

a complete supporting document for an  
**Interview with the BBC Television**



From VIETNAM to the MIDDLE EAST

# The American Syndrome

**TRAN NGOC CHAU**



"When Tran Ngoc Chau (X), a prominent South Vietnamese nationalist and legislator, became a political threat to Thieu in 1970, Shackley and Colby (of the CIA) cooperated with the Vietnamese police to paint him as a subversive and a Communist agent. And when the South Vietnamese government surfaced its allegations against Chau in the local press, both Shackley and Ambassador Bunker supported them. A few days later Chau was dragged out of the National Assembly building in downtown Saigon and thrown into jail to await trial, in violation of all legal process in South Vietnam."

- Frank Snepp, former CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam in his best-selling book *Decent Interval*.

"Because of the Chau trial the people lost confidence in the regime and in our right cause... They will find a thousand ways to turn against us. That is people's warfare."

-VN Senator Thai Lang Nghiem as reported by Elizabeth Pond in *The Chau Trial* - 1970.

"By supporting the constitutional system of which Chau speaks, Congress could give some meaning to the sacrifices made by the 55,000 Americans who died in Indochina and the hundreds of thousands more who were wounded, until now, for little more than to preserve in power a corrupt military despotism that combines the worst qualities of a Latin American banana republic dictatorship and Mafia rule."

- *The Daily Journal*, Tuesday, Evening, New Jersey, June 11, 1974.



Dai(Chau's lawyer): Your court has to send the exceptions to the Supreme Court, because your court has no right to say whether your own decision is constitutional or not.

Judge: [interrupting] This court has nothing to do with the Constitution.



Chau: My lawyers have exhausted all arguments, but your honor has not accepted my defense. If we continue this way, I don't think it is useful. I agree to let my lawyers resign... I know in advance I will be sentenced whether I have a lawyer or not. Now I am ready to take any sentence that your court has already reserved for me.

"Chau is convicted of being in 'liaison with a person who was detrimental to national defense.' He is sentenced to 10 years of hard labor in prison and confiscation of his property... ... and there is time for Chau to say, in English, to surrounding reporters, 'I am still useful for a peace settlement,' and to wave his familiar 'V' sign."

Note: All the captions used to illustrate the photos are excerpted from *The Chau Trial* by Miss Elizabeth Pond, the Christian Monitor, and the Alicia Patterson Fund.

# The American Syndrome



*Tran Ngoc Chau with wife Bich Nhan and Producer Peter Molloy  
in front of the Broadcasting House of the BBC Television in Bristol, England.  
Please read With the BBC Television, Part II, page XVIII*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS THE VIETNAM WAR 3

A WAR OF CONFLICTING CULTURES AND MISTAKEN PRESUMPTIONS.  
WAR WOULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED OR WON WITH THE BUILDING OF A  
DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

## THE DECISIVE FACTOR 27

THE PEASANT-ENEMY.  
CIA AND THE PACIFICATION 31

VILLAGES AND TERRITORY MILITARILY OCCUPIED WERE OFTEN REFERRED TO AS PACIFIED AREAS.  
NO PACIFICATION WAS POSSIBLE  
AS LONG AS THE PEASANT-ENEMY FACTOR HAD NOT BEEN RESOLVED.

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This document was written with the assistance of Editor Ken Fermoyle whose understanding of my thoughts made these words possible. Although Mr. Fermoyle worked closely with me for the most part, time constraints made it impossible for him to edit every part of this document. Therefore, I take on myself the responsibility for any errors.

## A WAR STORY 49

MY PERSONAL STORY:

FACING THE UNITED STATES AND THE COMMUNISTS:  
THE DEFEAT OF THE VIETNAMESE NATIONALISTS.

## LESSONS OF VIETNAM 61

ONLY A GOOD CAUSE COULD DEFEAT A BAD CAUSE:  
DEMOCRACY COULD HAVE WON OVER COMMUNISM.

## VIETNAM TODAY 69

Vietnam Today Is Suffering

A MARXIST-LENINIST SYNDROME AND A GUERRILLA LEGACY.  
ONLY A TRUE DEMOCRACY CAN SAVE THE NATION.

## ABOUT HAWKS AND DOVES 78

JOHN PAUL VANN AND DANIEL ELLSBERG, ALTHOUGH TAKING DIFFERENT COURSES OF ACTION,  
SYMBOLIZED THE BEST OF AMERICAN PATRIOTS.

### PART II

An Objective Report I-XXII

## THE PERSONAL STORY OF TRAN NGOC CHAU

### PART III

#### INTRODUCTION

To

## HAWKS, DOVES AND THE DRAGON

The Vietnam War Story

as told by a unique survivor

who fought the 30-year long war on all military and political fronts,  
first with Ho Chi Minh Forces against the French,  
then with South Vietnam and the United States against the Communists.

A substantial portion  
of my story  
was covered in

## FACING THE PHOENIX by ZALIN GRANT

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# THE VIETNAM WAR

4

War of Conflicting Cultures and Mistaken Presumptions.

22

War is Political by Nature:  
On political and civic effort.

23

The American Syndrome:  
A complex of superiority with self-deceiving effect.

25

Democracy Should Have Been The Main Weapon.

A *true* democratic system in South Vietnam should have been established as the nation foundation (Republic of Vietnam) to preserve the peace (1954-1963) and, eventually, to win the war (1964-1975).

Such a democratic system failed to establish in (South) Vietnam. Under the first and second Republics of Vietnam (1955-1975), elections were used to window-dress an authoritarian regime and favor a small group of government associates - exposing the peasantry and others to government abuses and communist propaganda.

As a consequence, North Vietnam began the conflict with the peasantry in the South and developed it into an open war with the United States.

The VietCong and North Vietnam could have been defeated or won over without a shot by a South Vietnam displaying a showcase of democracy and prosperity - We have seen an example of how this can occur recently in Communist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union which were won over by the example of the prosperous Western democracies.

BBC:

What kind of war  
was being fought in Vietnam and  
what kind of war should have been  
fought, in your opinion.

TNC:

*It was a war of conflicting cultures  
and mistaken presumptions.*

*On one side, were the city people, led by intellectuals and professionals formed in the best academic institutions and think tanks of Western civilization. On the other side were rural people, the peasants and farmers, led by self-taught revolutionaries indoctrinated in French penitentiaries with a dream of a Marxist-Leninist paradise.*

*The United States fought a war on the assumption that whatever decisions the Americans made would be best for the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese communists presumed that the Marxist-Leninism they advocated would also be right for the rest of the Vietnamese.*

*Consequently, the United States lost the war but it remains unbeatable and keeps growing in its stature as the leading nation while the Vietnamese communists had won the war but led Vietnam to the most humiliating position in its 4000-year history - becoming the beggar of its former enemy and one of the most backward and poorest nations on earth. Even the people and nations who supported the Vietnamese communists during the war are now looking down on communist-ruled Vietnam.*

*The United States lost the war in Vietnam because, first of all, it did not know the Enemy. Second, because it did not know the Enemy, the United States allied with the wrong Vietnamese leaders. And third, because of not knowing the Enemy and allying with the wrong Vietnamese leaders, the United States*

*devised an inappropriate strategy and committed itself to a war of conflicting cultures and mistaken presumptions.*

*A true, democratic government in South Vietnam could have preserved the peace and, eventually, won the war.*

*In my opinion, the war could have been avoided, North Vietnam could have been won over or defeated IF:*

*A. Before the Viet Cong insurgency (1954-1958):*

*A democratic system of government had been established in South Vietnam so all the US financial, economic and military aids would have been appropriately used to make South Vietnam a showcase of democracy and prosperity to persuade the media and public of the United States' noble cause in its war - to protect the democratic South against the communist North.*

*A South Vietnam so constituted could have erased the French legacy, won over the peasantry and the Vietnamese at large - North Vietnam would have been unable to foment an insurgency and build its strategic base in the south for a "people's war."*

*Under these conditions, if the North still chose to launch the war, it would have been a Korean-type of war; the American troops would not have had to fight a war incompatible to their thinking, experience - as was the case in Vietnam.*

*B. During the insurgency (1959-1963) and the war (1964-1968):*

*A democratic, representative, and nationalistic government would have been capable of combating corruption and incompetence and directing appropriate actions to win over the peasantry, the Vietnamese people and eventually the enemy.*

*The role of the military should have been subordinated to and protective of the two above demands. American casualties would have been reduced,*

*progress of the war and prospect of the peace could have been displayed positively, not negatively as was the case, by the media - so much of the public's antiwar sentiment would have been minimized.*

*C. At the decision of the United States to disengage (1969-1975):*

*While continuing to implement (B), admit the Front of National Liberation in exchange for an international peace-keeping force to prevent the North from crossing and using the 17th parallel and the Ho Chi Minh Trail.*

*Restrict military operations - and thus save money, human lives and other resources on military expenses - and increase more spending on consolidating the South Vietnamese democratic system, to improve the living standard of the Vietnamese peasantry and protect it from "village rules" abuses and Communist propaganda.*

*Both the United States and the Republic of (south) Vietnam could have won the war in any of the three situations as described above.*

**Story as Told by an Active Participant.**

Hundreds of historians, military analysts, scholars and well-known authors, including generals and ambassadors deeply involved in the Vietnam war, have attempted to answer that question in one way or the other: some to defend their roles, others to reinforce their I-told-you-so attitudes, and the rest to present what they perceive, from their experiences and/or research, as the truth about that period.

I will not follow in their footsteps and use the familiar scholarly rhetoric to cover the subject. Instead, I would like to answer the first part of that question by telling you the *facts as seen by an actual participant*, from the beginning to the end of the 30-year conflict, in a variety of military and political capacities, from the grassroots to the top, and on both sides. Then,

based on my actual experiences and firsthand knowledge, I will discuss the second part of the question which I considered to be the most decisive factor of the entire war.

The war that most people, especially Americans, think of as constituting the Vietnam War actually covered a period of only 11 years, between 1964 and 1975, of the U.S. direct and active involvement there. It was in fact an extension of the 30-year long war that began in 1945.

"I have known Tran Ngoc Chau over many years and hold him in high regard at works as one of the most outstanding province chiefs in Vietnam and as a political leader who not only won the trust and support of his constituency, but did the same with fellow members of the Lower House in the National Assembly of Vietnam, who made him (one of) their leaders.

Beyond his managerial and political skills, he is a person of high morals, honest, very bright, and is dedicated to the ideals and principles shared by Americans."

-Edward G. Lansdale - November 17, 1979.  
Retired U.S. Air Force general & former minister plenipotentiary in Saigon.

"He was regarded by almost everyone as a most unusual Province Chief - an honest and efficient administrator who instituted many reforms and showed unmistakeable concern for all the people."

-George McArthur - November 19, 1979.  
Former Senior Correspondent  
for The Los Angeles Times in Saigon.

"The son of an upper-class family, he had the equally rare distinction for a South Vietnamese of having fought the French for four years with Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh and then coming over to the anti-communist side to serve as an army officer and provincial governor."

-The New York Times - January 14, 1980.

Ho Chi Minh and the French started the hostilities in 1945 as a war between the Vietnamese fighting for national independence and the French trying to reconquer a former colony. That (first) war ended in 1954 with the Vietnamese nation divided by the 17th parallel, almost evenly into two zones, as defined by the 1954 Geneva peace settlement.

The North under Communist leader Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic included some 17 million people. Nearly 100,000 Southern resisters who had fought with the Viet Minh against the French invaders were withdrawn from the South and moved to North Vietnam.

The South, under former Emperor Bao Dai's State of Vietnam, had a population of some 15 million people; nearly 1 million Northerners were evacuated to the South. A general election scheduled by the same Geneva Accord to reunify Vietnam in 1956 was later rejected by both South Vietnam and the United States. Both nations had earlier acknowledged the peace settlement but refused to sign it.

#### For North Vietnam:

##### **Peace was the continuation of War.**

Immediately after the Accords were signed, Ho Chi Minh made a solemn pledge to reunify the country and turned that pledge into a North Vietnam objective: to fight the Americans and their "puppets" in order to "liberate" the South and reunite it with the North. Through propaganda and indoctrination, Ho and the North Vietnamese were able to convince many Vietnamese that they were just continuing the struggle for freedom and independence that had started in the war against the French. A large number of Vietnamese who had participated in the earlier fight credited the victory over the French to Ho Chi Minh, and were thus ready to accept Ho's proclaimed objective and purpose. Ho's ultimate intent, to communize the entire nation, was understood mostly by the elitist and religious groups of Vietnamese - the populace in

the South was still confused between the images of resistance and realities of Communism.

With that objective in mind and following the North Vietnamese direction, the Communist leadership in the South proceeded to:

a/ maintain a secret apparatus of political infrastructure throughout South Vietnam, down to the village level, consisting mainly of proven personnel from the resistance they left behind after they had evacuated about 100,000 of their followers to the North (mid-1954 - 1956),

b/ rally former resisters (against the French) and organize them into armed propaganda teams to support their political cadres in the mobilization of the rural population and the development of self-supported and independently-operated villages and guerilla units (1957 - 1958),

c/ expand from their controlled villages into a rural base of human resources, logistical support, staging camps, and communication networks and began to organize small guerilla units to operate in and around their villages, thus creating an atmosphere of insecurity throughout. The actual fighting had started at this stage (1959 - 1960),

d/ develop and expand armed guerilla units into companies and battalions to guerilla warfare throughout South Vietnam. This forced South Vietnamese military and paramilitary units into defensive position in and around military bases, road nets, cities, fortified positions and "pacified" strategic hamlets - reserving for themselves the initiative to launch attacks on selected targets (1961-1962),

e/ take advantage of the politico-religious chaos in mid-1963 which resulted in the US-supported coup that overthrew President Ngo Dinh Diem. The Communists intensified their military activity by increasing local (village and district) small unit actions and fighting at battalion and regiment levels. As a result, the military situation was deteriorating rapidly and

the political leadership was in shambles. The circumstances forced the U.S. to send in more troops and bombers to begin an American war in order to save South Vietnam (1964 - 1965),

f/ compete with the American leadership in a war of attrition, with North Vietnam expecting the U.S. to give up under the American public disillusionment and frustration. Conversely the Americans expected North Vietnam to collapse under the weight of material devastation and human casualties. Subsequently, the Communists conducted a campaign of strategic diversion aimed at fixing the South Vietnamese into defensive operations in and around their "pacified" cities and villages and diverting the Americans troops into "search and kill" operations along the borders and jungles (1966 - 1968),

g/ perform a total unity of military (guerilla actions and conventional attacks combined) and political (call for reconciliation with the South and peace settlement with the U.S.) efforts according to the precepts of a revolutionary war - similar to the kind of efforts waged in the earlier war with the French. As the war dragged on, the American people became disillusioned, American leaders disoriented and American troops on the battlefield frustrated, President Nixon trumpeted his "Vietnamization" of the war and the Paris negotiations to camouflage U.S. plans to cut-and-run and to help avoid the stigma of a potential humiliating defeat (1969 - 1972).

h/ Finally, with the Paris negotiations settled, the American withdrawal completed, and the South Vietnam army over-extended trying to protect more than 90 percent of the population in "pacified" villages (as believed and self-deceived), the North Vietnamese troops launched the final conventional offensive. This was the last stage of a classic revolutionary war to attain their ultimate objective: the conquest of South Vietnam and its reunification with the communist North (1973 - 1975).

### For South Vietnam: A cracking foundation for Peace and a muddy ground for War.

While North Vietnam was pursuing a war with a clearly defined objective (one easily perceived by the peasantry) and a foundation of rural resources and support, the United States' objectives (to contain communist expansion and preserve a democratic South Vietnam) were easily perceived and enjoyed mostly by the elitist and sophisticated Vietnamese in the cities. The Vietnamese population at large, especially the peasantry, remained skeptical because a democratic South Vietnam never materialized to protect them against the traditional "village's rules" of the old colonial and feudal time.

By the time Vietnam was actually divided into two states (1955), the Vietnamese people were confused between the images of a communist revolutionary Ho Chi Minh, with his military officers and political cadres fighting against the French, and the images of a model nationalist Ngo Dinh Diem surrounded by a group of civilian administrators, police commissioners and military officers inherited from the French colonial time.

With well-controlled and orchestrated elections - due to the nonexistence of real political parties - the Republic of South Vietnam came under the absolute control of President Ngo Dinh Diem. An authoritarian regime was founded. After the nationalist but autocratic Diem failed and fell, the civilian dictatorship was then replaced by a military dictatorship hidden behind an unscrupulous facade of democracy. The general "elected-president" and a total dependence on the American leadership, troops, bombs, ammunition, and money to survive - the war was thus fought on that shaky foundation.

Following was the scenario which displayed how the South Vietnamese and Americans had prepared and gone to war to counter North Vietnam:

a/ Facing the imminent threat of a Communist

invasion from the North and a Viet Cong uprising in the South, President Ngo Dinh Diem launched a campaign of communist denunciation in 1957. Diem's intention and purpose were well-founded but his administration, police, and security were ill-prepared to execute the operation properly. The campaign resulted in catastrophic consequence.

Preconceived judgements leading to abusive actions performed by the police, secret service and intelligence agencies turned hundreds of thousands of peasants and others into suspects, prisoners, and fugitives from their own villages: they were either related to the 100,000 evacuees who went to the North, connected to activities against the French during the war, or considered disobedient by the local police and government.

"Thus the dominant theme of Diem's monologues to visiting American officials, the strategy behind his location of new communities in the trackless highlands, the purpose behind the strident slogans festooned on banners across Saigon streets or chanted by regimented peasants in rural communities, was in each case the imperative to defeat Communism. Its corollary was the denunciation of Communism's advocates or supporters. The Ministry of Information organized a "mass political organization," the National Revolutionary Movement, to serve as the vehicle for exhortations of this kind. Lack of loyalty to the Movement was viewed as treason to the nation and sympathy for the Communists, in many cases resulting in incarceration or ostracism."

-William Colby  
in his book *Lost Victory*.

b/ While the Communists were building and consolidating their bases in the rural villages, using rural resources and starting to train their guerilla units in tactics by conducting actual hit-and-run operations in local areas, the United States was building an Ameri-

canized Vietnamese army. It was equipped with modern weapons and its officers (I was one of them) went through re-training at Fort Benning and Leavenworth, probably in anticipation of a North Vietnamese invasion. Meanwhile the provincial military and paramilitary forces were left without adequate training and equipment to fight the ongoing war actually being fought: the guerilla war.

c/ As the guerilla warfare intensified, President Diem became victimized by his own window-dressing democratic system. This led to a chaotic situation; Diem's integrity, patriotism and compassion were betrayed by his subordinates' corruption, incompetence and oppression. Diem's decisions were altered by his brothers who controlled the secret police and political party. His army generals were manipulated by the CIA, and his attempts at reconciliation with the Buddhists and the majority of the Vietnamese came too late. Diem consequently was finished and replaced in the coup by Diem-promoted generals (more left-overs, who had been junior officers or NCOs in the French army).

d/ With the increasing infiltration and engagement of the North Vietnamese army the Americans proceeded to wage a total military war - using the South Vietnamese "elected" government more for the purpose of deceiving the American public than to build a democratic and viable South Vietnam. This served only to annihilate Vietnamese nationalists and enhance the enemy's motivation.

e/ Failing to win the war, the U.S. changed its course. Vietnamization of the war developed into Americanization of the Vietnamese leadership - the Vietnamese generals lived and fought the American way, following the American strategy of more men, more money, and more ammunition. When the Americans left and ceased to supply those American things, the Americanized-Vietnamese leadership fled - leaving behind many of the generals and senior officers to commit suicides and tens of thousands of

others who gave themselves fighting to the end.

One of the most celebrated images of that time were that of General Nguyen Khoa Nam, the commander of the 4th Military Region, who impassively shot himself in front of the group of North Vietnamese officers who asked him to surrender; another defiant image was that of the entire Cadet Corps of the Dalat Vietnamese National Military Academy, dressed in parade uniform, piercing in proud ranks through Communist-controlled territory.

**BBC:**

**What kind of war should have been fought?**

**TNC:**

**From being a professional soldier...**

- By mid-1954 and the time of the Geneva Accord, I was among the very few who had acquired more combat experience and knowledge than most South Vietnamese officer. At the time, although there were a dozen of general officers, and 2 to 3 dozen of colonels above my rank, they all had served in the French army, only a few in combat roles. Most served in staff and service duties. Some of them joined the Resistance during the 1945 August Revolution but quickly switched to the French side a few months later after French troops of General Leclerc landed on the Vietnamese soil.

I had fought with the Viet Minh for almost 5 years (living and fighting with the troop 24 hrs a day, 365 days a year) and with the South Vietnamese and French for 3 full years (sharing time between troop and family), again on the battlefield. Half of that time had been spent with my battalion, which was attached to a French Mobile Group. As a lieutenant, I was awarded with the nation's highest honor, above the dozen of highest military medals and citations for merit and bravery - the National Order with the

inscription: "The Nation Is Grateful." Subsequently I earned two promotions (first to captain, then to major) on the battlefield in less than one-year period. After the war ended, I was assigned as Commandant of a regional military school before becoming the first Vietnamese officer to serve as Commandant of the Cadet Corps at the Dalat National Military Academy - replacing Major Robert of the French Mission.

I was 30 years old, happily married with a model wife and 3 beautiful children. I was on my way to a successful career as professional military officer for a modern army, with an extensive knowledge of guerilla tactics and war. I was then selected to be part of the first group of Vietnamese officers sent to the United States for more advanced learning. Upon my return in 1956, I was deeply involved in the Americanization of the formation of Vietnamese career officers, NCOs and troops, and the transformation of the 7th French-type Infantry Division into the first Americanized Vietnamese division - renamed the 4th Infantry Division.

At that time, South Vietnam enjoyed a happy, peaceful period for 3 or 4 consecutive years (mid-1954-1959), except for a few incidents reported in some remote villages. As I looked at the growth of the new army with American equipment, armament, artillery, aircraft, and navy ships with their young proud officers freshly educated and trained at the best schools in Vietnam and America, I felt satisfied and confident that South Vietnam would be capable of fending off any military attempts by the North.

**... to become an unconventional fighter.**

Then in late 1959, I was transferred by President Ngo Dinh Diem from the regular army to detached service as inspector for social and psychological warfare of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Forces. Members of these organizations were recruited and employed by province governors and district chiefs to secure villages, districts and province. Before I came to

assume my newly-created position, the president sent for me and, in an hour-long conversation, asked me to travel throughout all the 40 provinces of South Vietnam and to as many villages as I could. Afterward, he wanted me to report to him on the conditions of that force and its inter-relationship with the population.

I began traveling and proceeded to inquire about the situation. I asked questions and listened to village, district and province officials, members of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Forces, notables and local religious leaders. It was peacetime in South Vietnam then, despite occasional reports of assassinations and disappearances of people affiliated either with the local government or former Viet Minh organizations.

"Chau had come to the attention of Americans when he was chief of Kien Hoa province in the early 1960s. An original innovative thinker - several of his ideas were incorporated into the US pacification program - Chau was less interested in killing Viet Cong than in converting the peasants through internal reform.

He had a hard core of American admirers but he was fiercely independent - some accused him of being a prima donna - and frequently was critical of American tactics."

-Los Angeles Times, June 14, 1979.

After an extensive 3-month trip, eating and sleeping mostly in the various villages and conversing with the people around me, I made a long report to the president. I reported such popularly-known things as that Civil Guard and Self-Defense soldiers were poorly paid and armed, received insufficient training and no political (civic actions) education to provide self-motivation and encourage good relationships with the population. I put special stress on the following facts:

a/ Those who were village officials, local police officers and paramilitary commanders were nearly all former military, civil servants or police and intelligence agents under the French-supported Vietnam-

ese administration. A few exceptions consisted of a small number of former Viet Minh deserters who had been recruited for their proved allegiance to the South Vietnamese government (by denouncing their former Viet Minh connections) and new recruits and volunteers. The latter had been introduced by their seniors, who had already been in the organizations.

b/ Those officials were the ones who were somehow entitled to make the judgement that some specific persons were pro-Viet Cong, Viet Cong members or Communists. The "proof" typically was founded on the fact that they had connections with the Viet Minh during the French war. So at this level of hamlet (part of a village) and village, former military, police agents, and others who had served under the French and a few former Viet Minh deserters formed a kind of unofficial jury to decide who was the enemy of the people and government. This influenced the higher levels of police, secret service, and military intelligence authorities in their collecting and analysis of intelligence on the enemy.

c/ The justice system, with its judges mostly serving also as prosecutors, rarely contradicted police reports on Communist- or Viet Cong-related cases. In fact, when people were reported as suspected Viet Cong, they were subject to the judgement of a small committee of representatives of police and security personnel, presided over by the provincial governor - with the police chief playing the decisive role in the sentencing.

The president discussed the contents of the report with me but he showed no emotion nor reaction. A few months later I was appointed director of a special course to train and retrain provincial commanders of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense forces. I learned more from those officers and concluded that the rural countryside was beginning to suffer a kind of instability and insurgency. No appropriate actions were taken to meet the new challenge, however.

## Source of Inspiration



Numerous images like those shown below haunted me day and night, in the big mansions where I lived, in the comfortable cars in which my chauffeurs drove me to work, at the banquets I was invited to, among the charming wives of high dignitaries with their expensive jewelry. These scenes many times nauseated me and tortured my conscience. I decided I would not be lured by the Communist appeal nor would I be captivated by the tremendous opportunity both my powerful American and Vietnamese friends were giving me. I then set out on my attempts to fight and win this war in a way that would deny both the Communists and the Opportunists their objectives - an authoritarian regime, communist or not.

*Shown in top down order:*

- A South Vietnamese soldier was killed. His wife was lost while searching for him on the battlefield, his body was returned to his home for burial. His children were at his side.
- The fighting very often occurred in and around the "pacified villages" as was this case in which this man lost his wife - among several other villagers caught between fires.
- Another woman lost her soldier husband in a battle along with other civilians killed.

## Among the Betrayed



• *In complying with President Thieu's order to withdraw from the Highland and Centre Vietnam, tens of thousands of troops and civilians were killed, hundreds of thousands others were abandoned and left to find their own means to escape.*

• *Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese army officers and civil servants were detained - many up to 15 years and more.*

*Civil servants and military officers were ordered to write their confessions before they were sent out for hard labor and starvation in camps and prisons.*

• *Hundreds of thousands of others died on the sea on their way of escape.*

*Hundreds of "boats" like these with up to 500 people on each were capsized and only a few survived.*



By late 1960, I was assigned as the commander of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense forces for the Upper Mekong delta, covering a vast area of 7 provinces. My responsibility was mainly in the field of control and inspection: the province governors were the recruiters and commanders of the forces.

My duties took me regularly through provincial capitals and district towns, to isolated villages and hamlets on muddy backroads, trails and narrow canals. I ate and talked with province governors, district chiefs, military, policemen, captured VietCong and suspected VietCong, local religious leaders and normal peasants.

The VietCong insurgency was just beginning. VietCong who were farmers worked peacefully in the ricefields during the daytime. At night, however, they had either to attend political meetings with the VietCong armed propaganda teams or to go around making continuous noise, beating drums and shouting anti-government slogans to create an atmosphere of insecurity through the rural countryside. Small units of armed VietCong also had begun to operate; assassination of village officials and persons suspected of cooperating with police and government officials intensified.

#### Source of Inspiration: Against the People's War.

Then one day, on a trip to Kien Hoa's provincial capital, I stopped my jeep by a gathering of people in front of a village headquarters to look at the display of a dozen corpses and four or five World War II-vintage rifles. I was told that the group had been killed by a unit of the Civil Guard in an ambush the night before, about 2 kilometers from the district headquarters. All 10 of the men, from about 15 to 35 years of age, and 2 young women were known as local farmers who had their homes in one of the village in the district - one of the women had been

suspected for some time to be a VietCong agent.

I had seen hundreds of dead bodies throughout my years of war, military as well as civilians, killed in the fighting. I always felt bad, hurt personally, compassionate for the dead and wondering about their surviving relatives. But I had always been somewhat consoled by understanding that death was one of the brutal facts of wartime.

**"What is of ultimate importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy."**

-Sun Tzu Wu  
(500 B.C.)

Army commander of the King of Wu.

But this was the first time I saw the bodies of those who were farmers, living a normal life by day and taking up weapons to fight at night against their own government personnel; people whose duties were to provide them security and peace. I felt compassionate and furious at the same time toward those dead bodies, and toward their relatives who surrounded them. None of the relatives cried, as all rural Vietnamese normally would in such circumstances. One woman of about 30 years of age looked at me in my uniform so intensely that I could detect her hatred.

I felt hurt badly inside myself; I wanted to clear my mind, which was deeply confused by many questions: Why did those people, mostly normal farmers with families living in their peaceful home villages, choose to join the insurgent minority who roamed from village to village and into the jungles, creating problems for their neighbors and themselves? Why did they renounce their peaceful life to risk their own lives? Why did they submit themselves to the VietCong, the communists? Why? Another question was: How could they, in most cases, remain undetected, and even protected by the villagers in areas the government had pacified and controlled completely?

I remained in the village for 3 days, going around listening separately to some 30 officials, police, military and private citizens. After analyzing all the information I gathered, the answers to my many questions - and anxiety - gave me a deeper look into the situation.

Those killed were actually connected with the Communists - although they surely never understood what Communism would mean to them. Some of them still looked in awe at Ho; to them, he was a myth, a hero who had defeated the French. This carried over to the cadres left behind when North and South were split. They considered the cadres to be Ho's legacy, so they hid and protected them, listened to them and became fascinated with their rosy stories of life in the North and the privileged treatment Ho reserved for their neighbors who had been evacuated and now lived there. The cadres casually reminded them that the South Vietnamese government and the United States refused to hold elections for reunification. They pointed out that the police and local administration continued to harass and discriminate against them and forced them to live in an atmosphere of no legal protection. The VietCong cadres told them they had to take arms to defend themselves and if the situation became worse, they would have to fight the Americans and the government in order to reunify the country for a better life.

The information also revealed that as anti-government activity increased, governmental counter actions and oppression also increased - escalating into more deaths and more replacements recruited for the insurgents. And so the vicious cycle continued. The dozen dead bodies I had seen were the results of a small number of peasants volunteering to fight against the government under the circumstances described above.

A few months later I came back to the site to learn that most of the surviving relatives of those killed on

that night had since either been arrested and imprisoned by the government, fled the village for unknown destination (normally a guerilla hideout), or escaped to live in some city's slums where police control was less strict. Despite the considerable number of VietCong and those known to be affiliated with the VietCong who had left the area, however, there were still frequent VietCong actions in and around the district - meaning VietCong members were still capable of hiding, moving and operating among the villagers.

#### From Malaysia With Lessons.

I interrupted my duties for a month-and-a-half visit to Malaysia, touring and studying the success of the counter-insurgency there.

The very hospitable treatment I received from British and Malay officials throughout the Federation did not derail me from my desire to learn more about insurgents, insurgency - and what causes led to tragedies like those dozen bloody corpses whose images had been burned into my mind. They had generated my interest, as well as my compassion, and stimulated an intense desire to learn all I could about the enemy I had to defeat. Although the past insurgency in Malaysia differed greatly from the one in South Vietnam, I found out three most important points that could have been implemented in Vietnam:

1/ The counter-insurgency hierarchy was arranged with the political direction first (civilian in charge), judicial authority second (police under strict control of the judiciary authority), and field force police third. The army played a very secondary role, mainly to operate in areas where the armed police were insufficient, and even then, in restricted assigned areas.

2/ One of the methods used to prevent the enemy or suspected enemy from living and operating among the people could be applied in South Vietnam.

3/ It was important for morale that dependents of the police and troops be well cared for.

I took my conclusions to Colonel Duong Ngoc Lam, head of the visiting team, suggesting that he should consider and include them in the report to be submitted to the president. Lam was a personal friend of mine but he was younger and had been formed by the French army, having grown up under its influence. I never heard anything as a result of the visit.

**The Enemy Factor was also the People Factor.** Immediately after my return from the trip, I set up a center in Tan Hiep, near My Tho, to retrain the entire Civil Guard in the area. Troops would be rotated through the Center, with great stress being placed on a subject I considered to be of the utmost importance: their personal behavior and their relationship with the villagers.

The more I worked with my trainees, the more I realized that changing their attitudes and relationships with the people could not be done without the participation and consent of village officials, police and security personnel. I then discussed the problem with the provincial governor there and made arrangements with him for my instructors to take the responsibility of running a few villages through the Training Center. I began real on-the-job training not only for the paramilitary units but also for village officials and police, security and intelligence personnel serving at the village level and dealing with the real people and the real enemy - whose activities had been consistently increasing.

The training program and the teaching of subjects I personally directed were focussed on the enemy factor. Because the enemy was just the villager - living, farming and fighting in and around his own village - the enemy factor had become the people factor. Thus, to know and understand the enemy was to know and understand the people. Often they were the SAME people, those who lived right in the

villages - including those who lived in the government's "pacified" villages.

To help my students and anyone interested, I formulated a few important truisms about and descriptions of the enemy, as follows:

- There were 3 kinds of enemy, and all three must be inter-related to be capable of living, surviving and acting effectively. They were (1) the Communist leaders in the North, (2) the South Vietnamese cadres evacuated to the North in 1954 and since reinfiltated to the South, and (3) the South Vietnamese villagers. Of the three, *the last ones played the cardinal and decisive role*. Without the support of the villagers, the infiltrators could be easily identified and eliminated, and without the South Vietnamese villagers' support for a guerilla warfare to divert and tie up the entire South Vietnamese paramilitary and military forces, North Vietnam's conventional forces would be easily annihilated. South Vietnamese soldiers would fight much better if they were not concerned with the security and living conditions of their families while fighting the war. Knowing the inter-relationship between the three kinds of enemy led to the focus on the main enemy: the villager who supported the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, the type of villagers who might welcome a GI into his home, chat with him, and might one day kill him.

- The villager-enemy lived with the memory of the last war with members of the resistance (many of whom had left for the North, others remained "inactivated", some "operated") cast as the good guys. The bad guys then, of course, had been the French and the Vietnamese associated with them. That memory was triggered each time a villager suffered bad treatment from South Vietnamese government representatives and supporters; they became the current bad guys in his mind. Thus, whether or not a villager took an anti- or pro-government stand depended largely on the behavior and manner with which the government guys (soldier, policeman, official) treated

him personally, or anyone around him.

