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NATIONAL LETTERS AND ARTS

Confidence of 12 Freedom Seekers in 1973

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WE CHOSE FREEDOM

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CONTENT

FOREWORD

LE HUYEN	CONFIDENTIAL FEELINGS	1st ARTICLE
-"-	INTERVIEW	2nd ARTICLE
DO QUYET	THE TELEPHONE BELL AND MY LIFE	3rd ARTICLE
LE VAN THANH	SAIGON AND TWO TRIPS	4th ARTICLE
TRAN TAN PHAT	I LEFT THE COMMUNIST RANK	5th ARTICLE
THAI SONG HIEN	THE 2/3 OF LIFE LOST	6th ARTICLE
TRANG VAN PHU	UNFINISHED DREAM	7th ARTICLE
THAI SANG	AFTER UNDERSTANDING THE TRUTH	8th ARTICLE
VO HONG TUOI	THE LEFT FACE OF COMMUNISTS	9th ARTICLE
VO TU CHUONG	10 YEARS WITH MISTAKEN THOUGHTS	10th ARTICLE
NGUYEN NGHIA	THE NIGHT-MARE	11th ARTICLE
NGUYEN HOAN	THE MAN LOSING GOLDEN YOUTH	12th ARTICLE
HO NGOC DUNG	HOPELESS DAYS AND MONTHS	13th ARTICLE

## FOREWORD

In 1973, after the Cease Fire Agreement on ending the war and restoring peace in Vietnam was signed by all parties concerned in Paris, many political observers realized clearly that the Vietnamese Communist ranks were strongly agitated to lead to a serious disorganization in their clan unable to advance before the fierce and protracted resistance of the Army Of The Free South Vietnam.

The great world events in recent months have brought serious disadvantages to the Communist plans for activities and have created series of difficult problems that have increased the confusion of Vietnamese Communist leaders who have been unable to correctly and effectively explain the contradictions for the knowledge of their subordinates. The effect of the conflict between The Free World and The Communist Clan has appeared more and more clearly: Finally the Communists will be defeated in the Psywar due to their invasion plot aimed at dominating the whole world.

An evident proof is that in SVN, a great number of Communist elements left their ranks to choose freedom.

These freedom seekers belong to different social strata: a great number of released V. C. prisoners asked the permission to stay and live in the RVN not to be handed to the other site, another number of Communists risked their lives to cross the frontier of Cambodia to survive in the Free South Vietnam, another number in the circle of writers and artists promised with one another to collectively rally to the Nationalist Government. A great majority of these freedom seekers were former cadres having important functions in the Communist ranks.

Each freedom seeker had a different past. But generally speaking, they had to live in a common tragic play, a type of nightmare in the hermetically closed Communist Hell with daily suffocative atmosphere. That tragic play had following characteristics:

(1) Communists can never win in both the military and political fields in SVN.

(2) The incredible sacrifices The Party has forced the NVN people and army to bear become useless, irrational and inhuman when everybody sees and feels only a sinister future

(3) **Supposing that Communism meet with success to build the socialist regime under which all people have been totally impoverished as in NVN, where is the real purpose of the struggle?**

**Through the confidence of 12 freedom seekers we have carefully collected, we hope that our readers will clearly and deeply understand the immense bitterness and despair and fear of persons that have erroneously lost more than a half of their lives that has been the common denominator of the common tragic play in which the People are Poor Victims.**

**The Publisher**

**LE HUYEN**

**Confidential Feelings**

**Photograph**

**LE HUYEN, alias LE THANH TUAN Movies Picture Producer, V. C. Studio, 5th Inter-Region, Member of The Propaganda-Training Section, 5th Inter-Region (Phu Yen, Da Nang, Pleiku, Kontum, Ban Me Thuot, born on 1 April 1930 in Hue, having wife + 2 children, graduated from The Soviet Movies Picture College in the Branch For Stage-Manager 1960-1964.**

**LE HUYEN entered the Communist Propaganda Group in February 1948, The Party in 1949, infiltrated into the South in January 1968 to be arrested on 25 November 1969 at Thang Binh District, Quang Tin Province by the RVNAF**

**On 25 March 1973 at 10.00 A.M., on the Bien Hoa Air Field, 210 Vietnamese Communist war prisoners, after released by the RVN Government, cried fearfully when guided to the helicopters to be handed to the Communist side later at the release point according to the clauses of the Paris Agreement. They fiercely denied the advance, firmly rejected the invitation to step into the planes and insistently asked the permission to stay and live in the Free South Vietnam. They wanted to renounce the Communist regime determinedly.**

**Their attitude made public opinion in Vietnam and foreign countries totally agitated. And I was one among those 210 freedom seekers.**

**Myself, I erroneously sacrificed more than a half of my life for The Party and The Communist regime. I desire to use these lines to relate my confidential feelings and thoughts during those unforgettable days in successive ups and downs so as to expose one part of deep reasons that motivated me to suddenly and boldly risk my own life to choose freedom on 25 March 1973, the memorable day when I stepped from the Red Hell into the Free Paradise.**

The 19 August 1945 Revolution occurred noisily, brilliantly, tumultuously with waves and waves of demonstrators when I was a young pupil of the Viet Anh High School (now Nguyễn Trĩ Phú High School) in Hue, in the very age of beautiful dream liking adventurous activities that led me to the Viet Minh Teenager Group considered by adults at that period as REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION defeating French imperialists and expelling Japanese aggressors to preserve Independence and Freedom for the people. Truly speaking, at that moment I had not to bear any damages created by those French and Japanese and I was still unable to understand the real meaning and form of the so-called National Independence.

In 1946, the French troops recaptured Hue City. Viet Minh cadres hastened to flee. At that very moment I was a liaison agent in the rank of a Combat Self-Guard Unit. I had to follow my parents to evacuate to the vicinity of the city then to Quang Tri Province where unable to bear more miseries and hardships my parents and relatives firmly returned to Hue to live in the areas controlled by the French authorities. As a Communist liaison agent I dared not follow my family to avoid possible punishments of the French troops. My survival road was reluctantly leaving my parents to go to fight in the Viet Minh war zone.

So, I participated in the propaganda activities, following the Psywar entertainment group to sing, cry, perform plays and compose poems... to urge the mass to resist against the French Colonists to protect villages and preserve independence. I worked for the propaganda agency then for the Security Service in letters and arts. I became more and more enthusiastic in improving my profession I had to overcome perils and hardships to be praised as "hero". Due to this reason in 1949, when the Indochina Communist Party was rapidly enlarged and reinforced, I was accepted as a member. Year after year, I studied and analysed the history of the Communist Party, I was able to understand that the above enlargement and reinforcement of The Party aimed to gather and control the neutral oscillating elements as the bourgeois intellectuals first to heighten the prestige of The Party and second to offer the "GLORY" cover to the neutral oscillating elements mentioned above so that they had the madness to rush themselves to the struggle furnace. At that period, in the military and civilian organs of The Party, a great majority of important functions were seized by the above neutral oscillating elements.

Before entering The Party we were promised by responsible cadres that we might enjoy complete equality regardless of differences in social class in the universal world. All world people would be considered as members in a great family. There would be neither poor nor rich persons. Each

individual might enjoy happiness with satisfied requirements. What a marvelous paradise! What a perfect ideology! All persons smiled happily. Myself I was totally attracted by propaganda cadres.

But the contradictions more and more terrible appeared soon... I was frightened by diverse political reorientation meetings to reform thoughts of party-members organized in accordance with the "experiences" of CHICOM, a brother socialist country. I was more frightened when in those "political reorientation meetings" I was taught that The Party was The Party Of Workers And Peasants and that other social elements following The Party's policy line should reform their thoughts through an extremely long and painful process. On this basis, the political reorientation meetings seemed to turn the sharp attack point into me. I was suspected by teaching cadres for having "relatives" and "family" living in enemy controlled areas and having peace-loving thoughts as well as attempt to rally to the enemy side. I was considered as an element having the desire to flee to the French controlled zone and the courage to read the leaflets dropped down by French pilots. I was mercilessly accused of having weak, romantic thoughts, desiring to let relatives live under the French control, having not a clear cut hatred toward Imperialists to have still the joy to receive money from family, I was obliged to stay in a jungle of the "Ba Long" war zone, Quang Tri Province for nearly two months to be daily accused as so. I became extremely confused and fearful.

After 15 days of "repentance", sitting correctly to note the mistakes in accordance with the above concept in many pages of paper, I was told by guiding cadres that I would be assisted by them to reach progress. Like a person nearly drowned seizing a bamboo cane, I merrily accepted their suggestion and promised:

-I would have a clear-cut hatred toward imperialists by cutting off all familial relations and by denying money sent by my parents to me.

-I would write Psyop letters to summon my younger brothers and sisters to leave the French controlled zone for our "War Zone".

-I would swear that I would be faithful toward The Party by accepting all activities and missions regardless of perils, by sacrificing my own life for The Party, weeding out bad, bourgeois thoughts in a strict manner.

-I would never have romantic love but obey the order of The Party whenever building my own family with the girl that I love.

Now everytime thinking of the last day when I wrote those confession lines to reach progress, I feel that I was no longer myself. My conscience mistreated me and my thoughts made my mind terribly agitated. My sufferings were beyond my imagination, the imagination of a 23 year youth. At last I was obliged to follow The Party completely though this surrender was not sincere and innocent as at the beginning when I entered it. I had germs of suspect and the sin complex. I also feel that my younger brothers and sisters in Hue were really wise not to follow my "mistaken" appeals. Ah! If not, my repentance will become eternal.

The 1953-1954 war was extremely terrible to end at Dien Bien Phu front. My enthusiasm in Psywar entertainment activities along with my colleagues helped me partly forget the spiritual crisis created by the 1954 political reorientation meetings.

In 1954, Peace was restored on the whole Indochina peninsula, I erroneously thought that my life became better and better. But unexpectedly my country was divided into 2 parts. In Quang Tri Propaganda Center I was taught that a general election would be organized two years later so that we might return the native place from the North. This was only a temporary division. The French troops had to withdraw. I had to temporarily forget my ardent desire to meet my relatives again after many years of separation to struggle in the Resistance rank, I regretted much for swearing to follow The Party. Just at that very moment I was consoled by the promise that after reaching the North I would be trained more in letters and arts to become highly instructed artist. So, once again, I dared to have the courage to disobey the advice of my father and reject his demand to have a rendez-vous with me in Quang-Tri Province before going to the North. Due to this ungrateful denial I was praised by The Party for having "clear cut separation" with Imperialists Alas! When I write these confidential lines, my beloved and poor father is sleeping eternally underground in his grave built in 1968. Daddy! I sincerely hope that your sacred and geneous soul is pleased to forgive me, your ungrateful son. Daddy! please, understand me.

