

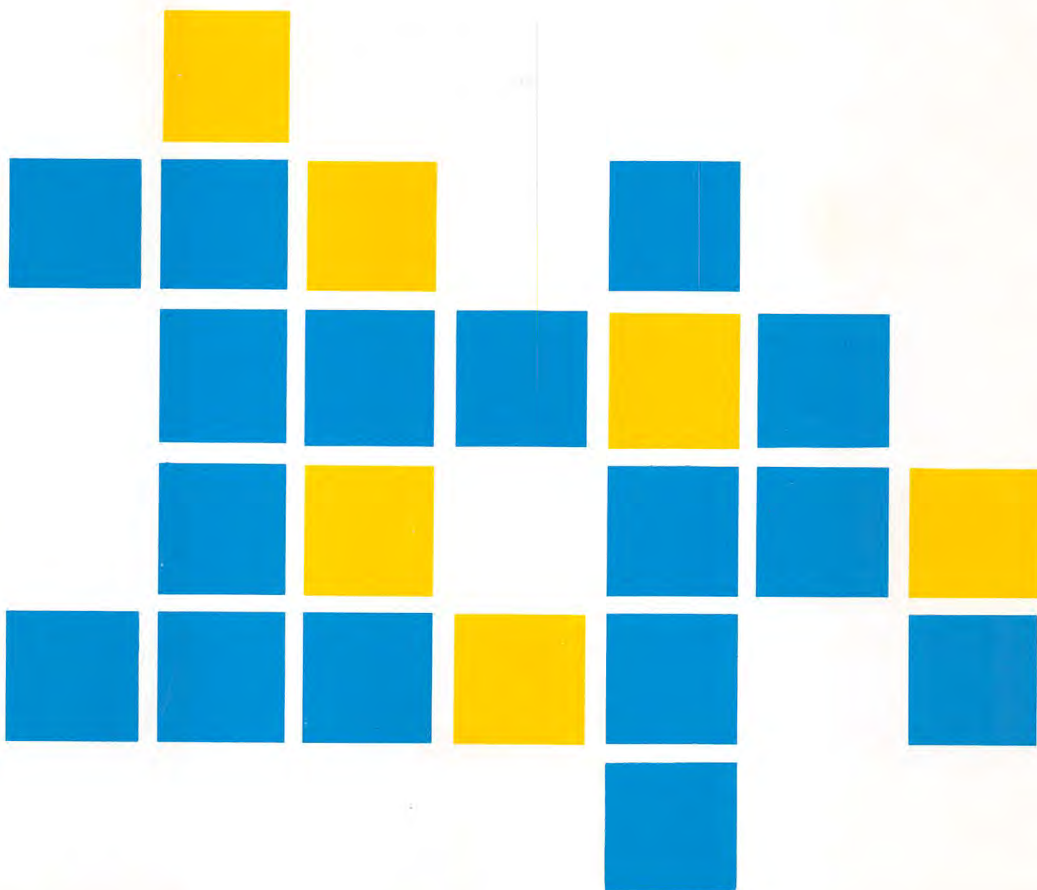


INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA • BERKELEY

After Saigon Fell

Daily Life Under the
Vietnamese Communists

Nguyen Long
with Harry H. Kendall



INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

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© 1981 by the Regents of the University of California
ISBN 0-912966-46-7
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 81-85304
Printed in the United States of America
\$8.00

**After Saigon Fell
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A publication of the
Institute of East Asian Studies
University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

The Research Papers and Policy Studies Series is one of several publications series sponsored by the Institute of East Asian Studies in conjunction with its three constituent units—the Center for Chinese Studies, the Center for Japanese Studies, and the Center for Korean Studies. The others include the China Research Monograph Series, whose first title appeared in 1967, the Japan Research Monograph Series, and the Korea Research Monograph Series. The Institute sponsors also a Faculty Reprint Series.

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**In memory of the boat people who died at sea
in search of freedom.**

Foreword

Nguyen Long is a Vietnamese intellectual who believed that he could make the adjustment necessary to live satisfactorily in the new Vietnam. He did not come from an affluent family. Nor had he been a supporter of either Ngo Dinh Diem or Nguyen Van Thieu. As a Buddhist activist, he had opposed both men, and he still considers himself an opponent of these leaders. More than this, Long aligned himself with the “antiwar” movement, and he knew, even respected, some Viet Cong adherents, although he was not one of them.

Yet as Long now admits, he was wrong. There was no place in the Communist order for a person like himself. It was only a matter of weeks before he began to realize the magnitude of his error. By that time, he had ample company. There were thousands—later, hundreds of thousands—like him. Long and his family were only a small part of a large picture. Along with others, they were ultimately prepared to risk death rather than remain under intolerable conditions. Fortunately, unlike many of their compatriots, they survived their ordeal as boat people, but the memories of the past will always be with them.

Although Long received an American higher education, he remains Vietnamese to his very essence. It was his deep love for his country, his hope that he could contribute something to the rebuilding of a shattered society, that induced him to stay after April 1975. Yet his story illustrates how simplistic and how wrong it is to equate Vietnamese communism with Vietnamese nationalism. For non-Communist nationalists like Long, life after the fall of South Vietnam became a nightmare.

In reading his highly personal account, one gets a close-up, graphic picture of life under the new Communist elite. One will not find extensive materials on the *doctrines* of the Communists in this essay, only on the *practices*. Thus, the idealism expressed in the collected works of Ho Chi Minh seems to have come from another world, another time. Here, scarcity, suspicion, and hatred flourish—all the very opposites of idealism.

It is difficult to know what was the most onerous to bear. The physical privations were substantial, and Long paints a story of poor and inadequate food, clothing, and other necessities. Yet in these respects, his fate, and that of his family, was not nearly so bad as that of others. Moreover, in South Vietnam—more richly endowed with food than the North—the problem was less survival and more adjustment to much lower living standards and the endless time consumed in scrounging for daily necessities. Long suggests that in causing the average citizen to spend an inordinate amount of time in

seeking merely the requirements for survival, the regime was limiting the hours available for possible mischief. One of the hallmarks of the new Vietnamese order was that everyone was extremely busy doing very little.

Some may be surprised at the massive corruption that characterized post-1975 Vietnam. There was the legacy of the past, to be sure, but Long believes—and he cites evidence to prove his point—that in many respects, communism brought a deeper, more pervasive corruption than had existed previously. It soon affected Northern cadres as well as the cadres and citizens of the South. How else did one surmount the endless, senseless regulations and the entrenched layer upon layer of bureaucracy?

The real corruption, however, was of the soul. One had to learn how to lie, not occasionally but routinely, and as a part of the system. One had to be able to say things which one did not believe, and say them *ardently*, not just in a casual fashion. One had to be able to camouflage one's actions and one's thoughts, concealing the inner self from all but the most intimate, trusted friends. In effect, therefore, one had to live dual or triple lives simultaneously. One life was displayed publicly, to neighbors and security personnel. Another life was lived in the back alleys and closed offices where one dealt in black market goods and made arrangements for boat motors—all part of the struggle for survival. And yet another life was the life of one's private thoughts and dreams, when the individual tried to blot out reality and conjure up hope.