### From the Generals on the Field...

At the time there were no American advisors assigned to my command, but one day Lt. Colonel Frank Clay (who would retire a few years later as a major general), then the senior American advisor to the 4th Vietnamese Infantry Division, happened to come to visit me. He asked me to brief him on what I thought of the Viet Cong insurgency. He listened closely to me, viewed the graphics I had prepared, and asked me question after question. He seemed sincerely interested in what I had to say and listened with a serious, meditative air. And his interest was genuine, because during the following weeks, colonels and generals from what then was MAAG, among them Generals Mc Garr and Charles Timmes, took turns coming to the Training Center for visits of many hours. They were especially interested in the operations of the model hamlets and villages I used for the training. Afterward I was invited to Saigon to give a briefing to a full audience of General Mc Garr's staff.

I never knew whether this caused any related actions to follow.

### ...to the War in the Palace.

By near the end of 1961, I was called in by President Diem to work as his special reporter in the National Security Council. I later accompanied him to Dalat for his first conference with Defense Secretary McNamara. Although I was not entitled to enter the discussion, I was fully responsible for briefing the president and at times his brother and advisor, Ngo Dinh Nhu, on the main points of all papers submitted by the Vietnamese General Staff, the Field Command, the US Military Mission, and related ministries and agencies for any specific subject which related to national security. I was mentally occupied with big, very big, problems: from the "strategic hamlets" to the demilitarized zone; from the situation in the North

Vietnamese communist Politburo to the politics in Washington. Always the enemy, the big one, Ho Chi Minh, and his next move hovered in the background.

For several months, I almost forgot my other enemy: the peasant-enemy.

### A Dialogue with the Enemy...

He was revived in my mind and I was to live with his image constantly very soon.

I knew that the day I was ordered to take over as the provincial governor of Kien Hoa, with almost absolute authority - a replica of Ngo Dinh Diem at the province level.

In a period of three months, I reorganized the province's administration. I released full administrative and financial responsibility to my civilian deputy, military operations to my military deputy, and "strategic hamlet" operations to my newly-created third deputy. The reorganization and release of authority had to be (and were) approved by the president himself.

I took time to tour the villages, listened again to people of all kinds and then completed my own plan to fight the insurgency, which at this time (mid-1962) had developed into full-scale guerilla warfare. Viet Cong were everywhere and nowhere! A village was friendly and secured one day, only to be attacked the next day, and then retaken by government forces the day after that! Hundreds of villagers and soldiers were killed every week.

### ...and With Our Minds and Hearts.

I set out to fight the war as I thought it should be fought.

I recruited the first group of cadres to share my emotion, compassion, and the need to understand every villager in the "pacified" villages and to start the process of pacification from there. I called them the Census Grievance cadres. Once they shared with me the moral and patriotic motivation for the new

program, they would learn the very simple methods of identifying and interviewing the villagers for 3 purposes:

1/making it difficult for the villagers to rely on each other to keep secrets;

2/learning whether the village officials, police and military or paramilitary personnel were behaving properly toward the villagers;

3/ getting intelligence on VietCong activities and personnel; and

4/ knowing what the villagers wanted the government to do in their village.

All the information of that kind was filtered by counter-checking with appropriate agencies and actions to be taken were seriously considered before being implemented.

The immediate results were that the number of underground VietCong who lived and operated in and around their villages chose to leave before they got caught, not knowing who might provide intelligence on them. That meticulous operation also helped to reduce all kinds of social and economic injustice, political oppression and other abuses performed by the local government on the villagers.

A new atmosphere of mutual inter-relationship between the villagers and government began to develop, to the best interests of both sides. We began an "open arms" program offering amnesty for returning VietCong, plus various self-help projects for the good of the village. And finally, all villagers *without exception* were called in for the election of their own administrators and security officers, and then all the villagers were asked to volunteer to serve in their own self-defense organizations.

To accommodate to the newly developed concept of fighting the war at this village level, the current entire civilian administration, police and military deployment were revised and adapted to the overall plan:

- First priority of pacification under this Census Grievance program were given to villages located within the easy reach of the military forces.

- A group of Census Grievance and Pacification cadres was assigned to a hamlet at a time and then moved to perform the same operation in the next hamlet in the same village until the process was completed. One of the Census Grievance cadre definitely was to remain in each pacified hamlet for follow-up actions.

- The political action team of the pacification group was fully responsible for the security of the hamlet to be pacified. The team organized and trained the villagers to defend their home village after the pacification unit left. The village self-defense unit was assigned the responsibility of securing the outside of the perimeter of the hamlets undergoing pacification process. The district territorial units (formerly called Civil Guard) were to support the village self-defense units. Regional battalions and army units were kept ready to intercept enemy forces in support of the overall pacification effort. All social and economic development projects were to be subordinated to the suggestions of the villagers.

I designed the Census Grievance to be the center of direction and coordination for all military, political, and socio-economic operations in the overall pacification program. The program was interrupted in mid-1963 but it resumed in early 1964 and continued until late 1965. The Vietnamese government was totally indifferent to it, but the CIA supported the project consistently, and local representatives of MACV, USIA, and USAID were all enthusiastic supporters.

John Vann, who had previously been familiarized with the concept, came back often to observe the operations and always brought someone with him to show them how the operation worked. One of those visitors was Daniel Ellsberg.

Vann observed my operations and determined to

lead the Vietnamese toward "Harnessing the Revolution in South Vietnam" as he enthusiastically advocated in a paper-proposal to the American leadership. Vann gave himself to carry admirably and heroically to fulfill his objective, finally being killed in the process. Dan Ellsberg also observed my operations but drew a different conclusion: that only the Vietnamese themselves could create such a revolution. And as the Vietnamese leaders proved incapable of doing it, Ellsberg decided that the American effort would be futile. He then risked his own life and career to struggle to save American lives and his country's reputation.

### Material Logic Versus Moral Logic.

I was transferred to Saigon near the end of 1965 to help establish a nationwide program like the one I had implemented in Kien Hoa. However, after several months working with the CIA, the super-minister for pacification, General Nguyen Duc Thang, and others involved in the program, I realized that the understanding and moral motivation behind the program would never be shared by those who would be responsible for its implementation. In Kien Hoa, I was the leader and commander. I motivated the cadres before I trained them and sent them out to work and I kept an eye on them; here, I was a trainer - a producer without any control of the products.

It was the moment back in 1961 when I looked at the corpses of those Viet Cong guerillas displayed in front of a village town that my heart accelerated, my sentiment was engaged and my mind became absorbed in the question of why those farmers sided with the Communists. Then I came to understand that they did so not because they supported Communism, but out of anger at the Vietnamese government and because of political seduction by the Communists. I then began to devise that Census Grievance procedure to save other farmers from that dual trap. Through the process of developing the program I came to

conceive that whoever was involved in this pacification operation or in this war, be it the Vietnamese president, province or district chief or the pacification cadre, they must win their own hearts and minds before they could win those of others! The Census Grievance which I conceived to be the key to the entire pacification program could be effective only with cadres who had that kind of motivation.

It took me years of experiencing the Census Grievance program to realize that the cardinal factor needed to make it succeed was the moral factor and that all the leaders from the central government down to the province and village levels must be conscientiously involved. It was, in my understanding, a revolutionary process to build the power from the grassroot peasants to change the past colonial and mandarin system that most of the Vietnamese leaders, military and civilian inherited. I thus requested that the CIA stay in the background, go covert as it were, to let the program and pacification cadres develop a nationalistic spirit and motivation. When I came to the conclusion that all my effort had failed to change the indifference of the generals above me, I resigned.

I never blamed the CIA for its refusal to comply with my request for I fully acknowledged that if the Vietnamese generals themselves could not feel the need for the nationalistic and moral motivation and image - the two were intertwined inseparably - behind any program to fight the North Vietnamese, it was understandable that the CIA might also ignore it. (Former Ambassador and CIA Director William Colby boasted in his book *Lost Victory* that he regularly sat in the South Vietnamese Cabinet meetings and frequently went out on trips with President Nguyen Van Thieu to visit the Vietnamese public and farmers. I would make a comment that the Ambassador had acted naturally and innocently in the same spirit as Ambassadors Maxwell Taylor, Cabot Lodge and Ellsworth Bunker did to their Vietnamese cronies

previously.)

(NOTE: The period immediately before, during and after my time as National Director of Pacification (Revolutionary Development) Cadres is covered in more detail in Chapters 25-26 of *Hawks, Doves and the Dragon*, a work in progress.)

### War and Strategy.

The strategy I used successfully in Kien Hoa province should, in my opinion, have been applied on a national level. Following are to be the vital points that should have been implemented:

"Chau's physical courage, his incorruptibility, and his agenda appealed to mavericks within the American establishment - among them Edward Lansdale, John Paul Vann, and Daniel Ellsberg - who knew that body counts and bombing missions were not going to win the war.

In what the author (Zalin Grant) identifies as a blunder of catastrophic consequences, the United States government turned its back on Tran Ngoc Chau: the war was waged in conventional ways; Chau himself was betrayed, disgraced, and imprisoned; and his plan to defeat the communists by community action was perverted by the CIA into the controversial Phoenix Program, wherein thousands of suspected communists were assassinated."

- From the cover story of  
*Facing the Phoenix* by Zalin Grant.

a/ The well-publicized objective of anti-communism should have been balanced with the building of a democratic system with a check-and-balance effect on the three branches of government. That should have been the only system that could have reduced corruption and incompetence on the part of the military and government and protected the population from economic, social and political oppression. Such a system of government would negate the Communist

propaganda and enhance the images of South Vietnamese leaders, winning them respect and attracting support for the people. (For the Vietnamese "experts" who used to say that Vietnamese did not care about or were not sophisticated enough to enjoy democracy and elections, I would recommend that they learn more about the sufferings and anxiety of the poor and uneducated who lived in the rural villages and city slums, and about the corrupted officials who were well protected because the legal system was never independent under the window-dressing democracy in South Vietnam.)

b/ A national policy should have been declared publicly and respected by all branches of government with regard to the former resists (against the French). A definition of who were VietCong, pro-communist and communist should have been made clear to and understood throughout the police, military, administration and justice system. Any infraction of that policy should have been pursued in court and punished. Vietnamese with past connections or activities in the war against the French and French-employed Vietnamese should not have been automatically considered to be pro-communist and should have been treated equally.

c/ The above conditions, being fulfilled at the central government and in cities should next have been implemented at the village level. Social and economic development should have followed.

d/ Conjointly, the military forces should have been organized progressively so that:

- The village and provincial territorial forces were recruited and employed locally. They should have been prepared to rotate to serve in the regular army; their families had to be taken care of, kept secure and allowed to remain in their home villages.

- A modern army on the American lines was desirable but a sense of nationalism and democracy needed to be instilled into the troops and officers to motivate them in the war against the Communists.

If the above conditions had been implemented right after the 1954 partition, North Vietnam would have been unable to mobilize enough rural villagers to transform the South into a vast strategic base to wage their people's war. Without the need to deploy almost all of the Vietnamese military and paramilitary forces to protect the "pacified" villages and territory, the same number of South Vietnamese troops would have been capable of fending off all North Vietnamese conventional attacks. And if the American army was to intervene under those circumstances, it would have made the job an easy one.

But to complete an answer to the question of "What kind of war should have been fought?", I would go back to the year of 1964 when the United States began an American war against the communists.

### Instead of a "Search and Kill" Strategy.

With an appropriate strategy:

1/ The mission assigned to the military (Americans, Allied, and Vietnamese) should have been to protect the areas where most people were concentrated. Priority would be given accordingly to cities, towns and villages, along main communication networks. Missions would have been broken down into:

a/ The Census Grievance cadres would lead the pacification group to perform the pacification process in hamlets and villages,

b/ The Self-Defense force would provide the outside protection for the pacification cadres,

c/ The Provincial force would prevent and fend off Viet Cong force from interfering with the pacification process,

d/ The Vietnamese army would be operating in self-supported mobile units to prevent Viet Cong and North Vietnamese from attacking the provincial territorial forces. Larger Vietnamese regular units would be ready to support the mobile units in their

routine operations,

e/ The U.S. and Allied forces would be deployed in areas and locations from where they could intervene to exploit the Vietnamese contact with the communist big units. In a long conversation with General Gavin at General Westmoreland's guesthouse in 1966(?), the general showed interest in my ideas.

2/ Concurrently with the military effort,

a/ an elected government leading to a true democratic government was required to enhance the South Vietnamese image, reduce corruption and incompetence among government officials and military commanders, province and district chiefs, and protect the Vietnamese of all walks of life from social and economic exploitation and political persecution,

b/ a national policy with regard to the former resistants (against the French and their Vietnamese associates) was to be respected by all branches of government. A special effort in this field was to be made at the village level.

3/ Social and economic development would be aimed at:

a/ upgrading the rural villages and villagers to a reasonable degree of modernization, and

b/ releasing the war refugees and displaced people either back to their villages or to new economic zones (not in the communist sense and intention.)

To conclude this long exposition in response to the question on the kind of war being fought in Vietnam and what kind of war should have been fought, I would like to bring out the following points:

1. The Vietnamese communists learned, and then taught their leaders, and commanders to prepare for and fight the kind of war they had experienced with the French: a revolutionary war in which all people must be involved actively.

They started the war with a political infrastructure which waged a campaign of propaganda to mobilize the peasants, thus building their People's War - with

human and logistical resources provided by the people on the premises. The tools they used for propaganda and political indoctrination were the glorious images of victors over the French, the images of the Americans as successors to the French they created, the tarnished images of Vietnamese leaders because of their service under the French, and wrongdoings committed by the South Vietnam government and the United States. Their people's war was translated into a fundamentally political war with the military supporting it - the military themselves sharing the same understanding. Consequently, their war was fought through propaganda: in and among their own, on the people, on their enemy. They used sabotage and terrorism to create dissensions between elements of the South Vietnamese government and between the government and its people. Military operations created conditions for political exploitation - negotiate and fight, and fight and negotiate was known to be their war cry. It also illustrated the nature of a revolutionary war.

2. The Americans taught the Vietnamese to prepare and fight a war they had experienced in WWs and the Korean war. The war in Vietnam was thus fought militarily - the pacification was more for making the military character less arrogant and less reprimanded by the American media and public. Elections were an open fraud and elected government was for the same purpose of diverting the critics from the objective of the war rather than to appeal to the South Vietnamese to support their government and subsequently the United States. The disastrous deficiency was that, while the Americans taught the Vietnamese military arts and industrial technology, they did not remind them that it was the factors of democracy and patriotism that motivated the Americans to fight to win their wars.

3. For its entire existence from 1955 to 1975, South Vietnam's governments, under President Diem as well as under the generals, operated more to consoli-

date their personal power than to make the government a rallying point for the majority of Vietnamese to make South Vietnam a political power strong enough to mobilize its people for peace or war. The government, and consequently the army, was led by a disparate group of civilians and military whose moral and patriotic motivation had been proved more on the French side than on the Vietnamese. They in turn led and betrayed the most active and nationalistic generation of Vietnamese formed through such prestigious schools as national administration, universities of Saigon and Hue, and the military academies of Dalat and Thu Duc.

As a result, the Vietnam war became a war between the cities and the villages and by one culture against the other: the material logic against the human logic. That conflict of cultures and leaders translated into a conventional (military) war against a revolutionary (political) war.

BBC:

**Could the war in Vietnam have been won by concentrating on political and civic efforts rather than on military action?**

TNC:

*Appropriate political and civic actions could have won over the peasantry and population to the (south) Vietnamese government long before North Vietnam and the Viet Cong could turn the ricefields and jungles into a strategic base for their "people's war." The 1963-1975 war could have been avoided entirely!*

*Even during the 1960s and early 1970s, the war could have still been won by concentrating on political and civic efforts (through pacification*

*programmes) with the military providing protection around the populated areas - a containment strategy instead of the well known search-and-kill strategy.*

*But appropriate political and civic actions would have been possible only by leaders at all levels who were motivated by the same desire to create a free, independent and democratic nation, and imbued with nationalistic images. Such leaders would have been patriotic nationalists, seeking to build their country - not self-seeking opportunists, more concerned with their personal gain and power than with the fate of their own people.*

*Only a truly democratic system could provide South Vietnam with leaders of that quality.*

### **War is political by nature.**

The Vietnam war was fundamentally political, as is any war; military actions were needed only because political actions failed to achieve the (political) purpose.

The Vietnamese communist leaders used paramilitary and military forces to support their political actions from the beginning to the end. North Vietnam's final offensive with conventional forces was made possible only after a revolutionary war had destroyed the United States' will to continue the war, and South Vietnam's leaders, who had been so Americanized mentally and dependent on the U.S. militarily could do no more than collapse. The United States had fought the war there militarily all the way, without proper understanding of political considerations or implementing policies and programs to support effective political action.

### **Identity in Difference.**

Recently, the general public who observed the fighting in the Persian Gulf may have concluded that war was a military one - and were quick to declare that the (military) victory there would end the Vietnam syn-

drome. The generals who fought and won that war went even further, thanking President Bush for letting the military have a free hand - implying that liberty of maneuver given to the generals on the battlefield had enabled the military to win the war.

Although the generals and troops who fought the war in the Persian Gulf deserve all honors and admiration, we must treat the subject with better understanding.

First, President Bush launched a vigorous political campaign to sell the objective he wanted to achieve in the war to come. The enemy (Sadam Hussein and Iraq), apparently confused on the U.S. reaction to such a move, committed a flagrant aggression by invading Kuwait. The result was almost unanimous worldwide condemnation. China and the Soviet, who countered the United States in the Vietnam war, this time aligned themselves with the United States. With the United Nations support, the enormous military buildup in the Gulf, and the commitment of other nations to pay for the war, the US Congress was finally brought down to the president's will. The political war had been mainly won. The military, looming behind to infuse more strength to the "political general" James Baker, the State Secretary and anonymous hero, came in to finish the war - with a visible enemy, who made it possible for General Schwarzkopf to cut General Westmoreland's famous "Search and Kill" strategy in half: there was no need to Search, only to Kill.

In Vietnam, the U.S. objective was not entirely understood by the world and the American public, and the enemy did not have the same clear identity. (Ho Chi Minh never achieved the same arch-villian status as Sadem Hussein.) China and the Soviet (and not a Soviet Union in the process of self-dissolution) supported Ho Chi Minh. The American people were committed to paying the full cost (in men and money), and the U.S. Congress never fully supported the war. Thus, the political war was never fought properly

while the military war was committed. Under those circumstances, no U.S. president was able to give the military a free hand to proceed with the war.

Consequently, the different outcomes of the wars in Vietnam and in the Persian Gulf were perfectly logical and to be expected.

### **The American Syndrome.**

Statements that the victory in the Middle East erased the Vietnam syndrome and that the victory was made possible because the generals were given freedom to prosecute the war ignore reality, and only reflect an American syndrome: the inability to learn from other countries' experiences (the British in Malaya and the French in Vietnam and Indochina for example). This is aggravated by the American tendency to underestimate the capabilities of others, to feel that "good old U.S. know-how" can provide all the answers.

The consequence of this syndrome would lead the Americans to more confusion, mistaking the last (military) phase of a war (such as the one in the Persian war) for the meaning of the entire war, or committing to a military conflict without first winning the political war (as in the case of Vietnam).

"Conversely, the United States was overconfident in believing that superiority U.S. technology, Yankee ingenuity, industrial and military might, modern military organization, tactics, and techniques, and a tradition of crisis solving in peace and war would surely bring success in Vietnam where the French had failed."

-General Bruce Palmer, Jr.  
in his book *The 25-Year War*.

### **The Perfect War.**

Observing the Persian war in parallel with the Vietnam war, although I still strongly believe that both wars could have been won in a more humane way, I must express my admiration for our President. He

conducted a perfect war (in terms of the way it was orchestrated and waged politically and militarily - not in human terms).

The scenario, when analyzed, is a textbook example of war-making strategy:

- a/ the purpose had (certainly) been determined,
- b/ an objective (customized to the purpose) was made clearly understood and accepted by parties needed to help initiate and support the war (through political, economic, and financial inducements and/or pressure.},
- d/ the enemy was confused and attracted to a self-destructive course that destroyed its image and capability,
- c/ a total unity of political forces (the United Nations, the US Congress, and the Media), and military (massive and superior) efforts was created and maintained throughout the entire war.

### **An Imperfect War.**

In Vietnam, by the time the United States entered the war, it was too late to wage the war with the same scenario and strategy. But the war could still have been won by using the same principles: fighting the political war along with the military war.

The objective (of preventing the spread of communism) should have gone hand-in-hand with the building of a democratic South Vietnam - a truly democratic regime.

I had often listened to highly educated and sincere Vietnamese who argued that the Vietnamese populace - in particular the poor, the peasants, and the illiterate - did not understand what democracy meant and thus did not care about it - they were mostly concerned with food, shelter, freedom and their own family.

It was true that the Vietnamese populace did not fully understand the ideas of democracy and they were even skeptical of the terms of democracy, constitution, laws, elected system because since the

creation of the 1st (under President Ngo Dinh Diem) and the 2nd (under President Nguyen Van Thieu) Republic of (South) Vietnam, they still lived constantly under oppression (subject to the rules and judgements of police, military and officials in the village) and exploitation (with illegal taxation, forced labor, high rent, and one-sided justice) by the same ruling class who had cooperated with the French during their war and occupation.

I was an army officer and my family was part of the educated and the well-to-do Vietnamese. We never suffered that kind of oppression or exploitation because our class of citizens were usually on good, if not equal, terms with the country's rulers. With or without constitution, laws, or elected government, we were the privileged, we were part of the ruling system. Long before the State of Vietnam and the Republic of (South) Vietnam were created, the constitution promulgated, the elections held, the French governors and their Vietnamese protégé administrators, always let us enjoy the kind of democracy that the rest of the Vietnamese population was kept at bay. All this explained the reasons why most of the educated, land and property owners, generals and high-ranking officials talked voluptuously about democracy and social justice but were reluctant to see a true democratic system materialized.

As a result, the poor and illiterate, the peasantry were in fact left unprotected against government abuses and subject to communists propaganda. Relieving these people from century-old French and mandarin legacy of tyranny and injustice would have negated the communist appeal and made the communist people's war impossible.

With the 1975 communist victory, our "democratic system" with its privileged rulers and favorites has been replaced by the communist "democratic" system, also with its privileged rulers and favorites - leaving the rest of the Vietnamese people in human conditions much worse than they had known previously.

#### For Some: Democracy was a Luxury.

Thus there was a conflict of interest concerning democracy among Vietnamese. On one hand were those who needed a democratic and freely elected government to care for them, though they may not have understood the concept of democracy. On the other hand were the better-off Vietnamese who surely understood democracy but did not need such a government to the same extent because they themselves and their forebears had already enjoyed - and were enjoying - more freedom and protection than prescribed by any constitution or laws.

President Diem understood the need of changing the system but he seemed not to believe in the kind of democracy he discarded as Western-oriented and alien to the Vietnamese people. He then relied on his brother-counselors to build their own kind of democracy they conceived that could compete with Communism - a Catholic-Confucianist oriented monarchy versus a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship. The consequence was disastrous for both.

President Diem was a nationalist, patriot, and a religious person who honestly believed that the system his brothers were building would serve his ideals. He was betrayed by the people he himself and his brothers brought in to build a kind of one-party democracy. Nguyen Van Thieu, a French left-over lieutenant and the last US-supported Vietnamese president, was no Ngo Dinh Diem. But Thieu followed Diem's footsteps to form his own one-party system with the difference that Thieu had neither Diem's ideals nor the Communists' experience. As a result, Thieu and his cohort of supporters betrayed the best generation of Vietnamese nationalists - military officers, civilian administrators and technocrats and others - who had bestowed their faith in Thieu and the United States. Thus, South Vietnam was lost, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and tens of thousands of Americans died because of the United States misjudgements and Thieu's depen-

dence on the US.

South Vietnam had never known a true democracy nor a truly elected government. Constitutions and elections had been used to deceive the American public, to justify the request for more American blood and money - and often these farces were covered up and/or done with the complicity of American ambassadors and subordinated agencies, including the CIA.

Dr. Phan Quang Dan, a Harvard graduate, and I remain as two living examples of South Vietnamese democracy. Under Diem, Dan was elected to the National Assembly from Gia Dinh province on the outskirts of the capital, where it was impossible for the police and other government members to alter the results because they were under the scrutiny of the foreign press. However, Dr. Dan was denied his seat. I also was elected to the National Assembly in what the New York Times called "one of the few unrigged contests in the history of the country." In truth, it would have been rigged because the province chief had been ordered to get the government-preselected candidates "elected." I learned about this a few days before the election and brought pressure on the government by threatening to "go public" about the matter, so the actual voting results were allowed to stand and I won handily.

However, when I proposed a negotiated settlement and if, necessary, a coalition government for the South, something Thieu opposed, I was tried on a trumped-up pro-communist charge by a military court and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, although I was a National Assembly deputy with parliamentary immunity.

In his book *Lost Victory*, former US Ambassador for pacification in South Vietnam William Colby boasted about "free elections" during the same period - the kind of elections in which even generals Duong Van Minh and Nguyen Cao Ky were pressured to withdraw their candidacies to let Thieu win

a one-candidate election for the presidency.

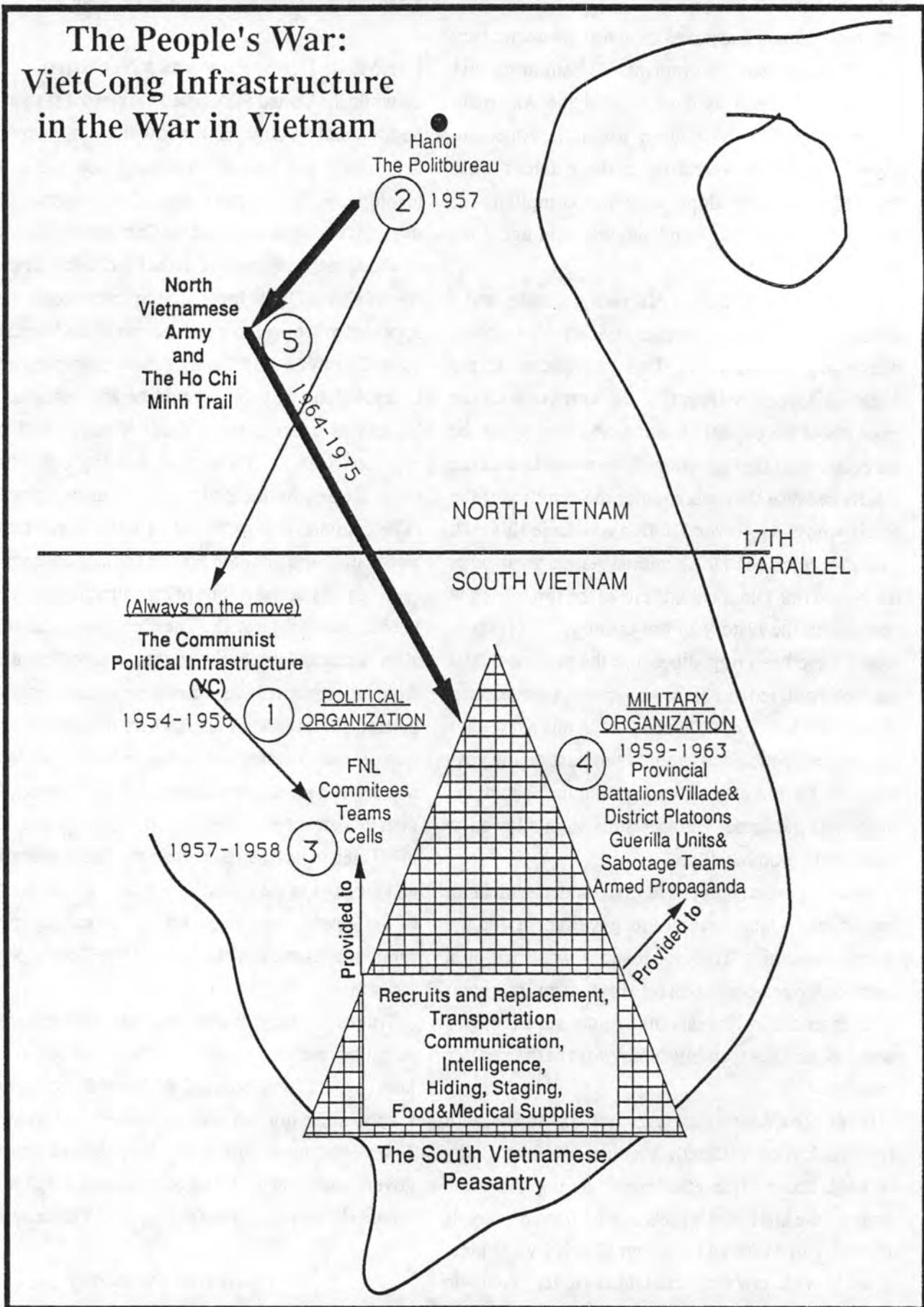
#### For Most: Democracy was a Necessity.

So while the United States used the elected system in South Vietnam only for window-dressing purpose, democracy was crucially needed - not just as an ideology, but as a means to fight Communism effectively. It would have denied the Communists the kind of Vietnamese they needed as the foundation for their "people's war." The fruits of democracy would have appealed to the peasants and the rest of the Vietnamese and motivated them to fight the war, helping them to understand why they should be anti-communist. Instead of a democracy, South Vietnam had run elections with no Vietnamese running other than those cleared by the police and security agencies. (The commanding personnel of those organization were left-overs from the French so their conception of the enemy and methods of operation reflected the French colonial legacy). The election results were always manipulated by the government because there were no representatives of *real* opposition political parties, except in some areas where the foreign press was present and/or where certain religions predominated. As a result, the National Assembly was more than 98 percent pro-Diem before the coup, and 80% pro-Thieu in its later reincarnation. The constitution and the laws of the country were used for the benefit of the govern, not the governed - especially in the rural villages and city slums where 85% of the population lived.

True democracy in South Vietnam, with real representation and application of the constitution and laws, would have reduced or limited corruption, favoritism, extortion and persecution of citizens. Those common sins committed by successive governements helped the communists enroll more recruits in the villages and turned most Vietnamese in

*Please read Democracy, page 77.*

# The People's War: VietCong Infrastructure in the War in Vietnam



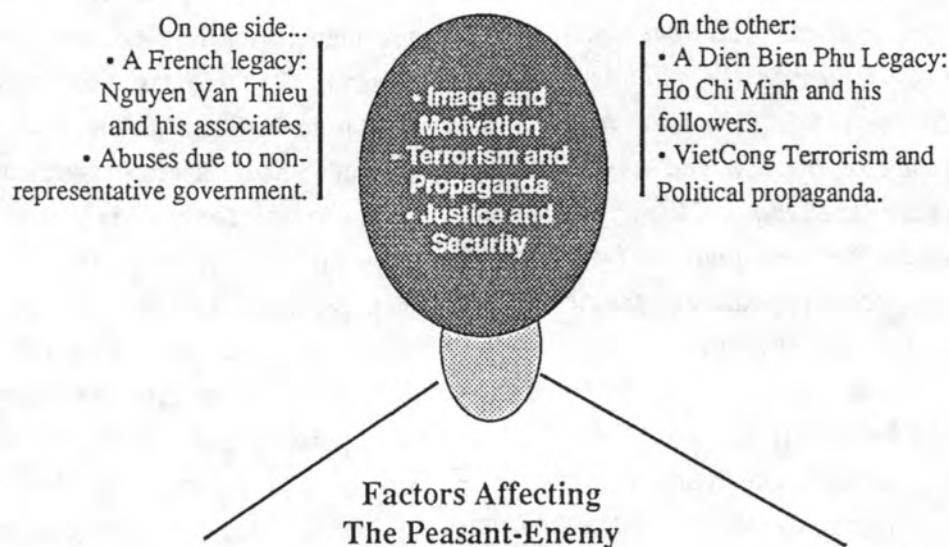
# The Decisive Factor

26, 28

The Peasant-Enemy:  
Vo Nguyen Giap People's War:  
The VietCong Infrastructure.

29

The Census Grievance program.



It was the Peasant-Enemy who formed the basis of all military, political, economic, and psychological activities and created the favorable conditions in South Vietnam that allowed the North to wage and finish the war. Defeating the peasant-enemy by ways of winning him over or eliminating him should have been the primary objectives.

BBC:

A discussion of the importance of the VietCong infrastructure to Hanoi's fight and how revolutionary cadres were developed on your side to combat them.

Your analysis here also of the importance of the Communists' political organization to their war effort.

TNC:

*Without the VietCong infrastructure Hanoi would not have been capable of waging the kind of war we saw in South Vietnam. Revolutionary or Pacification Cadres were created to eradicate that infrastructure. Political organization, indoctrination and propaganda were the backbone of all Communist success. But it was our failure in the building of a true democratic nation in South Vietnam which resulted in incompetence, corruption and un-nationalistic images - all combined to provide the Communists with ingredients for their political (war) efforts, primarily a disaffected populace ripe for their propaganda and indoctrination efforts.*

#### Building the Foundation.

The VietCong infrastructure in South Vietnam consisted first of a number of political cadres the Communists left behind after they withdrew to the North in accord with the 1954 Geneva peace settlement. Those cadres, individually or in teams of 2 or 3, remained in their villages, hideouts or moved from one area to the other, maintaining the relationship between former members of the resistance (against the French) and working to rally them to the North.

The VietCong usually lived a normal life, the same as anyone around the village.

Le Duan, who succeeded Ho Chi Minh, and other high ranking communist leaders who formed the leadership of that infrastructure, moved frequently around South Vietnam and, as disclosed after the war, often stayed a long time with supporters right in the Saigon capital. Some of those supporters were senior officials of the South Vietnamese government.

Thanks to that political infrastructure, which remained almost intact throughout the years despite consistent pursuit and persecution by South Vietnamese police and secret service, the North Vietnamese communists could send thousands of their cadres, who had left to join Hanoi in 1954, back to the South. There, they were able to reinforce and develop that political infrastructure into a large-scale machine, with communication networks, logistical supply, recruit resources, propaganda and terrorist teams, and district and provincial military units whose members were recruited on premises. Their armament and ammunitions for the guerilla warfare which openly started in 1960 were taken out from caches or captured from the South Vietnamese forces. More considerable amount of weapons and ammunition would be sent in from the North in later years.

Despite South Vietnamese efforts and successes in some provinces and districts, the guerilla war intensified and developed towards 1963 into combined actions by multiple small units at hamlet and village levels, and battalion unit level at selected military targets - thus creating a state of emergency that tied up the South Vietnamese army in a defensive posture nationwide - providing VietCong with more recruits, supply, and territorial control in villages, districts and provinces.

This made it possible for more infiltration and future intervention of North Vietnamese troops to capture South Vietnam in 1975 with a series of conventional-type battles. They were only able to do that, however, after more than a decade during which the VietCong had operated intensively in the South.

