome us? When may I participate in the military parade in Saigon along with the Liberation Army?"

Dear Readers, how could I answer the above questions of this young, very young combatant, when myself, I had been told so prior to my departure day Southwards? I silently thought... and felt extremely sorry for my own fate. Saigon Government sent a battalion of Field Policemen to Cay Thi Cross Road to "welcome" us. Their numerous light machine gun explosions were bursts of applause to welcome this Liberation Group. The Red Flags my young combatants were dreaming of were only pools of red blood seen everywhere on the asphalted roads. Waves and waves of assaults of field-policemen pierced gradually our formation and position. The regional inhabitants had left their houses which were fiercely burnt along with vehicles and other things. A wounded dog lamentably barked when staggering to my shelter. My platoon had only about 2 squads, the Regiment Forward Headquarters lost Assistant Political Commissioner: Comrade Ba Vien the surgery team of Dr. Lê Công Hùng had to work ceaselessly. However, he and his collaborators had not time enough to take care of a greater number of wounded soldiers that moaned pitifully. At that very moment RVN helos continued firing to open the road for the other waves of assaults of field policemen to aim at my platoon. At that minute, the row of houses behind us were totally burnt. The flame spiralled high to make the atmosphere hot as in an oven of bread. The cries, roars and yells of RVN field policemen agitated our minds. They assaulted and blew whistles noisily in accordance with their technical habits. We had to struggle in a desperate manner, M26 grenades were successively thrown into my shelter. I caught some ones and rejected them back to the enemies grenade particles spread out everywhere, 2 comrades more in my side were wounded. RVN field policemen and us were in a "fine tooth comb" position, we'd be inevitably perished by enemies if this dangerous was still prolonged. I wished to see the darkness come round the sooner the better. The combat was temporarily appeased at 0500 PM. Maybe the enemy forces desired to rest to take dinner. In combat, they also respected the dinner time. After they withdrew, I looked around the house still clean and beautiful when we came. Alas! it became a pile of charred columns and pillars. Pigs, hens were burnt as men and women. The burnt smell spread out everywhere. On the road to the Liberation Headquarters, red hot charcoal was seen piece after piece. Only two barrels of water near my shelter were still intact. I ordered my combatants to use that water to make the burnt charcoal less hot to withdraw far behind. At that same night we rushed to the direction of Lập Thành Pagoda. (maybe from the Đông Ông Cồ area inwards) We walked through a muddy field and arroyo. Enemy flares made everything bright like in the day time. In many portions we had to crawl on the dirty mud. In the aurora we reached our target.

THE LAST DAYS IN THE 2ND WAVE.

The bombs of RVN fighter planes destroyed series of shelters and trenches. An Air Borne Brigade reinforced the Saigon troops on this front. The remnants of my unit were totally encircled.

On 4 June, comrade Ba Tuân contacted the other side to ask for reinforcements from the Liberation Army. Lieutenant Colonel Tam May briefly answered: "Enemies have blockaded the Saigon River very closely. All supplies have become impossible as well as all reinforcement attempts. You and other comrades should disperse as thinly as possible to fight till the last round". After hearing so, comrade Ba Tuân ordered to stop the liaison and prepared the withdrawal from the battle front even that night. All regional inhabitants had left their houses. Enemy artillery could freely fire at us. The encirclement became closer and closer. We were unable to escape. Our dead combatants were not yet buried. A stinking and fetid odour spread out. 4 June was the death day of the Advance Headquarters of Dong Nai Regiment, a famous Liberation Regiment in the East region. At 1230H, 4 RVN fighter planes tried to completely destroy the Lấp Thành pagoda area and the road having the row of tamarind trees, guiding to Gia Định Province. A bomb reached the shelter of comrade Ba Tuan to kill the overall Headquarters inside. Fortunately for me, my shelter was 10 meters far from there and well covered by a thick umbrella of tamarind trees. However, the pression of terrible bombs made blood run out from my ears. No dog was still alive to bark. Only more than 20 wounded combatants tried to silently crawl back to the Saigon River bank the place near Hàng Xanh Gia Định. I was very exhausted. I slept in a bush of coco trees and lost consciousness until the next morning. Gun explosions roaring near my ears awoke me, having at that moment ragged clothes, thin, dry, dirty face, wounds on my arms impregnated by water made me extremely painful.

I tried to step into the house of a regional inhabitant. His family and himself were preparing to evacuate by cars.

Nobody asked me. One knew who I was. I opened the wardrobe to take a suit to put on then left the house. I staggered to the Hàng Xanh Cross-Road... I had nothing in my mind. I knew nothing about the future...

A Company of RVN Marines marched on the other road side. Maybe they were searching the remnants of my unit in the direction of the fish sauce factory near the Saigon River Bank... The war refugees rushed away from their houses. Nobody paid concern to me. When seeing an RVN lieutenant followed by a young soldier holding a machine, I guessed that he was possibly the commander of this company. I called him. He was astonished, hand touching on the cudgel hung on his hip. I murmured briefly: "I am a Việt Công". An unexpected thing occurred immediately. Instead of a burst of fire that brought me to the society of my forefathers or my soul to the manes of my comrades still lingering on the Đống Ông Cộ battlefield that RVN lieutenant warmly shook my hands. A military car of the RVN Marines brought me to the dispensary for bandage.

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Now, I am sitting in Saigon to write these lines. In this very moment, there is no longer destruction vestige on that battlefield. Burnt houses are rebuilt. The dead bodies of my comrades are transformed into fertilizer in those rice fields. I feel sad when thinking that series and series of Vietnamese mothers have lost their beloved sons, myriads of Vietnamese women have become widows, rows and rows of children have no longer had fathers.

Is it possible that NVN Communists consider the above scenes as their victories? Though those warlike leaders in NVN have created deaths and mournings, the Free South Vietnam is still proudly alive. The An Phú Bông river current still runs sweetly; rows of areca trees are still dark green with the fragrance of their flowers. The Golden Flags of the Nationalist Government are seen everywhere in SVN. I secretly sing the song of Musician Pham Duy: "Vietnam! Vietnam!". I warmly welcome my first free days in my own life. /.

