



Vietnam War & Black April Memorial



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Purpose

In the early 1960, the North Vietnamese Communist mounted a nasty campaign to invade the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). With military aids and advisors from Russia and China, North Vietnam Army begin send hundred thousand of soldiers, tanks and artilleries attacked South Vietnam. The Free Nations including the United State, Great Britain, Korea, Singapore, Phillipine, Thailand, and Australia rush in to help the South Vietnamese defending from the aggression of North Vietnam, Russia, and China. What followed was a 20 plus years of bloody battles that claimed some fifty thousand plus US soldiers, five thousand plus Korean soldiers, and more than a million South Vietnamese soldiers and civilians. In 1972, President Nixon entered an agreement with Peking, withdraw the West coalition troops, and begin to cut military aids to South Vietnam. In the spring and summer of 1975, facing shortage of ammunitions and supplies, South Vietnam Military began to collapse which lead to the tragic April 30 collapse. Five Generals and a dozen high ranking officers took their own life rather than surrendering, while many other soldiers defiantly fought to death. Thousands officers are imprison for ten to twenty years in force labor camps in jungles through out Vietnam.

Some forty years have passed, to the Vietnamese refugees, the single largest event that stand as the symbol of Black April is the honorary suicide of the Five Generals.

The Vietnam War and Black April Memorial is to honor the ultimate sacrifices of these noble service men and women of the Republic of South Vietnam, the United States of America, and the free nations of the world who had fought in the Vietnam War. The Memorial will also honor Goldstar veterans from Garden Grove - two MIA veterans and 41 veterans who had made the ultimate sacrifices.

Summary

The Vietnam War and Black April Memorial Committee (VNBAM Committee) consists of the 4 organizations: Vietnamese American Federation of Southern California, Central Coordination – RVNA, Coalition of Vietnamese Veterans, and Vietnam War Veterans of America – Chapter 875.

The Memorial (about 25ft x 40ft) will be located at a to-be-determined location in the Garden Grove Park where there will be no or little impact to other use of the park. It will serve as a memorial for people to come to learn about the Vietnam War and to honor those who had scarified in the war, but it also double as a venue for other public gathering for residents of Garden Grove.

The costs for planning, design, and construction will be paid for via fund raising in the Vietnamese communities and by our Vietnam Veterans of America friends. The budget for this project is estimated to be between \$500,000 to 600,000. The memorial will be powered by solar energy and the maintenance and insurance cost is estimated at less than \$4,000 per year. The maintenance and insurance cost will also be paid for by the VNBAM committee and will be at no financial impact to the City.

VNBAM committee will work with the City to identify issues, impacts, and devise solutions to address them.



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Design

Following is a mockup design to illustrate the design concept and use.



Left Wall – Honoring the Vietnam War Veterans who fought in the Vietnam War and the Forty One soldiers that made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam



Right Wall – Honoring other nations’ army that fought in the Vietnam War and the Forty One soldiers the Vietnam War – including the South Korean Army Divisions and the 5K plus solders that had sacrificed in Vietnam



Project Time Line

Preliminary Feasibility Study	Impact & Feasibility Report	Concept Approval	Fund Raising
October 2016	November 2016	November 2016	2016 - 2017

Detail Design & Planning	Design Report	Project and Contract Approval	Permit
Dec 2016 - June 2017	July 2017	Q3 2017	Q4 2017

Project Budget

The estimate for the project will be between \$400K and \$600,000. The annual maintenance cost is estimated at \$4,000 and will be paid for by interest from an escrow account that are funded by the project. Operating cost will be insignificant as the project utilize solar powers.

Project Benefits

To be expanded during feasibility and impact study work sessions with Staff, though among the benefits include:

1. The Memorial can also be utilized for other general use and venues. For example, various organizations and residents may apply for permit to use the staging platform for ceremony or other use. This will also contribute to the City’s park fund or general fund.
2. The Memorial will be a tourist attraction and bring tourists and would bring additional revenues to Garden Grove.

