



**A COUNTRY
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
VN, Land of Boat People	1
Books - Boat People	2
Operation: Passage to Freedom	2
Vietnamese Boat People	3
Voyage of Hope	3
Pirates on Gulf of Siam	4
Remembrance	4
Inhumanity	4

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To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture

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EDITORIAL NOTE: On the occasion of the 39th anniversary of the fall of Saigon, it is time to re-live the history of communist Hanoi's conquest of South Vietnam in full violation of the 1972 Paris Peace Accords. Thirty-nine years have not diminished the pain, suffering, anguish, and despair the South Vietnamese have endured under the oppressive and corrupt communist regime. Many children have lost their parents, many people have lost their loved ones during this tragic and epic "run to the sea" or "escape at all costs" that would take them away from their oppressive tormentors. Never have the Vietnamese suffered that much under any regime throughout their 3,000 year-history. Their land has become the "Land of the reeducation camps," the "Land of the Boat People," the "Land of Oppression," the "land of....," where *freedom* is a foreign word.

Vietnam, The Land of the Boat People

Although Vietnam has more than 3,000 kilometers of shoreline, the Vietnamese have never been a seafaring people. Only on two occasions, in 1954 and 1975-1992 under the oppressive Hanoi communist regime did they reluctantly climb on board boats and ships that brought the shores of freedom. The word here is FREEDOM. The South Vietnamese did it because of lack of Freedom under communism and because communism is an evil empire, no matter its variant form, pseudo-communism, socialism... In the process, they had:

1. to abandon their homeland, the land of their forefathers,
2. to abandon their houses, businesses, properties, and belongings to the communists,
3. to buy their way out by bribing officials,
4. to fight against unscrupulous dealers, intermediaries, pirates, storms, starvation, prison camps,..
5. to survive in other Asian camps before being accepted by third countries,
6. to retrain themselves into the new societies in order to earn a living...

It is with sadness and sorrow that we look back at all these photos featuring people crammed like sardines aboard unseaworthy boats trying to reach foreign lands because they could no longer live in their ancestral lands under an oppressive regime. They have bought their way out of the country by saving what little they have and by mortgaging their future and their lives. It is with sadness and sorrow that we watch people trying to get away from an overturned boat that should have taken them to the land of freedom. The voyage was not without risks; but they went ahead anyway, because living under a communist regime could only mean dying of a slow and certain death.

What kind of regime would push its own people to escape by sea, to run away from it? What kind of regime would force hundreds of thousands of its own people to their certain death? Not even under the harsh French colonial regime did we see people rushing to the seas to escape abroad.

When one looks at a boat—be it a love boat, a war ship, or cruise ship, the Vietnamese will always remember these tragic episodes in the 1950s, 1970s, 1980s and remember who did it and the gulf that separates the non-communist Vietnamese and the Vietnamese communists.

History will record the 1954 local Exodus and the world-wide 1970-1980 Exodus of the Vietnamese as the quest for FREEDOM of the Vietnamese and a fight against communism.



SACEI Master List of Books About the Vietnamese Boat People

SACEI is publishing this master list of books to:

