

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

THE VIETNAM CENTER

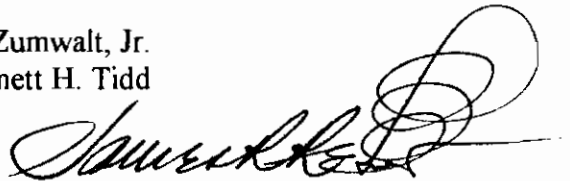
Box 41045 / Lubbock, Texas 79409 - 1045 / (806) 742-3742, 742-8663 / Fax: (806) 742-8664 / E-Mail vietnam.center@ttu.edu

Memorandum

January 28, 1999

To: Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr.
Vice Admiral Emmett H. Tidd

From: James R. Reckner



Subj: Correspondence with Captain Kiem Do

At Admiral Zumwalt's suggestion I contacted Captain Kiem regarding Ambassador Bui Diem and our initiative to preserve the record of the Republic of Vietnam. He has now responded most enthusiastically about that and also about the symposium.

I have now slated him to give a presentation about the role of the VNN in the evacuation of South Vietnam in 1975, which should be exceedingly interesting. He also is interested in the presentation relating to the convoys to Cambodia, and while I am reluctant to ask him to present two papers, I intend, after a few days, to invite him to chair/comment on that session.

As an aside, Captain Kiem tells me that VNN officers in the US have established their own website, and currently are working on producing a history of the VNN. That should be a very interesting product when completed.

encl: Memo of telephone correspondence
Letter from Capt. Kiem

Memorandum of Telephone Conversation
Captain Kiem Do, VNN
Tuesday, January 26, 1999

Background: Captain Kiem Do was a career naval officer with the VNN. He published his own memoir of those years in 1998 in a book entitled, *Counterpart: A South Vietnamese Naval Officer's War* (Naval Institute Press, 1998). In it he was particularly scathing in his comments about a number of advisors who were assigned to work with him; nevertheless, it was an excellent book.

At Admiral Zumwalt's suggestion, I wrote a letter to Captain Kiem advising him of Ambassador Diem's initiative to preserve the record of the Republic of Vietnam and inviting him to become involved in that and in the Vietnam project. He was slow in responding, but late last week called (when I was not available) to report that he had been out of town, in California, and had just returned to his home in Louisiana. Shortly thereafter, we received an exceedingly supportive letter from him, volunteering to work with Ambassador Diem and also to take an active part in the symposium, offering either to participate in the panel on the end of the war (he was in charge of the VNN evacuation from South Vietnam) or in the panel dealing with the convoys to Cambodia, which he also had charge of). To begin with, I have assigned him to the panel on the end of the war, wishing him to speak about the role the VNN played at the end of the war.

I happened to ask him about the fate of my former counterpart, Cdr. Nguyen Van May. He reported that in April 1975 May was in charge of the Fifth Zone, and when the officers supporting Duong Van Minh issued their order for all ships to remain in port, May took his ships to Nam Cam, where they were captured and he was imprisoned. In Saigon, thanks to Kiem's efforts, the fleet sailed and eventually reached the Philippines. However, as Captain Kiem reported, he had failed to destroy the Navy communications center, and the officers who took it over were able to issue orders to fleet units away from Saigon, which Kiem was unable to countermand.

As an aside, in 1993 Rear Admiral Tran Van Chon reported that Captain May spent from 1975 to 1992 in so-called "re-education camps." During that time he apparently had had no visits from his wife and son. When he returned to his home, behind the racetrack in the Phu To District of Saigon, a home with which I was quite familiar, Admiral Chon reported that neither his wife nor his son would even talk to him! Yet one more uncounted casualty of the war.

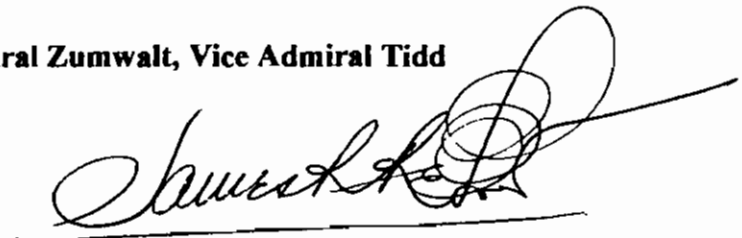
At any rate, Captain Kiem will participate in the symposium. I have asked and received his permission to send a copy of his letter to Ambassador Diem.

Action Pending:

Letter to Captain Kiem

Letter to Ambassador Diem

Forward correspondence to Admiral Zumwalt, Vice Admiral Tidd


1-26-99

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December 18, 1998

Captain Do Kiem

Dear Captain:

I received a telephone call yesterday from Admiral Zumwalt in which he asked me to correspond with you about a project which the Vietnam Center, working under the direction of Ambassador Bui Diem, has undertaken. At present, Ambassador Diem is forming a small committee of Vietnamese scholars, journalists, etc., to examine ways to preserve what remains of the record of the Republic of Vietnam and the men and women who struggled throughout the time of its existence to make the Republic a permanent reality.

I am absolutely convinced that the work before this committee is exceedingly important. It is essential that we preserve as much of the record of the Republic of Vietnam as possible. Future generations of Vietnamese-Americans, I am utterly convinced, will seek answers to many questions about their ancestors, the role they played in the Republic of Vietnam, and why they came to be Vietnamese-Americans, rather than Vietnamese residing in Vietnam. In this respect, I particularly appreciated your own effort to record your experiences in your book, which I read with great interest, having myself served two years with the VNN under Admiral Zumwalt's leadership.