Project Impacts

To be expanded during feasibility and impact study work sessions with Staff, though as the project is self-financed by contributions from the communities, financial impact to the City will be negligible and is estimated at less than a thousand dollar in term of Staff’s time. Impact to the Park will also be negligible because it is to be located in an unused area to be determined by City Staff. One possible site would be an unused area way back in the back of the Park.



Exhibits

ABOUT THE FIVE GENERALS AND THE TWO COLONELS

Brigadier General Tran Van Hai,

7th Infantry Division - Midnight, April 30, 1975



At approximately 12:00 am, April 30, 1975, Brigadier General Tran Van Hai of the 7th Infantry Division committed suicide at the Dong Tam military base in My Tho City, Dinh Tuong Province. On the previous day, the general called upon all of his officers for one last meeting, where he thanked them for their faithful service, and gave a final order for all of them to go home and be with their families. It was on April 29th that the provisional president Duong Van Minh issued the official surrender to the Communist North. With the war all but lost, Brig. Gen. Tran Van Hai gave warm parting words to his men, taking some time and enjoying a few short and meaningful conversations with his soldiers.

Later that night, one of Hai's overly concerned officers found the general in his office, motionless, with a glass of water on the table, signifying that he had poisoned himself. Earlier that week, President Nguyen Van Thieu offered to fly Tran Van Hai to Saigon, but the general refused. "He had a helicopter," his son said, "but he decided not to go. I know my father. He didn't want to run away and abandoned his soldiers."

Before his death, the general left a small parcel for his mother containing some money and a few of his personal items. This was his final gift to her. For the nation, he gave his life.

Brigadier General Le Nguyen Vy,

5th Infantry Division - 11:00 am, April 30, 1975



At 11:00 am on the same day, Brigadier General Le Nguyen Vy of the 5th Infantry Division died by his own gun as his final act of loyalty. With the higher command issuing the order for the South to surrender, General Vy shot himself that following morning. His place of death was the 5th Division Headquarters at Lai Khe, his original area of deployment.

General Le Nguyen Vy was considered among the many talented young commanders of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. His courageous and outstanding performance at the Battle of An Loc in 1972, a major Southern victory over the North, gained him great distinction within the ranks. Up until the time of his death, Vy was considered an exceptional regimental commander.



Brigadier General Le Van Hung,

5th Infantry Division; 21st Infantry Division; IV Corps - 8:45 pm, April 30, 1975



Le Van Hung is one of the most renowned and admired figures of the RVN Army, and of South Vietnam in general. Like Le Nguyen Vy, General Hung also fought brilliantly at the Battle of An Loc. Le Van Hung was the Commander of the 5th Division at An Loc, with Le Nguyen Vy acting as his Deputy Commander. He would later be promoted to the IV Corps of ARVN, acting as the Deputy Commander to Major General Nguyen Khoa Nam. Lauded as the “Hero of An Loc,” General Hung was one of the brightest stars of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, dealing great damage to the Communist forces up until his final days. He famously stated that, “As long as I’m still alive, An Loc will remain standing,” a promise he had honored to the

very end.

General Hung took his own life at approximately 8:45 pm, April 30, 1975. Before then, General Hung’s forces still kept hold of the city of Can Tho, and were planning to fight to their very last breath, their very last bullet. However, the threat of Northern reprisal forced Hung’s hand, as the frightened and exhausted residents of Can Tho themselves begged him not to resist the Communists any longer. Respecting their wishes, General Le Van Hung decided to stand down. However, the general would not be content with just a simple surrender.

Summoning his military staff, his wife, and his children, the general bid all those around him a sad farewell, before taking his own life in private, with his .45 pistol. At around 6:00 pm, the general’s forces were still bent on fighting. By 9:00 pm, the general was dead. Along with his ARVN compatriots, the general had taken his own life, in honor of his country, and in honor of his people.

Major General Nguyen Khoa Nam

IV Corps; MR4, ARVN: *Late April 30-Early Morning May 1, 1975*



One of the last generals to take his own life on that 30th of April, Major General Nguyen Khoa Nam too had shot himself rather than surrender to the Communists. Earlier in the day, the Major had talked on the phone with his Deputy Commander Le Van Hung, before the latter killed himself. After saying his last goodbyes to his general staff, and a heartfelt commiseration to General Hung’s wife, the Major ended his own life, sometime between the final hours of Black April and the early hours of May 1, 1975.