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In the North, from 1954 to 1959 I worked for the Communist 4th Region Propaganda Agency in Psywar entertainment activities (Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh Provinces). Later I was designated to work in the Cultural Ministry in Hanoi. Myself, I was an active cadre in the Psywar Entertainment Branch to oppose the 1954-1955 emigration. I also participated in the Land Reform Movement as a bourgeois intellectual element studying to have thoughts reformed and brain washed to be classified as a faithful poor farmer element of The Party.

What a bitter thing! When oppressing the NVN inhabitants rushing to flee to the South according to the Geneva Agreement I suddenly felt my decision to regroup to the North partly agitated and irrational. My thoughts were oscillating: "Why am I so mad to go to the North when millions of NVN people rush to flee to the South?" Thus at that very moment, The Party and State propagandized that those escapees had Imperialist thoughts indoctrinated by the French Colonists and deceived by a number of NVN traitors. I was once again forced to follow the teachings of The Party but had series of doubts though my activity area was Nghe An, province of most fanatic Pro-Communist elements famous with the 1930-1931 Nghe Tinh Soviet Movement. I had doubts but I dared not express my thoughts. Also at that very moment I was taught by The Party that the correct implementation of The Geneva Agreement was not important because signing it was only a temporary stratagem. The basic thing was using violence in all cases to defeat those daring to oppose The Communist Party and State.

Tens of thousands of party-members, innocent inhabitants, Resistance combatants were accused, insulted and mercilessly massacred in The Land Reform Movement. This cruelty made me extremely anxious for my own fate especially when I was taught by The Party that the purpose at that period of the Communist policy "Land to The Tiller" was making it bloody to completely destroy the class of landlords, overthrow the class of rich farmers, reform the thoughts of rural bourgeois elements (middle level farmers). It's useless to relate here the inhuman accusations of fathers by sons and vice-versa or to condemn here the immoral mutual massacres between husbands and wives to express the faithfulness toward The Party, The Class of Poor Farmers. All of you, dear readers, have been told about those deadful scenes or have eye-witnessed them. What I desire to touch on here was the Communist intention to punish the meritorious combatants in the Anti-French Resistance, the neutral oscillating party members by arguing that they were backward before the progressive objectives of The Party desiring to rush rapidly to the Collectivism and Socialism. The Party leaders paid no longer attention to distinguishing enthusiastic fighters against French Colonists from those that dared to immorally accuse their parents. The elements that denounced the others most falsely most noisily were considered having firmest standpoint. Those irrational, strange, complex and incomprehensible arguments made me both astonished and frightened. To save myself and particularly hide my contemptible bourgeois intellectual class I began to madly cry, eagerly denounce, falsely insult, continuously run here and there among the poor mass to be recognized as "a progressive element".

Time glided away as so till the Movement of "NHÂN VĂN GIAI PHẠM", an Anti Party Literary Movement to claim for the Freedom of Speech in the Letters and Arts. These ironic verses of Lê Đạt:

MODELS OF "SONGS AND POEMS" KILL THE FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS OF MUSICIANS AND POETS. HUMAN LOVE IS GUIDED BY THE STATE'S LAW AS A VEHICLE RUNNING ON THE ROAD BY THE POLICEMAN.

or these bitter sentences of Trần Dần:

"I step forwards... seeing no house, no street but red flags on which are falling very fine drops of drizzle".

or this stubborn conclusion of Phùng Quán:

"I'll never transform love into hatred though well treated by other comrades. And vice-versa I'll never transform hatred into love though menaced by man-killers."

suddenly created pleasant feeling in my mind because these verses and sentences spoke out the real impressions of the soul of MAN. That sudden natural pleasant feeling unfortunately led me to the Self Control Section where I was criticized for agreeing with the thoughts of imperialists and traitors daring to oppose The Party and State in the NHÂN VĂN GIAI PHẠM Movement. Once more, I reluctantly accepted my shortcomings to be considered as "a progressive element", I must sincerely confess with all of you, dear readers, that at that period I was extremely frightened by the accusation scenes in which a rather great number of neutral oscillating party members were condemned and expelled away from The Party because after being punished or expelled those poor elements met with incredible calamities and mistreatments.

Therefore I enthusiastically studied Culture in night class at that period. My demand was rejected by the "Worker-Farmer" Advanced Education School because I was classified in the bourgeois intellectual class. I also strictly worked in TDY by perfectly executing all orders of The Party to satisfy all responsible cadres in The Party and State. I had to do so to decrease the concern of theirs to these "bad points" and "shortcomings" in my "personal" data":

(1) Bourgeois element with confusion and agitation in mind having not yet the firm standpoint of workers and farmers.

(2) Having relations with enemies (parents living in the zone controlled by The Nationalist Government).

(3) Working in the letters-and-arts branch with free and romantic thoughts of the bourgeois and capitalist classes.

When living in such an unstable and precautions manner I said to myself to do my best to improve my technique as much as possible so that my talent would be able to let responsible cadres partly forget the above "bad points" and "shortcomings" in my "personal data".

In 1959, I passed the examination to the College for Film and Stage Managers in Hanoi after finishing the 10th Form (i. e. after passing the baccalaureat examination organized for night classes, and was classified among the excellent students to be noted by the Soviet Advisor in the MOPIC branch in NVN named F BRAGUIMOV who proposed with the DRVN Cultural Ministry that I'd have a scholarship to go to study in the U. S. S. R. along with 4 other students in the same branch of film and stage managers. This proposal was approved and I was extremely happy to prepare for my trip for having the occasion to better my technique in the branch of letters and arts. However, I dared not inform my chance to other colleagues for fear that they would falsely denounce me due to their jealousy. If there was any opposition, my trip would be immediately annulled. This anxiety lasted for two years of study in the College for Film and Stage Managers in Moscow. One day I was told that Mr. Lê Liêm, Deputy Secretary of Culture and a Politburo member responsible for the cultural activities of this Ministry was dismissed due to his revisionist thoughts in selecting NVN students to go to study abroad. He was condemned for paying stricter attention to the talent than to the social class of the selected elements. In fact, faithful Communist leader Lê Liêm was considered by us "progressist" because he paid little attention to the "bad points" of personal data" of the cadres in the branch of letters of arts. Due to his selection, most of about 300 students in this branch in the Soviet Union belonged to the bourgeois class. Many were not party or group members. And speaking more correctly, if Lê Liêm did not select students as so, how could he find out talented germs in letters and arts to pass the entrance-examinations of the Soviet College of Letters and Arts?

In my study period from 1963 to 1964 in the Soviet Union, I witnessed the development of the Soviet Revisionism proposed by KRUSHCHEV and the results of the internal conflict of the so-called Socialist Community Bloc.

It seemed that that internal conflict was so great to become irreconcilable. In such a way I was condemned by Hanoi cadres for having numerous mistaken thoughts in the political field due to the Revisionist propaganda, contrary to the policy line of Hanoi Government at that period. Truly speaking, I liked the policy of KRUSHCHEV at that time due to following reasons:

-He exposed the "economic emulation in peace" policy aimed at developing the economy to improve the people's living standards and basing on the economic progress to evaluate the political regime.

-He believed that all types of wars and conflicts would be solved by negotiations.

-He proposed the improvement of Soviet-American foreign relations and the sincere cooperation between these two world powers.

-He accepted to reduce the control of thoughts for cadres and persons serving in the branch of letters and arts.

At that period, there was serious tension among overseas Vietnamese students. Many became agents for the DRVN Ambassador besides the strict control of The Party's Security Net. Each of our actions, words was strictly noted. We might not have free relations even with Soviet students or students coming from other countries. The characters of MAN in me began to revolt, react on one hand. But on the other, they advised me to be patient to end my study program not to be expelled from the Soviet Union. My mind was troubled by complex feelings, thoughts and undescrivable anxiety, such a contradictory, tense, fearful life continued for 2 remaining school years. But at last . . . . the inevitable calamity occurred.

In the summer of 1964, The Overseas NVN Students Association Party Committee in Moscow and the DRVN Embassy here received an order from The Central Committee in Hanoi to repatriate all Overseas Vietnamese students in the Soviet Union and other Eastern Europe Countries so that they might study the policy line and the resolution of The Party. All travel fees, all necessary papers and procedures were correctly and timely paid by the DRVN Ambassador and the Overseas NVN Students Association Party Committee. Among the circle of NVN students, there was the rumour that after repatriating they would no longer be allowed to return to the Soviet Union because according to the past experience the Albanian, Chicom students had to be repatriated by their own Governments in such a manner.

In August 1964, I had to leave Moscow for home, mind totally confused and frightened with immense regret not to be allowed to stay longer in Moscow to realize the film of our graduation day from the College For Film And Stage Managers in accordance with the rule of this Establishment reserved for foreign students.

After stepping down on the platform of the HANG CỎ Railways Station, each overseas student might stay only a night at home to be present next morning at The Economic And Finance College in Hanoi lying on the street leading to the Bach Mai Hospital for a "study". This meant that for 15 successive days in strict control, we had to express our own thoughts to have them compared with the Resolution 9 of The Party or The Anti Soviet Revisionism Resolution. In this study, one accused the others of smallest details as: wearing dress cut in accordance <sup>with</sup> Soviet modern fashion, having friendly attitude toward Soviet girl students, manners on the training ground, pro-Soviet arguments etc. . . Those mistakes were considered as proofs to accuse the victims of having revisionist thoughts to oppose THE PARTY AND STATE in NVN, the Vietnamese people, the Revolutionary Liberation War in SVN. Once again, I reluctantly exposed all thoughts of mine for the criticism to be considered a "progressist" with the hope that I might return to the Soviet modern studio to make movies pictures. After 15 days, Tô Hữu Secretary, Party Central Committee, Chief of Thought Control Branch, Chairman of The Committee of Letters And Arts visited us to declare that we should no longer need to go to the Soviet Union because our deeper study would bring only harm not interest to The Party.

As others, I felt extremely desperate. <sup>more desperate were</sup> Those that ended only the 1st, the 2nd or the 3rd year in Soviet Colleges. At that very moment only could we understand that the "circumspection" of The Party when ordering us to repatriate aimed at such a bitter fact. More bitter and ironical was the exaggerated prudence of The NVN Party And State toward 3,000 students repatriating from the Soviet Union, two months later. When we returned to the HANG CỎ Railways Station to receive our luggage from the Soviet Union we realized that everything being in terrible disorder inside, pairs of right shoes and pairs of left shoes: no matching.