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LE VAN THANH

5TH ARTICLE

TRẦN TÂN PHÁT

I LEFT THE COMMUNIST RANK

TRẦN TÂN PHÁT, alias TÂM THƯỜNG, Assistant Chief, Propaganda-Training Sub-Section, Postal Telecommunication And Transportation Branch, Communist MR/III Party Committee (Chợng Thiên, Kiên Giang, Phong Dinh, Ba Xuyên, An Xuyên, Vĩnh Long, Vĩnh Bình, Bạc Liêu Provinces) concurrently Director of "The School for Postal Telecommunication and Transportation Cadres" in the West region. He was also Secretary in the Editorial Staff of the Magazine: "OPENING THE ROADS" "MỘ DUONG" of the Postal Telecommunication and Transportation Branch/COSVN.

Born in 1930 at Thới An Village, Ô Môn District, Cần Thơ Province, Trần-Tân-Phát has a wife and 3 children; education degree: 7th Form, Communist education system; He entered the Army in July 1947, the Party on 28 November 1955, infiltrated Southwards in December 1960. He was arrested on 29 June 1971 at Vĩnh Thuận Village, Kiên Long District, Chợng Thiên Province.

As a Communist combatant born in SVN, first I desire to relate here the progressive steps of my regroupment to the North.

After the signing of the 1954 Geneva Agreement, I might study the document entitled: "LEAVING AND STAYING HOME ARE PRAISED". Surely I had to analyze this matter as carefully as possible. In the depth of my mind, I desired to stay home and act as an "underground" cadre in the South, my native country.

When expressing the above decision in the Conference of The Communist Quartermaster and Finance Section/Cần Thơ Provincial Unit (Vĩnh Viên Village, Long Mỹ District, Rạch Giá Province), comrade Xuân Hoà, Chairman of the Presiding Board made efforts to advise me to regroup to the North. He criticized my viewpoint even in this conference. He argued that as being young, I should go to the North to build the force. He said during the resistance years, I had to fight in the army. So I had not experience in building-organizations. Moreover I was not yet a member of the Communist Party. So I was unable to thoroughly understand The Party's policy line to continue the method aimed at organizing the underground

elements in the South. Then he criticized me for loving peace, pleasures, having passive thoughts, desiring to live an ordinary life in family and forgetting the august task toward the Fatherland.

I might not argue. I might not have any other decision. Silently and bitterly I accepted leaving home. I secretly understood that comrade Xuan Hoa himself had to say so according to the Party's Directive. Due to his denunciations, other comrades of mine began to fiercely, mercilessly criticize and even insult me.

After that conference, I was sent to the Liaison-Information Company/2nd Regiment/West Region of SVN to prepare for the regroupment to the North with the following observations in my personal data: "peace-loving thoughts; paralyzed spirit; reduced struggle morale; oscillating viewpoint. The new unit should continuously pursue to help comrade Phat reach progress". In this case, I was strictly pursued, oppressed. And the regroupment to the North was kept totally secret until the last minute.

It began at 0500 AM, on 28 November 1954, after series of urging whistles of the political member of the company. We hastened to run to the concentration spot to step down into the ship in great order. It rained tumultuously and noisily. But the commanders indifferently looked at the group of trembling passengers obliged to leave their native place reluctantly. They paid no attention to the sorrowful separation scenes between mothers and sons, between wives and husbands, between innocent children and fathers. The return day nobody saw. Our fate was like that of former soldiers described in two following verses:

"THE DRUM NOISE URGED SOLDIERS TO ACCELERATE THEIR STEPS WHEN TEAR OVERFLOWING THEIR EYES".

I had the heart totally broken, shutting eyes not to witness the sad scenes, groping forward along with the group to step down into the LCD, ready in the CHAC BANG harbour. When being in the immense open sea, we were ordered to step into the Soviet ship SEBASTOPOL to go directly to the NVN. I felt more and more desperate.

Late 1958, I was transferred from the Army to the hydro electric ministry responsible for The School To Turn Out Mechanical Workers for the Việt Trì-Phu Thọ Electric Company.

Due to the requirements of the Socialist Construction, The Temple of Hung Vương King was moved to another area. Land and rice fields distributed in the "Land Reform Period" were recaptured by The State. Pagodas, temples, graves were planned.

I asked myself what the former combatants in the 305th Division and The Nam Bộ Regiment would think when obliged to change their job from a soldier struggling patiently in the Anti-French Resistance Period to a worker with heavy shoulder pieces for carrying stones bricks in constructing the socialist regime to enjoy 37\$00 monthly and survive after the regroupment to the North.

The working slogan of The Party was: "WORKING CEASELESSLY DAY AFTER DAY AND WEEK AFTER WEEK". It aimed to exploit till the climax the labor force of those former combatants after they became workers in a factory or peasants in a farm site....

The Party and The State realistically applied the Marxist Leninism to build the so called socialist Communist paradise. But where was that paradise? We saw nothing. In fact, we witnessed thin abdomens, hard working persons having no bright future.

The Communists had to work harder and harder to build that illusive paradise. I guessed... poverty would increase greatly after the signing of the Paris Cease Fire on 27-01-1973. The NVN cadres, workers, officials would be obliged to increase their output and would be forced to work harder than in the period of economic restoration between 1954-1957. Their poor fate was once described in two following verses:

"THE HUMAN BODY HAD TO FIGHT IN THREE PROTRACTED WARS
UNTIL ITS OLD AGE"

The bitter experiences of mine and many other comrades haunted my mind. I had the opportunity to review and analyze my past activities when living in the RVN jails.

I think, we erroneously sacrificed our blood and bone to build the socialist regime. We see happiness nowhere. I regret that though being an intellectual with human conscience I was unable to select the right cause road. On 25 March 1973, at last, I found out it. So I firmly decided to return to the Free South Vietnam to rebuild my life.

TRẦN TÂN PHÁT

6TH ARTICLE

THAI SONG HIEN

I HAVE WASTED THE 2/3 OF MY LIFE

Photograph

THAI SONG HIEN born in 1934 at Phong Thanh village, Gia Rai District, Bac Lieu Province. He followed the Communists in June 1968 to regroup to the North. He graduated from the School of Medicine and entered the Communist Party. He returned to the South as doctor chief of The External Medicine Section/Dispensary in the rear area of the military region/group 210. He and his close friend TRANG VAN PHU, escaped from Loc Ninh to cross the border and rally to Kien Tuong Authorities on 16 March 1973.

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In 1945, the French colonists returned to Indochina. Their gun explosions spread out gradually to Gia Rai. I had to evacuate along with the family of Mr. Hai to the Nach Rau Muong area near Ganh Hao harbour. In the evacuation period, due to the poverty of Mr. Hai's family and my innocence, I was unable to go home by myself though living along with Mr. Hai created incredible difficulties and complications to him as well as to me. However I tried to overcome all obstacles to suit the new situation during 3 years to wait for the growth of my intelligence and knowledge.

