SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE

To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese Culture

NEWSLETTER # 92 JUNE 2016

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

April 30: Black April or White April	1
Remembers Fall of Saigon	4
An My Le: Professor of Photography	15
Hoi An	16
Huge Fish Kill Tests Vietnam's New Regime	17

Editor: Viet Thanh Nguyen is an associate professor of English and American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California, Irvine. He is the author of the 2016 Pulitzer award winning *The Sympathizer*. His other books include: *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (2002) and *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (2016).

April 30: Black April or White April?

Viet Nguyen·Saturday, April 30, 2016

Today is what many Vietnamese in the diaspora call "Black April." For them it is the anniversary of the Fall of Saigon. I understand their feelings. I grew up in a Vietnamese community in San Jose, and I absorbed their memories and their unspoken trauma. My own family was marked by separation and division, by people and property left behind. And yet, I could never wholeheartedly endorse this sense of loss and grievance, could never bring myself to say "Black April" (not least of all because if we were to speak of mourning, we should say "White April," but that would not go over so well in a white America). Like my narrator in The Sympathizer, I see every issue from both sides, and so I see that for some Vietnamese people this is not a day of mourning but one of celebration. The Fall is for some the Liberation.

And yet, it is important to mark this day because it is the symbolic moment when so many Vietnamese people became refugees. Many people have described me as an immigrant, and my novel as an immigrant story. No. I am a refugee, and my novel is a war story. I came to the United States because of a war that the United States fought in Vietnam, a war that the Vietnamese fought with each other, a war that China and the Soviet Union were involved in, a war that the Vietnamese brought to Laos and Cambodia, a war that did not end in 1975, a war that is not over for so many people of so many nationalities and cultures. For Americans to call me an immigrant and my novel an immigrant novel is to deny a basic fact of American history: that many immigrants to this country came because of American wars fought in the Philippines, Korea, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam. Immigrants are the story of the American Dream, of American exceptionalism. Refugees are the reminder of the American nightmare, which is how so many who are caught under American bombardment experience the United States.

As much as Americans fear refugees and seek to transform refugees into immigrants who fulfill the American Dream, the Vietnamese who stayed in Vietnam have a hard time understanding their refugee brethren. I had breakfast with a former Vietnamese ambassador in Hanoi and she said that the "boat people" were economic refugees, not political refugees. Probably every single Vietnamese refugee would disagree with her, and the ethnic Chinese who were persecuted, robbed, and blackmailed would say that the line between being an economic refugee and a political refugee is a very thin one.

One of my Vietnamese language teachers said that the re-education camps were necessary to prevent postwar rebellion. Perhaps rebellion was in the making, but reaching out a hand in peace and reconciliation would have done so much more to heal the country.
The Vietnamese people overseas remember the re-education camps as the ultimate hypocrisy of the Vietnamese revolution, the failure of Vietnamese brotherhood and sisterhood. This, too, is one reason why so many Vietnamese people became refugees and why so many find it hard to reconcile with a Vietnam that will not acknowledge its crimes against its own people, even as it is so ready to talk about the crimes of the South Vietnamese, the Americans, the French, and the Chinese. Nothing is more difficult than to look in the mirror and hold oneself to account. The victorious Vietnamese are guilty of that. So are the defeated Vietnamese.

I've heard more than once from Vietnamese foreign students in the United States that the past is over, that the Vietnamese at home understand the pain of the Vietnamese overseas, and that we should reconcile and move on. These students do not understand what the overseas Vietnamese feel--that they lost a country. It is easier to be magnanimous when one has won. But at least these Vietnamese students want to be magnanimous. At least they reach out a hand in friendship, unlike many of an older generation.

Continue on next page

April 30...

The younger Vietnamese Americans need to reach out that hand, too, even as they feel the deep need of filial piety. They wish to acknowledge the suffering and the pain of their parents and grandparents. If they do not, who will? They live in a country where most Americans know nothing about the Vietnamese people, or about Vietnamese Americans, where Americans care little to remember the Southern Vietnamese who they supposedly fought the war for. So the younger Vietnamese Americans feel that burden to carry on their parents' memories. One day, perhaps, they can let that burden go, but it will be much easier to do so when Vietnam helps to carry that burden by officially acknowledging that every side in that war had its reasons, that every side had its patriots, that we cannot divide the past into heroes and traitors.

As for me, I remain a refugee. My memory begins when I arrived in the United States at age four and was taken away from my parents to live with a white family. That was the condition for being able to leave the refugee camp in Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. That experience remains an invisible brand stamped between my shoulder blades. I have spent my life trying to see that brand, to make sense of it, to rework it into words that I can speak to myself, that I can share with others. As painful as that experience was, what I learned from it was not to dwell only on my own pain. I needed to acknowledge that pain, to understand it, but in order to live beyond it, I also needed to acknowledge the pain of others, the worldview of others. This is why I cannot say "Black April," because it is one story of one side, and I am interested in all stories of all sides.
Viet Nguyen

April 30: Black April or White April?

A Rebuttal
Dear Viet,

In your letter you told us you are a Vietnamese refugee who cannot accept the term “Black April” because it is the story of one side. This is understandable because as a 2.0 generation Vietnamese, you had neither witnessed the communist atrocities nor suffered during the 21-year war when South Vietnam was *attacked* by the communists; also having been schooled by liberal teachers in liberal institutions, you start spitting out the one-side story of the liberals. So please do not tell us you are interested in all stories of all sides.

Although we are proud of your success in releasing *The Sympathizer* and *Nothing Ever Dies*, your knowledge of Vietnamese history remains biased, thus limited. Among other things, your books described the war as a fight between the North Vietnamese and the Americans; it is not, because it was also a fight for freedom between the South and North Vietnamese, between nationalists and communists, between right and wrong. This was not a fight for Liberation because even the communists knew we did not need to be liberated. It was a fight for decency, for freedom which even today does not exist under communist Vietnam. Second, you described the U.S. had lost 58,000 soldiers to the war compared to 3 million Vietnamese. The one million South Vietnamese (300,000 soldiers and 700,000 civilians) died not from U.S. weaponry, but mainly from sophisticated communist shells, mortars, bombs, fired from AK 47 guns, Chinese and Soviet cannons, T54 tanks, etc. Third, the communists exhibited an unbelievable savagery during that war: they *invaded* (Italics are mine) South Vietnam and killed everyone without discrimination, soldiers and civilians alike, women and children, young and old to spread their communist rule. The 2/1 ratio of civilians/soldiers killed revealed the extent of the horrors of the war. Therefore, the Vietnamese-Americans cannot call April 30 a “White April” because it was never white, it was bloody red and turned to a dirty maroon color after a while.
How could such a soiled and dirty past be called white? How could such unspeakable cruelty, disregard of freedom and human rights be called liberation? Even on the last days of the war, the communists shot down a C-130 transport aircraft as it took off from Tan Son Nhut airport and shelled Saigon killing thousands of unarmed civilians and the last two U.S. Marines. Where did these T-54 tanks, AK-47 guns come from? Were they made in the Mekong delta or transported from Moscow, Peking, and Hanoi all the way down to the delta? If this was a blatant communist invasion in violation of international accords, why should we be interested in their views?

The communists violated the peace process and the integrity of the Vietnamese government by taking over the Hanoi government in 1954. They violated the 1954 Geneva Accords by sending troops to conquer South Vietnam. They violated the 1962 Geneva Accords on Laos by refusing to get out of Laos and by using the peace generated by that accord to build the Ho Chi Minh Trail to invade South Vietnam. They violated the 1972 Paris Accords by continuing war after 1972 and by taking over South Vietnam in 1975. Because of these violations, Dommen called the Hanoi government illegitimate. The latter is only hanging on to power through the use of its Cong An (secret police).