Yet as one reads Long's straightforward, painfully honest account of his experiences, one senses that the greatest hardship lay in the complete absence of privacy, combined with the constant fear that somehow one's inner thoughts would be revealed, that security agents would suddenly find a way in which to strip one bare, exposing the contempt and hatred which one was accumulating for a government and a system that were failing on every count.

To me, the part of Long's story that is at once the most dramatic and the most revealing is the "battle" of Bien Hoa. For a brief time, the residents of Ho Chi Minh City and vicinity thought that a new liberation had come as the sound of massive explosions continued through the night. And what happened? People smiled, celebrated in cafes, for the first time since Communist "liberation," and *opened* their doors. The important cadres, on the other hand, disappeared, and their doors were firmly closed. Could there be a more revealing commentary on the true meaning of liberation in South Vietnam today?

Robert A. Scalapino, *Director*
Institute of East Asian Studies
Berkeley, California
July, 1981

Introduction

This series of essays on life under the Vietnamese Communists is based on my experiences as a Saigon citizen from the time of the Communist takeover on April 30, 1975, until my escape, curiously on the anniversary of that day four years later, on April 30, 1979, to the United States.

To understand the following accounts, some chronology should be helpful:

I first came to the United States as a graduate student in 1969 and stayed until 1972, when I completed the academic work for my Ph.D.

Then I returned to Vietnam from 1972 to 1973 to write my thesis.

I arrived in the United States for the second time in 1973 to receive my doctoral degree.

I returned to Vietnam a second time in late 1973 and stayed until my escape in 1979.

When my family and I escaped, we brought with us only the barest essentials for survival, so I have of necessity drawn almost entirely on my memory for the accounts related here. It is a memory etched with painful experiences. The episodes are of no “historic” importance, but I hope that they will illustrate the conditions imposed by the Communist regime on 50 million Vietnamese. I do not hesitate to call these conditions near-slavery.

When the Communists took over Saigon on April 30, 1975, I decided to stay in Vietnam—a decision for which I had to pay a high price in the following four years. My wife, in tearful pleas, had urged that we leave, contending that the Communists would never employ me because they had their own candidates, the “cadres,” and our children would live in poverty and hardship, the children of a “bourgeois intellectual.” In the months and years that followed, the exodus of thousands of Vietnamese into exile for political or economic reasons vindicated my wife’s judgment.

But my initial decision was different. In the early months of 1975 when a Communist victory was imminent, after many sleepless nights I decided to remain in my country and make a living under whatever political system was to come.

I was born in Dalat—a beautiful, mountainous town situated on a high plateau. My parents had come to Dalat from Hué in Central Vietnam, to which they returned in the years of famine after World War II. In those years in Hué we subsisted on small pieces of sweet potato and cassava (a similar root plant), and as long as I shall live the smell and flavor of those two vegetables will be with me. Hué is also the center of a deeply implanted Vietnamese culture stretching back into ancient history, and is noted for its resistance to external influence. I considered myself intensely Vietnamese, proud of my heritage, and committed to the independence of my nation.

Before my second return to Vietnam in late 1973, I had spent more than three years at the University of California in Berkeley. I came to understand the richness of America, spiritual as well as material. Like many young Asians committed to liberty and justice, I was inspired by America's great documents, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Even Ho Chi Minh borrowed from the American Declaration of Independence when he issued his own proclamation in 1945:

All men are created equal. The Creator has given us certain inviolable Rights; the right to Life, the right to be Free, and the right to achieve Happiness.¹

It was for this ideal that I later left Vietnam in 1979, but it was also for this ideal that I had returned to my country in 1973 and decided to remain there rather than become an expatriate. I was also proud of the small home which I had purchased with funds saved over many years. During my studies in the United States my wife and children had remained in Vietnam, and I looked forward to returning to them and my aged mother. Thus I saw no reason to stay in the United States in 1973, nor was I prepared to flee back to that country in 1975.

Vietnamese are proud that from ancient times they have maintained their national identity in the face of foreign aggression; three times in the thirteenth century the Vietnamese defeated Mongolian-Chinese forces. Vietnam had no cultural, scientific, or social revolution in its long history, but it was engaged in many struggles to protect its independence. All other tribes in south China ultimately became Sinicized and incorporated politically into the greater Chinese empire, but the Vietnamese resisted Chinese domination.

When I expatiated on this principle of independence in the so-called political-study courses organized by the Communists for South Vietnamese

1. A. L. A. Patti, *Why Vietnam?* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980).

intellectuals, it was clear that the new rulers did not appreciate my remarks. By setting forth the “law of independence” that had governed Vietnam throughout its history, I was implying that what the Communists considered their unique contributions—namely the Dien Bien Phu victory over the French in 1954 and the “liberation” of South Vietnam from the American-backed Thieu regime in 1975—were only a continuation of the struggles of Vietnamese patriots over centuries, by no means events initiated by the Communists. The Communists wanted to hear that “thanks to communism, Vietnam won over French colonialism and American imperialism,” and that “thanks to the Party and to Uncle [Ho Chi Minh], we are able to enjoy today”—phrases that all citizens, from small children to the elderly, are supposed to repeat at all public meetings.

Yes, earlier I had reservations about American policies in Vietnam. In 1972 an American friend came to say goodbye as I was leaving for Saigon. He asked my opinion about the war and how the United States could end the conflict. I said that I believed the United States should withdraw its forces and then assist the country by various economic and social measures. My friend did not accept this doctrine, and today I realize that my approach was too simplistic.

It is true that the end of the war in April 1975 brought peace to Vietnam after nearly one hundred years of intermittent struggle against foreign forces. At the time of the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam, I regarded President Nguyen Van Thieu as a coward. In his last speech on television Thieu announced that he was resigning but promised to stay on the anti-Communist battlefield “as a fervent fighter.” Immediately after that tearful speech he took flight, taking with him his family and relatives, close subordinates, and many tons of “merchandise,” which were the property of his poor country. President Thieu in his last speech deceived the Vietnamese people and then left them to their fate; but, then, I was never a supporter of Thieu.

As I contemplated my future in early 1975, I could not accept the idea of leaving my homeland, shedding my cultural heritage, and becoming an American or French citizen. I realized, of course, that the material standards of the advanced industrial nations were higher than those of Vietnam, but I did not regard the civilization of these nations superior to that of my native land. The thought of becoming a refugee was frightening.

My decision to remain in Vietnam after April 30, 1975, was influenced by another consideration—my inaccurate assessment of the real nature of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF), the Viet Cong. A month after the fall of Saigon, I still thought that the NLF was a powerful political organization composed of Southern patriots even though many had joined under Northern Communist pressure. I realized that its policies and activities had been coordinated with and influenced by the Communist Party of North Vietnam, but I saw the cooperation between the Party and the NLF

as forged by a common interest. I believed that South Vietnam would continue to have a separate political organization which, after peace came, could balance the power and the role of the Communist Party of North Vietnam. It was also my belief that still other groups of the South Vietnamese people could organize into a third force or bloc, and that a coalition government of these three elements would eventually emerge. I foresaw the possibilities of a neutralist regime at least for some years during the opening phase of national reconstruction.

