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SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture

NEWSLETTER # 115

MAY 2018



The Old Ice Cream Man

Le Van Huong

Translated by SACEI

It was summer of 1994 in front of the Splendid China Theme Park, Orlando, Florida.

The sun was burning hot—one of these torrid Floridian summer days with temperatures over 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius). In front of a client-filled gift shop, an elder Vietnamese man was selling ice cream to customers. The ice cream cart looked like a long square box, the outside of which were painted images of frozen ice cream bars and cones. The man was cordial to all his customers. Not far from there, a middle age Vietnamese man looked intensely at the ice cream vendor, as if he had rediscovered a friend of years ago from his old country. The stranger approached the cart while the vendor was busying with his clients. He looked at the vendor's nametag and recognized the name of someone he knew. But he waited until the clientele had thinned out before raising his voice.

"Excuse me, sir. Are you once the former province chief of Can Tho?"

"Certainly not. You must have mistaken me for someone else," reacted the vendor with surprise.

Cut short by the response, the stranger thought to himself, "I must have overreacted. A former province chief could not be standing here now. But there was no mistake about it, the name tag bore his name. He is as tall as before. His traits look the same although he has aged quite a bit." The stranger approached the vendor and said:

"I'm not mistaken. I remember you very well. It was thanks to you that we, contractors, had an easy life when you were made province chief of Can Tho."

Confronted by the certitude of the stranger, the vendor smiled. "You are correct. But why rehash that old stuff?"

From that time onward, the stranger befriended the vendor, an honest high official who has fallen through hard times. In subsequent meetings at restaurants outside Splendid China, I reminded him how difficult it was for us contractors to work with former province chiefs. But from 1963 to 1965 when he was the chief, things got easier. Those who followed the rules won the bids; that was why we were so fond of him. He argued that he did not help anyone in particular because he was just following the orders. The President had made him province chief to provide security to the villagers by militarily controlling the Viet Cong. His civilian deputy took care of all the administrative matters although he personally had advised him to be honest and not request bribes.

While he was selling ice cream, some Vietnamese people who also recognized him liked him while others felt sorry for him. He told them not to feel sorry for him. The communists had jailed and mistreated him for more than 10 years. To live free in a western country and be able to earn an honest living is better than to live under the communists. Especially, when talking about reeducation camp, he told them not use the word reeducation because the communists mistreated, terrorized, and took revenge on the people, but they did not reeducate anyone. The ice cream vendor in the Splendid China Theme Park was the former

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The Old Ice Cream Man...

General Tran Ba Di, an exemplary elder.

This short essay just raises a few significant points, but does not cover all his major military accomplishments. While he was Can Tho province chief, then Lieutenant Colonel Di was known for the following battles. He liberated Vinh Long province during the Tet Offensive. In January 1968, around Tet Mau Than, the top two military commanders, Lt Colonel Nguyen Ngoc Diep and his deputy went on a military mission. They were ambushed on their return to their headquarters, wounded and transferred to a hospital for treatment. Vinh Long province was like a snake without head. Gen Lam Quang Thi, commander of the 9th ARVN division assigned Lt Colonel Duong Hieu Nghia to temporarily assume the command of Vinh Long. But when the Tet Offensive officially began, Lt Col Nghia being on leave remained stuck in Saigon. Gen Thi then ordered Lt Col Di, deputy commander of the 9th ARVN division to go to Vinh Long to take a look at the situation. The same evening, alone with a radio set on his back, Lt Col Di was helilifted to the command post in Vinh Long. Because of heavy ground to air artillery, he was instead dropped at the river wharf and had to walk a few hundred steps to reach the CP. There, he coordinated the different military units to defend Vinh Long province and called for air and ground artillery support on enemy positions. Since the VC offered strong resistance with the intention of overrunning the province, Lt Col Di was forced to request additional force. A few days later, an ARVN regiment was sent in to connect with local forces. Di ordered the counterattack destroying almost all enemy forces. In 1970, as the commander of the 9th ARVN division, he led the attack on the secret VC headquarters of Ba Khu on Cambodian soil (province of Ta Keo) destroying the enemy's infrastructure and confiscating a number of military hardware.

After 1975, the VC sent him to reeducation camps for more than 17 years. After his release, he immigrated to the U.S. in 1993 under the Humanitarian Operation. Three months later after completing the immigration procedures, he began working for Dobbs, a food service provider for airports. Six months later, he transferred to Splendid China Theme Park before moving to Disney World where he worked as a floor stacker from 1999 to 2011 retiring only at age 80 because of joint ache. He worked for Dobbs, Splendid China, and Disney World and paid taxes for a total of 18 years meeting the 10 year-minimum requirement for receiving retirement benefits. At one time, when his supervisor at Disney World advised him about retiring, he told him that although he was old, he felt strong enough to continue working. When another person asked why he did not want to enjoy the perks of retirement, he explained that while the VC had imprisoned him and his friends, the US had allowed them to enjoy freedom in an egalitarian society by bringing them to America. Therefore, he did not want to further burden the society by using social benefits while he was still able to work.



