

**DIEM VAN NGO:  
THE REEDUCATION CAMP STORY OF A U.S. RESIDENT AND  
SOUTH VIETNAMESE VETERAN**

**REVIEW OF VIETNAMESE STUDIES, 2004-05**

[www.vstudies.org](http://www.vstudies.org)

BY PETER VAN DO

A VERSION OF THIS PAPER WAS ORIGINALLY SUBMITTED  
BY THE AUTHOR AS A FINAL PROJECT FOR THE  
MASTERS OF AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM AT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

## Section I. Introduction

There are many reasons for the interest in the topic of the South Vietnamese perspective during and after the Vietnam War--one reason being that this particular perspective is often overlooked. With this in mind, I decided to focus my topic on not only the perspectives of the South Vietnamese, but also on one of the most invisible and unrecognized military experiences in American history. One can visit a general U.S. library and find shelves of information on the Vietnam War. Despite all of the Vietnam War information available in U.S. libraries, the experiences and perspectives of the South Vietnamese military or the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN), which first fought independently and later alongside and under the lead of the Americans against the North Vietnamese Communists, is almost non-existent. The South Vietnamese military also suffered the defeat and tragic loss of life, like the American military if not significantly more than them. In many cases, the ARVN military men lost not only the war, but most importantly their nation, country, and their freedom. As the North Vietnamese Communists took over the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon on April 30, 1975, a new chapter began for South Vietnamese veterans, as most took refuge in the United States or were imprisoned in reeducation camps. Many of these South Vietnam war veterans either became citizens of the U.S., or were inducted in reeducation camps and later fled to the U.S. (Takaki, 1989, 449).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>According to Takaki, in *Strangers from a Different Shore*, about ten to fifteen thousand people Vietnamese people (South Vietnam military participants and their families) were evacuated before the collapse of the South Vietnamese government on April 30. Later, thousands more former native South Vietnamese Vietnam War veterans took refuge in the United States between 1975 to the present.

It would seem only natural that I would begin research that would be close to my own personal familial history. I am part of the Vietnamese American second-generation that has become “America’s single largest group of refugee children as they experience growing up American” (Zhou, 1998, 1). 96% of Vietnamese American children were born here or arrived before the age of 12 (Zhou, 1998, 4).<sup>2</sup> As one of the initial 96% that was born and raised in a U.S. American environment, I want to share and empower not only Vietnamese Americans, but also all Americans in offering a different narrative of the U.S. American experience. I am also a son of a South Vietnamese army veteran.

Mainly, my reasons for this focus falls under the realm of empowerment. In the past, I was an active college student activist who initiated action that followed the old notions and traditions of the Civil Rights movement.<sup>3</sup> My personal form of activism also developed from my upbringing in growing up from an extremely diverse environment where race, ethnicity, class, and gender settled tightly within a small East Coast urban/suburban city just outside of New York City. As a product of this sometimes volatile community my own classified race/ethnicity (Asian/Vietnamese American) was mainly represented by myself and a very small number of isolated others in my public school education. Thus, I was forced by my environment to develop an understanding of different perspectives and cultures once I was able to begin to make friends at my local

---

<sup>2</sup> Of the Vietnamese American children, 79% were born in the US or arrived prior the age of 5. Another 17% are members of the 1.5 generation of which includes those that arrived in the US between the ages of 5 and 12. The majority of the Vietnamese American second-generation are now heavily attending high school, college, or entering the American professional work communities.

<sup>3</sup>My college activist background includes my work as the 1999-2000 president of the Asian Student Union of the State University of New York (SUNY) at Binghamton. In spring 2000, my organization was able to initiate a multicultural collective to address the SUNY-Binghamton’s lack of acknowledgement of the hate crime committed to four Asian American students by three white wrestlers. Further information and photos of this particular initiative can be found at the web addresses below:  
<http://www.geocities.com/yr2000asu/photos.html>  
<http://www.geocities.com/yr2000asu/news.html>

public school and neighborhood. As I began my career in higher education, I naturally offered my personal understanding of diversity through my activism. As time progressed, I developed a personal principle to infuse an intellectual emphasis to my community work and cultural understandings; this carefully thought-out principle primarily stands for equal race, class, and gender rights for all Americans<sup>4</sup> through education, communication, and understanding. Therefore, through life and my undergraduate career in activist work, I learned and made the decision that I want to dedicate my future work and efforts to empowering others by offering research and study that would set a forum for the voices and perspectives that are often marginalized in mainstream America. I believe studying my own ethnic history and others puts myself in a position to further this life goal.

As a student committed in Vietnamese and Vietnamese American history, I want to acknowledge and set a stage to articulate the South Vietnamese military veteran experience since it is my belief that their story deserves study and inclusion within the American narrative framework; the ARVN's direct relationship (not indirect because the American military took control, directed, educated, and helped the South Vietnam military escape) within contemporary American military history is obvious, yet ignored. It is my firm belief that once the perspective of the South Vietnamese military is represented, the United States will find another means to find a psychological process of closure to the Vietnam War question where the U.S. needs a means to participate. As a proud American of Vietnamese ancestry, I want to help find this closure.

This project evolved to focus on the reeducation camp experiences because of their relationship with the recent Vietnamese American community's political

---

<sup>4</sup>I define "American" as a person with citizenship or residence in the United States of America.

involvement, including support of the U.S. government's pressure on Vietnamese Communists on the issue of human rights. Remarks by Ambassador Michael W. Marine at the March 17, 2005 Texas Tech 5th Triennial Vietnam Symposium indicate the U.S. current concerns on human rights in Vietnam:

As the Department of State has described in the Human Rights and Religious Freedom Reports, the United States Government has serious concerns about the human rights and religious freedom situations in Vietnam. The Government of Vietnam continues to be intolerant of political dissent and significantly restricts freedom of speech, the press, assembly and association (Marine, from the listserve: paassage\_connection@yahoogleroups.com, April 16, 2005).

Currently, the Vietnamese American community has been active in lobbying their support for U.S. pressure for better human rights in Vietnam; a significant number of those involved are Vietnamese Americans who are ARVN veterans and former inducted reeducation camp prisoners. Although the discussions of human rights issues in Vietnam currently do not include reeducation camp prisoners since the late 1980s and early 1990s, they once did. I thought that to study Vietnamese Communist human right violations in respects to the reeducation camp treatment would be important. These are important stories to gather and analyze in this particular moment in Vietnamese American history. The issues of human rights are still discussed and many active participants in a movement for freedom in Vietnam happen to be victims of Vietnam Communism's history of civil rights abuses for its citizens. The single edited interview I have produced for this project is potentially the first of a series of Vietnam reeducation camp oral histories of ARVN veterans I would like to do and study. This project has helped me see some of the issues I am likely to encounter in a larger-scale oral history project on this topic.

This paper has several parts: I discuss my application of the oral history methodology in an exploratory way to this topic; I document a story of South Vietnamese military experience and life in the reeducation camps; I include a single edited transcript; and I offer my personal reflections.

## Section II. Oral History Methodology

This project is drawn from an interview with seventy-three year old Dien Van Ngo, a former South Vietnam army lieutenant colonel and reeducation camp inductee now residing in the Vietnamese American community in the Boston, Massachusetts area, the eighth largest Vietnamese American community in the U.S. (U.S. Census 2000).

Earlier studies of literature on the Vietnam War and the Vietnamese reeducation camps were used in preparation for the interview. I also located and read several transcriptions of South Vietnamese veteran oral histories done across the country. In particular, the University of Massachusetts-Boston Archives has a small collection of oral histories of South Vietnamese veterans. All sources helped in generating questions that were more specifically located in the history of the war and its aftermath with concerns of the camp experience. Background study of the history of the war and the reeducation camp also offered insight to structure and formulate specific questions that would lead the interviewee to discuss certain topics in detail. The questions were generally focused on topics on the ARVN, the enemy army, the reeducation camp experience, and U.S. immigration, and also the interviewee background. Below is a partial version of the questions used for this project:

- Background information.  
Date and place of birth; place of parents' birth. Number of children in family.  
Parents' education and work history? Subjects' education and work history.

- Participation in the South Vietnamese military  
When and how did most of the South Vietnamese military get recruited? What was their social status? How do you personally get involved in the military service? What was the extent of the participation of the South Vietnamese military? How long were they required to serve and how were they rewarded? What was your first official position in the military? Later? When you were in your first military position, what were your responsibilities? Later?
- First impressions of new established government in South Vietnam in 1975?
- First impressions of assembly centers for reeducation?  
Who were assembled first; any criteria explained for reeducation? What process was done to collect people for reeducation? How did you personally wind up in the reeducation camps?
- First impressions of reeducation camps?
- Typical daily life in reeducation camps?  
Structure of reeducation camps? How did you fit into that? Where there informal lines of power that differed from the formal positions? Reeducation camp crime and punishment – actual personal experience, vs. rumors? What was the reeducation camp process like? Freetime activities, recreation? Relationships with neighbors? (Tell some stories?)
- Release from reeducation camp.  
What kind of circumstances brought about subjects' release. First impressions of life after reeducation camp?
- Immigration story?  
Why leave the home country? Under what circumstances? with what help? with what expectations? Events of the trip
- Reflections  
Feelings about; life and activities since.

I was able to find the interviewee, Diem Van Ngo, through a leader, whom I contacted for the purpose of this project, of the Massachusetts Vietnamese American Community organization. Diem Van Ngo is a seventy-three year old Vietnamese American amateur songwriter, who has retired and is supported by his now adult children, but volunteers his time to work with the Vietnamese American community in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston.