These VietCong operations created conditions which led the American and Vietnamese generals to take actions that were like those of the French/Vietnamese earlier to the eyes of the VietCong and Communists and their sympathizers and destroyed the dignity, self-confidence and motivation among the majority of Vietnamese nationalists. This reduced support for Vietnamese leadership to a group of the most corrupted Vietnamese favored by the Americans, which facilitated the downfall of South Vietnam.

### **The French Experience.**

The short exposé above explains clearly the cardinal role of the VietCong political infrastructure in the framing, forming and developing of all VietCong forces in the years that followed. Without that infrastructure, or if that infrastructure had been discovered early, and destroyed or handicapped, North Vietnam had only one option to conquer South Vietnam: through a conventional war. The Vietnamese army, with their backyard (villages and cities and families) secured, would have been capable of standing off the North successfully in that kind of warfare.

During the 1945-1954 war, the French had set up a variety of Vietnamese civilian, paramilitary, military and combined civilian-military organizations to perform civic actions (improving health and living conditions, eradicating illiteracy, exercising pro-government and anti-communist propaganda ...) in villages and hamlets (winning the people's minds and hearts) the military had controlled. After the French, from 1955 to 1960 in a state of peace, President Ngo Dinh Diem did the same with all kinds of organizations involving women, youth and the rest. Only the names changed, the purposes and operations remained nearly the same - pacifying, winning the people's minds and hearts. With the insurgency developing, civic actions were directed at supporting the founding of "agrovilles" and "strategic hamlets" (in which farmers were to be relocated) as ways to stop the

VietCong applying the well-known people's war strategy of using the population and other resources to fight the war.

### **Resources for Insurgency.**

On the South Vietnamese side, the Americans did have plans to foment an insurgency in the North, too. Right after the 1954 Geneva peace accords were enforced, the Communists took nearly 100,000 South Vietnamese to the North and left behind numerous caches of weapons and ammunitions. At the same time, the CIA team, under the direction of the famous Colonel Edward Lansdale, succeeded in the evacuation of almost 1,000,000 North Vietnamese, mostly Catholic, heading to the South. Lansdale's men, too, managed to leave behind a large quantity of armament and ammunitions. By early 1960, William E. Colby, then CIA chief in Saigon, began dropping and infiltrating well trained and equipped Vietnamese special teams into North Vietnam to perform sabotage and foment revolt there as a reply to the Communist insurgency in the South. Run for more than 3 years, the operation failed miserably; almost all teams were discovered, arrested, killed or imprisoned. The program was later turned over to the military but it also failed.

### **BBC:**

**Discussion of your Census Grievance team programmes.**

### **TNC:**

*The Census Grievance cadres were intended first to know the peasant-enemy and then to convert - among members of the police, security, and intelligence - a French-inherited mentality to a Vietnamese nationalistic spirit with regard to the assessment of their enemies and countrymen. Only then could other*

*military and pacification programs succeed.*

### To Know the Peasant-Enemy.

Although the French had left, the Vietnamese in high positions in the intelligence, secret service, police and military security agencies and at most of the village and province levels, came from those who had cooperated with the French during the war. They still viewed the peasants and Vietnamese who fought against the French and against them as the suspects, the potential enemy. They felt that the peasants and other resisters were VietCong and pro-VietCong and tended to treat them as such.

The Census Grievance cadres would operate independently to compensate for and counter these attitudes of the police, security and intelligence agencies.

To make them different from the Vietnamese who had been trained and employed by the French, I recruited young people mostly from farmer families whose records showed no affiliation with the Communists nor with the French.

I personally trained them in the methods of operation and discussed with them the conditions of the peasants, the war and the nation. *I wanted them to be motivated morally before they could operate professionally.*

After the training, each cadre was then assigned to a hamlet (a segment of a village) to work with the inhabitants there (usually about 300 individuals in 50 households or families per hamlet). This was how the operation proceeded daily:

All family members aged 10 and above from each one of the 50 households or families would take turns meeting with the Census Grievance cadre and answering mandatory questions along the following lines:

1/ Do you and your family feel safe, satisfied with the security in the family and hamlet? If not, why and what causes your concern?

2/ Do you have any complaint or suggestion to make vis-a-vis the military, paramilitary, police and security, and village, district and provincial officials?

3/ Do you know about any VietCong activities? What and who?

4/ What do you think the government should do to improve the conditions in your hamlet?

The one-on-one meeting and discussion would last exactly 10 minutes between the villager and the cadre. Every member from each household would be interviewed, one at a time, with all members taking their turns to meet with the cadre. All information from each interview was recorded in a journal and forwarded to a provincial collecting and analyzing office.

That process alone created a state of confusion for the VietCong. They could no longer be sure they were not being denounced by the inhabitants in the hamlets and villages. Many known and as yet undetected VietCong agents left as a result.

While he was no more successful when the results were counted than other province chiefs (it was from Chau's strategic hamlets that the VietCong recruited most of the 2,500 volunteers they raised in Kien Hoa for new battalions in the spring of 1963 after Ap Bac), Chau was an exception in that he seriously tried to pacify his province. The CIA officers involved in pacification had been drawn to him by his attitude and by the same qualities that attracted Vann."

Neil Sheehan

in his book *A Bright Shining Lie.*

### The Focus of a Total Unity of all Political, Social, Economic, and Military Efforts.

The reports from the cadres were counter-checked and translated in follow-up actions to be taken by appropriate departments.

*Please read Census Grievance, page 77.*

## CIA AND THE PACIFICATION

32

The Peasant-Enemy.

Of all the three enemies we faced in Vietnam  
- the North Vietnamese, the VietCong and the Peasant-Enemy -  
the latter was the main enemy;  
without him the two others could not operate.  
Thus, the peasant-enemy was the main enemy  
to pacify, to win over or to eliminate.

33

That was the objectives of  
My programs in Kien Hoa.

34, 42

Counter terror teams and the Phoenix Program.

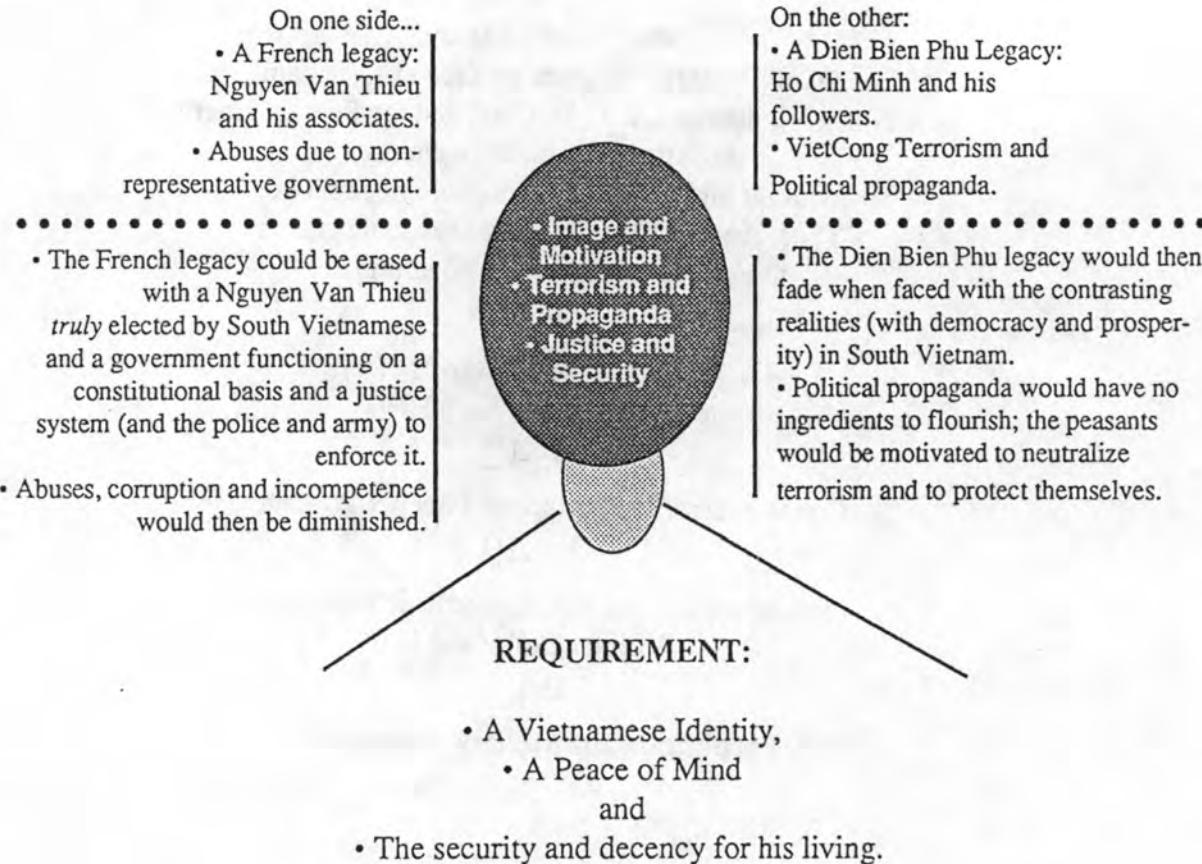
38,40

Vietnamese images and nationalistic motivation:  
William Colby and I.

44

Pacification and Military occupation.

## The Peasant-Enemy to be "pacified."



### SOLUTION:

- Predominance of Vietnamese nationalistic images,
- Duly represented and protected by a truly elected government and
- The Peasant-Enemy would become the Peasant-Friend, and the peasantry would take an active role in securing themselves against the Communists.

**BBC:**

**The significance of your programmes in Kien Hoa and the lessons to be learned for the US (and the CIA).**

**TNC:**

*Know the enemy and the people (peasants) and then customize all socio-political and military organizations and operations according to that knowledge. Those were the fundamental, significant precepts of my programs in Kien Hoa. Thus the lessons for the US and the CIA were that they should have learned to know (not to presume to know as was the case) the enemy before they made decisions on what strategy they would develop, with whom they would ally, and what means (political, economic or military) they would use. For that effort of knowing the enemy and the people, the sources of information should be appropriately rooted so the information could be accurate.*

#### **From Colonialism to Nationalism.**

The objective of my programs in Kien Hoa was to compensate for and convert an administration and army born from a century-old mandarin and colonial legacy to a new nationalistic and democratic Vietnam. The programs would first focus at all people on the government side to understand the conditions which motivated the peasants and others to sympathise with and support the VietCong and Communists. Only then would it be possible to launch appropriate actions and attacks to remedy each condition. Failure to do this would mean that each VietCong killed or captured would be replaced by at least one new recruit from the disaffected populace. South Vietnam would become a militarily occupied country with its population under military control - in what most US generals and ambassadors were ready to call a pacification success. I made that warning many times to

the Americans and Dr. Daniel Ellsberg disclosed it in his testimony before the US Senate Committee on Foreign relations in 1970.

My pacification program, which required a total and harmonious coordination of all military, socio-economic, and political efforts based on and around the Census Grievance cadres, had these objectives:

a/ To fully identify and understand friends and foes among the individual peasants and their families living in the areas exposed to VietCong contamination - in particular the reasons why certain individuals sympathized with or actively supported the VietCong - and consequently to make every effort to win the individuals over to the government side. Only in extremities, when all else failed, would the decision be made to neutralize an individual. The meticulous investigation led me to realize that we were dealing with what I later termed "the enemy we fomented or created."

b/ To get the local government and military to be responsive to the peasants and to build a better relationship and mutual trust with them.

c/ To create a new kind of "revolutionary cadres" motivated morally and nationalistically by their own conviction that their work was vital to rebuild the nation, that the people could be convinced, that they themselves could be the builders and guardians of the villages and nation because they were respected and were able to exercise their rights over those who governed them - not the other way around, in the manner they and their fathers before had been governed. The new kind of cadres would compensate for and provide a check on the current security and police operations.

#### **Nationalistic Image and Motivation.**

The CIA agreed fully with my ideas and began to support the development of the program in 1962. By late 1965, the agency wanted me to develop a similar program nationwide. But after less than a year work-

ing with the CIA and the Vietnamese super-minister in charge of pacification in Saigon, I realized that:

a/ the Vietnamese generals and government were more interested in the statistics on numbers of cadres trained, schools and bridges built, hamlets and villages organized, etc. than in the concept of pacification (and fighting the socio-political war) I had long nurtured,

b/ that the CIA was supporting the mechanism I worked out but they did not understand the fact that because those cadres were strongly identified with the CIA, and CIA officials were known as the patrons of the "revolution," would make the cadres ineffective, distancing them from the people and even from other governmental personnel.

#### **Had the United States had Known their Real and Main Enemy.**

Thus the lessons learned from my programs there for the US and the CIA were:

1/ To defeat the enemy one must know who he really is and how important was he among the many other enemies one may have. Unlike the WWS, Korean, Grenada, Panama, and Iraqi wars, the Vietnamese enemy was a totally different one. He was the farmer who just lived among and like other farmers; the bar girl who frolicked with the GIs; the reporter whom American reporters befriended; the high-ranking Vietnamese in the government.

2/ It is necessary to identify and understand the enemy (the actual face-to-face enemy). Doing this should have been the prime factor in determining the kind of allies to cooperate with and listen to, and then to decide on what strategy to apply and means to use.

3/ The fundamental mistake that affected the knowledge and understanding of the enemy in the Vietnam war - as stated by General Maxwell Taylor - came from the fact that the South Vietnamese government never made a national policy as to how to deal with those who had fought against the French.

It was left to the French-associated Vietnamese to deal with the subject on an ad-hoc basis - which was disastrous for the tens of thousands of nationalists who had joined the fight for freedom from France without embracing Communism, or even knowing what the term meant!

When the enemy is not fully understood, effective strategies for dealing with him cannot be formulated, suitable allies to work with will not be chosen, and inadequate methods to use in defeating the enemy will be selected.

#### **BBC:**

**Your civic action programmes and your teams designed to counter communist terror. A discussion of the impact of your work on the CIA's pacification programmes including Phoenix Programme.**

#### **TNC:**

*Only after all political and civic efforts failed to rally or neutralize an identified VietCong terrorist were the counter-terrorist teams called into action.*

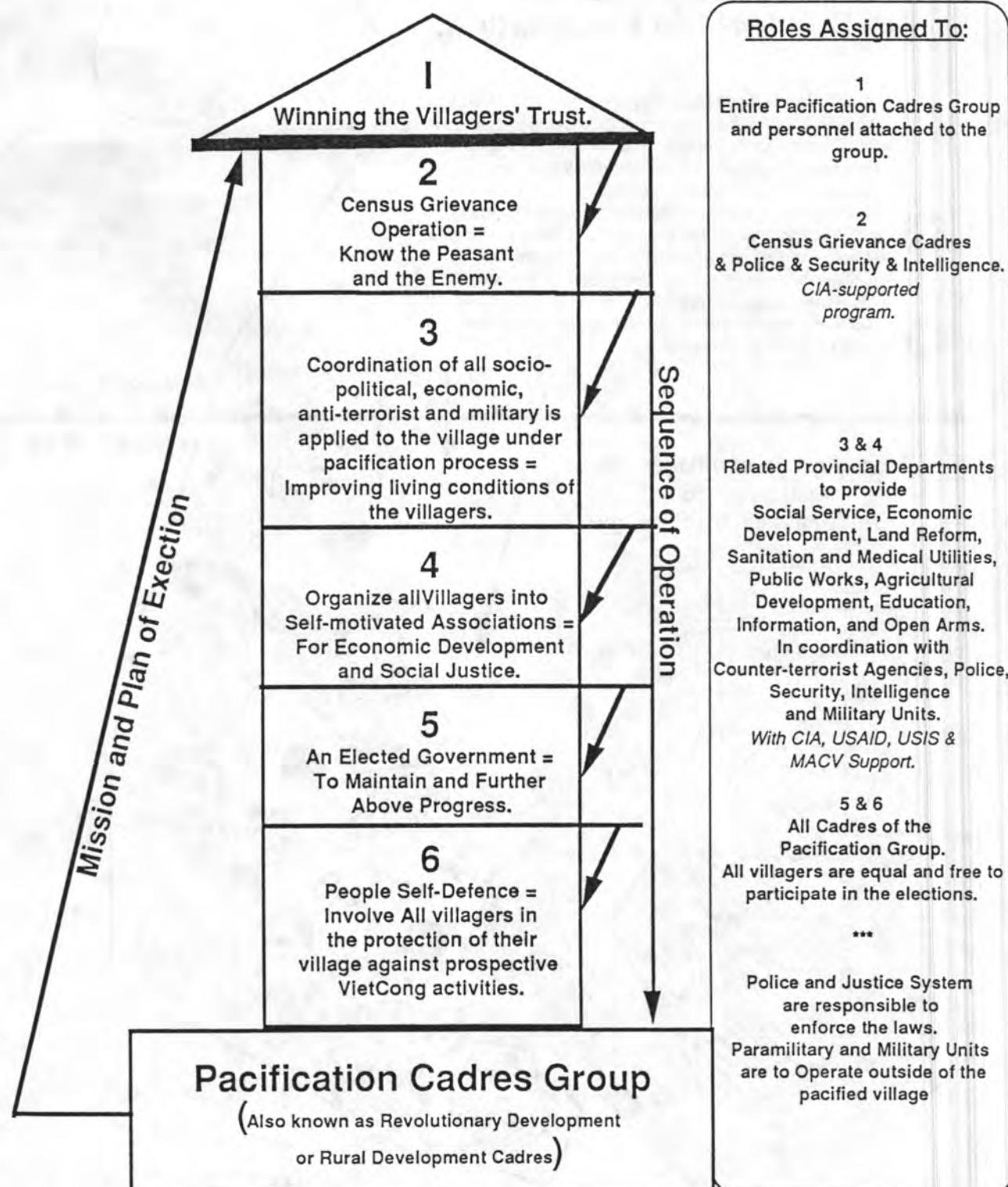
*Almost all US military and civilian personnel who worked with me or who come to observe my work agreed with my theories and practices. But it was the CIA who offered support for my programs from 1962 to 1966. John Paul Vann was instrumental in the conversion of my ideas into most of the CIA-supported pacification program.*

#### **A Human and Decent Interval.**

The Counter-Terrorist teams would come, as a last resort, to eliminate those who refused to give up.

I conceived that members of the counter-terrorist teams must also be motivated as strongly and effec-

# Objectives, Execution Plan, and Organization of the Pacification Cadres Group In The Process of Pacification.

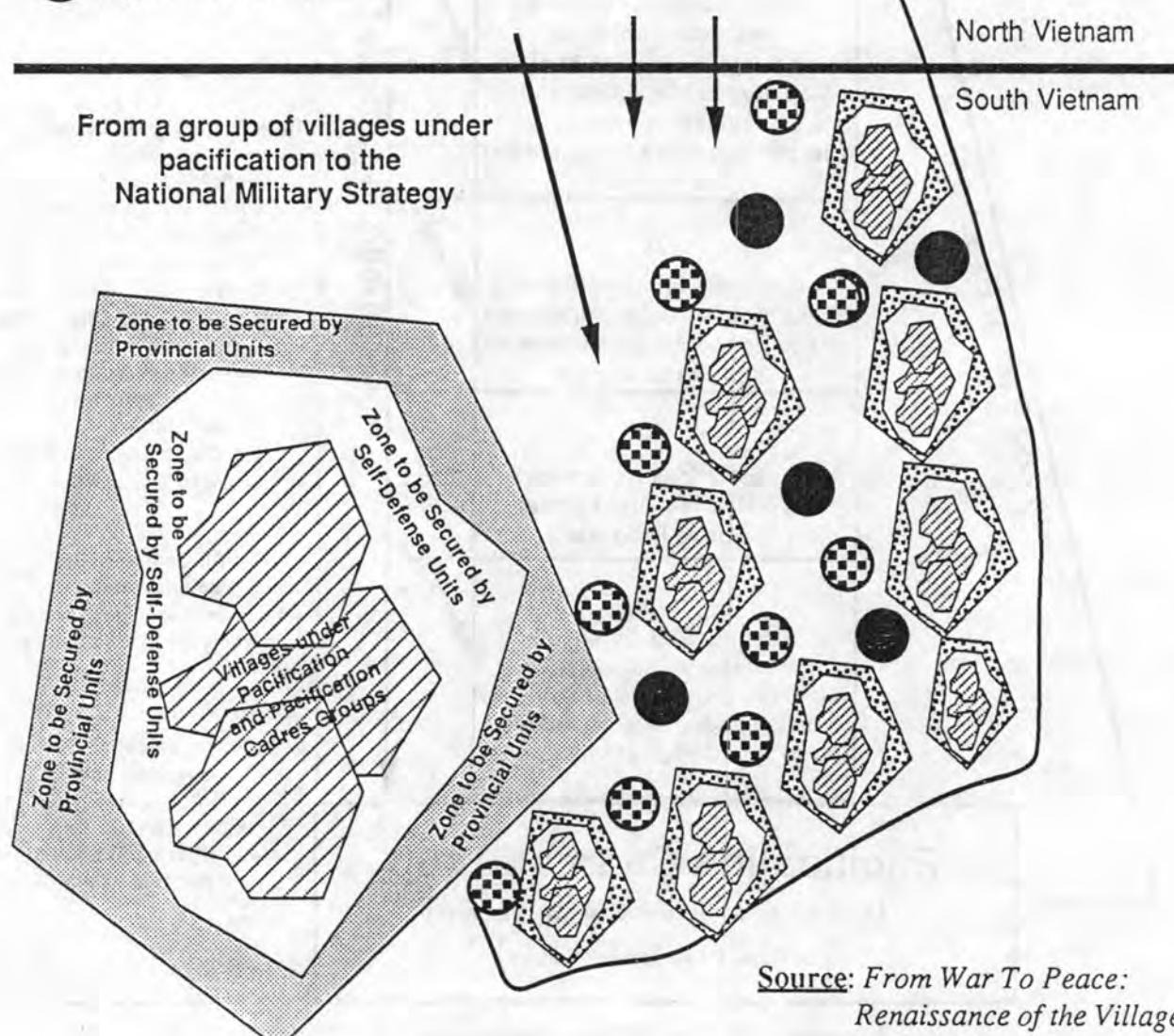


Source: *From War To Peace: Renaissance of the Village*  
by Tran Ngoc Chau - 1967.

My gratitude to Professor Harry G. Harris for giving me the copy of my book I dedicated to him in 1967 while he was in Saigon.

# From War To Peace: Renaissance of the Village and A Military Strategy to Support the Pacification.

- People-Self-Defense Units Operate inside of Pacified Villages (Villagers volunteered and Unpaid)
- Self-Defense Units Operate Around Pacified Villages
- Provincial (Regional) Units to Patrol and Intervene in support of the Self-Defense Units
- Vietnamese Divisions organized into Mobile Brigades to Patrol and Intervene in support of the Provincial Forces; Airborne and Marine would be rotated to operate on intelligence and in support of Army; Special Force would be to Harass Enemy Infiltration.
- U.S. Army kept in strategic location to intervene only in support of SVN Divisions.



tively as other cadres so they would not use their weapons for other purposes - revenge, personal profit, political gain, etc. - as had quite often been the case in the past.

"Kien Hoa had been a Viet Minh hotbed from the beginning and continued as a Viet Cong stronghold in the latter period. When Lt. Col. Chau took over, only 80,000 out of a population of 530,000 could be said to be under government control. Within a year - and a year, moreover, in which the general situation was deteriorating elsewhere - Chau raised this number to 220,000.

"No military victories were responsible for this, nor did Chau develop anything new in the way of political organization. Rather, he buttressed the existing leadership and organization - and he provided channels for the population to improve its lot.

.....

"In January of 1964, however, he was moved back to Kien Hoa, thus becoming the sole province chief to run the same province both before and after the coup (which overthrew Diem). In his absence and in the general turmoil surrounding the overthrow of Diem, the situation in Kien Hoa had drastically deteriorated, with government control slipping down to 100,000.

In his second term Chau stayed in Kien Hoa for two years. In that time he again raised government control figures to over 300,000 - again in stark contrast to the general chaos in the rest of the country, where the government was losing one district and one battalion a week.

-Elizabeth Pond in her report on  
*The Chau Trial* - March 1970.

In my first months of running the province, I learned that both the Vietnamese and American resources and personnel deployed in the province were acting

very much independently from each other. As I was developing my pacification program, I integrated all civilian, social, political and military personnel and resources into one organization with the Census Grievance as the leading element. Military deployment and use of resources would then be determined on the results of the intelligence and information obtained about the enemy and the people.

As explained above and according to my pacification program, the Census Grievance was to identify the enemy and to report on the behavior of the government personnel as well. The security and police were to provide information to balance and be considered with that of the census grievance. Subsequential measures would then be taken.

- Province, district and village chiefs were to take actions to ensure that the military, police and other officials would behave in the way that they should to win over the people and the enemy as well.

(In the Vietnam war, the two used to be very much related in one way or the other; it was hard to distinguish between them, as I have said.)

- Social, medical and other public agencies would provide appropriate services to villagers and related community - according to the priority given.

- The justice system and legal process were to be implemented and strictly respected by all citizens - beginning with the police and military.

- The Political Action Team (PAT of the pacification group) would provide the security for the villagers and train the volunteers for their self-defense.

- Finally the military deployment and operations were to provide adequate security for the village to be pacified - resulting in the release or reduction of military protection - thus, the military, in my program, was to support and be subordinated to the pacification program, not the other way around.

#### A Window of Opportunity.

I did not know whether my friend John Paul Vann,

who was enthusiastic about my concept and program, and the visits of William Colby and other American officials to some of my model hamlets, had anything to do with later developments in the pacification effort. Superficially they were alike but the big difference could be seen in the reversed role of the military - making that the main element, with other elements in subordinate roles, and the American shadow looming over the Vietnamese in the program. Sir Robert Thompson was also one of the distinguished visitors and I learned a lot from him about the British counter-insurgency strategy - some of which was incorporated in my pacification program.

After I left the program, the counter-terrorist team I integrated as just one part (and far from the most important one) of the pacification group was separated and developed into its own organization that came under a combined intelligence center control. This system and the way the counter-terrorist teams were used under the Phoenix Program completely perverted my original concept.

The Colby-Phoenix program, although taken out of the context of my pacification concept and program, was unfairly treated by the critics.

Contrary to popular opinion, the program greatly reduced abuses and killings which had been often committed throughout the years (in war as in peace) by all kind of organizations before they could be controlled and directed under the Phoenix program.

"I never met anyone so highly motivated," Phillips said. "If you wanted someone who had an instinctive understanding of how to generate popular support in a province, this was the man, Chau. He impressed me as being a very proud, very intelligent guy who obviously had a clear idea and sense of purpose in what he was doing."

-Rufus Phillips, the head of the USOM  
Rural Aid program).

"Stu Methven was quick to realize that Chau was probably the most forward-thinking pacification specialist in the country, and he offered CIA help."

"I loved Chau like an older brother," (Daniel) Ellsberg said. "By the time I left Vietnam he and John Paul Vann were my closest friends in the whole world. Most of what I learned about pacification I learned from Chau and Vann - and Vann got it from Chau."

-Zalin Grant in his book  
*Facing The Phoenix*.

## BBC:

The impact your projects and ideas  
made on William Colby and your  
impressions of William Colby.

## TNC:

*Mr. William Colby visited Kien Hoa a few times and talked with me about the programs I implemented there. He was among the few top Americans who made an effort to listen to ideas but I doubted whether he understood the rationale behind the pacification mechanism. It turned out that while I attached the importance of nationalistic image and motivation as a prime condition for the creation and training of the Pacification Cadres, the well-known CIA official William Colby was seen sitting in Vietnamese Cabinet meetings and frequently traveling with President Nguyen Van Thieu to visit the rural people. This reinforced the image of South Vietnam as a puppet nation under the control of the US and the CIA - and thus played into the communist propaganda.*

### And Officer and a Gentleman.

Ambassador and CIA Director William Colby was involved in the conspiracy with President Nguyen Van Thieu to destroy me and the influence I wielded for a peace settlement which did not fit in with the then-current US agenda. Colby thought he acted rightly to preserve Thieu for the US interest. I would leave it to Mr. Colby to comment on my projects and role because he seemed to have a selective memory.

"It was at this time also that Chau experimented with and developed a prototype of what would become the Revolutionary Development pacification cadres, the paramilitary defense, intelligence, and development workers in villages and hamlets. With the encouragement of the group around Gen. Edward Lansdale (the one who had "discovered" Ramon Magsaysay in the Philippines and was trying to repeat the feat in Vietnam), Chau gathered his ideas on pacification into a book, "From War to Peace: Renaissance of the Village." American enthusiasts of Chau's work assert that there is no pacification program in Vietnam today that was not pioneered by Chau in Kien Hoa.

"At the end of 1965 Chau was selected, with the endorsement of both Vietnamese and American officials, to direct the young Revolutionary Development training program, which was financed and sponsored by the CIA."

-Elizabeth Pond in her report on  
*The Chau Trial* - March 1970.

A story, unrelated in content but related in nature, should help the readers understand what I mean about "selective memories."

A few months before the 1968 Viet Cong Tet offensive that General Frederic Weyand succeeded in beating back, I briefed the general (with Ambassadors Bunker and Porter present throughout the 3-hour session) about the importance of holding and controlling the populated cities (which were considered to be

pacified at the time) against the enemy actions. A year later, during my trial, the general commented in his report that he did not get anything from that briefing. I was surprised to learn that it took 3 hours of listening to an interlocutor for a general (and two ambassadors) to find out that there was nothing in the lecture. I did make an effort to believe the gentleman in the general.

### Only Vietnamese Nationalists - not Opportunists - Could Understand It.

My impressions of William Colby are that he was capable of listening to Vietnamese other than the generals he used to deal with, of considering new ideas and absorbing them.

But I am convinced that he, like other Americans of his stature, over-confident of the noble cause and victory the United States was pursuing in Vietnam, was unable to overcome the usual material logic to handle the Vietnamese affairs. Vietnamese who read the reports and memoirs of General Westmoreland and William Colby must be astonished to see how "innocent" they were in their ways of tarnishing and destroying the images of the Vietnamese leadership, not realizing that the Soviet and Chinese chose not to follow the same process with North Vietnamese communist leaders. Westmoreland depicted the ways and means he induced the Vietnamese president and generals to do his bidding. Colby told of his presence in Vietnamese Cabinet meetings and of being frequently at the side of the Vietnamese president in his visits with the rural population. How much more could the Communists expect the US generals and ambassadors to do to help their propaganda in their war against the Americans and Thieu?

More than just tarnishing the Vietnamese nationalistic images and making it impossible to compete with the other side, such "innocent" mistakes destroyed the self-confidence and self-respect of the Vietnamese leaders themselves. Subsequently the

latter relied totally on the Americans for their personal opportunities and survival, not on their Vietnamese constituency. As a result, with the American withdrawal, the entire Vietnamese leadership, forged through years in that ambiance and psychology, was ready to collapse, and did so at the end.

Only Vietnamese nationalists could understand the vastly greater importance of nationalistic image and motivation as crucial factors, far above the material and organizational factors, in the war. The North Vietnamese were able initially to blind the peasants to the fact that Communism actually meant selling their souls completely to that most alien Marxist-Leninist kind of religion. Then they were able to convert them fully through extensive propaganda and indoctrination. The Soviets and Chinese helped their Vietnamese comrades in their "winning the 'minds and the hearts" of the peasants and other Vietnamese by staying in the background, unlike the Americans, whose actions made it clear that they controlled Vietnamese political and military leaders. This made it an "American war" in the eyes of most Vietnamese people.

**Image and Nationalistic Motivation, or  
From Vietnamization of the Corpses to  
Americanization of the Minds. (1)**

"Subtle leverage was possible through the American advisers located at virtually every level in the South Vietnamese military forces from the battalion to the budget bureau in the Ministry of Defense. A particularly effective tool was the money provided under the Military Assistance Program, which I administered; if a unit was under par and failed to respond to my urging for improvement, I could simply withhold support for it until I could detect substantial change." -General Westmoreland in his book *A Soldier Report*.

**BBC:**

Many of your ideas, including census grievance, amnesty programmes and counter-terror were later taken up by the CIA.

How do you feel about this, and do you feel they did justice to your ideas?

**TNC:**

*Although they adopted my ideas to set up new systems or altered the existing ones with regard to pacification efforts, the CIA, probably reflecting the United States perception, based their operations on a materialistic logic while my Census Grievance and Pacification programs were initiated and developed on a basis of moral logic. They adopted many of the mechanics of my programs but not the soul of them.*

**A Clash of Images.**

The Americans had made it a pacification program and a Vietnamese leadership openly identified it with the CIA. When I came to Saigon to head the Pacification (revolutionary development) cadres, my first requirement was that the American presence be reduced, the CIA involvement kept covert, and the Vietnamese cadres be won first by nationalistic images and motivation before they could motivate the peasants. The CIA and the Vietnamese government refused to back me up; I resigned and chose the National Assembly platform to serve my countrymen.

My concept of building a nationalistic image and motivation, with a fair legal system providing equal justice and a truly democratic, elected government as the political foundation to counter the images of Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants and their proletarian dictatorship, and to rally the people to the govern-

ment side was never really accepted.

The American images of well-known CIA official William Colby (sitting in South Vietnamese Cabinet meetings and traveling with Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu around the country) and American advisors (down to village and hamlet levels) and the identification of the CIA with the pacification and Phoenix programs destroyed the Vietnamese nationalistic images and motivations. (If they had observed the defiant presence of American advisors from Saigon to the villages and hamlets, from the military general staff to the company and battalion levels, the former French colonialists would have had red faces, realizing how shy they were in the highlight of their colonial time several decades earlier!)

That was the root of my conflict with the United States and the CIA during the war. I did not need to express my feelings strongly while I was in Kien Hoa where I could exercise fully my beliefs and authority thanks to the "innocence" of the generals above me and the conscientious acceptance of the American advisors (MACV, CIA, USAID and USIS). In Saigon, I made my feelings known openly and very strongly and I failed to sell my ideas, I chose to resign as an act of loyalty to myself, friends and collaborators and the Vietnamese nation.

**Image and Nationalistic Motivation, or  
From Vietnamization of the Corpses to  
Americanization of the Minds. (2)**

"As it was the first time Nguyen Van Thieu had been President, so it was also the first time for almost all Vietnamese leaders to hold positions of authority. I often recalled General MacArthur's advice as I departed for Vietnam: treat them as you did your cadets. Cajole, guide, encourage."

-General Westmoreland

in his book *A Soldier Report*.

