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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

An Interview wt "Harry" Tran Ngoc Hue	1
A New Magazine: Vietnam	4
April 30, 1975: Remembrances of Honor & Celebrations of Treason	4
Remembering April 30th	11
Four Years of Jail for Blogger Ho Van Hai	17
Vietnam: End Repression Against Religious Activists	17

SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture

NEWSLETTER # 114

APRIL 2018

An Interview wt "Harry" Tran Ngoc Hue

Nghia M. Vo

Name: Tran Ngoc Hue

Born: January 4, 1942 in Hue City, central Vietnam

Residence: Fairfax County, Virginia USA

Education: Vietnamese National Military Academy (Dalat), 1963

Counterinsurgency training in Vietnamese Ranger School

Training at the Jungle Warfare School in Malaysia, Fall 1965

Military service: 1963-1971: from first Lieutenant to Lt-Colonel

1971-1983: POW in communist reeducation camps

U.S. immigration: 1991 under Humanitarian Operation

In South Vietnam in the 1960's, ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Tran Ngoc Hue led his 200-men strong Hac Bao (Black Panthers) company against the Viet Cong and communist North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops. This rapid assault force that was designed to assist the main ARVN forces in the I Corps combat operations later became a battalion. He also participated in many actions with American units such as the 1st Marine Division, 3rd Marine Division, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), and the 101st Airborne Division. Having difficulties pronouncing his Vietnamese name Hue, the Americans simply nicknamed him "Harry."



A recent photo showing Harry with his three missing left fingers.

His successes on the Vietnamese battlefields years ago have now translated into a continuing American social success during which his former advisers and friends in turn invite him as a speaker or special guest to the Marines' and other units' meetings and reunions. "Every day, I live the American Dream," declared Harry who for his American friends personifies the best the ARVN could be. This is his story.

Q. What motivated you to enroll into ARVN?

A. Born in 1942 in the imperial city of Hue, I grew up during the First Vietnam War and ended up serving in the ARVN in the Second Vietnam War. At the age of eight while staying at Khe Mon, a region under Viet Minh (communist) control some twenty miles northeast of Hue City, I realized that my

country was hammered by two oppressors. The Viet Minh having ambushed a VNA (Vietnamese National Army—the precursor of the ARVN) unit, ordered the soldiers to strip naked and buried them alive in front of the Khe Mon villagers because they didn't want to waste a bullet on these people.

A few days later, French Legionnaires arrived determined to punish Khe Mon for having supported the Viet Minh, although the latter had disappeared a long time ago. They rounded up the villagers, burned a few homes and raped one of my cousins.

These incidents remained forever imprinted in my mind. The French came and wanted to civilize the country, but ended up burning houses and raping people. The communists, on the other hand,

Continue on next page

“Harry” Tran Ngoc Hue... claimed to protect the people but behave inhumanly. I made up my mind to protect South Vietnam when I grew up.

After finishing high school, I enrolled into the prestigious Vietnamese National Military School in Dalat, South Vietnam in 1961 and graduated in 1963 with the rank of first lieutenant. Before 1965, the school cadets went through a rigorous two-year study, which afterwards changed to a four-year study. My first assignment was the 3rd Company, 1st Battalion, 1st regiment of the 1st ARVN Division at the Ta Bat Fire Base in the infamous A Shau Valley, some five kilometers east of the Laotian border. Through 1963 and 1964, I ran constant search and destroy missions amid the rugged terrain. In 1965, I became the aide-de-camp to General Nguyen Van Chuan, the commander of the 1st ARVN Division before being promoted to commander of the Hac Bao (Black Panther) Company, which brought me back to Hue City during the violent 1968 Tet Offensive.

Q. Could you tell us how Ken Burns and Lynn Novick got hold of you for the “The Vietnam War project?”

A. When Lynn Novick asked the group of Marines she was interviewing in Washington, DC if they knew an ARVN soldier or officer in the area, they introduced me to her. She called me one day to ask for an interview. Although I had granted a few interviews in the past—including a long one with author Andrew Wiest *“Vietnam’s Forgotten Army”*—I had never participated in a big project. Ambivalent about the proposition, I spent time discussing it with my friends, Vietnamese and American.

After a long and successful military career in the ARVN—from 1963 to my capture in 1971 in Laos—which ended with a 13-year-imprisonment in northern communist camps, I felt proud of my service to my country and ready to extoll the ARVN successes. However, I also understood that in any interview, the interviewee does not usually control the event. There was a chance that my opinions could be misquoted or distorted by a self-serving interviewer or editor. But having decided to do my best to defend the ARVN honor, I opted to take the challenge and leave the rest to Burns-Novick’s conscience.

Q. What happened next?

A. Novick got acquainted with my wife and took my family out once to the [Vietnamese] Eden Center in Virginia to savor a few bowls of Pho. Since I was not familiar with the complexities and intricacies of the interview process, I had asked for my American advisor’s help and advice. When I finally agreed to sit down for an interview, she sent a limousine to pick me up along with my American advisor and to drive us to the meeting place somewhere in the Washington, DC area.

Q. What other interviews have you given?

A. On various occasions I have given interviews to newspapers and local TV stations in the past, but not to a big organization. In 2015, two juniors at Seaman High School, Topeka, Kansas decided to interview me. One of the girls thought about writing a story about her uncle, but changed her mind after hearing mine. They finally wrote an essay titled, *“Tran Ngoc ‘Harry’ Hue: Steadfast Leader for Liberty,”* that won the 2015 national Unsung Heroes Discovery Award.

Q. Could you tell us a little more about your participation in the battle of Hue as you have mentioned about it to Ward and Burns, although that portion was never shown in the film. American advisers noted that you were everywhere during that battle and without you and your Hac Bao unit, the ARVN 1st Division headquarters would have been overwhelmed.

A. Like I had explained many times before, explosions woke me up at 3:40 am on January 31, 1968. Since this was the first day of Tet, I first thought that the sounds were fireworks. As they grew louder and more insistent, I felt they were mortar shells and rockets. I jumped out of bed and rode on a bicycle to the airstrip that lay right in the middle of Hue City. In the darkened streets, I recognized North Vietnamese units moving quietly around me. One whole battalion was fanning toward the residential quarter while another attacked the airstrip before trying to overrun the headquarters’ compound of the I Corps inside the Citadel. As I knew the terrain, I was able to avoid enemy troops, although sometimes with difficulty. When I saw the NVA moving toward one direction, I moved the opposite way to avoid getting caught.

At the airstrip, I rallied my men who defended the area with tenacity and courage. Since half of Brigadier General Ngo Quang Truong’s troops were on leave for the Tet holidays and the rest were scattered outside the city, he told me to pull back to the headquarters compound to defend it. I told my men about their next mission: to defend the headquarters compound as well as Hue city and the fatherland. I asked them, “Will you fight with me, Hac Bao?” My men concurred and proceeded to retreat to the headquarters.

In the Hue Battle, we fought long and hard and in the end were able to regain control and push the invading communist forces out of the city. I was promoted captain and awarded the American Silver Star, the highest award for valor that can be bestowed by the United States on an allied soldier. I was later awarded a Bronze star for other actions.