But the NLF was only a satellite, mobilized and dominated by the Communist party. As I look back on events, I do not understand how I could have come to believe that the NLF had any independence from the Communist movement. The truth, however, shortly became apparent to me and to others.

Only two or three months after the Communist victory it became painfully obvious that the patriotism and nationalism of the Vietnamese Communists upon which I had counted so heavily had been employed primarily to seize power. Patriotism was a means to gain political control. One might assume that a truly nationalist force in the aftermath of a long and destructive conflict would make an effort to unify the people, bind their wounds, and bring all citizenry together in an independent nation. But in fact, from the beginning, the Communists divided the people instead of integrating them. Communism had won out against noncommunism, and the struggle between the two camps continued. The Communists' operating principle was: "Who defeats whom? Who destroys whom?" Capitalism was the target for destruction, and "capitalists" (meaning all non-Communists) were the target, for conversion, at the least. Traditional nationalist parties, such as the Quoc-Dan-Dang and the Dai Viet, were condemned as reactionary and their members imprisoned or destroyed.

In 1976 the Ministry of Education of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam organized a three-month "political study seminar" for university professors of the Saigon-Giadinh region, held at the School of Medicine. In this seminar, the instructor from the Nguyen Ai Quoc Communist Party School said that the Vietnamese national hero Phan Chau Trinh would have been executed had he not died when he did. His death had been nationally mourned.

The Cadres

A few weeks after April 30 I met some low- and middle-level cadres at their offices or entertained them at my home. I wanted to know how Communist cadres operated, for my own sake and for the sake of the university.

Most cadres I met were imbued in an almost religious sense with Communist ideology. They had been educated to have a deep pride in themselves and their movement, and a strong will when coping with enemies. They were steeled to sacrifice, and this was demonstrated in their mode of dress, their manner of speech, and their life-style. They were highly disciplined, prepared to carry out difficult orders without question, knew how to keep secrets, and were vigilant against outsiders or potential spies. They exhibited strong optimism, although one could not help thinking that in some cases this was artificial. They constantly used such words as “enthusiastic” (*phan khoi*) and “happy” (*ho hoi*) in describing their mood regarding conditions. Ho Chi Minh and his comrades had imbued their followers with the political qualities suited to a successful revolutionary struggle far more effectively than had the South Vietnamese leaders.

Besides, the Vietnamese Communists proved better in propaganda, in depth of commitment and, one must add, deception than the non-Communist South Vietnamese leaders or governments.

Organizing Associations

After April 30 the Communists organized associations for various groups—the young, the old, men, women—in every urban ward and block, and in every village and hamlet throughout the country. Aged people were mobilized to join occupational or professional associations. Young men were required to take part in the Ho Chi Minh revolutionary society. Intellectuals were mustered into the so-called Association for Patriotic Intellectuals (*Hoi Tri Thuc Yeu Nuoc*), which, after 1975, we called “the Association for Water-Loving Intellectuals” (*Hoi Tri Thuc Yeu Nuoc La*) because we did not have enough food to eat and so we drank more water than usual. This group was also nicknamed “The Association for Foreign-Country-Loving Intellectuals” (*Hoi Tri Thuc Yeu Nuoc Ngoai*) because many intellectuals were escaping or seeking to escape the country. These included the association’s president, Nguyen Van Thoi, whom the Communists had decorated for his work in atomic physics, and Nguyen Van Hai, the association’s vice president, who was captured in his escape attempt. The latter was released but kept under surveillance.

Standing on the balcony of my home, I could watch Communist cadres assemble the children of our block, teaching them how to perform “patriotic dances,” how to stand at attention like soldiers, and similar activities. I realized the usefulness of the operation: It caused the children to cease wandering about the streets aimlessly, and it began their political indoctrination.

From late 1975 these Communist people’s associations showed their true nature. Their purpose was to detach every individual from his past so

that every person could be more easily controlled. The preoccupation with these associations consumed an enormous amount of time. People were not allowed to have enough rest or to take care of their families adequately; after working at least ten hours a day, many times including Sundays and holidays, they had to carry out the additional duties required by the newly formed associations; on many occasions they were compelled to donate money or contribute their services in connection with various meetings and assigned tasks.

Party members kept tight control of these associations. Cadres, particularly those who held leading positions in public institutions such as the offices of Industrial and Commercial Reconstruction and of Sea Products, competed with each other in occupying the most comfortable homes and offices, and used their authority to squeeze money or gold out of those who were currying their favor, especially the commercial and business community. At the same time cadres cultivated the appearance of sacrifice and zealous work habits. Even while taking bribes, they had, hanging on the walls of their offices, such pious Communist maxims as “Be diligent, parsimonious, honest, and upright” and “Completely fair and just.”

Communism—Theory and Practice

In graduate school at Berkeley I studied communism along with other subjects in political science, and when I returned home from the United States in 1972, I brought with me selected Communist literature, such as the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Zedung. Indeed when I started teaching at Van Hanh University my subject was communism—a subject few professors wanted to touch under the Thieu government before 1975. During this period I confess that in some respects communism appeared to me a more complete, more realistic, and more humanist ideology than anything either Western or Oriental philosophy had to offer. I did not become a Marxist, partly because of my deep commitment to Buddhism, but I had strong sympathies with the theories and values expressed in Marxist works. Even today, South Vietnam, the United States, Japan, and Hong Kong—societies to which I traveled or in which I had lived—often seem to me unnecessarily competitive and conflictive, and operating under a multiplicity of pressures not conducive to cultivating the best in human nature. I was prepared to conceive of communism as a possible route for the realization of justice by removing some of the inequities that existed in free-enterprise capitalist society and striking down the profound differences between poor and rich.

In those earlier days I did not appreciate the meaning, in practice, of such Communist code words as “class struggle,” “dictatorship of the

proletariat," "organic relationship," "collective ownership," "democracy," "liberation," "cultural and thought revolution," "scientific and technological revolution." Indeed, even after April 30, 1975, I bought numerous Communist works—then being reprinted in great quantities thanks to the modern presses and imported paper still left in South Vietnam—and I read them earnestly, still finding beautiful sentiments expressed on nearly every page. But by living under the Vietnamese Communists, I came to understand that "class struggle" meant expunging by intimidation, and that "reeducation" meant brain-washing. I saw that heavy labor was imposed on individuals from every level of society except on the working class—and that the working class also was "reeducated" because none of the workers fit the conceptual mold. I saw that work was under the surveillance of police, security agents, secret informers, and the dictatorial leadership of Communist party members. I learned that my "organic relationships" with my parents, who had not sided with Ho Chi Minh, prevented my recognition as a "good element" in the new society. Even my children, for the four years we were to remain in Vietnam, were not permitted to visit the "Vanguard Children's Palace"—an activities center reserved for talented Party children—or to study in schools specially reserved for children of Party members and cadres.

