

The condensed version  
of a biography of

# Tran Ngoc Chau

or

## *The Unveiling of Men, System, and Cause in the Vietnam War*

as described by

Excerpts from Articles  
of Magazines, Newspapers, and  
Statements from Personalities  
cited in the references  
during and after the  
Vietnam War

Compiled in 1989

by Tran Ngoc Chau

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The complete version of this document of 165 pages was prepared to accompany the two coming books: • *"Re-Thinking Decision-Making"* from the Lessons of Vietnam. A Contribution to Meet the Third World Revolutionary Trend by Tran Ngoc Chau, and • *"Doves, Hawks and the Dragon"*, an autobiography covering the Vietnam War from 1945 to 1979 by Tran Ngoc Chau with Ken Fermoye

## Remarks

### By Tran Ngoc Chau

The contents of this document are all excerpts from articles of magazines, newspapers and statements from personalities cited in the references.

I have served only as the compiler, arranging the excerpts in the sequence of the events as they occurred and with consideration of their interrelationship. I added the title and sub-titles only to help explain this sequence and the relationships.

I do not take it upon myself to comment on the accuracy of the facts and opinions quoted except to clarify some points as follow:

x. Post Ngo Dinh Diem regimes.

xi. Fourth.

xii. He was chief of a provincial justice and retired as a deputy minister before the war against the French.

xiii. He was given the title of the "Great Scholar" and the noble title "Vinh loc Dai phu Hiep ta Dai hoc Si thuy Van Y." He retired as a Royal Cabined minister - not that of defense.

xiv. 18.

xv. It was not exactly the reason.

xvi. Elected with absolute majority Secretary General of the House of Deputies -- only the President (Speaker) and the Secretary General were required to be elected with absolute majority.

xvii. Together with Thich Thien Minh, Thich Thien Hoa and others, for five years, who became thirty years later the Most Venerables and leaders of the Vietnamese Unified Buddhist Church that opposed to Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963.

xviii. the second highest -- Madam Tran Thi Hoa, the widow of Hoa Hao's General Ba Cut (executed by Diem a decade earlier) was the highest vote getter but with only 6 candidates competing.

xix. I was awarded the National Order\* the first time by Chief of State Bao Dai for exceptional performances on the battlefield in 1953 as a captain --I wonder whether Thieu, a captain or major at that time, had yet received the same Order. The second time, I was elevated to the rank of Officer of the Order for accumulated acts of gallantry on the battlefield. Thieu did sign a decree, how ever, to rescind my National Order the day after I was arrested and even before I was sentenced -- the medal I was wearing at the time was brutally ripped off by the police.

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\* The National Order was designed to award to officers either for having served the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam for at least 25 years with exceptional conduct or for officers of lesser seniority but with no less than 7 times of having been awarded of the 'Gallantry Medal ', two of those at the highest level in the military. The rank of "Officer of the National Order" could be attained through seniority or through combat gallantry by the holders of the "Knight of the Order". Respectively fifth and fourth rank. The first and second rank of the Order, respectively titled "Cross" and "Grand Cross" of the Order were traditionally awarded to the most senior officers at their retirement or death and to foreign high dignitaries for diplomatic purposes. The third rank titled "Commander" of the Order in fact was the highest for combat gallantry. After the Diem regime, although several officers were rewarded with due dignity, others with political or personal favoritism.