Q. Could you tell us about your participation in the Operation Lam Son in Laos and subsequent imprisonment in Hanoi?

Continue on next page

A. Wounded in the Operation Lam Son in Laos in 1971, I was captured by the enemy *“Harry” Tran Ngoc Hue...* and forced to travel to North Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail before landing in the infamous Hoa Lo Jail in Hanoi. We were about seventy POWs from first lieutenants and above who were housed in different quarters than captured U.S. officers.

While imprisoned in Hanoi, a senior PAVN officer interviewed me and tried to lure me to defect to the communist side by giving me extra clothing, blanket, and better food. A few cigarettes and cups of coffee could do wonder to any prisoner, especially one in a communist jail. He even told someone to give me a tour of Hanoi. After thanking the generosity of the State and the Party, I told him that if I betrayed South Vietnam and the ARVN, which I had faithfully served for eight years, I could also do the same with North Vietnam. As a man who deeply valued loyalty and responsibility, I could not bring myself to do it. I thus turned down his offer and was sent to other reeducation camps for the next thirteen years. While a POW held certain privileges, a jailed ARVN officer had all his rights revoked by the communists. I therefore was subjected to the whims of my captors, but survived the taunting and bad treatment, the hard labor, the lack of food, the isolation, and a bout of depression. I was finally released in 1983 and emigrated to the U.S. in 1991 under the Humanitarian Operation.

Q. What was your reaction to the film after previewing it?

A. Although I thought I did well at the Burns’ interview session as evidenced by the paragraphs written about my war experience in the companion book to the film, I was not happy with the Burns’ Vietnam War film after previewing it at the Newseum in Washington, DC on June 13, 2017. I told Burns at that time that if I knew that America was exactly as represented in the film, I would have moved to another country. I believe that Burns under heavy pressure from the antiwar movement had shifted his views leftward.

Q. Do you have any final comment?

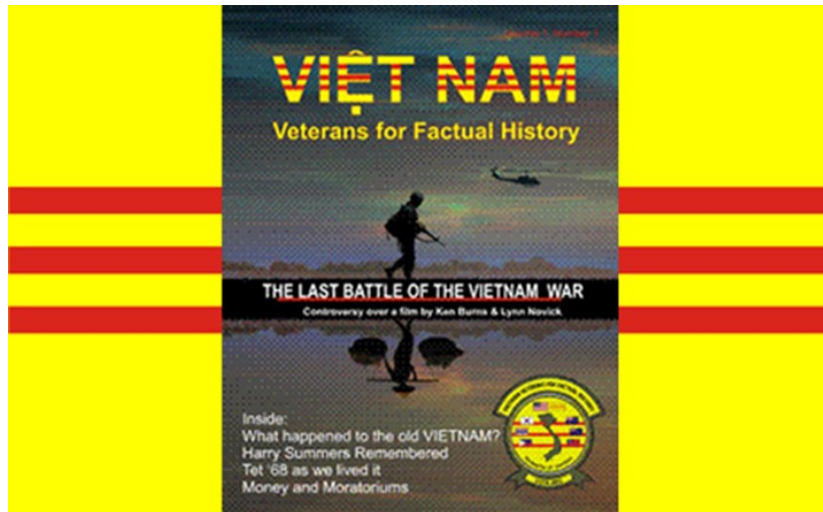
A. I’m happy with who I am and what I have achieved, although I feel sad for Vietnam and the people who remain under the repressive communist regime. After serving eight years in the South Vietnamese army and spending thirteen years in communist reeducation camps, I now have the chance to live in a free country where personal rights are respected and friends abound. “Every day I live the American Dream.”



General Abrams pinning the American Silver Star on Harry Hue's shirt after the 1968 Hue Battle

A New Magazine: Vietnam

VVFH (Veterans for Factual History) is introducing the pilot issue of our magazine. Please go to <http://www.vvfhmag.org/> Register for a free download. Wait for a confirmation email and click on the confirmation link. Take note of the password to unlock the .pdf file and download the file. [You might want to pay particular attention to the story on page 45 and the link embedded therein.]



April 30, 1975: Remembrances of Honor & Celebrations of Treason

Roger Canfield

Adopted from *Comrades in Arms:*
How the Americong Won the War in Vietnam
Against the Common Enemy—America
 at <http://americong.com>, parts at VVFH.org

April 30 of every year since 1975 marks the end of the brutal communist conquest of Vietnam and Indochina. The annual remembrances of "Black April" in Vietnamese communities pay tribute to patriotic Vietnamese and Americans who fought for liberty against tyranny.

Meanwhile, those "peace" activists, aiding the enemy in war, do not celebrate the arrival of white doves and spring flowers. They gleefully, cheer every communist victory on the road to Saigon (also Phnom Penh). To this day, they pay tribute to monsters murdering women and children.

History ought to record their dishonor, disloyalty and treason during the war and their cover up of communist atrocities and oppressions since. For most readers, this infamy is impolitely recorded here for the first time.

Applauding each Hanoi battlefield victory during 1975, the antiwar leaders lobby against giving any military or medical aid to S. Vietnam and Cambodia.

On January 8, 1975, Ambassador Graham Martin in Saigon urges the U.S to "overcome the deliberate organized campaign of lies and distortions" of Tom Hayden, Jane Fonda, Fred Branfman and Don Luce are using doing to lobby Congress for the enemy.

On January 14, the American Coalition to Stop Funding the War, the Coalition, accuse Saigon's troops, not Hanoi's 20 invading divisions, for aggression. The coalition declares the U.S. is attempting to "manipulate opinion by distorting and over dramatizing the fighting."

On January 28, the Weatherman Underground, Bill Ayers, Bernardine Dohrn, aiding invaders, bombs the State Department.

Gareth Porter, George Kahin and Hayden of the Coalition demand Congress "reject ANY attempt to increase military aid to South Vietnam OR Cambodia."

January 25-29, Hayden and Fonda join many pro-Hanoi "peace" activists in a National Assembly to Save the Peace. They show "Introduction to the Enemy," happiness in "liberated" Vietnam.

Continue on next page

April 30, 1975...

In February in Saigon Cong. Reps. Abzug and McCloskey inform a Hanoi spy Congress will cut aid to South Vietnam. The US drops a futile investigation of tax exemptions for Hayden and Fonda's IPC.

March. In March 1975 Anthony Lake, former top aide to Robert McNamara and Henry Kissinger, headlines the *Washington Post*, "At Stake in Cambodia: Extending Aid Will Only Prolong the Killing."

In Moscow, Fonda declares, "...civil liberties are most infringed...in South Vietnam." In the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, she "thank[s] the Soviet people for the assistance they're rendering to Vietnam,..."

Hanoi invites Prof. Gabriel Kolko for "immediately" consultations.
The House Democratic Caucus votes 189-49 against aid to Vietnam or Cambodia, a resolution of secret communist Abzug.

Sokhom Hing, an agent of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and an IPC activist, blames massacres in Cambodia on U.S. B-52 strikes.

Wilfred Burchett, a KGB agent, reporter, and greeter of the peace activists says, "One of the gentlest...people... (Cambodians) have been used as guinea-pigs in experiments with the ... the US arsenal."

On March 25, President Ford meets Saigon diplomats. One, Dinh Van De, a secret Communist spy argues, "Mountains of money ...would not ...rescue a regime...falling apart."

Visiting Hanoi, Larry Levin, Hayden's director of the Coalition, interviews Paris negotiator Xuan Thuy. Thuy condemns "the forcible evacuation... (the U.S. Government) ...refers to as rescue...This is a mere U.S. hoax ... a pretext to intervene..."

