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#### **INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

The 2018 SACEI Man of the Year— Lt. Col. Tran Nghoc Hue (Ret.)	1
Lam Son 719	1
Indochina in the Year of the Pig - 1971: Vietnam Veterans for Factual History	5
Douglas Ramsey Memorial	6
Freed Vietnam Blogger "Mother Mushroom" Arrives in the U.S.	9
Ms. Eva Nguyen Binh, French Ambassador to Cambodia	10
2017 World Bank Data, GDP per capita	11
Saigon 1920	11

## **SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE**



**To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture**

**NEWSLETTER # 121**

**NOVEMBER 2018**



### **The 2018 SACEI Man of the Year Lt. Col. Tran Ngoc Hue (Ret.)**



- **Vietnamese National Military (Dalat), 1963**
- **Counterinsurgency training in Vietnamese Ranger School**
- **Training at the Jungle Warfare School in Malaysia, Fall 1965**
- **U.S. Silver Star for the battle of Hue**
- **On the spot promotion to Lt. Col. during the attack on Tchepone, Laos**
- **POW in communist camps from 1971-1983.**
- **13 Years in communist reeducation camps as POW**

## Lam Son 719 *Nghia M. Vo*

To duplicate the success of the 1970 US/GVN successful Cambodian incursion that disrupted North Vietnamese supply lines and destroyed their base areas in the Cambodian borders and to test the effectiveness of "Vietnamization," Saigon-Washington gave birth to Lam Son 719 operation.

But unlike the flat Cambodian terrain, the rugged mountainous Laotian territories and the December 1970 Cooper-Church Amendment passed after the Cambodian incursion would prove difficult to manage. The Amendment prevented U.S. forces to go into Laos and U.S. advisers could not accompany ARVN forces to which they were attached. The ARVN had to go by themselves.

"The Ho Chi Minh Trail was in 1971 the only means of supplying the entire enemy force in South Vietnam, southern Laos and Cambodia. If the ARVN could cut the trail ...they would deal a devastating blow to all communist operations in South Vietnam... The North Vietnamese had to oppose Lam Son 719 with every resource they could bring to bear." (1)

### The Plan

It was bold and risky. General Bruce Palmer wrote, "Only a Patton or a MacArthur would have made such a daring move; an Eisenhower or a Bradley would not have attempted it." (2) Scheduled to start on 30 January, 1971, it would end 90 days later when the Southwest monsoon would end all tactical operations. Although many concepts of a westward attack along Highway 9 existed long before Operation Lam Son 719, (3) its execution was so difficult and impractical that no one had dared to claim as being its originator.

In phase I or Operation Dewey Canyon II, U.S. troops would clear the area to the Vietnam/Laos border and reactivate Khe Sanh as base of the operation. In phase II, ARVN would launch a three-pronged assault from South Vietnam along Highway 9 to Tchepone. The central column consisting of the airborne division reinforced by the 1st Armored Brigade would assault A Luoi on the way to Tchepone. The 1st Infantry Division minus the 2nd Regiment would advance on a parallel axis south of Highway 9. A Ranger group would protect the northern flank of the airborne division.

Phase III would include the razing of NVA Base Area 604 after taking Tchepone. In phase IV, the ARVN force would swing southward and attack Base Area 611 before returning to South Vietnam. The ARVN force will be led by Lt. Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam and supported by U.S. helicopter, air strikes and artillery fire from South Vietnam.

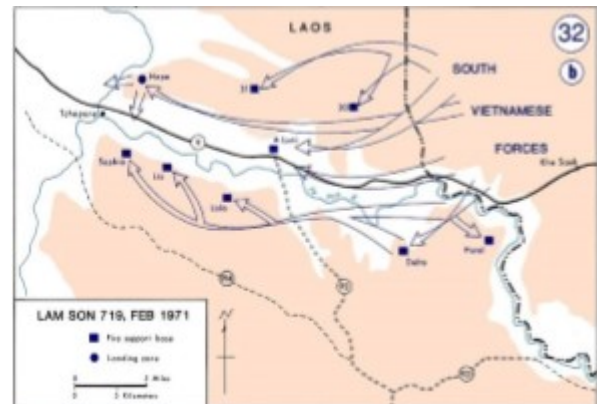
The area was rugged covered with dense undergrowth and a sheer escarpment led to a mountainous region south of Highway 9. There were few areas for fire bases or helicopter landing zones. The so-called Highway 9 was a single dirt road so badly damaged by the ravages of the war that it was impassable in many places. It was also susceptible to demolitions and ambushes. The destruction of one tank on this road would stall the whole military column. Low clouds hung over the region and prevented helicopter operation only within corridors and between 1000 and 1500 hours.

