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STAYS ALIVE  
WHEN ITS  
CULTURE IS  
ALIVE.**

**HOPE NEVER  
DIES IN THE  
INDOMITABLE  
VIETNAMESE  
MIND.**

- **SACEI Newsletter** updates you on the latest news about Vietnamese-America.
- It serves as a link between **SACEI** members and those who are interested in the Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American culture.

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

Editorial	1
Kim Anh Nguyen	1
Mitchell Pham	2
Duc: A Reporter's	2
Love for Wounded People of Vietnam....	
Blowtorch: Robert	2
Komer, Vietnam, and American Cold War	

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



### **To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese Culture**

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## **Editorial Note: The Two Vietnams**

As I stand on the southern bank of the Potomac River and look toward Washington DC, I imagine myself standing 38 years ago on the bank of the Saigon River looking back at my beloved downtown Saigon.

When April 30, 1975 came, northern communist soldiers with their tanks broke through the gates of the Independence Palace and took over the country. The first wave of 130,000 Vietnamese fled the country to look for freedom somewhere else. (1) The consequences--psychological, social, political, economic, and moral--were often tragic and painful.

To fully understand these consequences and their impact on the South Vietnamese, one has to discuss about the loss in general, the Little Saigons, and the two Vietnams.

### **THE LOSS**

With the Fall of Saigon, the world as the South Vietnamese knew it ended abruptly. There were:

1. *Punishment.* Truong Nhu Tang acknowledged that "in the first year of liberation, some three hundred thousand people were arrested." (2) Overall, more than one million government officials and military personnel were hauled to reeducation camps where they were starved and forced to do hard labor. (3) This was a wholesale enslavement of the country not heard of in human history, except under communist regimes. Prisoners were treated harshly without any rights. "We were less than animals and not really human." (4) Even the communist Bui Tin wondered after visiting various reeducation camps in the South as well as in the North "why pursue a policy of such harshness towards hundreds of thousands of people?" (5)
2. *Suppression of basic freedoms.* (6) One could not even visit one's friend a few miles away without approval from government officials. Basic freedoms were abolished and replaced by communist rules--those of the invaders. "In the eye of our communist leaders, an enemy 'puppet' whether alive or dead, was always a puppet--a second class citizen who had no citizen's rights at all." (7) Even today, Father Ly who has fought for human rights in Vietnam for decades, was gagged in court by a Cong An (secret police) to prevent him from speaking up. This was a far cry from the so-called liberation of Saigon.
3. *Impoverishment.* Private properties, bank accounts, houses, and businesses were confiscated and turned over to communist officials. The latter "fought each other over houses,

## **Kim Anh Nguyen: Tae Kwon Do 5th Dan Blackbelt**

Instructor Kim-Anh Nguyen Dang is one of the top martial arts students of Dang Huy Duc Martial Arts Academy in Irvine, CA. For the past 19 years, she has diligently trained in Tae Kwon-Do. Instructor Kim-Anh Nguyen Dang consistently practices and teaches martial arts every day of the week (3 hours/day, 7 days/week). She is also a professional tennis player.

A fourth year student at the University of CA, Irvine, she won the Gold Medal in Tae Kwon Do at the July 12-14, 2013 Tae Kwon Do Meeting organized by the British Tae Kwon Do Association in Coventry England.



## Mitchell Pham, CEO of Augen Group

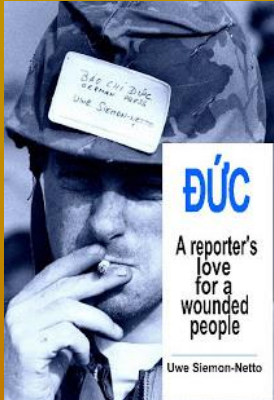


Pham was born in Vietnam and later settled in New Zealand at the age of 12. He put great effort into his high school and university studies there, while working in the evenings and at weekends to make ends meet.

Pham founded the Augen software company with four of his friends in 1993 and the company's annual revenue now stands at around US\$10 million.

Pham was honored by the World Economic Forum as a young global leader on March 9, 2011.