In 1948, the Bach Dang Troops camped near my house. I voluntarily entered the army. My demand was quickly approved. At the beginning I acted as a liaison agent. About 3 months later, I might study in the course for first aid men "Le Van Bo" in the military hospital of the 125th Regiment Bac Lieu. After 3 months of study, I returned to the former unit named newly Company 1.095/125.

About late 1948 my unit moved to act in Long Châu Hà Province. In May 1949 I might go along with a platoon to establish Company 2.006/406th Battalion, Joint Regiment 126-128 in Long Châu Hà Province. In 1952, I was transferred to the Company 4.053, 410th Battalion, Tây Đô Regiment in the function: First aid man of The Company that acted on all battlefields in the West region of South Vietnam.

In June 1953, I might study in the course for medics: "Vân Thủy", Military Service, Cần Thơ Provincial Unit under the management of Dr. Phạm Bá Cử. When I graduated from that course, the 1954 Geneva Agreement was signed. Despite this fact, I might return to the former unit in the function Medic/ Company 4053/410. On 5 November 1954, I regrouped to go to the North along with the whole 410th Battalion in the heroic and proud atmosphere of a victorious army.

11 French L. C. M. s slowly left the Chac Băng harbour. The separation moment made me both merry and sad. My comrades and I went to the North with the belief that we'd return two years later.

When our ship ran through Kinh Sang, Vĩ Thanh areas, we used two fingers in the V Form in sign of victorious return promise. Darkness gradually covered everything and we saw nothing more. The regular explosion of the engine brought me into a deep sleep...

Strange noises and talks in the L. C. M awoke me. Later my comrades and I were ordered to step into an LCT. About 0900 A. M. next morning, we were sent to a Soviet ship already present in the Vung Tau open sea. We stayed there for four days to wait for more passengers and more provisions (particularly more rice). During 7 days when the ship ran in the immense open sea, I had serious sea sickness though using Gardenal. Worse than that I was unable to eat sufficiently in daily meals. So I had to drink Nestrovic to help myself support the illtreatments of sea sickness. At last we reached the North on the 7th day.

MY DAYS IN THE NORTH

We might land on the North territory by great boats in Hai Thôn Village Sam Son beach. I staggered forwards as if I were drunk, 2 women hastened to bring me to a bed where I might rest for some days to recover strength.

Later we were equipped with NVN uniforms to establish our camp at CHUA market, in Thanh Hoá Province.

At the beginning at Sãm Sơn beach, we were informed by higher ranking authorities that we might use Soviet made Molotova trucks. But in reality, we had to walk, walk ceaselessly. Many comrades had not the habit to march continuously as so in shoes. So they had pains on their soles. Some had to hold those shoes when trying to continue the operation. Many had not the habit to carry heavy guns and equipment on shoulders during the long march. So they rejected their luggage in great disorder along the operation road. We looked like the remnants of a defeated unit.

On both road sides, we read many slogans relating to the "Anti-Famine Campaign". The fatigue at that very moment plus the doubt about our life in the future through the above slogans made our depression more and more serious.

THE FIRST BREAKAGE IN MIND

About January 1955, we might study The Political Reorientation In The Land Reform. As a penetration attack unit, we were taught by Duong Quoc Chinh from The West Region Headquarters that we'd be totally reformed in both material and spiritual aspects. We had to sincerely declare everything in our personal data list: social-element, famillal situation, individual activities, motive force that pushed me to the Revolution, past errors and shortcomings toward higher ranking authorities on the people. To express exaggerated sincerity, many invented stories or actions to gain the sympathy and confidence of party members and cadres.

After studying the argument manner, and completing the self-control sheet, some were ordered to speak out their typical miseries in the past to motivate the hatred of the labor class to other social elements. Then we stepped into the mutual accusation phase.

One after one we read our self control and self-analysis sheet with our shortcomings. The collective began to criticize by using political arguments. All of us were fiercely insulted for having discrimination of the labor class in the past, capitalist objective thoughts, committing ambitious corrupt practices in an undisciplined freedom and being too much proud of past achievement and high position to have the culte of individual heroism etc... The Accusation became more severe to aim at unfortunate middle-man (comprador) elements or bourgeois landlords. There were many funny

but bitter-scenes. All were condemned for stubbornness opposition toward higher ranking authorities and for generosity, forgiveness toward the faults of subalterns. All were criticized for not thoroughly understanding the lesson.

As for me, I was deceived by The Party's teachings. So I sincerely declared the profession of my parents (Exclusive Agent for The Sale of Dry Coco Fruit in Gia Rai District). As a result, I was classified into the comprador bourgeois element having relations with the French capitalists in rights and interests

With this social element, my future will be totally dark. Despite my numerous years of service in the Anti-French Resistance Movement, my participation in 30 or 40 combats in the function of a first aid man, a medic, daring to cross the fire line to save wounded combatants, heal their wounds to be hit by enemy rounds, I was mercilessly condemned for betraying the people, harming the country and working for enemies as lackeys etc...

Later, my unit was trained to become one in the regular army. Due to this reason, I was immediately eliminated because I was in a "basic" enemy element. The eliminated medical soldiers concentrated to work in the Military Health Section/Joint Western Region Unit reached nearly one company. Before leaving the area for the new position, I was promoted by favour to the position "Squad leader" or Senior Sergeant in the military channel. Our team about 10 persons under the leadership of Physician Thôi Công might work in the K. 32 Hospital. Maybe due to the shortcoming in principle or my individual chance, I had my social element changed from "exploiting class" to "poor elements in city".

In one word, during my days in the North, I was treated in a relatively better manner than others due to my profession as a medic. More lamentable were pure soldiers knowing only to hold guns to fight. They were either sick or wounded to lose their own strength to be treated in the recuperation center in the 78th Group. The 330th Division were ordered to go to the jungles to exploit waste land and establish Xuân Mai-Quí Cao-Lam Sơn farm-sites etc... One The Party's cadres visited the Division to motivate the struggle morale of combatants: "Our Army is the most faithful force. In the Resistance for National Salvation our combatants dared to sacrifice blood and bone. So in this peace phase, we must be in the advance line to build the state's economy and heal war wounds".

Many tried to escape from their ranks by asking the permission to go to negotiate for a position in The State's firm. But this was a great difficulty. These elements were weak, had no technical knowledge. So they were obliged to work in a farm site.