The best example of a BAD peace idea is that imposed on South Vietnam in the 1970’s. Hanoi never wanted to have peace, they only wanted to conquer South Vietnam. Thich Nhat Hanh (Yes, that monk who demanded peace then in Saigon in the 1960s but never dared to tell Hanoi to hold down their guns. He returned to Vietnam for peace work in 1982 only to be kicked out of the country by the communists), Jane Fonda, the peaceniks, the U.S. liberals tried to impose peace on South Vietnam in the 1960’s and 1970’s, but they never tried to force it on Hanoi and the communists. The end result was the disintegration and collapse of South Vietnam. This was followed by enslavement of the South Vietnamese, incarceration in concentration camps, and escape by refugees and so on… This was the ultimate result of unilateral peaceful ideas of weak peo-

ple. Please NEVER talk of peace offer again by the communists.

When the overseas Vietnamese escaped from communist Vietnam, Hanoi called them "traitors" (and other ugly names, too ugly to name them here) because they did not want to live in communist concentration camps, under the control of the Cong An and their corrupt and oppressive government. Hanoi disparaged them, stripped them of citizenships, and treated the South Vietnamese still living in Vietnam like slaves. When some overseas Vietnamese returned to Vietnam to visit their relatives, they were treated worse than foreigners. But when Hanoi finally realized that Vietnamese-Americans have acquired freedom, are economically successful, and have sent home billions of dollars each year, Hanoi changes its tone and tries to be "magnanimous" by offering concessions. However, the South Vietnamese living in Vietnam are still shunned; they are not given freedom and rights, are not compensated for their past and present losses; the Bien Hoa National Cemetery continues to be desecrated 41 years after the war, and so on. As the Vietnamese-Americans disregard Hanoi's overtures, the communists begin to acquire businesses in the U.S. Little Saigons to make their presence feel and to compete with the overseas Vietnamese. They organize Vietnam TV in Los Angeles last month in an attempt to influence and control heart and mind of the Vietnamese Americans. They try to prevent Vietnamese Americans from raising and flying their yellow national flag in communities and institutions in the U.S. They continue to wage war to them on foreign lands. Is this a real peace offer by the communists?

You told us you want to learn from all sides, but while claiming to be a refugee you have failed to learn the true nature of being a Vietnamese. To be Vietnamese is not only to suffer through pain, loss, and adversity, but also to have climbed out of this vicious cycle of war, poverty, and despair and to rebuild themselves into free people. To be Vietnamese is to live free and to be anti-communist because communism is a foreign ideology that is not consistent with Vietnamese culture and ideals of freedom and human rights. (Vo, *Reflections about the Vietnam War*)

You claim to be a refugee coming out of Fort Indiantown Gap but cannot say "Black April" simply because it is the story of one side. What is wrong with telling the truth as it is, a truth that not only did not kill us, but also made us one hundred times stronger than before? What is wrong with describing and living what we had gone through? And you Viet, how could you renege on that experience when it is "stamped between your shoulder blades?" You can run away but cannot hide from it. First of all, April 30 is not a story of Liberation, but one of Aggression, Conquest, and Subjugation. Since Hanoi could not peacefully win the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese, it simply used force to subjugate us. Second, it is a story of lies, of deception, of shame, of betrayal, of disregard of various accords, including the 1972 Paris Accords by the communists. Vietnamese people will NEVER trust and believe the communists who have betrayed and deceived them. Third, but it is also a story of self-liberation for the Vietnamese-Americans who through hard work, persistence, and ingenuity had pulled themselves out of the realm of war loss and despair. It is a magnificent story of courage and self-belief of millions of people who lost everything, including their motherland and dared to rebuild themselves a new life in new countries. They believe in themselves and have learned to NEVER befriend nor submit to the communists. They have found by themselves a new way of being Vietnamese.

Therefore, April 30 for us is ALWAYS a "BLACK APRIL" because we own it. Through it and because of it, we finally got the freedom we fought for, not in our motherland, but in foreign countries that nurtured us through decades of painful sorrow, depressive sadness, and resilient courage. Black April has become part of our Vietnamese-American heritage. It not only reminds us of the cruelty, savagery, deceit, illegitimacy, and corruption of the communist government, to just name a few, but also of the deep abyss we fell into after the war and the way we pulled ourselves out of this abyss to earn freedom, legitimacy, and respectability in the lands of freedom. We DID it and will do it again.

Like Nazism and all other terror states, we can NEVER accept nor befriend communism simply because it is against our genetic heritage. And on each Black April Day, we will forever mourn the one million South Vietnamese as well as the 58,000 Americans who died protecting Freedom, Justice, and Human Rights for Vietnam.

Nghia M. Vo
Author, *The Bamboo Gulag*
The Vietnamese Boat People

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon

By Larry Engelman

Q. … start at Ban Me Thuot or must one go back to the 1973 Paris Agreement with the North Vietnamese left in the country. What was that sealed the fate of South Vietnam?

A. Yes. I think you are right. The fact that the South was limited in its response to the aggression of North Vietnam.

I've given a lot of thought about the strategic balance that existed in Southeast Asia and I kind of start with the idea that the South being limited to fighting a defensive war was destined to be defeated. Whether or not they would have been defeated at Ban Me Thuot or Saigon, or Xuan Loc it really does not matter. They were committed to try to defend the entire country with a force that was static, had very little mobility and they had no capacity to make it larger. They couldn't create reserves. They had their strategic reserve committed in Military Region One almost from the very beginning. They had the marine division that was supposed to be reserved. It was up in Quang Tri. The airborne division, almost all of it, was in Thua Thien. They had no reserve. The North was dedicated to overwhelming the South and they were going to do it one way or another and they had the advantage of the offensive. Just a simple principle, if you attack you have one big advantage of the offensive.

They had sanctuary because we had to stop the bombing of the North. There is some evidence and I think it's pretty good that had we continued that bombing much longer, we probably would have gotten a better treaty out of it, because they were pretty much on the ropes. But they had no constraints on their activities. They had Laos. They had sanctuaries in Cambodia. And they had the unwavering support of the Chinese and Soviets with all the material and equipment that they could possibly use.

Q. What about Enhance Plus? Was that just a temporary aid?

A. That was our attempt to upgrade the South Vietnamese forces. It worked for a while. That's when we brought in more F5s and I guess we turned over some more artillery to them, perhaps more tanks. In the end it really did not matter because this stuff was scattered all over the country anyway. We had no ability to focus their military power on anything that would be decisive, whereas the North had the advantage of getting—they could attack as they did in Ban Me Thuot, with three divisions against one regiment. Now, had Phu maneuvered the twenty-third Division rapidly enough down Ban Me Thuot, he might have held them off from Ban Me Thuot for a while. They were at Pleiku because he expected the attack at Pleiku. There was a minor attack at Pleiku, a diversion, so he elected to leave about two thirds of his division, the 23rd Division, in the Pleiku area and moved too late to save Ban Me Thuot. As I say, Ban Me Thuot might have been saved had he had the whole division there.

Q. Saved only in the short run.

A. Yeah, only in the short run, because they say the North Vietnamese were not going to give up. They were going to attack and they could mass, as they did in Phuoc Long Province headquarters and Song Be.

Q. Now was that a test? People say that was a test to see what the American response would be.

A. I don't really know if that was their motive, but they did find out what our response was, and that was nothing. We even maneuvered an aircraft carrier back into the South China Sea there and then denied that it was there as a response.

Q. Why the agreement to leaving that army in the South? Political pressure to get us out?

A. That was my reading of it. I think Kissinger went into this thing trying to get the best agreement he could, but he knew that whatever happened, he had two things to do. To get the United States out of there, and second to get the prisoners back. That's all he could expect. And he even said in responding to some questions from the Press, they asked what's going to make the North Vietnamese honor this agreement, particularly with respect to forces in Laos, and in effect, he said "Nothing. But putting more words in this agreement is not going to change it either."

You can put all you want into it about you can't do this or that, but unless you enforce it with power, it doesn't make any difference.

Q. Were the Vietnamese wiser at that stage? Do you think Thieu and his general staff saw what would happen? What was their state of mind?