I interviewed Diem Van Ngo on March 16, 2005. The interview took place at his family's apartment in a triple-decker house--so typical in the Dorchester section of Boston where many Vietnamese Americans reside. Other materials/items included extra copies of interview questions (which I gave Ngo a copy of before we started the

interview), my own business cards, an English/Vietnamese dictionary, and a notepad. Before we began the recorded interview, I informed him of my purpose as a student completing a project on the Vietnamese Communist reeducation camp experiences of ARVN veterans. Since the interview took place during mid-day, there were no interruptions. The interview lasted for approximately two-and-a-half hours. During this one session, Ngo signed a deed of gift for the recorded interview. The general motive for Ngo's participation was because he was a loyal friend of the leader of the Massachusetts Vietnamese American Community organization leader whom I corresponded with.

The dynamic between Diem Van Ngo and me was interesting. We both share the same Vietnamese ethnic background. I believe that this factor may have been influential in Ngo's receptive and open behavior in the interview. I was aware that the difference in age and sub-cultural upbringing (his in Vietnam and me in U.S.) might create barriers of understanding. According to Ritchie's *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, he states that barriers built that would prevent trust are common to the point where "differences in age, race, gender, and ethnicity may influence both the questions asked and the responses elicited" (Ritchie, 2003, 100). Ritchie further states that there are no set "prescriptions" to overcome differences. However, "interviewers might reveal a little of themselves" (Ritchie, 2003, 101). Keeping Ritchie's advice in mind, I often made references to connection by interjecting my experiences with other Vietnamese (including my father) who belonged to Ngo's generation, if related to whatever he was talking about at the time. I also referred often to the research I had done on the Vietnamese Communist reeducation camps. Often, the combination of my past experiences of hearing stories of the Vietnam War from first generation Vietnamese Americans and my own reading on the subject of the Vietnam War and the reeducation camps became a "one-two punch" in causing him

to offer more details. For instance, in the edited transcript of Diem Van Ngo, he offers his perspective on South Vietnam's President Diem and President Thieu (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005). This topic was not included in the set of questions that were produced for this particular interview. What made Ngo discuss this topic was my own reference to how I learned from my father that President Diem was embraced by many South Vietnamese as a good leader, whereas in American history texts, President Diem is often portrayed as a corrupt leader who alienated the majority of his countrymen. More details of this segment will be discussed in Section III on Diem's Van Ngo's Story of Military Experience and Life in the Camps.

I was able to collect some stories from Ngo. Ngo invested most of his time in stories about the typical daily life of the reeducation camps, his involvement within the ARVN, and his immigration to the U.S. Some of these topics were in response to my own questions. Initially, the interview took more time than expected because the entire oral history of Diem Van Ngo felt like a "practice-run" in order to make Ngo understand the need for more detail in his storytelling in the beginning. I would like to firmly state that there were no instances where "words were put into his mouth." However, there were instances where I wished to have followed up, but did not. For instance, Ngo offers some information about his high school education in Vietnam and his U.S. military sponsored education in New Jersey and North Carolina while serving in the ARVN; I wished I could have asked additional questions to clarify and learn more about how he was able to receive these specific levels of higher learning when only a small minority were able to receive such privileges. Also quite a few topics were not discussed from the interview outline such as the:

- Daily South Vietnam life description pre-April 31, 1975
- South Vietnamese military relations
- The Opposing Army Front
- Family Life with a family member in the reeducation camps
- Community Support

These topics were ignored because much of the time was invested in asking additional more detailed follow-up questions in response to the interviewee's evasive replies. In addition, the interviewee was restless in the beginning half of the interview because so much time was invested in his background history instead on the reeducation camp experiences. My perception of this specific situation is that I should have communicated with the interviewee that further background information would be needed in addition to his camp experience before coming to the actual interview. If I had a second interview opportunity, I would like to ask for more information about his immigration experience and also the topics that he was not able to discuss in the first interview.

In addition, Ngo did reassure me that he was capable in communicating in English. However, there were moments of awkward pauses in the beginning of the interview due to the informant's lack of ability to communicate in English adequately enough. At times he offered fewer than one or two sentences, for example. Ritchie mentions the problem if an interviewee answers evasively, he includes:

If the interviewer allows them [interviewee] to respond incompletely... follow up with more specific questions on the same subject... if this tack does not work, then clearly and respectfully point out that the interviewee seems to be less than forthcoming (Ritchie, 2003, 95).

Within about thirty minutes through the interview, noticing that Ngo was struggling in offering enough detail in his responses, I decided to begin to communicate to Ngo that he needed to be more forthcoming. Later, I decided to communicate with Ngo in both

Vietnamese and English, ultimately asking my questions (initial and follow-up) entirely in Vietnamese towards half-way to the end of the interview. Ngo began to reply back in Vietnamese after learning that I was able to communicate in Vietnamese. Later into the interview, he relaxed and became more comfortable speaking in more detail.

In the transcribing and editing process, I decided to work Diem Van Ngo's words into a monologue rather than use a question and answer format, even though a full transcription was done. This decision was made due to the fact that Ngo offered a lot of insight and experiences but some topics were often scattered throughout the interview and the interview was conducted in two languages, which was unplanned. In Willa K. Baum's book, *Transcribing and Editing Oral History*, she emphasized that an oral historian should keep in mind the goals of the program within the editing oral history transcript process. Baum includes seven general principles of transcribing and editing oral history where the first principle states to "Meet the purposes of your program....Are you mainly trying to get a feel for this narrator, or a clear, accurate account of something that happened?" (Baum, 1991, 40). Baum's editing advice helped me in prioritizing aspects of the editing of the transcript to meet the requirements of this project and also influenced me to format this particular oral history into a monologue to make this particular project salient.

Baum describes the importance of keeping the accurate voice of the subject. Baum recommends "keeping as close to the manner of speaking and order of thoughts of the narrator as you [one] can" (Baum, 1991, 40). I have also kept Baum's suggestion in mind in editing my interview transcript. I tried to reproduce Diem Van Ngo's Vietnamese statements in English as accurately as possible. His statements made in

English were edited minimally. The editing process included deleting repetitions, misunderstandings of questions, or translations, and misinterpretations because of some of my pronunciation of Vietnamese words. Some minor grammatical changes were made and punctuation was included by me. Also some unnecessary words and phrases were omitted due to over repetition, such as the “do you know?” types of phrases that Diem Van Ngo used many times throughout the interview. I took some out and left just enough in to still capture Ngo’s “voice.”

I began the process of arranging comments by topics, according to the outline I used for the interviews. Later, I sequenced the sections in logical or chronological order. In many cases, a topic was spread in different parts of the interview that would only make sense if placed together in the final edited transcript. The challenge for me was to piece these details of the topic together while still making the “voice” smooth and in a speech pattern uniquely Ngo’s. The only parts of the edited transcript that I had to seriously piece together were parts of the interview relate to the story of how Ngo was shipped from the southern regions of Vietnam to the North to eventually settle in a reeducation camp around Yen Bay (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005). In the original interview, the interviewee tended to jump back and forth between several details and periods as we were processing his memories. It was also at this point of the interview where I decided to conduct the interview entirely in Vietnamese because I sensed that Ngo was having difficulty expressing himself in English.

### Section III. Diem Van Ngo’s Story of Military Experience and Life in the Camps

Diem Van Ngo's story begins on March 8, 1932 when he was born in Phu Tho province in the northern regions of Vietnam near Hanoi. He describes his early life as being the youngest of eight brothers and sisters; his primary school educated parents were rice farmers; primary school education was generally offered for all Vietnamese at the time. The parents' reaching of only the primary level in education indicates that Ngo's family background is neither elite nor aristocratic since education levels often indicated levels of class in Vietnam during the time. His family also were landowning rice farmers in the peasantry class, meaning that his family had more social privileges than those in the peasantry class without land (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

Ngo was supported by his family to receive a high school education in the city of Hanoi where he would graduate in 1952 (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005). Ngo could have been academically exceptional where he might have received a high school education scholarship or received the profit of being the youngest child in the family where each member contributed to his education; this question needs to be asked and answered.<sup>5</sup> Just the same, the Vietnamese regard education and literature highly. In traditional pre-modern Vietnamese society, men of learning (Si) were at the top of the social scale (Long, 1997, 91).<sup>6</sup> Such family and educational values are central to nearly all Vietnamese regardless of class background. In Vietnam, the apparent focus of education is competitive throughout the whole country. Therefore, many areas of rural farming backgrounds also believe that a good education is important (Zhou, 1998, 76).

---

<sup>5</sup>In the interview with Diem Van Ngo, I did not think to ask how he was able to support himself to attend high school. This is a clear mistake on my part in my interview process.

<sup>6</sup>After the men of learning (Si) were farmers (Nong), skilled workers (Cong), and lastly businessmen (Thuong).