The hurried way in which the operation was planned could adversely affect the outcome of the operation itself. Preparations and planning being done in a rush would further impact the coordination and cohesiveness of the various units that had not worked together in the past.

The enemy had roughly 22,000 troops (7,000 combat, 10,000 logistical soldiers manning the binh trams, 5,000 communist Pathet Lao) on hand with the ability to bring in eleven to twelve infantry regiments within two weeks for a total of 40,000 troops. They had moved twenty additional anti-aircraft battalions with both light (7.6 mm and 12.7 mm machine guns) and medium (23 mm to 100 mm) guns. They also used the medium T-54 tanks that outgunned the ARVN M-41 light tanks (4). They knew the layout of the land for having been in this region for almost two decades. Tactical surprise was lost from the beginning from press leaks and from agents within ARVN.

To fight against this formidable NVA machine, the ARVN committed an understrength 1st infantry division (with one regiment left at the DMZ), one understrength airborne division, three ranger battalions, some light armor and a marine brigade as reserve. They neither had extensive experience in fighting as divisions nor the chance of practicing together. They were rushed into this operation to beat the monsoon season when the fighting would be impractical if not impossible; they were not well prepared to prevent any potential intelligence leak. And they were going into Laos without their military advisers. There could be no reinforcement or relief as all the ARVN reserve had been dumped into Lam Son 719. Since there was

*Continue on next page*





## Lam Son 719...

no room for error, one could feel that President Thieu was worried and jittery when he sent his troops across the border into Laos.

### The Operation

It began on 30 January, 1971 with U.S. forces repairing Highway 9 within South Vietnam and rehabilitating Khe Sanh. Preparatory air strikes against enemy artillery were cancelled due to bad weather. On 8 February, ARVN forces crossed the Laotian border and the airborne division and the armored brigade met at A Luoi on 10 February.

Then unexpectedly instead of moving forward to Tchepone, the operation froze in place. General Abrams who was furious when he learned the news, met with General Vien and both were able to get some action returned on 19 February. It turned out that President Thieu had told Lam to be cautious and to cancel the operation once ARVN forces had taken 3,000 casualties. The airborne division and the marines that were participating in the operation, were not only the total ARVN reserve, they were also Thieu's "palace guard." Their destruction would expose him to dangers from his internal enemies.

In the meantime, the enemy had mobilized its forces. The 308th Division was in action in the northern flank. The 2nd NVA division appeared on the west of the ARVN advance and the 304th Division appeared along Highway 9. By the last week of February, the NVA had four divisions plus tanks and artillery in the area. A fire base in the northern flank was lost and the 39th Ranger Battalion was virtually wiped out. Another firebase held by an airborne battalion was also wiped out. (5) At 1100 hours, on 25 February, NVA artillery fire rained down on FSB 31 while U.S. helicopters scrambled to suppress the source of bombardment. Then antiaircraft fire struck a U.S. F-4 aircraft and forced the pilot to eject. The U.S. forward air controller shifted his attention to the rescue of the downed pilot leaving no air cover for the beleaguered defenders of FSB 31. General Lam ordered the nearby armor to relieve the pressure on the firebase. The armor was under the control of General Dong who was equal in rank to Lam and was unhappy to be subordinated to him. The tanks and APC rumbled northward only to meet an NVA ambush. The fighting was heavy and despite losing two tanks, Lam instructed the armor to continue its relief effort. Dong, however, ordered the armor to remain in place 1,800 meters short of its goal. The command breakdown sealed the fate of FSB 31. By early evening, NVA armor penetrated the base defenses and the ARVN paratroopers responded with small arms and LAW rockets, which took a fearsome toll on the attackers. However, enemy infantry soon overwhelmed the defenders and the 21st Airborne Battalion Artillery commander sent out a last message for fire directly on his position. A number of paratroopers managed to break out of the encirclement but a total of 135 ARVN soldiers were either captured or killed. ARVN soldiers had fought bravely and well inflicting 250 KIA on the NVA, which also lost eleven tanks in the bitter fighting. (6)

On 28 February, Lam came up with a new plan that was approved by Thieu. Two battalions of the 1st ARVN division were helilifted to Tchepone—then a deserted village—on 7 May and the withdrawal began the next day. The NVA units concentrated heavy antiaircraft fire on the evacuation helicopters, attacked the fire bases, and ambushed the retreating ARVN troops.