Thousands of Tears Falling. Hanoi aims long-range Chinese and Russian artillery and tanks, upon fleeing troops and women and children. Route 7 is piled with corpses, a "Convoy of Tears." 50,000 die fleeing Quang Tri and Hue. On Highway 21, the communist army "chopped to pieces" 200,000, a "Trail of Tears." About half die. The mother of Hanoi Premier Pham Van Dong escapes south.

Black April. April 5-6, communist Sylvia Kushner, Chicago Peace Council, convenes a National Conference for a Drastic Cutback in Military Spending.

On April 7, in Paris, Cora Weiss, an exploiter of POW families, and Gareth Porter, a denier of Hanoi massacres, meet Dinh Ba Thi, head of Hanoi intelligence. Thi "thank[s]...the American[s] ...for ...working 'to completely end U.S. aid to the Thieu clique."

Rep. Ron Dellums (D-Berkeley), provider of taxpayer-funded staff and office to IPC, cheers "... inspiring resistance to the war..."

On April 7 in Paris Hanoi's agents thank the peace movement for opposing "the evacuation of people and ... orphans..."

April 8, Bert Schneider gets the Academy Award for "Hearts and Minds." "...Vietnam is about to be liberated." Spy Thi thanks the American peace movement. Francis Ford Coppola appreciates Thi's "positive, human optimistic message...beautiful."

ARVN's Last Stands. In the initial invasion, ARVN defended Phuoc Binh to the death. After a Saigon ordered northern retreat and bloody chaos on roads south, the ARVN stand and fight.

The allegedly "cowardly" ARVN 7th division since the battle of Ap Bac in 1963 defeats the NVA in a last battle commanded by Gen. Nguyen Khoa Nam. Gen. Le Van Hung, victor in the major battle of An Loc in 1972, ably assists Nam until both commit suicide. Seventeen Saigon commanders commit suicide.

In the last battle of the war on the Street without Joy, Highway 1, a 60-man remnant of the 82nd ARVN Rangers led by Major Vuong Mong Long, surrounded, fights unto death.

Medicine to "Liberated." Binding up the wounds of the enemy, William Zimmerman's Medical Aid for Indochina, MAI, distributes medical aid to "liberated" Indochina. AFSC gives \$301,797 aid to Hanoi and PRG. U.S. mainline churches pledge \$1.5 million to the Soviet dominated World Council of Churches, 80% to Hanoi's side. On April 16, while Saigon's forces are out of medicine and bandages, the American Committee for UNICEF delivers 19 tons of drugs to "liberated" South Vietnam, UN military assistance to the conquerors. Soviet controlled Stockholm Conference gives medical aid to the "liberated."

In Hanoi on April 16, Paris negotiator Xuan Thuy tells Levin, Hayden's staff director, "the South Vietnamese people...have risen up and liberation forces [had] joined(ed) in their struggle."

Continue on next page

April 30, 1975... Fonda says, "The suffering and turmoil... is just a pittance." Hayden and Fonda have a "large map filled with push pins and inked-in lines...[of] troop movements."

USA and Cambodian Blood. On April 17, Cambodia falls. Sokhom Hing, Khmer Rouge agent in IPC, claims the "people cheered... There was no bloodbath." *New York Times* headline "Indochina without Americans: For Most a Better Life." On April 18, Hayden is rumored to meet the Khmer Rouge, Hing? He says, "Indochina has not fallen -- it has risen. ... Communism is one of the options that improve people's lives." Like Lake, Fonda, Hayden and the *Times*, MIT's Noam Chomsky says the Khmer Rouge "may...have saved lives."

Yet on Day One of the Khmer Rouge's "Year Zero," Cambodia becomes Hell itself. The Khmer Rouge drive the population, e.g. hospital patients, out of towns. About 2 million Cambodians, a third of the population, die in "Killing Fields." Jim Wallis, spiritual adviser to Obama, blames this Cambodian genocide on America.

April 25-27, American "peace" organizations, the AFSC, FOR, WRL, and the KGB controlled Stockholm Conference on Viet Nam, sponsor an Emergency Conference on Viet Nam. Spy Thi attends. Perhaps riding with the invaders, Gabriel Kolko spends the last four days of the war (April 26-30, 1975) in "liberated" Hue and Danang.

By April 28 in Saigon, the last of 43,000 Vietnamese and Americans fly out of Tan Son Nhut airport. Soon the Joint Chiefs end U.S. "refugee operations" abandoning 980,000 Saigon military and 30,000 U.S. agents. A pittance of honor.

Last Night in Saigon. At 6:30 P.M. on the 29th, "A power cut ...blackened out the city ... it cloaked the shame." The lights go out, the rains come down, but American betrayal and shame does not wash away. On the last night in Saigon, a few rich take to barges.

Dunkirk, No Churchill. On the morning of the April 30, the sun comes up to reveal hundreds of small boats. About 32,000 South Vietnamese make it out by sampan, raft, basket and row-boat to US ships and Saigon's Navy vessels. The U.S.S. *Kirk* convoys thirty-two Saigon's ships, 32,000 refugees, to the 7th Fleet and the Philippines.

In California, Gov. Jerry Brown, friend of Hayden, does not want "to dump Vietnamese" on his state. He tries to "prevent planes carrying refugees [to]... Travis Air Force Base." His welfare director, Mario Obledo, says, "California already has a large population of Hispanics, Filipinos, blacks..."

7:30 A.M., April 30, 1975, the commander of the winning army, Gen. Van Tien Dung, sees a "... morning so fresh and beautiful, so radiant, so clear and cool, so sweet-scented as this ...total victory." Sharing a victory she has earned as an agent of Hanoi, Cora Weiss holds the English copyright of the General Dung's book *Our Great Spring Victory*.

Peaceniks Celebrate:

Hayden is close to tears "thinking of the faces of the people in Vietnam...thinking how happy they must be." Watching TV, the Weathermen bombers, Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn, rejoice, "We were overjoyed. ...celebrating, laughing and crying." Secret communist professor Howard Zinn says, "Everyone stood up and cheered." John McAuliff, AFSC, goes to Hanoi with a "peace delegation" of Weiss, Branfman and Ira Arlook meeting Do Xuan Oanh, greeter of Americans, to "celebrate the end of the war and... to thank the American people." A Vietnam Veterans Against the War, VVAW, letter says, "The [Communists] have won great victories ... We too will one day celebrate our victory over imperialism." On May 9, at a "joyful welcome to peace" celebration of 50,000 people at Sheep Meadow in Central Park, David Dellinger, Abzug, and Elizabeth Holtzman speak and Joan Baez, Harry Belafonte, and Phil Ochs sing. Madame Binh cables, "our... profound gratitude to those Americans who ... worked ... to end the unjust, criminal war..." Le Thi Xuyen tells Arlene Eisen Bergman, "This great victory is inseparable from your militant solidarity.... We think...our victory is also yours." Wallis, the now pacified editor of *Sojourners*, expresses, "...the quiet emotion that rushed through me when ...the United States had finally been defeated in Vietnam"

Consequences for the Peoples of Indochina

"Peace was another name for the *reglement de compte*: the punishment and repression of the defeated," Nghia M. Vo writes. None escape the wrath of the victors.