"Collective ownership," I soon found out, meant that all properties were placed in the hands of the Party. My family and I were allowed to have access to less and less food, and food of an increasingly inferior kind. We found ourselves living under mounting hardships and in an almost furtive existence, never knowing from one moment to the next what fate held for us, but always expecting to see a further deterioration.

Early Activities

I do not come from a privileged family. My father was a maker of wooden shoes, my mother a peasant. My education is the result of considerable sacrifice by my family. Even as a boy I was interested in political activism. As a seventh-grade student in the Dalat junior high school, I helped to organize student demonstrations. After one of these the whole school marched to the office of the government representative in the Central High Plateau in Dalat to protest against the principal who wanted to dismiss one of our teachers. In 1960 I was a founding member of the Buddhist Student Association in Saigon; and in 1963 I was the commissioner of the youth, high school, and university students in the Buddhist-protecting Intersect Committee, which resisted the repressive Ngo Dinh Diem government.

Throughout my student days I championed the causes I regarded as promoting freedom and progress. In 1965 I led many demonstrations—the largest of which forced the government of General Nguyen Khanh to resign;

and in 1967 as the organizing commissioner of Buddhist forces of Vietnam—under the auspices of the Democratic Construction Movement initiated by the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam—I led demonstrations against the Nguyen Van Thieu government. I was jailed twice by the government. The first time I was released from prison by the intervention of the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, secretary-general of the Vien Hoa Dao Buddhist church who later, in 1977, was arrested by the Communists. The second time I was freed by the intervention of the Venerable Thich Man Giac, then vice president of Van Hanh University, now a professor at the University of Oriental Studies in Los Angeles.

I participated in antiwar demonstrations in Berkeley and San Francisco between 1969 and 1972. I still believe that Americans must share the responsibility for the disintegration of South Vietnam because they neglected to study the nature of traditional Vietnamese society and because they lacked discipline and commitment to the task in which they were engaged. Too many American “heroes” while in Vietnam became “heroins.” The disintegration of Vietnamese society, which neither South Vietnamese nor American leadership could prevent, made it more difficult to mobilize the South Vietnamese people for the energy required for a bloody struggle. Besides, the leaders of South Vietnam lacked the political qualities of revolutionaries, thereby operating under serious disadvantages in their life-and-death struggle against the Communists.

Thus my life before 1975 was one of political dissidence. I was acquainted with various persons in the NLF, and they know these statements to be true. Indeed, some participated in the same demonstrations mentioned above, and I met a number of them after the fall of Saigon. The Communists, however, were not interested in using such talents as I might have. On my part, I did not apply for a position, although I had no steady employment for four years. The Communists did not compel me to undertake any activities during the period, but two incidents are revealing. First I was asked, without explanation, to submit my Ph.D. thesis. The authorities kept it for three months in late 1975, then returned it without comment. I learned, however, that a number of students in Dalat University had been arrested because their theses were regarded as anti-Communist. I had served as visiting professor of the Graduate Division of Dalat University in Saigon before the Communist takeover. I was concerned that my thesis might be judged anti-Communist although it was a nonideological work on public administration. However, no questions were raised.

In a second incident the Communists sent one of my friends to visit me to inquire about my attitude toward the imprisonment of a number of the leading venerables of the An Quang Unified Buddhist Church in 1977—imprisonments which in one case had led to the death of my religious master, the Venerable Thich Thien Minh. To my regret, I did not raise my

voice in protest although I gave no indication of approval. Nothing happened to me, but it alerted me that local security agents were watching my activities. The Communists, of course, knew that I had been active in the Buddhist movement. Thus, as my escape plans gradually took shape, I had to be exceedingly careful. Being aware that I was under surveillance slowed down my effort.

In sum, my original attitude had been, "Since I have nothing to fear from the Communists, why should I leave Vietnam?" This was the attitude I expressed to my wife many times both before and for two months after April 30. I had a record of opposition to most of the South Vietnamese regimes and of having demonstrated against the war. I had been in jail twice and could not possibly be associated with the Thieu government. Thus I did not feel I was in the same category as many South Vietnamese whom the Communists were to label "false soldiers" (*nguy quan*) or "false authorities" (*nguy quyen*), that is, persons related directly or indirectly to the governments of the past or to American policies. Many Vietnamese holding social positions different from mine took a similar attitude. This was especially true of lawyers, doctors, engineers, journalists, or literati. Most of them felt that they had committed no crime and that they had had no relationship to the politics of the past, therefore had no reason to leave Vietnam.

But their perceptions of themselves and that of the Communists were far apart. A society under Communist control, we came to discover, was far more politicized than any one of us had appreciated. From the Communist point of view, there is no room for a non-political individual. All citizens must be mobilized and participate, and must directly relate themselves to the political scene. As I now write these lines I can only wish that some Americans would understand this point more clearly. I think it would have an effect on their attitude toward communism, and they might learn a lesson vicariously. I was forced to learn through bitter experience.

There was one final reason why leaving Vietnam had limited appeal to me at first. I did not have the means for a painless escape. I did not have enough gold to purchase a boat or even to participate in such a purchase. The life of a university professor in Vietnam was reasonably comfortable, but there was little left over and our savings were meagre.

By late 1975, however, I had come to see the true face of communism, and all my old illusions were being stripped away. On many a day I would stand sadly on the small flat roof of my home, watching the sun fade away on the western horizon. The sky was high, the earth large, yet where could I find a place to take refuge? I knew that the area security agents were often passing my home, collecting information about my frame of mind. I doubted, under these circumstances, that it would be possible for the entire family to leave as a unit. My wife and I discussed three alternatives: for the entire family to leave, for me to take one or two of the older children, and

for me to flee alone. We tried the first and last alternatives.

On two occasions we failed. In 1977 I tried to take a boat by myself but was caught. In 1978 I organized a trip for my entire family with the son of one of my former professors, but we were betrayed. In January 1979, for the third time, I planned a family escape. This time we succeeded.

I

Agitation for Class Struggle

In Communist theory the class struggle is the motivating force of society. In Vietnam, the Communists have been victorious not because of the class struggle but because of deep-seated Vietnamese patriotism. It was this patriotism which persuaded many Vietnamese non-Communists, against their own conscience, to accept Communist participation in their struggle for national independence from the French and later against what they conceived to be a foreign (American)-dominated native regime.

The Vietnamese Communists have tried to associate nationalism and communism. A year after seizing power in South Vietnam they launched a campaign based on the slogan, "Loving the country is loving socialism." They talked about their takeover in terms of "liberation" or "revolution."

In keeping with their slogans "Who defeats whom" and "Who destroys whom" (*ai thang ai; ai diet ai*), the Communists launched two attacks: one called the "revolution of production structure" in which the workers become the collective owners, and the other designed to defeat and destroy all non-Communists regardless of their patriotic attitudes. The latter was based on the concept that communism equates with patriotism but not vice versa: if a person is a patriot he must be a Communist; if he is not a Communist he is not a patriot.