I received the function as movies pictures producer in the studio: HANOI STORIES in October 1964 after having political reorientation for 2 weeks in the MOPIC Department, Cultural Ministry about The Party Policy In The Letters And Arts. In November 1964, I had "my thought reform" for 3 months in the rural area to have realistic study. In May 1965, I wrote along with my colleague, stage-manager HUY THANH a scenario named: "The Wind Is Rising" adapted from a play of the same name

composed by Major DAC HONG CAM, a dramatist of the NVN Army. This film of 2,800 meters long, black and white, 35mm size, was produced in late 1966 among the bitterness and anxiety of my colleague and mine.

In this film we praised the revolt of the NFLSVN by calumniating the U.S. and RVN Governments to be very appropriate with the requirements of The NVN Party And State. Inevitably we tried to mix something of ourselves inside the film. Due to this point we became famous among the circle of NVN letters and arts. In the whole NVN there was the unique studio: "Hanoi Stories" that was able to produce yearly from 3 to 5 sentimental social films though having about 20 producers and stage managers. So I might not make the 2nd film immediately. I was designated to produce dramas in The Central Theatrical Mopic Group and also to improve the technics in performing plays of actors and actresses.

In late 1967, when my mission being in the advantageous and progressive run, the personnel section in the Cultural Ministry transmitted to me an order from The Party Central Committee to send me Southwards. I was explained that the South region was going to a more brilliant phase; The 3/4 of territory and the 4/5 of population were liberated by The NFLSVN. The final victory would come soon. One needed the presence of technicians in all branches particularly in the branch of Letters And Arts to note the historic victory when The Liberation Troops occupy the capital Saigon as well as the struggle activities in the branch of Letters And Arts against enemies (i. e. against the SVN nationalists) under the regime of a Coalition Government. Being very tired of the difficult living condition and the strict censure regime in the branch of Drama and Mopic and very discontent with the oppressing and despotical uninstructed method of work of The Managing Board of my studio I was glad to accept the order and was ready to fly to the South. Another rather important reason was that I desired to make the films in accordance with the neutral policy of the Coalition Government to compare them with the movies pictures of NVN. Naturally, at that period, if I had the courage to deny the infiltration Southwards, there would be a study meeting for criticism and self-criticism and possibly I'd be expelled mercilessly from The Party to be sent to a "Thought Reform" Center as the cases of Musician Hoang Van and many other persons. So I accepted to go to the South reluctantly.

I was ordered to come to a jungle and mountainous area, in Hoa Binh Province to practise climbing cols, carrying heavy luggage, washing brain;

Then I was informed I should go to work in The Mopic Studio of the 5th Inter-Region (territory running from Da Nang to Phu Yen Province), still the High Plateau with Kontum, Giarai, Darlac Provinces etc.... I understood my perils but I dared not speak out my complaints. The infiltrators to the South were usually allowed to act in their native villages. Myself I was not permitted to work in Tri Thien Province though the Mopic group there had no stage manager. This fact made me thinking of the bad prejudice of The Party toward me and my bourgeois intellectual class. The Party feared that my return to the native province after 25 years of separation would possibly create confusion in my mind. In reality, that bad prejudice of the Party created genuine hatred in my heart.

After a secret and silent farewell party in a jungle and mountainous area of Hoa Binh Province, I stepped Southwards along with the civilian group including 5 young Mopic technicians very young, in age as well as in profession.

-Come on! quick! comrades! If not, you'll lose the good opportunity to make an interesting film about the reception of S igon Capital.

-Come on! quick! comrades! South Vietnamese brother compatriots have impatiently waited for you.

-Come on! quick! comrades! Don't fear. The Liberation troops will protect you, the men in the Branch of Letters and Arts as much as they can.....

These were the last encouragement words of propaganda cadres before we were transported to the South by truck.

I had no regret when leaving the North. I felt still discontent when thinking of the days I served in the Branch of Letters and Arts in NVN.

3 months glided away along the Truong Son Range. The cold wind on high, deserted cols made me totally exhausted, exhausted both materially and spiritually. Adieu jungles, adieu mountains, you are no longer themes in my romantic dreams. You can no longer attract my curiosity as formerly in the hours of geography in my elementary class. Now, you are only blood currents from my abraded skin along arms and legs on my body due to the ill treatment of wild slugs, leeches. You are also sweat currents impregnating the dust and stone along those high slopes, in those narrow trails, through the dangerous sharp and slick rocks. Only a simple loss of equilibrium caused by carelessness could throw the body of the victim down into the deep chasm bottom.

The Mậu Thân Tết came when I lived on the dry and burning territory of Laos. Hanoi Radio cunningly announced starting news so that we, in the Mopic group had to complain stamping feet: "Alas! we have lost the chance to make a film about the victorious minute". Hanoi Radio spoke out that all SVN cities and provinces had been liberated and continued on propagandizing for the reception of such urban areas. At that time, our group had to advance by climbing through the highest cols and mountains not to be bombarded by enemy planes. What a bitter contradiction! But we could not avoid feeling impatient along the road that seemed endless and made our advance extremely slow. The concentration camp was still very far, very far from our reach.

However, one day we stopped in a jungle in Quang Nam Province. We seemed to be in Mid-April. Two day later, a liaison agent came to guide us to a place named "The Propaganda-Training Section of MR: 5 Party Committee". The studio was a branch of this Section. First, we had "brain washing" to be indoctrinated by the victorious situation after our Mậu Thân Tết general offensive. Figures and facts were tumultuously exposed or spoken out daily. We had doubts but we dared not to ask our higher authorities for explanations for fear that we would be criticized for mistaken thoughts. Fortunately for me, one day I met my close literary friends as poet and writer Bùi Minh Quốc, musician Phan Huy Diệu and many others in the Branch of Letters and Arts. They looked at me, negatively shook their head, bitterly smiled, secretly said to me: "Prepare your bag to go to take rice". Then they related series and series of funny contradictions in the Mậu Thân Tết general offensive. They thought they had no longer the chance to survive. They showed me their rucksacks in which I saw their beautiful uniforms they would wear to receive the SVN cities and provinces. They said that their composition met with deadlock because they were unable to imagine victories in accordance with the orders of the Party. They advised me to leave the jungle and avoid hardships. Dear me! my dreams were terribly broken up once again: I became extremely confused and fearful for my own fate. But how could I repair my broken dreams? I firmly decided to escape from the general deadlock of writers and artists under the Liberation regime. But how? How could I do to save my own life first and solve my living condition later? I thought, deeply thought... I decided to write a scenario for my coming extremely attractive film in accordance with the: "Anti American, National Salvation" requirement of the Party MR: 5 Party Committee so as to ask the permission to go down to the plain to observe the realities.

In reality the studio of the MR: 5 Party Committee had the name only not the real value in the technical meaning. It had some old fashioned

cameras and a number of rolls of film. We could do nothing worthy with such tools. But despite this fact, I was allowed by the deceived, uninstructed Propaganda-Training Section/MR: 5 Party Committee to go to study the situation in Quang Ngãi Province.

I reached this place along with other Mopic members in May 1968. Though this is the name of Quang Ngãi Province, it has only jungle, mountain & some deserted villages in the neighbourhood under the control of The Liberation Front. After nearly a month of malaria illtreatment to be terribly menaced by the GOD OF DEATH I tried to get up to drag my completely exhausted legs down to those villages in the plain controlled by The Liberation Front to study activity scenes for my imaginary film.

In August 1968, I followed the VC 83rd Regular Battalion of Quang-Ngai Province to "liberate" the East of Tu Nghia area including Tu An, Tu Hien, Tu Nguyen villages etc... After living here for a week I was extremely depressed before the complete destructions of regional houses by the rounds of B40. Mines of guerrilla units were displayed everywhere so that ourselves, we needed the guidance of responsible liaison agents. No inhabitant stayed in this "Liberated" area. The regional people had to flee to the safety zone. I asked the unit responsible for the security here about my fate in the troubled moment and I was told that nobody would protect me. I had not rice to prepare my meals. They met with the same difficulty due to the complete evacuation of regional inhabitants. When knowing that I desired to have some photographs of the unit, the battalion commanding board introduced me to a 30-man concentrated company. A reporter of "The Liberation Flag" in the MR: 5 took an "exposure" and decided to write under the photograph: "This is the Assault Platoon of The Concentrated Company". I was unable to make an imaginary film about nonexistent victories. I was unable to follow such a strange requirement of The Party. I sadly left the Mopic group to wander about the trails thoughtfully... I began to write plays and train The Psywar Entertainment Group of Quang Ngãi Province in performing such plays. When being criticized by the VC higher ranking authorities for the incompetence in making a film about victories of The Front around Da Nang Province (called by VC Quang Da Province including a number of districts as Duy Xuyen, Dai Loc belonging to Quang Nam Province), I searched for means to rally to the RVNAF. This was the plain truth. So, I was arrested by the RVNAF on 23 November 1969 in Thang Binh District, Quang Tin Province.

Nearly 18 months after infiltrating into the South, I was extremely discontent when understanding the false and deceitful propaganda of The

NVN Party and State. The Liberation Troops died of starvation, disease and accident met when obliged to search for rice along the trail, in a corner of jungle, on the brink of a spring when The Party and State spoke out of imaginary victories of The Liberation Army. The Liberation Secret Headquarters continuously changed its place to avoid the destruction of RVN bombshellings. When the Liberation camps were secretly positioned in deserted, deep jungles where the Liberation troops could not listen to The Liberation Radio, The Party and State falsely propagandized that the 3/4 of SVN territory were occupied by them. Everywhere the regional inhabitants rejected the Liberation Troops, did not lend them pots to cook rice, did not allow them to stay at night, but The Party and State falsely speak out that the 4/5 of the population followed and supported the NFLSVN. What a trick!

In those 18 months in the South, I deeply thought about the "Chieu-Hoi" problem. But I kept this thought in complete secrecy. In case of disclosure, I lost my life inevitably. I was also disturbed by the suspect. I did not know whether the Nationalist Government were really honest in the slogan: "Using Generosity to Annul Hatred and Enmity" and forgive the mistaken elements, followers of Communism for many years as myself. After being successively deceived by the Communist regime, I suspected everything and everybody. I believed only the things that I could touch with my own hands, witness by eyes and ears. After many thoughtful days and months, and after understanding the situation thoroughly, I selected the measure: letting the RVNAF arrest me.

From the arrestation day 23 November 1969 to 25 March 1973, I was detained in the jails reserved for Communist war prisoners under the RVN regime. That period helped me implement the above selected measure to rally to the RVN Government, to choose freedom and firmly reject the Communist regime. Adieu For Ever The Red Hell! My dear readers, remember well that in the jails reserved for Communist war prisoners from the Zone I to Phu Quoc Island and Bien Hoa Province, I was terribly menaced not by the RVN authorities but by my Communist Colleagues just as when I struggled in the Liberation side. Amidst the group of Communist prisoners, I was strictly controlled, menaced to be killed by them. There was also the formation of groups and party sections, the propaganda for revolt and struggle till the last breath etc... I was also menaced by *thân*, that in the future I would be denounced by them.