The Consequences

Peace brings not the Communist promised national salvation of reconciliation, democracy, and prosperity, but executions of tens of thousands of South Vietnamese, millions of Cambodians and the near genocide of Laotian Hmong immediate expulsion of all wounded ARVN from hospitals so that many died on the streets,

Continue on next page

April 30, 1975...

immediate suppression of the formerly free press in Saigon,
 ravenous seizure of all businesses and much private property with no compensation to owners,
 re-education camps for 1.3 million Southerners,
 forced relocations to barren 'New Economic Zones' for hundreds of thousands,
 a system of discrimination of all former RVN military, civil servants, and employees applies to families for three generations,

oppression of all organized religions,
 strict rationing of food leading to widespread malnutrition,
 attempted mind control and rewriting history,
 limited travel within the country, and
 great poverty and endemic corruption unknown in the worst days of South Vietnam.

Space limits a full discussion of all these consequences. A few stand out.

Left Rejects Refugees. On May 5, 1975, Hayden demands the return of refugees. The "outpouring of emotion for Vietnamese orphans and refugees" is "misdirected....They are a privileged class we created." Sen. George McGovern opposes aid to refugees. Nguyen T Ong Hy says U.S. is "detaining in many inhumane camps based in the USA tens of thousands ... There is urgency in returning these "trapped" people..." The Center for Constitutional Rights, sues to return orphans. AFSC sends "return home" messages to refugee camps. The antiwar Mennonite and AFSC oppose amnesty for Laotian refugees facing genocide. The State Department and the UN want to forcefully repatriate Hmong in Thailand back to Communist Laos.

Solidarity Forever: Forever Loyal to Viet Cong

On May 17, Arlene Eisen Bergman hosts 250 antiwar activists in Vancouver, Canada to meet representatives from PRG, and Hanoi. In July, the IPC forms the Friends of Indochina Organizing Committee, FIOC declaring the "true meaning of Freedom and independence [is] occurring in Vietnam today." On September 6, IPC, VVAW, the Revolutionary Union (Revolutionary Communist Party), the CPUSA and 15 others hold a reception at the Union Theological Seminary honoring Khmer Rouge generals and Ieng Sary, cofounder with Pol Pot of the Khmer Rouge. Sary thanks the assembled for "support[ing] the Cambodian struggle against the U.S. imperialist forces." While on trial for crimes against humanity, genocide, Ieng Sary dies of old age. In October, Cora Weiss and others form FRIENDSHIPMENT, for "people-to-people aid" to communist Vietnam in cash and goods. FRIENDSHIPMENT is ultimately composed of 40 organizations. Checks made to FRIENDSHIPMENT/Bach Mai Hospital Fund were tax deductible.

FIOC Softens Images of Communist Rule. On December 15, the tax exempt FIOC, publish the *US/Indochina Report*, Volume I, Number 1, a softer side of Vietnamese Communism. Both Friends and IRC are tax-exempt. The report sanitizes reeducation camps and softens forced resettlements. The noble intentions of socialist engineering in Reeducation camps and in New Economic Zones are to "train" soldiers, police, drug addicts and prostitutes "for productive work." *Arbeit Macht Frei*, over the gates of Nazi concentration camps. "Refugees who fled the bombing for the cities [are being] resettled in the countryside" and "800,000 people [are] ...resum[ing] rice farming." The FIOC report says FRIENDSHIPMENT will help reconstruction. Weiss expects Sen. Ted Kennedy to get \$100 million for reconstruction. Nguyen Duy Trinh, greeter of antiwar activists, thanks Sen. Kennedy.

1976 and Forever thereafter. In April 30, 1976, CALC sponsors a "celebration of peace" at All Soul's Church on the First Anniversary Celebration. Ironically, All Souls recognizes a new peace of graveyards. In July 1976, Doug Hostetter, of Friendshipment and United Methodists, says he has as a Christian his duty to "both sides." He blames the U.S. In October 1976, filmmaker, "People's War," Robert Kramer says "the revolutionary government... [has provided]...amnesty [for most] ... forgiveness... humility." Yet in September 1976, a few antiwar activists respectfully appeals to Hanoi to account for claims of human rights violations. Gareth Porter says the Appeal impugns the "good faith" of Hanoi. On January 30, 1977 an ad, "Vietnam: A Time For Healing and Compassion," in the *New York Times* praises Hanoi's "...moderation and ... reconciliation among its people."

1979--Joan Baez versus Friends of Hanoi.

Finally, Joan Baez publicly objected to Communist violations of human rights in Indochina in a full-page newspaper ad on May 30, 1979, in five newspapers in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Baez acquires signatures from 78 other

Continue on next page

April 30, 1975... ers former protesters.

Four years ago, the United States ended its 20-year presence in Vietnam. An anniversary that should be cause for celebration is, instead, a time for grieving.

Thousands of innocent Vietnamese, many whose only "crimes" are those of conscience, are being arrested, detained and tortured in prisons and re-education camps For many, life is hell and death is prayed for. ...

"The entire Baez campaign may be a CIA plot," said Chicago Seven attorney William Kunstler. "I refuse to criticize any Socialist government..." He "understood" why "war criminals" are used to clear minefields. The Communist Party USA and friends viciously attack Baez in the *New York Times* of June 24, 1979. Baez charges are

Outrageous ... Vietnam now enjoys human rights ...never known ... : the right to a job and safe, healthy working conditions ... education, medicine and health care ... we in the United States have yet to achieve."

Meanwhile, the Philadelphia SANE honors Tom and Jane with their 1979 SANE Peace Award.

Tenth Anniversary Celebration. In April 1985, Hanoi invites Fonda and Hayden to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the conquest of South Vietnam. They do not go, Tom is elected to the Assembly of the California Legislature with a whitewashed resume aligning him with putting flowers in gun barrels, not carrying Hanoi's propaganda. **Hanoi Awards War Medals.** Arriving in a Soviet plane, five antiwar Americans join the commemoration. Three known present are Dellinger, George Wald, conduit of Hanoi propaganda, and John McAuliff, AFSC, saying US bombing caused Cambodian genocide. Hanoi awards the Ho Chi Minh to Dellinger, Wald, McAuliff and two others, (likely Douglas Hostetter,) and another for their unique contributions to "the revolutionary cause of the Party, State and Vietnamese nation." The war medals ought to be big news, but 200 renowned, newsmen do not report peace activists receiving the highest military award. CBS's Liz Trotta and the Los Angeles *Times* report Dellinger and McAuliff in town.

In 2000, Leslie Cagan, organizes a coalition of 50 organizations and 200 individuals. Cagan *et al* sponsors declare many falsehoods among which: "Cambodian...people butchered ...grew out of U.S. policy in Indochina..., [In] My Lai and hundreds of other hamlets... children, women and elderly were killed by U.S. armed forces order[s]... [It was US ...policy to "bomb into the Stone Age" the hospitals, schools..."

January 23, 2013, Yuppies Nancy Kurshan and Judy Gumbo Albert, self-described "Americong," are invited to Hanoi. Mme. Binh stands "behind ...a giant gold star, hammer and sickle. ... As a 'red diaper baby,' I understood... a Lifetime Achievement Award."

October 2014, 1,000 peace activists condemn the Department of Defense's 50th Anniversary Commemoration for honoring Vietnam vets demanding "Full Disclosure" of peace activists bringing peace.