The statistics were ambiguous. The U.S. XXIV Corps After Action Report showed enemy KIA at 19,360 due to B-52's and fighter bombers strikes. U.S. and South Vietnamese totaled 9,065—1,402 Americans (215 KIA) and 7,683 South Vietnamese (1,764 KIA). ARVN lost 211 trucks, 87 combat vehicles, 54 tanks, and 96 pieces of artillery. The NVA lost 2,002 trucks, 106 tanks, 13 artillery pieces, 170,346 tons of ammunition. The U.S. lost 108 helicopters destroyed and 618 damaged. (7)

### The Attack on Tchepone

On 5 March Tran Ngoc Hue's 2/2 along with the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Regiment (3/2) of the ARVN 1st Division were helilifted by a combination of 120 helicopters to LZ Hope just north of Tchepone. This was the largest air mobile operation of the Vietnam War. Troops fanned out before moving into Tchepone, the ultimate goal of Lam Son 719. There, Hue was promoted to lieutenant colonel on the spot. For the next three days they searched the area in and around the town before moving south of Highway 9.

By 19 March cut off by vastly superior enemy forces, Hue and his men dug in atop Hill 660 and threw out defenses to stem the NVA attacks. They called for air support, including B-52 air strikes. NVA units poured forward in the assault. Facing death, Hue requested extraction. U.S. air power that day mounted 1,388 gunship sorties, 270 tactical air strikes, and 11 B-52 missions. Twenty of the 40 helicopters used in the lift were hit and rendered un-flyable; although 3/2 got out, 2/2 and 4/2 had to remain behind.

ARVN soldiers continued their fight. A mortar shell exploded close by and peppered Hue with shrapnel. He blacked out but soon regained consciousness. Too wounded to get away, he asked to be left behind as his men attempted a breakout. Sixty ARVN soldiers made to safety and were picked up by helicopters the following day, all that remained of the once proud 2nd

*Continue on next page*

## Lam Son 719...

Battalion, 2nd Regiment. Hue was taken prisoner. Unable to treat his extensive wounds, the NVA sent him to North Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh trail. His comrades in arms physically carried him from binh tram to binh tram along the trail, although they were not allowed inside the binh tram. Unable to eat the meager rations of rice and sugar the guards offered him, he hovered near death.

The journey was hell as insects and maggots invaded his open wounds and ate the flesh of his fingers. Once he reached North Vietnam, he received treatment but lost several fingers. Shifted to trucks, Hue and his men reached Vinh where groups of civilians cursed, spat, and pelted them with rocks. They were paraded through the streets before being herded on trains to Hanoi. Hue entered Hoa Lo Prison, the infamous Hanoi Hilton. At age 29, he faced the prospect of life in prison. (8)

Hue spent six months in solitary confinement in Hoa Lo Prison and was transferred to Son Tay as a POW. Attempts by Hanoi to get Hue to defect to the communist side failed and he was returned to jail. Following the 1973 Peace Treaty, Hue and his 70 comrades taken prisoners in Laos were brought to the Thach Han River to be released back to South Vietnam. But at the last minute, they were pulled out of the line and returned to jail because they were prisoners of the Pathet Lao in Laos and not the NVA. Many of the 70 ARVN soldiers later shaved their heads and staged hunger strikes in protest.

After the Fall of Saigon in 1975, all the ARVN soldiers were sent to reeducation camps and Hue was lucky to be released after 13 years in communist jails. Post-reeducation life was difficult for Hue and it was only in 1991 through the help of his former U.S. adviser that Hue was able to immigrate to the U.S. with his family. (9)

### Lessons learned

South Vietnam was a complex, diverse, and multi-party society. When the Thieu-Ky ticket competed for the 1967 presidency, they did it against two dozen other tickets. Almost everyone had his favored party or group, although not everyone was an active participant in his group. As a reflection of this diversity, the ARVN leadership was also heavily politicized. This diversity, although offering a wide variety of freedom to the people, thrived in a sea of lack of uniformity and cohesiveness.