Some had powerful influence. Their names were registered in the list of The Production Group as: "Vermicelli Making Group; Oil Pressing Group, Joiner Group, Bicycle Repairman Group, Nylon Gluing Group" etc... Any production group was successful in earning profits, was provided fund by The State to be transformed into a semi public company. Any production group dared to oppose The State, had all production facilities cut off.

In the years 1956-1957, Hanoi Radio announced that SVN was in a sea of blood, that SVN people were terribly menaced by famine and war destructions were seen everywhere to create maximum hatred to the minds of people especially of those living in the South. For two years I was obliged to live far from family. So, when Tết returned, I was extremely sad and home-sick.

I lost my confidence in The Party and State to become pessimist and depressed just as expressed in two following verses:

"I can only return to the South
"Whenever lotus and nenuphar flowers grow on mountains

Many units shared this depression with me when obliged to live in the Socialist North region repeated many times the two following verses:

"Coils are high, springs are dry, combatants are sad
"Military and people fear when obliged to fight and guard security

We saw nowhere actual happiness when living far from our native villages in the South. We expressed our sorrow in two following verses:

"Where are our white dress and table cloth?
"Here only brown uniform has appeased our homesickness

Myself, I considered me as a youth born in NVN. So I had to create to me a position to assure my future especially after I built a family here. I began to study culture in a school by correspondence. After ending the 7th Form, I got the diploma (1st degree High School under the French Domination). I resumed study in the 9th Form with the hope to pass the baccalaureat examination and enter the university.

But in about June 1972, I was ordered to go to the 338th Division to infiltrate Southwards. This unit headquarters was established in Xuân Mai (Hà Đông Province). In the Medical Branch, only military physicians might go to B

(i. e. to the South). So I had to go to study in the Third Course Reserved for Military Physicians organized in the 10th Military Hospital, in Đấp Cầu (Bắc Ninh town) under the management of Doctor Tâm Hoa. In December 1963, I graduated from this course and was promoted to the rank of Chief Warrant Officer. Later, to satisfy the requirements of my new task, I might participate in the 20th supplementary special training course concerning: "The Preventive Measures Against Modern Weapons Having The Ability to Massacre Men by Series" in the Military Medicine Study Center managed by Doctor Đỗ Xuân Hợp, in Hà Đông Province, on the opposite side of the 103th Institute, Military Health Department. On 26 June 1964, I was accepted as a Party member in this Military Medicine Study Center. Late June, 1964 after graduation, I returned to the 338th Division (transferred to Thọ Xuân District, Thanh Hoa Province).

In this 338th Division, I was assigned to the 624th Group (to infiltrate Southwards). This group had 47 men including key cadres in the Artillery and military health branches. At about 0500 P. M. on 6 September 1964, this group and I were transported by truck to the HO Village wherefrom we walked along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and climbed through numerous lofty cols as cols 200m, 1001m, 2400m to cross the frontier lines of Laos, South Vietnam and Cambodia. We reached Đông Nại Thượng, Đông Nại Hạ and crossed the Sông Be river, Mã Đá area to enter the final concentration camp (secret name: T14), in the COSVN, in Bàu Cỏ area, Tây Ninh Province.

Now everytime thinking of that "Long March" I still thrill with fear... I was terribly menaced by the God of Death, now wounded by cut off tree branches, now exhausted by the illtreatments of malaria, now pursued by tigers, now falling down into deep chasms or RVN ambushes, now dreadfully bombarded by American war planes... Along the infiltration road, I was extremely sad when seeing series and series of graves of unknown infiltrators.

After 3 months of long march through the Trường Sơn Range, I was ordered to go to work in the Military Health Service/COSVN managed by Senior Colonel Doctor Đặng Văn Chính (alias Hồ Văn Huệ) to assume responsibility of the Anti Epidemic Disease Section.

My strength was at that moment very poor due to the continuous illtreatments of fever. So, in July 1965 I was transferred to the Military Health Section, Rear Group 83 to work in "The Tam Giác Sắt" area (Iron Triangle Area) as Treatment Physician in the Treatment Team 2/83. I became later Chief of The Surgery Team to cure diseases for combatants struggling on the front line on the road 13 from Minh Thanh to Bến Cát area.

In February 1968 I was promoted from the rank Platoon leader to Company Executive Officer (Đại Đội Phó). In June 1968, I was designated to go to study in "The Course I Reserved for Specialist Doctors in The External Medicine" organized in the School of Medicine of Doctor R (H24A) managed by Senior Colonel Doctor Hoàng Minh Thọ (alias Trường Công Trung).

On 30 December 1969, after graduation I was designated to go to work in the Military Health Section/Rear Group 86, assuming responsibility of the management of the of the Dispensary KC11, in Suoi May area on the Cambodian territory.

According to the requirements of the situation, my unit KC11 might purely receive wounded soldiers under the new name: Mobile Treatment Team (yd1/cl0). Formerly this unit might receive and cure all ill and wounded soldiers.

AN IMPORTANT TURNING POINT

In December 1971, as my unit and I were still in wait case, our higher ranking authorities ordered us to transport rice at Soal area-on the road Snoul-Kratie-in Cambodia. As a team leader, I had to do nothing. So I walked down to the Kratie Market to visit the regional inhabitants here.

I felt suddenly very sorry for my fate though I was respected and admired by them. I was well treated by many families in Kratie, Snoul, Loc Ninh especially after I had applied my technical treatment to examine health and heal some wounds in some "operation" cases.

On this occasion I had the good opportunity to compare two living conditions in the North and South Vietnam that made me very thoughtful. After ten years living under the Socialist regime, the life of NVN people was poorer than that of their SVN compatriots though the areas known by me were only the deserted regions continuously destroyed and menaced by military operations and mercilessly exploited by Communist cadres under many forms as: Requests for support to nourish troops, tax etc. . .

My struggle morale was terribly agitated when I witnessed the above bitter contradictions.

I asked myself in successive sleepless nights why I had sacrificed wastefully my past years to serve the "Revolution" to be illtreated as so by my higher-ranking authorities.

In 20 recent years I served The Party and The Communist Ideology by bearing myriads of miseries and pains, now sleeping in secret trenches, now lying in thick bushes to avoid bomb particles, now witnessing dreadful death scenes, now totally exhausted by continuous malaria, to reach the present poor rank "Company Executive Officer".