According to the wife of General Le Van Hung, both generals Nam and Hung were in communication with each other throughout that 30th of April. The two men had, for some time, been planning for a prolonged counteroffensive that would carry on even after the fall of



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Saigon. However, with the official surrender of Duong Van Minh, followed then by General Hung's acceptance not to fight at the behest of the people of Can Tho, and ultimately with his death at 8:45 pm, the guerrilla strategy was never executed.

The two men lost contact with each other in the latter part of April 30th, and upon receiving news of Hung's death, General Nam was finally able to contact Mrs. Hung to express his condolences. Though he did not give his final goodbyes to Mrs. Hung, she recalls having premonitions that General Nam would kill himself, just like her husband had done. At around 7:00 am on May 1, 1975, news of Nam's death had reached Mrs. Hung, and her fears were realized.

Major General Pham Van Phu

II Corps; MR2: *Morning-Daytime, April 30, 1975*



From the fragmented sources available on General Pham Van Phu's final hours, it can only be told that the commander committed suicide honorably like the other four generals, doing so in the city of Saigon, sometime between the morning and midday.

Though coverage on General Phu is regrettably thin, it should be understood that the brave general is considered one of the five great ARVN generals to commit suicide on Black April, the 30th day of 1975.

Colonel Ho Ngoc Can (1940-1975)



He was one who elected to fight to death.

Ho Ngoc Can was admitted in the RVN Junior Military Academy when he was 14 years old. After graduation, he served 4 years as an instructor sergeant in the same academy. In 1961, he attended the Officer Candidates Course at the Dong De NCO Academy and was the distinguished graduate of the course in 1962.

After graduation, Can served the Ranger Corps as a platoon leader. He was promoted to Captain in 1965, to Major in 1968, to Lieutenant Colonel in 1971, and to full colonel in 1974. He was successfully commanding the 1/33 Battalion (21st Infantry Division), the 15th Regiment (9th Inf. Div.). In 1974, Can was appointed province chief of Chuong Thien Province, a province deep in the South of Vietnam.

On April 30, 1975, he refused to surrender to the enemy. Along with his troops, Can was fighting with all his might, holding the provincial headquarters until 11:00 PM on May 1. When his forces ran out of ammunition. He ordered the soldiers to leave the headquarters for safety while he covered them with a machine gun.



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Đại tá Hồ Ngọc Cẩn bị mù mắt tại Cần Thơ

Imprisoned from May 1st to August 14, he refused to submit to surrendering and was condemned to death by execution on August 14, 1975. Witness recounted his last words before execution: "Had I won, I would not accuse you of all the crimes you are accusing me. I would not dishonor you like you dishonor me. I would not ask you the questions you are asking me. I have fought for the freedom of my people. I have deeds but no crimes. No one can accuse me of any crimes. History will judge whether you are the red bandits or I am a Nguy (fake patriot). If you want to kill me, go ahead. Do not blindfold me. Down with the VC. Long live the Republic of Vietnam."

Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Van Long (?-1975)

Little was written about the Lieutenant Colonel Long other than the eyewitness account by a French AP reporter, who in the morning of April 30, ran into the Lieutenant Colonel a few minutes before he turned over and blast his brain out, and felt down. The video show him lying in front of the Vietnamese Marine Statue in front of the Congress building, with his hat and arms neatly on his chest... In the video, one can see he is grasping for the last breaths. Picture of his suicide circulated immediately far and wide throughout the world about South Vietnam Army officers refused to surrender by taking their own lives.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAz6EfZAQmw>



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EXCERPTS FROM LETTER OF GENERAL LE VAN HUNG'S WIFE

The Final Day of My Husband's Life April-30-1975

*Pham Thi Kim Hoang (General Le van Hung's wife)
translated by Tran Thi My Ngoc and Larry Engelmann*



My husband was stationed in the Delta in Can Tho in the spring of 1975 where he was vice commander for Military Region IV (MR IV) under General Nguyen Khoa Nam.