General Tran Ba Di

General Tran Ba Di was quite an unusual man. While in the military, besides his moral integrity he was a gifted, courageous, and simple leader who was loved by his soldiers. When older, he still preserved his essence of a hero. Lt Colonel Nguyen Kim Son, a former director of the Artillery School of the 9th ARVN division once wrote in his book *"the Death of a River"* the following words: "General Tran Ba Di is a peaceful and honest person who was loved and respected by his staff. The day he left the 9th division, the people of Vinh Long displayed on all streets of the province banners expressing their gratitude toward him and sorrow to see him leave." On the other hand, the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Graham Martin sent to Washington on December 5, 1973 a 6-page memo detailing the life and military experience of General Tran Ba Di throughout his many years of leading combat units in South Vietnam from a platoon to a battalion leader. As to his moral integrity, the Ambassador reported, "They have four children, three boys and a girl from 17 to 8. The Di's reportedly live on his military income and there has been no mention of corrupt activities on his or his wife's part." That document was declassified on August 13, 2009.

General Tran Ba Di passed away on March 23, 2018 in Orlando, Florida at the age of 87. A saying goes like this, "A lobster dies leaving behind its shell; a person who dies leaves behind his reputation." General Di left behind a sterling reputation for years to come.

Who Were the Real Nationalists in Vietnam?

Stephen B. Young

MARCH 9, 2018

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/opinion/who-were-the-real-nationalists-in-vietnam.html>

The Tet offensive was a turning point in the Vietnam War for Vietnamese nationalism. With North Vietnam having been turned over to the Communists by the French in 1954, Vietnam's southern provinces had become a haven for non-Communist nationalists, just as the western states of Germany were a haven for German non-Communists and the southern half of Korea was a secure state for Korean nationalists.

In the new state of South Vietnam, with American assistance, President Ngo Dinh Diem successfully built a functioning non-Communist state. Responding to this resilience of the nationalists, in 1959, the Communist regime in Hanoi decided to destroy what their rivals had achieved. Their intrusion into the internal affairs of South Vietnam made considerable headway, and set off what we now call the American war in Vietnam. But it took the Tet offensive to bring the various strains of southern nationalism together.

In early March 1968, the American ambassador in Saigon, Ellsworth Bunker, reported to President Lyndon B. Johnson on a remarkable change among the South Vietnamese.

Instead of falling apart, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam was growing — in February, after the Tet attacks, 10,084 South Vietnamese volunteered for military service, versus 3,924 the previous February. Some 10,600 draftees reported for duty that month, versus 4,006 the previous February.

It wasn't just that new recruits were signing up; veteran soldiers were staying, and stepping up. Of the 155 South Vietnamese regular maneuver battalions, 118 were rated combat effective. In the field, companies of the South Vietnamese Regional Forces, a militia that manned outposts and guarded critical infrastructure, were at fighting strength, with 99 out of a 123-man complement present for duty. The platoons of another militia, the Popular Forces, which guarded villages, were averaging 29 men out of a full complement of 35, another unprecedented turnout. The new civil defense militia was joined by 19,000 volunteers in 20 provinces.

South Vietnam's president, Nguyen van Thieu, stepped up to provide more vigorous leadership. He replaced corrupt and incompetent officials and personally headed the recovery committee charged with rebuilding destroyed or damaged infrastructure and buildings and resettling over 500,000 people who had fled Communist control. And elsewhere in national politics, new, surprising political coalitions formed to vociferously oppose Hanoi's aggression. These determined nationalist efforts continued to gain momentum during the ensuing months and years. A new pacification and development program, placed under village leadership, largely defeated Hanoi's southern followers in the National Liberation Front (also known as the Viet Cong). By 1973, the N.L.F. had just 25,000 fighters left. South Vietnam, by contrast, had 748,000 combat troops, along with an additional million citizens in lightly armed self-defense units. The nationalists controlled 90 percent of South Vietnam's population, 85 percent of which lived in secure communities.

South Vietnam's economy grew continuously. Elections were held in all villages and provinces, and several times for the national Senate and House of Representatives, bringing into power a wide range of political outlooks, without anyone seriously proposing surrender to Hanoi's one-party dictatorship.

The strength of South Vietnam's newly energized military held up for years; during the 1972 summer offensive, in which Hanoi threw its entire army into the south to take advantage of the withdrawal of American ground troops, the South Vietnamese successfully defended their positions, relying on the United States for air support only.