Between the time of Diem Van Ngo's birth in 1932 to the end of his high school career in 1952, the country of Vietnam was experiencing the development of the Vietnamese Communist Party while Vietnam was still a colony of the French Union. In January 1930, Moscow ordered the consolidation of three small groups to form the "Indochinese Communist Party," with a membership of 211. The strategy of Vietnamese Communism was made in Moscow by the Soviet Government "as an instrument for embarrassing France" (Joes, 2001, 12). Through Ngo's young life, Vietnamese Communism would grow through the domination of the small urban educated class in Hanoi and few other cities (Joes, 2001, 12). Often, Moscow directed instructions to the Vietnamese Communists. Ngo has accounts of this and offers his personal criticisms of the Vietnamese Communists subservience to the Soviets Communists (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

In the 1940s and early 1950s, the northern region of Vietnam experienced changes of power between the French, the Japanese, the Chinese, and the Vietnamese Communists. March 9, 1945, the Japanese were able to disarm the French and formally end French rule in all of Indochina (Kolko, 1985, 607-611).<sup>7</sup> The Japanese occupation produced one of the greatest famine experiences in Vietnam history. The Japanese had been taking rice out of Vietnam for war purposes during their participation in World War II. In the winter of 1944-1945, a serious famine broke out in the northern provinces where Diem Van Ngo's family resided. Estimates of those who died reached two million, out of the northern region of Vietnam's population of around nine million (Joes, 2001, 14). From August 15-17, 1945, Japan willingly surrendered control over the entire

---

<sup>7</sup>"Indochina" is the name of the French colony that included the countries now known as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

country of Vietnam to the Vietnamese Communists with little retaliatory military response.<sup>8</sup>

On September 2, 1945, Vietnamese Communist leader and major resistance figure, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam independent and founded the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.<sup>9</sup> Soon after, in September 1945, China occupied Vietnam north of the sixteenth parallel until February 28, 1946, when a Franco-Chinese accord allowed the French to take control of the northern half of Vietnam. From December 1946, war began between the Vietnamese Communists and the French. In 1951, the Vietnamese Communists were able to control most of the region north of Hanoi, and to begin land reform policies that would effect Ngo's family as peasant landowners. May 7, 1954, marks France's defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu. Until July 1954, the Geneva Conference announced the partition of Vietnam into a Communist north and a non-Communist south; the conference also directed that for the period of one year there would be free movement and migration of persons from one zone to another (Kolko, 1985, 607-611).

Diem Van Ngo was one of the many persons who took refuge by fleeing to the non-Communist south zone in 1954. He states that his reasons for leaving his home and region are due to his terrible experiences with the Vietnamese Communists and its land reform policies to establish central power in 1952. Ngo offers:

I am against Communism. This is the reason I left my familiar home back in the northern regions of Vietnam. I was and am against Communism because they have a history of corruption. The Communists are no good to me. For example, land reform in Vietnam in 1952. Often the Communists would take away land

---

<sup>8</sup>Japan was losing its fight in the World War II combat stage at the time; Atomic bombing of Japan by the United States began in early August 1945.

<sup>9</sup>Other sovereign nations did not recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam besides some the independent countries with established Communist Party-ruled governments.

from farmers. They would not let the landowners to rule their land. These lands were often several acres. All people who owned more than three acres would be killed by the Viet Cong (Vietnamese Communists). I know of this fact because my family was brutally murdered by the Viet Cong. I was only able to survive because my family had sent me to Hanoi to study. If it were not for the love that my family had in sending me to Hanoi in hopes that I would have a better life through education, I would not be here today speaking with you.... So I left the northern regions of Vietnam and fled to the south in 1954 when Vietnam had been broken into two countries; North Vietnam and South Vietnam (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

Ngo's accounts are supported by the history of the Vietnamese Communist's brutal campaign to establish power. During the war with the French from 1946-1954, the Vietnamese Communists had promised the "land to the tiller" rural land reform policy. Many landowning farmers were killed as a result of this policy. There are no exact numbers of how many died, although estimates range from 50,000 to "several hundred thousands" (Joes, 2001, 36). Those who offer these high numbers also indicate that the Vietnamese Communists defined the targeted class enemy<sup>10</sup> "rich landlords" to also include those peasants who exceeded the smallest permissible holding by only one-quarter of an acre.<sup>11</sup> Thousands of these targets were executed outright; many were buried alive. Regardless of those killed, the Vietnamese Communists justified their actions with a commonly repeated statement, "Better to kill ten innocent persons than to let one enemy escape" (Joes, 2001, 36). Often the family relatives of those who had been executed were isolated. Under orders by the Vietnamese Communists, the isolated were shunned by the local communities (Joes, 2001, 36).

---

<sup>10</sup> Leninist regimes in circumstances of instilling power imposed a form of land-reform collectivization. This involved the placing of land ownership and all decisions concerning rural life in the hands of government agents (almost always city men). In addition to eliminating landowners, however small their holdings, labeling them "class enemies of the revolution."

<sup>11</sup> Many of these so-called class enemies had previously been members of the Vietnamese Communists.

When Ngo left the northern Communist-run region of Vietnam for the south in 1954, he was part of the largest migration in response to any government control of Vietnamese people to date.<sup>12</sup> Of the number of those who fled from 1954-1956, estimates range from 800,000 to one million people (Joes, 2001, 36).<sup>13</sup>

Immediately after arriving in South Vietnam, Ngo joined and served in the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) from 1954-1975. He mentions that the reason for his decision to join the ARVN was his anti-Communist beliefs. Ngo states:

I joined the South Vietnamese military, because I was, and still am, anti-Communist. Remember, my family was brutally murdered because of Communist policies. Many of the other soldiers of South Vietnam had the same idea and background of anti-Communism. They did not like the Communists. And all of these military men came from many different backgrounds ranging from farmers to city people. The majority of the people who joined were the ones who did not like the Communists. These men volunteered and mobilized (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

Ngo's statement does not conflict with available descriptions of the ARVN. By July 1953, the force that would eventually become the ARVN numbered 200,000 men; by mid-1954, a total of 400,000 Vietnamese were serving in the South Vietnamese military. Many of these people recruited came from a wide range of diverse class backgrounds; and a significant number were those who fled from the north. Most ARVN officers entered the service right after graduation from high school or university. In fact, the commissioning system for ARVN officers placed a heavy emphasis on formal education that would make the "ARVN had [have] one of the most degree-laden officer corps in the

---

<sup>12</sup>The migration of Vietnamese after 1975 would exceed the numbers of people fleeing after 1954.

<sup>13</sup>Among those fleeing south was almost the entire student body of the University of Hanoi. The majority of the Vietnamese came from a Catholic peasant farmer background. The Northern authorities placed many obstacles in the way of those wishing to leave, including murder.

world” (Joes, 2001, 85):<sup>14</sup> In fact, several hundred ARVN officers attended various courses at U.S. military schools in the Philippines, Japan, and the United States, which Ngo also confirms through his personal experiences in receiving formal education at Fort Bragg in New Jersey (1959) and Fort Bragg in North Carolina (1960). From 1954-1975, Diem Van Ngo earned several ranks such as Commander and Lieutenant Colonel within his military career (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

Discussions on the topic of the South Vietnam leadership were additionally part of the interview with Ngo. He remarks:

Thinking back about the past South Vietnamese leadership, I believe that President Diem was a very good president.... The people who actually fired and assassinated President Diem were Vietnamese, but in terms of who masterminded the plan, I cannot say. President John F. Kennedy and its [the U.S.] army wanted President Diem dead. They did not like President Diem because President Diem did not like to work with the Americans. Although I have to say that President Diem was not corrupt at all; he did a lot for our country. But he did not like to work with the Americans. You understand? President Diem did not want the Americans to have total control of the country and so he became a target. President Thieu was a president who followed whatever the Americans instructed him to do only.... There were many Vietnamese people who did not like him and others who did. But most people did not like President Thieu because he became an American puppet (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

According to sources, during President Diem’s tenure there was little danger that the northern army and its guerilla warfare supporters would have the capacity to defeat the ARVN or overthrow the Diem government. Later, in 1963, the killing of Diem struck the ARVN like a “typhoon.” After the murder of Diem, “ARVN morale, discipline, and performance really deteriorated, the Communists undertook operations in main-force units, and South Viet Nam’s republican experience seemed perilously close to collapse” (Joes, 2001, 91). In the spring of 1965, the Johnson administration decided to begin

---

<sup>14</sup>In the mid-1960s, 5 percent of its generals, over 13 percent of its colonels, and nearly 15 percent of its field-grade officers held doctoral degrees.

inserting large numbers of U.S. troops into South Vietnam—making the assistance to the ARVN less of an emphasis and reducing to the status of the ARVN into an auxiliary force (Joes, 2001, 91). Even though reduced to an auxiliary position, the casualties of the ARVN were significantly different from the Americans in numbers. Based upon proportion to population, “the ARVN lost 40 men killed to every one American” (Joes, 2001, 92).

On April 30, 1975, the last U.S. troops remaining left the country formerly known as the Republic of South Vietnam. This final departure of American military presence in South Vietnam signaled the end of the last chapter of the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War; the North Vietnamese Communists had won and would prepare to unite the two countries. In the summer of 1975, the official reeducation campaign was implemented, on the basis that the South Vietnamese had been corrupted by foreign influence for a long period of time, the North Vietnamese government argued for the redress and cleansing of the South by deconstructing foreign influences such as anti-communism, capitalism, religious faith, ethnic difference, and urbanity (Feeney, 2002, 6). The Democratic Republic of Vietnam knowingly planned to implement heavy labor with lack of food or medicine as a major part of the reeducation process (Luong, 2000, 9). There would be a six-day work week, two half-days for political study, and nightly cultural classes (Matson, 2001, 5). The reeducation programs were “designed as a means to identify the ‘counterrevolutionaries’ who remained in Vietnam, to remove them from the urban centers, and to ‘build’ them into ‘new people’ [xay dung con nguoi moi]” (Feeney, 2002, 7). After the initial collection of detainees for reeducation in June 1975, the Communist army, local authorities, and security police began abducting individuals

who had somehow made it onto their respective lists for reeducation. There was no protection for those who were taken and no laws governing who was to be seized. People were often taken from their homes, offices, and simply right off the street (Truong, 1985, 279). No trial was offered to detainees kept in reeducation camps for indefinite periods (Freeman, 1989, 201).