**Image and Nationalistic Motivation, or  
From Vietnamization of the Corpses to  
Americanization of the Minds. (3...)**

"In a significant photograph, Secretary McNamara was shown lifting Nguyen Khanh's fist to show that he was 'our' fighter."

"Again assigned to Vietnam just after Tet 1968, I spent the next three years as Ambassador and Deputy to the Commanding General, Military Assistance Command Vietnam, traveling to every province and sitting in on President Nguyen Van Thieu's Cabinet meetings as I directed American support of the rural pacification program."

-William Colby in his book *Lost Victory*.

The junta knew very well that the U.S. needed them and the elections for the war - not for the Vietnamese people to get rid of the junta.

"We are going to win in Vietnam. We will remain here until we do win."

-Senator Robert Kennedy - 2/18/1962.

"The Saigon junta has ruled out 'neutralists,' has 'ruled out 'Communists,' has ruled out others of whom the generals disapproved, and now they will not even let who are left participate freely and openly.

"Candidates have been barred because their view were 'unacceptable' although they were loyal citizens. The Saigon junta is making the elections a fraud and a farce."

-Senator Robert Kennedy - 8/11, 1967.

*When I first met him, Daniel Ellsberg was a typical American - believing that the U.S. was right and would definitely win the war. A year later he became convinced that the war could not be won under the circumstances he had observed. Ellsberg then decided to fight to preserve American lives and honor. Kennedy and Ellsberg personified the millions of Americans who had changed their positions and attitudes in the Vietnam war because of the same reason: the Noble Cause was tainted and made the victory impossible.*

**BBC:**

Compare the ways in which your pacification programmes were related to Phoenix and in what ways (the CIA) did or did not distort your original ideas.

Describe the purpose of your 3-man counter terror teams.

Weren't these in the end turned into the assassination squads of the Phoenix Programme?

What do you think of the CIA's Phoenix Programme? Some people have called you the Father of the Phoenix Programme.

How do you react to this?

**TNC:**

*The actions of my 3-man counter-terrorist teams, which would later be integrated into the Phoenix program, were taken only to counter the VietCong who created terror (and assassination) and others who operated underground against the Vietnamese government personnel and the Vietnamese who supported their government. They were used only as a last resort, when all other means of converting those terrorists had failed. In the use of their version (in the Phoenix program) of those teams, the CIA fully trusted the information and judgement of the Vietnamese police, secret service, military security and intelligence agencies as the basis for using the counter-terror teams. Although I appreciated the value of their personnel, I was skeptical of the leadership (left-over from the French), perception and methods used in those agencies. The Census Grievance was created out of that skepticism and served to counter-check the information before a decision could be made to eliminate a person. Omission of the detailed interview and cross-checking process would change*

*things totally and fundamentally.*

*If the Phoenix Program was my child, it was then a runaway child that only bore my physical resemblance but lost my soul.*

**The Assassination Character.**

There were misinterpretations and misunderstandings on the part of the public about the usual "assassination" character of the Phoenix program.

First of all, the 3-man counter terror teams who would be taken into the Phoenix program and the Phoenix program itself were never designed for the sole purpose of assassination. They were created to counter the VietCong underground agents who created insecurity in and around the government-controlled villages by way of kidnapping and assassinating our officials and civilians suspected of collaborating with the government. Members of the anti-terrorist teams and the Phoenix program used similar techniques to neutralize and eliminate the VietCong terrorists. That similarity led the media and the public to the ideas that "assassination of civilians and innocents" was frequently committed by members of the Phoenix program.

To clarify this misunderstanding, one needs to know that the VietCong at this level were a kind of very fluid peasant-enemy who refused to respond to the government call and who kept operating while moving in and around the villages. They were in fact active members of the VietCong political, financial, intelligence and paramilitary infrastructure.

The major difference between my Census Grievance-related counter-terrorist teams and the Phoenix program was that my counter-terrorist teams were designed to operate under the guidance and supervision of the Census Grievance, using information painstakingly developed in many interviews. Under the Phoenix program, the police chief, acting as vice-chairman to the province chief, controlled the Census Grievance along with other military and civilian

intelligence agencies. Thus, my initial objective to create and use the Census Grievance as a counter-balance to the extremes of the French police legacy was totally nullified.

During my years as province governor, I, who never dared to kill a chicken, took on my own responsibility to make the final decision to eliminate a specific, identified VietCong. Conditions were that the person must be living in the contested or uncontrolled area and had refused to appear before the government authority for investigation of his activities as revealed by all sources of intelligence, with information developed by the Census Grievance as the final assurance that the decision was justified.

There was a situation that existed during the entire war, a very long time before the creation of the Phoenix program, that would also help to clarify the media and public misinterpretation of this program.

From the beginning of the war back in 1945 to the initial creation of the Census Grievance-related Counter-terrorist teams and the Phoenix program, both sides had been involved in assassinations, kidnapping, tortures, and "searching the underwater shrimps" (a very popular term used to tell about the fate of those suspects and presumed enemies who were kidnapped or captured by government forces and dumped in deep water to die after they had been tortured for intelligence).

In early 1946, I was in Quang Ngai province to witness and learn from large crowds of people in mourning dresses protesting against the Viet Minh there for having dumped thousands of their fathers, mothers, and childrens to die into wells and collective graves. In 1968, I was in Hue to witness thousands of bodies retrieved from underground; they were massacred by the Communists during the Tet offensive a few months earlier - a cousin of mine (who was a gas station employee) and his 13-year old son were among them. Such atrocities and terrorism existed

during the entire war, although at a relatively small and almost unnoticed scale of casualties - from one or two individuals to groups of several individuals at a time - but they occurred almost daily throughout the country. The Communists exercised their legal system under the spirit of "revolutionary brutality" as they used to justify their kind of terrorism.

On the South Vietnamese side, the central government had never made kidnapping and assassination a policy, but members of the police, security, secret service, paramilitary and military forces were let free to use any means and methods (kidnapping, torturing and assassinating) to fight the Communists. Although there was never any massacre or killing of the type the Communists did, individuals suspected rightly or wrongly of being pro-VietCong were at the mercy of members of whatever forces captured them - in particular at the village level. Because South Vietnam had never enjoyed a true democratic system, and military courts were the tools to enforce the "laws", there were no elected officials capable of defending and protecting their constituents. Material or political gain and revenge were often the motives behind individuals being accused as suspects, kidnapped and assassinated.

Wherever the Census Grievance was fully implemented, such unwarranted abuse and revenge actions were reduced and only counter-terrorist teams were assigned to do the dirty jobs of capturing and killing the VietCong underground agents; the number of agencies and people who had been virtually let free to kidnap and assassinate suspects thus was greatly reduced.

With regard to the title "Father of the Phoenix programme" some people and the Communists had given to me, I want to make this comment: " My Census Grievance-related counter-terrorist teams were my true children but the Phoenix programme was my teen-ager who went astray and was lost to his foster parents."

**BBC:**

**William Colby claimed that the war had been won and the pacification was successful. How do you respond to that?**

**TNC:**

*Again, Mr. Colby either knew that he did not tell the truth, or he considered a military-occupied village or area to be a pacified one and a US complete withdrawal to be a victory.*

General Maxwell Taylor, the respected elder scholar statesman who had pioneered the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, made an assessment after the war that the primary reason the U.S. failed to win the war there was that the Americans did not know the enemy nor the allies.

If this was the case then the CIA should be the first to be blamed; and, in fact, Mr. William Colby would be responsible for that failure for he had been involved with Vietnam for more than 15 years, from 1959 to 1975 as Chief of the Saigon Station, Far East Division and CIA Director.

Had Saigon CIA Station Chief Colby succeeded in his "possible mission," he would have helped his close partner Ngo Dinh Nhu to build a democratic foundation in the South to "pacify" Vietnamese nationalists and the peasantry in particular - the Viet Cong infrastructure would have been eliminated at that early stage of 1959-1962 while he was on his first tour of duty there. Mr. Colby could have then saved 58,000 American lives and prevented a war. Had Mr. Colby ever asked the question: "How could Mr. Ngo Dinh Nhu succeed in building the secret police, special forces and use them against the Vietnamese they disagreed with - in particular the Buddhists."

In his second tour of 1968-1971, Ambassador Colby could still have "pacified" South Vietnam and "won" the war, had he used his tremendous influence

as he described to build a democratic system in order to appeal to more Vietnamese to the government side, to reduce corruption, incompetence and oppression, and thus to appeal to more Vietnamese in the fight against the Communists and fend off the anti-sentiment at home. Instead he was involved in that scheme to deface democracy and strengthen the hands of an already authoritarian regime.

Even in the period of 1971-1975, CIA Director William Colby could still help South Vietnam and the United States to devise an alternative to maintain what former Ambassador for Pacification Colby described eloquently as "the war had been won" in South Vietnam.

**"You could pacify South Vietnam with American troops alone,"** Chau says. **"But it would take three million troops, and it would last only as long as they stayed."**

**"The crucial target of pacification, in Chau's mind, is to create a spirit in the rural people of willingness to organize in their own self-defense. Nor will it be generated by Vietnamese cadres widely regarded as "American employees" - particularly if CIA influence on the program emphasizes the role of PAP element alone."**

**-Daniel Ellsberg in his testimony  
before the Committee on Foreign Relations  
U.S. Senate - 1970.**

Were Saigon and dozens of other cities throughout South Vietnam pacified before they were all attacked by the Viet Cong and Communists during the 1968 Tet offensive?

Was it a victory for South Vietnam with fewer troops (after the American withdrawal) and more North Vietnamese forces, and with a peace settlement that no promises and powers could enforce?

Was it a victory at the time when the "peace" resulted in the Viet Cong being recognized as an equal partner in the Republic of Vietnam - the Viet Cong

being better supported by the Communists and the South Vietnamese left alone to face their enemy?

Was it a victory after the United States had suffered 58,000 KIAs and hundreds of thousands of wounded casualties to change a South Vietnam that was anti-communist before the US involvement to a South Vietnam sharing power with the Communists - as provided in the settlement that the United States concluded with North Vietnam?

I totally disagree with Mr. William Colby on his assessment. I called his claimed "free elections" travesties to mask an autocracy, his "pacification success" a military occupation, and his "victory" an unacceptable excuse for those who had created (possibly with an innocent arrogance) the conditions for the Communists to win the war there.

I would not discuss further about democracy and free elections, because the examples were plentiful and I am very sure that Mr. Colby should have known that, far better than most Americans do.

I suggest that Mr. Colby would draw his own conclusion by reading the very simple parallel I here enclosed on page 46.

The possible argument could be based on the Paris Accord - the Accord's actual purpose for the United States was to end the war honorably, without the stigma of a defeat, and for North Vietnam to face a South Vietnamese leadership Americanized to the degree that they expected it would become impotent without American troops, money and ammunition.

To expect North Vietnam to abide by the Paris Accord with a Nguyen Van Thieu sitting with the National Liberation Front or anyone else to set up elections for a new South Vietnam would have been a bad joke.

To search for a compromise with North Vietnam on the eve of South Vietnam's near-total collapse was another insane and dramatic comedy.

## About Pacification and Security

"My job was to go around to the villages and hamlets with Vietnamese officials and take measures. I was also supposed to listen to what the local leaders were saying about the security situation. The barometer for all of this was a report that you sent in each week or two, grading the hamlet on how pro-Viet Cong or how pro-government was. These reports were designed so they could be graded by computer. There were all sorts of different categories, maybe thirty or forty. Overall security. Local government. Whether or not taxes were being collected. Whether or not the land-reform representative was there. For each one of these indices you'd have five little squares, and you'd blacken one with a pencil so a computer could read it. Just like the SAT test. An *E* was the worst: *A* was the best. You had to get up to a *C* at least.

Well, this was a fraud. It was a paper exercise. In the first place, everyone knew that the higher-ups at the regional and Saigon levels wanted positive reports. We had been told that, not in memorandum or lecture, but the word gets down to you."

-Robert Boettcher  
Deputy Director  
IV Military Region  
Field Operations Division.

Mr. Robert Boettcher held a MS in international relations at Georgetown, and had successively served as a Foreign Service officer, congressional aide, staff director to the House Subcommittee on International Relations before he volunteered for Vietnam.

The above statement was excerpted from

*Strange Ground* by Harry Maurer

## A Parallel That Speaks For Itself

### The French Experience North Vietnam 1951-1954

#### • 1951

For a period of the first 6 months, Vo Nguyen Giap launched three consecutive offensives against the triangle of Vinh Yen, Mao Khe and Phat Diem which covered the entire Delta of the Red River, Hanoi and Haiphong. Giap was badly defeated and lost 20,000 men in the battles. French air power played a major role in Giap's defeat.

#### • 1952-1953

Exploiting the success, French troops captured Hoa Binh, a provincial town at some 40 miles of Hanoi, to expand the vast "pacified" Delta. A "De Lattre Line" was completed with the building of more than 1000 blockhouses and fortresses (and a very large force to man and protect the system) in and around the pacified villages.

A major pacification campaign was also launched to accelerate the process.

Communist troops were kept in check and chose to try on remote locations in Laos and along the jungles.

Most of the population in North Vietnam lived in "pacified" territory, heralded French.

#### • 1954

The French continued aggressively on the pacification in the Delta and initiated a strategy of offensive defense in Dien Bien Phu. Most of mobile and reserve units were fully tied to static defense.

The Communist won the battle and the war.

### The American Experience South Vietnam 1972-1975

#### • 1972

The Communists launched a series of massive attacks (the Easter offensive) throughout South Vietnam. They were badly defeated. U.S. air power played a major role in the Communist defeat.

Realizing that even with a limited U.S. military support, South Vietnamese were still capable of holding fast, North Vietnam made concessions and used the Paris negotiation to accelerate the U.S. pullout.

#### • 1973-1974

With the signing of the Paris Accord ending the war, the South Vietnamese army of 450,000 extended its coverage to a vast additional territory left vacant by the departure of the 600,000 U.S. and allied troops.

The over half of a million Popular and Self-Defense (provincial) forces were also extended to cover the "pacified" villages.

An "Accelerated Pacification" campaign was also launched with more paramilitary and military tied up for support.

Communist troops were also kept in check and repelled to operate mainly in remote jungles.

Most of South Vietnamese enjoyed peace and prosperity - "the war had been won," heralded Americans.

#### • 1975

Accelerated pacification continued. With no signs of U.S. renewed support and with most of SVN units tied to static defense, the Communists launched the big offensive and ended the war.

## THE UNIQUE WAR STORY

49

My personal story:

a 30-year war story told by the only active  
participant who had fought with Ho Chi Minh's Forces,  
before he sided with South Vietnam and the United States  
- on both military and political fronts.

51

From Kien Hoa to Vung Tau: the CIA and I.

53, 56

A matter of moral consideration.

59

The brother-enemies.

60

The Communists and I.

## A BRIGHT SHINING LIE

### Democracy at the Top

### and Democracy at the Grassroots

Only after President Diem offered me the opportunity in 1960 to look into the social and political pictures of South Vietnam, did I begin to learn that both the United States and South Vietnamese leaders who submitted themselves to American strategy were wrong and would lead Vietnam to devastation and defeat. I realized this more and more as the years went by and, over a 7-year period, developed and refined my own strategy to win the war.

After I fought, and lost, for a principle I considered the primary factor needed to win the war (the Vietnamese nationalistic image and motivation) I chose to resign as an act of total loyalty - to the country, friends and myself.

After I quit the administration and entered into politics, I fought to build a true democratic system to justify the war and mobilize the Vietnamese people. Again, I lost the battle. As the Americans began to disengage in 1968, I threw myself into an effort to unite all Vietnamese to preserve a non-communist South Vietnam - always with the same spirit of loyalty.

US Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, William Colby and Theodore Shackley (of the CIA) conspired with their protégé Nguyen Van Thieu to destroy me. The Communists looked at me as one of their most dangerous enemies but also one of the people with great potential if I could be converted. Therefore, they put me through re-education and prison trying to convert me to their cause. As a loyal nationalist anti-communist, I was rejected and condemned by both the United States and the Communists.

At the end, my personal story is also the factual story of why and how the United States won every battle and lost the war - the window dressing democratic system had turned the South Vietnamese leadership into a corrupted and incompetent group that depended on the war, the American blood and money to prosper with the war and thus to alienate

"We were trying to show that the government was serious about the elections, explain what the elections were, who they were going to elect - village chief, administrative chief - and that elections were really a good thing. The province chief would make a big pitch. Part of it was to urge people to run for office. We were in one village and Colonel Dong (the province chief) said, "I want people to run for village chief. Who's going to run for village chief?" No hands at all. "Somebody's got to run for village chief! What about you?" He'd just point to people. "All right, you, you, and you run for village chief." That was that.

The day was set aside for the election, the polling booths were assigned, ballots were printed, polling places were secured by military personnel. Everything was in order. The day before the election, I was talking to Dong and I said, "How are things?" "It's all set." I said, "You think there's going to be a big turnout?" He goes, "I know we're going to have 95 percent. I made sure.

So the elections were artificial, because they were just a part of the numbers game. Back home, the antiwar movement was saying that we were supporting a dictatorial government. The way they did was to hold local elections under the military with voters herded to the polling places, sometimes with candidates picked at random."

-Robert Boettcher, *Strange Ground*

the Vietnamese people. Consequently as the Americans withdrew, that group of *opportunistic leaders* panicked, disoriented and fled - with the residues of large sum of American money. My story thus was just one example of millions of Vietnamese people, soldiers and officers, civil servants and technocrats who have been betrayed by that opportunistic leadership supported by the United States.

BBC:

Details of your own  
personal story in Vietnam.

TNC:

*My personal story is intertwined with the human story of the 30-year war in Vietnam. It depicts the motivation of a people in wartime, the blood on the battlefield, the tortures in men of conscience, the intrigues and arrogance of men in power, the rivalries between ideals, religions, families, and the effects of Communization and Americanization on the Vietnamese nation.*

In short, my personal story could be told in the following lines:

- I was brought up as a Confucianist-Buddhist believer - a true Buddhist who always respects other religions (1924-1942).

- I was attracted by the people I admired and respected, like my brothers and friends in the Scout organization, whose leaders included Ta Quang Buu, Ton That Tung, Nguyen Thuc Tung, Hoang Dao Thuy, etc. They were my heroes of the 1940s. Following their examples, I joined the Viet Minh and fought the war against the French as a nationalist (1943-1949).

- I was confused and frustrated in my assessments with regard to political conviction, personal sentiment, and personal concern (the first time); consequently I quit the Viet Minh in late 1949.

- I fought on the South Vietnamese side with the Americans, partly to justify my leaving the other side - to prove that I was not a deserter but a man devoted to my religious and philosophical beliefs - and decided to help establish a non-communist nation, independent and democratic (1950-1966).

- My Census Grievance and pacification programs, although not entirely implemented to my expectation, speak for itself of my thoughts and conviction.

- After I failed to orient the responsible Americans

(CIA primarily) and Vietnamese generals and after I realized that the war would go on the way it was and that my concept of war and pacification would never be considered, I made one more effort with a book exposing my ideas and techniques. Then I moved to the National Assembly's platform and used it as my new battleground (1967-1968).

- With the U.S. preparing for its disengagement and in anticipation of the resulting outcome, I fought for an alternative to preserve South Vietnam (1969).

- As a nationalist anti-communist (versus the opportunistic anti-communist Nguyen Van Thieu), I was persecuted by both the United States (1970-1974) and the Communists (1975-1978) - but as a refugee I was granted the honor to become a U.S. citizen, a Vietnamese-American (1985).

My personal story has been told in part in the following literature: *The Chau Trial* by Elizabeth Pond, *A Bright Shining Lie* by Neil Sheehan, *Fire in the Lake* by Frances Fitzgerald, *Decent Interval* by Frank Snepp, and in the archives of the State Department and the US Senate.

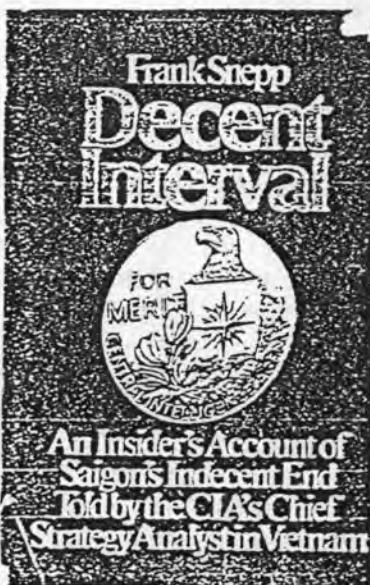
Recently, a substantial portion of my story was covered in a book titled *Facing The Phoenix* by Zalin Grant. The purpose of Grant's book was to present the author's view of how and why the CIA and the United States failed to win the political war (and thus the total war) in Vietnam.

My personal story will be complete in a book titled *Hawks, Doves and the Dragon* in which I will tell the story of the 30-year long war as a participant - not as witness, observer, reporter or scholar. My two personal friends, John Paul Vann and Daniel Ellsberg, would personify respectively Hawks and Doves while I was consistently struggling for the survival of the Dragon: Vietnam.

*My personal story has been told in part in books, magazines, newspapers. Among them:*

*The New York Times*  
**TIME**  
*The Washington Post*  
*Los Angeles Times*

**Le Monde**  
**Newsweek**



Congress Gets Some Action



**The Daily Journal**

Printed at Elizabeth, N.J.  
Founded 1779 as The New Jersey Journal  
Tuesday Evening, June 11, 1974

Dean A. Kreuz, Joseph S. Jennings,  
Publisher, Editor

Error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it. — Thomas Jefferson

Saigon Releases Peace Advocate

NATIONAL BESTSELLER  
WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE  
AND THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD

**A BRIGHT SHINING LIE**  
**John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam**  
**NEIL SHEEHAN**



BBC:

Describe your experiences at Vung Tau. How would you describe the relationship you had with the Agency?

How do you feel now about your whole experience with the CIA?

TNC:

*My experiences at Vung Tau reinforced my feelings that the CIA would never understand that the competition of images and motivation are very crucial factors, in the kind of revolutionary war that went on in Vietnam.*

*The CIA-supported Vietnamese generals who enjoyed the opportunity their status as anti-communists gave them would be embarrassed and offended if they were asked that same question. Indeed, because they were motivated differently in their anti-communist cause they would never feel they need to ask that question (although they all talked fashionably about the subject).*

*Gordon Jorgenson rejected me because no other Vietnamese talked to him the way I did, expressing ideas I considered loyal friends and patriots should raise. He thought I was being hostile to the CIA when I was only trying to help the Agency work most effectively.*

*William Colby and Theodore Shackley conspired with Thieu to destroy me because they had to do what their ambassador, who was responsible for the US policy in Vietnam, wanted them to do.*

*In 1956, as director of instruction at the Vietnamese National Military Academy, I discussed a proposal for a new 4-year training program with my American advisor, a West-Pointer, Major Butterfield. The major told me suddenly and very decisively: "Why should you waste time and energy on new ideas? We had adopted a program for the Cadets in the Philippines; just follow that program with a few minor*

*modifications." I insisted on my ideas, knowing that circumstances were very different here from the Philippines, and went to my school superintendent and the army general staff. My advisor's ideas prevailed, however.*

*In 1960, my ideas were discussed with and strongly supported by the CIA. There was a greater chance of success with the CIA, which was more flexible than the military. Since I always preferred to win over a living person than a dead one, my ideas basically were aimed at converting the enemy, thus eliminating the need to kill him.*

Although I cut out my working relationship with the CIA the day I left the Vietnamese government, I still enjoyed a good friendship with most of those in the organization who had known me.

As for William Colby and Ted Shackley, who acted to destroy me, probably in their belief that the United States needed Nguyen Van Thieu and that I was acting against the US interests in opposing Thieu. When President Thieu refused to set me free after the Vietnamese Supreme Court nullified the sentence imposed on me by a Military Court, not only Colby and Shackley but the entire American officialdom kept a conspiratory silence.

Thus, the United States had decided that no moral consideration could be taken with regard to the US interests. An "obedient" president Nguyen Van Thieu was considered a model and preferred ally over a Vietnamese nationalist - this explained how Nguyen Van Thieu suddenly found himself competing with a revolutionary Ho Chi Minh who had defeated Thieu's former patron: the French.

It was a mistake to sacrifice morality for practicability. The long lasting effects of such a misconception in the Vietnam war led to the upsurge of anti-war sentiments. The media was blamed for attacking the

## The U.S. Involvement:

Two of the nearly 100 telegrams exchanged between the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.



Department of State

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Department of State

TELEGRAM

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FOR AMBASSADOR BUNKER FROM ACTING SECRETARY

SUBJ: Tran Ngoc Chau

*Elijah Bunker*  
Jan. 18, 78

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1. I know you are aware from several recent messages of our concern that the Chau case is going to cause serious (and unnecessary) harm to US and GVN mutual interests, especially here but also in Viet-Nam and internationally. I recognize that Thieu has committed his personal prestige against Chau. What is not entirely clear is how far he intends to go, and specifically whether he will pursue the matter until Chau is behind bars or driven into exile.
2. The case has apparently already been referred to the military court and I suppose it will find him guilty. I hope Thieu can be convinced that the verdict will be sufficient for Thieu's purposes of blackening Chau's reputation and ending his political future, and that he will not rpt not proceed to press the Lower House into

US in Vietnam and the Vietnamese officials of corruption, incompetence and other wrongdoings. Did they lie or did we want to cover up the truth? As excuses, we used to say that those things could happen in any country. Yet the fact was that such things would be reduced under a true democratic system, while in South Vietnam, the rigged-election democratic system was used primarily to deceive the US media and public and to hide government officials' corruption, incompetence and wrongdoings.

"The CIA Station in Vietnam continued to have responsibility for covering the political machinations going on in Saigon among the contesting political groups and aspirants to power. Its reports were filled with references by the CIA's local contacts to the "necessity" for coalitions of national forces to contest the flawed credentials and performance of whoever was in office, as well as the coup plans of a variety of forces that sought American support for a new approach to the tangles of Saigon politics."

-William Colby in his *Lost Victory*.

"As became public after the fall of Saigon, the CIA also lavished large sums of money on the Thieu government to be used in cowing and "neutralizing" its opposition. The primary CIA subsidy, amounting to millions of dollars, was for the creation of a pro-government coalition of political parties in the early 1970s. Thieu's cousin Hoang Duc Nha was the primary conduit for the funds. As Nha once explained to me, only a small portion of the money was ever applied toward its intended purpose. The rest was pocketed by members of the Thieu regime.

-Frank Snepp in his book *Decent Interval*.

BBC:

How do you feel  
the Agency treated you  
during the period of the American  
evacuation? Do you feel they let  
you down by their behaviour?

Why didn't the CIA  
help you escape in 1975?  
Why do you think the Agency  
left you behind?

TNC:

*Those at the helm of the CIA in 1975 might have heard about me but might not have known me personally. As a result, they might have considered me an enemy for having opposed their protégé Nguyen Van Thieu, or they might have been used to dealing with indigenous agents and subordinates, not with friends and allies. As I was not their agent nor employee, they did not feel obligated to rescue me.*

*But taking such drastic actions to destroy me before and after 1975 must be considered incompatible with any legal and moral standards. Such behavior provides cause for good people to distance themselves from the CIA and the United States.*

During that period of 1966 and 1975 the United States was using President Nguyen Van Thieu to provide a kind of cover and stability for the United States to fight the war and, as the possibility of victory had seemed to be impossible, to withdraw with "honor".

Subsequently, Thieu was the man the American Mission in Saigon had to support.

I anticipated the tragic outcome of the American policy and decided to try to save South Vietnam from defeat by advocating a realistic negotiated settlement between Vietnamese on all sides. The United States relied on Thieu's stability built on the support of a minority of opportunistic anti-communists while I

tried to get Thieu to broaden his base of support to include the majority of nationalist anti-communists.

The United States and the CIA never trusted that Vietnamese majority and conspired with Thieu to destroy me and thus to give a warning to Thieu's other opponents. William Colby and Ted Shackley of the CIA were good civil servants in the American traditions. All they did to me - going from conspiring with Thieu's police to paint me as a pro-communist to compromising me to the Communists to finish me - probably, was to conform to the United States' line of conduct. If this was the case then Colby and Shackley only pursued a course they felt was best for the U.S. and conformed with ongoing American policy.

**BBC:**

**Describe your attitude then and now towards the Agency.**

**Describe your feelings towards the Americans and the Agency when you were left behind in 1975?**

**Did you feel betrayed?**

**TNC:**

*The American national leadership and policy-makers were responsible for the final failure in Vietnam. Vietnamese were certainly the first to be blamed: General Nguyen Van Thieu and his associates for having relied entirely on the United States to lose the war to the Communists, and the nationalists who were undecisive and divided, and thus incapable of changing Thieu's position.*

*The CIA, as the main organization providing the fundamental ingredients used by presidents, politicians and strategists to make policies, failed to achieve its expected role. As a result, the military was called in to fight a war about which they were ill-informed.*

*Despite its failure in Vietnam, the CIA remains less*

*bound by orthodoxy and less expensive than the military and taking the realistic stand that the CIA is here to stay, I wish the Agency would conscientiously draw a positive conclusion from its past performances in Vietnam. The actions and intentions of its men in my case, which far exceeded the need of sustaining an unconstitutional president Nguyen Van Thieu, was just one example of inappropriate CIA operations there. Drawing an appropriate conclusion from its performance would better the organization and its overall image for the future.*

In my relationships with officials and friends alike, I used to base my thinking and actions on moral considerations. (I do not pretend to imply by this that my moral standards were higher than those of everyone else.) So when I objected to and argued with the CIA about the pacification program concept and then resigned from my government, I felt satisfied that I had acted appropriately. I retain a sincere friendship with many in and out of the CIA. Most of them, Generals Edward Lansdale and Charles Timmes among them, had tried very hard to help me get out of Vietnam during the 1975 evacuation.

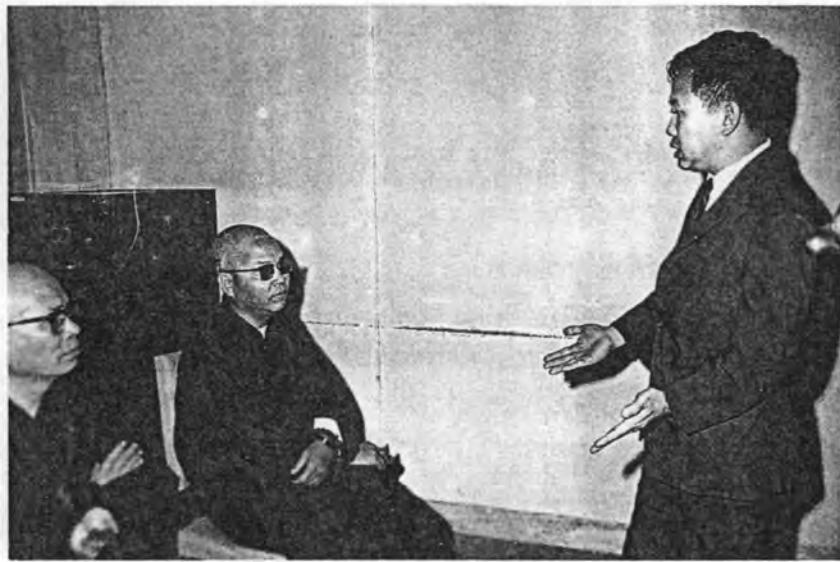
When I worked with the CIA, I did it openly in my capacity as a Vietnamese officer and official assigned by my government to those duties. I was never an agent or employee of the CIA. I worked with the CIA as I worked with MACV, USAID and USIS, in the same spirit: I worked with them in the service of Vietnam. I never expected them to reward or protect me. In my critical time between prison and liberty, between death and life, I never asked for the CIA or any US agencies to come to my help.

A few hours before I was dragged out of the National Assembly by Thieu's police, I did send a message to President Richard Nixon - but only to warn him of the consequence of Thieu's actions and the effect that United States compliance with these actions would have on the noble war in which young

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**For the United States and the Communists:  
Only Vietnamese who submitted themselves to the differing  
U.S. and Communist concepts could be accepted as Nationalists.**

How and Why the United States were led to believe that whoever disagreed with the American ways of fighting the war and conducting the Vietnamese nation were all communist or communist sympathizers? Duped by their Vietnamese protégés who wanted to preserve for themselves the power and thus to prolong the war so they could turn into foreign bank accounts part of the U.S. aid.? Or was the United States allergic to Nationalism and Buddhism? Or did the United States determine that only those who enjoyed the U.S. support were the only real nationalists? The Communists kept saying that only those who love (Communist) Socialism are true patriots.



*The Most Venerable Thich Tri Thu and Thich Thien Minh, leaders of the Vietnamese Unified Buddhist Church paid me a visit in front of the Vietnamese and foreign press after South Vietnamese government announced that they would come to arrest me at the seat of the National Assembly. This occurred just a few hours before my arrest. It was the first time in history that the Church took such a position in honor of one of its members under such circumstance. After the war ended, Ven. Thich Thien Minh was taken to a Communist prison and was beaten to death there. Ven. Thich Tri Thu was reported to have died mysteriously after he had been treated in a communist hospital for a common cold.*



*Although the sentence of 10 years of imprisonment pronounced by a military court was nullified by the Vietnamese Supreme Court, Nguyen Van Thieu kept me in prison for another 4 years and then decided that I should be turned over to the Communists -- after I had refused to ask for a presidential pardon. In the photo, I was mixed up with a group of Viet Cong prisoners ready to be lifted to Loc Ninh and released to the Communists. At the last minute, Thieu changed his mind and sent me back to prison.*

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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

February 17, 1970

"He doesn't belong to the political system here,"  
summarized an enemy succinctly."

-Elizabeth Pond in her *The Chau Trial*, March 1970.

Congressman Tran Ngoc Chau  
The National Assembly  
Saigon, Vietnam

Dear Mr. Chau:

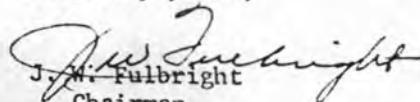
Thank you for your letter which I received through  
the good offices of a third party.

I am sorry that UPI has reported that I called you  
a CIA agent. I am enclosing a copy of the statement I  
made on February 5 at a hearing of the Committee which  
I later that day inserted in the Congressional Record.  
I think that you will see from reading the statement that  
I never alleged that you had been a CIA agent. I simply  
stated that you had worked closely with the CIA in connect-  
ion with the cadre training program and that you had  
reported your contacts with your brother to a number of  
U.S. officials in Vietnam, including CIA officers, with  
whom you had daily contact.

I found your letter most interesting and appreciated  
your taking the trouble to write.

I assure you that I will continue to follow your  
case with sympathetic interest.