In March, when the North Vietnamese Army attacked Ban Me Thuot, I was in Bien Hoa, MR III. My husband contacted me during the battle and he told me to move to MR IV. He said the Communists would march on to MR III, which include Saigon, from Ban Me Thuot and he did not think that MR III would be able to resist them. And so I moved to MR IV to be with my husband. My husband knew all along that the American government would abandon us. He had no faith in them. My husband told me that I had to hurry and move to MR IV because the National Road 4 linking Saigon with the Delta would be cut soon, because Saigon and Bien Hoa would be lost to the communists for sure. So on the 2nd of April 1975, I left with two children for Can Tho by car.

I stayed in a house near the corps commander's headquarters in MR IV. After the fall of Ban Me Thuot, General Pham Van Phu (Commander of MR II where Ban Me Thuot was located) was isolated and he could accomplish anything. The same is true for General Ngo Quang Truong in MR I. He could not do anything at all. As for General Nguyen Van Toan in MR III (the area around Saigon) and Cao Van Vien, the chairman of the Joint General Staff, my husband had no faith in them and he did not trust them.

My husband knew that Saigon would fall because after the loss of the other two regions, MR I and MR II. Seeing who was in charge in Saigon, he concluded that Saigon could not hold out. So, military and political survival meant retreating to the MR IV region and establishing an enclave there, but even that could not hold out for long all alone.

When, on April 21, 1975, President Nguyen Van Thieu resigned and handed over the government to Mr. Tran Van Huong. I still remember his words clearly: "Losing a President Thieu, the military still has a three-star General Thieu. The people still have a soldier, Nguyen



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Van Thieu. I pledge to fight side by side with my brothers, the soldiers." Thieu's announcement moved me very much. But then his words became meaningless when he and others ran away to seek safety for themselves and their families and friends and abandoned their own countrymen as we were caught up the final bloody hurricane of the war.

On April 30th, General Duong Van Minh surrendered the country to the Communists unconditionally. I heard Duong Van Minh's unconditional surrender speech to the North over the radio. When Duong Van Minh declared his surrender of South Vietnam to the Communists a number of soldiers left the military and went home. But I remember now still, the large number of officers and soldiers who broke into tears when they heard the surrender announcement from General Minh. They embraced the flag and they kept their weapons and they cried.

Prior to the surrender, my husband and General Nam made contingency plans. They decided to stay in MR IV and fight. And even should Saigon fall, they and their troops would withdraw into the secret hidden areas in the jungles of the Delta region. The plan to withdraw into the jungle areas was made before General Minh surrendered. However, they were kept secret and only a very few people knew about it. My husband and General Nam still carried out their duties and continued to make plans for regular military exercises and operations. The plan to retreat into the hidden areas was made and ready to be executed at the proper moment. My husband and General Nam never thought they would receive any military aid from the US Government. And so in order to carry out their plans they never planned on it and they never even considered it.

General Nam and General Hung were three times offered a chance to evacuate by their American advisor. And they refused each of the three times. They decided not to abandon their men and their country but to stay and defend it to the death. Their American advisor continued to prod them, but finally he left in desperation and in sadness.

The plan for a secret operation in the Delta was now ready. Weapons, ammunition and food were prepared. All was readied for the troops to be directed and redeployed in new zones. The plan of moving the troops was code named Operation LINKING HANDS. Military Region IV had good strategic points and an army there could continue the fight alone for a long time. By the 29th of April, there was not a single stronghold in any remote part of that countryside or any town that had yet fallen into the hands of the NVA or the VC.

But in Can Tho, in the early morning of April 30, 1975, people were in a confused and frightened state. What led to the collapse of morale in Can Tho was that there was an infiltrator from the Communists in the radio station and instead of broadcasting the order of General Nam, that everybody was supposed to stay put and fight, they broadcast the message from General Minh telling everyone to surrender and to lay down their arms. So people became disoriented and didn't know what to do and many became pessimistic. Some of the military people deserted.