One technique to destroy non-Communists is to convince the populace to accept the class-struggle dogma.

The People's Court at Thai Binh Market Circle

Shortly after "liberation" in 1975 Saigon lived in uncertainty and fear, yet its markets were still crowded, the streets still filled with bicycles, motorcycles and cars, and the people put up a front of unconcern so as not betray their feelings. Such was the appearance of things at the Thai Binh market when the following incident occurred.

The Thai Binh Market is situated at the conjunction of five major streets, along with the former headquarters of the International Control Commission of the 1954 Geneva Armistice agreement, a movie theater, a gas station, an orphanage, and small stores. The market is typical of a working-class neighborhood. It is in the open air and is crowded and dirty.

One afternoon in the summer of 1975 as I approached the Thai Binh intersection on my bicycle, I saw a crowd gathering, blocking all rush-hour traffic. Since I could not get through I decided to see what was going on, and turned my bicycle over to the person in charge of theater bicycle parking.

In the center of the traffic circle in front of the Thai Binh Market a dark-skinned man, about thirty-five, his face bloodless, was kneeling on the pavement with his head bent. His hands were roped behind his back and tied to the traffic light pole. Beside him a Communist cadre, using a battery-powered loudspeaker, harangued the crowd calling for the people to denounce the man in a public trial. This criminal, said the cadre, symbolized how Americans and "false authorities" had despoiled the people's property. He asked the crowd to enforce socialist justice. Periodically he raised his arms and shouted, "Down with the Americans and the false officials."

A few persons in the crowd of about a thousand automatically imitated the cadre, raising their hands, and repeating the slogan. Most, however, stood silently watching. Scattered through the crowd, ten or twelve other cadres carrying rifles and dressed in green uniforms or black pajamas lent their presence to the spectacle.

The subject of all this attention had tried to steal a bicycle from a family nearby, but her shouts of alarm had alerted the security cadres who seized the thief and organized an instant "people's court." It was patterned on the public trials held in Ho Chi Minh's native village of Nghe Tinh during the 1956 agricultural reform where peasants, previously instructed, denounced their former landowners.

After almost an hour of agitating the crowd with his denunciations, the cadre asked the people to pass judgment on the thief. "Should he be judged guilty of the crime?" Several times he repeated the question. Each time the crowd remained silent. The cadre then invited the bicycle's owner, a woman of about forty, to appear before the "court." Since the bicycle, recovered by the "revolution," was hers, he said, she should make the judgment.

There was a ripple of apprehension as the woman stepped forward. Then, contrary to the purpose of the lengthy denunciation, she said, "I want to ask the revolution to forgive this man. It is true he tried to steal my bicycle but he did so only because he is so poor."

The cadres were frustrated, especially the one who had led the denunciation. After a few moments he announced that in accordance with the

people's decision, the "revolution" would absolve the accused man. Then he and two of his armed comrades escorted the forgiven man to their nearby office. I never knew whether he was actually released.

As I left the dispersing crowd and bicycled home I felt a sense of relief that Vietnamese tolerance had defeated the cadre's effort to invoke the class-struggle dogma by a public trial.

The Communists have rewritten four thousand years of Vietnamese history in accordance with the class struggle, substituting Marxist dogma for Vietnamese philosophy in explaining the nation's struggles for independence, an explanation completely contrary to national pride.

Vietnam today is no longer struggling for independence from colonial powers, but is engaged in a struggle between the values of traditional Vietnam and those of imported communism. Communists have won the political and military battles in both North and South Vietnam, but the cultural, social, and psychological battles are still under way.

The Thai Binh Market incident was symbolic. Other attempts at public trials in South Vietnam also failed. The Vietnamese Communists quickly learned that they would be unable to use such methods to sow their seeds.

Historically, the Vietnamese have been skillful in weaving together contradictory thoughts. The most successful outgrowth of this process has been the Vietnamese national values derived from "three religions from the same source," that is, Confucian realism, Taoist supernaturalism, and Buddhist spiritualism, combined with Vietnamese philosophies of life and universe. Western thought, introduced through colonial powers, has not altered the "same source" spirit.

The mindless class-struggle denunciations and the politically predecided judgments made by the so-called people's courts are unlikely to shake the historical foundation of the Vietnamese. In the thirteenth century they defeated Genghis Khan, in the eighteenth century the Chinese Manchurians, and in the twentieth the French. Nor are the Vietnamese people likely to conduct a Pol Pot style racial-extirpation campaign.

Vietnamese Communists, who fought against colonialism, cannot escape their own national tradition to follow Stalin's or Mao Zedong's. But they feel compelled to carry out the class struggle, for the time being, in a moderate form, suited to the current sociopolitical conditions.

The University Reports to the City Security Bureau

At about the time of the Thai Binh incident, the managers of all public and private institutions were ordered to report to the highest security authority of Ho Chi Minh City. The order was signed by Dang Minh Chiem, an assumed name. It is customary for Party members to assume “propaganda-effective” *noms de guerre*. Ho Chi Minh is such a name, just as Stalin (steel) is a propaganda name.

After the order was published, all executives of Van Hanh University—president, office chiefs, and tenured professors—reported to the security bureau. Managerial staff members below the rank of office chief were required to report to a different location the following day. By dividing the organization in this manner, security officials separated higher-echelon officials from the lower-ranking employees so they could more easily induce subordinates to denounce their superiors, thus causing conflict between the different social strata. They ignored the fact that many executives began life as proletarians and achieved their social status by hard work.

On arriving at the security bureau, installed in the former Republic’s Department of Labor building on Tran Hung Dao Avenue, we were invited into a small waiting room. After twenty minutes we were escorted into a large room and told to be seated. Then a cadre entered and, without introduction, lectured to us for an hour about the crimes we were accused of having committed. We were all charged, he said, with educating students in the reactionary manner of the French colonialists and the “false authorities” of the Republic. From the Communist viewpoint, there was no such thing as objective and scientific education or education for its own sake. There was only education in the service of the political purpose of the regime.

This Communist view left no room for our argument that as educators we had not been engaged in the politics of the Republic nor that we had opposed the Republic’s educational mistakes because we believed that our own educational policies were better suited to make humanistic and responsible citizens out of the younger generation.

Our lecturer made it clear that he and the Communist Party considered “false educators” more dangerous than “false soldiers” who fought against them on the battlefield. Once destroyed, he said, false soldiers go away forever, but reactionary thoughts planted in the minds of youth by false educators take a long time to be corrected.

During the first half of his lecture we listened in silence to his charges of educational crimes, but during the second half I became impatient and raised my hand for questions. Several others, accustomed to democratic discussions in the university, did likewise; but the cadre ignored us and continued his solo performance.

Having established that educating youth under the regime of the Republic was tantamount to a crime, the cadre announced that each of us must make a full confession and denounce others in order to atone for the offenses we had committed against the people and the "revolution." He then departed without allowing any questions.

Then another cadre entered and told us to sit apart from each other. Passing out blank sheets of paper, he told us to write down our personal data, give details of the crimes we had committed, and denounce the anti-revolutionary activities of others if known. He allowed an hour for these confessions. All of us noted our personal data but, as I learned from my colleagues later, no one said a word about crimes.