General Lam, the I Corps commander, could not even control two of his three principal subordinates: the commanders of the airborne and marine divisions, who were also lieutenant commanders like him. The airborne commander, Lt. Gen. Du Quoc Dong although more submissive did what he pleased. The marine commander, Lt. Gen. Le Nguyen Khang who was more senior in rank than Lam, boycotted the entire operation and delegated his command authority to a subordinate colonel. Khang made his own decision to abandon FSB Hotel and withdrew his troops from Laos. The dissension affected staff coordination and responses to enemy attacks. (10)

President Thieu, did not intervene on behalf of Lam because he depended on the marine and airborne as his palace guard. Lam, on the other hand, was not without blame. He was a military administrator who had no experience in large unit operations but was unfortunate to be commander of the I Corps at that time and therefore was recruited to lead Lam Son 719. The best general for this type of operation would be General Do Cao Tri, the leader of the successful Cambodian operation who was known for his fighting prowess and flamboyant style. Accordingly, plans were made to replace Lam with Tri. Unfortunately, the latter was killed in a helicopter accident in Cambodia prior to assuming command of the Lam Son 719 operation.

Thieu's decision on 12 February to suspend the operation's forward movement not only doomed Lam Son 719, but also put his troops in a vulnerable and dangerous position. When the situation got tough, Thieu in critical situations, had these moments of indecision that forever changed history. He would repeat the same mistake in 1975 that led to South Vietnam's downfall.

ARVN units had little time devoted to combined tank-infantry training and coordination. The tanks fought alone, the infantry fought alone, and both suffered. (11) There was a lack of a system of accurate and timely reporting. In the case of Lam Son 719, the reporting was deplorable. Reports were slow, inaccurate, and sometimes non-existent. (12) Since staffs rarely visited the front lines, the operation drifted along without information, intelligence or control. This led to disastrous failings that were indicative of basic deficiencies in training and discipline.

ARVN units had also picked up some bad traits from the Americans. They relied too much on helicopters when it would be easier and safer to travel by foot. When they made contact with the enemy, they sat down and called for air or artillery support instead of maneuvering and attacking. On the ground, the ARVN tactics, developed over nearly a decade of battle against a low-tech threat, proved completely inadequate against an enemy equipped with modern armor, heavy artillery, and sophisticated air defense weapons. (13)

From the ARVN/U.S. planners, there was a careless disregard for the effects of the terrain, weather and road network.

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## Lam Son 719...

There was an underestimation of the enemy forces and its ability to mobilize additional troops. There was a sense of the superiority of one's troops and resources, especially the overestimation of American air power to dominate the battlefield. (14)

One wonders why the experienced, pragmatic, and usually cautious General Creighton Abrams who had spent four years of fifteen hour- days among the Vietnamese and the ARVN not only advocated the operation, but also pushed it on the Vietnamese and his American superiors. He knew the condition, morale, and training of the ARVN units. Maybe that he thought the NVA would run away and not want to protect their bases as in CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY operations? This estimate was wrong for the operations cited above and Lam Son 719 were vastly different. The bases in Laos were critical for future aggressions in South Vietnam a year later in 1972 when the NVA spearheaded a three-pronged attack on Quang Tri, Ban Me Thuot, and An Loc. Maybe that he wanted South Vietnam to acquire some experience dealing with the NVA by themselves? (15)

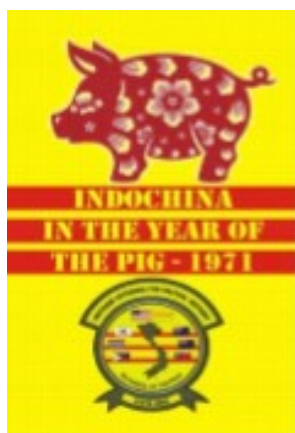
Following Lam Son 719, MACV equipped one South Vietnamese tank battalion with the heavier U.S. M-48; one ARVN artillery battalion received the 175 mm self-propelled guns to combat the Russian 130 mm guns in the hands of the NVA. This upgrading was grossly inadequate and came in reaction to prior modernization in the weapons or tactics of the NVA. All ARVN battalions should have been given the M-48 and several artillery battalions should have received the lethal 175 mm guns. This was a significant weakness of Vietnamization. The NVA were always one step ahead of the ARVN. (16)

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## Indochina in the Year of the Pig - 1971: Vietnam Veterans for Factual History

### Contents



The Situation in 1971:	MACV Command History 1971
Creighton Abrams:	Lewis Sorley
Command Hunt	Darrel Whitcomb
Demise of Psywar Against North Vietnam	Mervyn Edwin Roberts III
Lam Son 719	Nghia M. Vo
Pentagon Papers	Dr. Robert Turner, Dr. Roger Canfield
Graft and Corruption	Stephen Sherman
The Battle For Sam Neua Province (Part II)	Frederic C. Benson
The Vietnam Peace Movement in 1971	Dr. Roger Canfield
Neil Sheehan: Bright Shining Liar	Bill Laurie
Our Wrap Up: 1971-The Year of Missed Opportunities	Col. Andrew Finlayson (Ret)



## Douglas Ramsey Memorial *Frank Scotton*

So many friends here, impossible to acknowledge each of you, but feel compelled to express appreciation for attendance by:

Rufus Phillips ... godfather of field operations, having begun in 1954 with Lansdale, by accompanying recovery operations in Ca Mau and Inter-Zone V.