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For over the half of my life I uselessly served Communists. So I have deeply understood, clearly witnessed and bitterly tasted the different phases of that inhuman regime. The above confidential lines are unable to express the irrationality, the terror and the misery under the Red regime. However I hope that the above simple, sincere stories related by me will help all of you, my dear readers understand how my comrades and myself had to live under the Communist oppression. I also hope that all analysts about the Communist regime will have some facts-more concrete-relating to it. My confidential lines today may be considered specific proofs to explain the question why I choose freedom, why I select the RVN regime to be a MAN with its real meaning.

## 2ND ARTICLE

INTERVIEW IN THE SOUND RECORDING ROOM OF THE RVN ARMY RADIO - WITH QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS BETWEEN A REPORTER OF THE RVN ARMY RADIO AND RALLIER LE HUYEN, VC MOPIC PRODUCER THAT SOUGHT FREEDOM ON 26 MARCH 1973.

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Question: Do you agree with me that it is a great pleasure of ours to talk with each other about the Arts and Letters? Once, you promised with us at Bien Hoa aerodrome that you would touch on the activities of NVN Artists and Writers more clearly and more completely whenever having more free time and better occasion. Well, let's discuss: "The Activities of NVN Artists and Writers Under the Communist Regime".

Answer: In the Artistic and literary activities in the North, generally speaking, we had to strictly depend on the policy line of The NVN Communist Party. It is possible that all world artists and writers including those working in the Communist clan feel astonished when I conclude that NVN Communist leaders totally oppressed the freedom of speech of NVN artists and writers.

Their policy was forcing all these elements to speak out everything in accordance with the requirements of the Socialist regime in the North i. e. those of workers and farmers. All artists and writers in the Free World as well as in the Communist clan have touched on these requirements. But in NVN, the Psywar entertainment group had to compose their works in accordance with the special policy line of The Party, consider workers and farmers as key elements, excellent in action as well as in thought to be praised later as NEW SOCIAL CLASS. Those workers and farmers were suggested by NVN Communist leaders to be described and praised by artists and writers. Those persons were forced to put the affection and respect toward Uncle And The Party above all after under-estimating their familial sentiments and their individual feelings. I firmly believe that a long time ago all of you in the South had the good occasion to read the poems of poets in the NHÂN VĂN GIẢI PHÁM period. I still remember the following verses of Poet LE ĐẠT being imprisoned now in NVN: "THE SECURITY RAILING IS PUT IN THE CENTER OF HEART  
"TO OBLIGE HUMAN FEELINGS TO CIRCULATE IN THE UNIQUE WAY  
"BUC CÔNG AN ĐẠT GIỮA TIM NGƯỜI  
"BẤT TÌNH CẢM NGƯỜC SƯỜI THEO LUẬT ĐI ĐƯỜNG NHÀ NƯỚC

These verses correctly described the content of the present policy of NVN Communist leaders in the branch of Arts and Letters in the sentimental aspect.

In recent years, there was still another movement in which all NVN artists and writers had to live in deep rural areas as well as in genuine factories (myself I had to go to study there) to thoroughly understand the so called "NEW, PROGRESSIVE WORKERS or LABOR EMULATION HEROES". I must confess that a great majority of NVN artists and writers were very discouraging when obliged to write about these model elements. For example: A farmer in Halphong port continued working though the work-time was over to double his production in the factory. But at that very overtime, he was informed that his father being seriously attacked by a dangerous disease in the regional hospital. A comrade of his voluntarily worked to replace him so that he might visit his ill father in the hospital. But the Labor Hero put the production for The Party and State above his filial piety. He continued working in the factory to visit his ill father next morning.

In such a story how could we describe the farmer's genuine feelings correctly? The above thought was totally the model obliged by The Party and State. The farmer had to follow it like a robot. He might never oppose it. In such a condition, how could we praise that strange soulless Labor Hero? Any hero according to The Party and State must be complete, having no shortcoming, no weak point. If we described the scene in which a Hero drank coffee in a tea shop. That Hero lost his honour to become a sinful man because he did not respect the saving regulations.

To let all of you understand this fact more clearly, I desire to expose another proof: In 1967, a Chicom hero whose name I can't remember was obliged by The Party to participate in a study-meeting. All Chicom artists and writers were ordered to study his special character and praise him and other heroes of his type. The produced film showed him entering a tea shop. When asked to drink beer, he fiercely and heroically rejected the invitation. Later, he saw an old tooth brush at the bottom of a garbage box. Furrily the Hero picked it up, cleaned it and happily, proudly used it to brush his teeth to implement the saving policy of The State. When seeing such funny and ironic scenes, we said to one another that if this character was followed by the Chicom people, The State Trade Company would be in total bankruptcy because its manufactured goods would not be bought by anybody.

Before such Chicom Heroes, how could us and others, free artists and writers all over the world, in the Communist as well as in the Free World can praise them or compose a literary or artistic work through them? They had not the human soul, my dear readers. Remember well that that is the policy line about letters and arts in NVN as well as in the so-called NFLSVN. I may conclude as so because most of NVN artists and writers were sent to the South to give guidance to the cadres in the Liberation Front with such weak points and shortcomings. Moreover, in the so-called Liberation zone there was no noteworthy installation to train letters and arts for SVN cadres. I firmly conclude as so because SVN cadres were only taught how to fight against Americans to save the country, how to overthrow the Saigon Traitor Government i. e. the present RVN Government. Please forgive me for using the Communist arguments here. The above objectives were deeply indoctrinated to create hatred in the SVN cadres' minds to transform all good works of the RVN Government and U. S. Authorities into bad proofs to turn that hatred into actions.

Today, I feel the honour to sit near all of you, the reporters of the RVN Army Radio And Press; I had the occasion to contact the RVN combatants when arrested and imprisoned by them. Let me frankly declare that I have rejected my former false propaganda words, erroneous impressions about the RVN combatants when I was still a forced Communist cadre. At that contemptible period I was taught that the RVN combatants had no human conscience, no human sentiment to be only warlike and massacre-like elements ready to shoot at their compatriots at any time. NVN Communists still criticized the tightened legs of trousers of the RVN combatants as those of cowboys and considered this fact a sign of lackey. But they forgot that the Soviet Red Army had the similar type of trousers. I saw the same fashion when studying in the Soviet Union. NVN Communists distorted everything whenever possible. And NVN artists and writers had to speak out such distortions reluctantly.

I desire to expose here a specific proof: the film: "THE WIND IS RISING" in NVN. After graduating from the Soviet College, I had to produce it in accordance with the order of The Party And State.

My colleague HUY THANE and I discussed with each other and decided that we would express a part of our viewpoint in it if possible. We selected a very handsome actor to play the role of a RVN lieutenant graduating from Dalat National Military Academy. He had a very attractive smile with a fine set of teeth. According to us, a Vietnamese student after passing his baccalaureat examination to enter Dalat National Military Academy, had at least a necessary degree of culture to be considered as

an intellectual. Beside his military command technique, he had individual and private sentiments, correct and courteous attitude. But when exposing our viewpoint, we met with fierce reactions. At last, we might only select a young, handsome actor because in the film that RVN Lieutenant rallied to The Front to suit the order of The Party. So the youth and courtesy of the actor did not harm the propaganda policy of Hanoi leaders. Due to the rally of that RVN Lieutenant we might maintain the RVN Lieutenant's handsome and courteous characters in which we desired to secretly express our conception in the form. In the substance of that film, I must frankly confess that the interior thoughts and feelings that pushed the RVN lieutenant into The Front side were not sincere but invented to satisfy the propaganda purpose of Hanoi leaders. The affection of that RVN Lieutenant toward his sister, and his pro-Communist thoughts were completely different from the RVN officers whom I had the occasion to contact. The so-called "viewpoint" of the producer i. e. of mine at that period was erroneous. I had to follow the order of HN leading cadres.

However, I am proud that my colleague HUY THANH and I could express a part of our own viewpoint in that film: "THE WIND IS RISING" in the field of appearance and bearing and living manners.

I desire now to touch on another point. After projecting that film, one day we were menaced by many concerned cadres: "Whenever returning to Hanoi, you would meet with political complications. The girls in Hanoi have loved that RVN Lieutenant Phuong in your film". And whenever walking along with actor THE ANH, playing the role of RVN Lieutenant Phuong in that film, I smiled happily seeing that he was called by the people as Lieutenant Phuong not The Anh as formerly because the actor could already well perform his role. But I felt secretly anxious because the Communist Authorities would pay heed to me and would possibly condemn me for intentionally propagandizing for a RVN Lieutenant among the girls in Hanoi through that film, "THE WIND IS RISING"

I desire to touch on the above point a little more, longer to prove that in NVN or in Chicom particularly speaking, and in the Communist bloc, generally speaking, the actors or actress playing the roles of opponents had a wicked, brutal deformed appearance and vice versa those playing the roles of faithful Communist cadres and combatants had good-looking faces. All of you will laugh if having the occasion to see a Chicom film here. As for me, I did not share this viewpoint with the Communist leaders. When being in the RVN jails, I met Communist deserters that could not flee from their units safely. They were arrested and by imprisoned their leaders. Later they joined the Liberation Army to fight in the South, where they were arrested alive by the RVN troops to be put into the RVN jails. These

elements had the occasion to make a comparison between two detention systems to follow the better side. For example, my friend Nguyen Van Minh was once imprisoned by Communists. In the Communist camp, boy and girl prisoners might disdain him, illtreat him. He had two legs strictly fastened all day and night. Around him there were only cruel, brutal faces.

Contrary to this, in the RVN detention houses, my friends and I met more smiling than cruel persons. We usually thought of the production of a film to expose this easy and generous atmosphere of the RVN jails and the material life of a number of RVN combatants. They are not inhuman, not blind-minded to follow the Communist regime. This decision is born from our own mind. We are not influenced by the RVN.

An interesting film in the Communist side was a literary work already passed through a very strict net of censure. As a film producer, I desire to expose my own case as a concrete proof. First I had to submit my subject and general content summary. After receiving the permission, I began to write the scenario and submitted it to the responsible cadre. After having the second permission I organized everything and everybody to make the main film. Generally speaking, I had to have my whole work censured by many sections, offices, branches at many levels from the studio manager through the Chief of The Mopic Department to the Cultural Ministry then to The Cultural Committee Chief in The Party Central Executive Committee i. e. to Tô Hữu, the Boss of the Branch of Arts and Letters in North Vietnam. Many times, even Tô Hữu, himself was unable to solve the complex problem. He transmitted the whole case to the Politburo of The Party to be finally decided by either Trường Chinh or Phạm Văn Đồng. Alas! my poor literary work had to be controlled by many cadres and chiefs, many directors and party leaders before becoming a film. But this was not the last complication. I had also to draw pictures on papers first to be strictly checked and analyzed by responsible authorities. The Council Of Censure controlled strictly as so through a strict system. Due to this reason, I lost 2 years to make a complete film. For example, my film: "The Wind Is Rising" of 2,800 meters long, size: 35mm lost more than two years (from May 1965 to June 1967) before being projected on the screen for the mass propaganda. Ah! There was still another control.