# A Cause Celebre

## The Unveiling of Men, System, and Cause in the Vietnam War

### Contents

A Cause Celebre	3
An Unexpected Ally of U.S.	
• The Rooted Vietnamese	4
• An Officer and a Governor	5
• The Moral Logic:	5
From Religious beliefs to Political practice	
• To Meet the People's War: A People's Approach	6
• With the American Allies and the CIA	7
For Vietnam: In Search for Survival	
• Establishing a Position: Of, By, and For the People	9
• Establishing a Nationalist Base: Between non-Communists	9
• The Last Chance of Survival: Between	12
"Impossible Victory" and "Inconceivable Defeat"	
• Between Vietnamese and Vietnamese	13
For the United States: In Search for a Way Out without the stigma of defeat	
• An Established Vision, a War by Proxy and a Man of Necessity	14
• The Unwieldy Link: Washington and Saigon	15
• The Mastering Pupil: Vision and Opportunity	17
The Unveiling of Men, System and Cause	
• The Making of a Communist	18
* Conspiracy and Blackening   * The Accused	
• The Unveiling	22
* Constitutional Challenge   * The Benedictions of a Nationalist * A Tribunal of No Constitution	
• Vietnamese System and American Cause	25
• The Nation's Editorial and Senator Fulbright's Statement	27, 28
End of Visions of	30 -- 35
• Idealists	
• Opportunists	
• Supremacists	

## Excerpts from

### 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<sup>x</sup> 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.

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

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."

"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*

## An Unexpected Ally of U.S.

### *The Rooted Vietnamese*

"The third<sup>xI</sup> son of the chief judge<sup>xII</sup> of Central Vietnam (and grandson of a Minister of Defense<sup>xIII</sup>), Chau inherited the fierce mandarin pride and ethic of leadership. Early in World War II, at the age of 16<sup>xIV</sup>, 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<sup>xV</sup>. He did so only after a series of ideological arguments with his brother (Tran Ngoc) Hien.

*Elizabeth Pond  
The Christian Science  
Monitor  
The Alicia Patterson Fund  
March 1970*

"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."



"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<sup>xvi</sup>.

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."

## Excerpts from

*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 unmistakable concern for all the people."

*George McArthur*

*Former Senior Correspondent - The Los Angeles*

*Times in Saigon*

*November 19, 1979*

### *An Officer and a Governor*

"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.

*Elizabeth Pond*

*The Christian Science*

*Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund*

*March 1970*

### *The Moral Logic:*

#### *From Religious beliefs 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<sup>xvii</sup>, 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."

"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."

TRAN NGOC CHAU

## Excerpts from

*Elizabeth Pond*

*The Christian Science  
Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund  
March 1970*

*Elizabeth Pond*

*The Christian Science  
Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund  
March 1970*

*Dr. Daniel Ellsberg in his  
testimony before the Com-  
mittee on Foreign Relations  
U.S. Senate  
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."

#### *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."

"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

## Excerpts from

*Elizabeth Pond*

*The Christian Science Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund*  
March 1970

*Los Angeles Times*

*Thursday, June 14, 1979*

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

*April - May - June - August, 1970*



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."

"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."

He 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."

## Excerpts from

*Dr. Daniel Ellsberg in his  
testimony before the Com-  
mittee on Foreign Relations  
U.S. Senate  
April - May - June -  
August, 1970*

*Elizabeth Pond  
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<sup>xviii</sup> 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*

*The Christian Science  
Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund  
March 1970*

### *Establishing a Nationalist Base:*

#### *Between non-Communists*

"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.

*Elizabeth Pond*

*The Christian Science  
Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund  
March 1970*

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.

## Excerpts from

*Elizabeth Pond*

*The Christian Science*

*Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund*

*March 1970*

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 indis-

## Excerpts from

*Elizabeth Pond*  
*The Christian Science*  
*Monitor*  
*The Alicia Patterson Fund*  
*March 1970*



criminally 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 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."

## Excerpts from

*Elizabeth Pond  
The Christian Science  
Monitor  
The Alicia Patterson Fund  
March 1970*

*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."

*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 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."

**Excerpts from**

*The Daily Journal, New Jersey*

*Tuesday Evening, June 11, 1974*

*Elizabeth Pond*

*The Christian Science Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund March 1970*

*Neil Sheehan in his Pulitzer Prize book:"*

*A Bright Shining Lie"*

*John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam 1988*

"Hien's arrest in Saigon last year gave Thieu a chance to attack Chau openly, and U.S. officials did little to protect him."

**Excerpts from**

**For the U.S.:  
In Search for a Way Out  
without the stigma of defeat**

*An Established Vision,  
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.

"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,

*Elizabeth Pond  
The Christian Science  
Monitor  
The Alicia Patterson Fund  
March 1970*

*Neil Sheehan in his Pulitzer Prize book:  
"A Bright Shining Lie"  
John Paul Vann and  
America in Vietnam  
1988*

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."