To become a military doctor, I had to make extraordinary efforts in combat. I risked my own life many times to cross the fire line to bandage wounded combatants as a first aid man. After six successive years of perilous struggle, I was designated to study in A Course for Medics. Then after seven other years of hard working and self study in culture to pass the baccalaureat examination I might study in A Training Course for Military Physicians. For over 3 years more I had to fight in "The Iron Triangle" area to survive from most fearful dangers caused by war. At last I might designated to study in A Special Course Reserved for Military Doctors.

In one word I lost the 2/3 of my life to seize this profession in my hands. But what profit might I enjoy from my technique when I met with lack of all necessary medicines? What progress might I reach when surgical operations met with incredible difficulties and complications? And in case of failure, I was mercilessly criticized for having weak viewpoint, low morale of responsibility etc... Once, meeting with an important failure, I was severely menaced by higher ranking authorities for possible postponement of mission and loss of medical diploma. Worse than that, according to the internal regulations of The Party, Political cadres might replace The Party to decide even in the technical branch. Physicians and doctors had not any right to replace The Party to decide even in the determination of diseases and the treatment manner.

The following typical contradictions gradually blackened the Communist ideology in my mind.

- The life of NVN people became poorer, more lamentable after 20 years under the Socialist regime. Contrary to that, the SVN people could develop their economy rapidly to reach abundant life and prosperous society after only 5 years under the free regime... If unfortunately, in the future, Communists can dominate the South, the regional inhabitants will be obliged to bear a poor life as in the North. This would be an impossible thing.

- I was well treated and warmly received by the regional inhabitants when I was continuously pursued, checked, criticized and oppressed by my higher ranking authorities.

- After examining the health for regional inhabitants I was highly respected with deep gratitude by my customers. But after treating ill and wounded soldiers, I received nothing thankful from them. Contrary to that I was severely criticized or menaced by higher ranking cadres especially after meeting with failure.

- The life as a civilian medic was very easy and even easier than my life as a military doctor in the Communist Army. My monthly wage was not sufficient to buy cigarettes.

- I was continuously weakened by malaria in jungles. My wife and I received no allowance or assistance from The Party in case of illness. From time to time we were given only some useless bottles of "Cod Liver Oil Extract".

There were still many other sad things as following:

- My wife and I had to send children to live along with our parents. For 4 years we had not the occasion to meet them. As a husband, in such an unjust case, how could I help feeling sad and discontent?

- Worse than that, Communist cadres under-estimated my wife. They had suspect about her familial relations. In 1960, she lived in Chanh Luu, the area controlled by the Nationalist Government. She entered "The Association of Vietnamese Women for Mutual Assistance" and participated in a training course for one month each afternoon. Due to this fact, my wife was condemned for having political relations with enemies.

- For nearly 30 years I had no occasion to visit my parents, brothers and sisters. I missed them very much. I did not know when this war would end so that I might go home to meet them again. I doubted whether The Party could liberate the South and build the Socialist regime there as they did in the North or they should fight a protracted war, generation after generation. And if they could reunify the country maybe at that moment I became already fertilizer for the waste soil. Frankly speaking, I tired of this suffocative socialist regime.

The above thoughts went deeper and deeper into my mind to disperse gradually the black curtain to the Communist doctrine and help me understand the whole TRUTH.

Secretly, I exchanged my viewpoint with comrade Phu. We decided to save ourselves from this deadlock by seeking freedom. It was comrade Phu that led me to the rally to the Nationalist Right Cause to rebuild my life.

I CHOOSE FREEDOM

The Paris Agreement was signed. Peace had the chance to be restored. However, The Party's policy line had not any change. The violent class-struggle till the final victory continued along with the Revolutionary Movement to liberate the South, reunify the country and build the Socialist Communist regime. So, despite the signing of the Paris Agreement, The Party ordered us not to reject guns. We had to double and even triple our productions.

As for me, I asked myself why I might not go home to meet my parents, brothers and sisters after many years of separation, why my comrades and I had still live in deserted jungles, exploit waste land to cultivate more potato, manioc to prepare for depots of provisions.

I did not understand why The Party continued sending more men, weapons, ammunitions, tanks from the North to the South, why my comrades and I had to continue this immoral civil war.

The above questions let back hatred and depression in my mind.

I hatred war for creating mournings and separations to the Vietnamese inhabitants, for destroying villages and impoverishing everybody.

I hatred the "Communist Ideology" for spoiling the 2/3 of my life. I regretted that I had been unable to understand the TRUTH to be deceived by Communists and nourish hatred and enmity toward my compatriots that I killed fanatically, eagerly and immorally.

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Dear readers, I am writing these lines to thank the free men in this benefactor region for opening their arms to warmly welcome me, returning from a sinful road and allowing me to meet my relatives and rebuild my life.

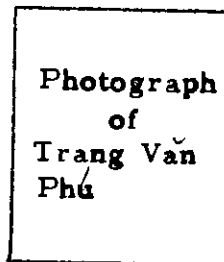
At present I fear nothing more. I am no longer desperate. My future is no longer sinister. I am really happy for choosing freedom. I am really happy to become A FREEDOM SEEKER.

Saigon, 30-3-1973

Dr. SONG HIÊN

7TH ARTICLE
TRANG VAN PHU

UNFINISHED DREAM



TRANG VAN PHU, born in 1939 in Kompong Cham (Cambodia). He followed the NFLSVN in 1960 to become a member of the Communist Party. His function was Company Executive Officer/Supply Section Cambodian Rear Group 210th Education: 4th Form (Communist Education System). He along with Dr. THAI SONG HIEN rallied on 16 March 1973 to Kien Tuong Authorities.

I was born in a poor family. In 1955 I left my family to search for a job in Saigon. Due to my innocence and inexperience I had to bear myriads of miseries and tests in daily life.

One day my comrade Sau visited me. We had a confidential talk to share sadness and joy with each other.

He said that he knew Comrade Hai, an underground VC cadre, desiring to have a friendly contact with both of us.

I asked: "Who is Comrade Hai? What is he doing as an underground cadre?"

Sau answered: "He is a revolutionary cadre".

When hearing the words: "revolutionary cadre" I was very excited, half merry half anxious. I kept mute.

Sau consoled me: "You have nothing to fear. He will relate many funny stories to please both of us".

Due to my inexperience and innocence, I was deceived by VC cadres that praised the Communist doctrine exaggeratedly and were very fond of the so called Communist Paradise. They led me to the sinful road.

Like a mindless youth, I dreamed that one day The Revolution would be marvelously successful to build a Just, Free and Happy Society in which I might enjoy an abundant life. Then I prepared my luggage to follow Comrades Hai and Sau.