## Duc: A Reporter's Love for Wounded People of Vietnam: Uwe Siemon-Netto

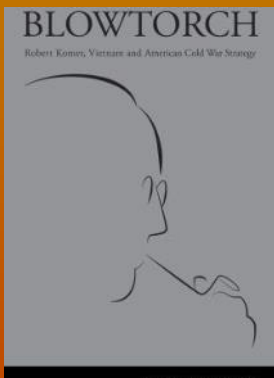


Almost half a century ago, a young reporter from Germany arrived in still-glamorous Saigon to cover the Vietnam War over a period of five years. In this memoir he now tells the story of how he fell in love with the Vietnamese people. He praises the beauty, elegance and feistiness of their women. He describes blood-curdling Communist atrocities and fierce combat scenes he had witnessed. He introduces a striking array of characters: heroes, villains, statesmen and spooks, hilarious eccentrics, street urchins and orphans herding water buffalos. He shows how professional malpractice by U.S. media stars such as Walter Cronkite turned the military victory of American and South Vietnamese forces during the 1968 Tet Offensive into a political defeat. He mourns the countless innocent victims of the Communist conquest of South Vietnam, which was the grim consequence of its abandonment by the United States. Thus, he argues, the wrong side won.

Available on Amazon:

<http://www.amazon.com/Duc-reporters-wounded-people-Vietnam/dp/1482692805/>

## Blowtorch: Robert Komer, Vietnam, and American Cold War Frank Leith Jones



History has not been kind to Robert Komer, a casualty of bad historical analysis and inaccurate information. A Cold War national security policy and strategy adviser to three presidents, Komer was one of the most influential national security professionals of the era. The book begins with a review of his early life that helped shape his worldview. It then examines Komer's influence as a National Security Council staff member during the Kennedy administration, where he helped set its activist course regarding the Third World. Upon Kennedy's death, Lyndon Johnson named Komer his "point man" for Vietnam pacification policy, and later General Westmoreland's operational deputy in Vietnam.

Available on Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/Blowtorch-Robert-Vietnam-American-Strategy/dp/1612512283>

## Editorial...continued

cars, prostitutes, and bribes. Soldiers and officials ...were suddenly confronted with what seemed to them an almost fairy tale richness, theirs for the taking." (8)

4. *Escape and adjustment.* Unable to tolerate an illegitimate and cruel regime, more than two million people braved the seas, storms, and pirates to look for freedom elsewhere. (9) This was a massive exodus by sea and land of epic proportions.

5. *Nightmares.* They have been the constant followers of many Vietnamese for the next three-and-a half decades, especially those who had gone through re-education camps. The inhumane treatment (10) of the prisoners by sadistic jailers--"they did not kill you outright in the camp by shooting you. Instead they slowly tortured and terrified you"--(11) left an indelible and painful mark on many. And today, a scratching at the door would wake a former camp inmate up sweating all over. (12)

San Juan wrote about a refugee who had relocated to the U.S. (13)



## Editorial...continued

*"It is hard to say that the war was over...  
The past like a nightmare endlessly haunts...  
It is like a dream he cannot forget...  
The past that [he] enjoyed in South Vietnam is  
meaningless in the United States...  
[His] dream torments and has no satisfactory resolution in the present."*

Memories have become a prominent feature of those who had escaped from Vietnam--the overseas Vietnamese. They led to community-building and place making.

*"Periodically these festering wounds bleed again...[resulting] in vigorous protests. What the Vietnamese-American community wants to do with these protests is to remind themselves, and others too, not to forget the old South Vietnam that they know and love." (14)*

In life, one could count three levels of loss:

First, there is the trivial loss--loss of money, wallet, keys...--that could momentarily be replaced.

The second type of loss is that of a friendship. One day, he/she left us: that person who had been so dear to us in many ways is no longer around. We become heartbroken. And until we recover, we feel that something in us is missing. We are no longer wholesome. Our mind wanders around making it difficult for us to concentrate and work.