- honor and commemorate the Vietnamese who perished while trying to get to the shores of freedom,
 - document the breadth and depth of this Vietnamese diaspora,
 - signal to the world that the Hanoi communists have committed CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AND ITS OWN PEOPLE,
 - remind the world and the Vietnamese in general that their loved ones had accomplished this voyage for the quest of FREEDOM that was violated by the Hanoi communists,
 - remind the world that the Hanoi communists continue to oppress Vietnamese citizens preventing them to look for freedom.
1. Vo, Nghia. *The Vietnamese Boat People. 1965 and 1975-1992*. Jefferson, McFarland, 2005.
 2. Dang, Chat et al. *The Vietnamese Mayflowers of 1975*. Book Surge 2010.
 3. Cargill, Terry, Huynh Jade. *Voices of Vietnamese People. Nineteen Narratives of Escape and Survival*. Jefferson, McFarland, 2001.
 4. Vo, Nghia. *The Viet Kieu in America. Personal Accounts of Postwar Immigrants from Vietnam*. McFarland, 2009.
 5. Grant, Bruce. *The Boat People. An Age Investigation*. Penguin, 1979.
 6. Robinson, Courtland. *Terms of Refuge. The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*. Zed Books, 2000.
 7. Wain, Barry. *The Refused. The Agony of the Indochina Refugees*. Simon Schuster, 1981.
 8. Nguyen, Nathalie Chau. *Voyage of Hope: Vietnamese-Australian Narratives*. Common ground Publishing, 2005.
 9. Lady Borton. *Sensing the Enemy. An American Woman among the Boat People of Vietnam*. The Dial press, 1984.
 10. Tran Vu. *The Dragon Hunt*. Hyperion, 1999.
 11. Scott, Joanna. *Indochina's Refugees. Oral Histories from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam*. McFarland, 1989.
 12. Chan, Sucheng. *The Vietnamese-American 1.5 Generation. Stories of War, Revolution, Flight, and New Beginnings*. Temple University Press, 2006.
 13. Hoang, Carina. *Boat People. Personal Stories from the Vietnamese Exodus: 1975-1996*. Beaufort Books, 2013.
 14. Vaala and NV Press. *Risking Death to Find Freedom: Thirty Escape Stories by Vietnamese Boat People*.
 15. Trinh Quang Do. *Saigon to San Diego. Memoir of a Boy who escaped from communist Vietnam*. Jefferson, McFarland, 2004.
 16. Tai Van Nguyen. *The Storm of our Lives. A Vietnamese Family's Boat Journey to Freedom*. McFarland, 2009.
 17. Freeman, James, Nguyen Dinh Huu. *Voices from the Camps. Vietnamese Children seeking Asylum*. Washington University Press, 2003.
 18. Nguyen, Huynh Chau. *Memory is another Country. Women of the Vietnamese Diaspora*. Praeger, 2009.
 19. Nhat Tien, Dong Phuc. *Pirates on the Gulf of Siam. Report from the Vietnamese Boat People Living in the Refugee Camp of Songkhla-Thailand*. Van Moch, 1981.
 20. Diller, Janelle. *In Search of Asylum: Vietnamese Boat people in Hong Kong*. The Center, 1988.
 21. Haskins, James. *The New Americans: Vietnamese Boat People*. Enslow Pub, 1980.
 22. Yuk Wa Chan. *The Chinese/Vietnamese Diaspora. Revisiting the Boat People*. Routledge, 2011.
 23. Doan, Brian. *The Forgotten Ones. A Photographic Documentation of the last Vietnamese People in the Philippines*. VAALA, 2001.
 24. Lam, Lawrence. *From being Uprooted to Surviving. Resettlement of Vietnamese-Chinese Boat People in Montreal, 1980-1990*. Toronto, York Lanes, 1996.
 25. Knudsen, John. *Boat People in Transit. Vietnamese in Refugee Camps in the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Japan*. Bergen University Press, 1983.

PS. This list is in way exhaustive. If you are aware of any book title about the Vietnamese Boat people missing from this list, please let us know at sacei007@yahoo.com. Many thanks.

Operation Passage to Freedom: Ronald Frankum

It all began in 1954 when the first Vietnamese decided to run away from the communists who then occupied North Vietnam. Aware of communists' cruelty and oppression, close to a million northerners

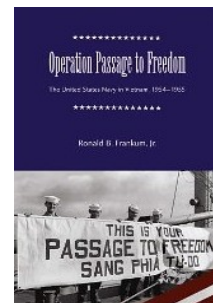
abandoned their hamlets, villages, and towns leaving behind their belongings, houses, businesses, and ancestral lands to board ships and boats that would take them to the land of Freedom: South Vietnam. That was the first Exodus in more than 2000-year-Vietnamese history: people willingly leaving their ancestral lands under oppression.

The same thing again happened in 1975 when a second Exodus featuring more than 3 m Vietnamese-- although the exact number is unknown because most of them had died during the escape at seas and on land, in the hands of pirates or Khmer Rouge--ran away from the communists.

When the communists came, people just ran away. Those who stayed behind for one reason or another, eventually left some time later gradually swelling the number of escapees leaving communist Vietnam.

"Very little has been written about the U.S. Navy in Vietnam in the immediate post-Korean War era, nor has the magnitude of American participation in the resettlement of Vietnam refugees following the 1954 Geneva Conference been explored. Beginning in the fall of 1954, U.S. Navy ships, as a part of Task Force 90, helped to relocate thousands of displaced North Vietnamese to South Vietnam following the separation of the nation at the 17th parallel. What those sailors accomplished during the three hundred days of Operation Passage to Freedom forever changed the lives of more than 310,000 Vietnamese who traveled on their ships. In Operation Passage to Freedom Ronald B. Frankum, Jr. recounts the events surrounding this enormous humanitarian evacuation that was the American military's first major involvement with the Vietnamese people."

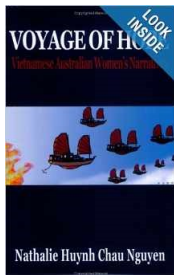
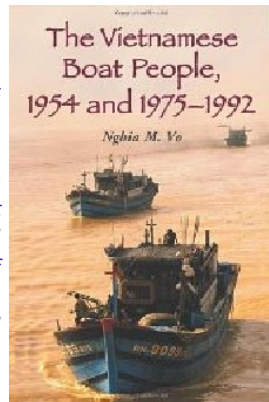
<http://www.amazon.com/Operation-Passage-Freedom-1954-1955-Southeast/dp/0896726088/>



THE VIETNAMESE BOAT PEOPLE: 1954 AND 1975-1982: NGHIA M. VO

Vietnam is forever associated with the image of the boat people. The communists have caused two of largest sea diasporas in the world: one in 1954 and the other from 1975 to 1992. Had nations in the world have not intervened and pressured Hanoi to be more humane and change its attitude, the flow of refugees would have continued until today.