What made this resistance to Communist aggression so effective? It was not as if the South Vietnamese had suddenly discovered nationalist pride in March 1968. Rather, it reached back to millennia-old traditions of ethnic pride.

Put in simple terms, the fundamental cultural norm for many Vietnamese is dependence on the will of heaven, which gives individualism to each Vietnamese, provides the people good or bad fortune, and mandates a sovereign state for them. It's also a bad fit for communism, which is Western in its premises about class warfare and government ownership of the means of production.

Of course, historians have largely accepted the notion that the North Vietnamese leadership was at least as nationalist as it was communist. But in fact, that conflation was intentional, and artificial: As early as 1945, party leaders real-

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Real Nationalists in VN... ized that they could never rally Vietnamese to the banner of Communism, so they used the tactic of working through a supposedly non-Communist front, an approach that the Soviets had promoted for the 1920s struggle against feudalism in China, and then against fascism globally.

The ties between Communists and nationalists were always tenuous, precisely because the Communists recognized their incompatibility. In 1945, the Communists outlawed two nationalist parties, and murdered the founder of one of them. Two years later, they murdered Huynh Phu So, the charismatic young man who had founded the nationalist Hoa Hao religion in the Mekong Delta in 1939.

As late as 1960, the 10-point plan proposed by North Vietnam for the formation of the National Liberation Front made no single mention of communism as the future for South Vietnam. Instead, it leaned heavily on anti-Americanism and the overthrow of the Saigon regime that it said, playing on traditional Vietnamese nationalism, lacked merit-virtue.

So, in 1968, when ordinary South Vietnamese considered the military failure of the Communists in the Tet offensive, the failure of their fellow citizens to come out in support of Hanoi, and the success of South Vietnamese forces in fighting back, many concluded that heaven had turned the tides of fate their way.

Obviously, even this revitalized nationalist spirit alone wasn't enough to defeat North Vietnam's aggression. In 1975, Hanoi conquered Saigon, after the Americans withdrew their forces and then, just a few years later, much of their financial and military support.

But it's also important to understand that the impetus for the American withdrawal was, in large part, a misunderstanding about Vietnamese nationalism by the antiwar movement, which came to dominate much American thinking about the war. While there were American radicals who indeed embraced Ho Chi Minh's communist vision, the movement in general preferred to see him as a nationalist first, fighting for his country against colony and empire.

It's true that Ho fought for independence from France, and then against the Americans for a unified, independent Vietnam. In that limited sense he was true to deep Vietnamese aspirations for cultural autonomy. But that narrow demand for independence did not make him a nationalist, especially in the Vietnamese tradition. Ho wanted independence for a country to be ruled in its culture, society, economy and politics by his party alone.

Except for a relatively small contingent that found French rule acceptable — some Catholics, some French-speaking intellectuals and some well-off families — most every Vietnamese wanted independence without communism. Had the Americans understood this, they might have better understood what motivated South Vietnam, and not moved so quickly to abandon them just as they were coalescing into a unified, motivated political and military force.

Propagandists Masquerading as Historians

Terry Garlock

Wed, Jan 31 in The Citizen, a local Fayette County, GA newspaper

I was only one of many Vietnam veterans who wrote opinion columns criticizing the Vietnam War film by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, opining their work seemed more like propaganda than history. In doing so I occasionally used "Burns" as shorthand for the pair, to which Ms. Novick emailed me her objection. She is correct, I should consistently include her name as co-producer because she is equally culpable in the hit piece they brazenly call a documentary.

So, Ms. Novick and Mr. Burns, this is for you. My back-handed compliment is that your wholly inaccurate film is a slick rationalization for aging Americans who, decades ago, loudly encouraged our enemy while we were killing each other in combat. For those harboring doubts about actively opposing us in their youth while we served our country in a war, your film may have supplied just the soothing salve they need.

You bent the truth in your film too far, too consistently, too repetitively, and omitted too much to leave any room for me to believe those errors, omissions, distortions, half-truths and complete falsehoods were remotely accidental.

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Propagandists Masquerading as Historians...

Like a house of distorted mirrors, you portrayed the murderous and avowed Stalinist Ho Chi Minh as a nationalist driven by reunification of North and South Vietnam rather than his real commitment to Communist conquest of free South Vietnam. Your film repeatedly depicted the war as unwinnable, the North Vietnamese cause as just, war crimes between the two sides as morally equivalent, American troops as victims, South Vietnamese as mere bit players, all that and much more of your content completely opposite of the truth. You selected for dominant interviews from the tiny percentage of American combat veterans with a grievance who joined the protestors when they returned home.

I cannot know the motivation in your hearts, but I have the stark impression that your plan from the very beginning was to delegitimize America's role in the war and justify the anti-war left by very selectively emphasizing negatives and minimizing positives to shape the film's message to your liking.