April-May 2015, the Kroc Foundation assesses the Vietnam War. Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman, Weiss, Hayden, and Marilyn Bratt Young speak of an unjust and unwinnable war led by liars.

In 2017, Ken Burns' \$30 million, 18-hour docudrama "Vietnam," inspired by true events, interviews mostly antiwar veterans and glorifies the "peace" movement without mentioning many "peace" activist celebrations of communist victory.

1. 158. Telegram, Embassy in Vietnam to Department of State, Saigon, January 8, 1975, 1230Z in National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, Secret: Immediate.
2. "Envoy Blasts the New York Times For Misleading Reporting on Vietnam," *AIM REPORT*, Accuracy in Media, Vol. III, No. 4, April 1974, 1.
3. Hanoi gives instructions to Hayden, lobbying begins at Germantown Oct 1973-April 75.
4. Coalition to Stop Funding the War, "1975: Will Peace Come to Indo China?" *Legislative Update*, January 14, 1975.
5. David Binder, *New York Times* Jan. 30, 1975; FBI, FOIA, Acting SAC Chicago to Director, memo, "Foreign Influence- Weather Underground Organization," August 20, 1976, 185.
6. Coalition to Stop Funding the War, "1975: Will Peace Come?," January 14, 1975.
7. The Assembly program workshops at Georgetown most notably includes I. F. Stone, Rep. Bella Abzug, Daniel Ellsberg, Sen. George McGovern, Pete Seeger Bishop James Armstrong, Nguyen Huu An (Union of Vietnamese), Fred Branfman (IRC), Center, Thich Thien Chau (Viet-Nam Resource Center), Bob Chenoweth (Indochina Peace Campaign, IPC, POW), Tom Cornell (Fellowship of Reconciliation, FOR), Rep. Ron Dellums, Rep. Robert Drinan, Ngo Cong Duc (IRC), Daniel Ellsberg, Jim Forest (American Friends Service Committee, AFSC), Morton Halpern (Center for National Security Studies). Also Rep. Tom Harkin, Sokhom Hing (Group of Khmer Residents), Ngo Vinh Long (IRC), Don Luce (Clergy and Laity Concerned, CALC), Doug Hostetter (United Methodists), Ed Miller (IPC, former POW), Gary Porter (IRC), Le Anh Tu (NARMIC/AFSC), Cora Weiss (Bill Zimmerman's Medical Aid to Indochina, MAI) and Ron Young (AFSC).
8. Tran Van Son, former RVN Lower House Representative cited in Rich Webster, "Voices From the South Seminar," *SITREP*, Counterparts, Fall 2012. http://www.counterparts.net/sitrep/SITREP_2012_Fall.pdf

Continue on next page

April 30, 1975...

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Continue on next page

April 30, 1975...

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Continue on next page

April 30, 1975...

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Remembering April 30th

Nghia M. Vo

A lot of Vietnamese-Americans, and this include many Americans, do not know or remember what had happened on April 30, 1975 in Saigon. They were either too young, not born yet or had already escaped from Saigon at that time. They, therefore, are not aware of or have ignored the suffering of ARVN soldiers in general and the southern Vietnamese people in general who had struggled under communist control for almost four decades following the fall of Saigon.

Remembering April 30th is one way to remember their last ditch effort to preserve that part of the country, their invaluable courage under adversity, their noble sacrifice against the savage northern war machinery, and their untold suffering under an oppressive and corrupt regime. They were the true men and women of Vietnam, the true descendants of the proud and valiant Vietnamese Dragon race.

In order to understand April 30th, we need to go back to Saigon 38 years ago.

A. REMEMBERING APRIL 30th

A summary of the main April 30th events deserves to be reiterated here.

1. The incomplete *Memoirs of Colonel Dương Hiếu Nghĩa* (1) record the following:

-28 April at 1900 hours: the communists fired 6-7 rockets at the Tân Sơn Nhứt Airport, which landed instead on the Trương Minh Giản and Lăng Cha Cả subdivisions. By 2200 hours, following visual guidance from communist insiders housed at the Davis camp, all the rockets landed on the airport runways destroying them and forcing the closure of the airport to fixed-winged aircraft. The Davis Camp of course remained unharmed.

-29 April, Operation Frequent Wind began in the afternoon allowing the airlift of more than 7,000 people from the US Embassy without interference from the communists.

-30 April, at 1100 Dương Văn Minh announced on the radio the unconditional surrender of Saigon. By 1300, all the streets were deserted and offices and stores closed, except for looters who sprang into action. The battle at the Hoàng Hoa Thám camp between the 81st Airborne Rangers and the communists the day before left the carcasses of 13 T-54 northern tanks strewn along the streets.

At 1800 hours, a heart breaking scene occurred at the front gate of the Cộng Hòa General Military Hospital from which a procession of patients in small groups, one leading the other walked out. It turned out that at 1700 hours a group of communist soldiers who took over the hospital ordered everyone to evacuate the hospital without bringing anything including cars, carts, and medications, except for their clothes. This included physicians, nurses, workers, and patients no matter their medical conditions, whether they had been operated on or not, whether their wounds had healed or not. This was an abominable order for patients who had been transferred from the battlefields to the hospital for surgery and had not had their operations yet, or just came out of surgery still in a

Continue on next page

Remembering April 30th ...

sedated state had to walk out with their fresh wounds not knowing where to go. Their homes or units may be hundreds of miles away from the hospital for they had been evacuated to Cộng Hòa Hospital for care.

This was one of the most depressing events of the North-South war. How could brothers treat brothers like that? Not even foreigners had done such a thing to the Vietnamese. To help these patients, we called cabs, cars, cyclos, motorcycles...to transport the sickest ones to private and community hospitals for care.

-After April 30, "committees against decadent culture" composed of northern soldiers and local students and hooligans were formed in towns and cities. These students, called "the 30th tigers" wore red arm bands, roamed through the streets informing communist soldiers and imposing their own control. They went to the National Library and brought out all the books, encyclopedias, treatises, national treasures, etc...to the streets and burned them....

Thus began the evil communist domination of South Vietnam

2. Thạch Ngọc Trường looking back at the four decade-communist control wrote the following verses.

My April 30th

*April 30th, 1975
Lying at home
Capitulation news spreading
My eyes dazzled
My head tipsy
Tumultuous city
Military uniforms, knapsacks,
firearms, bullets
all over the streets.
Familiar faces
Now bragging red arm bands
Prison cells are open
Criminals, big and small, out errant.
Many stores are looted.*

*April 30th, 1976
In reeducation camps
They celebrate "liberation"
A day off from labor
I enjoy my bowl of rice mixed with gravel
Few grams of sliced meat
Few twigs of potato plants.*

*April 30th, 1978
Holding my parole paper
Overjoyed I walk to the gate
They had me back:
"Wait a few more days
Only after we change the currency."
The cyclo-driver scolds me,
"No more officers' wives,
Corrupted, women have gone to the cadres' side."
I enter my home
My wife brimming with tears
Welcoming me back from the dead.*

*April 30th, 1980
Refugee camp
with thousands of people
who have braved death and seas
leaving behind their native land
their ancestral tombs
their spouses, their properties
just to breathe
the air of liberty.*