"The biggest diaspora in Vietnamese history occurred between 1975 and 1992, when more than two million people fled by boat to escape North Vietnam's oppressive communist regime. Before this well-known exodus from Vietnam's shores, however, there was a massive population shift within the country. In 1954, one million fled from north to south to escape war, famine, and the communist land reform campaign. Many of these refugees went on to flee Vietnam altogether in the 1970s and 1980s, and the experiences of 1954 influenced the later diaspora in other ways as well. This book reassesses the causes and dynamics of the 1975-92 diaspora. It begins with a discussion of Vietnam from 1939 to 1954, then looks closely at the 1954 "Operation Exodus" and the subsequent resettlements. From here the focus turns to the later events that drove hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese to flee their homeland in 1975 and the years that followed. Planning for escape, choosing routes, facing pirates at sea, and surviving the refugee camps are among the many topics covered. Stories of individual escapees are provided throughout. The book closes with a look at the struggles and achievements of the resettled Vietnamese." (Amazon.com)



This is one of the rare books focusing on the travails and hardships of women during the Vietnamese diaspora.

Voyage of Hope: Vietnamese Australian Narratives

Nathalie Chau Nguyen

"VOYAGE OF HOPE explores the experiences and journeys of Vietnamese women who arrived in Australia as part of the massive exodus of refugees from Vietnam following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. It reveals women's memories of life in Vietnam during the French colonial period and after, throughout the war and its aftermath, and what motivated them to leave their homeland and embark on an often dangerous journey to freedom a voyage of hope that eventually led them to a new life in Australia."

<http://www.amazon.com/Voyage-Hope-Vietnamese-Australian-Narratives/dp/186335591X/>

A BI DONG STORY: <http://pulaubidong.wordpress.com/>

My parents fled Southern Vietnam (Ca Mau) after the Vietnam War in late 1978. Along with their siblings, they acquired a boat through a friend, a compass, and a map for their journey. My parents, along with the people on their boat had no set destination in mind, just to flee and find freedom. They wanted to leave as quickly as they could, to find the freedom that the other millions of Chinese Vietnamese people who fled during the same time were looking for. They abandoned their house, belongings, mementos, and wedding photos in hope to flee the communist country. They took only what was most important to them. The most valuable thing my mom brought with her was her diamond ring which my dad bought for her for their wedding.



With the only navigation tools they had of a compass and a map, they sailed to the closest country with hopes that they will accept the refugees. They landed in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia, a few days later, but was told to go to Pulau Bidong where a refugee camp was set up. There were many pirates who stole my parents' siblings' things such as their guitar, jewelry, and other valuable things. Luckily, my mom hid her wedding ring inside the waistband of her pants and the pirates never got to them. The pirates did not care who you were or what your purpose here was for. They only had a few things in mind, to rob, rape, beat and murder the Boat People who were going through hunger and sea sickness. Finally, after what was a horrendous, long boat trip and with many people sick, throwing up on themselves, they landed on the island of Pulau Bidong off the coast of Malaysia on 10/22/1978. My parents even recalled having to purposely sink the boat they were in so that they

were allowed in. They were boat #91, boat name called MH 375 (Minh Hai 375).

Because they were one of the first wave of Boat People there, there was barely any resources and shelter. Each family was put through the ultimate test of the survival of the fittest. My dad along with my uncles had to build their own houses out of wood from the forest, some string and some blue tarp they had gathered up. Fetching "fresh" water was not an easy job. Every time they wanted water to drink, cook or bathe in, they had to walk up to the mountainous area and collect water from wells which they dug up. Food was given in rations from the supply boat that arrived every once in a while. People would have to swim out or use the bridge to where the supply boat was parked. My parents recall the supply boat giving out peas and chicken inside tin cans. It was all they had to eat there.

As days passed by, more and more Boat People who fled Vietnam arrived at Bidong island. This created an economy in which people bartered for money, food, and essential things. Since my family knew their time on the island could be long, they needed money to survive so

Continue on next page

A BI DONG STORY... continued

they thought of some ways to make a little business selling things. My dad was the first (he believes) baker there as he traded some of his belongings for flour to make bread. He cooked the bread in a tin cookie box in which he sold to other people for them to sell for profit. Luckily, my mom was (and still is) a good chef. She made Banh Bia to sell for others to get away from the rationed canned food they were given. But to start this little island business, it set her back some valuables. She had to trade her wedding ring for ingredients to be able to make the pastries. It was such a memorable and valuable item to my mom, but my parents needed to make sacrifices to raise and feed my newborn brother, who was born on Bidong Island.