In June 1975, many of those who were involved in the South Vietnamese military and government were assembled for reeducation. In Diem Van Ngo's situation, he describes his assembly experience:

In the process of collecting all the former ARVN soldiers for reeducation, in June 1975, the Vietnamese Communists first made an announcement that all Vietnamese high officers were to be reeducated for only two months. But, again, it was not two months, it was more. All former ARVN officers were told to bring only enough clothes and rice for two months. I did believe what they had told us and promised. I believed the first time about their two month assembly for reeducation. Although after two months passed while I was in the reeducation camps, I figured that my time in captivity would be more (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

Sources support Ngo's case. In June 1975, tens of thousands of officers of the defeated ARVN turned themselves in for a mandatory political study period that was announced by the North Vietnamese Communists (Freeman, 1989, 209; Metzger et al., 2001, 55; Nguyen, 1982, 91; Tran, 1988, 37; WGBH Educational Foundation and Vietnam Project, "Luong Duong, SR #22," Interview Transcript, 1979-1983, 2). Those to be enrolled for reeducation were classified into three categories according to rank. Common soldiers and low-level government workers would enroll in a three-day course. Middle-level officers and junior officers were planned for a ten-day course. High officials, leaders of the national parties, senior officers, and members of the National Police would be admitted for thirty days (Freeman, 1989, 209; Metzger et al., 2001, 55;

Nguyen, 1982, 92; WGBH Educational Foundation and Vietnam Project, “Luong Duong, SR #22,” Interview Transcript, 1979-1983, 2-4). In the process of assembly, the men were instructed to bring food and other supplies to last them during their respective periods according to their rank (Freeman, 1989, 209; Metzger et al., 2001, 55; Nguyen, 1982, 92; WGBH Educational Foundation and Vietnam Project “Luong Duong, SR #22,” Interview Transcript, 1979-1983, 2-4).

Diem Van Ngo described being sent to a reeducation camp location near Yen Bay. Ngo’s description of transportation to the north included vivid details about the conditions:

For three days we were on such a terrible ship and a terrible trip. The boat was not huge, but it could carry about two hundred people. In the bottom of the boat we were forced to spend all of our time there. We also ate and slept within these tight conditions. There were no bathrooms and so we were also forced to urinate and soil in buckets in the areas we would also eat and sleep in. It definitely was not like the bathrooms, like what we use in America today. The conditions and smells of about two hundred people stored in a boat for three days was no good (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

The passage above showcases how Diem Van Ngo told his story in his own way with particular memories that stood out for him. Near Yen Bay, he, along with other inmates, was forced to build their own prison. Ngo reflects:

We also were instructed to be creative by creating our own tools for building our prison since they did not have any appropriate tools or equipment at this location near Yen Bay (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

Quite often the buildings of these military bases had been stripped down to mere shells by the captive prisoners. Similar to Ngo’s case, the prisoners were required to labor to hastily convert these shells into barracks to house the guards, monitors, and thousands of inmates. They also had to build makeshift classrooms, kitchens, latrines, and prison cells

for resistant and rebellious inmates (Freeman, 1989, 229-231; Nguyen, 1982, 105; Tran, 1988, 62).

Diem Van Ngo remembers the very poor living conditions where lack of food and illness was typical. Ngo reflects as “often always starving” and only “fed with manioc, corn, and rotten rice.” In addition, Ngo states that within his own experience there was no medication available for the prisoners. According to Ngo, “diarrhea and eventually dysentery were typical forms of sicknesses” that led to the majority of deaths (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005). Often, any edible crawling insect, leaf, root, or tuber, and even vegetables stolen from the cadres’ pigsty, were used to supplement the usual daily diet of rotten rice, manioc, or indigestible sorghum. Many inmates were stricken with malaria, scabies, hepatitis, or diarrhea and died from inadequate medical attention (Freeman, 1989, 232; Metzger et al., 2001, 79-80; Nguyen, 1982, 126-127; Tran, 1988, 63-67; WGBH Educational Foundation and Vietnam Project “Luong Duong, SR #22,” Interview Transcript, 1979-1983, 13-15).

Since 1975, between roughly 40,000 and 1,000,000 individuals were sent to reeducation camps because of their association with the former South Vietnam government (Luong, 2000, 9). In 1990, the Amnesty International documented that the Provisional Government acknowledged at least 40,000 prisoners, including 29,000 former military personal, were transferred to reeducation camps throughout the country (Matson, 2001, 4). However, other calculations are offered. Nguyen’s study “Psychology well-being of the former Vietnamese political prisoner in the United States” (1994) maintained that contrary to government figures, 125,000 were actually detained. Young’s *Harvard International Law Journal* article “The Legality of Vietnamese Re-

education Camps,” reported a range between 100,000 and 300,000 individuals. Tran’s book *Lost Years* (1988) reported a ceiling figure of 1,000,000 former South Vietnamese military and political prisoners detained (Matson, 2001, 4). A total of 150 camps nationwide were constructed. Each of the forty provinces of Vietnam had at least a main reeducation camp that was divided into several sub-camp branches (Matson, 2001, 4).

Lastly, the reeducation camps generally resembled a setting for labor gangs, whose members had to clear land, build furniture, roof sheds, grow vegetables, and cut bamboo and other trees. These were also major themes among the literature and Diem Van Ngo’s accounts.

Particularly striking were the statements made of how Ngo was prepared to resign to the Communists after having first-hand knowledge of their brutal policies such as land reform. He stated having no choice in the matter:

In the process of collecting all the former ARVN soldiers for reeducation, in June 1975, the Vietnamese Communists first made an announcement that all Vietnamese high officers were to be reeducated for only two months.... All former ARVN officers were told to bring only enough clothes and rice for two months. I did believe what they had told us and promised. I believed the first time about their two month assembly for reeducation. Although after two months passed while I was in the reeducation camps, I figured that my time in captivity would be more. I believed the Viet Cong at that time that their word would be true. I think it was because in 1975 that because there was no more war, there would be nothing to be afraid of anymore. But they were liars and I was dead wrong.

Other comments of how the reeducation camps did not include any formal training or instruction for “reeducation” also revealed the actual purpose to treat these prisoners as a conquered people to be terrorized for the benefit of their new rulers.

#### Section IV. Leaving Vietnam and Starting Over in America

In 1986, Diem Van Ngo was formerly released from the reeducation camp system to join his family near Saigon. Ngo gives his account of the severity of his personal need to get out of his country:

I did not have any expectations from leaving Vietnam. I did not have any other expectations at all. I just wanted to get out of the country as soon as possible. My children have already grown into adults by now. I knew that there would probably be better opportunities for them in terms of jobs. But mainly, I left because I just plainly wanted to leave the country (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

The above account gives insight into the situation and relationship between the former ARVN veterans and the Vietnamese Communist government. Ngo was able to seek asylum to the United States in 1993. Diem Van Ngo, like many Vietnamese refugees prior to him, struggled to learn/re-learn a new language, raise a family, earn a living in menial jobs, and learn new cultural rules and standards. Under these conditions “many Vietnamese, particularly those who have come here since 1985, are struggling merely to survive” (Long, 1997, 83). Those Vietnamese refugees arriving since the mid-1980s, like Ngo, are often considered part of the fourth and fifth wave of Vietnamese immigration into the U.S.

For over thirty years, the Vietnamese American refugee community has called the United States of America its home. The Vietnamese refugees began flowing into the U.S. after the fall of the South Vietnamese government in 1975. Classified as political refugees, political turmoil forced them to leave. For many Vietnamese refugees had little or no time or choice to prepare for their relocation into another country due to their fear of unfavorable fate.

This first wave of refugee immigration from 1975-1978 was composed of mostly upper middle-class urbanites. Many of these people had a professional occupation, higher education, and some knowledge of English. Many were Roman Catholics originally from North Vietnam. They settled in South Vietnam after 1954 as refugees where they fled from the new North Vietnamese Communist government. Typically successful, these double refugees controlled much of the power and wealth of South Vietnam. The US Government helped most leave by ship or airplane in safely organized groups because many of them had relations in helping the US military (Thai, 1999, 90).

The second-wave refugees, 1978-1979, were mostly ethnic Chinese. They experienced hostility within Vietnamese society for decades, and this group became targets of the new Communist government. Primarily of middle-upper class backgrounds, these Chinese Vietnamese fled by fishing boats or bribed their way out of Vietnam (Thai, 1999, 90).

The third wave Vietnamese refugees, from 1978-through-the-mid-1980s commonly labeled as the “boat people,” were prominently rural farmers with no exposure to “western” culture. Fleeing in small fishing boats, they faced brutal conditions including murdering and raping Thai pirates, extreme hunger, and getting lost, wrecked and recaptured. The largest Vietnamese refugee wave, they have been the media’s center of interest (Thai, 1999, 90).

With the first to third wave Vietnamese refugees into the US, the American government used four satellite refugee dispersion centers (military bases in California, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, and Florida) to cater and spread the incoming Vietnamese

refugees across the entire nation because of fears that a large Vietnamese refugee community located in one location (most probably in the West Coast areas of the US) would offset the local economy. The American government carefully dispersed these Vietnamese refugees across the country to avoid undue concentration and to encourage assimilation into American culture (Do, 1999, 34). The government also used nine voluntary agencies (VOLAGS), some religious, to find sponsors for individual families and to promote adjustment to America.

Dispersion assured that Vietnamese Americans are to be found in almost every large metropolitan area in the US including areas that historically have not experienced any ethnic immigration at all. Ethnic enclaves developed through the migration of Vietnamese Americans for family reunification, communal reasons, and employment opportunities. The primary areas where early Vietnamese Americans migrated and settled were large metropolitan areas in California, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Massachusetts, and Florida. Over half of the Vietnamese population lives in California and Texas (Zhou, 1998, 17).