*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.

## Excerpts from

*Neil Sheehan in his Pulitzer Prize book: "A Bright Shining Lie" John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam • 1988*

*Deputy Secretary of State Richardson to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker  
23 December 1969*



## Excerpts from

*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 effects.

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."

"When I saw Thieu late yesterday I took up the Tran Ngoc Chau case along the lines of reftel.

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.

*Ambassador Bunker  
to the State Department  
11 February 1970*

## Excerpts from

Comment: While this is not entirely satisfactory, I think we have gone about as far as we can at this juncture."

"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.

*Ambassador Bunker  
to the State Department  
17 February 1970*

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: Vision and Opportunity*

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.

*Ambassador Bunker  
to the State Department  
17 February 1970*

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."

## The Unveiling of Men, System, and Cause

*The Making of a Communist,  
also a Warning to Thieu's Oppositionists*

### 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

*Elizabeth Pond  
The Christian Science Monitor  
The Alicia Patterson Fund  
March 1970*

<sup>1</sup>Former colleagues of Daniel Ellsberg claim that the Chau case was instrumental in turning the young analyst against the Vietnam war, since he and Chau had long been close friends. It may not be too much to say that in persecuting Chau the CIA gave impetus to the most spectacular intelligence leak in the history of the war -- the surfacing of the Pentagon Papers, for which Ellsberg was responsible.

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."

## Excerpts from

*Elizabeth Pond*  
*The Christian Science*  
*Monitor*  
*The Alicia Patterson Fund*  
*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.

*Newsweek*  
*March 9, 1970*

Chau's real crime, his friends charged, was to emerge as a potential leader of the legislature and threaten Thieu's autocratic power."

"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.

*Elizabeth Pond*  
*The Christian Science*  
*Monitor*  
*The Alicia Patterson Fund*  
*March 1970*

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 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

<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.

## Excerpts from

*Elizabeth Pond*

*The Christian Science*

*Monitor*

*The Alicia Patterson Fund*

*March 1970*

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."

"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."

"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

## Excerpts from

*Elizabeth Pond*  
*The Christian Science*  
*Monitor*  
*The Alicia Patterson Fund*  
*March 1970*

*Dr. Daniel Ellsberg in his*  
*testimony before the*  
*Committee on Foreign*  
*Relations U.S. Senate*  
*April - May - June -*  
*August, 1970*

*Elizabeth Pond*  
*The Christian Science*  
*Monitor*  
*The Alicia Patterson Fund*  
*March 1970*

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.

## Excerpts from

*Elizabeth Pond*  
*The Christian Science*  
*Monitor*  
*The Alicia Patterson Fund*  
*March 1970*

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."

### *The Unveiling*

#### Constitutional Challenge

"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."

"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.

*Neil Sheehan in his Pulitzer Prize book: "A Bright Shining Lie" John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam • 1988*

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."

"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 govern-

*Elizabeth Pond*  
*The Christian Science*  
*Monitor*  
*The Alicia Patterson Fund*  
*March 1970*

## Excerpts from

ment to use force against him in the legally inviolate Chamber of Deputies itself.

### 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 Daily Journal, New Jersey*  
*Tuesday Evening, June 11, 1974*

"As a final dramatic gesture, Chau pinned on the green and gold National Order<sup>xix</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."

*Elizabeth Pond*  
*The Christian Science Monitor*  
*The Alicia Patterson Fund*  
*March 1970*

"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."



## Excerpts from

### 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."

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

*Elizabeth Pond  
The Christian Science Monitor  
The Alicia Patterson Fund  
March 1970*

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.

.....

"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.

*The Washington Post  
March 2, 1970*

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's decision to give up the case."

.....

[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.]

*Elizabeth Pond  
The Christian Science Monitor  
The Alicia Patterson Fund  
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."

*Vietnamese System and American Cause*

(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.