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Right in the town the saddest scene of chaos took place. Some criminal elements seized the uncertain occasion to loot the properties of the American offices and buildings and disregarded the warnings shots of the police who tried to maintain order and safety. The civilians fled. Some people were paralyzed by fear and they sobbed and screamed and other people looted and destroyed like a bunch of madmen. There must have been a number fifth column people in the crowd who tried to create disorder and to terrorize the people and to destroy the morale of the soldiers.

The plans for Operation LINKING HANDS were kept secret and only a few close staff members of my husband and General Nam were aware of them. The other people under their command were not told of the plan because there existed at that time an atmosphere of mistrust among the officers and others in the military. The withdrawal was planned to begin at noon on April 30th, 1975. The troops would be withdrawn into the secret hidden areas of the jungle at that time. However, before that time, my husband gave the orders to begin the troop redeployment to the colonel who was chief of the security office. The colonel was supposed to relay the orders to the troops, but this colonel delegated this direct responsibility to his captain and then took off with his family and fled the country. And so what happened to that captain? Nobody knows! He just disappeared too. He left. His commander fled in the 1st the place, so naturally he did too. But we did not know that yet.

The order to begin Operation LINKING HANDS was issued. But then when contacting the commanders of the units in the area, we found out that they did not know anything about the plan. They had not readied their troops as they should have done in the morning. when we tried to locate the colonel who was in charge of distributing maps and orders for the secret redeployment of the troops, we realized that this officer had taken his family and ran away after passing the duty to his captain and the captain had disappeared right on the heels of his commander. And all of the maps and the orders for the Operation LINKING HANDS had disappeared with them.

Generals Nam and Hung were filled with anger, frustration and disappointment. Their feelings cannot be described adequately with my words. As for myself, I cannot help but cry today when I remember the torn expression and the pain and the disappointment that showed on my husband's face at the moment when he realized that the plan to fight was hopeless. The lines of veins appeared in his forehead and his teeth were clenched. He expressed his deepest and utmost inner pain upon hearing the news of the treachery. He pounded on his desk. The careful and well-arranged plan was now suddenly foiled because of an act of betrayal and cowardice.

My husband lifted his eyes to look at me and he said, "Victory is what we have always aimed for. But what if we fail? Then what do you want to do?" I responded, "Then we will all die. Our children do not want us to be in the hands of the communists either. I will stay with you. I will not abandon you in this moment of disappointment." And to deflect the possibility of being captured and falling into the hands of the enemy, I methodically and calmly planned for the death of my children--the final rescue of all of us.



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A small number of pessimistic people who only thought of themselves, and who did not want to fight, were there. But the others, who were close to my husband and to General Nam, those who were trustworthy, stuck close by and said they would follow the Generals' orders. Let me tell you about this thing first. My husband and General Nam planned all their military operations from their headquarters building. My husband divided this place into two sections. One was where General Nam planned the military events. And the other section my husband designated as the secondary headquarters. It was to this place that my husband called me to tell me of the betrayal by his colonel. And as soon as he heard of the betrayal he developed new plans and discussed them with General Nam.

At 4:45 PM that day my husband left his office at the Corps headquarters to return to the headquarters office where we lived temporarily. The reason he returned home on that day was because there was a rumor that the representatives of the communists would come in and sit down with General Nam to demand his surrender and to ask him to sign over the troops and the region. My husband did not agree to this. And he did not want to witness this event and so he returned home. He did not wish to witness the shameful transfer between 2 star General Nam and the Major Hoang Van Thach of the Viet Cong.

At 5:30 PM my husband radioed to General Mach Van Truong to order him to deploy two units of tanks to protect the Command Office of the 21st Division. After that he contacted other troops that were still fighting in various other nearby areas. At that time, alongside national road number 4 from Cai Lay and My Tho to Long An, there was heavy fighting going on. Along this route, fighting continued until May 2nd, 1975. Very heavy fighting.