There are also smaller waves such as the fourth and fifth wave refugees, 1983-1989 and post-1989, where asylum seekers mostly from refugee camps in countries such as the Philippines and Thailand, were brought here by the US Government in aid of family reunification.

The fifth wave specifically includes primarily the former prisoners of reeducation camps through the support of the United States government, like Diem Van Ngo. In 1988, the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam negotiated and established the Orderly Departure program (ODP), often referred as the Humanitarian Operation

(H.O.) program, which provided for the safe immigration of Vietnamese citizens to the U.S. The ODP agreement contained the Special Released Reeducation Center Detainees Resettlement Program, which singled out former political and military prisoners who had been detained more than three years for U.S. immigration because of their close association with the Republic of Vietnam and its American allies. These individuals were also able to bring their spouse and any unmarried children along with them to the U.S. (Feeney, 2002, 11). In 1989, over 70,000 reeducation camp detainees with South Vietnamese military backgrounds and their families arrived in the United States under the H.O. program (Luong, 2000, 1). Diem Van Ngo received U.S. asylum with his entire family through the H.O. program in 1993. Ngo's release from Vietnam took three years since he first completed the H.O. program application in 1990. The reasons for the long wait to get to the U.S. are unknown.

Currently, the Vietnamese American community is one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the US with an estimated population of over 1,100,000 people in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2000). The Vietnamese Americans are the 4<sup>th</sup> largest Asian American community after the Chinese, Filipino, and Asian Indian Americans (U.S. Census, 2000).

Almost all Vietnamese American refugees started off at the bottom in American society in the worst neighborhoods and in menial jobs. Ngo, along with his family, received sponsorship from a close friend, who offered his home in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston. Sponsorship from a Vietnamese relative or close friend was typical for many of those of the fourth and fifth waves because the first-to-third waves of Vietnamese refugees were more settled and more trusted. Since Ngo did not have any close family members who would be able to sponsor him and his family, this aspect might

have caused some problems and delays for him and his family to come over to the United States. Once Ngo and his family did arrive in Dorchester, his family was put on welfare for eight months. Arriving in the U.S. at the age of sixty-one, Ngo was too weak to support his family. All eight of his children were adults at the time. His children did most of the work to support the family while Ngo took up a retired lifestyle, volunteering in community work, and continued his amateur songwriting. Ngo's children still live close-by in Dorchester with their own respective families. In fact, Ngo and his wife live in an apartment with one of his children's family (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

Currently, Diem Van Ngo feels the responsibility to invest time in working with the Vietnamese American community in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston.<sup>15</sup> Understandably, Ngo reaches out to the community to improve the lives of Vietnamese Americans and also to educate the upcoming Vietnamese American second-generation about the history of Communist corruption. He offers his views of freedom in Vietnam:

Even now, I realize that Vietnam still does not have much freedom. For example, there are no private newspapers and there are no private television stations. The Communists regulate and own everything. So if they want to say or do anything, they cannot. There is no freedom. There are no government parties, but only one. No democracy. No freedom. (Ngo, Personal Interview, March 16, 2005).

At the age of seventy-eight, Diem Van Ngo today still seems to retain the inner strength that enabled him to withstand such hard physical labor, emotional hardships, and

---

<sup>15</sup>The Dorchester neighborhood of Boston is home to the largest Vietnamese ethnic enclave in Boston and the Northeast. The Boston metropolitan area Vietnamese American community is ranked eighth in comparison to other U.S. metropolitan areas according to Vietnamese population. The population of the Boston metropolitan area Vietnamese is 31,325. Boston has a total Vietnamese population of 10,818 people. During the 1990s, the Dorchester neighborhood received a form of urban renewal with the influx of Vietnamese residents and businesses.

persecution during his eleven years serving as a political prisoner in the Vietnamese Communist reeducation camps.

## V. Edited Transcript of Diem Van Ngo

March 16, 2005

### **Background**

My name is Diem Van Ngo or Ngo Van Diem in the traditional Vietnamese full name form where our names are formatted first by family name, middle name, then our first name. Diem Van is my pen name; I am a song writer. I have written several songs about my involvement in the South Vietnamese army, otherwise known as the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN). I have also written other songs about traditional life in Vietnam too.

My parents were born in Phu Tho province in the northern region of Vietnam. They died a long time ago. Both of my parents' education only reached to a primary school level. My parents had many children along with me. They had a total of seven children. My parents had four sons and three daughters. I am the youngest. My parents lived primarily in a village in Phu Tho province all their lives. They were farmers who cultivated rice.

Currently, I am seventy-three years old. Am I considered a very old man then? Well, I am also married with my wife and I have a total of eight children; all born before 1975. My date of birth is March 8, 1932. I was born in the northern regions of Vietnam in the province called Phu Tho, like my parents. I also lived in Hanoi when I was a

teenager. In Hanoi, I was able to study and go to school there. I finished high school in Hanoi by the year 1952. In Hanoi, the high schools were very similar to U.S. high schools in its curriculum of the sciences, math, history, and writing. I was also able to learn the English language from my Hanoi education as well.

### **Participation in the South Vietnamese military**

I was in the South Vietnamese military for about twenty years. After I completed my high school career I left my familiar home in Hanoi to go to the south in 1954. I joined the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) and later would eventually become a Lieutenant Colonel. Do you know what it means to be a Lieutenant Colonel? A Lieutenant Colonel is a high ranking officer. Although there are other ranks that are higher than a Lieutenant Colonel, I am very proud that I was able to get this far.

The highest ranking officer is the General. The General is then followed by the Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel (which is what I was), and Major. Below the Major is Captain. Under the Captain is the 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant. Under the 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. Then after is the NCOs [non-commissioned officer]; they are the surgeons and nurses, or those who practice medicine. Then after surgeons, or NCOs, are the soldiers.

The reason I joined the army is because I am against Communism. This is the reason I left my familiar home back in the northern regions of Vietnam. I was and am against Communism because they have a history of corruption. The Communists are no good to me. For example, land reform in Vietnam in 1952. Often the Communists would take away land from farmers. They would not let the landowners to rule their land. These lands were often several acres. All people who owned more than three

acres would be killed by the Viet Cong (Vietnamese Communists). I know of this fact because my family was brutally murdered by the Viet Cong. I was only able to survive because my family had sent me to Hanoi to study. If it were not for the love that my family had in sending me to Hanoi in hopes that I would have a better life through education, I would not be here today speaking with you. The experiences with the land reforms of 1952 and the reeducations are intimate interactions with me, my family, and of the Viet Cong. I lost my parents and my family while I was a teenager back in 1952 because of the Viet Cong land reforms.

So I left the northern regions of Vietnam and fled to the south in 1954 when Vietnam had been broken into two countries; North Vietnam and South Vietnam. I fled to southern Vietnam because I did not agree with how China and Russia had so much command over the Vietnamese Communists. I already heard and saw how the Chinese and Russian Communists killed many of its own people; especially landowning educated people. So I don't like Communism. And just knowing how the Russian people were able to demand freedom and oppose Communism gives me hope. No more Communists. This is what I hope for my own country, Vietnam.

This is the main reason why I joined the South Vietnamese military, because I was, and still am, anti-Communist. Remember, my family was brutally murdered because of Communist policies. Many of the other soldiers of South Vietnam had the same idea and background of anti-Communism. They did not like the Communists. And all of these military men came from many different backgrounds ranging from farmers to city people. The majority of the people who joined were the ones who did not like the Communists. These men volunteered and mobilized.

Many of the officers were recruited to the Thu Duc officer school in the city of Dalat. Others also volunteered and were sent to the Si Quan volunteer school in Dalat as well. They had a school over there for officers and another school for volunteers. There was another military school in Nga Trang called Ha Si Quan. Ha Si Quan school was for non-officers, or intelligence members. There was another school called Quang Trung Military Center or Quang Trang Training Military Center. This school was for soldiers and was located in Saigon. These four schools were the four main military schools in South Vietnam. Although, there were a lot of other schools all over South Vietnam, the four main ones were the four I mentioned. The government of South Vietnam was running all of these schools. After 1954, Vietnam did not pass the torch to the Americans to take the lead against the Communists at this time. South Vietnam, under President Diem, always had its goal in training and leading its military. I believed with my whole heart that we were on the right side because our government and military was not controlled by any outside power like the Vietnamese Communists with their Soviet and Chinese influences.

In the army I was a Commander. You know what that was? This person leads small teams of soldiers, called Platoons, Companies, or Battalions. A Platoon is smaller than a Company and a Company is smaller than a Battalion in number of soldiers. To fight and engage in military combat, there needed to be a structure.

I was a Battalion Commander for some years in the infantry. But I did not become a Commander quickly. I first became a soldier and then a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant and then 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant after some years and training until I became a Commander. In the military there are so many ranks. But all you need to know is that I was a Commander; first, a

Platoon Commander, second, a Company Commander, and later, a Battalion Commander. Above the Battalion is the Regiment. I did not get that far; it's very big. After Regiment is the Division. Do you know what a Division is? A Division is very large. There are about over 10,000 people within a Division. I only lead a 400 person Battalion. A Battalion has less people than a Division. It is much smaller.

I also studied while I moved up in military ranks. I studied Psychology after I was a Platoon Commander. I studied military skills at the Information School in New Jersey in 1959. It was at a fort. The name of the fort was Fort Slocum. I also later studied at Fort Bragg in 1960. Do you know Fort Bragg at all? Fort Bragg is in North Carolina. I studied Psychology at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. So I studied at two places.