After the completion of the film, The People's Supreme Council Of Censure had it projected on the screen for its members' comments. These members did not pay concern to the political domain. If through my film, I erroneously or intentionally propandized for the RVN Government to cleverly oppose the Communist regime, I had nothing to complain about if my film was prevented from being projected. But here these members had another manner to censure. Let me expose the strange case of the film entitled: "THE ORIOLE" awarded in Czechoslovakia but prevented from being projected in NVN. In that film, the Anti French heroic child

had to sacrifice the life at last. NVN leaders did not agree with that final death because this mourningful end would badly influence the soul and morale of Communist cadres and soldiers. Due to this reason, the projection of that film was forbidden in NVN. In reality there was nothing anti-Communist in its content. So, I desire to conclude that the censure was very complex not only basing on the political field but also in many other aspects. For example, there was lack of any policy of The Party And State as: an NVN girl married her lover. But in her wedding there was not the support of her group. The film had to be completed or had the projection forbidden. That NVN girl might never live lonely without her group as so under the Communist regime.

Another case occurred in the film: "One Step More With The 2nd Wedding". A woman desired to marry <sup>an</sup> other man. The NVN society did not allow her to do so and condemned her for having a feudalist attempt and action. But that stubborn woman clandestinely married her lover to have a baby and she tried to work hard to nourish her child courageously.

Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thap, Chief Of The Association of Vietnamese Woman criticized that film for blackening the Vietnamese Fair Sex. The North Vietnamese women had to save money and had good behaviour. Due to this reason, the projection of the film was forbidden in the North.

Dear readers, through the above facts, all of you see that the production and projection of films in NVN met with incredible difficulties and obstacles. The simple opposition of the Chief Of The Association Of Vietnamese Women could stop the projection of a film however interesting it might be.

Through the above facts, I desire to demonstrate that there was no freedom but exaggerated oppression in the branch of Arts And Letters in NVN. Due to this reason, NVN artists and writers usually composed verses to satisfy their own spirit and put their written poems in pockets. For example the following one of my friend might never be printed in NVN:

"I wander in the shade of sleeping trees  
"Hanoi electric light care<sup>ss</sup> my body affectionately  
"From bulbs seeming worrisome on the spot  
"Behind me follows my shadow cherishing another  
"Long and round. I ask myself whether  
"They are my shadow and that of my lover.

"Tôi đi dưới hàng cây yên ngủ

"Đến Hanoi chẳng lên tôi tình tứ  
"Đến Hanoi nhìn tôi như tu' là  
"Bóng ngả dài, bóng tròn lại bóng đi theo  
"Nhìn bóng giao nhau lòng chột hời  
"Bóng riêng mình hay bóng cả người yêu

Such a poem might never be printed. If its author dared to print it, he or she would be condemned for having a romantic love and would be sent to the rural area to plough land and plant potato for 3 months. That poet or poetess with weak arms and smooth hands was never able to work hard. So how had he or she the courage to *jest* among the censure authorities? Only that lovesickness and that loneliness were already able to create the uneasiness in the mind of the responsible cadres.

Love in NVN must mix with the struggle against the Americans. Allow me to use some rough words here: even when you are lying on your wife's body, you must think of your "Anti-American-National Salvation" task first. What an ironic thing! How can you think of your struggle against enemies when you and your wife are taking sexual relations? If you must say so, you bluntly and stubbornly lie, don't you?

Due to the shortage of time and the limit of this interview, I am unable to relate the content of all stories or films written or made by me and severely criticized by NVN cadres for touching on love. The censure system covered not only the Mople Branch but also the poems, musical songs. The listeners of Hanoi Radio might never enjoy any sentimental song. Musician Phan Huỳnh Điểu (pen name Huy Quang), working now in the Association of Artists And Letters in the VC Military Region: 5, had many songs of his in his file. These songs of love might never be printed in NVN but secretly generalized among confidential literary friends. I'm sorry that I'm not a musician so that I'm unable to expose some cases here. However the content of such songs of love was like that of the never printed poem composed by Bui Minh Quốc.

In the North, musician Van Cao, the composer of the National Anthem Tiên Quân Ca for the DRVN and also of the famous song: Paradise, had to draw paintings and illustrations for newspapers, magazines and books to earn his living instead of composing songs in the present easy, peaceful phase when the socialist regime is already on the road to the progress. It was so because the production of songs was unable to nourish him especially in the period when the Party's policy was strict and hard as mentioned above. There is still the case of poet Xuân Diệu. Now he

ceases composing poems to train youths because his poems in the TỰ LỰC VĂN ĐOÀN time along with those of Chế Lan Viên, Vũ Huy Cận were severely condemned by the North Communist regime. In the study of the National Culture, the TỰ LỰC VĂN ĐOÀN was fearfully criticized. NVN Artists and Writers have temporarily ceased their composition to wait for the development of the South Free Regime. Let me frankly declare that the NVN Authorities have been very confused before the good treatment, the meaningful respect of the free regime in the RVN toward the circles of Artists and Writers.

Though they are waiting for the development of the South Free Regime, they try from time to time to express their oppositions and discontents in a secret manner among their groups or circles. Fortunately for me, I studied from the Soviet Union not from Chicom. So in particular conversations and literary discussions, they let me know some personal thoughts and viewpoints. They don't have such confidential talks with those coming from Chicom universities. Chicom is considered by us a bad land for North Vietnamese artists and writers. In NVN there were two different circles in the Administration as well as in the Society of Arts and Letters. The pro-Chicom circle decided to oppress the mind of intellectuals as strictly as possible while the pro-Soviet circle had a less severe policy line. However, according to my viewpoint, both circles were despotical and led the NVN artists and writers to a complete deadlock.

In one word, I desire to conclude that under the Communist regime in NVN, the artists and writers have not the freedom in composing their literary and artistic works even to praise the Vietnamese people, the beautiful feelings and the high spirit of the Vietnamese race. All poems, songs, stories etc... must follow the Anti-American-National Salvation policy line or the South Liberation Struggle. They are written in accordance with the same models. So they are nearly alike in content. There is nothing interesting and valuable from the very heart or soul of artists and writers. When going to the South in accordance with the order of The Party And State, we feel nothing enthusiastic and attractive to praise the so-called The South Liberation Struggle. On the Biên Hòa Aerodrome, once I touched on a report written by Bùi Mỹ Quốc entitled: "Victory In Hội An Municipality" in Mậu Thân Tet general offensive. After two thoughtful months, he was unable to write a conclusion for this article. He had to end it with the following tasteless sentence: "The aurora appears and announces the brighter future of this municipality" to have it censured and printed. The NVN Authorities tried to know why he was unable to praise their victories in the Mau Than General Offensive

through many criticism and self-criticism meetings. Let me frankly declare that all NVN artists and writers obliged to fight in the South never recognize and praise those imaginary victories. A proof was that Nguyễn Ngọc, Chief Of The Association Of Artists And Writers in the VC Region: 5 or Trung Bộ Region had to flee from Hà Nẵng to the Lao frontier through deep and dense jungles along with his money on that occasion. He decided to use this sum to organize a banquet to entertain the SVN Artists and Writers and welcome the complete liberation of The South on Mậu Thân Tết days after the general offensive and general revolt. But this was a bitter defeat. So how can we recognize and praise that unfinished and defeated offensive?

This strange story was told to me by confidential literary friends on the brink of a spring not in the study-meetings in April 1968 when I reached the South.

Question: Dear Mr. Lê Huyền, in 1945 you left Huế and Việt Anh High School to join the Anti-French Resistance. Was it true that you were pushed by your passion of Arts And Letters to enter the Communist Party later and go to study in the Mopic Course in the Soviet College in 1960? Was it true that that passion urged you in 1968 to go to the South to make historic films about The Liberation Of The South? Was it true that later you left the jungle to return to the plain, Quảng Nam, Quảng Ngãi, Quảng Tín provinces and Thăng Bình district to prepare for the arrestation by the RVN AF in 1969? Please let's know why in the above period you wrote plays instead of making films and made films instead of writing plays in such a confused state of mind? By what cause you did not return to the Communist side when released by the RVN Government on 25 March 1973 in Bien Hoa when you had good opportunity to rejoin the Liberation Front. On that occasion one of your sentences made many persons moved. You said that it was better for you to be shot dead immediately by the RVN military policemen than be obliged to return to the Communist side. Please let us know more details about this fact.

Answer: I can reaffirm that my past activities have been correctly noted by all of you. I was a cadre acting for a very long time in the Communist side. And it was that long period that made my decision to rally to the Free World regime firmer and firmer to enjoy the remaining years of the last half of my life. After reviewing my past activities thoughtfully I realized that in 1945 I was pushed strongly by The Student And Youth Movement. In reality I know nothing about Communism but the Anti-French resistance to maintain the national independence. After the defeat

of French colonists, speaking French less frequently was already good.

Truly I had the passion of Arts And Letters. So in 1945 I did not obey the letter-content and advice of my family. I left home to serve in the Psywar Entertainment Propaganda Group of Quang Tri to go to the North later. I did so with the hope to have study in the branch of Arts And Letters. I was deceived at that period. I was considered by NVN cadres as a bourgeois element, having family living in the area controlled by enemies not to be allowed to study in "The Worker And Farmer Advanced Education School". This first discontent made me angry toward the Communist despotical regime. As a party member, I was in a deadlock position. I did not know how and what to do to leave it. Really speaking, though being a party member, I thoroughly understood the Communist regime only in the period from 1959 to 1964 when I lived in a foreign country: the Soviet Union and witnessed the Revisionism in practice. I agreed with this viewpoint of the Soviet Government. According to my analysis, the Revisionism has led the Soviet regime partly back to the capitalism with private property right. This has been a reasonable turning point because the leading cadres have been unable to impoverish the mass in the long run.

Due to this reason, I had the clear cut attitude to leave the irrational Communist side I had well known on Bien Hoa Aerodrome on 25 March. I don't want to be deceived by the Communists once again. I still maintain that viewpoint until now. It is better for me to be shot dead by free men than be massacred by the rounds of Communists. I have not any weapon to protect myself. If I may struggle against Communists with weapons, I am ready to act immediately. I don't want to die in the hands of Communists after I am handed to them. They are only cunning elements trying to deceive me and other artists and writers. I have well known them, well known their jails, too.