My husband called a meeting of his officers for 6:30 that evening. But at 6:30 when all these officers had arrived at the gate there were also ten townspeople already standing there waiting. They asked to meet with General Hung in the name of representatives of the people of Can Tho. They then made their request. "We know that General Hung will never agree to surrender. But we beg of you not to counterattack. With only your order of counterattacking, the Viet Cong will shell the town. Can Tho then will be destroyed completely, just like the ruins of An Loc [which General Hung had successfully defended in 1972]. Please, for whatever the fate of our country is as such, please General, for the sake of the people and their lives, please put away your daring and proud spirit." They said that it would be better to accept shame and to bear shame than to go on fighting, killing and dying.

Listening to them, I felt both pain and discomfort. I was not surprised at their request because just one week earlier, the Viet Cong had shelled heavily in the area of Can Doi, creating a great loss of life and property. The people of Can Tho were still horrified that the same thing would happen to them. My husband was expressionless as he listened to their request. It took a long time and he forced a smile and replied, "Please be at ease. I will try my very best to minimize the loss and damage for our people."

When this group left, my husband turned to me and said, "Do you remember the story of Mr. Phan Thanh Gian? When three eastern provinces were lost, he had to bend himself to let go of three more western provinces to the French because of his care for the people. He could not



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bring himself to make the people suffer and he could not let himself lose his proud spirit or his hands in surrender, for this act would bring shame to his country and his soldiers. He, then went on a fast and took poison to end his life. I would rather die than to have my hands tied and watch the invasion of the Vietcong." Because the people came forward to make that request and said they were the representatives of the local population of Can Tho, my husband could not refuse them. They made the request on behalf of the people themselves and not on behalf of the communists. They made the request as the people, so my husband did not want to hurt them and so he decided to honor their request.

At 6:45 PM General Nam called my husband to check the situation in various places. My husband told Nam of what the representatives of the people of Can Tho had requested. Hung also let Nam know that the newest secret order would be given to a trusted person to be distributed. General Nam said to Hung that he had recorded a message to the people of Can Tho and the message would be broadcast by the radio channel in Can Tho. One more time there was a failure. The channel of Can Tho was taken over one hour before by the infiltrators. The director was threatened into broadcasting the message to the people of the Vietcong Major Hoang Van Thach instead of General Nam's message. They broadcast Thach's message first and ten minutes later they broadcast Nam's. But it was too late. It was impossible to regain the trust of the civilians and the soldiers then. More men deserted.

My husband had one major worry. He worried about the safety of me and of our children. And he asked me what I wanted to do about all this. Deep in my heart, I had made the decision that if my husband and his troops were to withdraw into the secret hidden places in the jungle, then my children and I would not go with him. I had made a decision also I would kill myself and my children so that my husband would not carry this burden, this worry, that would divide his attention away from fighting. The reason I wanted to do that was because I knew that during the time the troops were moving to the jungles, no doubt, fighting with the communist forces would take place, therefore as soon as the troops were to be deployed to the places that were set up and began the march and the withdrawal, then at that time I would take my life and my children's lives, and this way my husband would not be distracted from his responsibility and his duty to defend the country. I did not want us to be an added burden on him.

I am a Catholic. And I know that Catholicism forbids taking one's life, but you must know, that there are exceptions to the rule. For example, to kill oneself for one's country, and for one's military forces, that is acceptable. I did not change my mind. I did not change the decision of killing myself and my children, but what happened was at that time, when the plans for the withdrawal into the jungle collapsed, my husband thought of killing himself. I wanted to die with him. The children and I wanted to die together with him. At the beginning I did not tell him of my plan of killing myself and the children, but at that time, when the plans for withdrawal collapsed and my husband talked of killing himself, we discussed a plan of dying together as a family. But my husband disagreed with my decision. He did not want me to do that. To tell the truth, in the beginning, my husband agreed with my plan that the whole family would die together. I would inject the children with sleep medication and then I would inject myself with the same medication, and my husband would then shoot himself. But when the



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time came, my husband changed his mind and he did not want me to die nor the children. But he wanted to go ahead with his own plan to die.