### **First Impression of New Established Government in South Vietnam in 1975**

In 1975, when the Communists came to take over South Vietnam, it was at a point where we just knew there was no reason to fight anymore. There were a few people who had still committed themselves in fighting. But I knew that there was no reason to fight at all. There were about thirty people who fought against the Communists when they first arrived to take over Saigon. Of course they were killed. A lot of the people in Saigon thought that when the Communists would come over that they would seek revenge on the people of Saigon.

I could not flee at all. How or why would I go? There was no way for me to go because I had no transportation. No plane to go on. The Americans did not or could not help. They only helped the important government officials of South Vietnam and also the Vietnamese officials affiliated with the American Embassy in Saigon. The South

Vietnam officials were the first to receive help in leaving. I could not leave because I was lower in rank. So there were those in the army who kept on fighting the Vietnamese Communists until they finally were killed and that just left the surviving others who stayed behind in the country.

Those who were involved in the South Vietnamese military were not aided in leaving the country, but only a few. There were all the Americans and also the Vietnamese who were in the Navy and some in the Airforce. These Vietnamese had transportation to leave because they had the big ships to leave in. Also those military members who were in the Airforce were able to leave by aircraft. So non-Navy and non-Airforce military members did not have big ships or airplanes to leave; so the rest of us stayed in the country. Those who were in the infantry had what to flee with? The infantry only had tanks. Where are you going to go with a tank? So we stayed. We were the last military members who were left fighting to the end until we had nothing to fight with anymore, until President Minh made the official announcement to the South Vietnamese people to stop any form of fighting against the Communists.

### **President Diem and President Thieu**

Thinking back about the past South Vietnamese leadership, I believe that President Diem was a very good president. The Americans did not kill President Diem, however, he was killed by Vietnamese people. The Americans did not have the capacity, or did not want the capacity, to reach President Diem. Americans say that President Diem was assassinated. But who initiated the assassination process? The people who actually fired and assassinated President Diem were Vietnamese, but in terms of who masterminded the plan, I cannot say. President John F. Kennedy and his army wanted

President Diem dead. They did not like President Diem because President Diem did not like to work with the Americans. Although I have to say that President Diem was not corrupt at all; he did a lot for our country. But he did not like to work with the Americans. You understand? President Diem did not want the Americans to have total control of the country and so he became a target.

President Thieu was a president who followed whatever the Americans instructed him to do only. He was a “yes” man. There were many Vietnamese people who did not like him and others who did. But most people did not like President Thieu because he became an American puppet.

### **First Impressions of Assembly Center for Reeducation**

First impressions of the assembly center for reeducation. The Viet Cong first said that they wanted to assemble all Vietnamese military high officers for only two months. Three days and seven days were for NCOs and soldiers. But officers were to be assembled for two months only. But what actually happened to me was that I was put in prison at a Vietnamese reeducation camps for eleven years. So what I am saying is that the Viet Cong lied to us in saying that we would be assembled for reeducation for only two months. Once they assembled us and took us in for “reeducation”, we were not allowed to go home. They forced us in actual prisons for over several years. I was put into prison for eleven years.

In the process of collecting all the former ARVN soldiers for reeducation, in June 1975, the Vietnamese Communists first made an announcement that all Vietnamese high officers were to be reeducated for only two months. But, again, it was not two months, it was more. All former ARVN officers were told to bring only enough clothes and rice for

two months. I did believe what they had told us and promised. I believed the first time about their two month assembly for reeducation. Although after two months passed while I was in the reeducation camps, I figured that my time in captivity would be more. I believed the Viet Cong at that time that their word would be true. I think it was because in 1975 that because there was no more war, there would be nothing to be afraid of anymore. But they were liars and I was dead wrong.

They forced all those who were involved in the South Vietnamese military to assemble for reeducation. The Viet Cong made announcements in the newspapers stating that all those involved with the South Vietnamese military were to report to assembly centers for reeducation. They talked about how the U.S. was no good and the Viet Cong said the Vietnamese government in the south was no good either. They forced all those who were involved in the South Vietnamese military to assemble for reeducation. Other people included for reeducation were former South Vietnamese government officials. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants up to Generals were asked to stay for two months. NCOs were asked to leave for only a few days. Government officials were asked to go, but not all of them. But these people were put in prison in years ranging from two to ten years depending on their government official status.

Well, I figured since we lost the war, I wondered why they would ask us to assemble for reeducation. But I did not feel that I was in a position to argue with the Viet Cong because we had lost. I do not know if they had a record of my name or my participation within the South Vietnamese military. But I knew that when the Viet Cong made the announcement that all military officials were to report for assembly, I had no choice but to go and report myself. If I had not, there were definitely people who would

report to the Viet Cong of my history and eventually the Viet Cong would find out about me. I could not leave the country because security was at an all time high when the Communists took over South Vietnam and there were no forms of leaving. So I was trapped. A new government had formed and now we had a new government to follow. The new government made assurance that we would not stay for over two months and there was no other option for me to believe otherwise. After April 13, 1975, most of South Vietnam was overtaken by the Viet Cong by then. On April 30, Saigon was taken and South Vietnam was officially taken by the Viet Cong.

There were many assembly centers throughout what was formerly known as South Vietnam. I reported to the assembly center in Can Tho, just outside Saigon. So the Viet Cong ordered all officers in Saigon to gather at the assembly center in Can Tho. When people went over to the assembly center they were held within the center for some time for about one year. Several hundred of us became prisoners in the Can Tho camp; most were officers of the South Vietnamese military. And then afterwards, we were ordered to go to the north.

So we were put in an assembly center/reeducation camp in the south for about a year and later sent to the north where we would follow one of the most difficult points of our lives within the reeducation camps in the northern regions of Vietnam. We were ordered to go on a boat provided by the Viet Cong transportation. At this time, the Viet Cong were supported by Russia, China, Hungary... many countries in providing aid and supplies such as the boat that we were forced to go in. Bolivia as well was one of these supporting countries. We were on the boat for three days on the seas. They would then afterwards send us in the jungles of north Vietnam.

But when we were told to leave the Can Tho camp and to board the boat we did not know where we would be shipped to. They did not tell us anything. They just told us to go on the ship. I thought that we were going to be sent to an island off the coast a few hundred miles from Can Tho, like Phu Quoc. Phu Quoc is a big island on Vietnamese waters in the south, near Cambodia. So when we were first on the ship, I, and many others, thought that they were going to send us over to Phu Quoc island. It was not until I stayed for about two days in the ship did I figure out that we were possibly going to be sent to the north. I thought of this because I could hear the accents of the people in charge of the boat as being northern Vietnamese. And after three days, the Viet Cong finally confirmed and informed us that we were in the northern region of Vietnam when we first stepped on land from the boat. But on the ship, they did not tell us where we were going. Only when we arrived to the north did they tell us.

For three days we were on such a terrible ship and a terrible trip. The boat was not huge, but it could carry about two hundred people. In the bottom of the boat we were forced to spend all of our time there. We also ate and slept within these tight conditions. There were no bathrooms and so we were also forced to urinate and soil in buckets in the areas we would also eat and sleep in. It definitely was not like the bathrooms, like what we use in America today. The conditions and smells of about two hundred people stored in a boat for three days was no good.

The boat landed in the town of Vinh. From Vinh, we were put on a train and sent to the jungle area where we would be forced to build a prison for ourselves. The location of this area where we would stay was close to the town of Yen Bay. But the train did not send us all the way to the prison reeducation camp area. We would stop at Yen Bay and

then we were shipped to the free jungle location by truck. So from Vinh we went to Yen Bay by train and then from Yen Bay to the jungle we went by truck.

I could not believe it. So after two months passed I lost any trust for the Communist government. So when we were sent to board a ship and they did not tell us where we were to be sent, I did not know what to expect. Only until we arrived at Vinh, did we know that we were in the north. When we arrived to that jungle, I just knew in my heart that I would not be going home again. I knew that I would be working hard and for a very long time.

### **First Impressions of Reeducation Camps and History of Camp Admittances**

My first impression of the reeducation camp was that it was very cold since the location of the site of the reeducation camp was in the jungle area close to the mountain areas where the weather changed often. At the reeducation camp we had tents to sleep into. We only rested and slept during the night. When day broke we were forced to find wood to build housing for ourselves. The reeducation camp was not built at this time. We were instructed to build our own prison. We also were instructed to be creative by creating our own tools for building our prison since they did not have any appropriate tools or equipment at this location near Yen Bay.

1976 was the year when we were sent up to the north from the south by boat, and also marked the beginning of several transfers to other northern reeducation camps that would put us in many years of extreme starvation and forced labor. 1980, I was sent to a camp near Vinh Phu, then Thanh Phong in 1983, and finally Han Tan in 1985. Some reeducation camps had a few thousand prisoners; in the one I was sent to at Yen Bay, there were several hundred. In 1986, I was finally released and gained my freedom.

## **Typical Daily Life in Reeducation Camps**

Typical daily life in reeducation camps was very hard. What did we actually do in the reeducation camps? Well, we farmed. We cultivated potatoes, rice, and manioc. Things like this. We had to do everything from the planting and taking care of these vegetables with no adequate tools or equipment. We also planted legumes; all different varieties of legumes and vegetables. So that is what we did most of the time.

From sunup we had to start work in the fields. There would be camp guards who would follow us when we were off to work because they did not want us to have a chance to escape. We did not have much to eat and so we were often always starving. We would only be fed with manioc, corn, and rotten rice. We were always hungry. Our clothes were dirty and not well kept. I remember eating leaves of manioc because I was so hungry. Do you know the leaf of the manioc? If you eat too many of these leaves, you can die because it can be poisonous. So I ate these leaves anyways. I just ate enough so that I would not die. If I were to eat too much, I would have definitely died. Others also knew that eating too much manioc leaves would be poisonous. Others also purposely ate manioc leaves because they were so hungry.