Sincerely yours,

  
J. W. Fulbright  
Chairman

Enclosure

"Provincial regret at his departure - a rare phenomenon for any outgoing province chief - was expressed in a petition signed by leaders of all major religions there asking Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky not to let Chau leave Kien Hoa." "In consequence, he won 41.2% of the votes, even out of a field of 19. His resounding victory - his runner-up received only 12.6% - made Chau the second or third highest vote getter in the Assembly.

Once in Saigon, Chau was elected Secretary General of the Assembly and a member of the select Special Court that is empowered to impeach the President and Vice President." -Elizabeth Pond in her *The Chau Trial*, March 1970.

"Beyond his managerial and political skills, he is a person of high morals, honest, very bright, and is dedicated to the ideals and principles shared by Americans." -General Edward G. Lansdale, November 17, 1979.

"Tran Ngoc Chau was the good Vietnamese. In a South Vietnam where every American official had to admit, however reluctantly and privately, that most of the Vietnamese officials with whom he dealt were corrupt, incompetent, or both, Mr. Chau was an exception." -The New York Times, January 14, 1980.

Americans were called to give their lives and for which the American taxpayers had to pay.

As a conclusion to the above question, I made it clear that, despite my personal philosophy that no country is entitled to involve itself in the internal affairs of another country, we must accept the reality that the CIA, or any eventual organization with similar role, is here to stay to play a very crucial role in long-term US policy-making which would continue to affect forever the world as well as the United States. Facing that realistic situation, we had better discuss about the prospect of making a better CIA than the "to be or not to be" of that institution.

The public and media often talked about the failures and real or imaginary atrocities of the CIA but rarely of its successes. Cuba and Vietnam were cited as examples of failures (although if President Kennedy had listened to the CIA in both cases, the failures would have been less disastrous). Many more innocent Vietnamese were killed by bombings and artillery shells than by the Phoenix program. Although I reject it as my runaway child, the Phoenix program was uniquely cited as having purposely committed assassinations while the killing by bombings and artillery were rarely mentioned. Even the Communists, who brutally murdered thousands of innocent Vietnamese during the 1968 Tet offensive, were never the object of such vilification by the American media, public or Congress. The usual focus of the public on CIA activities is centered on the negative ones.

Conversely, most of the CIA successes remained unpublicized and unknown to the public. Also, for example, in the cases of the Soviet disintegration and the war in the Persian Gulf, the CIA was blamed for overestimating the Soviet potential and the Iraqi capabilities leading to the US excessive military spending (to deter the Soviet) and unnecessary kill-

ing (to defeat the Iraqis). Nothing in the collapse of the Soviet and the Middle East victory was credited to the CIA although we all understood that the CIA would have played an important role in those events.

This is to say that, admitting realistically that the CIA has become, and remains, an integral part of the United States government, we had better draw from experiences in failures as well as in success to make it a better tool for the United States to safeguard its stature as the leading nation in the world - and thus to save American lives and money in military adventures.

Presidents, ambassadors, senators and congressmen change as individuals and ideas but the fundamental ingredients to make and enforce national foreign policies (and influencing domestic policies as well) remains the property of the CIA. War or peace would depend largely on the CIA efficiency.

Had the CIA succeeded in defining the enemy in Vietnam, the United States would have helped South Vietnam to build a true democratic regime to rally the peasants and the rest of the population. Thus, the VietCong political infrastructure would have been eradicated from the beginning. Guerilla warfare, leading to bigger war, would have been impossible. The South Vietnamese army, free of concern for their families and conditions in their own backyard, would have been capable of fending off any North Vietnamese conventional attacks. The United States would have saved 58,000 American lives and hundreds of billions of US dollars in a vain effort to try to save South Vietnam.

In the changing world today, the CIA's mission should be to provide American presidents and national leaders valuable, accurate information to help them formulate their policies and strategies with regard to almost all fields of activities - from national defense to cultural, economic and industrial compe-

tion. War would never occur as long as the gap between such a competition could be reasonably accepted by all parties involved.

In order to stand up to the demands of its mission, the CIA should :

a/ Revise its moral standard by differentiating allies from lackeys, nationalists from opportunists, and subsequently treat them accordingly.

In Vietnam, the United States and the CIA failed to keep up to that standard. They supported a window-dressing and deceptive democratic system (instead of a truly democratic one) and a group of opportunistic anti-communist leaders left over from the French (instead of proven nationalistic anti-communist leaders). This left the Vietnamese at large and the peasants in particular unprotected and exposed to the communists' appeal. Many of them were then recruited into the ranks of the enemy.

The kind of leaders and system the United States and the CIA chose to support alienated most of the energetic nationalists and created conditions for incompetence and corruption - the objects of anti-war sentiments.

b/ Equip their organization with personnel of the highest intelligence, competence, and, above all, of nationalistic (non-partisan) motivation. Although their personnel at the operational level proved intelligent, dedicated and kept-up with the realistic situation, those at higher level (Saigon and above) failed to see the difference between their past experiences and the current realities.

William Colby tried to repeat his WWII success of operating behind the enemy lines in the early 1960s by launching infiltrators behind the North Vietnamese lines - and failed miserably. CIA operatives who understood the difference between opportunistic motivation and nationalistic motivation would have been more sensitive to the feelings and suggestions of other nationalists. They would have been able to cooperate with all Vietnamese - as authoritative mas-

ters to the opportunists and as loyal allies to the nationalists.

c/ Make an honest and patriotic effort to draw from their experiences in Vietnam the lessons they must learn and practice in other parts of the world in the future. In the last 10 years, I read a lot of reports, memoirs and confessions written by high-ranking Americans involved in the Vietnam war. Most of them tried to cover their failures under the usual themes such as we had won the war but lost the peace, we would have won the war if.... or because..., etc. There were some who admitted courageously (I would say patriotically, for the benefits of the nation) that we lost the war because we did commit mistakes - Generals Maxwell Taylor and Phillip Davidson were among the latter.

In Vietnam two of the giants among United States organizations had played their games. The CIA lost the initial game in the villages and thus enabled the Communists to turn the muddy ricefield into a losing ground for the Military to "win" all the battles but lose the war.

In most autocratic nations today, Communism has ceased to be a revolutionary force, but the governed who continue to suffer political oppression and religious, economic or social discrimination remain a potential source of rebellion against the rulers. The United States must choose between the positions of allying with one side against the other or rallying both sides to resolve their difference and enjoy their respect. Stability or chaos, war or peace, a new world order or disorder would be rooted in such policies.

The CIA would certainly play the key role in making such policies possible. It could prevent the United States from targeting the wrong enemies, befriending the wrong allies, and fighting unnecessary wars.

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BBC:

A discussion of the role family played in the war with particular reference to your brother, Tran Ngoc Hien.

TNC:

*My brother Tran Ngoc Hien began as a fervent nationalist and ended up a devoted communist. For a devoted communist, brotherhood is a secondary consideration.*

As a proven nationalist, I had become the target of the communist Hien for seduction to his cause and exploitation. Despite his repeated efforts to destroy me, who he knew he was unable to change ideologically, I do not blame my brother. Hien was a remarkable nationalist during the war against the French. The nationalistic motivation that translated into sacrifice and heroism for Hien and my many friends of that period kept me in moral confusion after I left them, and even during my years of serving the South. That sentiment also inspired me morally and led me to devise the Census Grievance program to save South Vietnam from Communism but also to open a way out for nationalists and others.

Hien, as the chief architect of the intelligence and counter-intelligence of the 5th Military Interzone (covering the entire territory from south of Hue to the northern border with former Cochinchina and Saigon) during the French war, had built and developed that organization from nothing. He started the organization and developed it mostly from his connections with his personal friends at schools and in the Boy Scout organization, and family relatives. Only after his capture in early 1969 did I discover that Hien had used the same family and friendly ties to further the operations.

I did not know how much success Hien achieved during the war against the South and the Americans. One thing was obvious: among those incriminated after his arrest were a large number of intellectuals and professionals living in South Vietnam or working with the government and the military - most of them were friends or relatives of Hien. His failure probably began in early 1966 with the detection and follow-up of his efforts by the CIA; his liaison officer was bought, turned into a double-agent and used by the CIA until Hien was arrested. (I met that liaison officer, Captain Cong, in Chi Hoa prison and learned the story from him. Hien confirmed the story, which he too learned only after his arrest.)

Without my political position on the settlement of the war and the powerful nationalist and religious influence I was attached to, and the possibility of a political compromise between Vietnamese on both sides which I was backing (and which was not on the American agenda), Hien would not have been captured to be used to destroy me. The need to use Hien to incriminate me was the main reason for Hien's capture; otherwise, Hien would have been left free to continue his (intended) service to the North and (unintended) service to the CIA.

Hien was demoted after the war and it took a long time before he was re-installed - as I learned from friends. I still feel sorry for the nationalist brother I had lost because of Marx and Lenin, but I do still love him as brother as I still love all of my friends of the 1940s. I knew them well enough to make this assessment: that they had committed themselves to the war with nationalistic motivation - the war creating the conditions and environment which helped the Communist leadership to lure most of them into the party. I wish them a total recovery of the spirit of 1945.

A lesson from Hien's performance was that family ties (and those to old friends) affected the psychologi-

cal part of the war in Vietnam profoundly. It was disclosed later that several known anti-communist generals and high-ranking officials at one time or another harbored their communist relatives and friends in their homes. Culturally, betrayal between family members (extended to almost everyone related to the husbands and wives of all "known" generations) and friends were rare.

If the CIA and the United States had taken that cultural fact of Vietnamese life into consideration, they would have done a much better job.

**BBC:**

**How would you describe the relationship you have with your brother? Were you betrayed by your brother? What message would you have for your brother?**

**TNC:**

*I treated Hien in my quality of a nationalist and brother while Hien treated me in his conviction of a communist. Hien did not betray me because I never work for Hien or the communists.*

*In Hien, I feel sad for having lost a brother to Communism and sorry for a devoted communist of 45 years to suffer the present humiliating conditions.*

Hien was a good Communist as Colby and Shackley were good American civil servants. Hien, like Colby and Shackley acted against me, expecting me to be destroyed, because I stood firmly as a Vietnamese nationalist, unyielding to the Communist seduction and refusing to be part of a cover-up conspiracy to give away South Vietnam to the Communists.

I only felt sorry for the nationalist Hien and other nationalists of the mid-1940s who had fought hero-

ically for 30 years, to see themselves and their children living in the poorest, most morally and physically corrupted and backward country.

Like the many brothers and friends of mine in the South who were betrayed by Nguyen Van Thieu and his cohort of supporters, my brother Hien and most of my friends on the communist side were also betrayed by the group of communist leaders.

The more I hate Communism the more I feel compassion for my nationalist brothers and friends who were absorbed into the party and betrayed by their leaders.

I maintain the same sentiments to my other brothers and friends who had placed their trust in President Nguyen Van Thieu and were later betrayed by Thieu.

**BBC:**

**Describe your imprisonment by the Communists and your escape.**

**TNC:**

*It would take a long story to tell about the various methods the Communists used on their different enemies, the sufferings and mental tortures I went My imprisonment by the Communists lasted for more than 2 years. I would not comment on my sufferings out of the respect I have to pay to those who were imprisoned longer and endured more sufferings.*

It would be difficult to make a comparison between the Cambodian Khmer Rouges and the Vietnamese Communists in their way of handling their former enemies. The Vietnamese communists were trying to destroy the souls of their former enemies while the Khmer Rouges just simply exterminated theirs.

In that spirit, the Vietnamese communists tried to seduce me to spy on my former supporters and friends and they set me free on that condition. It was the main

*Please read Imprisonment, page 70.*

# LESSONS OF VIETNAM

62

The Vietnam experience as applied to other situations.

65

Assessment of the CIA performance in Vietnam.

67

The US and the CIA experience.

68

The Key to Winning the War.

68

One Image: One History:

One Lesson.

Time, Countries and Circumstances might change, but the following principles must remain unchanged:

- First, the Real and Main Enemy must be identified accurately and precisely. In Vietnam it was the Peasant-Enemy who was the Real and Main Enemy; only with his support, whether with conviction or under pressure, could the VietCong develop and the infiltrators from the North could operate - preparing the battlefield for the North's conventional forces to intervene.
- Second, objectives; policies and strategies should be formulated and decided on, and adjusted to the Enemy Factor. In Vietnam the United States imposed an undecisive objective, fought a presumed enemy, and consequently conceived inappropriate policies and strategies.
- Third, once the Real Enemy was identified, Objective decided, Policies and Strategies were accordingly designed, then Appropriate Allies could be selected. In Vietnam, if the Peasant-Enemy were identified the Real and Main Enemy, a Democratic System would have been the the Objective to win over the peasantry - the right kind of Vietnamese allies to the U.S. would come from the ranks of the Vietnamese people, and the U.S. itself would be regarded and gratified as a friend and supporter, on the side of the Vietnamese people, not on the side of a group of opportunists.

In order to convert the Nguyen Van Thieu's system into a government that would appeal to the Vietnamese people, the following elements should have been observed according to the hierarchy shown below:

1. Representative government and a justice system that conformed to the Constitution.
3. The Police and the Military must support the above.
4. Civil servants, judges, the police and military personnel must be assured of relatively decent living conditions - so that they can fulfill their expected obligations.

BBC:

A discussion of what lessons can be drawn from your experience in Vietnam about political and community action that could be applied to other situations.

TNC:

*Political and community actions can be meaningful and effective only if they reflect the political thinking and conviction of the ones who rule the country. My effort was partially successful because it was conscientiously acknowledged by President Ngo Dinh Diem and unconsciously tolerated by the indifference of the generals after Diem - the CIA remained the consistent supporter of my programs.*

From my personal experience in Vietnam with regard to political and community action that could be applied to other developing and underdeveloped countries is that political and community actions can be effective only if they are conscientiously supported by the central government and national leaders. That prerequisite would lead to the establishment of the kind and priority of work to be implemented in each community - all this is to be done at the suggestion of the local people.

In Vietnam, central and provincial government tended to take the initiative to decide for what they perceived the local people needed. The U.S. commodities were then provided generously. Surely people would welcome any kind of help, any kind of generosity - even at times hurting their feelings and not in the agenda of their needs. One day I found abandoned outside of a village headquarters a set of toilet normally destined to equip a villa in Saigon. The village chief explained that the toilet things were part of a USAID giveout but no one in the village wanted it because they got used to their own way which

they considered much more suitable.

A Consistent Consideration:

The Human Factor.

In the early 1960s, I tried to put a pacification program in place - implementing it in the field and later explaining it in a book I wrote. The book was titled *From War to Peace: Renaissance of the Village*. The theme of the book was built on two quotations from two most respected philosophers: Edwin Markham (1852-1940) of the West and Manh Kha (372-289) of the East. Both quotations placed the human value above any other consideration. With the human being and the village involved in the contest between the opposing sides, I proposed in the book ideas and methods to renovate the village in order to pacify the country and terminate the war.

President Diem approved the plan and ordered me to implement it as an experiment. Americans at non-decision-making levels, such as Edward Lansdale, John Vann, and Daniel Ellsberg, among others, supported it. Rufus Phillips of the USAID, Everett Bumgardner of the USIA, Colonel Simko of the MACV warmly supported but, as they explained, the bureaucracy of their agencies could not help such a new program they considered as getting beyond their norms. Finally, it was Stu Methven of the CIA who led the Agency to support and develop my experiment into an expanding pacification program. The momentum was kept up with my CIA counterpart, the young, dynamic and very thoughtful John O'Reilly.

It all started with the Census Grievance Cadres whose performances would later lead me to overhaul all the existing socio-political, technical and military operations that were going on in the province. As a consequence, I put all of them - medical doctors, land reformers, public workers, economists, social workers, propagandists, and police and paramilitary and military commanders to work together in a new pacification program and strategy (Please refer to

*relate chart, page 35).* Several years later, the flavor of that centralization of efforts was found in the U.S. organization of U.S. CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support). I say that only the flavor of my concept was found there but the essence of it was not. My concept of centralization of efforts included the military and placed the latter under the direction of the political leadership - which I exercised as provincial governor with the Censud Grievance Cadres as the principal communication channel to the villagers.

The Vietnamese generals never cared to understand what I was doing in Kien Hoa; they just let the CIA manage things with province and district chiefs in their own way - and that way did not differ very much from the way French and French-trained (in that field) Vietnamese had done long before. Conclusively, this explains why political and community actions cannot be successful without the conviction and conscientious support from the central government and national leaders.

#### Revolution without Communism.

Although Communism is on its way to dissipation and is no longer a threat, the prospect of social disorder, insurgency, internal war between or by various factions, and rebellion against the rulers still exists and can develop from a state of low and silent discontentment to a state of national disruption. This can occur in countries where and when there is a dictatorial system, a window-dressing democratic government, or ill-treatment of people because of their race or religion.

The same is true in countries where and when the gaps between military officers and troops, between high-ranking officials and ordinary civil servants, and between the rich and the poor are too great and too visible. It is especially true where the country's laws and its justice system do not provide enough protection for all the people. Any prospective social

disorder, struggle and war taking roots from the above deficiencies (often observed in developing and under-developed countries) would be much more for the government to suppress without being tainted by the Soviet and international communists than was true with the old communist doctrine and support.

In Vietnam, at the beginning of the war of resistance against the French in 1945, the Vietnamese understood only one thing: the feverish and emotional desire to liberate the country from the French colonialists. Ho Chi Minh succeeded in getting the last emperor, Bao Dai, to abdicate in his favor, and in attracting other prominent nationalists to rally with him in the fight against the French.

The French, by miscalculations, in an attempt to preserve their interests, reluctantly released their authority to the State of Vietnam they had agreed to accept in 1949 - at the time more as an accommodation of war than to make true peace with the Vietnamese. The French attitude once again discredited former Emperor Bao Dai and the State of Vietnam and thus helped Ho Chi Minh justify and prolong the war. Under those conditions, Ho Chi Minh was capable of inducing most of the Vietnamese, who joined him at the beginning only to recover national independence, to join the Communist Party.

In that context, the United States lost credentials for having supported the French. I refused to enroll in the Communist Party and left the Viet Minh in 1949 but many of my brothers, cousins, relatives and friends did join - and I knew personally that they did so more because of circumstances than convictions. At the end, Ho Chi Minh defeated the French and thus justified and glorified himself in the eyes of those who had followed him in the fight and into his party.

Most of the Vietnamese, in the North as well as in the South, never really understood Communism (they must all have understood now). The atrocities of land reform under the Communists in the North had been

known only in a restricted area and to a limited number of people.

In South Vietnam in particular, after the French war, the majority of Vietnamese, who had actually cooperated with the Viet Minh or identified with them sentimentally, retained those images and emotions in their new life under Bao Dai and Ngo Dinh Diem - with Ho Chi Minh's supporters and sympathizers around to remind them of the old emotional time.

Slowly but steadily, the nationalist and religious leader Ngo Dinh Diem proved incapable of building up a government and system worthy of his personal reputation. The Republic he created was discredited in the eyes of the people by rigged elections; the democracy American and Vietnamese supporters of Diem kept claiming as the noble cause in the fight against the Communists was never really implemented and thus also was discredited itself in the minds of most Vietnamese - especially the poor and under-privileged who lived in the rural villages and city slums.

Because of that kind of fraudulent democracy, resulting in a window dressing parliament and a justice system controlled by the administration, the secret service, the police, the military security and the Can Lao one-party system took the destiny of the Vietnamese into their hands. People in these organizations dictated who was to be considered nationalist or communist or VietCong or pro-VietCong and decided who could enjoy and who should suffer. The system reverberated throughout the administration from the capital to the villages. As a consequence, the people who had responded to the resistance against the French were the ones who suffered or feared to suffer from such an administration.

After Diem, the generals who replaced him were those who had formerly been French servants before they became Vietnamese officers and, because of the American predominance, American puppets. They

discredited themselves and their American supporters by continuing the same kind of ills: "elected government" and dictatorial justice system that only the Communists today can compete with.

### **The Monopoly of Being anti-Communist.**

All these points explain the roots of the war in South Vietnam and the failure of the good Americans and Vietnamese - who were the majority in and out of the government and armed forces. They were betrayed by a small group of American and Vietnamese generals. (I would exclude the many professional generals who had not been involved in politics).

Such a lesson from Vietnam could still be used in other countries too - even where the inside and outside communist support is not present. Without communist support, dictators might think the job of putting down discontent would be easier; it may be so but oppression, if successful, can only delay the process of self-destruction.

Religions, any religion, are needed to maintain and develop the morality of human beings and the stability and security of societies and nations. The government should never favor any particular religions and discriminate against others for personal or political preference.

In Vietnam, the French just did that (favoring the Catholics) during their colonial time. President Ngo Dinh Diem did not revise the situation and got into the big trouble in 1963 - as a result of the Buddhist uprisings. Generals Thieu and Ky did the same with intended brutality resulting in moral and sentimental resentment in a large portion of Vietnamese in and out of the government and armed forces.

After the Communist victory, the same Buddhist leaders who had been treated by the Americans, Thieu and Ky as pro-communist were put in camps and prisons. The Most Venerable Thich Thien Minh who had been seriously wounded in an assassination attempt and imprisoned under Thieu and Ky was

beaten to death in a communist jail. The Most Venerable Thich Tri Thu, the head of the Buddhist Church who had refused to sign in a communist-prepared statement, also died in the hands of the Communists. Numerous other "pro-communist" (as accused by Thieu-Ky clan) Buddhist leaders are still in the communist prisons or confined in isolation - including the Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang.

#### Instead of an American Evaluation System: A Vietnamese Evaluation Precept.

Had the United States known the Vietnamese more humanly and culturally, American ambassadors and generals would have used the Confucian precept as described below to evaluate the Vietnamese leadership and avoid being lured into misperceptions and deceptions.

That precept was the most talked about but it also was the least observed. Its Sino-Vietnamese version Tu Thân, Tề Gia, Trì Quốc, Bình Thiên Hỷ" could be translated in this sequence:

One (the leader in particular) needs to  
a/ perfect himself, before he can  
b/ keep his family in harmony, before being able  
c/ to govern the country, and finally  
d/ to pacify (win the hearts and minds of) the  
people.

Applied to the case of the war in Vietnam, one should ask the questions:

- a/ Did the leaders prove good enough and show signs of improving themselves to
- b/ keep their families in harmony?
- c/ Did the government run the country harmoniously the same way the leaders run their families harmoniously?
- d/ How could they pacify the people without first implementing the a, b and c steps?

(Quite often, a good person corrupted himself after he moved to position of power (leadership). He thus failed to pass the (a) step.

#### BBC:

Your assessment of what the CIA got right and wrong in Vietnam.

#### TNC:

*At the end of a period of 20 years of US active involvement, South Vietnam was lost to the Communists. This is enough to tell what the United States and the CIA got wrong or right in Vietnam. Above all mistakes, the fundamental one was rooted in the American superiority complex - imposing its purposes and objectives on people without considering whether they understood them or not, deceiving them with window-dressing democratic systems, supporting a group of opportunists for leaders while preserving the French colonial legacy to dominate the Vietnamese people. This also explains the inability of the Vietnamese nationalists to appeal to their countrymen, to influence and support the U.S. in its war against the Communists.*

I was not in the position to fully understand all of what the CIA did in Vietnam, so I can't make a total assessment and judgement of their performance. Besides, I never worked for the CIA either as a volunteer agent nor a paid one. I worked with the CIA because I was assigned by the government to operate as its official representative in the field of pacification. After I left the government, I severed all connections with the CIA, other than personal and friendly ones with a few individuals. A letter from US Senator and Chairman of the US Foreign Relations Committee, the honorable J.W. Fulbright, confirmed my relationship with the CIA. However, through my experience with the CIA, I would make some comments.

In Vietnam, for almost 20 years working with the Americans, I knew only one unfit person among the

many CIA members I worked with - including those who disagreed with me. They were good and excellent, knowledgeable and performed admirably. Unfortunately, although they did well on operational level, they failed to influence the people at the policy-making level. Some people may ask me about the U.S. military men. I knew many of them, more than the CIAs; I never met a bad guy; but they were unfit to that kind of war in Vietnam.

### A Leadership Worthy of Its Fabricated Democracy.

CIA men seemed to me to be less orthodox and thus more open to new ideas. At one time during the war, in 1964-65, I expected either Edward Lansdale, Robert Komer or William Colby (all three associated with the CIA) to be assigned as the commander in chief in Vietnam. I was impressed with General Westmoreland and other military, too, but I had learned through my years in Dalat, Bien Hoa, Quang Trung and Fort Benning that they were destined to be formidable commanders of the kind skilled in conventional warfare but not the Vietnam war. Unfortunately, from the early days of US commitment in 1945 to the end in 1975, Vietnam was considered from a military perspective, and political consideration was subordinated to the military. Consequently, the military was assigned the leading role in the war, with the CIA only supporting it with (political) pacification programs.

Although the White House and US ambassadors made policy decisions, they would do so normally and mainly on the CIA assessments of related situations. Thus the CIA always plays the leading role in the strategy-making process.

In Vietnam the CIA played the crucial role which affected profoundly the entire South Vietnamese political and military leaderships.

Major Archimedes L.A. Patti of the OSS first brought information on Ho Chi Minh and his move-

ment to the US government. The intelligence was not used and Patti's assessments were not considered. Had the United States sided with the Vietnamese (instead with the French), the Vietnamese nationalists who formed the overwhelming majority in Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh would have been capable of fending off the Communist appeal.

The first Republic of (South) Vietnam and President Ngo Dinh Diem were created in 1954-55 with the intensive and courageous efforts of Colonel Lansdale of the CIA, and brought down in 1963 with similar efforts by Lt. Colonel Lucien Conein, again of the CIA. And things kept going on this way to the end - with President Nguyen Van Thieu driven out of Vietnam by Frank Snepp and Charles Timmes (again) of the CIA.

Numerous other less spectacular examples of CIA performances also created long-term effect on South Vietnam politics.

The CIA had a vision of the future but took the wrong measures to implement it.

In 1955, before the final evacuation to the south, the CIA did very well in hiding weapons, ammunitions and explosives in North Vietnam for eventual operations in case the situation required it. They also made arrangement to rush almost one million North Vietnamese to the South; most of them were Catholics who, in the years that followed, formed the hard core of the anti-communist regimes in the south.

However, even with such invaluable resources, the CIA failed to accomplish in the North what the North Vietnamese succeeded in the South: to foment an insurgency with the same kind of resources.

Had the CIA drawn any lesson from that failure? The failure was due to the application of a material logic instead of moral logic to the process of making such a plan. The selection, training, equipping and dropping of our men into North Vietnam were perfectly planned and executed. But the CIA, by direct

involvement in the operation, had implanted in the minds of those heroic men a confused image (between American and Vietnamese) for their motivation after they infiltrated the North and faced the North Vietnamese environment and propaganda.

The Vietnamese the North sent back to the South were selected, indoctrinated politically and after they arrived to their destination, most often by walking through the Ho Chi Minh Trail, were well received and secured by their comrades and families already there - preparation prior to and for the expedition was conducted entirely by Vietnamese.

**Popular Support : the Strategic Command.**  
In establishing and maintaining Diem, who I always respect, the CIA was successful in having a strongly pro-American and anti-Communist leader but it failed to help to build a truly democratic government. Subsequently, Diem's brothers and counselors received U.S. assistance to build a political infrastructure and a secret service which led to political repression and making democracy (with window-dressing elected government and parliament) a theme of propaganda against the noble cause in Vietnam. The political foundation had been destroyed before it was founded.

The Buddhist crisis, the coups d'etat and counter-coups, and other developments that followed were only the results of such a regime.

The CIA failed to build Diem and South Vietnam on an appropriate foundation, but after they destroyed Diem, the CIA let both the South Vietnamese leadership and political images be tarnished, with the US-supported generals perceived as American puppets and a political foundation with ingredients of the poorest quality.

My trial was widely reported in the United States as a case proving that democracy in Saigon was only a comedy, with Nguyen Van Thieu's flagrant violation of the Vietnamese constitution. In supporting Thieu's

actions against me, the CIA and the United States proved that they never cared about the political foundation and/or considered the constitution and elections as serious matters. They just wanted to build the system so they could use it at their convenience.

**BBC:**

**What do you think was the key to winning the war ?**  
**Do you think the CIA had a solution to the Vietnamese problem that others didn't have ?**  
**If so, what was it and to what extent it was borrowed from you ?**

**TNC:**

*Knowing and Understanding the Enemy must be the Key to Winning the War.*

*The CIA backed several good projects but was unable to provide an overall solution. It only reflected the inconclusive policy in the White House with regard to Vietnam. The reason was so simple: The men on the Hill trying to solve the problem of those in the Mud - with arrogance, imposition, confusion and desperation.*

*After 15 years of experience, I came up with a solution. The CIA only adopted the obvious and material aspects of my methods but not the underlying philosophy and basic elements that were keys to the solution.*

Despite voluminous studies made on the enemy by think tanks, academics and intelligence agencies during the war, General Maxwell Taylor made the conclusive assessment, after the war had ended, that we did not know the enemy.

As a consequence, we fought an enemy we presumed we knew while the real enemy remained intact to develop continuously.

## **The Key to Winning the War: The Least Understood Enemy.**

Specifically in South Vietnam, the enemy was primarily a peasant-enemy and 85 percent of the population were either peasants or peasant-related. The peasants enabled the North Vietnamese communists to maintain and consolidate a political infrastructure in South Vietnam. This provided the logistical base, with all resources in local areas, for the war to develop from an insurgency in the late 1950s to a guerilla warfare in the 1960s and a total war in the 1970s.

It was in fact the peasant-enemy who created the conditions that enabled the North Vietnamese communists to launch their conventional forces into the last phase of a long revolutionary war, ultimately conquering all of South Vietnam in April 1975.

Had the CIA been able to recognize and understand the enemy, the United States would have allied with Vietnamese nationalist anti-communist leaders (instead of with opportunistic anti-communist leaders), and formulated a much more positive nationalistic strategy (than one based primarily on a strongly negative one) to combat Communism.

Such a positive strategy would have translated into the building of a true democratic regime (instead of the one in which democracy was only for window-dressing purpose). Such a regime could have provided leaders imbued with nationalistic image, who dreamed of a truly independent Vietnam and who sincerely wanted to bring democracy and justice to their country. They would have been responsive to the people. That new environment would have helped to erase the images and promises of Ho Chi Minh (who had achieved credibility and great popularity due to his victory over the French) and to eradicate a French legacy of abuses and oppression on the peasants and others.

The peasant - with his mind and heart switching frequently between the images of a communist Ho Chi Minh and an anti-communist Nguyen Van Thieu,

between the practices and abuses of a colonial-legacy administration and the Viet Cong promises for a revolutionary nation, between the American advisors and troops and the French in the past, was forced to make a choice between the village and the jungle. (Many of them opted for the jungle, others remained in the village but worked secretly for the other side. The rest took a negative position at the government call.)

My Census Grievance program was initiated in 1960 and developed in the following years as way to know and understand that peasant-enemy. With this knowledge and understanding, it was possible to offer him a choice to remain in the village and on the government side. Thus, all other military, counter terror, economic, social and cultural activities I instituted, modified, and supported were customized to and based on the Census Grievance.

The legendary John Paul Vann was instrumental in the conversion of my ideas and experience into the organization and the functioning of the CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) but such conversion was limited strictly to their materialistic aspects and never embodied the spirit of my ideas.

## **BBC:**

**The one image you would use  
to illustrate the entire war  
in (South) Vietnam.**

## **TNC:**

*A conclusive image with former President Nguyen Van Thieu sandwiched between CIA officials sneaking out of Vietnam.*

The image of the last US-supported Vietnamese president (Nguyen Van Thieu) sandwiched between a couple of CIA officials sneaking out of a South Vietnam crumbling under communist fires and de-

## VIETNAM TODAY

71, 72

The Marxist-Leninist Syndrome.

73

A Guerilla Legacy.

74

Democracy is the Only Cure.

Economic Development and Prosperity  
can only be possible with Democracy.

The Vietnamese communist leaders are known to venerate Marx and Lenin as their spiritual leaders. Marx and Lenin have been discredited, dethroned and humiliated in their own "homes". The Vietnamese communist leaders are also known to praise the Soviet Union as their model paradise. After more than 70 years of Communism, the Soviet Union is now on its way to dissolution - Former communist leader Yeltsin became the first popularly elected president of Russia only after he categorically rejected Communism; Soviet President Gorbachev won worldwide sympathy because of his effort to ally with the West and save the Soviet Union from total bankruptcy.

In refusing this time to follow the Soviet model and turning instead to Communist China, the Vietnamese communist leaders might be able to prolong their personal status as the beneficiaries of comfort and luxuries left behind by Nguyen Van Thieu and his associates. However, they expose themselves to a situation that one of their own senior communist members, Dr Nguyen Khac Vien, warned them about by quoting Karl Marx: "The rulers who enjoy the comfort and abundance while the people under them suffer miseries could not be called human beings."

ceptions.

Thus, Colonel Edward Lansdale helped Ngo Dinh Diem to establish himself and the Republic of (south) Vietnam (1955), Lt. Colonel Lucien Conein played the key role in downing Diem (1963) and leading the way for Nguyen Van Thieu to host the United States to fight the war, change the corpses (with Vietnamization) and withdraw honorably (with the Paris settlement).

With Thieu evacuating, the United States closed the doors on its 30 years of a gigantic human drama. Millions of Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans lost their lives and millions of other Vietnamese and Americans suffered injuries for a war they deserved to win but lose it to the Communists. Their supreme sacrifices were betrayed by a combined group of adventurers and opportunists who lied to them about the splendid things while they themselves took on the war as a big opportunity to prosper socially and financially.

Thieu illustrated that group who kept calling for war while preparing for escape. He was then duly rewarded by his employers.

It would be a shameful act on my part to attack Thieu out of hatred or vengeance - such sentiment is incompatible with my moral standard.

The only reason I used Thieu as a factual proof that the United States has the tendency to rely and use immoral "leaders" to pursue moral objectives - how could a leader afford to send his wife and daughter to London to buy antiques at the moment tens of thousands troops and civilians got killed because of his withdrawl operation? How could an honest Vietnamese president "save" so much money from his small salary to afford a most "respectable" standard he has been living with since the CIA evacuated from Vietnam in 1975? - Are there any other non-Vietnamese Nguyen Van Thieus on the list or waiting list of the State Department?

"With Vien (Chairman of the Vietnamese Joint Chiefs of Staff) behind him, Don (Thieu's Deputy Prime Minister) was able to bring the principal members of the Can cabinet around: the Prime Minister himself, and Economics Minister Nguyen Van Hao. The four of them then made a pact. The next day they would call on Thieu to resign. If he refused, they would force him out.