There is a tragic irony in protests by the anti-war left and your justification for them. The noble cause of the Vietnam War was trying to stop the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia, especially important given the hegemony of China in the region. Even so, while we answered our country's call and honorably performed our difficult duty, leadership in the White House and Pentagon created a patchwork of micromanagement and idiotic war-fighting limitations, obstacles that got thousands of us killed while preventing victory. Those egregious and very real failures alone would have been worthy of protest, but your buddies on the left either didn't notice or felt compelled to manufacture their own demons, like John Kerry's fantastic lie that we were raping, murdering and rampaging in Vietnam like Genghis Khan.

The outrage is our enemy's daily atrocities against their own people, juxtaposed against how we Americans defended and helped those civilians in a hundred ways, both ignored by the news media while American troops were maligned.

Ms. Novick, you were just eleven years old when America withdrew from Vietnam in 1973, so you might have missed personally knowing the effects of false stereotypes about Vietnam and its veterans.

Like so many others, I came away from that experience with my eyes opened, having learned by watching young Americans the true meaning of honor, courage and trust. Those men and women were then and still are the finest people of character I have ever known.

I saw my fellow helicopter pilots fly into enemy fire routinely, taking mortal risks to protect civilians and their brothers, and I saw grunts do the same crazy things for each other. I flew gun cover for Dustoff crews braving enemy fire to pick up wounded, and I flew gun cover for LRP's sneaking in enemy turf, the bravest men I have ever seen; if you have an open mind, read *Six Silent Men* by Gary Linderer to understand how bold our Rangers were.

I saw doctors, nurses and orderlies drive themselves to physical and emotional exhaustion every day as they struggled to send us home alive, and still we found time to send medical help to poor villages where medicine had never been seen. There was much to admire, and when I finally wrote a book my title tells my sentiments: *Strength and Honor: America's Best in Vietnam*.

Anti-war voices were overwhelming, and America never knew what a fine job their youth had done in Vietnam, despite impediments imposed by our own government, despite collaboration with the enemy by our own fellow citizens.

When we came home, the country seemed to us to have turned principles upside down. Wearing the American uniform invited hostility while refusing to serve was somehow a virtue. These remarkable troops, young enough to be called boys but now battle-hardened men, never lost a single significant battle against a very tough enemy, but they didn't know how or want to engage in political argument. And so many like me kept their head down and went on with life. Nobody wanted to hear about our experience anyway, for two reasons.

First, everybody already knew all the answers about Vietnam, they had seen it on TV. Second, in those days the Vietnam War was a shunned topic, something dirty not discussed in polite company.

Even some family members skirted the subject, wary of the rumors they heard about rampant war crimes, drug addiction and vets prone to snap into violence. During his first visit home, Tony Foster's mother asked him what kind of drugs he was on.

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Propagandists Masquerading as Historians...

False stereotypes took root from repetition in a media leaning hard against the war. Movies reinforced the lies with absurd stories and unreal characters that indulged Hollywood's ridiculous fantasies of the war. Period fiction followed suit, and TV dramas occasionally created a Vietnam vet when they needed an unbalanced, unpredictable and dangerous character.

Spreading these attitudes has consequences. Not everyone thought the worst of us, but enough did to change the national mood.

Even small slights left lasting impressions. Jay Standish escorted his date to their seats near the front of an off-Broadway theater, proudly wearing his Marine Corps dress blues, prompting boos from many in the audience. A Sgt. named Chip went to see a Priest for pre-marital counseling wearing his Army dress greens, and the Priest told him to come back when he was wearing decent clothing.

Vietnam vets learned to leave the war off their resume to avoid rejection in the first cull of job applicants. They soon knew to keep quiet in college classes since anti-war professors used their grading pen as a weapon.

ROTC membership plummeted and some professors wouldn't accept members as students. Military recruiters were ejected from campus. The uniform was not popular, as R.J. DelVecchio learned by hostility to his Marine Corps uniform at the University of Maryland and was advised not to wear it again on campus. Wearing a uniform made some feel invisible waiting to be served in a restaurant.

Drew Johnson, who ferried Navy aircraft to Vietnam over an extended period, returned through California airports at least two dozen times and saw the escalation of vitriol aimed at our returning troops by anti-war protestors who, by my measure, were unfit to shine a veteran's shoes. Officials and most in the public merely looked the other way while protestors yelled "babykiller" and worse at returning vets, threw nasty splatter packets at them and frequently used their own spit.

In 1971, my commanding officer told me to remind my men not to wear their uniform off-base, for their own personal safety.