A. Their state of mind, I think, was simply yes, it was a really bad deal that they had agreed under duress to allow North Vietnamese to keep a major expeditionary force in South Vietnam and that was a bad deal. But, at least some of them believed that President Nixon's assurance was good, the assurance that the United States would respond with military force if the North violated the agreement. And we showed them that we were going to do it. We established an air base at Nakhon Phnom in Thailand. That was a big base, commanded by a four star Air Force officer. It was a major command. In fact we in DAO in my echelon of reporting went through NKP. It was called US Support Advisement. The fighter bombers were located there and the reconnaissance airplanes, but the B-52s were still at U Tapao. They were still available from Guam.

And USAG, General Vogt's headquarters, Seventh Air Force, had responsibility for continuing the targeting planning and in fact they invited and brought over to NKP General Ngo Quang Truong, for one, of First Corps, to go over the target quotas. And they accepted Truong's ideas on where he would want the B-52s to strike if… we had targeting there, we had targeting in Military Region Three, I worked on it myself. In fact we even used them. It was after the cease fire, while we still had authority to bomb in Cambodia. That wasn't cut off, I think, until June.

Continue on next page

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

We used B-52 targeting right on the border between South Vietnam and Cambodia to support, primarily, the Mekong River convoys going up into Phnom Penh and also while we were about it, since we knew where the base areas were of the North Vietnamese Army, right above the border area, we put them in there too, right along the Mekong and on the frontier.
So they had some reason to believe that we were serious. That if the North Vietnamese attacked in force that we would come to their assistance with the bombing.

Q. What about with Watergate beginning to unfold—Nixon's resignation? Did that news reach Vietnam and make an impact on the Americans there or the Vietnamese there? Thieu didn't seem to understand what was going on.
A. I don't remember—I wasn't prescient enough to say, "Well, this is the end of it." Nixon was out, so Ford or whoever followed—we didn't worry about that. What we were primarily worried about at the Defense Attache Office with respect to United States policy, was what was going on in the Congress to keep trimming the military assistance program. They cut it down to such bare bones that our logisticians were screaming.

Q. What about the Congressional committee that came? McCloskey, Abzug…
A. Abzug was the most ungracious, vile, rude. She was also nasty, mean spirited. That's her bag, I guess.

Q. You would think when you are on a fact finding commission, you would…
A. She came prepared to condemn the South. Her only interest while she was there was to see political prisoners. And we thought that was kind of bizarre. Here is a country fighting for its existence. It's under siege. Anybody that has any knowledge of history knows that countries under siege take extreme measures against the political opposition. We've done it in this country.

Q. Newspaper editors who had been in prison—one whispered to McCloskey that he had been tortured. Then McCloskey told me that in Cambodia he asked to see some prisoners that had been taken and they didn't have any. And then it struck him that our side weren't taking prisoners. But it didn't appear to him that that was what the war in Cambodia was like. Apparently our side was supposed to take prisoners while Phnom Penh was being besieged and their side didn't have to abide by that.
It was strange. I accompanied McCloskey everywhere to the field. I didn't go around with him in Saigon. He wanted to go to the delta and we went to the division headquarters and he wanted to see a prisoner of war. As it happened, they had just captured one. They happened to scarf some fellow up out of the canals as he was going down in a boat full of ammunition and something. They brought him in, very loosely tied with string and McCloskey through an interpreter asked him who he was. He was a VC, had been in the outfit for ten years, was thirty-five years old and he was tired. He was being well treated. There wasn't much to it, just a routine thing.
He wanted the same everywhere he went. He went up to the 22nd Division headquarters in Binh Dinh and the same thing. The division commander was kind of amused by it. He wanted to tell him about how he was fighting in the Lau Lat (???) Valley, and how the NVA Third Division was trying to fight out of the An Lao Valley and he had them blocked up there north of Bong Son. And McCloskey wanted to talk to a prisoner.

Q. Why? Did anybody advise him to talk to prisoners?
A. I don't know. I thought McCloskey was awfully bright. I saw him after the war, after I got back to Washington I called on him. He was interested in what I was doing. But I never really quite understood his attitude.
Some of them seemed much more interested in the battles than in what we needed, what would change it if anything.

Q. When you were meeting with them, did you see the writing on the wall that there was no way they were going to recommend additional funding?
A. It was pretty much settled. Then after they left, President Ford sent General Weyand, Chief of Staff of the Army and we talked to him.

Q. Why was he sending these people? There're two interpretations, one, he wanted to make sure he didn't get blamed for what happened eventually, that there was really no hope for that aid to come through. The second would be that it was under serious consideration.
He went to Congress and asked for it. Whether he thought it was possible or not, I did not know. By that time, as I told Weyand, it's really too late for military assistance.

Q. Millicent Fenwick said we sent battleship after battleship, is one more going to save them. The Vietnamese seemed to think so. Speak to the Vietnamese and they say just one more good B-52 attack would have done it.
A. That might have helped a great deal, sure, but we weren't talking in these terms. E were talking that we wanted another few shiploads of ammunition and bandages. We wanted plasma. We wanted to replenish the supply system of the Vietnamese army.
That's really all we were asking for. But at that time I told General Weyand on two occasions I had private meetings==I had known him in Vietnam in '66 and he knew me, so he listened—Snepp says this in his book, but he has it wrong, because I told him about it—I told him

Continue on next page

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

that we needed American firepower, fighter bombers as a minimum and that would be the only thing that could save it. They were closing in on Saigon at that time. B-52s were fine, but we needed something a little more precise right now.

Q. B-52s for tactical support or B-52s on Hanoi?
A. No, in South Vietnam, because they already had more divisions in South Vietnam than we had. You had plenty of targets in South Vietnam. You didn't have to go up and bomb rear areas then. Save that for later. There were concentrations of North Vietnamese divisions that were good targets. Not that we had any targeting done, because we didn't have any reconnaissance, but we could have. That's why we needed the fighter bombers and the "recon" airplanes to find out where they were for sure. If we don't get that, military assistance is irrelevant at that point.

Q. American fighter bombers with American pilots you mean?
A. Oh sure. Off of carriers or from U Tapao.

Q. What did he say?
A. Well, he didn't commit himself. He just said that's interesting.

Q. But it never happened.
A. No. Wasn't there already a resolution in the Congress? They would have had to change Congress's mind about it.

Q. What about Thieu's decision to abandon the highlands and abandon the Montagnards in the highlands? Ky thought this was unforgivable. Was that whole series of decisions unwise or just misunderstood?
A. I think the decision—of course that decision wasn't made until Ban Me Thuot was lost and until the first effort at a counter attack failed. By that time, the 320th NVA division, the 10th and another division, three divisions were then in the vicinity of Ban Me Thuot and Thieu thought he could withdraw the—there were at least two tank battalions in Pleiku and three or four regiments of Rangers that could be pulled out; and what remained of the 23rd Division. And get that back out of Nha Trang. Then he could reposition to hold Nha Trang and to counterattack and take Ban Me Thuot. That was the idea and I don't think there is anything wrong with that idea. If he hadn't tried to pull the people out of Pleiku and Kontum, there would have been lost anyway. They were cut off. The two highways going into Ban Me Thuot, Pleiku, and Kontum were cut. That's why they had to use the old Route 17. So I can't fault him on his attempt to make a withdrawal. I would fault him, and we did, on the execution by the commander.

Q. What about the provincials?
A. That I would say was part of the execution.

Q. Was it wise?
A. No, it was absolutely wrong thing to do. It was badly planned operation. He turned the planning over to his brigadier general. Phu was already in the hospital as I remember.

Q. Apparently it was just a flesh wound?
A. He wasn't seriously wounded, but it was a psychological wound as much as anything else.

Q. He had been captured at Dien Bien Phu evidently and that haunted him, the idea of being captured.
A. It's possible. I knew his G-2.

Q. You didn't have any input into that decision? Thieu was fairly reclusive by this time?
A. Start with this, the United States militarily there had no advisory responsibility, and we didn't try to get one. We were out of the advisory business. Even my boss, General Smith and General Murray before him made no attempt to give any strategic or tactical advice to the Vietnamese army. Their responsibilities were primarily managing the military assistance program according to the law. They had to answer to the Department of Defense and ultimately to the Congress about how the money was spent and where the equipment went and whether it was being used properly or not. All of the laws that govern the military assistance program, they were charged with seeing that they were followed.