**Excerpts from**

*Frank Sneff*

*Former CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam in his book "Decent Interval" - 1977*

*Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations U.S. Senate April - May - June - August, 1970*

(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 unprecedented 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 constitutional 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

## Excerpts from

*Hearings before the  
Committee on Foreign  
Relations U.S. Senate  
April - May - June -  
August, 1970*

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

"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."

## Excerpts from

*April - May - June -  
August, 1970*

### EDITORIALS

#### SAIGON: THE TAIL WAGS THE DOG

*THE NATION  
March 23, 1970*

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 Wash-



ington 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.

#### 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

**Excerpts from**  
**THE NATION**  
*March 23, 1970*

**CONGRESSIONAL  
RECORD - SENATE**  
*March 4, 1970*

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."

**Excerpts from**  
*CONGRESSIONAL  
RECORD - SENATE*  
*March 4, 1970*

"State Department press officer Carl E. Bartch 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*

*Should One Need a Conclusion*

**The End**

of Visions

of Idealists, Opportunists,  
and Supremacists

**Act One:**

*Saigon, 1968-1969*

*The Illusion of a Military Victory*

"Advocacy of coalition government is regarded here  
as tantamount to advocacy of the enemy's war aim."

US Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker

"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 13*

"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.

*Page 9*

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."

**Excerpts from  
this document.**  
*Page 9*

"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 12*

"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 14*

"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.

*Page 18*

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>."

"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.

*Page 3*

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."

### **Intermission:** *Vietnam, 1968-1973*

**Over 35,000 more American troops were killed, 100,000 wounded, billions of dollars spent, and much more considerable Vietnamese losses**



Act Two:

Paris, January 1973

Excerpts from

*In Search for a Way Out  
and a War by Proxy  
without the Stigma of Defeat*

*In the Background*

"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."

*Henry Kissinger in his  
book "White House Years"  
- 1979*

"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 statements. 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 of 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."

### Act Three:

Saigon, 19 April 1975

#### *It's Time of Recognition Too Late and Too Humiliating*

"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."

### Act Four:

Saigon, January -- April 1975

#### *The Model Ally of U.S. also the anti-Communist for a Cause*

"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."

TRAN NGOC CHAU

### Excerpts from

*Henry Kissinger in his  
book "White House Years"  
- 1979*

*Then still a Deputy Prime Minister under Thieu, General Tran Van Don, the co-conspirator with General Duong Van Minh and Lt. Col. Lucien Conein in the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem, and a Senator opposing to Thieu until Thieu appointed him Deputy Prime Minister, in his book "Our Endless War" - 1978*

*Frank Snepp, former CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Saigon, in his book "Decent Interval" - 1978*

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."

"Thieu was seated between Polgar and Timmes, "so that a guard at the gate would see an American face when he looked into the car," explained Polgar."

"As the back door clicked open, Thieu leaned over the seat and tapped me on the shoulder. "Thanh 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."

"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."

## Excerpts from

*Frank Snepp, former CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Saigon, in his book "Decent Interval" - 1978*

*Nguyen Tien Hung, Thieu's Advisor, in his book "The Palace File" - 1986*

*Frank Snepp, former CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Saigon, in his book "Decent Interval" - 1978*

*Nguyen Tien Hung, Thieu's Advisor, in his book "The Palace File" - 1986*

## Act Five:

Saigon, 29 - 30 April 1975

## Excerpts from

*An Eulogy to the late President Ngo Dinh Diem by the November 1963 Coup Leaders and Conspirators who acted on the U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge's Remarks that the War Could Not be Won with Diem*

"Now, as his first act of office, Big Minh broadcast an order for all Americans to leave within twenty-four hours."

*Michael Maclear  
in his book "The Ten Thousand Day War" - 1981*

"At the palace South Vietnam's last President, General Duong Van Minh, broadcast an order to all ARVN troops to "lay down your weapons and surrender unconditionally." He was then arrested and led away."

Go-between Tran Van Don 'was very surprised'. He called the American Embassy for its reaction and was told it was all over. and, "If you want to leave, come to the Embassy before two o'clock tomorrow afternoon."