Some anti-war tactics were despicable. An F-105 fighter pilot I will leave nameless bet his life every time he flew into North Vietnam through the toughest air defenses in the world. When he was shot down, even before his wife received official notification, anti-war activists called to say her husband was a baby-killing a**hole and deserved what he got.

There were many thousands of these uncouth episodes incited by fabrications from the anti-war left, and they were made worse that they were aimed at Americans who served honorably and sacrificed much. And yet every Vietnam vet I know is proud of their service, fiercely patriotic and doesn't want even a shred of sympathy.

They do want one thing. They want the truth told about them, their enemy, their war.

Now, after forty something years, Ms. Novick and Mr. Burns, along comes the misrepresentation you call a documentary, very pretty but with only fleeting intersections with the truth and reviving conflict long ago buried. It seems, to me at least, that you pre-planned your strategy to build up to your conclusion in support of your friends on the left, "The Vietnam War was a tragedy, immeasurable and irredeemable."

Even with 10 episodes over 18 hours, you left out vital pieces of the story. In 1974, in the aftermath of Watergate, Democrats were elected in a landslide and the new Congress violated America's promise by cutting off funding for South Vietnam's self-defense. Then when the Communists attacked South Vietnam in massive force, Congress refused to honor America's pledge to come to their aid. The left's view seems to be North Vietnam's conquest had the happy result of reunification. Senator J. William Fulbright, who provided the forum for that spectacular liar John Kerry, said about the fall of Saigon that he was "... no more depressed than I would be about Arkansas losing a football game to Texas."

Trivializing the human cost of Communist victory, you didn't mention tens of thousands of executions, the million or so sent to brutal re-education camps, the panicked populace fleeing in rickety overpacked boats and dying by the tens of thousands. You neglected North Vietnam's obscene practice of bulldozing South Vietnamese graves, and the influx of North Vietnamese to take over the best farms, businesses, homes and jobs in South Vietnam. And you swept under the rug America's shame, the betrayal of our ally, never mind the genocide by Communists as they murdered two million in Cambodia next door.

Propagandists Masquerading as Historians...

All in all, Ms. Novick and Mr. Burns, kudos on the slick appearance mixing photos, film clips, tilted narration and sad music to set the mood for your biased content. I think you have succeeded in making your semi-factual slop believable to a naïve public, and students in schools you send it to will likely lap it up because they don't know better.

That means we will need to redouble our efforts to tell the story true.

As I tell students when I speak to them about the Vietnam War, "Why does this ancient history matter to you? Because you need to know how a false history takes root, and you need to be smart enough to beware propaganda when you turn on TV news." Or watch a film labeled a "documentary."

Terry Garlock lives in Peachtree City, GA. He was a Cobra helicopter gunship pilot in the Vietnam War.

Ken Burn's Vietnam

Bing West

Every writer and film director has to project a frame reference and a set of beliefs; otherwise the work will be incoherent. Burns concludes his film with these words, "The Vietnam War was a tragedy, immeasurable and irredeemable." That overblown view shaped his narrative. The tragedy of Vietnam is the oppression of its people by an octogenarian communist tragedy.

The film persuades the viewer that America was predestined to defeat. Nonsense. A stronger case can be made that our military and political leaders doomed their own mission by strategic confusion and entropy of will. We granted the enemy ground sanctuaries in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. And after we withdrew in 1972, Congress forbade all future bombing and slashed aid to the South Vietnamese while the Soviet Union and China provided heavy weapons to the North.

Burns selected veterans who spoke in the lugubrious tones of the defeated. Yet poll after poll show that 90 percent of us who fought that war are proud we serve our nation. At the conclusion of the documentary, a veteran delivers this peroration: "We have learned a lesson—that we can't impose our will on others." Nonsense. The true lesson is that wars should be fought to impose your will upon the enemy. We imposed our will upon Nazi Germany and Bushido Japan in 1945. If you don't intend to accomplish that, or if the costs however enumerated, exceeded the gains from the war, don't fight. But given how we have over 16 years driven backwards into a cul-de-sac in Afghanistan, while Pakistan provides sanctuary for the Taliban Islamic extremists, it does not appear we learned that lesson.

In summary, Burns is unfair to the valor and decency of those Americans who fought, and he implies a moral equivalence with those who dodged the draft and opposed the war and those who fought it. He believes in geopolitical predestination rather than God's gift and challenge to each one of us to decide our individual destination. Our Congress chose to quit. Don't put that on the backs of us who fought.

The Saturday Evening POST, April 32, 2018

Bing West served in the Marine infantry in Vietnam and was Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the Reagan Administration.