*April 30th, 2007
I land at Noi Bai airport
I am back in my old town
I look for my narrow streets
my church, my old school still there
decrepit everywhere.
Next to them all splendid
high rise hotels and villas
showing off their opulence with arrogance.
I go back to my old village
poverty is rampant
with a seven day-work week
peasant sell their labor abroad
sacrifice for their children.*

*April 30th, 2009
I look back home
land and sea are given away.
Enemies are invited
to our High Plateaus
sitting tight on the country's spine.
They expel innocent villagers
to build their jungle bases.
They waste my motherland,
greedily extract bauxite.*

Continue on next page

Remembering April 30th ...**3. Forever war widows**

Mrs. Trần Thanh Minh, widow of a former instructor at the Đà Lạt Military Academy who had been jailed by the communists and died in a reeducation camp after the fall of Saigon recounted how she singlehandedly raised her four children, the oldest being six and the youngest a few months after her husband's death:

"He died when I was 35 years old. I remember the two decades I had to struggle to bring food on the table. I sold shrimp chips, *bánh cuốn* at the Turtle Basin Monument [in downtown Saigon]. I traded in and sold western medications. I sold food to students at school cafeterias. I can say that I did whatever they told me to do. Although I did everything in my capacity, I could not even feed my children. Therefore, my only wish at this time is that my children have enough to eat and they don't starve."

In her memoir *"The Sorrows of a POW's wife,"* she wrote that when she realized her husband had died, "That's it, that's hopelessness the rest of my life. Although I live, I was like a dead person..." She said that "reeducation camps were built in the middle of the jungle for prisoners to do hard labor. For one full year, I did not receive any of his news. After that, they allow me to visit him. I was not as lucky as other people. When he was jailed in the South, I could visit him; but after his transfer to a northern camp, I only realized he had died at Vĩnh, Nghệ Tĩnh when I arrived the camp. His friends told me that at that time, they had to eat cooked leaves because there was nothing to consume and without medications, death was certain. I felt like someone struck me in the head, everything went dark with some rays of light here and there. I lost consciousness."

"Why did [communist] leaders not use their brains to rebuild the country instead of sending men to the jungles so that they died from starvation and waste? And then send women to the miserable new economic zones? I have not seen any full and happy family. People had to look for freedom. Why? Because they lived a wretched life. They did not have anything to eat. They lived but were not allowed to talk; always constrained by security forces, always afraid. That was why her children had tried to escape."

She had tried to escape with her children almost 20 times but had failed and ended up in jails on many occasions. To this day, she still remembers the thirst, hunger, and misery in communist jails. (3)

Another war widow is Mrs. Huỳnh Thị Sinh, wife of former Lieutenant Commander Ngụy Văn Thà whose HQ-10 destroyer was sunk by the Chinese at the Battle of the Paracels on 19 January, 1974. At that time, she was only 26 with three children in tow. LTC Thà told her he had to go to Danang for duty and would come back to spend the Tết festival with the family. A few days later, she got the news of his death from newspapers and later from Vietnamese Navy officials. The Paracels are a series of 30 islands in the South China Sea about 300 kilometers east of Danang; these islands were claimed by the Vietnamese, Chinese, and Filipinos. The Chinese trying to settle on these islands caused the only sea battle during the Vietnam War. (4)

Mrs. Sinh has raised her children as a war widow and for the last forty years has always commemorated his death on January 19, although she has never received his remains.

Another war widow is Mrs. Phạm Thị Kim Hoàng, wife of former General Lê Văn Hưng, the hero of An Lộc who killed himself on 30 April, 1975 instead of surrendering to the enemy (5). She also has raised her children as a war widow and has immigrated to the U.S. She wrote a poignant letter that contains the following words:

"...As long as we called ourselves Lạc Hồng people and are still breathing, we are still indebted to our nation. This is a noble and precious debt that human words cannot characterize. Why should we not follow our heroic ancestors' footsteps, our forefathers' indomitable will and pay our debt to the nation?" (6)

The South Vietnamese, the Việt Kiều, and these tens of thousands of war widows will always remember 30 April as a day of mourning for all those who had sacrificed themselves for fatherland and Freedom in Vietnam.

B. THE SPOILS OF WAR: OPPRESSION AND CORRUPTION

The abominable communist revolution manages to hatch at least two huge ugly eggs: oppression and corruption. Never in Vietnamese history had Vietnamese people suffered as much as under communist control. Even hard-core communists had to agree.

1. Nguyễn Phước Tường, 77, a Marxist scholar says he is no longer a believer. A former adviser to two prime

Continue on next page

Remembering April 30th ...

ministers, Mr. Tường, like so many people in Vietnam today, is speaking out forcefully against the government.

"Our system now is the totalitarian rule of one party," he said in an interview at his apartment on the outskirts of Hồ Chí Minh City. "I come from within the system — I understand all its flaws, all its shortcomings, all its degradation," he said. "If the system is not fixed, it will collapse on its own."

...the country of course is ranked among some of the world's most corrupt by Transparency International, a global corruption monitor."

2. At its plenary session in Strasburg on 18 April 2013, the 754-member European Parliament adopted an Urgent Resolution on Vietnam strongly condemning a wide range of human rights violations and asking the EU to "assess the compatibility" of these violations with the new EU-Vietnam Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) which conditions trade and diplomatic relations on the respect of democratic principles and human rights.

Condemning the "political intimidation, harassment, assaults, arbitrary arrests, heavy prison sentences and unfair trials in Vietnam brought against political activists, journalists, bloggers, dissidents and human rights defenders, both on- and offline, in clear violation of its international human rights obligations", the EP particularly deplored the detention of 32 bloggers and cyber-dissidents, especially the heavy sentences of Điều Cây, Phan Thanh Hải and Tạ Phong Tần, and the recent harassment of Buddhists youth leader Lê Công and writer Huỳnh Ngọc Tuấn. (7)

C. THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Virginia State Senator Richard "Dick" Black a former Vietnam Marine pilot was instrumental in the passing of SJR 455 commemorating April 30 as the Day of the Republic of Vietnam. VA was one of the pioneer states in advancing the rights of Vietnamese Americans.

On May 25, 1994, the US Congress through SJ 168 approved May 11 as *Vietnam Human Rights Day*,

In 2002, with SJR139, the General Assembly of Virginia recognized the June 19 ARVN's Day as the *Vietnam's Freedom Fighters Day*,

On April 15, 2004, the General Assembly of Virginia recognized the Yellow flag with three red stripes as the *Vietnamese Americans' Heritage Flag*,

On March 30, 2013 the General Assembly through SJR 455 approved April 30 as the *South Vietnamese Recognition Day*.