In 1960, Sau and I secretly left our beloved town for an area temporarily controlled by VC. There was a very great difference between two ways of life. Here few people were seen. Houses were scattered. Daily the peasants had to work in their rice fields. Some guerrilla agents guarded the hamlet with guns. We were presented to the members in this small society. We might rest for some days. The regional inhabitants had to bear a very poor life. Daily they worked in their rice fields. At night they guarded security in control stations. Anxiety haunted them at all times. Later we were transported to Cambodia.

We had to obey the order given to us. They led us to cross jungles and springs. . . One month later we reached a dense and deserted forest where only cries of wild birds and roars of ferocious beasts were heard. This was a Cambodian Secret War Zone; The first man we contacted was Comrade Ly, cadre in Lam Dong Province Party Committee, belonging to T10. He warmly received us. We might rest the first day. The next day, we had to replenish the Lam Dong Provincial Unit where we fought along with Comrades Sau, Quang, A, Thanh, Bay and Dung. At the beginning, we were well treated by them. They prepared dining and sleeping rooms for us. They taught us how to work in forests, how to produce daily to go to study in political meetings at night, how to review excellent points and weak points in daily activities. We might enjoy 3 meals per day, eat all types of manioc as Cu Nang, cu chyp, cu my and consume the special vegetable; la bep and the aeroplane shape like vegetable along with salted water and potato. We met with daily shortages of rice, salt, medicine, clothes and particularly of freedom.

Formerly as youths in province, we liked FREEDOM. Beside the working time, we might go to the cinema and theater to enjoy the classic-play

performances, bathe in swimming pools or visit the zoo. Better than that, we might drink beer in a popular tea house. But adieu those pleasures for ever!

I was extremely sad and depressed. I missed Daddy. I missed Mummy. I missed my brothers and friends. I wished to return home the sooner the better. I thrilled with fear and anxiety when hearing the moans of cicadas and the roars of wild beasts from any far jungle. We looked like thoughtless youths. The present poor situation menaced our health, strength and happiness in life. Worse than that I lost consciousness when terribly attacked by fever. There was no medicine, no nourishing food. So my disease became more and more serious. Ah! if I were at home, how happy I would be! I did not know why I had had such a mad decision to bring myself to this far and deserted area.

When I was dreaming, Comrade Thanh called me to hand me his medicine.

I asked: "Where did you take this medicine?"

He answered: "This came from the wild leaves boiled with water. There is nothing strange".

I took the bowl and drank that black liquid. I knitted my brows and made grimaces. Dear me! What a bitter potion! I was thirsty for sugar, milk and sour preserved apricots, too. I desired to complain loudly. But after thinking more carefully, I realized that in this deserted area with only mountain and jungle some VC comrades like myself could never have such things.

After 45 days of sickness, I was able to gradually recover health. But I was still thin, pale and weak with trembling legs. Despite this fact, I was motivated by VC cadres to work to produce. They said if I still rested I'd be paralysed. I was criticized by them for being lazy and having weak struggle morale. They concluded that I was no longer worthy of being a youth. Angry, I opposed their inhuman thoughts. I was later condemned by them for Anti-Party and Organization actions and attempting to destroy the union spirit. To punish me, they ordered me to go to exploit waste land.

Many times, I had very tense spirit. I wanted to go home. I vaguely felt that I had chosen the erroneous road. However I had no other solution except trying to work hard to reach noteworthy achievements and obeying the orders from higher ranking cadres in The Party. If I voluntarily forgot

myself to become a lackey for them, surely I'd be congratulated by higher ranking cadres and able to gain their sympathy and confidence. With the above thoughts in mind, I tried to overcome all difficulties, obstacles and pains to well perform my duties.

In 1965, I was transferred to the 86th Group, Rear Department, COSVN. As I was a trustful element, I was designated to have contact with the units in Cambodia as a translator/interpreter to meet Khmer officers, overseas Vietnamese citizens as well as Chinese residents. Through our conversations, those Vietnamese and Chinese people could understand my poor situation. So they offered me cakes, candies and sometimes money. I thought I'd escape from this lamentable life the sooner the better to have a brighter future. So, I spent only 20% of money gathered by me and saved the rest for coming necessary expenditures. To gain the sympathy and confidence of the collective, I usually purchased tea, and candies to offer to my higher ranking cadres. As a results, I was accepted as member of The People's Revolutionary Party in SVN (i. e. The NVN Communist Party at present).

I was designated to work in the Exit and Entry Point to receive The Foreign Aid coming from the Soviet Union and Chicom (called at that period Hang Dai Nghich). Beside my brain work technique, I participated in the labor work as transporting rice, pushing bicycles and carts of goods etc.... Due to this reason, I was admired by all-level cadres. In fact, the exploitation of man-power under the Communist regime was very inhuman. We were warmly congratulated when being able to work as a soulless machine. But we were mercilessly forgotten, ill-treated if being ill, weak or unproductive. Myself, I had such a desperate and sinister future. I understood this cruel intention of Communists but I was incompetent-like a grain of sand in the Communist desert-to struggle against them especially when they had a dense security net in which we ^{were} strictly pursued, controlled ^{by} ^{the} and denounced one another. In our ranks those having freedom thoughts and strange actions would be immediately punished.

In 1968, The General Offensive and Revolt was generalized everywhere. We were ordered to participate in the attack. According to the propaganda of Hanoi Radio, the Communists were able to occupy this or that area. Cadres urged us to accelerate our productions 10 times, 20 times more to suit the new situation, the rare and good opportunity so as to reach the complete victory.

But contrary to that, I saw victory nowhere. Series and series of Communists wounded soldiers were transported to the rear. On the front line, Communist units had to disperse thinly. Communist cadres and soldiers lost their struggle morale after their posts, camps, depots were totally destroyed.

I did not know why Communist cadres considered such losses as their victories. They tried to extract excellent and weak points from their unfinished Mậu Than Tết General Offensive to launch the 2nd wave of attacks. The above facts made my comrades and I very thoughtful. We asked ourselves where this destructive war would lead us to and which side would win in the last minutes. The answer to the above question awoke us.

However with their stubborn and warlike nature, Communist leaders tried to continue this bloody war, create more miseries and pains to SVN people. They prepared a new secret plot. As we were in the lower level, we had to blindly obey their orders. If opposing them, we'd be immediately and mercilessly eliminated and annihilated.