There have been mutual suspects, mutual massacres. The higher ranking cadres have oppressed their subordinate comrades though being more ignorant and uninstructed. I am very sure that the released Communist prisoners will be illtreated by NVN cadres. Nobody may enjoy an easy life. The illtreatments reserved for the Communist prisoners after they were released by the French authorities in 1954 were very concrete proofs. Those poor elements have not yet had a legal living condition as Vietnamese citizens in their native places. They have enjoyed no right, no interest as free men. There has been a great difference between theory and

practice in the Communist side. Myself I applied false propaganda method to lull the minds of innocent people to erroneously serve the Communist regime. So I am unable to deceive myself now. I must confess that on the infiltration road Southwards I deceived many poor SVN families having sons, husbands, brothers living in the North Communist ranks. I tried to lie that those sons, husbands, brothers were busy studying in foreign universities not to have time to write familial letters. In reality they were obliged by The NVN Party And State to work in unhealthy mountainous regions, in work sites. Nobody might know their fate. Maybe some had to sacrifice life in a coffee or tea plantation after attacked by malaria or unhealthy weather. I had to lie, lie as much as possible to hide the bitter and brutal truth from those poor SVN families. Now I don't want to lie any longer. Now I have the duty to struggle against those trying to lie as I formerly. I have a very clear-cut decision to stay in this Free South region to be ready to fight against Communists right now if allowed by the RVN Government. I don't want to return to the Communists' side to be massacred or deceived by them once again.

Question: Dear Mr. Lê Huyên, it seems that we must have two or three days more to continue our talk about Arts And Letters. There is shortage of time. Please use these last minutes to say something to your literary friends still living in the South to fight for the Communist side.

Answer: I have been living far from family. So I desire to meet some younger brothers serving in the RVNAF. My younger sister Lê Thị Lữ, wife of late Chief Of Vinh Thaph District killed in the VC offensive in the period 1962-1963. She is living in Qui Nhon and serving in the Telecommunication Branch. Though receiving useful aid from the RVN Government, I have not yet the chance to meet her again. My younger brother Lê Hồng Đàng alias Lê Bá Đàng, sergeant or senior sergeant in the Ranger Force is working in the supply branch in Pleiku, MR2; Another younger brother Lê Bá Thanh was graduated from Thủ Đức Infantry School in the period 1962-1963. I had a good opportunity to see his photograph handed to me by another younger brother whose mother was a concubine of my father. In the period 1965-1966, he was sub lieutenant. I don't know where they are living now. If all of you, in the RVNAF have any information about them, please write it to me. For 25 successive years, I have been living far from my relatives. I desire to meet them again now regardless of past differences in political viewpoints. I desire to let them know my repentance about my past errors created by my thoughtless actions. I erroneously followed my passion to serve an illusive doctrine.

-Interviewer: I thank you very much, Dear Mr. Lê Huyên.

### 3RD ARTICLE

DR. ĐỒ QUYẾT

#### THE TELEPHONE BELL AND MY LIFE

Photograph  
of  
Dr. Đồ Quyết

Dr. Đồ Quyết, Assistant Chief in the Military Health Section/ Communist Front: 7 (Quang Tri Province), lieutenant, was born in 1934 at Hà-Tĩnh Province (NVN), graduated from Hanoi School of Medicine in 1960, accepted as party member in 1957, entering the army on 15 March 1963 to infiltrate into the South on 6 November 1961 (as a civilian member first to replenish the military unit later). He was arrested on 25 July 1968 at Quang Tri Province.

One morning, in early 1961, I stepped into my office to transmit the sentry duty to another comrade in Thái Nguyên Hospital. Suddenly the telephone rang and I was called by comrade Nguyễn Vĩnh Phúc to visit him immediately in his office.

I hastened to transmit the sentry duty to my colleague to rush to the bureau of The Hospital Party Committee Chief. I stepped into the room of comrade Nguyễn Phúc. A strange person was present there when I did not know. With a severe and worrisome appearance, he looked thin and tall through his tanned skin. After some usual salutations and compliments, comrade Nguyễn Phúc introduced me to comrade Nguyễn Liêm, cadre in the Party Central Committee (headed at that period by Comrade Lê-Đức Thọ). He needed to have a private talk with me. I sat then in the opposite side of Comrade Nguyễn Liêm. Comrade Nguyễn Phúc left his place, went out after carefully shutting the door to avoid the curiosity of other cadres in neighbouring rooms.

Comrade Nguyễn Liêm with a solemn voice began the talk: "According to the directive of The Party Central Committee, I come here to meet a number of comrades including yourself to discuss an important matter."

He continued: "At present, the Revolution in the South being in progress. We need a number of cadres in all branches including the Health Service to serve the Revolution and the people."

Then he let me know the general situation in SVN saying: "... As you know, The Party's goal is leading the people to perform the Revolution. After some tens of years, we can already restore the independence on a half of national territory. We must still struggle in the other half being under the exploitation and oppression of the American neo-colonialists and lackey group of Ngô Đình Diệm. The SVN people have been waiting for our liberation. This is a sacred mission, an extremely august, a great honour for you and others." He also informed me of the unfinished coup d'etat attempted by General Nguyễn Chánh Thi and Dr. Phan Quang Đán in 1960. He concluded: "This is a directive from The Party and a requirement of The Revolution. You must put the interests of The Revolution And The Party above all." Just at that moment, Party Committee Secretary Nguyễn Phúc entered adding: "The Party Committee studied this problem and selected you. We believe that you will be pleased to accept your new mission".

In my mind, I decided that after leaving Hanoi School of Medicine, I might work here for 6 months to practise my profession and cure diseases for patients, reduce their sufferings, under the Communist regime, I was influenced by the viewpoints and thoughts of the socialism to consider the SVN society just as the policy line of the NVN Communist leaders. I knew very well that with this mission, I should leave my dream, my family, my fiancée to go to the South ~~the~~ have no return day. The future became very sinister. But I could do nothing to avoid it. If I had the courage to deny this mission, my future life would become darker and more unstable; My name would be put into a black booknote; my personal data would have these worst details: element with individualist familial thoughts and attachments, my comrades would under-estimate me, I'd become a great zero type among them. My self-pride did not allow me to cowardly deny this mission. The teachings of Communism did not let me commit such a blamable rejection... I enthusiastically received the mission entrusted by my higher-ranking authorities without complaint though my anxiety and sadness were disturbing my heart terribly.

At last, I was advised by Comrade Nguyễn Liêm to keep this mission in complete secrecy and analyse it as deeply as possible. In the near future I should need a study period more to improve the technique.

On 25 January 1961, I was called to the Organization Section, Party Central Committee at P. 38 Ngọc Hạ near the Botanic Garden of Hanoi, then to the National Unification Section headed by Lieutenant General Nguyễn Văn Vinh. Daily I was introduced to work in the Phú Doãn and Saint Paul Hospitals to practise the anatomy. In this period, I was advised to limit all relations with relatives and friends. Everytime desiring to meet my fiancée, I had to hide our rendez vous from all people to avoid pursuit and control. In my letters, I dared never touch on my daily works.

In October 1961, I was called to Sơn Tây Province to study politics and prepare for the infiltration Southwards. In this study period I might not leave the camp lonely. My comrades and I had to form a group if wanting to go to any other installation. After the mission, the whole group should return by trucks. Daily, about 120 cadres including cadres from Province Party Committee level downwards and myself had to study 10 hours in two political meetings. At 2.00 each morning we had to practise carrying heavy luggage, walk without shoes or sandals. Most of instructors were cadres in the National Unification Section as Nguyễn Văn Vinh, Nguyễn Minh Phương, Vũ Tam, Hồ Văn Tâm, Vũ Thanh Trưng etc....

The content of our studies included:

- The situation at home and abroad
- The situation and the Revolutionary Task between 2 regions
- 15 years of experiences of The Party Central Committee And Uncle Hồ Chí Minh.
- The Revolutionary Spirit of Communists

I still remember, once, instructor Nguyễn Văn Vinh in The Party Central Committee taught: "At present if our Party And Government don't continue the Revolution to liberate the South, we are unable to build the Socialist regime in the North. It is so because the present living conditions of SVN people are higher than those of NVN compatriots, within some years they will defeat us because they can reinforce their army very rapidly. Now our North region needs the supply of provisions from the South".

He also recognized that in 1959, the Revolutionary Movement in the South was in the decadent phase due to the reinforcement of the Communist Accusing Campaign that could create very heavy losses to the forces of The Party And The Revolution. Due to this reason, my comrades and I had to urgently reconstruct and develop such forces... This was a sign of defeat of Communists after the implementation of the 1954 Geneva Agreement and the deployment of Communist cadres lying in ambush in the South. I secretly said to myself that maybe this was an error of The Party and Uncle in their political warfare policy to motivate SVN people. I dared not express this confidential thought of mine in the study meeting but discussed this with my 2 colleagues: Doctor Thanh and Doctor Thúc. We concluded that this was a deadlock for the policy line of The NVN Communist leaders.

The study time glided away rapidly. We were waiting for the departure day to the South.

In late October 1961, I desired to meet my fiancée the last time but I feared the control of The Party. I asked the permission to visit Phú Doãn Hospital to have teeth examined there to cover the eyes of inspectors. In this occasion only did I have the chance to meet her, my poor but beloved fiancée.

Following me to ~~the~~ my concentration camp, she said farewell to me at the Hàng Cỏ Railways Station... We walked near each other speechlessly... We tenderly looked at each other in the last minutes prior to the separation second. The train whistle roaring to signal the departure moment seemed to deeply pierce our hearts. She wept, tears running down abundantly from her eyes. She murmured: "Darling, darling, how will be our fate? You will be like that mass of cloud to be dispersed in the wind and I like the flame of a petrol lamp terribly blown by The wind... How will be our love, darling?"

My heart withered, my eyes blurred. Those black silhouettes of Communist cadres suddenly became an immense mass of wicked genii wherefrom red hot flames spread out to mercilessly burn then totally destroy the ardent love of ours... I lost my consciousness in a brief minute... Then I recovered it at once... Ah! I had to say something to console my lover: "Well, darling. We must courageously bear sufferings caused by war. Adieu!".

I left her standing lonely in the center of the immense platform to touch the door of the train rolling forwards. I looked at her my poor fiancée until her silhouette mixed with the darkness of a starless night.

I murmured two verses to console myself:

"Trời bậy chia ly chệch lòng héo  
"Người đi... trong cõi điêu tàn..."

"Oh! God! Why are you so wicked to separate us  
"So that I must leave her... to fight in a destructive war..."