Jerry Dodson ... President of a San Francisco investment company, teaching in New York, and making a dogleg detour from there to join us today.

Frank Snepp ... recently ill, but round tripping from Los Angeles to be here.

And ... Bruce Kinsey and Joan Anderson... they arranged this event, and always keep us connected.

....HERE'S HOW I REMEMBER DOUG.....

Image a February day 1965 in Doug's small Tan Binh District town house. Special Forces Captains Phil Werbiski and Jim Drinkwater arrive; and Jim... who once led teams on coastal China recon operations, notices a grand piano to rear of the room.

"Can you play that thing?"

"A little," replies Doug, and he seats himself on piano bench and with authority and passion, delivers a Beethoven piano concerto.

Stunned, the other captain, Werbiski, asks if he could do another.....And Douglas did. How is it that a Foreign Service Officer is playing Beethoven for, a couple of life-long Special Forces field operators?

As a child Doug was educated here and there in a number of good public schools while the family traversed the country when his father worked large scale construction projects culminating with the Hoover Dam in Nevada. Despite frequent relocation Doug's mother made sure that he would always have a piano and access to a concert level instructor.

Following Air Force assignment in Japan as an intelligence officer, Doug entered the Foreign Service, worked at first in I & R, then volunteered for Viet Nam arriving in Saigon May 1963.

Douglas was placed in the Embassy Security Office, but within a few days Ev Bumgardner lured him toward field operations by offering a USIS transfer for taking up duty in Dalat as a Branch Public Affairs Officer "jack of all trades." I met Doug for the first time in September 1963 when Ev, responding to peculiarities of that period, switched me to Dalat and Doug to Qui Nhon.

I checked into Dalat for a few days with Doug. He happened to introduce me to my eventual wife, Kim Vui, who then owned a coffee shop in town down the street from the city market. A few days later Doug traveled by road with me to Qui Nhon, and afterward to Quang Ngai for introduction to some significant Vietnamese and American personalities.

Doug was quick to understand the nature of field work...not in province capitols; but in hamlets, and not at Division...but at battalion level. I envied his fluency in Vietnamese compared with my crude self-taught level. He was always the smartest person in a group, but simultaneously self-deprecating. We talked a lot about the value of travel by road vs by air, how to move between hamlets or on trails, what to look for, how to relate with Vietnamese who accompanied us. Doug was immediately in sync!

In December 1963 USIS undertook the first American field survey of rural opinion in Viet Nam. The project was at request of Ambassador Lodge who was alarmed by a USAID report by Earl Young, seconded by Rufus Phillips, of

*Continue on next page*

## Douglas Ramsey Memorial...

crippling deterioration in Long An Province.

There were two Long An Survey components: a family by family annotation of observations in fifteen hamlets along Provincial Highway 22 and National Highway 4 between Tan An town and the border of Dinh Tuong Province; and a companion attitude survey of secondary students in two schools located in the same area. I led the first while Douglas handled the second. Ev put that division into blunt context for me by explaining that ...“while Doug could handle what you will be doing, you would not be as effective as he with students and teachers.” The two surveys confirmed in detail the earlier signal by Earl Young, and endorsed by Rufus Phillips in a White House meeting.

In early 1964 we were back in central Viet Nam: me traveling out from Dalat; and Doug in Qui Nhon. I was beginning to organize, by enhanced training and improved weaponry, district level – in and between hamlets - mobile platoons, **Biet Kich Nhan Dan**, in Quang Ngai. Douglas would frequently accompany. He immediately comprehended the significance of that local initiative and the inherent potential for hamlet and district political development.

In mid-1964 Douglas was brought back to Saigon for duty within the Regional Security Office, but he still had the field operations virus and “Uncle Ev” was keeping an eye on him in case a suitable opportunity developed.

A few months later a new provisional MACV project based on two infantry officers, two special forces captains, USIS organizational/instructor cadre, and myself, was initiated for the districts surrounding Saigon. The purpose was to prepare and operate an enhanced mobile platoon in each district. I introduced Doug to everyone involved, and he would sometimes meet us in the field until he took December 1964 home leave with parents in Nevada.