In 1969, when the Communist troops were withdrawing to the rear of the secret war zone in Cambodia (usually called by Communists The Holy Land) suddenly the Allied Forces launched the B52 campaign to terribly destroy our military bases, our supply depots along the Cambodian-South Vietnamese frontier line. Daily tens of giant B52s bombed Communist units. Our own group was ordered to firmly protect our supplies and positions despite the serious losses created by American bombs. We hurriedly dug underground trenches. We lived miserably like rats to be dreadfully menaced by 60 bombing raids daily. We hermetically shut eyes and covered ears when dreadful bombs exploded to wait for the God of Death. After the bomb explosion, our position was not damaged, we opened eyes and ears. At that moment only might we believe that we were still alive. We thrilled with fear and anxiety when our brain grew numb with buzz and strong agitation caused by the bomb explosions, the fall of gigantic trees, the cries "SOS" of unfortunate comrades, the moans of wounded persons. Too much fearful and anxious we lost appetite and quiet sleep. Mourningful scenes haunted us minute after minute. The rumours relating to the loss of confidence in the complete victory of the Communists, the decadent morale of cadres and soldiers spread out everywhere. Our life became more and more unstable. Rows and rows of Communist elements fell dead when erroneously serving the ambitious Communist regime wanting to invade the South and put it under the domination of the Red Empire.

In 1970, the war situation unexpectedly changed. In March 1970, Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown in Cambodia. The Anti-Communist war break out there. The embassies of the DRVN and the so-called PRGSVN of VC were destroyed. Pro-Communist Vietnamese residents were executed. A legal organization of Communists in the Hác Ly Company was dispersed. The supply road from Sihanouk Ville was cut off and the Communist secret war zone was attacked by the RVN and Allied Forces, the depots of provisions were discovered, cadres and soldiers were either arrested or massacred. According to the recapitulation of the Group 86, 70/100, the overall group headquarters was replaced. Comrades Xuan Chanh, Sau Đoi, Cu Đang and Tu Bang were warned by higher ranking authorities and were withdrawn to another branch of service.

Communist leaders dared not confess their losses. They falsely propagandized for their imaginary victories. They deceived public opinion by claiming that their forces were still intact. They urged cadres and soldiers to double productions by working harder to rebuild the destroyed installations, and sacrificing more blood and bone for The Party. They sent more troops from NVN to consolidate their units, replenish their ranks, enlarge war to the Cambodian territory. Gun explosions roared everywhere. They occupied the Northwest of Cambodia and used this area as a run to fiercely attack the Republic of Vietnam.

And in 1972, we received the directive from the COSVN to motivate all units to participate in the struggle and bring the general offensive to the complete victory. In April we attacked Lôc Ninh, Bu Đóp, An Lôc. Many other units encircled enemies in Quang Tri, Huê, Kontum and other provinces. The Party's aim was occupying at least one city to create pressure so as to support the Communist Delegation in the Paris Peace Conference. When propagandizing for their High Point Movement to occupy a city, they urged the inhabitants to struggle against the RVN Government. They massacred all Anti-Communist elements, killed RVN officials. Moreover, they reinforced their armed forces, artillery units to create mere mournings, more damages to the regional inhabitants. Communists gained victories everywhere according to the false propaganda words of Communist leaders.

In reality, thousands of Communist wounded soldiers were hurriedly transported to the rear. Communist tanks, destroyed by American bombs were lying pell mell on the operation roads. They had to bear serious

losses. Wounded soldiers met with scarcity of medicines. Their struggle morale became more and more decadent. They lost confidence in the final victory. Rumours relating to the defeat of Communists spread out everywhere and created fear to the minds of the leaders that prevented all cadres and soldiers from speaking out the Truth but everybody should act and speak according to the orders of The Party.

In September of 1972, our Group held a meeting to consider the recapitulation of the Nguyễn Huệ Campaign with the participation of the Group Headquarters, the representative of the COSVN, and all cadres in the Group: 210.

In this meeting, victories were highly praised, shortcomings were carefully noted to be used by the participants to draft a new policy. In this very solemn meeting, there was the projection of a film, the performances of Paywar entertainment artists to consolidate the thoughts of all cadres and soldiers and push them into the deadlock road. But despite the above propaganda forms, many persons could understand the Truth. They hated war, tired of the prolonged struggle and their own useless sacrifices.

One cadre said: "I have fought for 25 successive years". Another complained: "I have followed The Party for over ten years but I have enjoyed nothing interesting. I wish to have peace to go home, work and produce to live a simple but easy life". In daily conversations, they spoke out the above general aspiration. . . . One day maybe we might understand the Truth of the Free Regime in SVN.

Contrary to that, the VC leaders lackeys of NVN Communists, continued their ambition aimed at occupying the South. In the areas temporarily controlled by them as Loc Ninh, Quang Loi etc. . . , the inhabitants had to bear a very miserable life; Their houses were destroyed. Those having freedom loving thoughts secretly had good sympathy toward the RVN regime though being strictly pursued by Communists. Many unfortunately persons were forced by VC to live in unhealthy, poor areas to bear all types of shortages and to die of hunger or disease there.

Who were creating these destructive war scenes if not ambitions, stubborn and warlike NVN Communists?

We were born on the same Vietnamese territory. We had to bear myriads of miseries created by those Communist leaders. If we continued the struggle in the Communist ranks, we still created more mournings and miseries to our compatriots. We hated Communists very much. We prepared everything to rally to the National Right Cause whenever possible.

On 27 January 1973, the Paris Agreement was signed. Peace was restored. When everybody felt happy and thought about the return to the family, The Party's Policy line did not change: tanks, artillery units, supplies were sent continuously to the South. We might not rest or go home. We might not take contacts with the inhabitants in free areas. We had to double our productions, exploit waste jungles, cultivate manioc, prepare ammunition and food depots to continue the protracted war.

Realizing that the irrational war waged by The Party will never be successful and that I had lost uselessly a half of life in the struggle for The Party to be exploited by Communist leaders as a soulless machine, to be forgotten by ungrateful cadres after weakness. I firmly decided to leave The Party. On 14 March 1973, along with my closest friend: Doctor Thái Song Hiên, I crossed the Iron Curtain to rally to the Free South Region.

Saigon, 30-3-1973

TRANG VĂN PHÚ

8TH ARTICLE

THAI SANG

Photograph
of
Thai Sang

THAI SANG has the real name THAI VAN VO born in 1944 at Phú Chánh Village, Bình Dương Province. He finished the 5th Form in the V.C. education system. He entered the Psywar Entertainment Group/COSVN in 1968 and worked there as illustrator. Besides, he played violin (classic music) in this group, too.