This was a separation extremely sad for me, a youth stepping into life. The more I thought, the greater was my hatred toward NVN Communist leaders. They continuously propagandized that only the Socialist regime would be able to bring happiness to MAN... but this extremely sad separation was the genuine happiness that that Socialist regime brought to my fiancée and me.

Until today, after 13 successive years of separation, our 1st love seems to become a past dream letting back to my heart an eternal painful regret. God Damn Those Communists!

#### The Departure Day

One day after I reached the concentration camp, 30 doctors and medics were sent to the Health Department to participate in the farewell party. Was present there Pham Hung, Lê Đức Thọ, Ung Văn Khiêm, Pham Ngọc Thanh, Hoàng Văn Thái etc... Pham Hung, Vice Premier raised his voice to advise us to maintain the security and the pride of the Revolutionaries.

In the morning of 6 November 1960, a group of nearly 90 cadres including 30 doctors and medics of my branch were transported by completely covered trucks from Sơn Tây through Hòa Bình to Hà Nam connecting with the National Road No. 1 to reach Nghệ An Province. We rested a night at the bureau of the Nghệ An Province Party Committee to continue our road to Quảng Bình Province the next morning. We stopped at the camp of the 101st Reg/325th Div. before entering the Ho station, in the mountainous area of Vinh Linh Province. It rained tumultuously here. We had to stay 3 days to wait for finer weather. In this period, we were ordered to reject all vestiges from the North including the photographs of our beloved relatives.

3 days later, the weather became finer. The rain ceased. We began to resume our infiltration trip.

Dr. Thanh was the Chief of my group. His assistant was Dr. Tien. The political member of my group was Võ Công Nhân, a cadre in the Quảng Ngãi Province Party Committee.

We crossed the Lao frontier, climbed up the Col: 1001, walking all day long to rest only at night. When crossing the Road No. 9 we had to grope forwards in the darkness of night. My own trip was relatively short. After about a month, I left the group to walk to the frontier direction between two provinces Quang Trị and Thừa Thiên. Then I was guided to a reception camp of Inter-Province Trị Thiên Party Committee whose secretary was comrade Nguyễn Minh (alias Tư Minh). Here I might enjoy 3 days for rest and recuperation. The 4th day, comrade Nguyễn Minh met me and asked me to prepare luggage to go to the West of Quảng Trị Province (i. e. Hướng Hóa Province) to establish a dispensary here to take care of the health of regional cadres and inhabitants. On 20 December 1961, I held my rucksack and climbed up cols and mountains to reach Hướng Hóa District. Around me there were only jungles and mounts where were living highlanders whose living conditions being extremely poor with shortage of rice and salt. They had to consume maize and manioc instead of cooked rice. They had not salt for two or three months. When seeing me they begged for salt and tasted it as if I gave them sweet candies. What a heart rending scene!

After conversations, I realized that those poor farmers had to contribute all their rice productions to The Revolution. They had not cooked rice. So they consumed manioc to survive. I could not help feeling sad and confused. In the dinner in A Bung Village, I complained with comrade Dang, Chief of Hướng Hóa District Party Committee that the regional inhabitants were so much poor due to their forced rice productions to The Party And State. Unexpectedly this complaint of mine was reported by him to the Chief of Quang Trị Province Party Committee: Comrade Nguyễn Tâm Thử. As a result, in a conference, I was severely criticized by the latter for having a thoughtless complaint badly influencing the mass thoughts and also for not performing my task toward the mass movement. Worse than that, I had to bear an extremely miserable life in this secret war zone. Monthly I received only 45 cans of rice and 2 cans of salt (22 Kgs 500 of rice and nearly 1 Kg of salt). My subordinates and I had to burn the waste jungle to have land to cultivate rice plants and manioc to consume instead of cooked rice in daily meals. On 10 January 1962, I visited Khe Báp liaison station, Ba Hy village, Hướng Hóa District. I received there an order from

Comrade Nguyễn Tâm Thu' to go to work in the Military Section: 50 of his province (at that period there was not yet the Quang Tri Unit Headquarters). This made me more displeased. I did not like the military service due to its restricted discipline. I would lose freedom there. Due to this reason, I wrote a reply to Comrade Nguyễn Tâm Thu', Chief of Quang Tri Province Party Committee to let him know that I came to the South not to serve in the military service but in the civilian branch. So I asked him to send me to a civilian dispensary. Two days after, he was obliged to send me to the Cà Mau Hospital (built in the secret war zone to become later the Cà Mau hospital in the Liberation Area). From this day onwards, I was strictly pursued and controlled by Quang Tri Province Party Committee. My former complaint about the poor living condition of Hung Hoa highlanders and the rejection of the order of Quang Tri Province Party Committee Chief made my life more and more difficult.

In this period, I was a treatment physician. Dr. Hồ Nam was the Chief of this hospital under the control of Comrade Nguyễn Tâm Thu', Chief of Quang Tri Province Party Committee. So I met with numerous complications from Dr. Hồ Nam.

There was serious shortage of provisions and medicines. There was nothing to cure and bandage the wounds of VC soldiers brought to my hospital. I had no absorbent cotton. Once, too much discontent, I complained: "What a poor province! One is unable to purchase 1 Kg of absorbent cotton to help us in this hospital. Unexpectedly these words were reported to the Chief Quang Tri Province Party Committee. I still remember, in a political reorientation in early 1963 of the Health Section, I was mercilessly criticized by Comrade Nguyễn Tâm Thu' and Dr. Hồ Nam, his faithful supporter in 3 following problems:

(1) Expressing thoughtless complaints about the forced contributions of provisions of the highlanders in Hung Hoa District and not agreeing with the strict requisition and merciless exploitation of The Party that made the regional inhabitants hungry.

(2) Expressing complaints about the shortage of facilities and medicines and about the attitude, prejudice in the leadership of The Party.

(3) Using illegally the secret official code in a familial letter to accelerate the transmission, and generalizing the method and organization among the inhabitants to rear goats to have milk without the permission from the Chief of Quang Tri Province Party Committee.

This fact made me extremely discontent and increased my hatred toward The Party. Once, a VC in Cam Lộ District was seriously attacked by heart failure. He asked me to visit him for treatment. I prepared my luggage for a 5-day trip through the Thạch Hãn river and jungle trail. I reached near the bureau of the ill VC cadre when I received an order from Comrade Võ Chí Công, Secretary in Quang Trị Province Party Committee through a medic and liaison agent. I had to return to my office immediately to cure a patient seriously ill. In reality, the Communist cadres feared that I would rally to the RVN Government because I was going nearer to the area controlled by the Saigon Administration. The medic and liaison-agent did not let me know so frankly. How cruel they were, those Communist cadres! They continuously suspected me and thought that I was not faithful toward the Communist regime.

After this 1st unfinished mission trip, I became more discontent, and the contradictions between Dr. Hồ Nam and me became more serious. In early 1963, the RVNAF launched a military operation into my secret zone at Hùng Hoa District. I was ordered by him to evacuate our dispensary to Ba Lê mountain (Độc Miếu area) but I did not accept this mission due to my poor health and my high blood pressure that prevented me from living on the high altitude. He tried to persuade me but vainly. At last he reported my case to Nguyễn Tâm Thư, Chief of Quang Trị Province Party Committee for interference to solve this problem. In the discussion, I opposed their suspects and asked them to send me back to the North if I was no longer needed by them. If they still needed my presence, they had to respect my right in the mission of a physician to treat patients and use medicines.

I still remember the following funny story: in my operation area, all medicines and medical tools were supplied by the North after each quarter. In the 1st quarter of 1963, I received a bag of nearly 25 Kgs of Korean ginseng. But after bringing it to the dispensary, I was ordered by the Chief of Quang Trị Province Party Committee Bureau to transmit this bag to him. I asked him the reason and did not send ginseng to him because this was a medicinal product used to treat patients. Ill persons might use it to recover their health during the convalescence. Nguyễn Tâm Thư had to visit me twice but he was unable to persuade me. At last he sent a liaison agent to transport the bag to his office but I continued opposing though being not the Chief of this dispensary. I considered his action unjust, corrupt. As a leading cadre, he might not illegally use this ginseng because all citizens were equal in the medical treatment. If Quang Trị Province Party Committee needed it, I might offer to it 5 Kgs only. This was already the highest quantity and my most generous concession.

After this ginseng story, Dr. Hồ Nam wanted to push me into another dispensary. During my absence for a medical mission trip, he proposed with Comrade Nguyễn Bô, Quang Tri Province Party Committee Member responsible for the economic branch to transmit me to military service by arguing that medical cadres were needed to establish the Health Section for the Quang Tri Unit. Really speaking, he decided to push me away from his dispensary to seize the whole management and control. But he reaped storm after sowing strong wind. Dr. Hồ Nam was killed by the RVNAF in an ambush at Khe Sanh in 1963 after I had left his dispensary to work in the military service.

The Poor Fate of Liberation Combatants: I was sent to the military service to become Chief of The Health Section/Quang Tri Unit having the duty to form various surgery field teams (đội phẫu thuật dã chiến) stationed on the forward line to operate wounded combatants in VC Battalions K8-14-K9 and Group T Work Site 7 of the 324B Division reinforced by the regiment of sappers K10, an anti aerial battalion and a DKB Battalion (equipped with 122mm rockets). The above forces formed the 7th Front in 1967 not including the combat forces and the surgery field teams 31-32-34 formed by myself.

The above units had the duty to act in separate areas. For example the team 31 camped in the area, near the frontier at the West of Hải Lăng District; the team 32 in the plain of this district in Hải Duong, Hải Que, Hải Hoa and Hải Kinh villages; the team 34 in the plain of Triệu Phong district in Triệu Trạch, Triệu Văn, Hải An and Hải Khê villages. These surgery field teams had the duty to receive all wounded cadres and soldiers from the above units as well as all civilian patients in their areas. They had to operate their wounds and evacuate seriously wounded cadres to Ha Dong hospital for more careful and complex treatment. All the above units were under the technical management of the Military Health Section/7th Front headed by Captain Doctor Lê Lưu.