The third type is the loss of a country: the biggest of all losses for *"There is no greater loss than that of losing one's country,"* claimed Phan Boi Chau, one of Vietnam's greatest non-communist revolutionaries in 1906. (15) What he meant was losing independence to France was akin to losing one's country, although it physically was still there. But in 1975, the South Vietnamese lost it completely. It was a complete loss with no chance of regaining it back. It left them disoriented in time and space. By escaping to America, they now experience the feeling of belonging to two worlds-- *"Vietnam and Vietnamese America--and to neither and of responsibility for the communities to which [they] are not always sure to belong." (16)*

### THE LITTLE SAIGONS

With time, Vietnamese immigrants became Vietnamese-Americans--people who walk around with hyphens between their names. They may no longer be Vietnamese, but not yet or never Americans. They are in limbo between the two worlds, one that had rejected them and one they have not become familiar with.

This is not a new phenomenon as the sociologist Georg Simmel once confronted it in the 1900's. He wrote about the immigrant, *"The stranger intends to stay, although he cannot even become native."* Born of Jewish parents in Berlin, Germany--his father later became a Roman Catholic and his mother a Lutheran--he never felt accepted by the German academia despite his talents. He was turned down from many vacant Chairmanship positions before being elevated to full Professor without Chair in 1901. (17) He, therefore, knew what it meant to be a "stranger" in a new land.

Along that same vein, a successful Vietnamese business-lady despite having married an American military lawyer and having children with him declared:

*"As for me and the Vietnamese of my generation, there will always be memories of another time and place, another life. I will forever remain an immigrant here. And even when I am happiest, I will remember my beloved Vietnam and the fate of my people.*

*I am the child of war, I am a Vietnamese." (18)*

The Vietnamese-Americans, therefore, have to define themselves and their identity before being able to sell it to the American public. They have to submerge into or feel confident about their native culture before feeling comfortable with the American culture.

## Editorial...continued

Vietnam for the community is an “era, an epoch, and of course the war, but not a people or a nation. Vietnamese-Americans put forth their own social memories as a way to assert their presence in this country.” (19) In order to preserve their identity, their wholesomeness, to validate themselves, and to some degree to boost up or restore their pride and strength, they congregate in ethnic enclaves that are called “*Little Saigons*,” where they could express their Vietnamese-ness within the boundaries of the American society.

This may apply to the older generation—the Saigon government officials and military personnel who wielded power in the past, were sent to re-education camps for a long time and had lost everything including their ranks, properties, belongings, and prestige. This may not apply to Vietnamese who came later to make a new life or to second generation Vietnamese-Americans.

The latter, born and raised in the U.S. feel at ease within the American society. At home, however, they could feel pressure from their parents who force them to follow Vietnamese traditions and remain Vietnamese instead of Vietnamese-Americans. Those who do not want to disrespect their parents, therefore, could be torn apart by the different Vietnamese and American traditions.

The Vietnam War was a war of conquest—an invasion of superior northern military forces against the Southern Republic of Vietnam. By April 1975, Hanoi had sent all its military divisions—minus one left to protect North Vietnam—racing down National Highway 1 toward Saigon. The arrival of northern communist tanks through the gates of the Independence Palace was a flagrant violation of the 1972 Paris Accords, one of a long series of violations of human rights against the South Vietnamese. Hanoi had finally thrown down its mask and proved to the world that it had waged for more than two decades a war of conquest against South Vietnam.

When the South Vietnamese Truong Nhu Tang, a national Liberation Front (NLF) official and Minister of Justice of the Provisional revolutionary Government (PRG), returned from the jungle to Saigon on the bandwagon on the northern communists, his mother told him,

*“My son. You have abandoned everything...to follow the communists. They will never return to you a particle of the things you have left. You will see. They will betray you, and you will suffer your entire life.”* (20)

On May 15, 1975 in Saigon, Tang witnessed on the review stand with northern officials a parade celebrating the conquest. One military organization after another paraded in front of the officials followed by representatives of all northern military units. At last came a few unkempt NLF troops under the Hanoi's flag. Befuddled, Tang turned to General Van Tien Dung to enquire about the NLF 1st, 3rd, 7th and 9<sup>th</sup> divisions. Dung told him: *“The army has been reunified.”* (21) Tang soon realized that the PRG was only subordinate to the Hanoi government and all the orders came from Hanoi. Realizing a little bit too late that he had been betrayed by Hanoi, Tang retired from the PRG and escaped from Vietnam as a boat refugee in 1976.