"Thieu, in fact, was already several chess moves ahead of them. Overnight he had decided not to give his tormentors the pleasure of picking over his corpse. He would step down at once and let them tear each other to pieces. "Yes, my timing was just right," he told a friend on Taiwan several months later. "I waited until the patient was on his deathbed. No one could save him. Then I left. I wanted no one to be able to surpass what I had done for my country."

-Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval*.

### *Imprisonment*

*Continued from page 60*

.... factor that pushed me towards expatriation. I knew I had to escape - or die in the attempt - because I could not allow the Communists let my body live and destroy my soul - in spying over my friends and associates.

I thus chose to escape. Only a divine protection had saved me and my family many times during my 8-month escape and isolation. But once again, while the American officials tried to destroy me, other American friends and sympathizers made their best effort to save me and my family. I owe a profound gratitude to the late Keyes Beech of the Los Angeles Times, former State Deputy Secretary Richard Holbrooke and my personal friend Tony Cistaro who were instrumental to our rescue.

BBC:

### Your impressions of Vietnam today.

TNC:

*Vietnam today suffers a disintegration in moral and cultural foundation, a sell-out of national resources, and a miserable humiliation in human conditions. Sovietized and Americanized Vietnamese had made the war possible and devastating, but the Vietnamese Communists are solely responsible for the conditions Vietnam is suffering today.*

*Only Vietnamese, true and nationalist Vietnamese, can save the Vietnamese Nation and its people. A true democratic system of government would rally the right, convert the wrong, and reunify the Vietnamese people in Vietnam and elsewhere for the rebuilding of a new Vietnam within the community of modern nations. I make a point here of emphasizing that the system must be truly democratic - not the window-dressing facade of a Nguyen Van Thieu "democracy" nor the current type of "socialist democracy."*

*Clinging to the present "socialist democracy" system and refusing to change it into a true democratic system, the Vietnamese communist leaders have to admit that after 16 years in power they failed to get the consent of the Vietnamese people.*

*They then decided to use the current system to remain in power and enjoy the good life. They left millions of their lower-level party members, their officers and soldiers, their war widows, orphans, and the rest of the Vietnamese population to suffer the consequences of a nation the Communists are leading toward disintegration, misery and humiliation.*

*In 1949, my communist friend Ho Ba urged me to join the party, I quit the army and returned to the nationalist side without altering the sentiments and admiration I had for Ho Ba as an individual. For an entire period of 4 years in the 1960s, my communist brother Tran Ngoc Hien tried to recruit me. I rejected*

*the offer and I worked harder to defeat Communism. Then, when I realized that victory was impossible, I risked my life to contain it. During those years, I keep repeating my belief that Communism must be hated and rejected but the communists, as Vietnamese, could be changed and this must be duly reconsidered. I hope and expect to re-find a full friend and brother in Ho Ba and Tran Ngoc Hien the day they change their reasoning to build and support a Vietnam to be loved and admired by all Vietnamese and respected and supported by all nations.*

*For almost half a century, the communist leaders called on the Vietnamese people to struggle to free the country from French and American invasion, and the peasants and workers from the feudal system. Their stated goal was to transform the Vietnamese people into "new people" in a communist-socialist nation of equality and happiness. Vietnam today is free from French and American presence but their leaders are still imprisoned in a disintegrating Marxist-Leninism mold while the rest of the Vietnamese are suffering poverty, oppression, corruption and the incompetence of a communist administration.*

*The Vietnamese communists claimed that they were nationalists first, and then communists: it is now the time for them to reject Communism to return to Mother Vietnam - for their own benefit and the benefit of their children and the Vietnamese people.*

Vietnam today is facing three most dangerous obstacles:

- 1/ The Marxist-Leninist syndrome,
- 2/ A guerilla legacy, and
- 3/ As a consequential effect, Vietnamese culture and morality deteriorated and led to a national resources sell-out.

### **The Marxist-Leninist Syndrome.**

The Vietnamese communist leaders today have become the victims of their own images as Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries - certainly the few last ones from a worldwide communism on its way of disintegration. There are some factors that could help to understand their present state of mind.

The leaders of the 1930s proved incapable of coming out of their Bolshevik cocoons. They remain wrapped up in their past performances and glories as leaders in the struggle against the gigantic "enemies of mankind," as they pointed at the United States. They must now be afraid to lose the status of glorious revolutionaries, feeling unsecure as they now form the few, the privileged who factually replaced the Vietnamese rulers they had accused as puppets to French colonialists and American imperialists - thus, the Vietnamese committed to an alien Marxist-Leninist ghost are now taking the seats of the Vietnamese puppets of the American supremacists.

Ironically, one can see the parallel between the Vietnamese communist leaders today and former President Nguyen Van Thieu and his associates in the last years of the American withdrawal and disengagement.

As the Americans were withdrawing from Vietnam, President Nguyen Van Thieu refused to negotiate and called on his officers and troops to continue the war while he himself sent his wife and daughter (the only child at that time) to London to buy antiques. He shipped most of his own personal fortune and household effects to Taiwan and Canada before he resigned and fled. As a result of Thieu clinging to power for his own benefit and that of his small group of favorites, tens of thousands soldiers, women, men and children were massacred in the Highlands and Center Vietnam during the last days of Thieu's reign.

Almost similar to Nguyen Van Thieu, using the slogan of combatting Communism to the last drops of

blood (of officers and troops) to cling to power and to prepare for his escape, the Communist leaders today are hiding behind the shield of the Marxist-Leninism to cling to power, and to enjoy the comfort and luxuries Thieu left behind while exposing the Vietnamese nation and people to misery and humiliation. I can't see how the Vietnamese communist leaders could escape the country the way Thieu and his associates did.

Their only alternative would be either they would conform to the expectation of Vietnamese people or the Vietnamese people will "liberate" themselves of the Communist leaders.

There are other explanations the Vietnamese communist leaders might have used to support their reluctance to erase the Marxist-Leninist syndrome.

Prior to the August Revolution in 1945 - a nationalist revolution the communist leaders captured and exploited in a movement aimed at communizing the Vietnamese nation - Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants were indoctrinated in and formed by the Marxist-Leninist philosophy that only Communism could save Vietnam from colonialism and "liberate" farmers and workers from the oppressive regime formed by the alliance of colonialists, capitalists, mandarins and landowners.

The French, by refusing to rehabilitate Emperor Bao Dai with a nationalistic image and instead relying on a group of former French-citizen and French-associated Vietnamese, mostly from the class of "mandarins and landowners", to support them in the war, gave more ammunition to the Marxist allegation. The communists used it as a strong evidence to convert most of the nationalists into joining the Communist party.

With the war continuing and the final victory over the French, Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants and an expanding communist party were sold out completely to the Marxist-Leninist teachings.

Obsessed intellectually and morally with Marxist-Leninism, the communist leaders have been unable to accept the fact that many of the former colonies did not need their leaders to be communist to lead them toward recovering independence. Moreover, Communism, once rapidly and strongly developed in wartime or under social, economic and political injustice, evaporated in countries where the above conditions changed for the better. France gave the most eloquent example of that nature. Curiously Communism could prosper only under social, economic and political injustice committed by dictatorial governments - usually at war and using war for justification. In countries where the Communists took power, its consequence resulted in social, economic and political disaster that their archenemies (i.e. the capitalists and "reactionary" revisionists such as the socialists of French President Francois Mitterrand-type) would be incapable of creating.

The Soviet Union and the communist Eastern Europe provided the most spectacular example; but they too would be ashamed at the speed their longtime and most loyal Vietnamese comrades took to bring the Vietnamese nation to its present social and economic chaos and political disaster. It took only 15 years for Vietnam to reach the depth that occurred in Eastern Europe after 40 to 75 years. At the end of this, the Soviet Union turned out to be the most amiable client and petitioner to the capitalist West and the fervent supporter of their arch American enemy against their longtime Iraqi ally. I feel more compassion than disdain or hatred for the Soviet leaders for I consider their conversion more as a proof of their patriotism than humiliation.

Years after their 1975 victory and realizing that the United States was impotent in the war but remained the most powerful force in peace, the Vietnamese Communist leaders took the audacious steps to leave their "summit of mankind" to beg their former enemy for normalization and help. But I doubt that they

would succeed as long as they intend to use the resources from outside to retain their dictatorial system and deny the Vietnamese people the right to elect their government.

This explains why for all gestures of humiliation in search of an American rescue, the Vietnamese leaders are rewarded with a humiliating million dollars and a 4-point roadmap (amounting to an ultimatum) toward normalization of relations between the two countries. The road is long and the games are now no longer in the hands of the Vietnamese communists. The Cambodian theatre and the prospect of foreign investments in Vietnam are becoming a far more destructive force than the Westmoreland-led army - the road map could also be extended to an ocean map as long as the Vietnamese communist leaders refused to follow in the footsteps of Russian President Yeltsin and Soviet President Gorbachev.

With the Communists refusing to release the power to the Vietnamese people, Vietnam has now isolated herself on a new battlefield - with China and the Soviet Union courting the Americans for aid and the rest of the world watching with indifference. There would be no bloody fighting, no destructive bombing, but the effect is far more reaching. With the American embargo, no significant long term investment is possible, the economic stagnation will keep Vietnam in the back seat of the world community.

The Vietnamese people, pushed to extremities, could arise and finish the regime. The generation of nationalists of the August Revolution could turn against the communist party and its unrepenting leaders to recover from their years of suffering and betrayal. Such eventualities have already happened in most of the communist world.

### A Guerilla Legacy

All Vietnamese expatriates and foreign investors who returned from visits to Vietnam are unanimous

in admitting that the government there is functioning on a tacit power-sharing basis, regardless of the existence of its own constitution, laws and legal procedure. Cabinet ministries interrelated to the same problem try to solve it independently from each other. A decision made at one level of the government would not necessarily be accepted by another government level. And there are many, many levels of government agencies, all making decisions and policies, often in conflict with each other.

That situation has led to a tremendous confusing bureaucracy. An investor who might get the approval of a Hanoi central ministry for a specific project to be set up in a provincial area might not be accepted by the authority of that province, and vice versa. An import license might be accepted by the Customs Agency but it might not be concurred with by the Taxation agency. The examples keep growing higher and higher; it was impossible for investors and concerned persons to devise plans and schedules for any serious projects.

As a result of that de facto power-sharing system and because of the inability of the government to pay its personnel enough to keep up with the growing cost of living, corruption has become a normal way - at all levels and branches of government. That disease of corruption that is common in most undeveloped countries grew to such an enormous magnitude that it discouraged most of serious investors, leaving others to compete in frauds and deceipts in their dealing with Vietnamese government authorities. The situation led to high-ranking officials caught red-handed in stealing from their own government.

The Communist party and government did make a considerable effort to remediate deficiencies in the functioning of government and to reduce, if not to stop, the corruption. It resulted in the expulsion of tens of thousands of communist party members and officials, but government continued to run the same way and corruption kept growing bigger - regardless

of all provisions in all kind of new laws promulgated to guarantee investors and individuals.

The above state of government functioning and its companion corruption originated from a long period of a government that operated in the jungle during the war, sharing power and delegating authority to autonomous, self-sufficient entities that provided support. Unlike the South Vietnamese government system in which subordinate agencies and authorities depended on central government logistical and financial support to operate, the Vietnamese communist system developed almost independently and autonomously from the grassroots - and the central or higher level of authority in most of the cases had to depend inversely on lower levels to operate.

The guerilla legacy persists and prevails in the actual conventional system of government. It won't fade away until the central government is capable of paying their personnel enough to suffice, to come to support the local government in its development, and finally to build an efficient legal system with a police force willing to enforce the laws above the present interference of "comrades."

#### **Cultural and Moral Deterioration Resulting in Mismanagement of National Resources.**

The communist leadership has refused to put aside the Marxist-Leninist syndrome and the guerilla legacy, and instead incorporated them into the system of government operation that has resulted in a state of national self-destruction.

Former Secretary General Le Duan envisioned building a communist-socialist society with and by a new type of Vietnamese forged in the socialist mold. Duan's vision was not realized. Instead, most of the "new" type of Vietnamese, after 30 years of Marxist-Leninism, have corrupted themselves, the communist party and the rest of the Vietnamese society to a devastating degree. The result is that Vietnam today is regarded by the world community as the cradle of

prostitution, bribery, black market, and administrative and technological incompetence.

In Vietnam today, probably, only a small number of party members and high officials are in positions where they can get a royal treatment, with mansions, villas, cars, chauffeurs, servants and plenty of cash. All the rest live in poverty and humiliation. A friend of mine in the 40s, now a retired general, is known to perform a kind of handyman job to supplement his small pension for survival. This example is just one meant to illustrate the lives of millions of other generals, officers, soldiers, civil servants, party members, retirees, war widows and orphans who had responded to the calls of the communist leadership throughout the 30-year-long war. It is also cited to describe clearly the disastrous conditions of the entire Vietnamese population.

In a period of a few months between the time I was set free and the day I escaped (in 1978-1979), I witnessed a number of communist cadres who proved uncorruptible. Recently I was told that 2 or 3 of them remained poor, very poor, living on government subsidies, the others had become corrupted; each had bought homes, cars; and had begun to live in near luxury. (in South Vietnam, the salary of a senior executive is just enough for his day to day feeding.)

The inability of the communist party and government to treat their millions of devotees with decency and to create conditions for the population to earn their living led to a Vietnamese society of corrupted officials, professional and casual prostitutes, and criminals of all kinds. The government and people thus have become dependent on the limited resources provided by the Vietnamese expatriates and the relatively small amount of foreign investments.

The various religious organizations and activities also bear the impact. Their most respected and capable leaders have been imprisoned or placed under house surveillance. Training of replacements for the

old and dead religious leaders is tightly restricted, religious activities are monitored, etc... Teachers who normally enjoyed respectability are often ridiculed for their effort of surviving. In higher education, university graduates wonder what they would do to not go hungry.

Unable to borrow loans from international funds due to the US economic embargo and looking in desperation to other sources for investments, the communist leaders left to the adventurous investors the initiative to exploit the national resources in ways that would damage the nation in the long run. The fishing along the Vietnamese coast, for example, conjointly with some foreign companies would result in the extermination of the fish population - due to the modern equipment the foreign fishing companies operate while the Vietnamese are not trained and equipped to prevent such operations. The same is true with the lumber industry and many other joint projects with foreign firms.

The general and specific situation described above speaks about the state of a nation slowly being bankrupted - morally, culturally and materially. The entire Vietnamese people have to pay for the Marxist-Leninist syndrome and the guerilla legacy of a government under the communist leadership.

### **Democracy Is The Only Remedy.**

The Vietnamese communist leaders have certainly observed, and must admit, that they won a war but failed to build a nation with their Marxist-Leninist teachings. They have begun to change with various actions they have called reform, renovation, democratization - all terms and names they could use.

The results turned the country into more (better hidden until exploded) corruption and more mismanagement in the administration of ministries, agencies, and other governmental institutions. Vietnamese expatriates who returned from visits to Vietnam reported that Saigon and most cities offered the

spectacle of a combination of brothels, black markets and that the Vietnamese students and teachers - traditionally most respected and loved Vietnamese class - are all humiliated. I felt suffering and humiliation myself when I was told of the above described images.

The current situation proves that all the reforms the communist leaders have taken can only prolong the sufferings and deterioration of the Vietnamese nation before it either explodes in revolts, uprisings or total disintegration.

The Vietnamese communist leaders might argue that China, North Korea and Cuba could be used as models of a renovated communism. It is a dangerous assessment. China is, with her vast resources, capabilities and her potentiality of becoming the real world power in the decades to come, has to be treated differently.

It took me all my life to accept the reality of the world today: that there are no such things as political standard and human principle in international relationship between nations and nations. They exists only between individuals, private organizations and religious people. Nations, of any ideologies, tend to use those beautiful terms and words only when they benefit them. In that sense, following the footsteps of China will surely be counter-productive. China deserves to be treated as a brother, albeit maybe a big one, culturally and realistically. Our ancestors used to treat her with modesty each time she was defeated. The Vietnamese communists who refused to learn the lessons with regard to their enemies, China and the United States, brought Vietnam to today 's political and economic isolation. The well-publicized challenge that "watch to see who would win from the competition of Communism and Capitalism" has now the answer - in the Soviet Union, the Communist world, Cuba and North Korea included. In a democratic system, the deficiencies in capitalism could be

changed for the better but Communism, because of its one-party power system could never prosper.

Again, all current and future reforms would never save the Vietnamese nation and communism. The root of the malfunctioning of the Vietnamese government today, despite even all good intentions and purposes, resides in the Marxist-Leninist syndrome and guerilla legacy planted so profoundly in the minds of the communist leaders.

The only medication to cure this is a true democracy.

Not the kind of fake democarcy Nguyen Van Thieu represented, which limited the power to his group of supporters and alienated the rest of the South Vietnamese population, nor the kind of proletarian democracy which protects the communist leaders in their luxurious villas while exposing the entire Vietnamese population to starvation and indecency.

Despite the current desperate situation, which has resulted from the communist administration, there is still a hope: that a true democratic system of government can be generated. The communists may lose the power but they should remember the fate of their former comrades in Poland, East Germany...

Only a truly democratic elected government with true representation from all walks of life, regardless of their past performances on either side of the war, can serve to reduce corruption and incompetency in the government, stimulate the entire population, convince the United States to drop the economic embago, open Vietnam to long-term investments, attract Vietnamese technicians and talents from overseas back to help to accelerate and develop the current technology and industry toward modernization.

Such a radical change in Vietnamese politics and economics would create enough employment with decent earnings for university and high school graduates, technicians and non-technicians as well. The nation would then ensure a long-term prosperity and a comeback to its cultural and religious foundation.

In order to arrive at the building of a new Vietnam with a new perspective as above projected, I would recommend that the Vietnamese communist leadership take the first steps to renounce communism, to set free all political opponents, religious leaders and guarantee them liberty and safety for their continuing activities.

No true democracy is possible without elections freely run and results objectively controlled. For that reason, Vietnamese of all political affiliations would be permitted to participate in all steps of election organization from the preparation to the establishment of a new elected government.

An international committee would supervise the above process of democratization to ensure all parties concerned impartiality and safety, and to enlighten the new and promising image of a democratic, truly democratic, Vietnam.

### *Census Grievance*

*Continued from page 30*

Intelligence on the enemy and enemy activities would be converted into actions to win over the pro-VietCong and VietCong, to call them back from hiding. If these efforts failed, the last resort was to eliminate them. The communist infrastructure and strategic base in the hamlets and villages - where the foundation of the revolutionary war had to begin - would thus be eliminated.

Information on the government officials, military and police led to necessary actions to make sure that the government personnel (military, police, security and officials) would cease to alienate the innocent people. Such reforms would make the people, and the peasants, more willing to support the government side.

### *Democracy*

*Continued from page 25*

....the cities against the government - VietCong agents had been able to infiltrate into the cities with weapons and ammunitions several days before they cooperated with their military units to launch the 1968 Tet offensive throughout most cities of South Vietnam.

If a democratic foundation had been truly built, and run with the hearts and the minds of the Vietnamese leaders truly committed to it, the emergency in the rural villages and the turmoil in towns would not have happened. Or, if it did occur, it would not have reached such a state that the Communists were able to send their agents from the North, building their people's war in the South before they attempted to send in their regular troops.

Civic actions, repeated through pacification programs by French, Americans and Vietnamese, failed to appeal to the peasants because they were only counter-productive measures by a system of government which was neither an effective dictatorship nor a true democracy.

I always strongly advocated a *true* democracy because I believed that only true democracy was capable of challenging Communism and it would be easier to build than an effective dictatorship. The ideals were already there and fundamentally parallel to the traditional Vietnamese religious sentiment, which was more spiritual than rigidly structured in nature. It took the Vietnamese communists decades of efforts with a doctrine and ideology (the Marxist-Leninist) and hundreds of revolutionary cadres (indoctrinated in French penitentiaries) to build their dictatorship and make it an efficient tool to wage their political war. Presidents Diem and Thieu tried and failed to build an efficient dictatorship, behind the window-dressing of a democratic facade, because they had no time and appropriate cadres to do it.

Democracy, imperfect as it might be, was the only thing the United States and South Vietnam could build there to use as the basis for a political war that could have defeated the North Vietnamese people's revolutionary war before it got a foothold.

## Epilogue

### About Hawks and Doves

In the climax of the war in Vietnam, John Paul Vann, Daniel Ellsberg and I formed a curious trio. We had become close personal friends and very often we talked about the war, its problems and its effects on the Vietnamese and Americans. At times we cried because of our impotence, despite our desire and compassion, to influence the leadership: the White House, ambassadors and generals.

We were all three united in what should be done, how to do it, and who should do it (strategy and concept of implementation). We faced a dilemma, however.

Most of Americans and Vietnamese who worked in the field and in all capacities - be it the military, police, the CIA, USAID or USIA - were excellent and energetic people; they risked their lives in performing their jobs and they learned a lot in the field.

And we also learned a lot from them, which led us to consolidate convincingly our conception of war, strategy and ...tragedy.

The three of us felt closer to each other than ever but decided to take different paths to comply with our personal conviction and compassion.

John Vann launched himself into an effort to set a personal example and to lead Americans and Vietnamese to implement what we all three believed right: to harness the revolution in South Vietnam. Vann strongly and proudly believed that the war there could be won only through such an effort. Vann gave himself in the manner of a religious zealot, forgetting about himself. Vann personified the millions of Americans who fought the war with the conviction that their dedication and heroic performances would fulfill their patriotic obligation - and that their leaders would not deceive them.

Daniel Ellsberg admired Vann but he was convinced that such a revolution could never be successful when controlled, directed and led by Americans. Ellsberg argued time after time that Vietnamese leaders should be in control, with Americans in support roles. He argued that the Vietnamese leaders should be motivated patriotically and must transmit that sense of motivation throughout

their channel to get it down to the Vietnamese troops, administrators and people, and thus to unite all of them. After months of observing actions and people in the countryside and in the salons of Saigon, Ellsberg decided that such Vietnamese leadership did not exist and would never exist because of the Vietnamese dependence on the Americans and because Vietnamese were denied true, democratic elections to provide their own leaders - so that such a patriotic motivation could happen. Ellsberg then committed himself to act in such a way that a lot of people accused him of being a traitor to America and a breaker of the laws. He simply answered by saying that he did all that because he was loyal to America and he broke the laws to save human lives and America from a futile war.

Ellsberg was not the lone American who converted himself from a hawk to a dove. He only personified the hundreds of thousands of other Americans who might have not gone through the same learning process as Ellsberg did, but who all came to the same conclusion: that the most responsible men at the leadership level did lie to them.

I gave my best to win the war, and when the war had proven unwinnable, I fought for an alternative that would have saved South Vietnam from the 1975 debacle.

We all three rejected the opportunities for personal gains to serve our personal conscience and patriotism. Vann had acceded to the highest position for a professional American - a civilian with actual command over generals and troops. He could have taken less provocative and risky course of action; instead he had become more aggressive and lost his life on the battlefield. Ellsberg could very much have benefited from his Harvard Ph. D. and his equivalent position of a major general, and advanced from there in the establishment. He instead decided to act against those whose lies to the American people resulted in loss of American lives, money and prestige.

Vann and Ellsberg, although taking different courses of action, symbolised the best of American patriots.

My personal story, among the hundreds, as follows would help the readers to understand more about How the Very Noble Cause of the United States was denied and What might have justified the antiwar sentiment.

# The Personal Story Of TRAN NGOC CHAU

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## *A Cause Celebre*

"Tran Ngoc Chau a former South Vietnamese national assemblyman who became a cause celebre in the United States when he was jailed by the Saigon government during the war and was later imprisoned by the Communists, has escaped and is now a refugee on an island in the South China Sea."

*-Los Angeles Times, Thursday, June 14, 1979*

"Chau fought alongside the Viet Minh in the late 1940's against the French colonialists. But he broke with the communists because he considered himself a nationalist patriot -- a stance he steadfastly maintained by opposing successive regimes in south Vietnam. When the north Vietnamese marched into Saigon on April 30, 1975, Chau had already spent five years in jail and house arrest under the Nguyen Van Thieu regime.

"The communists sent him to a re-education camp for several months, but he pleased them no better than he had Thieu, so he was sent from the re-education centre to prison. Later he was released, but was held under house detention. Former comrades from his Viet Minh days went to visit Chau. Many are now high-ranking cadres and privy to the decisions made at a high level in Hanoi."

*-Far Eastern Economic Review - August 3, 1979*

"He escaped from Ho Chi Minh City, the new name for Saigon, last February, buying places for himself and his family on a Chinese refugee boat and, after being marooned on an Indonesian island for months, reached California in November."

*-The New York Times - Monday, January 14, 1980*

As compiled from and combined with excerpts from books, magazines, newspapers, documents released by the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Congress, and statements made by personalities cited in the references during and after the war in Vietnam.

Excerpts are arranged in the sequence of the events as they occurred and with consideration of their interrelationship. Title and sub-titles are added to help to explain this sequence and the relationships.

# The personal Story of TRAN NGOC CHAU

## An Unexpected Ally of U.S.

• An Original Vietnamese	iii
• An Unusual Province Chief	iii
• The Moral Logic: From Religious beliefs to Political practice	iv
• To Meet the People's War: A People's Approach	iv
• With American Allies and the CIA	v

## For Vietnam: In Search for Survival

• Establishing a Position: Of, By, and For the People	vi
• Establishing a Nationalist Base: Between non-Communists	vii
• The Last Chance of Survival: Between "Impossible Victory" and "Inconceivable Defeat"	viii
• Between Vietnamese and Vietnamese	viii

## For the United States: In Search for a Way Out

### Without the Stigma of a Defeat.

• The Last Illusion, a War by Proxy and a Man of Necessity	ix
• The UnwieldyLink: Washington and Saigon	x
• The Mastering Pupil: 'To Be or Not To Be'	xi

## For Whom the Bells Tolled:

### Men, System and Cause

• Conspiracy and Blackening	xi
• The Accused	xii
• Vietnamese Constitution and American Noble Cause	xiii
• The Benedictions of a Nationalist	xiv
• A Tribunal of No Constitution	xv
• Impotence in Democracy	xv
• Editorials	xvi-xviii

## An Indecent Interval

• Lies, Deception and Betrayal	xix
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## As a Drama

• An Expected Ally of U.S. [The point is he is not the only one]	xx-xxii
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## An Unexpected Ally of U.S.

### An Original Vietnamese.

"The third son of the chief judge of Central Vietnam (and grandson of a Minister of Defense), Chau inherited the fierce mandarin pride and ethic of leadership. Early in World War II, at the age of 16, he left his comfortable life in Hue to join his two older brothers in the Viet Minh resistance to the French. By 1949, however, he had quit the Viet Minh in distress at the Communist takeover of the resistance and Communist murder of competing nationalists. He did so only after a series of ideological arguments with his brother (Tran Ngoc) Hien.

"Ambitious, may be a little arrogant, very dynamic," a friend described Chau. "He talked a lot, may be too much."

"He doesn't belong to the political system here," summarized an enemy succinctly.

"I think Chau is not a politician; he is a man of action," said a neutral.

"At the end the right man in the wrong place at the wrong time, Chau was a minor political figure who always had the potential of becoming major. At the end, he did become major, though not in quite the anticipated way.

"A passionate nationalist, he was a Confucian ethically, a mandarin instinctively, a proud man personally who was attracted and repelled by the Americans at the same time. He was ambitious, for himself and his country. It was said he was something of an opportunist, and probably he was, inasmuch as ambition compels action. But he possessed neither the motivation nor the sense of timing of the real operator. He was principled to a degree that hurt him politically. He could be headstrong and a little foolhardy, his friends said in despair."

*-Elizabeth Pond in her "The Chau Trial".*

*The Christian Science Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund March 1970.*

### An Unusual Province Chief.

"I have known Tran Ngoc Chau over many years and hold him in high regard at work as one of the most outstanding province chiefs in Vietnam and as a political leader who not only won the trust and support of his constituency, but did the same with fellow members of the Lower House in the National Assembly of Vietnam, who made him their leader.

"Beyond his managerial and political skills, he is a person of high morals, honest, very bright, and is dedicated to the ideals and principles shared by Americans."

*-Edward G. Lansdale*

*Maj. General, U.S.A.F.(Retired)*

*Former Minister Plenipotentiary in  
Saigon. - November 17, 1979.*

"He was regarded by almost everyone as a most unusual Province Chief -- an honest and efficient administrator who instituted many reforms and showed unmistakeable concern for all the people."

*-George McArthur*

*Former Senior Correspondent*

*The Los Angeles Times in Saigon  
November 19, 1979*

"Under President Ngo Dinh Diem, whose family had long known Chau's family in the elite circles of Hue, Chau's military career progressed well enough. He did not distinguish himself as a military commander, however, and it was only when he was appointed province chief of Kien Hoa in the Mekong delta in 1962 that he began to make a real name for himself. Kien Hoa has been a Viet Minh hotbed from the beginning and continued as a Viet Cong stronghold in the later period. When Lt. Col. Chau took over, only 80,000 out of a population of 530,000 could be said to be under government control. Within a year -- and a year, moreover, in which the general situation was deteriorating elsewhere -- Chau raised this number to 220,000.

**The Moral Logic:**

**From religious belief to political practice.**

"No military victories were responsible for this. Nor did Chau develop anything new in the way of political organization. Rather, he buttressed the existing leadership and organization -- and he provided channels for the population to improve its lot. He made a particular effort to galvanize the leadership of the religious groups -- Buddhist, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Catholic primarily --as the only really strong social structures outside the National Liberation Front and the South Vietnamese army.

"After a year in Kien Hoa Chau was moved by President Diem up to Danang, South Vietnam's second city, to become mayor there. The Buddhist crisis that would eventually topple the Catholic Diem was deepening at that time, and the president wanted a Buddhist trusted by the Buddhists in charge in Danang. Chau was known for his advocacy of government reconciliation with the Buddhists. Moreover, in his youth in Hue he had been a schoolmate of Thich Tri Quang, by now the leader of the militant Buddhists, and he had kept up his contact with the pagodas.

"Chau, who did not join the coup, remained in Danang for two months after Diem was overthrown. In January of 1964, however, he was moved back to Kien Hoa, thus becoming the sole province chief to run the same province both before and after the coup. In his absence and in the general turmoil surrounding the overthrow of Diem, the situation in Kien Hoa had drastically deteriorated, with government control slipping down to 100,000.

**To Meet the People's War:  
a People's Approach.**

"In his second term Chau stayed in Kien Hoa for two years. In that time he again raised government control figures to over 300,000 -- again in stark contrast to the general chaos in the rest of the country, where the government was losing one district and one battalion a week. It was at this time that Chau

formulated his objections to over-Americanization of the war.

"Give me a budget equivalent to the cost of one of your helicopters that are shot down in my province all the time, he would say to American friends, and I will produce a pacified province. The standard of living of each family could be raised, and officials could be paid enough that they wouldn't have to steal."

*-Elizabeth Pond in her "The Chau Trial".*

*The Christian Science Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund March 1970.*

"You could pacify South Vietnam with American Troops alone," Chau says. "But it would take three million troops, and it would last only as long as they stayed.

"The crucial target of pacification, in Chau's mind, is to create a spirit in the rural people of willingness to organize in their own self-defense. This spirit cannot be lit by an American occupying army. Nor will it be generated by Vietnamese cadre widely regarded as "American employees" --particularly if CIA influence on the program emphasizes the role of PAT element alone."

*-Daniel Ellsberg in his testimony  
before the U.S. Senate Committee  
on Foreign Relations.*

*April - May - June - August, 1970.*

"It was at this time also that Chau experimented with and develop a prototype of what would become the Revolutionary Development pacification cadres, the paramilitary defense, intelligence, and development workers in villages and hamlets. With the encouragement of the group around Gen. Edward Lansdale (the one who had "discovered" Ramon Magsaysay in the Philippines and was trying to repeat the feat in Vietnam), Chau gathered his ideas on pacification into a book, *"From War to Peace, Renaissance of the Village."* American enthusiasts of Chau's work assert that there is no pacification program in Vietnam today that was not pioneered by Chau in Kien Hoa.

"At the end of 1965 Chau was selected, with the

endorsement of both Vietnamese and American officials, to direct the young Revolutionary Development training program, which was financed and sponsored by the CIA.

"Provincial regret at his departure -- a rare phenomenon for any outgoing province chief -- was expressed in a petition signed by leaders of all the major religions there asking Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky not to let Chau leave Kien Hoa."

*-Elizabeth Pond*

*The Chau Trial - March 1970.*

## With American Allies and the CIA

"Chau had come to the attention of Americans when he was chief of Kien Hoa province in the early 1960s. An original innovative thinker -- several of his ideas were incorporated into the US pacification program -- Chau was less interested in killing Viet Cong than in converting the peasants through internal reform.

"He had a hard core of American admirers but he was fiercely independent -- some accused him of being a prima donna -- and frequently was critical of American tactics."

*-Los Angeles Times*

*Thursday, June 14, 1979*

"Frictions and pressures in his relations with CIA have obviously put great emotional strain on Chau because of his past friendship with that agency. In our first conversation and frequently in later ones he would interject with great emotion:

"You know, I have great appreciation and gratitude for help I got in Kien Hoa from CIA: more for the moral support than for material help. They were the only ones who believed in what I was trying to do, and helped me. Believe me, I have nothing against CIA.

"But I think that I was brought to Saigon on a misunderstanding. I thought I would run the program, determine the policies: with consultation with all the agencies involved. But I think that Mr. J and Mr. D only wanted me to do a technical job, administering it but not affecting policy matters. If that is what they want, that is fine, but I do not want that job.

"With considerable emotion Chau has said to me

on two occasions: "It is better for my country to be taken over by the Americans than by the Communists. If that is the only choice, then I think it is better for the Americans to take it over. But I do not want to be part of that. They can do it without me.

"More specifically, he says: "I like CIA. I have been a friend of CIA; that is why I speak so frankly to Mr. J because I do not think a friend should hide his feelings. But I do not want to be an employee of CIA. I would not have come here for that."

*-Daniel Ellsberg*

*in his testimony before the  
U.S. Senate Committee on  
Foreign Relations. -  
April - August, 1970.*

"By now Chau's perceptions and the CIA's perceptions of the effectiveness of some of the CIA programs were diametrically opposed. His disenchantment was so total that he predicted the total failure of Revolutionary Development unless the CIA turned the program over to the US Agency for International Development immediately. Chau's conflict with the CIA became so acute that he resigned as director of RD training and was given an obscure job at the RD ministry.