In reality, we had to live in the troubled area controlled by VC but usually attacked by the RVNAF. So we met with great difficulties in the supply and transportation field. We had to ceaselessly flee, avoid clashes with the RVN troops to maintain our own safety. Due to this reason, we had to organize urgent operations for wounded cadres and soldiers coming from the battlefronts to evacuate them to appropriate areas within the activity sphere of each separate surgery team before transporting them to the secret war zone. This was a problem extremely difficult to be solved by us. Our leading cadres were usually incompetent. We might decide

what to do according to our knowledge and will. The poor fate of Liberation Combatants was under-estimated by the Communists. After each combat, due to the close encirclement of the RVNAF, Liberation wounded soldiers were let back on the battlefields. A number of others were arrested though being drawn by their comrades away from the front due to lack of facilities to be transported to the VC secret war zone. This bad situation lasted from 1965 to 1968. Liberation soldiers and our teams were very discontent and confused. We did not want to struggle any longer. So we tried to avoid clashes. Myself, I shared this viewpoint with them because in combats, a great number of Liberation cadres and soldiers would be wounded to disturb me and my surgery field teams. At that period with a desperate mind I usually felt uneasy and anxious when being informed of the arrival of a new wounded person. I felt so not only due to the lack of surgery facilities and medicines but also due to the extreme complications and difficulties in transporting wounded cadres and soldiers to the secret war zone. Obliging the civilians to transport wounded combatants gratuitously, to supply provisions to nourish them was considered as a brutal action by me because they had to bear myriads of war miseries and perils. Despite the people's poverties, soulless VC cadres continued forcing the regional inhabitants to do what they did not like because these poor civilians had to work hard, earn money to nourish their own families. Besides, they had to pay agricultural tax, to work as civilian laborers to transport ammunitions, weapons and wounded soldiers successively and gratuitously.

I visited their houses, hamlets and villages before the arrival of VC troops. At that period a prosperous atmosphere was displayed everywhere with crowded population, noisy streets, abundant provisions. The material life of the inhabitants was plentiful. But later, the Liberation troops got in. Combats occurred. The regional people became poorer. Many were killed or wounded. Mournings spread out everywhere along with destroyed plants and trees. The yellowish color of destructions caused by The Liberation War of the NVN leaders has covered this South region for over ten years.

Worse than that the NVN youths including myself had to leave our native places and beloved relatives to infiltrate to this South region to be continuously menaced by death when creating myriads of miseries and pains to our SVN compatriots. The NVN leaders must be fully responsible for the above mourningful results in our national history.

Dr. *D*o *Q*u<sup>~</sup>yst

#### 4TH ARTICLE

LE VAN THANH

#### SAIGON AND TWO TRIPS

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LE VAN THANH, a reconnaissance, sapper platoon leader, Đồng Nai Regiment, born in 1947 in Thái Bình Province (NVN), single, education degree: 10th form (Communist Education System) and middle-level School of Arts in Hanoi, in the sculpture branch for 18 months, entered the Army in May 1965 and infiltrated into the South in December 1966. He was arrested on 5 June 1968 in Saigon.

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I return to Saigon in the sweet sunlight of late summer in a jeep lightly running on the large National Road No. 1 between two rows of floating RVN flags to rally to the Free South Vietnam.

I am extremely moved when reaching the limit of the magnificent capital to be warmly welcome by all-level authorities in the first organization of the RVN Government as if I were really a relative of theirs coming home after a long absence.

Saigon! the name that reminded me of the terrible combats in two waves of offensive of Communists in Mậu Thân Tết (1968) was shot by bursts of fire from AK guns or angry B40s. But today I return here like in a marvelous dream in this military jeep.

Saigon! Today I return not with hatred and enmity but with immense and warm national love reserved for me by all inhabitants.

Saigon! In this return I don't bring to you and the people miseries, pains and mournings as formerly. I don't destroy any houses, bridges and locks as in the Mậu Thân Tết attacks.

Saigon! I feel I have complete freedom and bright hope this time. I ask the driver to run his jeep as slowly as possible to let me observe by my own eyes the portions of land into which my Communist comrades and I dared to infiltrate only in the darkness of starless nights. Today, I look at the long streets more and more carefully. The jeep reaches Gia Định soon. What a joyful and animated scene! There is no gun explosion, no broken bricks, no grey ash as in the Mậu Thân Tết general offensive to

liberate the people. This time, series of high buildings appear on both road sides wherefrom spreads out the fierce and free living force immense as that of rolling sea waves.

I thrill with fear, repentance and regret when thinking of my past errors in sacrificing uselessly for The Party. I can never forget the great wound deeply carved into the Vietnamese history by the defeated 2nd wave of general attack into this area. I can never forget that painful souvenir. My fear, repentance and regret increase higher and higher in my heart. When living freely on this beloved plot of land, I understand more clearly the deep meaning of the slogan: "USING LOVE TO REPLACE HATRED AND ENMITY" of the "Chieu Hoi" policy of the Free South Vietnam. In fact, this generous policy has opened road for hundreds of thousands of other Communist comrades and for myself to return to the Survival Road from the Red Hell.

I still remember . . . . a night of May 1968, my unit and I were ordered to launch an urgent operation from Binh My, Binh Duong to Saigon. We advanced silently, heavy weapons pressing on shoulders and arms and flanks. Enemy flares shining brilliantly the area of dense posts and camps of the RVN, created great obstacles to our movement. In the unit, only platoon-leader level cadres as myself upwards might know the real purpose and the target-concentration camp. The others did not know whether they would go and why they had to go. The only sure thing was that everybody felt confusion and fear for his own life especially when advancing to the plain. Dreadful thoughts created by the mourningful scenes during the Mậu Thân Tết general offensive still haunted the memory of everybody.

Many though having wounds not yet healed had to participate in this operation. We stepped through the deserted rice fields in Châu Thành District to the orchards destroyed by bombs and rounds in the Mậu Thân Tết combats then passed Lái Thiêu and Thủ Đức Districts to witness the war destructions wherefrom spread out the stinking and fetid odour of dead bodies. We crossed the National Roads No. 13, No. 1. At 0500 AM we were totally exhausted to be obliged to stop on the bank of the Saigon River, about 2 Kms far from Bình Triệu Cross-Road. At that very moment, a friendly unit began to fiercely fire 122mm rocket rounds into Saigon capital to create dreadful explosions everywhere. Looking at our map, we knew we were near the Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base and the limit of Gia-Định. When listening to the radio station we realized the S. O. S. of our forces inside the city. That platoon met with perils near the Phan Thanh Gian Bridge wherefrom explosions of guns were denser. At the same moment, we had to try to cross the Saigon River. Major Ba Thuần, Chief of Staff of Communist Đồng Nai Regiment

directly ordered my own platoon to lead that cross. Using a small quantity of boats, we had to row by hands in accordance with his order. This portion of the Saigon River was about 400 meters wide with dense coco-trees rows on both sides and skin tearing sharp leaves of Holly trees. The salted river water caused incredible pains when impregnating our wounds. Far away, in the direction of the Binh Loi Bridge, the lamp-light was much clearer due to enemy flares. From Binh Loi Bridge, bursts of fire of sub machine guns echoed. The blue flames of rounds seemed to tear the thick black curtain of night. Unfortunately at 1/3 of the river width we had to fight against the RVN Navy in patrol. Our boats were on the surface of the river. There was no secret place to hide in it. We had to exploit the surprise factor first: We hastened to fire the B40 rounds into the enemies. As I sat in my floating boat, my two first rounds lost their targets to fall down on the right flank of the RVN ship. Immediately the RVN light machine guns 50 and all size cannons shot at us from the ship. This was my first combat against the RVN Navy. Due to the enemy dense fire, one boat of our side was sunk. The surviving boats tried to flee to Thu Duc District bank. 7 comrades along with their weapons were lost in this first river combat. Many had to die unjustly after wounded because they were unable to reach the bank.

In the aurora, the whole strength of our 2 battalions looked at the swamp totally deserted with some scattered coco trees. I felt sad when comparing my own fate with that of the bats fearing day-light. We were ordered to dig ditches and foxholes to avoid the damages created by enemy sweep operations. Our platoon had to bear the heaviest responsibility: forming the barrage around the banana garden of 2 buildings near the river bank. There were many small motor boats with a floating palace and bunches of beautiful multi colored paper flowers. It was the morning of 2 May. Just as our guess, the RVN Artillery from Co Loa Barrack in Saigon and from other bases began to fire. Our position was the first to bear damages. Their 105mm round, and 81mm mortar rounds dreadfully whizzed above our heads. Particles of brick walls fell down. The coco tree trunks were cut off to lie down here and there. In that smoky and sinister atmosphere spread out the tragic cries and moans of Liberation combatants. An arm then a brain were strongly thrown to the front door of my shelter; blood abundantly poured out to redden the dirty dust. Then the artillery stopped temporarily to let the place for armed helicopters' activities. I secretly praised the clever and effective coordination of the RVNAF 4 armed heloes began to fire. Their rockets terribly ploughed the ground one after another.

Their light machine guns began to destroy all thick bushes around me. I felt sorry for the poor fate of my comrades hiding themselves in frail shelters. I was ordered to shoot at RVN heloes. I use my radio set to contact comrade Ba Tuấn. Unexpectedly I met the radio frequency of the RVNAF and received the secret code of theirs. I knew that they were maneuvering Rangers at Bình Triệu Cross Road and that another force was crossing Gò Dứa bridge in Thủ Đức to seize their "Two-Prong-Pressure" and closely encircle my complete unit. 15 minutes later, comrade Ba Tuấn informed me through radio that the last group of our Di An Battalion had a clash with the RVNAF on the National Road No. 1, 1Km far from Gò Dứa bridge. The gun explosions roared dreadfully from that clash. The situation became more and more disadvantageous for our side. If desiring to advance, we could not cross the Saigon River in day time. If desiring to withdraw, we should defeat the RVN troops on the National Road No. 1, we had no other way except fighting until death here. 4 RVN heloes temporarily postponed their destructions and menaces. Maybe they rushed to the front to support two above mentioned wings of the RVNAF. At that very moment I was ordered to withdraw at any cost to the Headquarters, in Vuồn Xoài, near the trail connecting The National Road No. 1 to the Saigon River near the building we are in because the Saigon River position was no longer necessary. I gnashed the teeth to stop an insult. I did not know why that cruel commander reserved the most difficult task for my platoon and me. I suddenly felt sad with the following bitter thought covering my whole mind "A great majority of soldiers in my platoon were born in NVN, and that is a reinforcing platoon when comrade Ba Tuấn is a commander born in SVN. Maybe due to the above discrimination, injustice has happened at all times in my unit". However, to protect the lives of some hundreds of men in two Liberation battalions, I had to execute that unjust order reluctantly by maneuvering my platoon to the target area. This was not easy a problem. We had to cross an open area having no trees, no plants no heaps of earth. Any platoon became an easy prey and ideal target for RVN artillery and air fire. Fortunately for us, we were able to attain Vuồn Xoài safely by forming "3-man cells" crawling with difficulty through that open area".

The regional inhabitants had left their houses. Some horses had been killed by rounds near the broken barrels of water that had spread out into an immense pond. My unit had to fight against two wings of the RVNAF so closely that RVN heloes could no longer fire. Both sides tried to grab land from meter to meter. Houses in the area were completely burnt; Trees and plants totally cut off. The fight prolonged till 4 PM. Nearly