The second hour over, the cadre gathered our written accounts and told us to remain in place. Twenty minutes later each of us was called to meet separately with interrogating cadres.

My interrogator had my paper before him. Why, he asked, had I written only five lines giving my name, education, title, and nothing else? Did I know where "false soldiers" and "false authorities" had hidden their weapons and ammunition? I did not, of course, and said so. Next, noting my statement that I can read Chinese characters, he asked if I knew any of Ho's Chinese poems. I said I had read some but had not memorized any. Then, in a low voice, he declaimed a Chinese quatrain of Ho's with satisfaction. I watched him until he had finished and asked if he had studied in China. Instead of answering, he told me to leave.

The next day, the university's lower-echelon staff members were ordered to report to a different location. Two of this group accused the university of having conducted antipopular, antirevolutionary pro-American programs thereby building imperialist education. This denunciation drew strong protests from other staff members who stood up for the university where they had worked many years. The cadres paid no attention to the defenders.

One of the denouncers, Van Hanh University Band Conductor Pham The My, charged the university with maintaining a criminal education policy but defended his own music composed before 1975. The other, Nguyen Van Thang, was one of my graduate students who had received a university teaching fellowship. He, too, was a composer for the Van Hanh University Band.

Three months after these denunciations I met Thang and obliquely suggested that he should not do anything against his conscience. He told me his song, entitled "Khai Hoang" (Land Clearance), had drawn the attention of the cadres who promised to send it to Hanoi for publication.

The group-separation technique used at Van Hanh University is a standard Communist governing practice. By separating people into categories,

the regime can then reform or destroy any one of the categories and leave the others relieved not to have been affected. In addition, the Communists will mobilize one or more categories into denouncing another they wish to purge.

These techniques are also used against the proletariat, which the Communists profess to support. By isolating each element of the proletariat in the collective herd, no single group is able to exercise political force except through the Party, which keeps them under control through its security systems.

During the “pacification” period in South Vietnam, the Communists applied the separatist policy effectively. First they destroyed the import merchants—the compradors. A year later they shattered the commercial entrepreneurs, then leveled the commercial middle class. Now they are gradually sweeping away small traders and street vendors by closing down the open markets so that the Communists can monopolize all commercial power into what they call the nationalized business system.

The City Trade Union Convenes Meetings

In November 1975, the new regime’s educational authorities informed me my teaching position at Van Hanh University had been terminated. They gave me no explanation. Earlier after our meeting with the Ho Chi Minh City security bureau, I had been “selected” to participate in two political study seminars on Marxism-Leninism organized by the Provisional Revolutionary Government’s ministry of education. One was a ten-day seminar for professors from privately operated universities. The other, which lasted three months, was for professors from both public and private universities. Obviously, I had not “passed” the course.

Needing work, I took a position as administrative office chief for the Perfection Construction Company where I worked for a year. Then, in early 1977, I established my own organization, which I called the Construction Technology Company.

At that time the authorities were permitting private citizens to continue the operation of old companies and even to establish new ones. Many unemployed former executives took advantage of this chance to pool their capital and form cooperative production enterprises. Some did so to show the ward people’s committees, the local governments at the ward level, that they had jobs and thus to avoid being “invited” to go to the “new economic zones”; or just to be able to tell their local security cadres they were good citizens working in compliance with the government’s labor policy. Secretly, many used contracts with local governments, especially those along the coast, to prepare for their escapes.

In 1976, the Communists, without announcing any specific policy, began to expand trade unions in South Vietnam. In collective activities, it is standard Communist practice to convey the impression that the Party is bestowing great favors on those allowed to join a Communist organization, even though it may just be an organization engaged in sweeping litter from the street or in cheering speeches by Party officials.

Becoming a member of a Communist trade union is more difficult. In 1976 even government workers and officials were not permitted to join the city trade union of their profession, much less private workers such as myself. In any case, I did not consider it a privilege to spend more time and money in an organization which could only put one more yoke around my neck.

It was expected that sooner or later private institutions would be nationalized after their owners "voluntarily" turned their property over to the Party and government to avoid being accused of exploiting the people's property during the period of transition to socialism. At that time all private company workers and officials would become public employees.

While debates on these issues were going on, the local trade union sent a cadre to my company to educate officials and employees about the organization and to stimulate our consciousness about the proletariat.

The cadre was a Southern girl, about twenty, named Tu. She appeared in my office unexpectedly at 5 P.M., just as we were about to close, and announced she had come to tell us about the trade union and its role in the interest of the working class. She did not want to talk to the employers, only to the employees, from the office chief to the door keeper—the "exploited class," as she put it. She told those above the level of office chief—the president and the company engineers—that they should go home as usual. I had to stay.

Like most Communist cadres who have memorized their speeches, and talk interminably in public meetings, Miss Tu spoke to us without interruption for nearly an hour about the historic role of the working class. She talked on and on about the Party as the proletariat's ultimate representative which had led the people to final victory in the defeat of the feudal, colonialist, and imperialist forces and their reactionary lackeys; about the Party and government as the leaders in building socialism all over the country before advancing to the Communist period; about Party and government concern for the material and spiritual interests of the working class; and about the responsibility of the workers to join the trade union. At the end of her talk Miss Tu asked us to prepare ourselves spiritually for the next meeting to be convened at the local trade-union office.

Having listened for an hour, hoping she would cut her speech short so we could go home, we asked her to notify us in advance of future meetings so our families would not worry about our late arrival for dinner. She apologized for her negligence and we disbanded.

One week later Miss Tu came to our office and left an invitation for the company president to attend a meeting along with other presidents and owners at the ward trade-union office. She came in person because, she said, the trade-union office had no funds for postage; besides, mail would be much too slow; it takes months for a letter to move from one village to another. The invitation was typed on the clean side of a used sheet of mimeograph paper. She walked, because ward employees could not afford bicycles; even a second-hand one would cost them four or five months' salary. Telephones were too expensive, and those available were reserved for use by Party members and cadres. (A private telephone in a home or office cost 200 dong to install after a waiting period of several months and negotiation for approval. The monthly salary of a first year probationary government employee is 36 dong. Lines were often broken, and getting them repaired required an official application to the Post and Telegraph office, plus waiting several weeks. To get our company telephone repaired I had to grease the socialist hand of a public telephone repairman for faster service. In effect, I hired him privately to repair the telephone.)

Thus it was common for local cadres to walk, or at best bicycle, to deliver messages.

The trade union's letter of invitation generated no interest on the part of the company president or any member of the managerial board. None of them wanted to go. Other office chiefs said they were specialists and not good at speaking in public. In the end, the president named me to represent the company. At this stage, none of the company managers realized the importance of their presence at the meeting. I paid no attention to my status of "working for the exploiting board of management." On being asked, I got on my bicycle and went to the meeting.