At 7:00 PM my husband called me up to his office. We were alone. He recounted for me all the failures since the afternoon and up to that minute. Then, looking at me with his fiery eyes he told me slowly and gravely that he was going to kill himself. And he said, "You have to live to raise our children." I panicked, "Oh, my husband! Why did you change your mind?" He said, "Our children are innocent. I could never bring myself to kill them." "But we could not let them live with the communists. I will do it for you. All I need to do is to give them a very strong dose of sleeping drugs. Wait for me. We will all die at the same moment," I begged him. "Impossible! Parents cannot kill their children. I beg you, Hoang, please try to bear this shame. Try to live and replace me to raise our children into good people. Try hard to live, even if you have to bow and to bear a heavy burden of shame." "If this is for the children, for your love of the children, then why can't we leave for a foreign country like the others?" I asked him. He narrowed his eyes and with a severe look at me said, "You are my wife. How could you utter those words?" Knowing that I was clumsy with my words and had said the wrong things that disturbed him, I hastily expressed my excuses. "Please forgive me, my husband. It's only because I love you so much that I said these words."

His voice was so calm and so serious. "Listen to me. People can run away but I will never run away. There are thousands of soldiers under my command and we have lived and died together. How can I at this minute abandon them and seek life for myself? And I will not surrender. At this moment, it is too late to withdraw into the secret places because we do not have the supply of weapons, ammunition and food, therefore, we will not be able to withstand the enemy for long. It is too late. The Vietcong are coming. Don't let me lose my determination. Continuing to fight now will only bring trouble and loss not only to our family but to soldiers and civilians also. But I don't want to see the sight of any communists."

I shakily asked, "But what about me? What should I do?" Holding tightly to my hands he said, "Our marriage has been full of love and respect and that makes us understand each other. Please try to tolerate this, even though you will have to bear many shameful and disheartening things. Go in disguise, change yourself so you can stay alive. I trust you. For myself, for our children, for the love of the country, you must bear it. Listen to me. I beg you. I beg you!" I could say nothing before his gaze and his bittersweet words. "Yes, my husband, I will listen to you," I promised him. But he was afraid that I would change my mind, so he continued to press on, "Promise me! Promise me that you'll do it!" "I will, I promise. I promise to you, my love. But please let me have two conditions. If the communists make me live away from the children and if they rape me. Then do I have the right to take my own life?" My husband thought for a moment and then nodded his head in agreement. He stood and embraced me and wept. Finally he said, "Hurry up and ask your mother and children to come in to see me."

When my mother and the children came into his office, he said goodbye to them and kissed the children. He explained to my mother why he had to die and why I had to live. Then obeying his command, I invited all of the officers and soldiers who were still present for their meeting to go into his office. Everyone lined up and waited for the new orders. The atmosphere was so



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solemn and yet so moving. This was the moment of saying farewell between the living and the dying of people who had fought closely together for so many years. My husband said that there were no new orders to go to the hidden places to fight back. The fighting was finished for now. He said, instead, "I do not abandon all of you to take my wife and children to run away overseas. As you all know, the operation failed midway, and I did not counterattack because of the people. Now I cannot bear the shame of surrender. You all have cooperated with me and when you did something wrong I scolded you. But when I scolded you, it is not because I hated you. I scolded you because I wanted us to come and to help one another. Even though our country is being sold out, being offered to the communists today, you are not to be blamed. It is those who directly held the fate of the country in their hands who are to bear the blame. Please forgive me my mistakes if I have made any. I accept death. A commander who cannot protect his country, his position, then should die at his position for his country. He cannot abandon the people and the country and seek safety for himself. When I die, go back to your families, your wives and your children. And remember clearly this, my final warning: you must not let the communists put you in a concentration camp under some deceptive pretense. Goodbye, my brothers."

General Hung saluted and shook hands with his men one by one. When he came near Major Phuong and Captain Nghia, he said, "Please help my wife and children. Goodbye." Everyone stood still. Nobody was able to say a word. My mother rushed over to him and asked to die with him. My husband comforted her and asked her to look after her grandchildren. He then ordered everyone to leave. No one wanted to move. He had to push them out one by one. I then pleaded with him, "My love, please let me stay to witness your death." But he refused. Captain Nghia ran away. My husband returned to his office and locked the door. I heard a loud shot from the other side of the door. A terribly loud shot. It startled me.