<http://pulaubidong.wordpress.com/>

BIDONG REFUGEE CAMP

Bidong Island, a one square-kilometer area off the eastern coast of Malaysia, was officially opened as a refugee camp on August 8, 1978 with 121 Vietnamese refugees. The capacity of the camp was said to be 4,500. Another 600 refugees arrived in August and thereafter the arrival of boats from Vietnam was a near daily occurrence. By January 1979, there were 18,000 Vietnamese on the island and by June 1979 it was said to be the most heavily populated place on earth with about 40,000 refugees crowded into a flat area hardly larger than a football field.

By the time Bidong was closed as a refugee camp on October 30, 1991, about 250,000 Vietnamese had passed through or resided in the camp. With the closing of the camp, the remaining refugees were repatriated back to Vietnam. The refugees strongly protested their forced repatriation. A total of 9,000 Vietnamese were repatriated between 1991 and August 28, 2005 when the last refugees departed Malaysia for Vietnam. In 1999, the island was opened to tourism. It has regained its former pristine beauty and many former refugees have revisited their old home. (Wikipedia)



Pirates on the Gulf of Siam: Nhat Tien, Duong Phuc, Vu Thanh Thuy

This is one of the few and earliest reports on the pirates on the Gulf of Siam, especially on Koh Kra Island. This report has brought attention to the world of the

problem of Vietnamese refugees fleeing communist Vietnam who later fell into the hands of barbaric Thai pirates. Until spring of 1981, Thai fishermen hunted refugee women on that island. According to UNHCR, one female refugee was severely burned when southern Thai fishermen, attempting to flush her out, set fire to the hillside where she was hiding. Another cowered for days in a cave, waist deep in water, until crabs had torn the skin and much of the flesh away from her legs.

By Oct 1980, 160 refugees are known to have died on that island alone. The total no doubt was far higher before a detail of six or eight marines was stationed on the island in the spring of 1981 and halted the carnage.

<http://www.amazon.com/Pirates-Gulf-Siam-Vietnamese-Songkhla-Thailand/dp/B0006E6L9Y/>



Remembrance

These are some of the monuments erected throughout the world to honor the Boat People. Although the Hanoi communists had tried to erase these memorials, many more are being built throughout the world to document the criminality of their action.



France



Australia



USA - California



Canada



Australia - Perth



Germany

Inhumanity

In March 2005, a multi-national delegation of overseas Vietnamese decided to visit the two former refugee camps of Pulau Bidong, Malaysia and Pulau Galang, Indonesia. The group from California led by the Venerable Thich Giac Nhien joined the group from Victoria, Australia led by Venerable Thich Phuoc Tan and Tran Dong, head of a non-profit organization Archives of Vietnamese Boat people (AVBP) to pray for the souls of the people who perished in their search for freedom.

In the process they built two memorials one on Bi Dong and the other in Galang to remember their loved ones and to thank the host countries and UNHCR for helping them during this tragic moment in history. They made speeches, reflecting on the past, present, and their loved ones then chanted Buddhist spirit liberation prayers and Christian salvation prayers to help ease

the suffering of the dead. This was a collective memory of the massive loss of human lives that characterized the refugee crisis."

Each memorial was a 2 by 1 by 0.15 meter stele bearing a commemoration on one side and a gratitude message on the other and signed by the overseas Vietnamese. It embodied their collective memories of the refugee exodus. They in the process assume themselves as "self-mourners" because according to Nguyen Vo Thu Huong, they have been "triply erased from the public memories of the Vietnamese communist government, the American Left and the American Right."

In May 2005, the Hanoi government pressured the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia to take down the memorials. Malaysia totally removed the memorial in Bidong while Indonesia carved out the inscription plaque leaving a big gaping hole behind. The overseas Vietnamese reacted violently and even protested in front of the White House when Vietnam Prime Minister Pham Van Khai visited DC. Indonesia replaced the plaque although it altered the words written on it, while Malaysia never rebuilt the removed memorial.

By emphasizing the narrative of escape, loss, and survival, the Bidong and Galang memorials offered an original narrative of the Vietnamese diaspora, one that was born from a massive refugee movement out of communist Vietnam.

Quan Tue Tran: Remembering the Boat People Exodus: A Tale of two Memorials. *J of Vietnamese Studies*. 2012: 3: 80-121.



Communism hollows us out,
and diminishes us,
while Freedom fills us in
and makes us wholesome again.

Nghia M. Vo