The meeting with the company presidents was convened during office hours at the trade-union office in a house formerly owned by an escaped family. Miss Tu spoke volubly on the property owners' contributions of skill, labor, and money toward the construction of socialism. As the national bourgeoisie, she said, they were contributing, within limits, to the success of the revolution in a manner different from that of the compradors (importers' agents) who served only the imperialist economy, exploited the workers, and thus committed unforgivable crimes against the people and the revolution. Of course, she continued, the owners must realize the historical necessity of man's advance to socialism; they must voluntarily offer their establishments to the government and contribute their technical skills to reconstructing the nation.

She then handed a form to each person to list his capital and property and number and classification of workers employed by his establishment. "And please sign at the bottom."

Realizing that Miss Tu's request went beyond the responsibility delegated to me, I told her that I was just a salaried employee, named by the company president to participate in the meeting and report its outcome to the management, and that I had no authority to provide the information requested or to sign such a document. "Obviously, a worker cannot represent the owner's interests," she said. "Why are you participating in a meeting reserved for company presidents and owners?"

Instead of answering her question, I asked why the letter of invitation had not indicated that the company president should attend in person and not delegate an employee to take his place; why had she not stated the agenda and importance of the meeting so the company president would know that only he could participate. I said that as a paid employee I carried out my assigned duties as long as these tallied with the socialist labor laws and the company regulations based on guidelines provided by the government. I was unaware of any particular eloquence as I expressed my views on the need for cooperation between workers and owners, but after I finished the owners applauded. Having said my piece and lacking any jurisdiction to make decisions, I left the meeting.

Two weeks later, all workers in my company were summoned to another meeting in the ward trade-union conference hall, a former music and tea hall on Tran Hung Dao Avenue. This time the letter of invitation made it clear that only the workers were invited, not members of the management. The workers of my company elected me to represent them. Hence, on this occasion I met the young cadre as a representative of the workers, not the owner.

This time Miss Tu spoke—lengthily as usual—on the historical role of the proletariat and how it had struggled to free itself and other suppressed classes from exploitation by the owners; on the proletariat's participation in the revolution to expel French colonialism and American imperialism; on how we must now be conscious of the working class, defend workers' rights and never take sides with the exploiting owners. On this last point I knew she was alluding to my earlier representation of the company president. I continued to listen in silence while she emphasized that the trade union was of the workers, for the workers, and by the workers so the workers must join.

After her speech, given in a tone now familiar to us, our chief of operations said, "I have a very large family and since there is not enough essential food available at the ward food store I must buy on the black market. Will joining the trade union permit me to buy more food?"

Miss Tu responded that the trade union could sell a small amount of extra food to its members, but she insisted that joining it just to buy food was not the proper spirit for socialist workers. (In fact, any worker who joined the trade union did so to be able to buy this very small quantity of extra food.)

After this meeting I frequently saw Miss Tu passing by my office, but private company employees were not again encouraged to join the trade union. At this point several related factors may be worthy of attention.

Separating Workers from their Employers

One of the methods used by trade-union cadres is to try to separate workers from the owners by causing confrontations. Vietnamese property owners, as differentiated from the compradors, are considered to be the exploiting class. They are different from the compradors only in that the owners have presumably exploited the workers less and somehow contributed to the success of the "revolution."

The Communists always consider workers to be exploited by the owner-employers and teach them to be conscious of their class and to fight for an end to the exploitation. The local trade union convened owners and workers in separate meetings to facilitate stimulation of class-struggle consciousness among the workers. The cadres admitted they were unable to categorize intellectuals such as myself, who stand in the middle.

If agitation to stimulate class-struggle consciousness among South Vietnamese workers has had any effect, it has been more due to human aggressiveness than to the agitation itself. In a bakery near my company office in the center of Ho Chi Minh City, a worker accused the owner of making dishonest profits from the government-supplied wheat flour, and of exploiting the worker's labor by setting an hourly quota of loaves for him to make. Local security cadres immediately took the owner into custody.

Except for such minor cases, despite continuous Communist efforts, there has been no symbolic class-struggle occurrence in South Vietnam either before or since the takeover.

Worker Representation

Party leaders in the trade union were unable to establish a decisive policy on private workers. At first they tried to embrace all workers in a single organization, but later they abandoned the effort. It is not clear what happened between the Party and the trade union. In any case, the trade union is

a tool used by the Party to control workers and definitely not to protect their interests as in the free countries.

In case of a disagreement, the trade union cannot oppose the Party. The Polish strikes which began in 1980 are an exceptional phenomenon that have never occurred in any other Communist country.

The workers' monthly salaries are set by the Party and the salaries, compared with the cost of living, have always been at starvation levels. With salary policies being made at the highest echelons of the Party rather than by the subordinate trade union there is no one to safeguard the workers' interests.

In the free countries, trade unions were organized to protect workers' interests from abuse by owners; in Communist countries, they have become executors of orders issued by the Party.

Worker Exploitation

In South Vietnam the trade union is an organization used to mobilize workers to carry out political maneuvers by the Party, to force workers to participate in public meetings and demonstrations. When the workers are pressed in such collective activities, it is at their own expense; they draw no extra pay or rations for their efforts.

Security Control of Workers

The trade union is, in fact, a countrywide system of security agents, which penetrates down to the smallest unit of workers. This control mechanism is in addition to those operated by institutional and ward security offices.

An example from the Foreign-Exchange Office of the Ho Chi Minh City Bank which transacts monetary exchanges between Vietnamese abroad and their relatives in Vietnam will show how institutional trade union cadres function. My wife worked at this bank before our escape.

The Foreign-Exchange Office had forty employees of whom twenty had been admitted to the bank division of the city trade union. The office unit leader was called Ba of the Trade Union (*Chi Ba Cong-Doan*). Ba was a typist and the lowest-salaried person in the office; she was paid 40 dong a month, which could buy just two pounds of beef on the open market. In the spring of 1979, the city trade union proposed to the city bank that the bank raise her salary to 45 dong in recognition of her position as office trade-union unit leader.

Ba was the daughter of a “revolutionary family,” i.e., a family with a number of Party members and cadres. The trade union had given her special training as a unit leader, and her appointment was arranged by the Central Trade Union. She was responsible for keeping a watch on all employees of the Foreign Exchange Office, both on members and nonmembers of the trade union. She observed their activities, manners, speech, and their attitude toward the regime. She was instructed to take advantage of opportunities to strike up conversations with employees during office hours; and, whenever possible, to visit them at home, especially when they were ill.

Since all employees were aware of Ba’s role, no one was naïve enough to express discontent to her. They always pretended to be enthusiastic about their work assignments, to obey orders from the bank’s leading Party members and cadres, and especially, “to love socialism earnestly.” In meetings, trade-union members were required to make critical reports on the attitudes of office employees, and Ba was responsible for passing on any revelations to the bank commissariat and the bank trade union.

After our escape, Ba was severely criticized for not reporting the attitude of my wife, who had been a trade-union member. The leading Party members and cadres of the city bank accused Ba of not fulfilling her responsibility for surveillance of the trade-union members in the Foreign Exchange Office. In February 1980, ten months after our escape, the criticism of Ba’s failure was so severe that she resigned.