Q. Did they have to answer to that international control commission of the Poles, etc?
A. No, we didn't have to answer to them at all. Nobody answered to them. Poles, Hungarians, Canadians, Iranians, and Indonesians.

Q. Some of the Americans there said ICCS stood for I Can't Control Shit.

Continue on next page

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

A. I never heard that. But yeah, that's right. Being divided ideologically as they were, there was no consensus on anything that they inspected anyway. And the North Vietnamese kept them out of their sensitive areas. So the only area that they were looking at really, in any depth at all, was Tan Son Nhut where we bringing in stuff, so they checked all the cargo that we brought in. Otherwise, they were up—I know in one case some Hungarians did some scouting for the North Vietnamese, turned over the information to them, up in the Da Nang area. They had taken pictures of the bridges and taken photos of the South Vietnamese garrisons and installations and that. I talk about it in there.

Q. What about once the withdrawal starts, was the problem with the generals' failure in spirit? Or failure in courage? Did the generals leave command to the colonels and the colonels to the majors, etc?
A. I don't know what happened. I wasn't up there. But it's my impression that when it became apparent that they were going to be overrun, that most of the effort of the individual soldier was to try to save his family. The ARVN Third Division was responsible for the defense of Da Nang. As the pressure increased on them, and they began being moved back by the attack of two or three North Vietnamese divisions, I think they had a deterioration of command. Some people were deserting because their families lived in Da Nang, the soldiers' families, noncommissioned officers, and officers too, I suppose, were going back into Da Nang to try to pick up their families and save them. That was one thing.
Now the Marines, their families were down in Saigon. The Marine Corps headquarters was in Xian close to Saigon. I don't know why they went on a rampage. I didn't even know they did for that matter. I don't know how bad it was. They made a fairly orderly withdrawal out of Hue. They moved back and moved on that spit of land and got around the Hai Van pass and got into Da Nang in pretty good order, better that the ARVN First Division.

Q. Were you getting pictures, eye witness accounts from Da Nang at the time? Anybody from World Airways?
A. Part of the time. I may have seen pictures (of the 727) later, but I wasn't keeping track of those very much. I was trying to keep track of the North Vietnamese and what they were doing more than I could. We had no agent in the field. We had nobody to report on anything. We were cut down so severely and in the first part of April we began withdrawing our people away.

Q. Under the assumption that all would be lost?
A. Yeah. Under the assumption that if we didn't, they would get captured. I had a man in Pleiku, for instance, John Good and he worked out of the Nha trang Consul General's office, the Consul General of MR2, Monty Spear, and Monty called me and told me that he wanted me to pull John Good out of Pleiku. I wanted to leave him a couple more days, but—I think Monty was right, it was time to pull him out; but while he was there, Good was sending us information so long as the communications held up, which was kind of sometime thing. When we lost ban me Thuot, we lost a big transmitter.

Q. These were open cities, Da Nang, hue, Nha Trang—just abandoned.
A. Well. The South Vietnamese fought pretty hard at Phan Rang.
They held the outskirts of Nha Trang for quite a while, a couple of Ranger battalions held there, but things collapsed behind them and they had to get out. They were overwhelmed by numbers. I don't fault them very much, because when you put in the artillery, the armor and the overwhelming infantry strength the North Vietnamese had against them, they didn't have any hope of survival.

Q. Were you expecting any proposal of partition?
A. No, I didn't expect it at all. I think it was a very false hope on the part of the Vietnamese who were talking about it. There weren't really talking about partition as much as they were talking about, this is the only line that we can hold. We're exhausted, we've pulled back the survivors of the division that we had north of Nha Trang. We've got them back now into the Vung Tau area and we're trying to re-equip them and to hold a line short—well, the first idea was to anchor it on the coast near Nha Trang and to take Ban Me Thuot back and take the highlands and hold it there. But y that time, they didn't have enough equipment that could do that.

Q. The collapse wasn't just the collapse. It was the capturing of all that American equipment at Da Nang. They captured a whole squadron of F5s.
A. I think there were A37s too. I don't know that there were any F5s captured at Da Nang. I think there were some left on the ground in Pleiku.

Q. Ken Healey said he went by almost a whole squadron of F5s sitting there with ammunition. He said when he drove by them in his 727 he thought this was the end. No fuel, just sitting on the ground. So you were aware of what was falling into their hands, American equipment.
A. Pretty much, yeah.

Continue on next page

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

Q. Did those planes bomb Saigon eventually? I'm still not sure who was bombing Saigon.
A. They were A37s that were used. They bombed Tan Son Nhut.

Q. Okay. It wasn't just a rocket attack. The civilians seemed to think it was a rocket attack.
A. Yes. They would think that because it's hard to see a fighter plane with the smoke and everything. But yes, the evening of the 28th around six o'clock in the evening they came over Tan Son Nhut and dropped some bombs.

Q. Is there a point reached where you begin to pack your bags?
A. Yeah. I guess I came to that conclusion, I guess on the fourth of April. I think that's the date that I told General Smith that we should now evacuate all but our essential civilian employees. See, I had about two hundred civilian employees, Americans and a half dozen Vietnamese. But I'm talking about Americans. And a lot of these were women, stenographers, clerks, a few operations analysts, two or three of those, and I guess my chief of graphics in the intelligence branch was a woman. So I said we've got to get them out and get down to bare bone operation. Also any dependents that were there—my wife was there, living in a little trailer next to Tan Son Nhut.

Q. What happened of the fourth?
A. I don't think there was any specific thing that happened. It was just a buildup of realizing that we weren't going to get any assistance from the United States and that we had just made our intelligence estimate and I was talked out of saying that we've only got a month to go. My analysts were a little more optimistic than I was. They thought we might hold out until June--my intelligence analysts that worked for me. We had just published our monthly intelligence report. We'd come down that it was lost.
So I sent my wife home that day by Pan Am and I told General Smith we ought to clean out. The problem with that was, you see, we put a lot of our women on that C5 that went out with the orphans and it crashed. It got out over the South China Sea and the rear door fell off and crashed into the elevators of the airplane--that is, the tail section and damaged it to the point that the pilot had to turn back for Tan Son Nhut and almost made it. He landed in the rice paddy and burned. I lost twelve or thirteen of my civilian employees in that, all women. I kept my own personal secretary until the very last, but I sent out all the rest.

Q. What do you think at the time? Does something like that immobilize you? Put you in a darker mood? Does one just despair of everything?
A. I guess, to some people. It doesn't to me. I've been in a lot of battles, in a lot of wars.

Q. But this wasn't really our fight any more.
A. Of course I was distraught as anyone else would be. These people we knew.

Q. Nobody to blame?
A. No. Well, I guess in that particular case you'd find out the fellow that was supposed to close the rear door and didn't do it properly. But he was probably killed anyway.

Q. That plane was never hit by a SAM?
A. No. There were a remarkable number of survivors. Almost the entire crew, everybody that was in the forward part of the airplane survived because the nose broke off.

Q. Daley's people say a lot of the orphans they were supposed to take out were put on that plane and they should have gone on their plane. Did you have any opinion about Daley and his people at that time?
A. I didn't even know what he was doing. We were very involved in reporting the battles and in running our own evacuation. I was chief of operations as well as chief of intelligence at that time. But fortunately General Smith organized a "task force" or a special staff section to handle the nuts and bolts of the evacuation. That worked very well. The attaches from Saigon did an awfully good job in organizing that thing and keeping it running.

Q. What about Graham Martin during all of this? Was he in touch with reality?
A. I think he was. I saw him virtually every day. He asked me to come down and give him my views. The only thing that I had doubts about from the very beginning of this period was that he was getting some information that he thought indicated that the North was ready to hold and have what might be an orderly capitulation and I never believed it. I don't recall discussing it with him directly in those terms, but there was nothing that we could offer the North to cause them to take anything short of the clear victory that they knew was in their grasp. What have you got to give, how do you convince them not to do that? The only thing you could do was say we're going to bomb the hell out of you if you don't, and we weren't about to say that. There wasn't anything to trade off. That's why I thought it was a futile hope. I think Snepp thinks it could have been done.