Now, when you had an Ev Bumgardner connection, you were just by that fact alone simultaneously linked with other characters, including Lou Conein, Colonel Sam Wilson, US Army frequently on detail with another agency, and old-hand George Jacobson. Those latter two were aware that John Paul Vann was about to make a return to Viet Nam on USAID hire. They also knew that given immediate circumstances, John would be taken on board as a Province Representative, and no higher. Understanding Vann's personality and addiction to risk, those gentlemen decided that Vann should be paired with a field experienced assistant who would supplement and perhaps temper risky behavior. Doug Ramsey was ready, able, and definitely willing. In February 1965 Douglas was detailed to AID for assignment to Hau Nghia Province as Assistant Province Representative.

So the previously described February 1965 unanticipated, but enthusiastically received, Beethoven performance for Captains Drinkwater and Werbiski, was Doug's prelude to proposing we extend our MACV project slightly beyond the six districts immediately bordering Saigon, by placing a seventh enhanced and expanded mobile platoon in Cuu Chi District. Werbiski was agreeable; and for Drinkwater, the Beethoven overture guaranteed his commitment.

John Vann arrived in March, and Douglas and Vann clicked in partnership right away. Within a few months, Vann as restless intellectually as he was physically, began pushing for a different approach to the war. Vann, Ramsey, Bumgardner, Werbiski – who had been a battalion advisor with the ARVN 7th Division during Vann's first tour - and I, frequently met in Ramsey's Tan Binh house to argue and swap ideas. The result was the first in-country think piece paper on necessity to adopt a method for intervention in Viet Nam that would combine military, political, and rural recovery operations.

Doug's contribution was important because his conversations in rural secondary schools and teacher training centers was foundation for advocating consideration of long term educational elements and motivation training for province and district administrators.

In September 1965 we enjoyed another piano recital/meeting in Saigon as Werbiski, others and I, transited from Cambodian border An Phu of Chau Doc Province back to Central Vietnam. Afterward we did not have contact with Doug for a few months, but knew from Ev Bumgardner that John Vann left Hau Nghia in November for a III Corps assignment, and so Douglas became the Acting USAID Representative in Bao Trai.

Up to the end of 1965 our provisional team had been first organized for MACV, then shifted to Special

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**Douglas Ramsey Memorial...**

Forces auspices, with other agency equipment support as needed from the Truong Minh Giang warehouse. Some Vietnamese instructional and organizational cadre were transferred to the other agency for folding into different projects, while those in support to Special Forces activity remained on a USIS/JUSPAO payroll. Now we decided to transfer all of the cadre to the 5th Special Forces Group, and do the payroll shift one time for everyone. Operationally the optimum time would be mid-January when all concerned could be brought to Saigon for processing at the TOC on Pasteur Street. We planned to have a celebratory dinner on the evening of the 16th, and then on the next day everybody would scatter to remote assignments. Douglas was well known by the several Americans and dozens of Vietnamese, and so he was invited to attend.

The next morning Douglas returned to Hau Nghia and on the same day, late afternoon of the 17th, was captured while in a truck taking refugee supplies to a camp near Trung Lap. I knew nothing until the following morning when John Vann tracked me down before I could catch daily C-123 Flight 719 up the coast. Vann enlisted me in an ad hoc recovery effort. While he obtained USAID and Embassy approval, I received an OK from my senior supervisor General Freund, then got a helicopter to take me on an aerial survey from Trung Lap northward. What I observed of rubber plantation and jungle would not have inclined you to optimism. That night, having checked with the several Special Forces Vietnamese cadre not yet departed from Saigon, all them volunteered for the search. I selected two, Nguyen Thanh and Do Dinh Duyet. Do Dinh Duyet is here this afternoon. Two months later he was with me riding a downed helicopter into crash and burning within a valley further north, and so I am doubly glad that he is with us today.

Suffice here to say that we were in Hau Nghia most of three days by road and on foot, were on Doug's trail in the Trung Lap area, encountered people who knew and had seen him as a captive, were passed a note stating that he would be held for the duration, and on the last day Vann and I drove through an attempted ambush between Hiep Hoa and Bao Trai.