Again, we were often starving for food. There was never enough food for us. We ate a meal in the morning with only corn. They would often mix corn and manioc within the rotten rice for lunch and dinner. There was no seasoning like fish sauce or salt. No meat. Only once a month we would receive a sliver of pork meat. No beef, chicken, or fish. Only during Vietnamese New Year would we receive two to three slivers of pork. Some people in our prisoner quarters would go out in night in search for

food like fish. They would bring a bucket and a stick and try to catch fish the best way they could.

We were often overworked. We had to clear the jungle to set up our farmland. We would have to cut trees for firewood. In Vietnam firewood was essential for us since the nights were often cold and we did not have warm clothes. From sunup we worked until noon. From 2pm to 5pm we would work again. From 5pm we would rest and eat a meal. Saturdays we worked during the weekdays. Sunday we also worked, but we only had to clean up. We would also sometimes be ordered to do additional outside exercises like running. Or sometimes we would go out on supervised walks. We were also forced to farm and water the vegetables every chance they could make us. In the afternoons we would have community support meetings too. Basically, we worked hard all the time except after nightfall and we were starving all the time.

No one committed suicide. But if anyone was sick there would be no medicine available. In the reeducation camps there was no kind of treatment for illnesses. The guards would take any available medications and we would be left with nothing in case we needed anything like medicine. A lot of people died because of sickness and lack of medicine. A lot of people died that I knew personally. Diarrhea and eventually dysentery were typical forms of sicknesses. Dysentery is a severe form of diarrhea where one also excretes blood as well. Typically these types of illness, if not taken care of, would cause death among the prisoners. There was no medicine to help. First they would have diarrhea and then later dysentery. No doctors were available either. Although, there was a nurse, but they were often terrible. The conditions were less than

human. I remember a time when there was a doctor among the prisoners, but he fell ill to dysentery. There was no medicine and so he died.

I remember that there were fellow prisoners who were really depressed. What could they do? They only talked with other prisoners. Especially when there was free time during sleeping hours. Many thought about their wives and family members that they left behind. They often worried about how they [family] were surviving without their protection. Often, they felt sorry about themselves and about the life that they were living in the camps.

The only friends I made with were the fellow prisoners in the reeducation camp. It was not like we would speak with anyone else. They would not even allow it if we even wanted to make conversations with the security and soldiers at the reeducation camps. That wasn't allowed. But in the prisoner quarters, we spoke with each other. In the reeducation camp, there were about five or seven prisoner housing quarters.

Occasionally, there would be fellow prisoners in the prisoner quarters who would act as spies, because the Viet Cong would maybe offer food or something else to get information. There were prisoners who would later act as traitors or spies, but this was not often. We only spoke with those within our housing quarters; not with anyone else. Of course we were scared of any traitors or spies potentially being in our quarters. We would always be afraid of what kinds of information would be leaked out. I would hear some reports, but I never experienced or found out any spies in any of my quarters. Other places there were a lot of bad seeds, but not with me. Knowledge of these bad reporters would often make all of us weary and paranoid. They would report information

to those in charge of the reeducation camps. But generally, there were not that many that I knew of. Just a few.

The reason why they are called reeducation camps is because they wanted us to learn about Communism. But in actuality, they did not instruct us with anything. Typically, there was a handful of security and about twenty soldiers at the camps. They only mentioned that the United States was evil. There was no formal instruction at all. They only ordered us to work. But the reason why they called it a reeducation camp is because they did not want the camps to be called prisons. They said that we would only be reeducated, but we were actually put to work and became prisoners.

They only spoke negatively about the United States and Capitalism. They only offered in saying that their way of Communism was the best form of government. They did not teach anything about Ho Chi Minh. They only mentioned that Ho Chi Minh was a great person. They mostly would negatively be outspoken about President Thieu, President Nixon. There was no formal instruction and we were not expected to learn any new teaching or training.

They forced us to write about our personal histories, about how we were involved in the South Vietnamese military or government. After, they often chastised us after reading our personal histories. They would not let us do much in the reeducation camps. There were not other reasons for writing. There was nothing to write on or with. This was forbidden. However, we were allowed to write letters to be sent out to family during some of our community meetings. But we were limited in what we wrote because we could not write anything political or anything in relation to the United States or anything deemed as Capitalistic. Otherwise, we were not allowed to write, not even to study. The

authorities did not let us read books, especially any texts in English or connected with any meanings of the U.S. or capitalism. Today, they let people read American books in Vietnam. Now in Vietnam, they like American things. But back then, they did not let us read anything, especially American related texts.

### **Release from Reeducation Camps**

In 1986, I was asked to come to one of the soldiers in charge of the camp. Once I came to his office, he said to me that I would be released from the reeducation camp at Han Tan and that I was free to return to my family just outside Saigon. At first, I could not believe it. But when I said my goodbyes to my friends and left the gates, I kept on walking. I did not even look back because I was so afraid that something bad might happen if I did look back.

I could not wait to return to my family around Saigon. For about eleven years, I have not seen my wife or any of my children. While I was in the camps, my family was ordered to move outside of Saigon to a guarded supervised economic zone. My wife and children lived with the family of a good friend of ours. Together they worked hard to make a living by selling cheap goods and selling food on the street.

On my trip over from Han Tan to Saigon, I walked to the nearest train station for about several kilometers. It took me about a half a day to get to the train station. At the train station I took a train to Saigon with the money that was left for me from the Han Tan reeducation camp for transportation home.

I knew where my family was living because I had been writing to my wife while I was in the camps. So finding my family was not very hard. When I did find my family's home and first walked inside, my wife and family were so happy to see me. They could

not believe that it was me. Later, they would also mention how surprised they were of how much I looked different from how they last remembered me. They said I looked so skinny and wrinkled. I was about fifty-four years old at the time.

I still had to contact the Communists after I was released from the camps and settling with my family. Often I would go to the local security police once per week. If I went anywhere I had to report to them.

### **Immigration Story**

Why did I leave and go to the United States? I knew I had the chance to leave because there was a 1988 agreement between the United States and Vietnam that would give safe passage for those who were former South Vietnamese military persons. I had to fill out paperwork to be able to go. It took about two years after the agreement until I was able to do the paperwork in 1990. June 1993 we left for the United States. Do you know about the H.O. program? That was the program under which I was able to leave Vietnam. And the Viet Cong did not say anything about me leaving the country. They could not do anything. They could only let us go. Actually, at this time, Vietnam had reached an extreme point of poverty and the Vietnamese government figured that letting us go would be a good investment. We would have the chance to leave and make some money and the Viet Cong thought that we might return money back to our families in Vietnam. They would not make such a decision without thinking about all the consequences. So they let us go.

I left with my immediate family. I did all the paperwork and we left in a very organized manner. We left on an American airline. The name of the airline I don't remember anymore. I left with my family and that is all I cared about. We did not leave

by boat, however. The only thing we had to bring with us was only the clothes on our backs. We did not have anything left to bring at this point in time. We were so poor and we did not have any money to bring. We arrived in the U.S. to Dorchester, Massachusetts. We first came over to Boston and we first settled in Dorchester. We moved in an area around the highway within this neighborhood. The house we moved into belonged to a friend who agreed to help sponsor us in settling in the United States. He offered to let us stay in his home over here in the United States. We were also put on welfare by the United States government at the time—for eight months. After, we started to work. I did not go to work, however. My children did. I had become too old and weak to work. I only worked to volunteer for about six thousand hours. Do you know the Kit Clark Senior Center [in Dorchester]? I volunteered there for six thousand hours. I volunteered there for some time.

I did not have any expectations from leaving Vietnam. I did not have any other expectations at all. I just wanted to get out of the country as soon as possible. In Vietnam they had schooling. My children have already grown into adults by now. I knew that there would probably be better opportunities for them in terms of jobs. But mainly, I left because I just plain wanted to leave the country.

## **Reflections**

I do not have any feelings of returning back to Vietnam to fight against the Communists. I do not have any of these kinds of feelings. There is no point in thinking of such things. In the past, I have already made these attempts. And also, what can I use to fight back with the Communists? I don't have any artillery or my youth. I can only fight with my writing and hopefully this will make an impact. I fight with my wits and

not with my hands. To fight by hands will only cause death. I also want to clarify that I want to oppose and demolish Communism, not just Vietnamese Communism. I am against Red China and others. It is not that I am [only] against Vietnamese Communism. No. I am against Communism in general.

Many of my children went to work and to school. Now they all work now in their respective professions. For me, I just work within the Vietnamese community. I want to help the Vietnamese community here. Right now, I understand that we are Americans. But I do want all the Vietnamese people in Vietnam to have democracy and freedom. So I talk about the reeducation camps to other Vietnamese as much as people are willing to listen. I want the younger generation to understand the importance of community and about some of the negative actions of Communism. If the younger generation wants to learn to be against Communism, they must learn about Communism. The Communists are no good people. If Communism was a good government way of life, than why is it dying in other countries? In Soviet Russia, Communism is no more. If the people involved in Communism are corrupt than why would people stand for that kind of government. The Vietnamese Communists follow the Chinese. They follow North Koreans. The Chinese also reeducated many prisoners as well and the Vietnamese Communists also followed this sickening form of punishment. These were some of my experiences with the Viet Cong. I lost eleven years of my life in a reeducation camp prison because of the Viet Cong.