"Chau's relations with Americans were a mixed bag in this period, as the Dai Viet affair illustrated. He had several close friends and colleagues whom he admired greatly, but he was deeply ashamed -- as he would cry out at his trial -- by his country's impotence and dependence on the Americans."

"His dissatisfaction with the way the South Vietnamese government was operating at this time also made Chau want to go further and resign from the army altogether to run for the new Constituent Assembly. But he was not permitted to do so by his superiors."

*-Elizabeth Pond.*

*The Chau Trial*

*The Christian Science Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund*

*March 1970.*

## For Vietnam: In Search for Survival

### Establishing a Position:

#### By, Of and For the People.

"Under the new Constitution military officers were permitted to run for the legislature, however, so in 1967 Chau, still retaining his commission, did run for Deputy to the Lower House from Kien Hoa.

"In consequence, he won 41.2% of the votes, even out of a field of 19. His resounding victory -- his runner-up received only 12.6% -- made Chau the second or third highest vote getter in the Assembly.

"Once in Saigon, Chau was elected Secretary-General of the Assembly and a member of the select Special Court that is empowered to impeach the President and Vice President."

"It appears that the drifting apart of (South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van) Thieu and Chau began sometime during 1968. The 1968 Tet offensive and its aftermath had spurred Chau's thinking about a political settlement to the war -- and so had his contacts on a voyage to Japan, the United States, and Europe that year.

"Specifically, Chau was one of the first to recognize that the Tet offensive would prove to be the last straw for the US and that Washington would henceforth try to disengage from Vietnam as quickly as possible.

"He believed that the US would now be interested only in containing the military and political situation long enough to withdraw without the appearance of defeat. But he was convinced that the kind of short-term political stability this implied -- one based on right-wing militants -- would doom South Vietnam to Communist takeover in the long run."

"Chau therefore began to argue that Thieu should reach out for the support of other non-Communist nationalists, perhaps by appointing a "council of notables" drawn from the whole non-Communist spectrum.

"To Thieu it must have appeared that Chau, who was known to be very friendly with the Americans, was speaking for the Americans, who were also prodding the Vietnamese President to broaden his political base."

"In reality, however, Chau was moving farther away from the mainstream of US policy.

"The Americans were looking for a superficial political broadening in Saigon that would assuage a restive public opinion in the US. Because their basic goal was indeed the short-term stability that Chau feared, however, they could easily be maneuvered by Thieu into upholding the Vietnamese President no matter what he did politically.

"Chau's compulsion to a political broadening, on the contrary, was aimed at a fundamental long-term sharing of political power.

"For his part, Thieu was not prepared to risk losing his core of right-wing support in some chancey appeal to an unknown middle ground, whether at Americans' or Chau's or anyone else's urging.

"The divergence thus widened, though it was little noted at the time. Chau, after all, was still only a minor figure in Saigon politics, and he was just beginning to feel his way in new political directions."

"At no point did Chau attempt to build a political organization of his own. The administrative apparatus he built in Kien Hoa was exactly that, one which did not follow him as he moved, but more or less accrued to any successor province chief. After he became Deputy, Chau set up local offices in Kien Hoa (effectively consuming his entire House salary in doing so), and he kept in personal touch by frequent trips to province and district. Individual district chiefs continued to admire Chau greatly also. But all this was no cadre organization.

"Nor did Chau play the game of military politics. With his Viet Minh background he was hardly in a

position to deal with generals who had been on the French side and mistrusted anyone who had been in the resistance. And Chau was disinclined to do so anyway, simply as a matter of personal taste."

#### Establishing a Nationalist Base.

"To forward his policies, Chau seemed to be banking more on a Confucian approach of popular persuasion by virtue of good leadership once he was established in a position of power. This was the way he had operated with such success in Kien Hoa. And here Confucian mores blended with a certain Americanization in expecting a harmony of policy and politics. Chau floated ideas and lobbied for them in public books and articles. He disobeyed the canon that success in politics in Vietnam depends on making oneself slightly distinct, but not too much so, from those in control.

"Furthermore, Chau probably did not consider himself in opposition to Thieu at the beginning and thus having to build an opposition following. The situation was in flux. His views were changing, while Thieu's were not, but he was on balance still pro-government and pro certain American elements. (Probably too Chau was consciously playing for the high if elusive stakes of American support.)

"As Chau's ideas evolved and crystallized, however, he moved closer and closer to a loose grouping of young Southern Deputies, progressive Catholics, and Buddhists. His original pro-Thieu bloc had broken up by now, and Chau did not formally join any new bloc. But he spoke with ever more consonance with this opposition group.

"Toward the end of 1968 and the beginning of 1969 Chau spoke out more and more on issues of pacification, political settlement, and de-Americanization of the war.

"He advocated a more flexible policy of accommodation, not with Communists, but with nationalist groups (like the Buddhists) that were being shut out of Saigon political life.

"Some confusion did arise over Chau's position on coalition that would later affect the US Embassy's attitude toward Chau. He frequently used the term "coalition of non-Communist elements" to describe his central concept of bringing religious groups and ethnic minorities into the country's political life as real participants. And he sometimes spoke of this in shorthand simply as "coalition." Furthermore, he held that the NLF was separable from the Communists (which may have been true in the earlier stages of the insurgency but appeared naive for 1969). If not the NLF as a whole, then at least its supporters and cadres could be lured away from the Front and into the government system.

"This position led some Americans to infer--whether indiscriminately or by conscious distinction--that Chau might not oppose a coalition with the NLF as strongly as he opposed one with the Communists per se. This might or might not have proved true in the future evolution of Chau's thinking.

"A conscientious investigation by this reporter, however, based on Chau's recorded statements and on interviews with Vietnamese and Americans going back to 1967 has not turned up any evidence that it was ever true up to the time of Chau's trial. One press conference given by Chau in January of 1969, for example, which is sometimes cited as favoring coalition, proves on closer reading to be dealing with Chau's pet non-Communist coalition.

"All this detail on Chau's views on coalition is unnecessary for an understanding of the internal development of the Chau case; there was no Vietnamese accusation that Chau supported coalition. But it is essential to an understanding of the role of the US Embassy, for the Embassy view that Chau was pro-coalition was in part responsible for the Embassy's relative indifference to him."

*-The Chau Trial*

by Elizabeth Pond

*The Christian Science Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund*

*March 1970*

**The Last Chance:  
Between "Impossible Victory"  
and "Inconceivable Defeat".**

"Mr. Chau anticipates that victory is "impossible" under actual circumstances and yet to accept defeat is "inconceivable"; thus it would be preferable at least to admit the "existence" of the (National Liberation) Front. That deputy thus recommends a settlement in three steps.

"In the first step, the FNL would be invited to "designate" their representatives to take part in the current National Assembly -- members of the Communist party excluded.

"In the second step, members of the FNL would be invited to participate in the general elections as defined by the present Constitution for the renewal of members of both Chambers of the Assembly.

"In the third step, Saigon and Hanoi would discuss about the problems of the re-unification (of the two Vietnams.)

"A cease-fire must be respected before the application of this plan. It could be the object of a secret negotiation," added Mr. Chau, who emphasized that "the formation of a coalition government with the participation of the FNL as a minority must precede before the second phase -- before the general elections.

"Mr. Chau originally from the Center of Vietnam is considered as one of the most thoughtful leaders in a National Assembly which is often accused of playing a negative role."

*-Translated from French *Le Monde*,  
Paris January 17, 1969.*

"By 1969, Chau, who had once been a strong political associate of (President) Thieu, had become an outspoken advocate of a peace settlement that included political representation for the National Liberation Front."

*-The Daily Journal, New Jersey  
Tuesday Evening, June 11, 1974.*

**Between Vietnamese and Vietnamese.**

"On negotiations, Chau began in the late-1968 early 1969 period to demand talks between the three Vietnamese sides (Saigon, Hanoi, and the NLF) without the Americans. As an aid to starting this, he proposed a meeting between parliamentary delegations of North and South Vietnam. This was the period when the new Nixon Administration was searching out its own Vietnam policy, when Thieu was grudgingly responding to American nudges with peace proposals of his own, and when there was still a modest hope for the Paris talks.

"After the Paris peace talks began, Chau, who had been elected to a seat in South Vietnam's House of Representatives in the 1967 elections, proposed that members of the legislature should travel secretly to Hanoi to try to end the war by direct negotiations.

This proposal, which was backed by several leading Vietnamese, angered Thieu. He construed the move as an attempt to undermine his own power and reacted by breaking publicly with Chau. At the same time, Chau believed, high ranking Americans, including the C.I.A. became disturbed that North and South Vietnamese might try to deal behind America's back."

*-The Chau Trial  
by Elizabeth Pond  
The Christian Science Monitor  
The Alicia Patterson Fund  
March 1970*

"The Tet Offensive then propelled him (Chau) into a high-stakes maneuver. He sought to make himself the go-between in the peace talks, utilizing one of his brothers who had stayed loyal to Ho Chi Minh as a secret channel to the other side. This brother, Tran Ngoc Hien, was a senior agent in Hanoi's intelligence service and had been back in the South since 1965, posing as a traveling salesman of pharmaceuticals.

"Chau was not motivated entirely by ambition. Tet

had convinced him that it was wrong to inflict on the Vietnamese people a war "without any end in sight," and he thought that the Saigon side had a chance of surviving if it negotiated a peace in time.

"(John Paul) Vann did not approve of Chau's negotiating maneuver, and (Ambassador Ellsworth) Bunker had warned him to stay clear of the affair the previous summer after Vann intervened to try to defuse the quarrel between Thieu and Chau."

"Hien's arrest in Saigon last year gave Thieu a chance to attack Chau openly, and U.S. officials did little to protect him."

*-Neil Sheehan in his book:  
"A Bright Shining Lie" • 1988.*

## For the U.S.: In Search for a Retreat without the Stigma of a Defeat.

### The Last Illusion, a War by Proxy, and a Man of Necessity.

"[Ambassador] Bunker certainly did recoil from doing anything that might push South Vietnam into another chaotic interregnum like that that followed the assassination of Diem. Thieu, despite drawbacks, was able and had been governing the country well in a number of respects. There was no alternative to Thieu in sight, and no foreseeable smooth transition even if one should appear (except perhaps, sometime in the future, for Prime Minister Khiem).

"Taking political risks for some abstract consideration of keeping trusts or for some vague principle of broadening political participation could be lethal, especially at a time when the US needed all the calm it could get to proceed with withdrawal.

*-The Chau Trial  
by Elizabeth Pond - March 1970.*

"Bunker prized Thieu for the stability of his rule. He suspected that Chau was a Communist or a Communist agent, in any case a dangerous troublemaker who seemed to be attempting to gain a place for himself in a coalition government with the other side.

"The ambassador had called Vann to the embassy and administered "a polite but very steely asschewing," as Vann later described the session. "John, you're getting involved in politics. That's my business," Bunker said. "You tend to the pacification of the Delta and I'll tend to the politics of South Vietnam. Don't let it happen again."

"By the time Vann returned in early January 1970 from his holiday leave and the exhilaration of his talk with President Nixon, Thieu, who had been moving slowly but surely toward vengeance, was about to arrest Chau for the secret meetings with his brother. He was bribing other deputies to sign a petition to strip Chau of immunity as a member of the National Assembly.

"Vann submitted a request through Colby asking that Chau be flown out of the country on a U.S. plane and granted asylum in the United States in consideration for past services. Chau could not leave South Vietnam legally, because Thieu had revoked his passport. Ev Bumgardner, who was back in Saigon working as an assistant to Colby, joined in the request. Bunker refused.

"John Vann couldn't bear to give up Chau. It was not simply a matter of friendship. Chau still represented to Vann "the good Vietnamese" of his earlier vision, a symbol of the decent, progressive society that he and Bumgardner, Doug Ramsey, Frank Scotton, and Dan Ellsberg had wanted to create in South Vietnam. He knew that Chau was not a Communist or a Communist agent, no matter how much Chau might try to use Hien, as Hien might try to use Chau in this war in which brother exploited brother. Bumgardner felt the same way."

*-Neil Sheehan in his book:  
"A Bright Shining Lie"  
John Paul Vann and America  
in Vietnam - 1988.*

**The Unwieldy Link:**

**Washington and Saigon.**

"... we are concerned about GVN (government of Vietnam) decision to proceed against Chau. Several reports have indicated GVN's case against him is weak in terms of his having aided communists in contrast to his having admittedly associated with them.

"Ambassador Bui Diem's protest has affirmed that such is also his understanding based on his recent visit.

"Chau is well known to many Americans who worked with him in the United Nations and he has a number of devoted supporters here both in and out of government. They are convinced GVN's move against him is not because of any alleged communist activities but because he is an effective and vocal critic of the shortcomings of the GVN.

"I leave to your discretion how to bring this problem to Thieu's attention. I think he should know that arrest of Deputy Chau would not be helpful to President Nixon's efforts to retain the support of the American people for our policy in Vietnam.

*-Deputy Secretary of State Richardson to Ambassador Bunker - 7 February 1970.*

"1. I know you are aware from several recent messages of our concern that the Chau case is going to cause serious (and unnecessary) harm to us and GVN mutual interests, especially here but also in Vietnam and internationally. I recognize that Thieu has committed his personal prestige against Chau. What is not entirely clear is how far he intends to go, and specifically whether he will pursue the matter until Chau is behind bars or driven to exile.

2. The case has already been referred to the military court and I suppose it will find him guilty. I hope Thieu can be convinced that the verdict will be sufficient for Thieu's purposes of blackening Chau's reputation and ending his political future, that he will not proceed to press the lower house into officially lifting his immunity and permitting his arrest and imprisonment. If Thieu stops short of that step, I believe it will mitigate most of the unfavorable ef-

fects.

3. There have been charges (among them by Sen. Fullbright) that we have not made our views known sufficiently plainly and forcefully.

4. In your message of December 31st, you indicated that you would take personal action with Thieu when and if approaches by mission officers to lower levels appeared to be unsuccessful. It seems clear to me that time has come for a direct and forceful approach by you. I leave the timing and manner of your approach to you, of course, but it should be soon and Thieu should be left in no doubt of high level concern here that he is unnecessary harming our mutual objectives."

*-Deputy Secretary of State Richardson to Ambassador Bunker, 7 February, 1970.*

"When I saw Thieu late yesterday I took up the Tran Ngoc Chau case along the lines of refel.

"I said I thought it would be most inadvisable to imprison and make a martyr out of him.

"I said the Kraft article and Sen. Fullbright's statement, which he had read, were samples of the kind of adverse publicity that was already developing, and there would be more of this, for the case would be closely followed. It was not just a question of Americans who were hostile to Vietnam and our Vietnam policy, who felt this way about the Chau case, but those who were friendly to Vietnam and actively supported our Vietnam policy also had grave doubts about the wisdom of pushing the Chau case, ("high level concern"?) too far. It would greatly complicate this problem with the American press and Congress.

"Comment: While this is not entirely satisfactory, I think we have gone about as far as we can at this juncture."

*-Ambassador Bunker to the State Department 11 February 1970.*

"1. We note that AP story datelined Saigon ( ) reports with respect to the Chau case that "Washington clearly feels it would be inopportune to silence

someone preaching reconciliation among the Vietnamese who is a responsible nationalist.

"2. Department should be aware, in case any such views are being expressed by or to the press in Washington, that Tran Ngoc Chau's record is preaching reconciliation among the Vietnamese goes beyond that of other liberals here.

"Advocacy of coalition government is regarded here as tantamount to advocacy of the enemy's war aim.

"5. I referred to our previous conversations on the GVN's handling of this matter (S.2055). I said then I thought the GVN had made its point and that Chau had been destroyed politically and the GVN would be wise not to push the case to the limit. Chau would be henceforth of no importance and certainly no threat to the government. Now he had been made into an international figure and was being built up by critics of the GVN not only as a leading oppositionist, but as evidence that all opposition was being suppressed.

#### The Mastering Pupil: 'To Be or Not To Be.'

"6. Thieu replied that he was aware of the problems which the case was creating for him and the GVN abroad and especially in the U.S. On the other hand, he himself was in a difficult position. He had to try to draw the line as carefully as he could between adverse effects in the U.S. and harmful effects in Vietnam.

"Chau had provoked the government and defied it.

"The Vietnamese people, he said, are very sensitive. (I take it he meant suspicious). If he acted hesitantly in the Chau case his own position would be brought into doubt, and people would question the motivations both of him and the government and might well suspect him of sympathy with Chau's position.

"7. A general had said to him after Tet this year that "we doubted your determination when you moved so slowly against Chau, but now that you have taken action, we are very content. We have no fear now about a coalition."

*-Ambassador Bunker to the  
State Department 17 February, 1970.*

## For Whom the Bells Tolled: Men, System, and Cause.

### Conspiracy and Blackening.

"When Tran Ngoc Chau, a prominent South Vietnamese nationalist and legislator, became a political threat to Thieu in 1970, Shackley and Colby cooperated with the Vietnamese police to paint him as a subversive and a Communist agent.

"And when the South Vietnamese government surfaced its allegations against Chau in the local press, both Shackley and Ambassador Bunker supported them. A few days later Chau was dragged out of the National Assembly building in downtown Saigon and thrown into jail to await trial, in violation of all legal process in South Vietnam<sup>1</sup>."

*-Frank Sneff  
Former CIA's Chief Strategy  
Analyst in Vietnam in his book  
"Decent Interval" - 1977.*

"Actually, the Americans had handed Thieu a conspicuous *carte blanche* on Chau long before the controversial period of the two Richardson cables -- and the earlier American actions were probably the more significant ones in telegraphing the Embassy's indifference. John Paul Vann, one of Chau's close friends (and currently chief American Advisor to the pacification program in the Mekong Delta) had interceded on Chau's behalf with then Deputy Prime Minister (now Prime Minister) Tran Thien Khiem back at the time of Hien's trial in July 1969. Vann was reported in Washington as having testified to the Senate Foreign Relations about Chau's association with the US Government "in detail" -- i.e., about Chau's having informed the Americans about his talks with Hien. Although Vann had had the permission of his superior to do so, according to the Washington accounts, the US Mission immediately, in what seemed a reflex action, imposed a gag rule on Vann and every other American official who had been close to Chau. They were not to see Chau, nor

were they to discuss the case with any outsider, especially the press."

*-The Chau Trial*

*by Elizabeth Pond - March 1970.*

### The Accused.

"Chau's crime was to hold eight meetings with his elder brother, Tran Ngoc Hien, a confessed Communist who was one of Hanoi's top spies. But what the court chose to ignore were Chau's protestations that high-ranking Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, had known about his contacts with Hien and encouraged the meetings (Newsweek, March 2). Some U.S. officials privately admit that Chau is telling the truth, but the U.S. Embassy has declined to intervene. According to one report, the U.S. abandoned Chau, who had once been rated as one of Vietnam's brightest leaders, after Thieu agreed to rid his palace of several cronies adjudged by the CIA to be dangerous security risks.

"Chau's real crime, his friends charged, was to emerge as a potential leader of the legislature and threaten Thieu's autocratic power."

*-Newsweek magazine March 9, 1970.*

"Hien was listed as a North Vietnamese captain at the time of his capture, though he probably held a higher rank than that. As early as 1949 he had already held a colonel's position as political officer for all of the Viet Minh Military Region 5. On his return to the South in 1964 he was head of a strategic intelligence cell reporting directly to Hanoi, not to the NLF. (Strategic intelligence means roughly political evaluation. It is concerned with long-range trends, opinions, and motivation rather than tactical military intelligence or specific plans.) His primary task was to take soundings of the thinking of various political leaders and intellectuals. He first met Chau in Kien Hoa in 1965, after a separation of 16 years.

"The nature of Chau's contact with Hien in their eight meetings between 1965 and 1969 is best described in their respective statements for Chau's trial. It consisted primarily of mutual exploration of views and of

arguments in which each tried unsuccessfully to convince the other of the error of his way. Chau tried to get Hien to defect and go to the US to study. Hien constantly worked on Chau's frustrations to try to win him over to the Communist side.

"Chau had visions of becoming an intermediary in peace negotiations, and on his own initiative he broached to Hien his proposal for a meeting of parliamentary delegations from North and South Vietnam. Hien was dubious, however, and there is no indication that the two brothers' contacts ever moved beyond useful but minor exchanges to become a major line of communication in a peace settlement. Some observers attribute Chau's contention that he was conducting a significant peace probe through Hien to an exaggerated and somewhat naive self-importance on the part of Chau. Others attribute it to a patriotic willingness to risk taking the initiative even in unfavorable circumstances, even when most prudent Vietnamese were sitting back and waiting for fate or the Americans to move.

"The CIA knew of the contacts between the two brothers, according to a Joseph Kraft column from Washington, but it is doubtful whether Chau gave the CIA all the information it wanted about these contacts. In any case, according to that account, Chau refused to serve as an agent for the CIA.

"From Congressional and State Department leaks in Washington in late March<sup>1</sup> it appears that there was one proposal of a direct meeting between Hien and the Americans in 1966. Chau says it was initiated by Hien; Hien says it was initiated by Chau. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge was interested, but after considering meeting with Hien himself, Lodge opted instead for a lower-level American contact. It may be assumed that the CIA would have been happy to have an additional source of information, but it appears that the probe never reached the stage of an explicit CIA approach to Hien. Chau himself clearly mistrusted the CIA insofar as his brother was concerned and feared the agency would set a trap for him and kill him. In the upshot, Hien refused to meet with any American below the Ambassador, and no

## Lies, Deception, and Betrayal

direct meeting was held.

"Chau's decision not to tell Vietnamese authorities anything formally was natural enough, given the inept and ephemeral nature of the post-coup governments. A certain economy of information is advisable when someone new may be in power in a few months and anyone with access to the files could turn information against one. (In this period and later many Vietnamese had contacts with "the other side" and didn't report them. This state was considered normal.) Chau had no incentive either to inform the Ky government, which he disliked. And after Thieu came to power Chau probably thought that the private understandings, whatever they were, would cover him."

"Hien was captured in April 1969.

"Hien's arrest was sensational, for it touched off the arrest and trial of two dozen South Vietnamese citizens, some of them quite prominent, who had been meeting with Hien and discussing issues over the years. Among them were Nguyen Lau, publisher of the English-language Saigon Daily News (later closed by the government); Vo Dinh Cuong, a cousin of Hien's and head of the Buddhist Layman's Association (aligned with the An Quang pagoda); and a few military officers and policemen who would either be acquitted or not brought to trial at all."

*-The Chau Trial*

*by Elizabeth Pond - March 1970.*

"Why has Thieu shown such determination to strip Chau's immunity and punish him?

"Because Chau has been spokesman for the desires of many, probably most, Vietnamese for an end to the fighting. He has called for political concessions toward coexistence and direct talks with the NLF leading to a negotiated settlement. Thieu's backers cannot accept such a policy. His regime almost surely cannot survive peace or an end to American presence and support; without American aid backing, it could not win in a political competition either with non-communists or with communists."

*-Daniel Ellsberg in his testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations - April-August 1970.*

"After Chau's trial the Embassy view still remained essentially unchanged. Bunker, who regretted the fact that Chau was being described in the US press as a "patriotic nationalist," intended, in fact, to reiterate the Embassy's hands-off position yet again. He told Washington that Chau's testimony was "false and misleading." (It was, to be sure, exaggerated in interpretation.)

"To counter this testimony, Bunker proposed to say publicly that "no American directly or through any intermediary suggested or encouraged Mr. Chau to initiate or continue his contacts with Captain Hien."

"It may have been literally true that neither he nor his predecessor had "encouraged" the meetings of the two brothers. But this statement itself was highly misleading, for the Americans had known about the meetings and had not discouraged them, and they had considered a meeting of their own with Hien. Nor did the statement allow that the Americans had thought enough of Chau's analysis to listen to his pacification recommendations for three hours in August (Chau's version) or September (the Washington accounts) of 1967. Ambassador Bunker, Deputy Ambassador Eugene Locke, Lt. Gen. Frederick C. Weyand, commander of the III Corps area around Saigon, and others had been present at that session.

"The Department of State therefore instructed Bunker not to issue the proposed statement. It thus was not given any official imprimatur, but the same phraseology did crop up in background talks between journalists and unattributable high officials."

### Vietnamese Constitution and American Noble Cause.

"The end came swiftly.

"The date was advanced from the planned March trial to February 23 so that there would be no time beforehand for the Supreme Court to rule on the

House query about the constitutionality of the petition process in removing parliamentary immunity."

*-The Chau Trial*

by Elizabeth Pond - March 1970.

"After days of hesitation and reflection, Chau decided that if he fled, he would be implicitly admitting Thieu's accusation that he was a Communist. If he stayed and denied the charge and went to jail, he would become a martyr and retain a political future in South Vietnam.

"He and Vann got into a tumultuous argument in the apartment in Can Tho. Vann told Chau he was being a fool, that Thieu would endure a long time, because the United States was behind him, and he would keep Chau locked up for years.

"Chau followed his star. He had Vann fly him back to Saigon to hide for a while. Then he went to his office in the building where the Lower House met, the same place where Diem's National Assembly had met, the Saigon Opera House of the French time, to wait for the police to arrest him."

*-Neil Sheehan in his book:*

*"A Bright Shining Lie"* - 1988.

"Chau had emerged from two months of hiding two days before the trial and had ensconced himself in an Assembly office. At various times in the past he had taken to sleeping in the Assembly because he feared assassination either by government or by Communist agents. Now, with the government rapidly closing in on him, he again sought refuge there, in effect daring the government to use force against him in the legally inviolate Chamber of Deputies itself

*-The Chau Trial*

by Elizabeth Pond - March 1970.

### The Benedictions of a Nationalist.

"Early Thursday morning ( a few hours before Chau was arrested at the National Assembly building) a delegation of Buddhist monks from the An Quang pagoda presented Chau with a hand of bananas, symbolic of purity and nourishment.

"The head of the delegation, Ven. Thich Thien

Minh, himself spent seven months in prison last year before he was pardoned from a five year term by the government."

*-The Vietnam Guardian* - February 27, 70.

"As a final dramatic gesture, Chau pinned on the green and gold National Order<sup>XXX</sup> medal he had won for his service as a former Mekong Delta province chief. The decoration, South Vietnam's highest, bears the inscription: "The Nation is Grateful to You." Wearers of the medal are supposed to be saluted by soldiers and police, and to be treated with particular courtesy. But when the cops burst in, they unceremoniously ripped his medal off, beat him to the floor, handcuffed him, dragged him down a flight of stairs by his feet, bumping his head on each step and tossed him into a waiting Jeep."

*-Time Magazine* - March 9, 1970.

"The government accepted the dare. The House Secretariat met and waffled, saying it could not prevent the government (i.e., the executive) from applying the law, but neither did it have the authority to agree to a government arrest of Chau in the Lower House. On February 26 it was all over. Some 50 policemen swarmed into the Assembly, roughed up Chau, who was impeccably dressed for the occasion in fresh shirt, jacket, and tie, with the medal for national service once awarded to him by Nguyen Van Thieu pinned on his chest and a copy of the Constitution in one hand. After subduing him, two policemen dragged and then four policemen carried Chau down the back steps and tossed him into a waiting jeep, which sped off."

"If the Communists had planned Thieu's moves, they couldn't have done a better job of undermining the regime," concluded one discouraged pro-government politician."

*-The Chau Trial*

by Elizabeth Pond

*The Christian Science Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund* -

March 1970.

### A Tribunal of No Constitution.

"The battle was lost before the trial, when Thieu was allowed to use enough pressure and coercion and corruption to get a three-fourths vote; now the independence of the national assembly has been destroyed."

*-Daniel Ellsberg in his testimony  
before the U.S. Senate Committee on  
Foreign Relations - April-August 1970.*

"The case has already been referred to the military court and I suppose it will find him guilty."

*-Deputy Secretary of State Richardson  
to Ambassador Bunker.*

"Huyen (Chau's lawyer): We ask the court to suspend the trial so that the Supreme Court has a chance to consider the exceptions.

"Judge: [interrupting] this court has nothing to do with the Constitution. It is a special court under decree law.

"Chau: I am a citizen. I know in advance I will be sentenced whether I have a lawyer or not.

*-The Chau Trial  
by Elizabeth Pond - March 1970.*

"Three lawyers defending Deputy Tran Ngoc Chau before a South Vietnamese military court resigned from the case after the first day of Chau's second trial, saying their efforts could have no effect on the verdict.

"One of the three, an attractive woman who is also vice president of the Vietnamese Senate, said the verdict was "prefabricated." The defendant agreed with this judgement and welcomed his lawyers' decision to give up the case."

*-The Washington Post  
March 2, 1970.*

[Court resesses for deliberation, then returns with a verdict of guilty. Chau is convicted of being in "liaison with a person who was carrying out activities

detrimental to national defense." He is sentenced to 10 years of hard labor in prison and confiscation of his property, but is not to be exiled from Saigon on his release from prison.]

*-The Chau Trial  
by Elizabeth Pond - March 1970.*

"Once convicted, Chau would remain imprisoned for four years, only to be released in early 1975. A few days before the Communist takeover in April, several sympathetic CIA officers cabled agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia, asking permission to put him on one of the evacuation flights. But Shackley, who by then had become chief of the CIA's East Asia Division, cabled back vetoing the request on the grounds that Chau had never contributed to American interests in Vietnam. Chau was duly left behind."

*-Frank Sneff  
Former CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst  
in Vietnam in his book  
"Decent Interval" - 1977.*

### Impotence in Democracy.

"(The Chairman.) Mr. Ellsberg, were you stationed in Vietnam, and while you were there did you ever become acquainted with Tran Ngoc Chau?

Mr. Ellsberg. He was a very close friend of mine. The Chairman. You know him. Do you know anything about his relationship with the CIA, which has been in the press. This is not related to what I asked you to discuss, but since you are here I thought I might ask you to comment on it.

Mr. Ellsberg. Well, I had anticipated that questions about Chau might come up. I have a file of various background papers on Chau, some of them memos of conversations that I had with him at the time. If you would like I could enter into the record a memo bearing on that particular subject. I wrote it in 1966 when I was assigned to liaison with Chau, who was then head of the revolutionary development (called rural construction by the Vietnamese) cadre program. It does not present a comprehensive picture of Chau's relations with CIA, but it does throw important light, I think, on the origins of friction between them.

The Chairman. I think it would be interesting because we have had some difficulty in getting information from the Administration on this subject. They always plead some kind of security. We asked Ambassador Bunker to come before the committee in open session, but he declined. He has agreed to come in executive session. I don't know whether or not he knows Mr. Chau, but being in Saigon and responsible for our representation, he at least came to him second hand. He should know about it, but I think it would be well to put in the record the memorandum about Mr. Chau.

(ACTION OF SAIGON SUPREME COURT ON CONVICTION OF TRAN NGOC CHAU)

"As I understand it, the supreme court in Saigon has declared his conviction unconstitutional or illegal. Mr. Ellsberg. That is right. The supreme court, in what would be in normal terms an encouraging move, almost unprecedently for them in terms of challenge to their executives, has declared that the manner of his arrest was unconstitutional, that he was tried in the wrong court and that his imprisonment was unconstitutional.

The Chairman. He is still in prison?

Mr. Ellsberg. He is still in prison. It has been reported in our newspapers that the U.S. Embassy in Saigon had taken the position that this Government should not be critical publicly of Thieu's behavior in this case until the full constitutional workings of their system had run out. It said, after all, the supreme court may rule on this and if they rule, presumably the executive will obey the guidance of the supreme court. As I read the account of our Embassy views, which sounds very plausible to me, it was put to our State Department by the Embassy that our judgment should be reserved until that time. Well, the time is now. I believe that the attitude of this Government toward obedience or nonobedience by President Thieu to the clear legal implications of this supreme court ruling is a test not just of Thieu but of us and our attitude. At the time I felt that Thieu's behavior showed that he had clearly decided to discard constitu-

tional legitimacy, simply to rule without it. I felt the emperor in full public view had taken off his clothes and the question was, will we notice? If our purposes there do not call for any such legitimacy, any pretense of legal restraints or self-determination, then I would call on the President to discard that particular vein of rationalizing our intentions and our preence there. The Chairman. I have seen no indication that our Government is going to respond to that finding. Mr. Ellsberg. Perhaps you will learn the plans when you see Ambassador Bunker.

The Chairman. I doubt that very seriously."

"In destroying the dignity and independence of the national assembly, the one institution (perhaps, on either side of the Vietnamese conflict) that, within limits, truly represents the voice of the people, Thieu has struck at what Milton Sacks has described as "the single basis of legitimacy of his government."

"The blatant neglect (so far) of the role of the Supreme Court points in the same direction, as do the proceedings of Chau's two military trials: Thieu has simply chosen to discard legitimacy, to rule without it."

*-Daniel Ellsberg in testimony  
before the U.S. Senate Committee  
on Foreign Relations -  
April-August, 1970.*

## EDITORIALS

### SAIGON: THE TAIL WAGS THE DOG.

By ruthlessly jailing one of his chief political opponents for ten years, President Thieu has virtually eliminated any early hope of broadening the base of his regime. It was dictatorial, it remains dictatorial, and if it changes at all it will become still more dictatorial. There is one other possibility—that Thieu will be overthrown by his fellow militarists. Whether Thieu remains in power, or is succeeded by another malefactor of the same type, the Nixon Administration will be firmly tied to this or the succeeding regime. This was inherent in the Vietnamization

policy to which the President resorted in his flight from the debacle which overtook Mr. Johnson. Once he had decided to turn over ground operations to our Vietnamese proteges, and so to continue the war by proxy and avoid the stigma of defeat, he had no choice but to support a government capable of maintaining the army in the field. Thus a democratic government, if that was ever our objective, became the stuff of dreams.

Thieu knows this well, hence his recalcitrance in the Tran Ngoc Chau affair. Poor Ellsworth Bunker! No one except the principals knows what he said to Thieu and what Thieu said to him, but about Bunker's objective there can be no doubt. It would have suited him to preserve the facade of democracy in South Vietnam, transparent though it was. By his actions in the Chau case, Thieu stripped his regime even of pretense. For domestic purposes the Nixon Administration may have needed a certain minimum of democratic camouflage, but that is of no interest to a pragmatic militarist of Thieu's stamp. The longevity of the present Saigon regime is-or should be- incidental to American plans, but it is the only thing that matters to Thieu. His main worry is the emergence of a powerful non-Communist opposition in South Vietnam, and that he has forestalled, for the calculable future, by stashing Chau away for ten years at hard labor.