The Plight of the Vietnamese People After the Conquest of South Vietnam *Mike Bengé*

It has been estimated that over the first five years of rule, as many as 65,000 South Vietnamese were executed by the communist North Vietnamese after the conquest of the Republic of South Vietnam (RSV) – April 29, 1975 thru 1980. We may never know the full number of Vietnamese who were imprisoned in communist concentration camps and soviet-style gulags in Vietnam. Reliable sources* estimate the number to be between 800,000 and one million. While some were released after three brutal years of incarceration, many were detained far longer, including officers and senior NCOs of South Vietnam's Army, Navy, Airborne, Marines, Rangers, as well as government officials and other politicians, intellectuals, school teachers, doctors, artists, poets, musicians, religious leaders of all faiths, northern emigres, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong *Chieu Hoi* defectors, and ethnic minorities who fought alongside the U.S. Some were imprisoned for more than 15 years. If the Vietnamese communists follow the precedent set by other communist regimes, some may still be held.

Of those incarcerated, it is estimated that over 165,000 died from torture, malnutrition, diseases and deprivation of medical treatment. Punishment for violating "camp rules" included being shackled in crowded unbearably hot metal boxes, dark cells, abandoned wells, or deep narrow ditches. Prisoners were fortunate if they were fed once a day – a bowl of rice or sorghum and water. They were forced to eat, sleep, and carry out bodily functions on the spot. Many were shackled so tightly that they became afflicted with gangrene and lost their hands or feet, or died. The usual punishment for attempted escape was execution upon recapture.

Repression was also severe against the [Hoa](#), the ethnic Chinese population of Vietnam, who the Vietnamese communists regarded as a security threat. The Hoa controlled much of the retail trade in South Vietnam, and the communists immediately began expropriating their properties and businesses. In May 1978, the Hoa began to leave Vietnam in large numbers for China, initially by land. Some families were split up when ethnic Vietnamese spouses were ordered to divorce ethnic Chinese husbands and wives. By the end of 1979, 250,000 Hoa had sought refuge in China, and many tens of thousands more were among the boat people scattered across Southeast Asia and in Hong Kong.

As in Cambodia, one million Vietnamese, mostly city dwellers, "volunteered" to live in "New Economic Zones" where they were to survive by reclaiming land and clearing jungle to grow crops. Conditions there were also extremely harsh, food was scarce, malnourishment was rife, and diseases and malaria were rampant with no medicines for treatment. All these factors resulted in an untold number of deaths.

No one really knows how many Vietnamese chose to flee in small boats on the open seas, but estimates by the Australian Immigration Ministry run as high as 1.5 million. The estimated number of deaths varies from 50,000 to 200,000. The primary cause of death was drowning, but many refugees were also attacked by pirates and murdered, or sold into slavery and prostitution. In one year, UNHCR (United Nations High Commission on Refugees) recorded that 452 boats carrying 15,479 Vietnamese refugees had arrived in Thailand. Of that number, 349 boats had been attacked by pirates – three times each, on average – 578 women were raped; 228 women were abducted; and 881 people were dead or missing. The [UN](#) convened an international conference in [Geneva, Switzerland](#) in July 1979. Western countries agreed to accelerate resettlement and Vietnam agreed to promote orderly departures, which then declined to a few thousand per month. (This created an opportunity for the communists to extort any wealth the refugees might have in order to gain authorization to leave – gold bars were preferred. The reported cost was the equivalent of \$3,000 for each adult and \$1,500 for each child.) Of those who survived the perils of exodus by boat, the United States accepted around 823,000 refugees, Britain 19,000, France 96,000 and Australia and Canada 137,000. These numbers exclude tens of thousands of Cambodians and Laotians who fled overland from Hanoi's militarist expansionism into Cambodia and Laos. Approximately 10% of the Laotian population fled the country.

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Unfortunately, many thousands were refoiled (returned) to their countries under brutal communist control after being deemed economic refugees, despite the threat of retribution. Most were probably sentenced to toil and die in gulags in "New Economic Zones."

Plight of Vietnamese People...

Mike Bengé spent eleven years in Vietnam as a Foreign Service Officer; five as a Prisoner of War of the North Vietnamese. He is a Student of Southeast Asian politics. He is very active in advocating for human rights, religious freedom and democracy for countries of former Indochina and has written extensively on these subjects.

VSG: Vietnamese Studies Group

The core mission of the **Vietnamese Studies Group** listserv is facilitating the exchange of academic knowledge about Vietnam and Vietnamese history, society, culture, and politics.

<http://mailman11.u.washington.edu/mailman/listinfo/vsg>

A couple of years ago I joined a forum called the Vietnam Studies Group, mostly a bunch of academics interested in many aspects of what goes on in Viet Nam. The bulk of them are just researchers looking at art, literature, business practices, internal politics, etc. A few are also serious admirers of Hanoi, and holding clear antiwar biases, even some anti-US biases, that occasionally get reflected in a post or a comment on some article someone has posted.