I only talk with other Vietnamese to not be involved with the Viet Cong. I speak with my friends and with my children about my experiences. I speak with my children about the experiences and my friends. I just want them to realize and appreciate the life

we have without the Viet Cong. Even now, I realize that Vietnam still does not have much freedom. For example, there are no private newspapers and there are no private television stations. The Communists regulate and own everything. So if they want to say or do anything, they cannot. There is no freedom. There are no government parties, but only one. No democracy. No freedom. But do not take my word only, you must also have to ask others about their opinions as well. There are others with different experiences that can also be informative.

#### V. Afterward

The last words Diem Van Ngo offered in this interview indicate that I should continue the work of studying the Vietnamese reeducation camps. I hope to take Ngo's advice and continue this project and interview other interviewees of his generation. The discussion with Diem Van Ngo indicates to me that there are more topics I need to learn about in depth, such as the daily life in South Vietnam pre-April 31, 1975; South Vietnamese military relations; the opposing army front; family life with a family member in the reeducation camps; community support of those imprisoned in the reeducation camps; and the amount of understanding and empowerment that the prisoners constructed in their oppressive environments. Other topics such as the extent of decision-making of the ARVN within the American control of the South Vietnamese side of the war should be explored as well as the details of immigration and life in the United States.

The experience of working with Diem Van Ngo for the creation of this project forces me to confront aspects of my own life that I had not previously thought about. I ask myself about how I would handle the certain life-changing situations that this person

was able to endure through out his life: such as losing his family in his early life, fleeing his familiar locality to escape from possible death, leading a command of soldiers in war, being imprisoned in camps, and starting a new life in a the United States. As an American born person of Vietnamese ancestry, I grew up disadvantaged from an economic standpoint from mainstream America. However, Ngo's life story proves to me how privileged I really am to have grow-up with certain freedoms that other locations of the world may not even have.

Ngo's story also makes me reflect on the certain strengths of the Vietnamese people to keep living no matter how tough life's situations are. Often, my maternal grandmother comes to mind as the quintessential figure of what I ideally believe what it means to be Vietnamese. My grandmother, as savvy and sharp minded as she is, always used her wits to uphold the principles of honor in her life and in the lives of those around her. This sense of honor was typically communicated through the warmth of her actions along with the strengths of intelligence and physical endurance. Her honor is complex and developed from an infusion of family, personal, and national types of honor. She often strives to take care and defend her family as she adjusts her personal and national honor to best fit her clan and the current situation. In short, there is always an inner Vietnamese will to survive and one's honor must balance out and adjust accordingly. I believe this is why my grandmother was able to raise and lead a family of five while running a business and still maintaining herself under the Vietnamese cultural and traditional constructions of a typical woman during the confusion and hardships of war during the 1950s-1970s. When her honor became in danger, an inner strength would typically be revealed with such great power. Similarly, Vietnam's history indicates when

honor and country comes in danger, an inner strength and power is revealed; for how could the Vietnamese defeat great military powers such as the ancient Chinese, Genghis Khan and the Mongolians, and Western powers after WWII? It is from my personal experience of knowing myself and others of people of Vietnamese ancestry that I understand this balance of upholding certain principles and having the will to live them. Ngo's interview also falls under this ideal through the examples of the experiences he had survived and endured mentioned in this interview. I hope to continue and contribute this legacy here in the United States as an example of this Vietnamese strength.

## APPENDIX A

### A STUDY OF U.S. RESIDENT SOUTH VIETNAMESE VETERAN EXPERIENCE AND PERSPECTIVE ON THE VIETNAMESE REEDUCATION CAMPS

—Interview Outline—

1. Background information.  
Date and place of birth; place of parents' birth. Number of children in family.  
Parents' education and work history? Subjects' education and work history.
2. Daily life description pre-South Vietnam April 31, 1975?  
How was time spent at home? How was time spent with family? Work?  
Community affiliations through churches or other local associations?
3. Participation in the South Vietnamese military  
When and how did most of the South Vietnamese military get recruited? What was their social status? How do you personally get involved in the military service? What was the extent of the participation of the South Vietnamese military? How long were they required to serve and how were they rewarded? What was your first official position in the military? Later? When you were in your first military position, what were your responsibilities? Later?
4. South Vietnamese military relations  
How popular was the military in your neighborhood, in the newspaper, when you first got started? As the war progressed, what were conditions like for them? How were the viewpoints of Vietnam War events different between the Americans and the South Vietnamese? What were their relations with each other like?
5. The Opposing Army Front  
How was the enemy run? What did you know about how the other side was organized?
6. First impressions of new established government in South Vietnam in 1975?
7. First impressions of assembly centers for reeducation?  
Who were assembled first; any criteria explained for reeducation? What process was done to collect people for reeducation? How did you personally wind up in the reeducation camps?
8. First impressions of reeducation camps?
9. Typical daily life in reeducation camps?  
Structure of reeducation camps? How did you fit into that? Where there informal lines of power that differed from the formal positions? Reeducation camp crime and punishment – actual personal experience, vs. rumors? What was the reeducation camp process like? Freetime activities, recreation? Relationships with neighbors? (Tell some stories?)
10. Family life without subject.

Family expectations and struggles without subject? How was family/work responsibilities handled? What kind of help was received (family/subject)? From whom? Any tensions or difficulties in the family during this period?

11. Community support.

What kind of community support did you receive from groups such as the churches, associations, and local people outside the reeducation camps.

12. Release from reeducation camp.

What kind of circumstances that brought to subjects' release. First impressions of life after reeducation camp?

13. Immigration story?

Why leave the home country? Under what circumstances? with what help? with what expectations?

Events of the trip

14. Reflections

Feelings about; life and activities since.

## APPENDIX B

### Interview with Diem Van Ngo

Interviewer= Peter Van Do (P)  
Interviewee= Diem Van Ngo (D)  
March 16, 2005

#### **Table of Contents**

##### **Tape 1, Side A**

Background Information (000)

Participation in the South Vietnamese military (048)

First Impression of New Established Government in South Vietnam in 1975 (365)

President Diem and President Thieu (436)

First Impressions of Assembly Center for Reeducation (482)

##### **Tape 1, Side B**

First Impressions of Reeducation Camps (190)

Typical Daily Life in Reeducation Camps (296)

##### **Tape 2, Side A**

Release from Reeducation Camps (000)

Immigration Story (010)

Reflections (066)

## WORKS CITED

- Baum, Willa K. Transcribing and Editing Oral History. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991.
- Do, Hien Duc. The Vietnamese Americans. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999.
- Feeney, Maureen P. "Freedom to Speak: Vietnamese Reeduction and the Search for Cold War Refuge." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2002.
- Freeman, James M. Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese-American Lives. Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1989.
- Herring, George C. America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975 with Poster. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.
- Huynh, Sanh Thong. To be Made Over: Tales of Socialist Reeduction Vietnam. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Council on Southeast Asia Studies, 1988.
- Joes, Anthony James. The War for South Viet Nam: 1954-1975. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001.
- Karnow, Stanley. Vietnam: A History. New York: The Viking Press, 1983.
- Kolko, Gabriel. Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, The United States, and the Modern Historical Experience. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Le, Huu Tri. Prisoners of the Word: A Memoir of the Vietnamese Reeduction Camps. Seattle: Black Heron Press, 2001.
- Long, D.P.P and L. Ricard. The Dream Shattered: Vietnamese Gangs in America. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997.
- Luong, Peter Bui-Xuan. "South Vietnamese Officer Prisoners of War: Their Resilience and Acculturation Experiences in Prison and in the U.S." Ph.D. diss., The Fielding Institute, 2000.
- Lu, Van Thanh. The Inviting Call of Wandering Souls: Memoir of an ARVN Liaison Officer to United States Forces in Vietnam Who was Imprisoned in Community Re-Education Camps and then Escaped. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1997.
- Marine, Michael W. (2005, April 16). Citing sources. Retrieved May 8, 2005 from the listserv: paassage\_connection@yahoogroups.com

- Matson III, Arthur William. "Coping, Culture, and Meaning in the Reeducation Camp Experience." Ph.D. diss., Antioch New England Graduate School, 2001.
- Metzner, Edward P., Huynh Van Chinh, Tran Van Phuc, and Le Nguyen Binh. Reeducation in Postwar Vietnam: Personal Postscripts to Peace. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001.
- Ngo, Diem Van. Personal interview. 16 March 2005.
- Nguyen, Ngoc Ngan. The Will of Heaven: A Story of One Vietnamese and the End of the World. New York: Dutton, 1982.
- Nguyen, W.H. "Psychology well-being of the former Vietnamese political prisoner in the United States." Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Arlington, 1994.
- Ritchie, Donald A. Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Thai, Hung C. "Splitting Things in Half is So White!" Amerasia Journal. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 25.1 (1999): 53-88.
- Takaki, Ronald. Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989.
- Tran, Tri Vu. Lost Years: My 1,632 Days in Vietnamese Reeducation Camps. Berkeley, California: Institute of East Asian Studies of the University of California, 1988.
- Tran, Xuan Dung. History of the Vietnamese Marine Corps, Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Hawthorne East, Vic.: Tran Xuan Dung, 1997.
- Truong, Nhu Tang. A Vietcong Memoir: Truong Nhu Tang, with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985.
- United States. Bureau of Census. Statistical Abstract of the United States. 227<sup>th</sup> ed. Washington: GPO, 2000.
- WGBH Educational Foundation and Vietnam Project. "Luong Duong, SR #22." Interview Transcripts, 1979-1983. University of Massachusetts-Boston Archives, 1979-1983.
- Young, S. B. "The legality of Vietnamese re-education camps." Harvard International Law Journal. 20.3 (1979): 519-537.
- Zhou, Min. Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998.