Months, then years, passing; we never forgot Doug, and his name would often rise during serious or even joking discussion. Drinkwater once suggested that we should air drop the grand piano into an approximate location, and maybe someone on the other side would have sufficient appreciation to let Doug work with it. Werbiski supposed that communists would at some point make the error of trying to argue political philosophy with Doug, an American who knew the subject, each school and flaws, and could debate in their own language. Werbiski, later Major, was killed in Laos 1969; John Paul Vann met his end on a hilltop south of Kontum in 1972: and Drinkwater has been long gone. At one point in 1971 the communist side had offered to exchange Douglas for two, and then even just one, of the important prisoners detained by us in Saigon. The proposal was considered in Washington, and declined. So Doug's next two years in and out of bamboo cage and occasional torture, were by courtesy of fellow Americans. Frank Snapp and I have our own considered suppositions as to why Doug was abandoned. Fortunately for those who made the decision, John Paul Vann was unaware of that choice.

February 1973, in accordance with the Paris Agreement, prisoners of war were released from northern camps and a location in the south. I was a member of the recovery team that helicoptered to Loc Ninh for receiving 27 American prisoners, including Doug Ramsey. There was a snag due to different understandings of the "exchange" commitment: simultaneous or separate. Time on ground extended 12 hours. Finally a token flight of communist prisoners from Bien Hoa allowed release of some ARVN detainees, and then the Americans were brought forth again.

Douglas was joyful, and we had a few minutes to converse before boarding the assigned UH-1. Even right at that moment Doug was more concerned for others than for himself. He helped me assist one of the other released Americans to board and secure belt. As we did so, he indicated by chin thrust another, while telling me that person was "fragile" and could even be a "jumper." He told me that we should sit him between us. Cautionary advice appropriately given, because Rich Waldhaus was the sole POW who did not want to go home as planned, and who was my responsibility until, for the most part due to Jim Nach's assistance, we persuaded him to leave on a Pan American flight three days later.

If Douglas had not alerted me to a potential problem there could have been tragedy.

Doug's attention to what was most important is characteristic of his comportment while in detention. Like John McCain, Douglas never placed himself above the code that applied to all. He assisted the physically and emotionally weak and represented the interest of all POWs to camp guards and administrators. Douglas took a number of foreign service assignments

*Continue on next page*



## Douglas Ramsey Memorial...

until retirement. I always thought that he was under utilized. I think he induced discomfort in some senior officers by strong personality and ironic attitude. After Kim Vui and I reunited, our first road travel was to Boulder City Nevada for a reunion with the man who had introduced us more than fifty years earlier. Several months ago we were with him on his last conscious day, vectored to the hospital with cell phone guidance by Chilo, long time caregiver and constant friend for Doug.

Douglas incorporated three special traits intrinsic to his nature and conspicuous by personal behavior as I knew him for fifty-five years.

**Brilliance of mind** ...never necessary to explain something more than once, and sometimes he grasped the essence before you completed descriptor. THE PIANIST !!!

**Bravery in action** ...once in a contested and sniped upon area he unhesitatingly assisted with recovery of two wounded regional forces soldiers who otherwise would have been abandoned.

**Benevolence by character** ...he never expressed bitterness about treatment while a prisoner. Even more surprising, he did not exhibit anger for the REMF American officials who chose to extend his time as a prisoner by two additional years rather than accept a proposal for exchange. He told us that he was not going to poison his own remaining years by meaningless focus on mistakes of others.

SIR MAX HASTINGS, in his account of Viet Nam events 1945 through 1975, and published this month, quotes Douglas extensively. In a September email Max wrote:

AMONG THE GREATEST PRIVILEGES OF THE RESEARCH FOR MY VIETNAM BOOK WAS TO MEET DOUG, WHO SEEMED TO ME TO REPRESENT THE HIGHEST IDEALS OF U.S. FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICERS.

I WAS AWED BY HIS ACCOUNT OF TERRIBLE EXPERIENCES IN COMMUNIST HANDS; BY THE FORTITUDE HE DISPLAYED WHILE ENDURING THEM; AND BY THE WISDOM OF HIS JUDGEMENTS UPON THE VIETNAM CONFLICT, WHICH HAVE STRONGLY INFLUENCED MY OWN NARRATIVE.

IF AMERICA IN THE 21st CENTURY IS AGAIN SERVED BY SUCH MEN AND WOMEN IN FAR AWAY PLACES, THEN ITS FOREIGN POLICIES MAY PROSPER MORE THAN THEY HAVE SOMETIMES DONE IN RECENT TIMES.

## Freed Vietnam Blogger “Mother Mushroom” Arrives in the U.S.

A dissident Vietnamese blogger known by her pen name 'Mother Mushroom' has arrived in the United States after her surprise release from prison, telling a large crowd of supporters she will "never keep silent" in her fight for democracy in the one-party state.

Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, 39, was quietly freed from a jail on Wednesday in Vietnam and put on a plane with her elderly mother and two young children who were seen smiling and hugging her in images shared on social media.