One of the members has been religiously posting all the NYT articles on the war, which by now adds up to something like 60-70 of them. I would say the great majority are antiwar in various levels, from mildly to really serious (like the most recent one by Chris Appy), a small fraction are more or less neutral, and maybe 5 or 6 have been positive in any sense.

When the worst ones have come along, I have posted critical comments to them on the forum, as factual as possible, probably a dozen or so. I have also posted positive comments on 3 or 4 others. My critical comments have often brought down assorted zingers and rebuttals, which I replied to carefully, since the rules of the forum forbid anything that even comes close to a personal attack. The moderators warned me that they were getting complaints from members about my causing conflict in the forum, some were so upset they were threatening to leave.

I wrote back to the people running the group and pointed out that as long as they were permitting the posting of newspaper articles, which in fact were not really part of the focus of the forum on current events in Viet Nam, then they had to expect people to make comments on those postings. But that I wasn't intending to offend or upset anyone, and would be careful to stay in the rules.

Another stupid NYT article came along, one of those "Agent Orange poisoned the land forever and has killed hundreds of thousands, and it's the horrible shame of the USA", and I posted a comment about its inaccuracies. This brought on a whole bunch of zingers, which I carefully answered in private messages rather than public ones. However the public zingers on me kept coming, even though three other people wrote in short notes supporting in part what I had been saying. I protested to the bosses that here I was getting attacked publicly, against the rules, will you do anything?

Well, they did do something. They had their yearly Board meeting in DC, and took a vote and expelled me from the forum. The rules say there's supposed to be a sequence of noted offenses against the rules, but they decided I was a "special case", and that some people were upset with my inputs and made to feel "uncomfortable", that the forum was not the safe space they want it to be, and that was sufficient to justify throwing me out.

Part of me finds this amusing.... in what is claimed to be an open forum of discussion, someone who makes some others uncomfortable sometimes cannot be tolerated. Adults with all kinds of qualifications, PhDs, professors, etc. cannot bear to be "uncomfortable". Bear in mind in the forum you can choose to block any other member's messages, so that all anyone had to do was block my address and they'd never see my posts again. But that was not enough, just having me there at all was too upsetting for these overeducated snowflakes.

Why do we feel like the culture is sliding downhill steadily? I dunno.....

But the good news is I won't waste any more time casting pearls before swine!

Former VSG member (name withheld)

SWJ Magazine Review: “Vietnam Veterans for Factual History”

W.R. Baker
04/09/2018

The new [Vietnam Veterans for Factual History](#) is a resource designed to address a concern by its creators and associated blog readers that many history books and teachers are presenting a fraudulent picture of what was done and accomplished in Vietnam.

It would be a mistake to think of this magazine as just a place to air complaints and reminisce about Vietnam. Most of the members are Vietnam veterans, which is unusual today for any magazine to have so many with a shared unique background and who can “talk the talk because they walked the walk.” But this magazine offers more with academics and “Indochina veterans with special expertise in various aspects of the war,” too. Most have written books and articles on Vietnam subjects, as well. Vietnamese-Americans are also members and present a side of Vietnam that is usually overlooked or deliberately ignored. Members’ books can be identified throughout the magazine.

What binds these people together is the last two words of their organization, factual history. Somehow, the years since Vietnam have seen the repetition of erroneous information that has, in turn, been repeated so often that they are now presented as facts. Likewise, the pseudo-experts today are not seemingly interested in the facts as much as they are interested in selling their books, obtaining their doctorates, or resting on their ill-gotten laurels. The old expression about “repeating a lie often enough...” seems to have come true. Because of this, factual information about the U.S. presence in Vietnam is now called “revisionist” because the foxes are now guarding hen house in academia and in the press.

The premiere issue takes on the Burns and Novick Vietnam “documentary” that was hailed by the press even before it was released. While Vietnam Veterans felt differently, the press knew better and didn’t print the objections to the film, but unlike them, the specifics of why veterans didn’t like it are addressed in the pilot issue. Carefully choosing who to interview and their Vietnam roles obviously slanted the story.

Tet 1968’s 50th anniversary also had a place in this issue, as one would expect. A review of a recently released book about this subject and information about the VC massacre in Hue is presented. A section written by many who “lived it” has numerous articles that individually present how Tet impacted their unit and themselves. Included in this overall discussion is Rich Botkin’s article entitled “Cronkite—The Broadcast You Never Saw or Heard” which includes a link to the actual broadcast he made in Vietnam.

The politics of the time, politicians, other personalities, and what was occurring back home are not glossed over, as well.

“Harry Summers Remembered” is a salute to a Vietnam veteran, strategist, and the first editor of Vietnam magazine. How his Vietnam magazine has waffled leftward is also bemoaned as an unfortunate event.