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 455

Designating April 30, in 2013 and in each succeeding year, as South Vietnamese Recognition Day in Virginia.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 21, 2013

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 22, 2013

WHEREAS, South Vietnamese Americans, a proud, industrious people, make up the fourth-largest group of Asian Americans in the United States; and

WHEREAS, a South Vietnamese mass immigration to the United States began when communist tyranny swept the former Republic of Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975; and

WHEREAS, to the very end, soldiers of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) fought valiantly, defending their freedom with skill, daring, and gallantry; the ARVN 3rd Cavalry Regiment, for example, demonstrated such skill and heroism in battle that it was awarded the coveted United States Presidential Unit Citation; and

WHEREAS, nearly 60,000 American fighters died in the Vietnam War and some 224,000 South Vietnamese troops also fell defending their nation; and

WHEREAS, although the American sacrifice in Vietnam was enormous, some of the most bitter combat, including the savage warfare after the United States' withdrawal, was shouldered principally by our South Vietnamese allies; and

Continue on next page

WHEREAS, the 1968 communist Tet Offensive was designed to crack South Vietnam's *Remembering April 30th ...* will to resist, instead, South Vietnamese forces fought ferociously, and not a single unit collapsed or ran; indeed, even the police fought, turning pistols against heavily armed enemy regulars; and

WHEREAS, together with American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines, the ARVN decimated the indigenous Viet Cong guerrillas, eliminating them as an effective fighting force for the remainder of the war; and

WHEREAS, most American units had left Vietnam by 1972, yet South Vietnamese units continued to perform remarkably well; with limited American help, they defeated North Vietnam's all-out Easter Offensive, a massive conventional invasion led by Soviet T-54 tanks; and

WHEREAS, the Easter Offensive victory helped force North Vietnam to accept a negotiated end to the war; and

WHEREAS, sadly, in 1974 the United States withdrew most military support, including air power, severely restricting the flow of fuel and munitions to the ARVN; strangled by a lack of supplies, tanks and artillery pieces were allotted meager quantities of ammunition, sometimes just a few shells per day, and radios often had no batteries; and

WHEREAS, the strangulation of South Vietnamese supply lines destroyed morale and decimated combat power, making it impossible for even the bravest South Vietnamese troops to effectively defend against the final invasion by North Vietnamese soldiers; North Vietnam remained well-supplied by its communist allies in China and the Soviet Union; and

WHEREAS, everyone with ties to the Americans or the government of the Republic of Vietnam feared the threatened communist reprisals; as communist forces overran the South during the spring of 1975, 125,000 key South Vietnamese personnel were airlifted from South Vietnam to refugee centers in the United States; and

WHEREAS, as American troops and embassy staff were evacuated by waiting aircraft, terrified South Vietnamese mothers thrust their babies into the hands of complete strangers, hoping their offspring might somehow survive the approaching blood-bath; and

WHEREAS, the promised reign of terror quickly emerged and the South Vietnamese desperately fled the murderous tyranny of the communists; roughly two million South Vietnamese fled to escape North Vietnam's promised "people's paradise"; and

WHEREAS, launching small, crowded sampans, many South Vietnamese sailed into the vast, treacherous waters of the South China Sea, where hundreds of thousands drowned in the escape attempt; the South Vietnamese continued to flee their country in huge numbers from 1975 until the mid-1980s; and

WHEREAS, beginning in 1975 and for decades afterwards, well over one million South Vietnamese, especially former military officers and government employees, were imprisoned in communist concentration camps; these were euphemistically called "reeducation camps," where many thousands of South Vietnamese were "educated" to their deaths; and

WHEREAS, the communist concentration camps were characterized by brutal forced labor, political indoctrination, and deadly assignments like human mine clearing; there were no formal charges or trials; and

WHEREAS, the conditions in the camps were so savage that many surviving inmates estimate that almost a third of the prisoners of war died while in captivity; and

WHEREAS, South Vietnamese immigration to the United States peaked in 1992 when, after decades of torture, many concentration camp survivors were finally released and sponsored by their families to come to this country; and

WHEREAS, after persevering through unimaginable brutality and suffering, the South Vietnamese who escaped their homeland demonstrated admirable talent and intellect; they became an entrepreneurial, upwardly mobile group, whose poverty rate rapidly declined after their arrival in the United States; and

WHEREAS, today, 82 percent of the South Vietnamese in the United States are native-born or naturalized citizens, an exceptionally high portion of American citizenship for any immigrant group; and

WHEREAS, for several decades, South Vietnamese American patriots have contributed to the United States with intellect, skill,

Continue on next page

Remembering April 30th ... loyalty, and determination; many have served proudly in the Armed Forces of the United States; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly designate April 30, in 2013 and in each succeeding year, as South Vietnamese Recognition Day in Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the Virginia Asian Chamber of Commerce and the National Congress of Vietnamese Americans so that the members of these organizations may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter; and, be it

RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the Senate post the designation of this day on the General Assembly's website.

D. CONCLUSION

The communist conquest of the South (1954-1975)-we have to call it by its name--has sown death (more than two million people) and untold destruction and misery in Vietnam.

In this moment of somber sadness, we pause for a moment to salute the courage of southern men and women who lived under the post-1975 neo-colonialist communist regime and of the Vietnamese, northern and southern, who continue to suffer under the oppressive and corrupt communist regime.

We agree with and support them in their fight for freedom and human rights. Vietnam cannot prosper without respect of human and property rights and rule of laws.

We agree that the Hanoi communist regime has betrayed the highest ideals of freedom, justice, and equality spearheaded by our forefathers some 4,000 years ago not only by embracing communism, importing it into Vietnam, and using it to conquer North then South Vietnam, but also in destroying the economic, political, and moral structures of the country.

We continue to remember and commemorate April 30th as the DAY OF MOURNING for the hundreds of thousands people who valiantly defended our country against the communists and in the process sacrificed themselves to the common cause of Freedom. Aggression should NEVER be tolerated and justice should prevail.

We would like to thank the Virginian General Assembly for remembering April 30th as the DAY OF SOUTH VIETNAM as we all have to contribute to the rebuilding of a strong, moral, and proud Vietnam after the communist debacle.

Always remember April 30th,
always remember the sacrifice
of Vietnamese southern men and women.
always remember the destruction
and misery brought about by the communists.

1. Duong Hieu Nghia. Hoi Ky Dang Do (An incomplete Memoir, <http://chauxuannguyen.org/2013/04/19/hoi-ky-dang-do-duong-hieu-nghia-qlvnch/>)
2. in Vo et al. *The Men Of Vietnam*. Outskirts Press, 2009: 179-184; and Vo et al. *War and Remembrance*. Outskirts Press, 2009: 199.
3. http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/women-and-the-war-pt-04162013120718.html
4. Do, Kiem. *Counterpart*. 1998: 175-179. Captain Kiem Do had requested the U.S. Seventh Fleet established a line of interdiction to prevent the Chinese from bringing additional reinforcement to the battlefield. His request was denied because Washington wanted to preserve its relationship with China.
5. See chapter 7
6. Document on file.
7. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/world/asia/vietnam-clings-to-single-party-rule-as-dissent-rises-sharply.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Four Years of Jail for Blogger Ho Van Hai

After Vietnamese blogger Ho Van Hai's four-year jail sentence at the end of secret trial yesterday, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) calls on the international community to step up its pressure on Vietnam to end its repeated violations of the freedom to inform.

Charged with "anti-state propaganda" under 88 of the penal code, **Ho Van Hai**, 52, was sentenced to four years in prison followed by two years of house arrest. After being held for more than a year, he was tried behind closed doors in Ho Chi Minh City without his lawyers being present.

Hai was arrested on 2 November 2016 for blogging about education and the environment, and above all for drawing attention to a toxic spill from a steel plant owned by the Taiwanese company Formosa that poisoned millions of fish.

"Yet again, a citizen has been severely punished just for trying to inform civil society in a country where all the media are closely controlled," said Daniel Bastard, the head of RSF's Asia-Pacific desk.

"It is high time to end this terrible crackdown on citizen-journalists that began nearly two years ago. We urge the international community to remind Vietnam, a UN Human Rights Council member, of its obligations. We also call on its trade partners to open their eyes to how Vietnam suppresses freedom of information, and to draw the appropriate conclusions."