"Only one day after his confident attendance at the palace, Tran Van Don was just one of the mob 'trying find a way out'."

"The very last American soldiers, eleven Marines bearing the Embassy flag, departed at 7.53 am, 30 April 1975. It had been thirty years almost to the day since the first American soldier, Major Archimedes Patti, had been assigned to Vietnam."

"At last, the war that was never officially called a war - though it was America's longest - was over."

"Our defeat in Vietnam sparked a rash of totalitarian conquests around the world as we retreated into a five-year, self-imposed exile."

*Former President Richard Nixon in his book "No More Vietnams" - 1985*



## Intermissions:

*Saigon, Paris, USA  
in different times*

## Excerpts from

### *Paris and Saigon and the Folies Bergères and Maxim's and A Farewell to Arms*

"My respect also goes to our non-Communist friends in the NLF. As promised, the NLF responded to my last query for national concord. Their favorable reply was transmitted to me at 9:00, April 27 (1975), four hours before the expected time."

*General Tran Van Don in  
his book "Our Endless War"  
- 1978*

"We had little desire to sit down with the Communists at all, and no intention of sitting with, and thereby recognizing, the National Liberation Front. This organization, founded in 1960, was the political arm of the Communist effort in South Vietnam, though led by South Vietnamese claiming to be non-Communists."

*Former Prime Minister and  
Vice President in his book  
"Twenty Years and Twenty  
Days," - 1976*

"After some hesitation, and without informing Saigon, I decided to meet a top Communist from Hanoi secretly, to see if we could not discover one mutual base from which we could start discussion."

"For three hours we talked alone, two men from the opposite camps of war. I told my fellow conspirator, 'I'm no more nationalist than you are. I love Vietnam--it's my country, but it's also yours. It's time to stop killing each other.'"

I remember the way he looked at me and said, "I am a Communist, but I am also a Vietnamese. I believe that if we were left alone we could write a ticket for peace in a couple of days."

I asked him what the major demand would be, and he never hesitated, not for a second. "Get rid of Thieu," he said. It was the first time I had heard direct evidence of the hatred which Thieu was held by the Communists. The man spat the words out.

Leaning forward, he added, "If you could get rid of Thieu, I know we could reach an amicable compromise solution."

"Not so easy," I replied.

"For you? Of course it is. Why don't you go back to Saigon, overthrow Thieu, and then...."

"I would do it," I agreed, "but only if I can have Hanoi's full agreement that if I come to power we can start talks immediately on a person-to-person level."

And this was where the plan broke down."

## Excerpts from

### Act Playing:

*Vietnam Today*

*"I will not steal a victory.  
The end and perfection of our victories  
is to avoid the vices and infirmities of  
those whom we subdue."*

Quoted in Plutarch, *The Lives of the  
Noble Grecians and Romans*, "Alexander"

"Americans could see for themselves in 1985, in the satellited television programs from Vietnam to celebrate the ten anniversary of the Vietnamese victory, that after ten years of Communist rule Saigon has deteriorated into a city with a bare subsistence economy run on corruption. The biggest business is selling permission to leave the country. By North Vietnamese admission, there are still some 10,000 people in re-education camps. Refugees estimate the numbers to range from 100,000 to 300,000; and conditions are far worse than the Tiger Cages of Con Son Island. Hung's friends told him, "We ate whatever moved."

In the North the economy continues to flounder. Military expenditures are the largest items in the budget. The armed forces number 1,220,500 in a total population of 59 million, the proportionate equivalent of five million Americans under arms. Vietnam's per capita income of less than \$200 is one of the lowest in the world. The North Vietnamese may have won the war, but they are losing the peace."

*Nguyen Tien Hung, Thieu's  
Advisor, in his book "The  
Palace File" -  
1986*

### Comments by Tran Ngoc Chau

The United States has lost the war in Vietnam but remains the most powerful nation in the world.

The Vietnamese people have been the victims and the objects of both Western materialism and Marxist idealism. The Vietnamese for thousands years had proved that they never lost their vitality and nationalism. Evil will recede -- so for the Will of the People.

*Tran Ngoc Chau*