The greater expanse of Southeast Asia has/will have discussions about the politics and war effort in these surrounding countries.

All of the contributors freely and without remuneration write their articles, research the facts (with or without advice from other members), as necessary. All are experts in their particular areas, all should be Ph.D’s (though the

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leftist professors of today wouldn't probably allow it to happen). *SWJ Magazine Review: VN Veterans for Factual History...*

The VVFH might turn towards also printing their issues in the future, depending upon subscriber interest and support.

The magazine will have much to contribute to the Vietnam and Southeast Asia story, though the popularity of criticizing the America and South Vietnam of yesteryear remains almost mainstream. Those who know better have taken up the gauntlet to convey the truth, no matter how bad or how good the real facts are.

A word of note: "This pilot issue is being offered free to interested parties who register at www.VVFHMag.org. After receiving this issue, we would greatly appreciate it if you would return to the website, provide a rating/comment on this issue and let us know whether or not you would be willing to be a subscriber, if the interest in this issue warrants a continuation of this effort."

A small enough requirement for the truth about one of the most divisive times in history.

About the Author(s)

W. R. Baker

W. R. (Bob) Baker graduated with the first 96B/Intelligence Analyst class at Fort Huachuca, AZ in 1971. He was then assigned to the 1st Battalion (which soon became the 571st MI Det.), 525th MI Group, headquartered in Da Nang, Vietnam. His further assignments included positions at Fort Bliss, Texas; two tours with the European Defense Analysis Center (EUDAC) in Stuttgart-Vaihingen, Germany; and the 513th MI Group in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

He left the US Army and worked as an analyst for Interstate Electronics, Northrop-Grumman and Xontec defense contractors before teaching in primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Baker has a bachelor of science degree in Government from the University of Maryland and a master's degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Dayton. He has authored other Easter Offensive articles and is currently writing a book on this subject.

Riffing On One of the World's Greatest Sandwiches

David Tanis
04/13/2018



The classic banh mi contains pâté, ham and roasted pork, but miniature pan-fried crab cakes are a clever twist on the original. Credit Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Oddly enough, I first tasted banh mi, one of the world's most delectable sandwiches, in Albuquerque.

This was decades ago; I was hungry and grabbed one from the checkout counter of a giant Asian supermarket. Two bites in, I was hooked. It was extraordinarily flavorful — sweet, spicy and meaty. For me, it was a pleasant change from the usual New Mexico menu of tacos, enchiladas and tamales (though I love those, too).

There are now, of course, numerous Vietnamese-American communities and Vietnamese restaurants all over the United States, so banh mi is readily available, known to many as a first-rate quick bite.

The classic, built in a crisp baguette spread with mayonnaise, contains pâté, thinly sliced ham and roasted pork, along with strips of pickled vegetables, cilantro, cucumber and hot chiles.

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World's Greatest Sandwiches... *Banh mi* is, after all, a hybrid, with French colonial roots. The French eventually pulled out of Vietnam, and for the most part, local flavors replaced Gallic ones. But the baguette, mayonnaise and liver pâté remained.

Shops specializing in the sandwich are fairly easy to find in New York City, but all are not created equal. Much of their success lies in the bread: ideally a sandwich roll or baguette, with a crisp crust and fluffy interior, and always heated. When I was in Vietnam a few years ago, the bread was warmed over hot coals, kept behind the counter for that specific task.

But at home, you might use your oven, and a kaiser roll, a small ciabatta or a bolillo from a corner bodega. Or look for an old-fashioned airy baguette from a French bakery (not the denser, new-wave type).

However much I love them, though, I'm no more than an amateur, one who has gleaned quite a few tips from the California-based teacher and food writer Andrea Nguyen's book, "The Banh Mi Handbook" (Ten Speed Press, 2014). In it, she offers countless twists on the original, including fillings of grilled chicken, stir-fried beef and char siu pork, and even a Louisiana po' boy-style banh mi with fried oysters, all of which she claims as authentic.

Emboldened, I decided to make banh mi with miniature pan-fried crab cakes and all the spicy trimmings. It received raves, but I've also made banh mi with fried shrimp. Both would be approved by Ms. Nguyen, I suspect.

Other options could include mayonnaise-dressed lobster or crab salad, as kind of riff on a Yankee lobster roll. But maybe don't try serving it to die-hard, traditionalist New Englanders.

Recipe: [Crab Cake Banh Mi Sandwich](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/dining/banh-mi-sandwich-recipe.html?)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/dining/banh-mi-sandwich-recipe.html?>



The crab meat is mixed with cornstarch, scallions and mayonnaise before being rolled in bread crumbs and flattened into cakes. Credit Karsten Moran for The New York Times



The crab cakes need one or two minutes on each side to be nicely browned and crisped. Credit Karsten Moran for The New York Times