The European Parliament [adopted an urgent resolution](#) in December 2017 calling on the Vietnamese authorities to stop persecuting citizen-journalists and to free all the imprisoned bloggers.

[More than 25 bloggers were imprisoned](#), convicted or expelled in 2017. The reports about prison conditions are alarming. After [a prison visit on 29 January](#), the wife of **Nguyen Van Dai**, [a blogger held since December 2015](#), said the conditions were shocking. She said he had to sleep on a concrete surface and had almost never left his cell in more than two years. Vietnam is ranked almost at the bottom of [RSF's 2017 World Press Freedom Index](#) – 175th out of 180 countries.

Reporters Without Borders

Vietnam: End Repression Against Religious Activists

Hoa Hao Buddhist Practitioners Persecuted

(New York, February 8, 2018) – [Vietnam](#) should suspend charges against six Hoa Hao Buddhist followers and investigate whether police actions against them were taken for discriminatory reasons or religious persecution, Human Rights Watch said today. Criminal trials for the six on public order charges are scheduled for February 9, 2018, before the People's Court in An Phu district, An Giang province.

The arrests stem from a public demonstration the defendants staged to protest police actions against believers in An Giang who were on their way to commemorate the death of a religious leader's mother. Police have frequently harassed independent members of this religious minority, which has a long history of friction with the government.

"This appears to be the latest instance of official persecution of members of this religion," said [Brad Adams](#), Asia director at Human Rights Watch. *"The government should stop harassing and arresting those who belong to unsanctioned religious groups and leave people to practice their faith as they see fit."*

The accused include Bui Van Trung, also known as Ut Trung, 54; his wife Le Thi Hen, 56; his daughter Bui Thi Bich Tuyen, also known as Lai, 36; his son Bui Van Tham, 31; Nguyen Hoang Nam, also known as Teo, 36; and Le Hong Hanh, 41.

Continue on next page

End Religious Repression...

On the evening of April 18, 2017, traffic police and men in civilian clothes set up a checkpoint near Bui Van Trung's house in An Phu district, An Giang province, to stop independent Hoa Hao Buddhist followers who came to attend the anniversary commemoration of Bui Van Trung's mother's death. The police did not cite them for traffic violations but confiscated their papers. Men in civilian clothes cursed and threatened to beat them while traffic police did not intervene. This appeared to follow a pattern of [plainclothes 'thugs' being used by police for intimidation](#).

The next morning, traffic police and men in civilian clothes again set up the checkpoint. The traffic police instructed men in civilian clothes to impound the motorbikes of [Mai Thi Dung, a former political prisoner](#), and of another Hoa Hao Buddhist follower, who were both stopped at the checkpoint, though neither were cited for any traffic violations. When Bui Van Trung's son Bui Van Tham tried to stop the men from taking the motorbikes, they beat him.

In response, Bui Van Trung and dozens of Hoa Hao Buddhist followers then staged [a public demonstration](#) to protest government repression. Bui Van Tham was later charged with "disrupting public order" under article 245 of the criminal code and "resisting people on public duty" under article 257. The other five were charged with "disrupting public order."

Founded in 1939 by Huynh Phu So, Hoa Hao is a Buddhist sect based in the western Mekong delta. Communist antipathy toward the Hoa Hao dates from the first Indochina war (1946-1954) when many members of the Hoa Hao community opposed the communist-led Viet Minh after the spiritual leader of the religion, Huynh Phu So, never returned from a meeting with communist representatives in 1947. During the second Indochina war (1954-1975), Hoa Hao zones in the western Mekong delta continued to resist the Viet Cong insurgency.

Hostility between the Hoa Hao community and the Communist Party continued after the end of the war in 1975. In 1999, the Vietnamese government recognized Hoa Hao Buddhism as a religion. However, many followers refused to join the state-sanctioned Hoa Hao Buddhist Church. They have been subjected to intrusive surveillance and repression. Every year, local police have used various means to prevent independent Hoa Hao Buddhist followers from gathering for important events such as the founding day of the religion or the anniversary of the death of the Hoa Hao founder Huynh Phu So. The authorities have repeatedly set up barriers to block the Quang Minh pagoda in Cho Moi district (An Giang province), which is often used by independent Hoa Hao followers for worshipping.

Bui Van Trung turned his house into an informal home church (*dao trang*) for independent Hoa Hao Buddhist followers in 2005 and preached the religion to practitioners who gathered at his house on numerous occasions without government approval.

Since then, his family has suffered intrusive surveillance, harassment, and intimidation on a regular basis. In [April 2012](#), the local authorities cut off their electricity, threw rocks and rotten fish at their house, and sprayed water to prevent people from gathering at Bui Van Trung's house. Local police beat several people, Bui Van Trung told a reporter at Radio Free Asia. In [May 2013](#), the authorities harassed, intimidated, and assaulted many of the people who tried to attend the ceremony commemorating the anniversary of his mother's death.

His family members have also been imprisoned. In July 2012, [Bui Van Tham was arrested](#) for "resisting people on public order" under article 257 of the penal code. He was convicted and sentenced to two years and six months in prison. In October 2012, Bui Van Trung was arrested on the same charge. He was [sentenced to four years](#) in prison. In February 2014, Bui Van Trung's son-in-law Nguyen Van Minh was arrested for [a bogus traffic violation](#), charged with "disrupting public order" under article 245, and sentenced to two years and six months in prison. A bogus traffic violation was also used to [arrest of Nguyen Van Lia](#), another independent Hoa Hao leader, in 2011.

In recent years, there have been numerous incidents of protest and [government attacks](#) centering on Hoa Hao believers. In August 2005, after one serious crackdown, a Hoa Hao Buddhist follower, Tran Van Ut, [burned himself to death](#) in protest. A dozen of Hoa Hao Buddhist activists were arrested and sentenced to many years in prison. In May 2017, [Vinh Long police arrested Nguyen Huu Tan](#), an independent Hoa Hao Buddhist practitioner, on charges of conducting propaganda against the state. Police later claimed he committed suicide with a knife left in the interrogation room by a policeman. His family protested, pointing out many discrepancies between what they saw on his body and a blurry police video recording shown to them briefly.

Most recently, on January 23, 2018, the People's Court of An Giang province convicted Hoa Hao Buddhist activists Vuong Van Tha, his son Vuong Thanh Thuan, and his twin nephews, Nguyen Nhat Truong and Nguyen Van Thuong, to between six and 12 years in prison for "conducting propaganda against the state" under article 88.

At least [129 people are currently imprisoned in Vietnam](#) for expressing critical views of the government, taking part in peaceful protests, participating in religious groups not approved by the authorities, or joining civil or political organizations that the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam deems threatening to its monopoly on power. Vietnam should unconditionally release them and repeal all laws that criminalize peaceful expression, Human Rights Watch said.

"Three members of Bui Van Trung's family served prison sentences simply because they refused to practice their religion under the control of the state," Adams said. "And now it looks like the authorities are putting him and his family members on trial for the same reason."

For more Human Rights Watch reporting on Vietnam, please visit:

<https://www.hrw.org/asia/vietnam>

For more information on Vietnam's political prisoners, please visit:

<https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2017/11/03/free-vietnams-political-prisoners>