It was 8:45 PM, April 30, 1975. It was the final day of Vietnam. The final day of my husband's life. Someone said, "General Le Van Hung was dead!" I thought, "Oh, my husband, you are no more!" When I entered the room my husband lay across the bed. His arms were open wide and he was still trembling hard, his whole body shook in waves and convulsions. His eyes were wide open and filled with anger. His mouth was open and his lips were moving. I threw myself at him and embraced him. I knelt beside the bed and put my ear to his mouth while asking, "My love, my love. Do you have anything else to say to me." But he could no longer answer me. I held him in my arms and he died there.

General Nam was unaware of my husband's suicide. When I tried to call him on the radio I could not reach him because the frequencies were jammed by the communists. I don't know exactly where General Nam was at that time. But I tried to call him on the radio and I tried to locate a frequency where I could connect with him before. My husband did not ask me nor did he instruct me to contact General Nam. Though I just wanted to tell him about his death. My husband did not talk to General Nam about killing himself because later in the day they had lost contact with each other. And besides, my husband did not commit suicide until the communists invaded the town of Can Tho.



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At about 1:00 AM the phone rang again. This time it was General Nam. "Hello, sister Hung?" he said. I cried when I heard his voice, "General Nam!" Nam's voice was filled with sorrow. "I heard the news of what happened," he said. "I share with you the sorrow. My condolences, sister Hung." I continued to sob. I asked General Nam what he planned to do. I heard him sigh on the telephone. And then he said to me words that I will never forget until the day I die. "The fate of this war is so miserable. Sister Hung, your husband and I planned everything so well, even to the last minute details, however at the last moment we were betrayed. That's it, sister Hung." Then his voice came back to his former calmness and strength. "Try to be brave, sister Hung. You have to live because of your kids. If there is anything urgent or dangerous then call me."

"Thank you, General, " I said. After my talk with General Nam, I stepped out onto the balcony and looked to the courtyard below. The officers and soldiers were all gone. The gate was wide open. The wind rocked the gate back and forth, making noises that sounded sad and tragic. I just stood there and cried for a long time.

The next morning at 7:00 AM I had just finished my prayer for my husband's soul when I heard a sob behind me. Turning around, I saw Lt. Col. Tung, the chief of staff of the military hospital in Can Tho. He had come to visit my husband one last time. He told me that he had to return to the hospital right away because General Nam had just committed suicide. His body was still in the hospital. General Nam ended his life by shooting himself in the temple at 6:00 AM, May 1st, 1975. After our phone conversation, I had a premonition that it would happen, that he would kill himself. Nevertheless, when Tung gave the news, I was still shocked. I knelt down facing the military hospital where he lay and I prayed for him.

Concern that the people of Can Tho knew me and would have pointed me out to the communists so I left Can Tho on May 2nd for Saigon in order to protect my children and me. We were constantly on the move to stay ahead of the communist police and informants. The children stayed with me most of the time, but whenever the search by the police got too close, I passed them to my mother to care for and when things calmed down then they would reunite with me again. In the aftermath of the war, during the first few years, my hope was high that there would be a coming back, as there were rumors of the resistance forces fighting, and I never thought of leaving the country. I was hoping that the communist would be booted out of the South. However, as time went on and I recognized that it is hopeless and there would be no future for the South Vietnamese people, I start to think about escaping to help my children.

When my husband was alive he never told me to leave the country nor did he have the idea of leaving the country. But at night, in my dreams, when my husband came back and he told me the communists were near and that I should flee again and he saved my life so many times. I left Vietnam finally by boat. I was in a refugee camp with my children for 11 months in the Philippines. Then I came to the United States. Besides freedom, I wanted my children to have a future, I wanted to raise them and to continue to follow the path of my husband. I tried to do as I promised my husband before he died. I dream about Vietnam all the time. It is in my mind and it is always with me. I often have bad dreams about being back in Vietnam and being chased and being hunted down by the communists.



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General Le Van Hung and General Nguyen Khoa Nam are dead. But their spirits, their heroic spirits, will not die. I will always remember and honor them.

Pham Thi Kim Hoang

translated by Tran Thi My Ngoc and Larry Engelmann