Continue on next page

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

Q. Some of the Vietnamese seem to think Martin strung them along concerning American intervention, or American aid.
A. Well, he tried awfully hard to convince the President and the Congress that we needed it. I think he worked awfully hard to try to get that done, and maybe he had an idea that he might succeed. He failed, but I sure don't fault him for that, he tried hard.

Q. What about his failure to organize the evacuation until the last moment?
A. I don't think that's a valid complaint. Under the circumstances where he was trying to convince the South Vietnamese that we were going to help, and all was not lost, and to keep the good fight going, it would have been extremely deleterious to morale if we had started a visible evacuation under those conditions. You can't do both. You either hold or you get out.
He allowed us, I thought much to his credit, allowed us at DAO to begin sending people out. People we told him should get out. And we did a lot of planning. I didn't get much cooperation out of his people at the embassy compiling lists so we could do any reasonable planning on how many airplanes we needed, but after a while we got that under way too. In fact it really didn't get started well until General Smith organized that team to handle it. Then we got cooperation.

Q. What about Thieu's resignation, then the fall of Xuan Loc on the 21st? Did that impress you at all?
A. No, irrelevant.

Q. Did you watch his address on television in which he blamed the Americans?
A. No. I didn't have a television. I had one in my trailer, but I never looked at it.

Q. Ky seems to think if he could have come in he could have rallied.
A. I don't think Ky had any constituency. He had some in the Air Force, but the Army didn't trust him.

Q. So it wasn't really a failure just of leadership. It was simply mathematical, they were overwhelmed by numbers.
A. Overwhelmed, out done, out maneuvered. As I say, you've got the advantage of mass.

Q. So President Thieu did some things wrong, but no matter it would have in the end come to the same conclusion.
A. That's my opinion. The only way to have defeated the North Vietnamese would have been to attack them directly. I recall--that is, at that time. Earlier perhaps they may have been persuaded, had the United States strategy in Vietnam been conducted a little bit differently from the very early days, such as not putting up any longer with that facade of Lao neutrality that Harriman thought was so precious. The 1968 Accords, which followed earlier accords, '63 or '61, which we didn't really observe, in fact, anyway. We had people operating in Laos all the while, but we never did it overtly.

Q. Both Ky and Chung and other Vietnamese, too, tell me the United States did not want to win the war. Winning would have been simple, bomb the dikes during the rainy season around Hanoi. Ky told me he had been trying to convince the Americans of that since 1965.
A. Maybe. I don't think that's very decisive at all. Besides the fact that it's an inhumane way to fight a war and not in the style of the United States to do it that way. We always tried to fight the military forces of the other country, not the civilians.
I know, World War II in Europe was different. We were initially responding to the German bombing of England. So that was a tit for tat sort of thing. If you read the bombing survey following World War II you find the bombing of Germany was not decisive. It could have been avoided. It didn't make much difference, in other words.

Q. It's interesting to hear you say it would be inhumane. The Vietnamese didn't think in those terms. They would think tit for tat. There's an army in the South being supplied, killing their people, and so the only way to respond would be to destroy the agriculture of the North temporarily.
A. Besides the fact it's inhumane, I don't think we would. For one thing I don't know if they could hit the dikes and really destroyed them that easily. They're awfully big dikes. You could drop a heck of a lot of bombs on them and they could repair them. It was kind of like trying to bomb all the bridges. They could still repair the bridges, and they did. Our U.S. Navy and Air Force devoted an awful lot of time and energy and blood to trying to destroy the bridges and they did a great job, but each time . . . we could have done it. When I was working on the Army staff in Plans and Operations in 1964, '65, I worked on a plan, the invasion of Vinh. We would put a force in Vinh, and another one which I thought was even more effective and less costly was where we put a corps across Route 9 from Lao Bao on the South Vietnamese border over to Savannakhet on the Mekong River. We figured it would take about a corps force. That would effectively block the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Let the South Vietnamese army handle the blocking from Lao Bao over to the coast. In those days that was not politically feasible anyway. Although it was a well-designed military plan. The Chief of Staff of the Army thought it was good, and he brought it up at meetings of Joint Chiefs of Staff from time to time as a member of the Joint Chiefs, but General Wheeler who was then the chairman, as far as I

Continue on next page

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

know, never brought it up seriously to the President. It would have had to be a Presidential decision. The President was still operating with the strategy that we could bomb them, reduce their will to continue by ever increasing pressure-- I've read that boilerplate so much on these plans-- that they would finally cave in and stop, decide it wasn't worthwhile. We on the army staff, primarily in operations, thought that that was not going to work.

Q. That was Rostow's idea.
A. Rostow and Bundy.

Q. Of course they didn't know that much about the military.
A. They didn't know much about the North Vietnamese stubbornness either, and their devotion to their cause.

Q. Had we invaded and taken Hanoi, Haiphong, taken the coastal cities, would we have been any more successful than the French who also held them throughout.
A. Only if we had put in enough force to do the job. And there was another part of the equation there that the political leadership was most concerned about and that was would the Chinese then enter the war?

Q. The Vietnamese think that's an illusion. They don't take it seriously.
A. But the Vietnamese who say that was an illusion weren't responsible for the decision either. You have to put yourself in President Johnson's place too. He might have said let's do that, but all somebody would have to say would be what if the Chinese enter the war?

Q. Ky said Rusk was always asking him what he thought the Chinese would do. He didn't understand the obsession with the Chinese.
A. The obsession probably came in large measure from recent experience in Korea.

Q. At that time there weren't forty Russian divisions on the Chinese border. He said you let a million Chinese into North Vietnam, who's going to make them go? He thought the North Vietnamese themselves would resist the Chinese coming in. You think the China consideration --
A. I don't think it was valid. I don't think they would have done it. I don't think they would have done anything unless you started operations right up on their border. But what I'm trying to say is that, also, I wasn't responsible. The President had to make that decision and if he erred, he erred on the side of conservatism. He didn't want to go too far. The Chinese at that time were building a network of roads in northern Laos. The Chinese communists had about two or three regiments including anti-aircraft artillery in northern Laos and this was, of course, at the so-called invitation of the government so we couldn't complain about that very much. But we were concerned about it. Because this was not far from Dien Bien Phu and the North Vietnamese border. And there's a pretty good road that goes right from there to North Vietnam. So there was a potential for Chinese intervention.

Q. What about Russian reaction? No consideration at all?
A. Well, I can remember that the chief of staff of the Army was concerned about the Russian intervention.

Q. Johnson was always concerned about that too. Afraid that some American plane would bomb a Russian ship in Haiphong.
A. I remember that was in '64 or '65 that the Navy staff came up with their first whack at mining Haiphong harbor. The Navy was a great advocate of that. Now each service has its own bias based upon its own capabilities and they want to exercise these capabilities if they can. The Air Force was all for bombing. The Navy aviation branch liked the bombing idea too. I guess the brown shoe navy wanted to use the mines, and the Army wanted to use the corps of three divisions of infantry. It's a natural bias. It doesn't say that they're parochial in a derogatory sense, but they know what they can do and they want to try it.
So the Navy came in with a plan to mine Haiphong Harbor, and I was all in favor of it. It was my responsibility to brief these plans to the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Johnson. I remember this in particular I told him I thought was a good idea. The Navy had it well worked out. They could do it with minimal casualties. In fact they probably wouldn't lose any airplanes at all. They put in the mines by air and effectively seal off Haiphong Harbor. His rejoinder was well, what do we do if the Soviet Navy mines Skagerak? That's something I hadn't thought of, up in the Baltic Sea, that's the pass between Denmark and Norway? I don't really think the Soviet Union would react to our mining of a little harbor in Southeast Asia with a major international violation, cutting off sea traffic into Sweden and Norway. I don't know whether he was being facetious or not, but he did tell me very firmly he didn't want us to put that plan in.