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I lost my father 3 or 4 months after my birth/ As my family was very poor, my mother had to practise small commerce from province to province. Due to this reason, I might only finish the elementary degree at school. Later I had to work to earn more money for my family. My two first brothers entered the Cao Đài Army to fight in Tây Ninh Province. I followed my third brother in driving bus cars all day long. In the evening, I learnt to play violin (classic music) along with my friends by practice day after day not through musical notes. Besides, due to my cleverness, I learnt to draw pictures along with many students of the Bình Dương Fine Arts School.

Early December 1962, in the evening of a Saturday, I followed my friends to the Lai Hùng Forest in Lai Khê (Bến Cát) to participate in the Psywar Entertainment Party organized by The Thủ-Biên Theatrical Group (Thủ Dầu Một + Biên Hòa Joint Group). Many regional inhabitants were also present there. All talented participants were invited by this Group to play their part in the Party to be warmly applauded by the large audience. I was also introduced by a friend to play violin at that night. I was thrice applauded after 3 pieces of music. Then comrade Nam Phùng, a Cultural Propaganda and Training cadre directly met me to invite to enter his Group. I was at that period 18 years old. I largely accepted his proposal after being highly

praised and realizing that my life as an assistant driver was not very satisfactory. However, I exposed my familial situation before comrade Năm Phụng and asked him to wait for me until I got the permission from my mother.

Naturally, my poor mother was displeased. She wished that I would learn correctly a profession to have a better life in the future. But I kept my decision firmly. Moreover, I was urged by comrade Năm Phụng to leave her. So I left my house secretly to follow him and his Psywar Entertainment Group.

At the beginning, I usually played violin when other cadres learnt to sing or performed their role on the play stage. My life was relatively easy. Later, this Group was divided into two sub-groups I followed the 2nd sub-group to Phước Thành, on the foot of the mountain, D war zone Headquarters. This was an unhealthy area with thick and deserted jungle and lofty mountain. I had only very poor daily meals. I became homesick I regretted why I had secretly left my beloved mother and friendly house to live this lamentable life. But it was too late. Around me spread out the immense and dense jungle. I knew no road to go home. Though being cultural and artistic cadres, we had to plough land, cultivate manioc and vegetables frequently beside playing roles on the play stage. Our higher ranking cadres strictly exploited the labor force of this sub-group to increase productions even for a whole month.

In 1963, I was illtreated by unhealthy water and weather in dense jungle and lofty mountain. Medicines were very scarce; Daily meals extremely poor; My disease became more serious. I had heart failure to reach near the death. I might rest for 6 months. After recovering my health, I was designated to work as secretary in the Psywar Section. My daily work was writing slogans, drawing pictures and decorating meeting rooms for diverse conferences.

In 1964, my malaria was less serious, I began to follow the Psywar Entertainment Sub-Group to play-violin when other cadres performed their roles on the play-stage. I was admired by colleagues due to my kindness. And due to my sweetness, I was not paid major attention to by higher ranking cadres. I might enjoy a little freedom in thoughts and actions.

In 1966, my Phước-Thành sub-group joined the Sub-Group of Binh Duong where I fortunately met comrade Võ Tử Chương. We had confidential talks to understand the whole TRUTH and search for The Right Cause Road. As

we were born in the same Bình Dương Province we agreed with each other in many problems.

During my sadness, I usually expressed my feelings with him and vice versa he had nothing to hide from me.

In 1966, exploiting my youth and thoughtless enthusiasm, my higher ranking authorities accepted me as a new party member. Due to this new position, I felt pride and tried to work harder and harder to be illtreated by illness created by overactivity.

In August 1968, my group and I fell into an ambush of the U. S. troops at Hoà Lợi (Bình Dương Province). I had my right arm broken to be treated in the Mã Đà military hospital in the Communist War Zone D 6 months later I could recover my health and my broken arm was able to move again after being plastered.

In 1970, the RVNAF launched a military operation into Cambodia to directly destroy the COSVN. My own group had to disperse thinly till Damber area. Despite this evacuation, we were able to organize training courses for many artists coming from other provinces. Beside the study time, all cadres had to cultivate rice plants, manioc and vegetables to have a sufficient life. I was under-estimated by higher ranking cadres and other hard-working cadres because I was a wounded soldier, unable to cultivate land. I had complex of inferiority and felt ashamed.

In 1971, a great event happened in my life as a brilliant flash of lightning to let me see the whole TRUTH. At that period the COSVN was destroyed. I might follow some comrades. I realized my unstable life. As I lost health and strength, I thought I would be left alone by them. Just at that difficult and doubtful period, I met comrade Nguyễn Bình, a South Vietnamese cadre regrouping to go to study in the North and coming from his NVN unit to the South again. He told me all phases of his life and expressed his despair when living under the Communist regime. He also let me see 10 wounds caused by rounds in his combats. He said that The Party knew only to exploit the labor force of strong cadres and soldiers. When they lost their abilities or were wounded, They were forgotten by higher ranking authorities. After living 10 years in the North, he tired of the struggle. His gun was captured by The Party. He was severely punished by higher ranking authorities. I completely awoke when listening to his own stories and his repentance. I realized my sinister future as a wounded soldier.

However, I feared, under the Communist regime, I had to strictly obey the Directive from higher ranking authorities. Contrary to that I should die inevitably.

Nguyễn Bình and I decided to flee to Tây Ninh. But we did not know the right road. We were arrested by Red Khmers. Thanks to their carelessness at night, we secretly left the jail and ran away...

Extremely depressed, unable to rally to the Nationalist Government, I returned to the Psywar Entertainment Group/COSVN and comrade Nguyễn Bình joined his unit. Nobody had suspect about our absence because the COSVN had to disperse thinly at that period.

In September 1972, I tried once again to seek freedom but vainly. Other comrades understood my case. They secretly advised me to overcome pains to wait for a more favorable occasion. They promised with me whenever possible they would rally to the RVN Government.

And that occasion happened... After enjoying Tết Days in Kratié Province, some comrades and I were designated to work in Binh Duong as illustrators.

2 comrades Chuong, Nghĩa and I rallied to the Police Station in Phú Cường Village on 27 February 1973.

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Now 30 years old, I think I have still time necessary to rebuild my life. I promise I'll do my best to become a useful citizen in my country and especially in this beloved South region of mine. /.

10-3-1973

THÁI SANG