Her unexpected release after two years behind bars came as US defence chief Jim Mattis visited Vietnam as part of warming ties between the former foes, who are eager to counter China's rising influence in Asia.

Soon after Quynh was released Wednesday, fellow dissident Nguyen Dinh Thanh, 27, was jailed for seven years for "spreading anti-state materials" in southern Binh Duong province.

The former medical student was accused of printing 3,000 leaflets apparently to distribute at nationwide protests in June, according to state media.

In another indication that Vietnam is not likely to let up its punishment of critics, activist Le Dinh Luong had his 20-year sentence upheld in an appeal trial Thursday in Nghe An province.

The sentence is one of the harshest doled out to an activist in years.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-dissident/vietnamese-dissident-mother-mushroom-on-way-to-u-s-after-release-sources-idUSKCN1MR1B0?il=0>

## Ms. Eva Nguyen Binh, French Ambassador to Cambodia



French President Francois Hollande appointed Ms. Nguyen Binh as French Ambassador to Cambodia on 8 February, 2017.

Ms. Nguyen Binh, whose mother is French, is a career diplomat who previously served as counselor on technical cooperation and cultural action at the French Embassy in Hanoi. She spent 16 years as a diplomat for the Foreign Affairs Ministry in France. Her husband, Jean-Noel Poirier, has been the French ambassador to Vietnam since 2012.

<https://kh.ambafrance.org/L-ambassadeur-2769>

## Vietnam's Forgotten Montagnards *Dan Sutherland*

<http://www.atimes.com/article/say-a-prayer-for-vietnams-forgotten-montagnards/>

Speaking on a panel at the September 14 event titled "Vietnam Revisited," Neil Nay, an ethnic Montagnard and spokesman for the group, described their years of suffering under Communist rule. In his presentation, Nay said that in the Central Highlands today authorities are systematically abolishing traditional ways of life.

As he explained it, internal security officers and the secret police "are constantly monitoring us like prisoners." Most Montagnards cannot afford to send their children to school. The Vietnamese government considers the Montagnards as "an historical enemy," Nay said. Churches are monitored and often charged with being anti-state organizations. Once the Communists defeated the South Vietnamese and took power in South Vietnam in the spring of 1975, life became much worse for the already beleaguered Montagnards. Some of the leaders who survived were executed. Others died in so-called re-education camps or in prisons.

The Montagnards lost whatever limited rights that they had previously enjoyed. The Communists had recruited a number of Montagnards to fight on their side, promising them autonomy once they gained power. That never came to pass.

But HRW research conducted from 2005 to 2006 showed that Vietnamese officials continued to violate religious freedom rights in parts of the Central Highlands. For example, large Christian gatherings continued to be banned unless presided over by officially recognized pastors.



## 2017 World Bank Data, GDP per capita

*Bill Laurie*

Country Communist	Rank/Per capita Income	Country Non-communist	Rank/Per capita Income
Laos	130/\$2,457	Malaysia	65/\$9,945
Vietnam	132/\$2,343	Thailand	83/\$6,594
Cambodia	151/\$1,384	Indonesia	113/\$3,847
		Philippines	125/\$2,989
<b>Average</b>	<b>138/\$2,061</b>		<b>121/\$5,844</b>

(All averages are unweighted)

Viet Nam's per capita is 36% of Thailand's, 40% of four non-communist neighbors

Communist (3 countries) per capita income 35% of non-communist (4 countries) (unweighted average)

<https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/economic-freedom-of-the-world-2018.pdf>

### CORRUPTION INDEX

Corruption Index, prepared/compiled by Transparency International.

Table below again compares Hanoi Communist Party control or strong influence in instances of Laos and Cambodia. Same noncommunist 4 countries.

First number is score as calculated by TI.

Lower number means more corruption.

Second number is world ranking of 176 countries surveyed.

Example, the least corrupt countries in this survey, Denmark and New Zealand, have are tied with score of 90.

Their numbers would be 90/1.

Highest point total/ranking.

Here are scores and rankings for SE Asia countries, communist and non-communist.

Communist	Corruption index	Non-communist	Corruption index
Cambodia	21/156	Malaysia	49/55
Laos	30/123	Indonesia	90/37
Viet Nam	33/113	Philippines	35/101
		Thailand	35/101 (Tied w/Philippines)
<b>Average</b>	<b>28/131</b>		<b>39/83</b>

In all cases non-communist countries are less corrupt.

## Saigon 1920

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGKwoa39XGk>