Q. Can you tell me about your last days in Vietnam and what your fears were, what your eyes were seeing?
A. I left on the night of the 29th. I guess it started on the night of the 28th when they bombed Tan Son Nhut. That afternoon Tan Son Nhut gates were jammed with people trying to leave. Much to their credit, the South Vietnamese police and Air Police were keeping order at Tan Son Nhut. Nobody was climbing the fence or breaking down gates. They were checking their passes as they came in.

Continue on next page

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

On the 28th, I went down to the embassy and talked to Ambassador Martin, and I was able to get my driver and able to get through the gate—a real crowd, very slow getting through, but we managed to get down to the embassy and I had a discussion with him about the situation. He wanted to know what I knew about where the forces were and how much more time—and I gave him the best I could, because I had all through this time had daily meetings with the J2 of the JGS, Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung. In fact, I've got Lung's battle map.
I got back in the afternoon, I guess, from the embassy. My driver, a Chinese Vietnamese, said his little boy was in the hospital with pneumonia and he wanted to go home early and I said go ahead, get your family together and come on back so we can evacuate. This guy had started his career—he is a Hainan Chinese from Hainan Island. When the Chinese communists took over Hainan, he went to North Vietnam to Vinh. He was a grocery man, opened a little store. It seems all the Chinese I know have a store; they all sell something to somebody. So he had a store there. And the communists took over North Vietnam and he came down to Binh Dinh Province--the worst place he could pick, probably the strongest communist organization in South Vietnam, I suppose, in those days was in Binh Dinh. They confiscated his store, took all his stuff, so he came down to Saigon. He had about six or seven kids and he began working for the Americans. He drove all of the J2s at MACV. That's how I inherited him. In fact, I was J2 MACV for a week or two at the end, when MACV was phasing out. He came to me and asked me if he could drive for me and I said sure.

So he went off to get his kid out of the hospital and I never saw him. He couldn't get back. He had a little motorbike. Then the bombing started, which lasted twenty minutes or so. I was also chief of the mess there. I was running the command mess and I got some money from the finance and paid off all my Vietnamese in dollars. I didn't want to pay them in piasters, all those that were still there. A lot of them I had already sent out and were already in Guam. Anybody of our employees who wanted to go. One young lady, one of our waitresses I had known for a couple years didn't want to go because she had three children and a mother. She came and said good-bye. My American secretary--I told her it wasn't safe for her to go back to Saigon, to stay in my trailer that night. I had what they call a mobile home now, I guess. It was rather small, had only one bedroom, and no cooking facilities. So she said she'd stay. That night she stayed on the couch.

It was in the middle of the night the rockets started coming in to Tan Son Nhut, and artillery. I think everything that hit our area was rockets and we were hearing things that sounded like artillery. One hit the gym where we were doing the processing of the refugees about two hundred yards from my trailer. Blew the roof off of it, but miraculously nobody was hurt. Another one hit on the road junction about three hundred yards in the other direction and killed two marines. One hit the side of General Smith's house and knocked the wall off, but again, nobody was hurt. There was somebody sleeping right there and the wall just disappeared. So El Tanner, my secretary and I, left there about four o'clock and went back to the office. In the meantime I had -- I guess it was that afternoon General Smith told me to go over and get General Diem who was the chief of the Joint General Staff and tell him it was time. We'd already sent Diem's wife and family out. And he told me to get Diem. So I still had my driver and went over there and picked up Diem and Lung and Tau, the J3, the three of them. And an aide, I think, Diem's aide, or he may have come in his own car.

I flew General Diem out to the Blue Ridge in a helicopter, went with him and then came back. Then I got a place of Tau and Lung to sleep right there on the compound. And I wanted to keep Lung with me and Tho with me because Tho (T-h-o) was the J3 the Operations Officer and Lung was the Intelligence Officer. We also brought in the Vietnamese Lt. Colonel who was responsible for security at Tan Son Nhut.

So El Tanner and I came back that morning, the 29th. Lung and Tho reported in to the operations center. I had an operations center three or four times the size of this room and adjacent to that we had what we called the bunker. It was underground and was protected from air strikes and artillery fire. It was in there that General Smith had brought in the guys from the fleet who were handling the evacuation, the Marines. They were right next to my operations. They brought in their communications. It was a very smooth operation.

Q. They didn't actually establish their perimeter until the afternoon, two o'clock.
A. Probably not. We were pretty secure. The Vietnamese army were still there. Part of the Airborne Division was right adjacent to us. -- I never felt any danger of being imminently overrun. Maybe I should have, but I didn't. I never felt that. There was intermittent artillery fire falling around us, about every twenty minutes or so another shell would go off.
Lung, and I and Tho and this colonel from security, and I had about three or four of my own people still there--I'd sent everybody else out. I sent El Tanner, my secretary, out on the first helicopter that morning, probably about nine o'clock. Ellen Tanner. There were no more women left. Tho and Lung kept contact by telephone with a few people as long as the lines were still open, and could keep track of the movement of the North Vietnamese forces as they were coming closer and closer to Saigon. The last place I remember was Go Bot? There was a cemetery up there and part of the airborne division and other locals were fighting about three miles north of the air base.

Q. Is there a bridge and a river on the north side of Saigon where they reach a certain bridge?
A. Yeah, that's the bridge over the Saigon River. By a place we called "Newport" as I remember. And then there's another bridge over the Song Be. I guess it was the bridge over the Song Be that the fighting was on.
We kept track for a while and then I think the Ambassador called from downtown and he wanted to talk to me and I told him they were

Continue on next page

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

getting awfully close and it was time for everybody to leave. And he said he'd like to come out and look at the situation and talk to me. So he came out. And it must have been quite a trip for him because Saigon was in such a turmoil then and it was so hard to get through, and yet he did it. It was remarkable. Even getting through that gate was a job because of all the traffic there and the police trying to keep order. But he came out and came down to the operations center and Lung talked to him and so did I, and told him where they were, and showed him on the map our latest reports of where they were. And he could see clearly that that was it. He wanted to continue the evacuation by fixed wing airplanes and General Smith told him it couldn't be done. They couldn't use the airstrip any more, they had to do it 100 per cent helicopters. It seems to me he went out and looked. I think he got in the back of his car and went out to the air strip and saw the shambles out there.

Then he went into my -- I had the only telephone that was a scrambler that was left, we had destroyed everything else. He went in my office and called Brent Scowcroft who was in the National Security Adviser to Ford and he told him that he wanted to activate that particular plan to go by helicopter.

Q. Oh, I thought he had been ordered to do it.

A. The way I read it then, was that he was telling Scowcroft the situation and recommending that we do that and Scowcroft said to go ahead. Then he left. He was sick, too, very run down, had a terrible cold, bordering on pneumonia. After the evacuation he went to Rome and was very sick, almost died. It might have been incipient cancer. He got cancer and was getting sick then. That might have been what was starting.

Then he left. As soon as he left, I think that's about the time I told Lung and Tho to go. And they left. I stayed with my few troops and General Smith until about eight or nine o'clock. We were the last of the DAO to leave that office. By that time we had about two platoons of Marines in there and they were wiring the building for demolition. I spent a few minutes back there making sure that our secure communications equipment was destroyed. I had a sledge hammer, busted it.

Q. What about the papers?

A. Well, we were in pretty good shape. In January of that year we began shredding all of our intelligence stuff. I put everything on microfilm, brought in a soldier from Fort Shafter, Army Pacific, to run a microfilm machine and he photographed all that stuff. As soon as he photographed it, we destroyed it. We had very little in intelligence to destroy, only current stuff. There was quite a bit more in my operations side, but I had a shredding operating right there.

Q. Did you witness the demolition of the compound?

A. No, they did that after we left. Burned a lot of twenty dollar bills. We had a big truckload of bills. In fact we did that in the morning. I put my secretary in charge of that.

