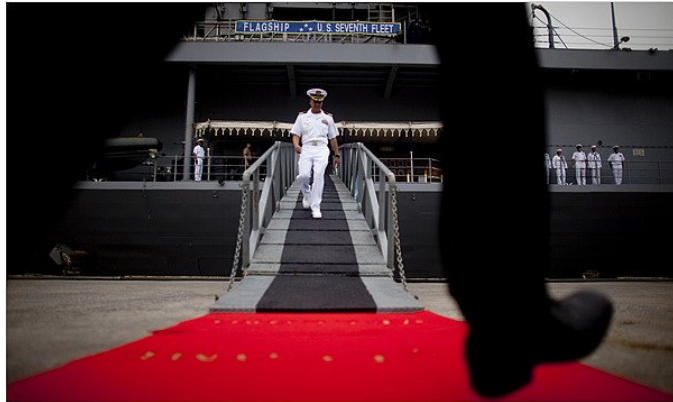


COMMANDER HUNG B. LE



Danang, Vietnam. On November 9, 2009, thirty-nine year-old Cmdr. Hung Ba Le, the first Vietnamese-American to command a United States Navy destroyer, *USS Lassen*, had just stepped ashore on a formal port call, making an emotional return to Vietnam for the first time since he fled as a young boy on a fishing boat at the end of the war in 1975.

“To be able to return to Vietnam after 35 years and to be able to do it as commander of a United States naval warship was an incredible honor and a privilege.”

Commander Le’s father, Thong Ba Le, who is now 68, was a commander in the wartime South Vietnamese Navy. In 1975 he fled the Communist military when his base came under attack by rocket and mortar fire. The family spent two days at sea before being rescued by a United States Navy vessel.

While he was able to take his wife and his four younger children when he fled, he was unable to rescue four older children, who were trapped in Hue, Commander Le said. Two of these sons spent several years in Communist re-education camps, he said.

A standout scholar and athlete in high school, Commander Le graduated from the United States Naval Academy with a bachelor’s degree in economics in 1992 and was commissioned as a Navy officer. He is married with two children.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/10/world/asia/10vietnam.html>