Rep. Jonathan B. Bingham (D., N.Y.) documented these facts by inserting in the Congressional Record (March 4) a Washington Post article by Lee Lescaze, based on an interview with Dan Ellsberg, who worked for Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton and Gen. Edward G. Lansdale for several years, and came to know Chau well. Chau was a collaborator with the American diplomatic establishment in South Vietnam. He had contacts with his brother, Tran Ngoc Hien, a captain in the North Vietnamese army. His purpose was to obtain information and eventually to initiate negotiations to end the war. He kept the American Embassy informed.

Of course, the last thing Thieu and his associates desire is an end to the fighting. War is their only occupation, whether on the side of the French, when

France had her heel on the Vietnamese neck, or on the side of the Americans after the French defeat. Chau himself had served in the Vietnamese armed forces for more than twenty years and had been a close associate of President Thieu. But in his role as a potential peacemaker he was anathema to Thieu. Therefore Chau was stripped of his parliamentary immunity and thrown to a military tribunal for predetermined judgment. And when that happened, the American Embassy refrained from any public move on his behalf.

By this silence it served notice on political opponents of Thieu that the Americans would do nothing to protect them. As Ellsberg puts it, "If Thieu can act thus blatantly against a man known by many Americans and Vietnamese to be an anti-Communist nationalist, then he can do it to anyone...The suppression of non-Communist opponents of Thieu...ends whatever small hope there was for a negotiated settlement. It puts time on the side of the Communists."

It also displays before the world the impotence of the world's foremost military power before the one-time puppet it raised to power. By intervening in ever growing strength, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson prepared the way for American debasement. Nixon's Vietnamization dodge projects our humiliation into the limitless future.

-*THE NATION*  
March 23, 1970

### CAMPAIGN TO JAIL SOUTH VIETNAM OPPOSITION LEADER TRAN NGOC CHAU

Mr. Fulbright, Mr. President, among the many innovative ideas which we have exported to South Vietnam are "pacification," "neutralization," and western-style political institution. I am continually impressed by the ease with which the Vietnamese adapt themselves to such alien concepts. It is true, of course, that they have had a great deal of practice at this as a result of their experience at the hands of the Chinese, the French, and now the Americans.

In recent weeks the Foreign Relations Committee has heard American advisers recount with pride the

accomplishments of their Vietnamese pupils. Occasionally, however, one does get an uneasy feeling that the Vietnamese may be a step or two ahead of their tutors. Vietnamese judicial practices are a case in point.

In 1967 it was discovered that the Vietnamese needed a constitution. Naturally we showed them how to write one which provided everything we thought necessary-a President and Vice President, elective legislature, independent judiciary, due process, and so forth. These institutions have flourished and-with a certain amount of prodding from us-we are now told that the Vietnamese are so devoted to them that it is our duty to insure their survival.

Lately, however, the Vietnamese constitution has become something of a burden to President Thieu in his campaign to bind the affection of the Vietnamese people to his regime. He has proven himself equal to the challenge, a fact which is not really surprising

since he is, as we have been told, one of the four or five greatest politicians in the world. Certainly no one can deny that title to Thieu after what we have witnessed of his determined campaign to jail the prominent opposition leader Tran Ngoc Chau.<sup>1</sup>

*-Congressional Records - March 4, 1970.*

"State Department press officer Carl E. Bartz said yesterday, "I will have no comment on that matter," declining to discuss the Chau case, the Lewis report or any other aspect of the affair.

President Nixon was asked about the Chau case on Saturday during his impromptu news conference. He replied that "this was a matter which Ambassador Bunker has discussed with President Thieu "but it" would not be appropriate" to say anything further."

*-The Washington Post*  
*Thursday, March 26, 1970.*

### With the BBC Television

*I was invited with my wife to England for an interview with the BBC Television. The interview took place at the Broadcasting House in Bristol on June 12, 1991. It was conducted by Producer Peter Molloy and scheduled to be aired worldwide. The interview was conducted entirely in English and partially repeated in Vietnamese. I was asked to answer questions relating to my personal story during the war and to give my opinion on matters relating to the war, the involvement of the US and the CIA in Vietnam, and the situation in Vietnam today.*

*Some of the questions were repeated so were the answers. In this background document, questions and answers are regrouped under specific chapters so that readers could have a better picture of each subject. Some questions might have been skipped on the screen but the answers here provided could be used for commentary and clarification.*

*Although I have criticized and commented on mandarin and colonial systems, the French legacy, its perception and methods, and French-left-over personnel, I do understand the inability of officers, civil servants and others who wanted to change the system or the attitude of their leaders and commanders. By the same token, I remain sympathetic to those who served under and remained loyal to their former leaders and affiliations.*

*This brochure is intended to provide a complement to my answers which were restricted due to the constraints of time and space in the programme. The document will also provide additional background for the commentary and for those who view the BBC Television Series and would like more detailed information.*

<sup>1</sup>Flora Lewis in the Los Angeles Times, March 25, 1970; James Doyle in the Washington Star, March 26, 1970; Tad Szulc in the New York Times, March 27 and 28, 1970.

## An Indecent Interval

• In mid-1968 I proposed and actively worked towards recognition of and coexistence with the National Liberation Front in exchange for a peace settlement, with both U.S. and North Vietnamese forces withdrawn from South Vietnam. An international peace-keeping force would guard the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the 17th parallel against North Vietnam infiltration. My proposal was supported by the majority of Vietnamese, who had long been opposed to Nguyen Van Thieu's categoric rejection of any compromise with North Vietnam. Because of my stand, I became the target of a long conspiracy by Thieu, U.S. Ambassador Bunker and William Colby and Ted Shackley of the CIA to discredit me. The result was that Thieu imprisoned me in early 1970. Although the Supreme Court nullified the 10-year sentence pronounced by a special military court, I was kept in prison for another 4-1/2 years.

**"Advocacy of coalition government is regarded here as tantamount to advocacy of the enemy's war aim."**

-U.S. Ambassador Bunker in his telegram, dated  
February 17, 1970, replying to the State Department.

- The Paris peace settlement was signed 4-1/2 years later. It resulted in the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and the accord for a coalition government in South Vietnam - but with more than 200,000 North Vietnamese regular troops to remain in the south.
- During that interval of war and peace, and of illusion and deception, an additional 35,000 American troops were killed, 100,000 wounded, billions of dollars spent; Vietnamese losses were considerably greater.

- After two and half years (1973-mid-1975) that followed the peace settlement, with the American withdrawal, the South Vietnamese collapsed. They had been Americanized to the point where they could not stand by themselves without the support of American troops, money and ammunition. The tragic outcome Vietnamese nationalistic anti-communists and I tried to avoid was inevitable.

# As a Drama

## Act One:

Saigon, 1968-1969

### *When Victory is impossible but Defeat is inconceivable*

"On negotiations, Chau began in the late-1968 early 1969 period to demand talks between the three Vietnamese sides (Saigon, Hanoi, and the NLF) without the Americans. As an aid to starting this, he proposed a meeting between parliamentary delegations of North and South Vietnam. This was the period when the new Nixon Administration was searching out its own Vietnam policy, when Thieu was grudgingly responding to American nudges with peace proposals of his own, and when there was still a modest hope for the Paris talks."

*-Page 8, this document.*

"Specifically, Chau was one of the first to recognize that the Tet offensive would prove to be the last straw for the US and that Washington would henceforth try to disengage from Vietnam as quickly as possible.

He believed that the US would now be interested only in containing the military and political situation long enough to withdraw without the appearance of defeat. But he was convinced that the kind of short-term political stability this implied -- one based on right-wing militants -- would doom South Vietnam to Communist takeover in the long run."

*-Page 6, this document.*

"Mr. Chau anticipates that victory is "impossible" under actual circumstances and yet to accept defeat is "inconceivable"; thus it would be preferable at least to admit the "existence" of the (National Liberation) Front. That deputy thus recommends a settlement in three steps."

*-Page 8, this document.*

"Bunker prized Thieu for the stability of his rule. He suspected that Chau was a Communist or a Communist agent, in any case a dangerous troublemaker who seemed to be attempting to gain a place for himself in a coalition government with the other side."

*-Page 9, this document.*

"When Tran Ngoc Chau, a prominent South Vietnamese nationalist and legislator, became a political threat to Thieu in 1970, Shackley and Colby cooperated with the Vietnamese police to paint him as a subversive and a Communist agent.

And when the South Vietnamese government surfaced its allegations against Chau in the local press, both Shackley and Ambassador Bunker supported them. A few days later Chau was dragged out of the National Assembly building in downtown Saigon and thrown into jail to await trial, in violation of all legal process in South Vietnam<sup>1</sup>."

*-Page 11, this document.*

"When the north Vietnamese marched into Saigon on April 30, 1975, Chau had already spent five years in jail and house arrest under the Nguyen Van Thieu regime.

The communists sent him to a re-education camp for several months, but he pleased them no better than he had Thieu, so he was sent from the re-education centre to prison. Later he was released, but was held under house detention."

*-Page 1, this document.*

## *The Betrayed*

Vietnam, 1968-1973.

Over 35,000 more American troops were killed, another 100,000 wounded, billions of dollars spent, and much more considerable Vietnamese losses.

## Act Two:

Paris, January 1973.

### *In Search for a Way Out and a War by Proxy...*

"Of course, the last thing Thieu and his associates desire is an end to the fighting. War is their only occupation, whether on the side of the French, when France had her heel on the Vietnamese neck, or on the side of the Americans after the French defeat."

-THE NATION - March 23, 1970.

"Haig would leave the next evening (January 14) for Saigon with an ultimatum that we would sign the document, if necessary without Thieu."

"The formal signature by foreign ministers would take place in Paris on January 27. As a sop to Rogers (Secretary of State) I had agreed not to attend the final culmination of these efforts. What we had struggled, prayed, hoped, and perhaps even hated for -- the end of our involvement in Indochina -- was about to be celebrated.

"But we still did not have the agreement of that doughty little man in Saigon, President Thieu. Nixon was determined to prevail. "Brutality is nothing," he said to me. "You have never seen it if this son-of-a-bitch doesn't go along, believe me." Haig delivered a scorching letter from Nixon to Thieu on January 16.

"Two days later, January 22 (1973), I left for Paris for the final meeting with Le Duc Tho. It was to take place for the first time on neutral and ceremonial ground in a small conference room at Avenue Kléber, the scene of 174 futile plenary sessions since 1968. Even now it would be used for a symbolic event. Sullivan and Thach had spent several days checking all the texts."

Finally, at a quarter to one (January 23), we initialed the various texts and improvised brief closing state-

ments. Le Duc Tho said: "Mr. Adviser, we have been negotiating for almost five years now. I can say this is now the beginning of a new atmosphere between us..."

And I replied:

"Mr. Special Adviser, our two peoples have suffered a great deal. There have been many painful moments and much destruction. You and I have had the great honor to putting an end to this."

After this Le Duc Tho and I stepped out on the street in a cold misty rain, and shook hands for the benefit of photographers.

"America's Vietnam war was over."

-Henry Kissinger in his book  
*White House Years* - 1979.

## Act Three:

Saigon, 19 April 1975.

### *... without the Sigma of a Defeat. The Circumstantial Doves*

"On the morning of April 19 (1975), after a meeting with the generals and admirals at General Staff Headquarters, I received a call from Air Force General and former Premier Nguyen Cao Ky asking me to meet him at his residence at Tan Son Nhut.

At the meeting, he told me that he and his followers were ready for a type of coalition government with the NLF, that this had American Ambassador Martin's approval."

-Tran Van Don, then still Thieu's deputy prime minister, and also a conspirator in the Diem coup. In his book *Our Endless War*, 1978.

## Final Act:

Saigon, January - April 1975.

### *An Expected Ally of U.S. and the End of an Opportunist.*

"Apart from conspirators and the North Vietnamese, Thieu also was facing another compelling problem at the moment -- money. Earlier in the month, on 2 and 3 April, he had shipped most of his own personal fortune and household effects to Taiwan and Canada. But the nation's fortune -- the sixteen tons of gold, worth \$220 million, that made up a large part of Saigon's treasury -- had yet to be "expatriated."

Initially, Thieu had hoped to ship the entire cache surreptitiously to the Bank of International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland, where \$5 million in South Vietnamese gold was already on deposit, and to use it -- so he claimed to subordinates -- as collateral for loans to buy equipment for the army. But several days before the transaction was to be completed, the Embassy had learned of it through one of the CIA's intelligence sources, and someone on Martin's own staff, who apparently mistrusted Thieu's motives, had in turn leaked word of it to the press. The resulting publicity had aborted Thieu's plan, for the charter airlines with which he had been negotiating for shipment contracts quickly backed off for fear of drawing public criticism themselves."

In the dimness Nguyen Van Thieu looked more like a model for a Far Eastern edition of Gentleman's Quarterly than a former head of state. He did not deign to look at us as he hurried up the steps to the front door.

Thieu got into the back seat of mine, sandwiching himself between Timmes and a Vietnamese aide. "Stay down, Mr. President," Timmes advised him, "for your own sake."

I could see the ex-President's face in the rear mirror, eyes glistening as the streetlights flashed by. The odor of Scotch hung in the air-conditioned vacuum like a pall.

Again Timmes warned him to stay down."

"As the back door clicked open, Thieu leaned over the seat and tapped me on the shoulder. "Thank you," he said hoarsely, offering his hand. He held my grasp for a few moments, blinking away tears, then slid out and trotted up the ramp.

"I just told him goodbye," Martin later recalled of their final conversation. "Nothing historic. Just goodbye.

--Frank Sneff

Former CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst  
in Vietnam in his book  
*Decent Interval* - 1977.

"On April 29, Mrs. Anna Chennault visited Taiwan on private business, but she carried a private message to Thieu on behalf of President Ford. Mrs. Chennault had been asked to tell Thieu that it would not be a good time for him to come to the United States because of strong anti-war feelings; it would be better if he went someplace else."

--Nguyen Tien Hung, Thieu's Advisor,  
in his book *The Palace File* - 1986.

He (Thieu) told a friend on Taiwan several months later. "I waited until the patient was on his deathbed. No one could save him. Then I left. I wanted no one to be able to surpass what I had done for my country."

-Fran Sneff, *Decent Interval*.

### *The American syndrome:*

I would feel ashamed of talking much about Thieu if after Thieu the U.S. did not have to deal with its former allies Marcos and Noriega the way it did.

# *HAWKS DOVES AND THE DRAGON*

*HAWKS, DOVES*

*AND THE DRAGON*

**The Vietnam War Story**

as told by a unique survivor  
who fought the 30-year long war on all military and  
political fronts, first with Ho Chi Minh Forces  
against the French, then with South Vietnam and  
the United States against the Communists.

**TRAN NGOC CHAU**

with KEN FERMOYLE

*A summary of...*

## **Hawks, Doves and the Dragon**

### ***The human side of an inhumane conflict: the Vietnam War***

Hundreds of books have been written about the 30 years of war in Vietnam, from 1945 to 1975. Many are of great value, produced by scholars, reporters and others who had observed, studied or even were involved in the war to some degree. The authors of these books have one thing in common, however: they were outsiders, in the sense that they had little understanding of, or contact with, the people of Vietnam. Moreover, they had limited views of the war, focusing on one aspect or time period of the conflict. This is true even of the Vietnamese who have written about the period.

Thus, their writings, no matter how excellent they may be, do not provide a complete picture of those three decades. Most often overlooked is the human side of that time, the all-important role played by the people of Vietnam.

*Hawks, Doves and the Dragon* is an exception. Author Tran Ngoc Chau was a participant at all levels and in all fields during the entire 30-year period. He lived and fought with the people on both sides.

#### **From the very beginning:**

Tran Ngoc Chau served first in intelligence, then in turn as a guerilla, company commander and political officer for five years with Ho Chi Minh's forces in the fight against the French. "Early in World War II, at the age of 16, he left his comfortable life in Hue to join his two older brothers in the Viet Minh resistance to the French. By 1949, however, he quit the Viet Minh in distress at the Communist takeover of the resistance and Communist murder of competing nationalists." - As reported by The New York Times, January 14, 1980.

#### **1945-1949 - Chau joins the war for national independence:**

##### ***Chapters 1 - 12***

During the years from 1944 to 1949, the young Chau converted himself from a descendant of a traditional, highly nationalist and noble mandarin family into a peasant guerilla soldier and leader. Tens of thousands fervent nationalists from all walks of Vietnamese life underwent similar conversions, hoping to gain independence for their country. They made up the backbone of the Viet Minh during the early years when Ho Chi Minh was fighting the French and building his political and military forces. The conditions of the war—with the French enjoying the superiority of modern armament and technology and military professionalism—created an environment that strengthened the moral determination of Chau and his numerous comrades-in-arms and taught them their own way of fighting: the People's war.

As the fighting continued and the U.S. and the West threw their support behind the French, Ho Chi Minh seized upon the situation to promote Communism and convert many of the disaffected young nationalists in the Viet Minh to his ideology. Most of those young men had had no concept of Communism previously,

but would be indoctrinated and trained under those conditions to form a larger political and military infrastructure for the later war against the Americans and South Vietnamese.

#### **1949-1945 - The founding of South Vietnam, the ally the U.S. would fight and die for:**

##### ***Chapters 13 - 16***

The nationalistic and religious Chau found himself confused between the fight for national liberation from French colonialists and the desire to preserve the traditional virtues of his beloved "Little Dragon," Vietnam. He quit the Viet Minh and joined the nationalists of what was now the semi-independent nation of South Vietnam, whose titular head was former Emperor Bao Dai. Chau volunteered for the newly created Vietnamese army which fought alongside the French against his former Viet Minh comrades. Thus this episode of Chau's life describes the founding of the Vietnamese army and the State of Vietnam and its leadership, which would be allied with the Americans for the next 20 years.

#### **1955-1959 - Preparing for war: Americanization, and Communist influence in the countryside**

##### ***Chapters 17 - 21***

This section covers the process of Americanization of the Vietnamese Army and its effects on the Vietnamese leadership and society. Chau was both object and instrument of this process. His role in the military and paramilitary forces made him both participant and observer during that period of transformation—from a South Vietnam with a French colonial legacy to a country committed to American-oriented development. While such development was attempted in the cities and governmental bureaucracy, the countryside was left to the hazards of the old colonial system. Now, however, most Vietnamese who had served with the French replaced their former masters, many displaying the same arrogance as the French colonialists, unfortunately. They also looked upon the peasants as their enemies because most of the rural population had supported the fight against the French and their Vietnamese underlings, who were, by default, the new "leaders" in the countryside.

This, plus the harsh, indiscriminate anti-Communist policy of the South Vietnamese government and the seeming indifference of the American Mission in Saigon to these factors, combined to engender more chaos in the countryside and widespread discontentment everywhere. The situation helped Ho Chi Minh to open a new front in the South. The insurgency burgeoned. The Americans, who had already increased personnel, material and financial aid to South Vietnam, committed themselves even more substantially to help President Ngo Dinh Diem fight the insurgency. Chau, who had cooperated with the American military since 1955, became acquainted with more "active" American officers. He developed a close and lasting friendship with John Paul Vann, the only "civilian general" in the Vietnam war, whose story was made into a Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *A Bright Shining Lie*, by Neil Sheehan.

#### **1960-1963 - The Vietnamese change of power and direction increases American influence**

##### ***Chapters 22-24***

The years of 1960 and 1961 took Chau through the countryside, as a regional paramilitary commander. He also viewed the overall national situation as a Reporter to the National Security Council and an observation tour through the Federation of Malaysia where he saw the early stages of what would develop into a big war. In 1962 Chau got an even closer look at the roots and the problems of the war: he was assigned as the provincial governor of the Viet Cong hotbed province, Kien Hoa, also known as Ben Tre.

As Chau began developing his own way to fight the Viet Cong and pacify the province he was becoming more and more committed to cooperation with all American military and civilian agencies. The CIA in particular actively supported his carefully-planned, successful pacification project. The Buddhist crisis in 1963 took Chau to the northern part of South Vietnam as mayor of Da Nang, the second largest city after Saigon, where he could observe and report on the socio-political factors that were major influences on the Vietnamese positions and attitudes vis-a-vis the Communists and the Americans. These factors were totally ignored or misunderstood by American policy-makers, presidents, ambassadors and generals, which led to the American preference for Roman Catholic South Vietnamese leadership in a country where 80 percent of the population were Buddhist. As the Buddhist crisis developed into widespread popular discontentment, Diem was overthrown and murdered by a group of generals supported by the U.S. With great insight, Chau depicts the psychological effect of the coup, as well as the American military build-up that followed, on South Vietnamese of all classes and beliefs, and the subsequent political and military impact those events had on the entire country.

### **1964-1967 - Pacification: The CIA War**

#### *Chapters 25-29*

After the coup, Chau first returned to Saigon and participated in a new coup to overthrow leaders of the original coup against Diem. He then returned to Kien Hoa (Ben Tre), becoming provincial governor there for the second time--and establishing the unique case of a province chief who served under Diem's regime being accepted by the local dignitaries and people just a few months after the latter was overthrown. This was especially surprising since Chau was from Central Vietnam and leaders from that area were rarely accepted in the South. As the general situation worsened and more American troops were committed to fight the war, Chau reactivated his previous pacification plan. The CIA fully supported Chau and decided to gradually develop his program into a nationwide project. After almost two years in Kien Hoa, Chau was then transferred to Saigon and assumed the responsibility of forming and training cadres for a pacification program designed to cover all of South Vietnam. In these chapters, the author tells the story of his personal experiences with the CIA in the development of "the other war," considered at the time the heart of the war. Nevertheless Chau does not forget to remind readers of the military war in the background. That period also brings out the main characters of the war: the traditional Vietnamese nationalists, opportunists, and the American hawks and doves. It covers the personal relationship between John Paul Vann, Daniel Ellsberg and Chau with regard to the war. The evolution of the war led Chau to the conclusion that his participation in the war (and pacification) is fruitless and counter-productive. He then decided to quit the government, and ran for and won a seat in the National Assembly.

### **1967-68 - More Bombs, more Men: The Military War**

#### *Chapters 30-31*

The Americans during the years were at the height of their military buildup. There were nearly 1.7 million American, Vietnamese, Korean, Thai, Philippine, Australian, and New Zealand soldiers in South Vietnam. There were more Americans stationed at air and naval bases in Thailand, Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines. All had been waging a very aggressive war against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese both in the south and in the north (by air and naval bombardment). The outnumbered and less well-equipped enemy was also returning the fight aggressively, but had been losing both ground and people. Nevertheless, the war was at a stalemate. The Communists then launched the famous 1968 Tet offensive throughout the cities of South Vietnam and created the turning point for both Americans and Vietnamese. Victory or defeat, war escalation or peace settlement: what would happen next? Chau struggled for a peace settlement and lost. He was then thrown in jail with the approval of some Americans with whose policies he had disagreed. Other Americans remained fiercely loyal and were outraged by his treatment. John Paul Vann risked his career to support him and wanted to help him escape, but Chau refused. In telling of his 4-1/2

years in a South Vietnamese jail, Chau depicts his prison community as a microcosm of the outside Vietnamese society: common criminals, drug users and dealers, prostitutes, corrupted officials, military deserters, politicians, communists and their sympathizers--and, to administer it, a system similar to the system outside.

#### **1969-1975 - An Indecent Interval before defeat**

##### ***Chapters 32-34***

Although the Vietnamese Supreme Court in 1970 nullified the 10-year sentence pronounced on him by a special military court, Chau remained in prison for another 4-1/2 years before he was released and put under house arrest. Despite this, the environment was such that he was able to keep abreast of the evolution of the war still raging--despite the 1973 peace settlement in Paris between Americans and Vietnamese and between the North and South Vietnamese themselves. In these chapters, Chau tells the how the Americans, French, and Vietnamese on both sides prepared for the last showdown.

#### **1976-79 - Enemy Reunion and Escape for Freedom**

##### ***Chapters 35-37***

Chau, jailed by Thieu as a "Communist sympathizer," ironically enough was arrested by the Communists within weeks after they took over Saigon. He spent 2-1/2 years in a Communist Re-education Center and prison. He was sent back to Saigon under house arrest by the Communist for several months before he escaped to freedom. Chau's story of meeting his former comrades-in-arms on both sides is amazingly human and dramatic. And his journey to freedom is itself another exciting story.

#### **Epilogue**

After Tran Ngoc Chau set foot on the American soil, the legendary General Edward Lansdale, famous for his work in helping to defeat the Communist insurgency in the Philippines and his efforts to build South Vietnam into a democratic republic during the 1950s, said this of Chau:

"He is a person of high morals, honest, very bright, and is dedicated to the ideals and principles shared by Americans .," in his letter to Ms. Jeanne Landis, dated November 17, 1979.

The New York Times in its January 14, 1980 said this about Chau:

"Tran Ngoc Chau was the good Vietnamese. In a South Vietnam where every American official had to admit, however reluctantly and privately, that most of the Vietnamese officials with whom he dealt were corrupt, incompetent, or both, Mr. Chau was an exception."

# ZALIN GRANT FACING THE PHOENIX

*Facing the Phoenix* is a bold, original analysis of the defeat of the United States in Vietnam that unlocks the great puzzle of that baffling, bloody engagement: why the United States won the battles and lost the war.

The central figure in Zalin Grant's engrossing narrative is Tran Ngoc Chau, a Vietnamese soldier and statesman of unorthodox vision. Chau understood the history of his own country as most Americans did not; he also understood the appeal of the communists and knew how to neutralize it through political action on the local or community level.

Chau's physical courage, his incorruptibility, and his agenda appealed to mavericks within the American establishment—among them Edward Lansdale, John Paul Vann, and Daniel Ellsberg—who knew that body counts and bombing missions were not going to win the war. But Chau had liabilities as well: he could be difficult and arrogant; he had made many enemies among the generals and politicians of Saigon; his estranged brother was a high-ranking communist. In what the author identifies as a blunder of catastrophic consequences, the United States government turned its back on Tran Ngoc Chau; the war was waged in conventional ways; Chau him-

*continued from front page*

self was betrayed, disgraced, and imprisoned; and his plan to defeat the communists by community action was perverted by the CIA into the controversial Phoenix program, wherein thousands of suspected communists were assassinated.

Zalin Grant has interviewed the key participants in these events, and has woven their accounts into a story full of irony and surprises, one that moves from the streets of Saigon where Chau was hunted down, to the corridors of power in Washington where American policy was made and where Chau's fate was sealed.



ZALIN GRANT spent a total of five years in Vietnam between 1964 and 1973. He worked as a reporter for *Time*, then as a correspondent for *The New Republic*, and was one of only several Americans in the Saigon press corps who spoke Vietnamese. He is the author of *Survivors* and *Over the Beach*.

*continued on back flap*

## Praise for *Facing the Phoenix*

Zalin Grant was the bravest correspondent I knew in Vietnam and certainly the most eminently qualified to tell this remarkable story. Here I found the answer to why we lost a war that might have been won. *Facing the Phoenix* reads like a novel, but unfortunately every word is true. I placed it next to Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*. The two make brilliant bookends to the great literature of the Vietnam War.

—Wallace Terry  
author, *Blonds*

There is no way to fully understand the Vietnam War without reading the missing pages Zalin Grant provides in *Facing the Phoenix*. In treating the most controversial aspect of the war, he reveals a dimension so often ignored: what the South Vietnamese tried to do to save their country. The story of Tran Ngoc Chau is among the most moving and memorable of our times.

—Mary Stout  
president, Vietnam Veterans of America

A substantial portion of my personal story was covered in a book titled *Facing The Phoenix* by Zalin Grant.

# ZALIN GRANT FACING THE PHOENIX

## The CIA and the Political Defeat of the United States in Vietnam



South's National Assembly. Grant uses Chau's tragic personal story as an apt parallel to the constant attempts by American political strategists to arrive at a political solution and their constant failures. In the long run, both stories are told, obviously as the result of a monumental research and reporting job and as the result of astonishing evenhandedness on the part of the author, who, despite his clear sympathies, gives everybody his fair say.

—Georgie Anne Geyer

The phoenix of the title refers to Mr. Chau and his remarkable survival as soldier, official, betrayed prisoner of the South Vietnamese Government, re-education camp inmate after the victory of the North Vietnamese, boat person and immigrant to the United States, as well as to his role as unfortunate godfather of the CIA's dreaded, but highly successful, Phoenix program.

*The New York Times*

By Terrence Maitland

## Book Review

February 1, 1981

The  
Washington  
Monthly  
Volume Two

For an Interview with the BBC Television

# Chau Was a Model Ally of U.S. Who Ran Afoul of Thieu Regime

Special to The New York Times

VAN NUYS, Calif. — Tran Ngoc Chau was the good Vietnamese. In a South Vietnam where every American official had to admit, however reluctantly and privately, that most of the Vietnamese officials with whom he dealt were corrupt, incompetent, or both, Mr. Chau was an exception.

The son of an upper-class family, he had the equally rare distinction for a South Vietnamese of having fought the French for four years with Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh and then coming over to the anti-Communist side to serve as an army officer and provincial governor. He won a seat in the National Assembly in 1967 in one of the few unrigged contests in the history of the country.

In the early and mid-1960's the Central Intelligence Agency regarded his pacification programs as models and financed and imitated them. The American Embassy found his political information valuable. That a man like Mr. Chau would fight on the Saigon side helped to justify the war for those Americans who knew him. Then, in 1968, he decided that his country had suffered enough and that it was time to make peace.

Mr. Chau says he was convinced in 1968 that the Communists were so weakened by losses in their surprise offensive at Tet, the Lunar New Year holiday, that the Buddhists and other religious sects in the south could band together and hold their own after a cease-fire, without the presence of the United States Army. He used his brother, a senior Communist intelligence officer, as an intermediary with Hanoi to try to set himself up as the man who could negotiate a peace.

## Jailed by Friend Named Thieu

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker denounced Mr. Chau as a Communist agent to other Vietnamese politicians in an outburst overheard by another American, but which Mr. Bunker says he does not remember. One of Mr. Chau's former friends, Nguyen Van Thieu, the last of the American-backed strongmen in Saigon, ordered him thrown into jail in February 1970 for four and a half years.

The C.I.A. station chief declined ap-



The New York Times / Ned Sherehan

Tran Ngoc Chan

peals from Mr. Chau's American friends to save him. Suspicious of Mr. Chau's motives because of his contacts with his brother, the C.I.A. ruled that its collaboration with him had created no obligations.

On April 29, 1975, when the American presence in Vietnam had dwindled to a few landing pads and a string of helicopters, the United States abandoned Mr. Chau and many other Vietnamese to what Richard M. Nixon and other Presidents had predicted for decades would be a "bloody reign of terror."

In the middle of the night six weeks after their triumph, the Communists arrested Mr. Chau. There was no bloodbath, but he was kept in a "re-education camp" and prisons for two years and 20 days before being released under surveillance.

He escaped from Ho Chi Minh City, the new name for Saigon, last February, buying places for himself and his family on a Chinese refugee boat and, after being marooned on an Indonesian island for months, reached California in November.

# The New York Times

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# The American Syndrome

War is political by nature.

The Vietnam war was fundamentally political, as is any war; military actions were needed only because political actions failed to achieve the (political) purpose. The Vietnamese communist leaders used military forces to support their political actions from the beginning to the end. North Vietnam's final offensive with conventional forces was made possible only after a revolutionary war had destroyed the United States' will to continue the war; and South Vietnam's leaders, who had been Americanized mentally and dependent on the U.S. militarily could do no more than collapse. The United States had fought the war there militarily all the way, without proper understanding of political considerations or implementing policies and programs to support effective political action.

Recently, the general public who observed the fighting in the Persian Gulf may have concluded that war was a military one - and were quick to declare that the (military) victory there would end the Vietnam syndrome. The generals who fought and won that war went even further, thanking President Bush for letting the military have a free hand - implying that liberty of maneuver given to the generals on the battlefield had enabled the military to win the war.

Although the generals and troops who fought the war in the Persian Gulf deserve all honors and admiration, we must treat the subject with better understanding.

**This is an original analysis that answers the question: why the United States won every battle and "pacified" nearly all the villages but still lost the war in Vietnam to an enemy which was a backward country, only half the size of California.**

First, President Bush launched a vigorous political campaign to sell the objective he wanted to achieve in the war to come. The enemy (Sadam Hussein and Iraq), apparently confused on the U.S. reaction to such a move, committed a flagrant aggression by invading Kuwait. The result was almost unanimous worldwide condemnation. China and the Soviet, who countered the United States in the Vietnam war, this time aligned themselves with the United States. With United Nations support, the enormous military buildup in the Gulf, and the commitment of other nations to pay for the war, the US Congress was finally brought down to the president's will. The political war had been mainly won. The military, looming behind to infuse more strength to the "political general," State Secretary James Baker, came in to finish the war - against a visible enemy, which made it possible for General Schwarzkopf to cut General Westmoreland's famous "Search and Kill" strategy in half: there was no need to Search, only to Kill.

In Vietnam, the U.S. objective was not entirely understood by the world or the American public, and the enemy did not have the same clear identity. (Ho Chi Minh never achieved the same arch-villian status as Sadem Hussein.) China and the Soviet (and not a Soviet Union in the process of self-dissolution) supported Ho Chi Minh. The American people were committed to paying the full cost (in men and money), and the U.S. Congress never fully supported the war. Thus, the political war was never fought properly while the military war was committed. Under those circumstances, no U.S. president was able to give the military a free hand to proceed with the war. Consequently, the different outcomes of the wars in Vietnam and in the Persian Gulf were perfectly logical and to be expected.

Statements that the victory in the Middle East erased the Vietnam syndrome and that the victory was made possible because the generals were given freedom to prosecute the war ignore reality, and only reflect an American syndrome: the inability to learn from other countries' experiences (the British in Malaya and the French in Vietnam and Indochina for example). This is aggravated by the American tendency to underestimate the capabilities of others, to feel that "good old U.S. know-how" can provide all the answers. The consequence of this syndrome would lead the Americans to more confusion, mistaking the last (military) phase of a war (in the Persian war) for the meaning of the entire war, or committing to a military conflict without first winning the political war (as in the case of Vietnam).

- Tran Ngoc Chau, on the *Vietnam War*, page 4.

"Chau's physical courage, his incorruptibility, and his agenda appealed to mavericks within the American establishment - among them Edward Lansdale, John Paul Vann, and Daniel Ellsberg - who knew that body counts and bombing missions were not going to win the war.

In what the author (Zalin Grant) identifies as a blunder of catastrophic consequences, the United States government turned its back on Tran Ngoc Chau: the war was waged in conventional ways; Chau himself was betrayed, disgraced, and imprisoned; and his plan to defeat the communists by community action was perverted by the CIA into the controversial Phoenix Program, wherein thousands of suspected communists were assassinated."

- From the cover story of *Facing the Phoenix* by Zalin Grant.