We had a finance office there. It was actually a Navy finance office. We were, by some peculiar bureaucratic decision, the Navy was responsible for all administrative support for the Defense Attache Office. They pass that around from service to service, I guess. So we had a finance office and I don't know whether they had just received this big shipment of bills or not, but they had it. It was a four-wheel truck like they use in a warehouse stacked with wooden boxes filled with twenty dollar bills. They really looked like ammunition crates. There was no way to evacuate it, so we took it out in a courtyard inside the DAO building there and we had some burn barrels there and we were pitching the twenty dollar bills into the burn barrel. They had to break the boxes open otherwise the stuff wouldn't have burned. They were all packaged up. It was bizarre.

I went out to check on them just to see that everything was going right. They were doing the job very well. We had some good folks over there.

Q. So you flew out on a helicopter?

A. Yeah, on a Marine Corps helicopter. General Smith, I and my chief of operations, Colonel Hal Hodges, and there may have been two or three other officers, and just a handful of civilians. And then we loaded the rest of the aircraft with Vietnamese. We flew out to the carrier Midway. They took the Vietnamese off the Midway by the way, and brought them to another ship. We stayed on the Midway.

Q. A company of Marines was accidentally evacuated to the Midway. They were supposed to be going to another ship. They came in at night. The Captain said he's not going to get out until he gets on his own ship, but they wouldn't take them off. So they went to Thailand with the Midway to pick up F4s or F5s.

They probably had a landing ship out there.

Q. Any thoughts when you were lifting off? Any mental regrets?

A. Oh, sure. Just despair.

Q. Did you get a last look?

Continue on next page

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

A. Well, it was dark.

Q. Could you see the firing going on around?
A. No, not much. You could see a flash here and there. It looked very quiet. I didn't see any anti-aircraft fire. I don't think we were shot at.

Q. Fear of SAMs or anything?
A. No.

Q. Did you stay low to avoid SAMs? Or was it just a normal flight out?
A. It seemed kind of a normal flight. I don't think there were -- there were some SA 7s, the hand held missiles there, but they hadn't brought any what I would call a SAM down there. There were some of those hand-held heat seeking missiles.

Q. But flares could take care of those if you were fast enough.
A. That was the way they usually tried to avoid them. And I don't know whether we kicked out any flares or not.

Q. Was there a feeling of relief once you cleared the coast?
A. Not on my part. I wasn't afraid of anything about the flight. I was very sad.

Q. Any discussions on the helicopter?
A. No. You know how noisy it was.

Q. You were on the Midway the next morning when all those Vietnamese helicopters showed up then?
A. Yeah. Helicopters and one most interesting landing was made by a little O 1.

Q. Major Ly Bung was his name with his wife and five children.
A. They came piling out of that airplane. He made a nice landing.

Q. The Marines were watching it on TV below deck and they said they cheered when he landed because they thought that was really an impossible landing.
A. Well, the captain turned the ship into the wind. They cooperated.

Q. Were you amazed to see the helicopters come out that morning when they came out of the overcast?
A. I don't know. I might have been below deck.

Q. The photographer said he thought they were dust specks on his camera and he put it down to wipe it and looked up and couldn't believe how many were coming out. Where were they coming from?
A. Probably Tan Son Nhut. I really don't know. Or down in the Delta. From Can Tho, My Tho. Vung Tau was probably still open.
I had a friend who -- the J2 of the Vietnamese Air Force flew his little Cessna all the way from Tan Son Nhut to U Tapao Thailand. Almost ran out of gas. He climbed, got altitude and cut down to a very lean mixture, but the gas gauge was registering zero.

Q. You were on the Midway when Ky landed the next day? Did you see that?
A. No. I had met Ky in '66 when he was Premier. That's the only contact I ever had.

Q. You weren't up on the flight deck when he landed? He was ferried over after a couple of hours to the Blue Ridge.
A. I saw his helicopter below deck. They kept the helicopter.

Q. He said he took his pistol off and put it on the seat, left it on the helicopter and that's the last he ever saw of it, because he said he didn't want to surrender it to anybody. That would have been a final humiliation, so before he got out he left it there.
A. When we landed on the Midway, the first thing they did was usher us to the Sergeant of Arms and have us turn in our pistols. I turned in my 45 and had a little 38 police special. I got receipts but I didn't pick them up again.

Q. What was the mood on the Midway? Or was it just business as usual?
A. I think only among us who had come from DAO. We were the only ones who felt very deeply about it, because after all we had been in the ball game for a long time. These sailors and the officers on the ship were just doing their job. Very well, too.

Continue on next page

Col. William Legro Remembers the Fall of Saigon...

Q. How long did you stay on it?
A. Well, we fooled around in the South China Sea picking up survivors for about two days, I guess, and then we sailed out for Thailand. They took us off the ship, on helicopters again, into U Tapao, and then put us on a bus to Bangkok. In Bangkok they put us in the Indira Hotel. None of us had any clothes really, any uniforms of any kind. I was wearing a khaki uniform, suntan, and it was filthy. It was practically black. I left my fatigues. I figured I didn't need them for anything. I didn't travel in fatigues anyway.

Q. What about your personal things? Did you bring out a suitcase?
A. I brought out a large briefcase.

Q. What happened to your furnishings in your trailer?
A. The furnishing belonged to the government. I lost my library and all my phonograph records. I had a little stereo system there and lost all of that stuff. Actually I started packing that stuff up about three days before the fall. I figured that now I could do it and nobody was going to wonder if I was going to leave early. So I had the packers come in and crate all that stuff up. It was still in crates in my trailer when I left.

Q. The trailer wasn't destroyed by the demolition?
A. I imagine some communist probably got it. We managed to save some things because we had some in the Philippines. My wife had quarters in the Philippines for a while and we did manage to save that stuff, but everything else we had we had shipped home --several things I needed, like my library--around the first of April, I guess. It arrived in Oakland California, actually in a warehouse in Emeryville and was burned to ground. So everything we shipped home was either left in Vietnam or burned in Emeryville. That was the crowning blow. A guy from Oakland Army Base called me up and said they had some bad news. I said what could be bad now?

Q. Were you compensated for any of the stuff you left behind?
A. Oh, sure. I had insurance to start with and whatever the insurance didn't pay the government pays the rest.

Q. After ten years have your feelings changed much? What should have been done? What have we learned?
A. I can only talk in generalities I think, about something like that. I'd say that there should have been a clear statement of national purpose of what we wanted to achieve. Now maybe that was done, maybe they did say, "All we want to do is stop the North from taking over the South." I guess that's a political objective. That was stated a number of times. Then the political leadership should have gone to the military leadership and said, "How do we do that? Here's what we want to accomplish, what are the military objectives that you could seize that would accomplish this political objective?" Then the military would take the problem up with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and planners and say "Here's what we think you ought to do, and this is what it's going to cost. We think you'll have to put a blockade across Tchepone. We think you should mine Haiphong Harbor. We think you ought to put a beachhead in Vinh, cut off the Mu Gia Pass. And we think that if you accomplish those military objectives -- I'm talking hypothetically -- that we can convince the North that it's not worth the candle. They have been blocked. Let the South sort out its own problems with the Viet Cong. Support them the best way you can economically, and politically so that they will achieve their own form of independence."

The politicians should then ask what that would cost militarily. Then the military says, "This takes sixteen army divisions in action, and it takes three fourths of the Pacific Fleet. Mobilization of the reserves so far as the Army and Air Force is concerned. Federalization of these National Guard divisions. Declaration of war, perhaps. That's what it takes."

And then the politician comes back and says, "I don't think it's worth it. If that' what it's going to cost, maybe you shouldn't even try it." Or maybe he says, "Yeah, it's worth it. Go ahead and do it."

Q. What about the political consequences of not trying? In a sense you are damned if you do and damned if you don't.

That's the tremendous advantage that the communist way has. It makes it awfully expensive to try to counter it. We're facing a similar situation in Nicaragua. If you said, "Okay it's not really very important." The next is El Salvador --

So that's my idea of how national policy should be formed when it involves the military.