We have an excellent chance, now, to work to preserve the history of the Republic of Vietnam. The task must be accomplished by the generation who lived through the traumatic events which shaped, and ultimately ended, the Republic of Vietnam. While the Vietnam Center and its professional staff are prepared to help in every way possible, and to direct some of their financial resources to this task, in the end, the elder generation of Vietnamese-Americans must take the initiative to convince other Vietnamese of the importance of the task.

I think we must appeal to the sense of history of the Vietnamese people. We must preserve the history of the South for future generations, or those future Vietnamese will have to rely solely upon the Hanoi interpretation of events. That would be most unfortunate. Unless the Vietnamese community can be enlisted to work for this worthy cause, subsequent generations of Vietnamese-Americans will be condemned to a future without a past. For a people with such a rich and abiding sense of their own history, that would be most unfortunate. In the end, I suspect those future generations would condemn us for our failure to preserve what is an important part of their collective past.

VIETNAM CENTER NATIONAL COUNCIL
Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., USN (RET), Chairman
General William C. Westmoreland
Hon. William P. Bundy, Hon. Bui Diem, Professor Douglas Pike

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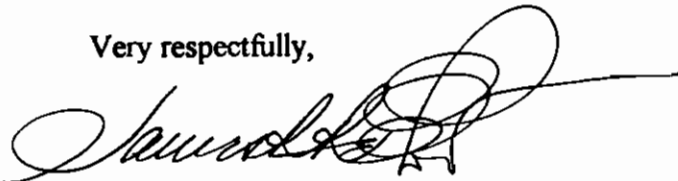
THE VIETNAM ARCHIVE
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In connection with this project, the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech has undertaken to conduct its principal conference for the year 2000 focusing solely upon the *Viet kieu* experience. We would hope, then, to use this meeting as a vehicle to network with overseas Vietnamese from around the world to chart a course for our endeavor. Texas Tech University, through its Vietnam project, has undertaken a longer-than-lifetime commitment to preserve any documents and artifacts which we might be able to obtain. Let us together, Vietnamese and friends of Vietnamese alike, work to establish a first-rate research resource documenting the efforts of the South Vietnamese people.

The Vietnam Center is involved in a number of other projects relating to the Vietnam War. We currently are in the planning stages for a symposium to be held in Lubbock, Texas, 15-17 April 1999. I will enclose a copy of the currently listing of papers proposed for the meeting. Among those currently planning to attend [that I know of] are including General and Mrs. Westmoreland, Admiral & Mrs. Zumwalt, and many other general officers and senior officers of our armed forces. Perhaps after reviewing the materials enclosed, you might be interested to become involved either with the project Ambassador Diem is heading, or with any of the other projects/meetings currently being planned.

At any rate, Captain, please permit me to extend my very best wishes from all of us at The Vietnam Center, and to again express my gratitude for your book.

Very respectfully,



James R. Reckner, Ph.D.

Director

encl: Vietnam Center newsletters
Indochina Chronology
Guide to the Vietnam Archive
Background Sheet
Symposium Paper Proposals

xc: Ambassador Bui Diem
Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt

KIEM DO

Tel:

E-mail :

January 20, 1999

Dr. James R.Reckner, Ph.D.
The Vietnam Center
Box 41045
Lubbock, Texas 79409-1045

Dear Dr. Reckner,

Please forgive me for being so late to answer your letter of December 18. I went to California to spend my Christmas and New Year with my son and I came down with a bad cold that had kept me there longer than we had planned.

Thank you very much for your kind letter and the package of eye-opening materials from the Center. I also have received an encouragement note from Admiral Zumwalt who was my boss and hero during the Vietnam War. Of course, I am very happy to join in your effort at the 1999 symposium. I consider it an honor.

I wholeheartedly concur with your comment that the elder generation of Vietnamese-Americans must take upon themselves the responsibility to preserve the history of the Republic of South Vietnam. They must understand that, to have a healthy growth, the future Vietnamese-American segment of our society must have the accessibility to link itself to a past. This past does not have to be victorious, but it is a past where their ancestors had lived, fought, and suffered for their belief in Democracy and Freedom. The preservation of that portion of the Vietnam history is very crucial to the understanding of the origin of the Vietnamese-American community which is now an integral part of the American make-up of this great country. A complete, objective and truthful record of the Republic of South Vietnam is

January 20, 1999

therefore much needed. For this reason, I find your endeavor, along with the effort of your staff at The Vietnam Center very laudable and I wholeheartedly support it.

After having reviewed the materials, I definitely would like to join Ambassador Bui Diem 's project as my top preference. It is time for the Vietnamese community to put aside bitterness, hatred and distrust and recognize its responsibility to contribute to the history of this defining period of their collective life. I am also available to participate in the Evacuation from South Vietnam panel being the person in charge of the VN Navy end. Other possibilities would include the Tripartite committee overseeing the Mekong River Convoy (I was its chairman from 1972-1975) or joining the club of authors. So please advise where I can best contribute according to the planning of the chairpersons of the above areas.

Again, I thank you very much for your invitation.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kiem Do', written in a cursive style.

Kiem Do