Hanoi has thus committed crimes against humanity by invading South Vietnam, waging a 21 year-war, killing millions of people, incarcerating hundreds of thousand people and shoving millions of others to the sea. By reaction, it has caused tens of thousands of angry overseas Vietnamese to become more vocal and anti-communist than before. Anticommunism has become the rallying point against the new Vietnamese rulers and the Vietnamese-Americans' new identity. The old divide between expatriates and present Vietnamese rulers, capitalism against communism has become more visible than in the past as the former try to affirm their identity.

### THE TWO VIETNAMS

*“The Two Vietnams”* was the title of a book published by Bernard Fall in 1963 in which he compared the two Vietnamese states—northern communist and southern democratic—following the partition of the country in 1954. What westerners did not realize or want to acknowledge was that Vietnam had been psychologically, socially, geographically, and politically divided into two or more entities on various occasions since its formation some 4,000 years ago.

According to mythology, the Vietnamese are the offspring of King Lac Long Quan (Dragon King) and the Fairy Au



## Editorial...continued



Co. The latter gave birth to a sac containing 100 eggs that developed into 100 children. The idyllic dragon-fairy union, however, did not last long because Lac Long Quan one day asked for a divorce. As the couple split up, Au Co took 50 children to the mountains and Lac Long Quan guided the remaining 50 to the seaside. (22) This was probably the first recorded divorce by any country in the world. The legend has been so engrained into Vietnamese psyche that it has almost become a reality. Descendants of the highlanders (Muong or Thuong) and lowlanders (Kinh) presently account for 15 and 85% of Vietnam's population respectively. That ancient rivalry or split-up between Thuong and Kinh gave way to a northern-southern rivalry

by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Either by design or fate, the Vietnamese have originally been divided into two different entities. That design eventually became a "curse" for the Vietnamese people.

Between 1600 and 1802 and for more than 200 years, Vietnam was divided into two states: dang ngoai (north) and dang trong (south), the boundaries of which roughly correspond to the 1960's North and South Vietnam. The North was ruled by the Le kings with the support of the Trinh lords while the South was controlled by the Nguyen lords. Without political connection and commerce between the two states, northerners and southerners evolved apart. The short period of reunification (1802-1859) under the southern Le Kings could not erase the two-century cultural and economic differences between North and South.

When the French moved into and controlled Vietnam (1859-1945), they separated central Vietnam from the South and attached it to the North to reshape the country according to administrative and political realms of the times. Since the Vietnamese king ruled from Hue, central Vietnam, the French could not leave it connected to the South without destroying the unity of his kingdom. Cochinchina (South), which was first occupied in 1859, became a French colony that was directly ruled from Paris. The bloc Annam (center) and Tonkin (north) in 1884 became a French protectorate that was nominally administered by a Nguyen King. Cochinchinese subjects therefore enjoyed rare political perks unknown to those living in Annam of Tonkin: they could become French citizens and had the rights to own a newspaper (freedom of press).

During the Vietnam War (1954-1975), Vietnam was divided into two regions described earlier by Bernard Fall through the 1954 Geneva Accords: a communist North Vietnam and a democratically-oriented South Vietnam.

Therefore, throughout its recent 400 year-history (1600-1975), North and South had evolved separately for more than 300 years or 80 percent of the time. (23) That separation no doubt has left deep marks on both sides of the country, marks manifested by major cultural, social, economic, and political differences that will not be easily erased by a short reunification period and lingering suspicions between northerners and southerners. (table I)

South Vietnam has existed as a viable state with its own particularities and flavors for the last four centuries while communist North Vietnam was present only since 1945. The Fall of Saigon, the capital of the South was due to the barbaric aggression of communist Hanoi against the southern state. Its remnants moved to America and the rest of the free world to establish the Little Saigons.

The history of the Fall of Saigon is that of a country divided by two ideologies, totalitarian communism against democratic capitalism, (24)

One party state against democracy,  
Repression enslavement against freedom (25)  
Red flag against yellow flag,  
Hanoi against Little Saigons  
Injustice against Justice  
Enslavement against Freedom.

As long as there are injustice, corruption, one party-state, and communism, there will always be TWO VIETNAMS.