Q. Why wasn't it, in your estimation?
A. I don't know.

Q. Vietnam kind of petered in and petered out, nobody knew what was around the corner. Eisenhower, Kennedy --

http://lde421.blogspot.com/2012/12/william-legro-remembers-fall-of-saigon.html

An My Le: Professor of Photography

Dr. Le is an American photographer, and professor at Bard College. An-My Lê (born 1960) received her BAS and MS degrees from Stanford University and an MFA from Yale University. She is a 2012 MacArthur Foundation Fellow and has received numerous other awards including the Tiffany Comfort Foundation Fellowship (2010), the National Science Foundation Antarctic Artists and Writers Program Award (2007) and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (1997). Her work has been widely exhibited,

Her photographs and films examine the impact, consequences, and representation of war. Whether in color or black-and-white, her pictures frame a tension between the natural landscape and its violent transformation into battlefields.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnzeEocAQHY

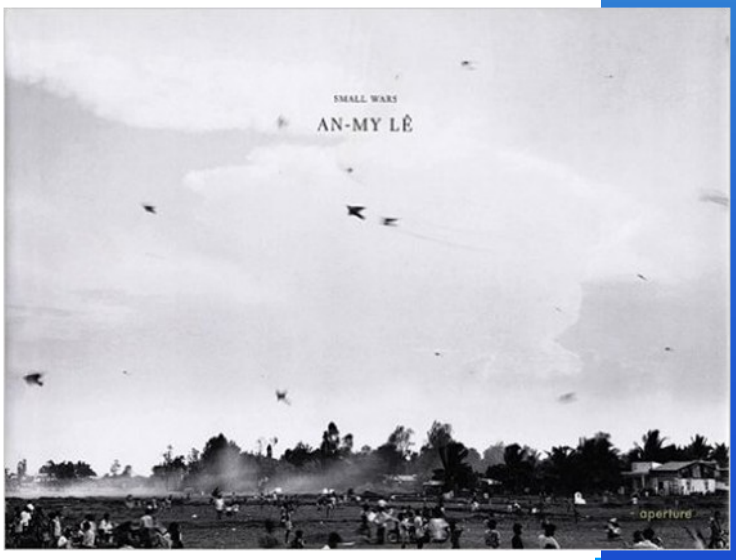
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/02/arts/macarthur-fellows-named-for-2012.html

http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/an-my-le

Night Operations #7, 2003-04

Small Wars: An My Le

Lê—currently a professor of photography at Bard College—has spent the past 20 years creating bold, simple "autobiographical still lifes," three series of which are assembled in this gorgeous new volume. Taken in startling black-and-white with a 5x7-view camera, Lê's still lifes combine the perspective and scope of landscape photography with the intimacy of portraits. And her three series—"Viêt Nam," "Small Wars" and "29 Palms"—depict modern Vietnamese villagers, Vietnam War battle reenactors, and soldiers training for Iraq, respectively. Strangely serene, the photos carefully blur the lines between war- and peacetime. In "Untitled, Ho Chi Minh City, 1998," for example, which shows a park full of people and the enormous sky above, viewers are likely to mistake the darting swallows, blurry from speed, for warplanes swooping over people's heads. For her most recent series, "29 Palms," Lê photographed a troop of Iraq- and Afghanistan-bound marines training in California. Juxtaposing soldiers in Nikes with faux anti-U.S.A. graffiti, Lê invites viewers to consider the nature of war, as well as the gap between smaller re-creations and their larger, more violent and destructive sources. In the volume's concluding pages, essayist Richard B. Woodward provides further insight into Lê's work with an astute look at her place in photographic history. Also included is an insightful interview with journalist Hilton Als in which Lê herself reveals her inspirations and techniques. This a beautifully shot and compiled collection that links Lê both to old war-photo masters like Timothy O'Sullivan and to landscape genre's modern-day practitioners.



Hoi An *by Thang Nguyen*

Hoi An or Faifo is a 120,000 people town in central Vietnam that is recognized as a World Heritage Site by Unesco.

From the 15th to 19th centuries, it was an important trading port linking various Asian countries. The city possessed the largest harbor in south-east Asia in the 1st century and was known as Lam Ap Pho (Champa City). Between the seventh and 10th centuries, the Cham (people of Champa) controlled the strategic spice trade and with this came tremendous wealth. The town is famous for its hand-made lanterns.

Huge Fish Kill Tests Vietnam's New Regime: *David Brown*

The story broke in Vietnam's national press on April 20: shoals of dead fish were washing up on the beaches all along a 200 kilometer stretch of the central Vietnamese coast, as far south as Hue.

Coastal fishermen and local staff of Vietnam's Fisheries Agency blamed a discharge of chemicals in the vicinity of the Vung Ang Industrial Zone on about April 6. They told reporters that a toxic tide then worked its way south along the coast of four provinces, killing farmed fish as well as free swimming species.

Beyond the damage, which is shaping up as a classic conflict between industrialization and the environment, the episode is probably part one of a developing test of the new Vietnamese regime's political acumen.

Vung Ang is in Ha Tinh province near its southern border, 430 km south of Vietnam's capital, Hanoi. A Taiwanese conglomerate, Formosa Plastics, is developing a steel mill, power plant and port complex there on a 3,000 hectare plot. Phase I of the US$10.5 billion Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Company (FHS) project is nearing completion. It is designed to produce 7 million tons of crude steel annually. The first blast furnace went into operation in December….

Whatever the facts, it's a hard call for Phuc. Suppose that after investigation, the evidence points to culpability on the part of the Taiwan Corporation. Whether the spill was intentional or not, Phuc's only rational course will be to come down hard, to set an example to other foreign investors and preserve his own credibility vis-à-vis the Vietnamese public. Suppose, however, FHS culpability cannot be proven. In that case, it will not be at all easy to persuade the public that the government has done its best.

This affair recalls a controversy that centered on another big Taiwanese company several years ago. Vedan is the world's No.1 producer of the food flavor enhancer MSG, and its biggest factory is in Bien Hoa province, just east of Ho Chi Minh City. In

Continue on next page

Huge Fish Kill...

2008, Vietnam's environmental police discovered that for 15 years, Vedan had been deliberately circumventing its factory waste processing system to discharge wastes directly into the Thi Vai River.
Some months later, Vedan paid roughly US$7.5 million in fines to the government. There was nothing in the settlement with the government, however, for some 3,000 fishing families who had been victimized by Vedan's criminal behavior. Remarkably, this sparked a grass roots campaign by local bar associations, consumers' unions and, belatedly, the farmers' union to force Vedan to pay compensation. That happened at last. In August 2010, facing almost sure defeat in court, Vedan capitulated and agreed to compensate the fisher families approximately US$10 million altogether.
http://ecowatch.com/2016/05/13/dead-fish-vietnam/

While the government is reluctant to a point any fingers—there's a $10-billion investment on the line—locals, particularly fishermen, blame the environmental catastrophe on Formosa, a steel plant from Taiwan that allegedly pumped untreated steel wastewater into the ecosystem. If that's true, the environmental consequences could be devastating.
Fortunately, the people of Vietnam don't agree with their government's blatant disregard for the environment. In response to Formosa's disconnected ultimatum between steel and fish, many locals choose fish, as the hashtag #ichoosefish illustrates. These locals understand: "No blue, no green."
Many fish supporters took it a step further. This "unprecedented" fish die-off has sparked another unprecedented event in Vietnam: protests. While it may not seem revolutionary to us in the west, keep in mind that Vietnam is a communist state, so standing up to the government is a big no-no. But the price is just too high in this case. You can't really eat steel now can you?

http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2016/05/obamas_visit_to_vietnam_comes_as_mass_demonstrations_protest_pollution_and_massive_fish_kills_.html

Recent environmental disasters spark protests in Vietnam and in the U.S. as Vietnamese Americans take to the streets to support protesters in Vietnam.
In the meantime, birds, chicken eating the dead fish fell sick and died. Sharks and whales wash ashore. Even people in the Da Nang area complaining of various illnesses begin seeking treatment at various Da Nang hospitals.

Stay tuned.