This episode illustrates the nature of the Communist trade union. A worker or employee who does not join is criticized; but if he does join he subjects himself to abuse by the master he serves.

Divide and Rule

Since cultural conditions were unfavorable to the staging of public trials for the propagation of the class struggle, the Communists turned to “divide and rule” techniques to force compliance. We have seen this in the examples of the university where lower and higher staff members of the university were pitted against each other, and of private companies where an effort was made to turn employers and employees against each other. This technique was inherited from the colonialists (and ultimately the ancient Romans).

The Communists have refined the divide and rule technique. In the South it has proved more successful than the violent denunciations in the public trials once used in the North. For the time being, at least, the Communists have achieved a degree of success with their divide-and-rule technique by using standard Communist methods of propaganda—criticism, denunciation, and arrest through peoples’ organizations, trade unions, the armed forces, and the security system.

Yet, while the Communists use their divisive techniques, they continuously appeal to the people to unite in one national bloc. The primary unity-theme slogan, painted on fences and walls throughout South Vietnam, is Ho Chi Minh's saying: "Vietnam is one; the Vietnamese people are one; rivers go dry, mountains wear away, but this truth can never be changed."

National unification is a natural desire which served well in fighting off invaders and in preserving independence; but having taken over South Vietnam, the Communists continue to take advantage of that desire in order to pacify the nation, expand their power into Laos and Cambodia, and modify world opinion to shine up the tarnished image of their regime.

The appeal to national unification and the agitation for class struggle, even in its presently moderate form, are contradictory. In the Marxist-Leninist seminars I asked leading Party members and cadres how they expected the people to carry out the class struggle and strive for national unification at the same time. The usual reply was that the question would be referred to higher echelons. Unification has become such an urgent necessity for calming the shaky political and psychological situation that the Communists have not dared to pursue the class struggle in its violent forms. The regime has now become somewhat more conciliatory because it has to absorb Laos and Cambodia in addition to South Vietnam. But this time of relative moderation is not likely to last.

II

The Ward Security System

Organizational Characteristics

After their victory in 1975 the Vietnamese Communist party and government sought to establish their presence rapidly throughout the South in every city, town, and village down to the smallest alley. Security cadres were placed in local governments, public institutions, military units, city people's clusters, and even in private residences. They also functioned within organizations under direct Party leadership such as the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Association and the Vanguard children's groups, as well as in popular associations for workers, peasants, and intellectuals who, for more effective control, were mustered into groups according to age, professions, and sex.

The municipal administration of Ho Chi Minh City is composed of two parallel structures: the government hierarchy and the Party hierarchy. (See chart 1.) The Party exercises control but remains in the background; the government deals directly with the people. The official expression of this system is: "The Party leads, the government manages, and the people are the collective masters."

The top municipal office of the Party is the City Commissariat; the top office of the municipal government is the City People's Committee.

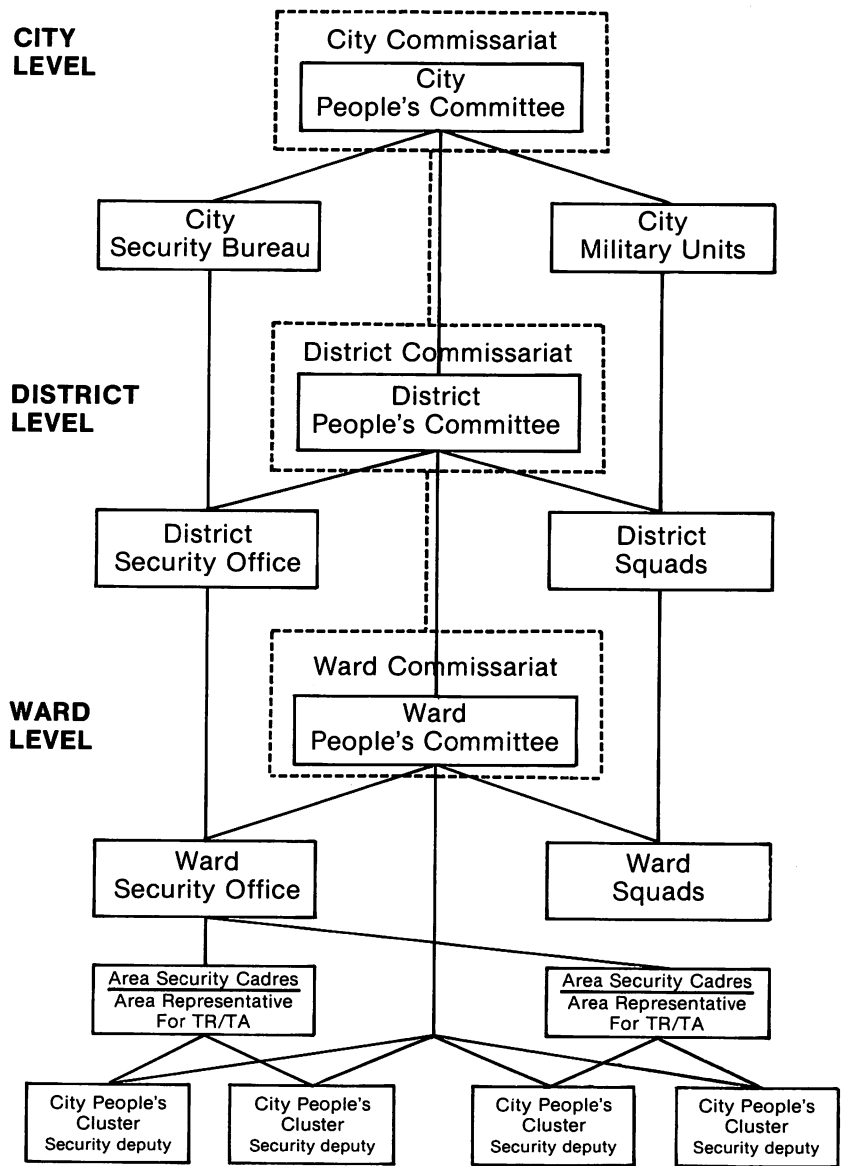
The structure of the Party, beneath the City Commissariat is, in descending order: district commissariat, ward commissariat.

The structure of the government, beneath the City People's Committee is, in descending order: district people's committee, ward people's committee, city people's cluster. (A "cluster" is approximately a city block.)

The municipal administration and its subordinate units have at their command parallel security and military law enforcement structures. They are the civilian security bureau, which subdivides into district security offices and ward security offices, and the city military units, which subdivide into district squads and ward squads.

Chart 1

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE



----- PARTY CHANNELS
—— GOVERNMENT CHANNELS

TR/TA: temporary residence
temporary absence

The Ward System

Most Vietnamese citizens come into contact with their government through the ward system. At this level, with the exception of the ward commissariat, Party and government offices frequently overlap and all Party members operate in dual Party and government roles.

A ward consists of approximately one thousand city people. The ward government functions in two separate but related lines: one is official; the other is technically unofficial but is controlled by the government.

The official structure includes the ward commissariat, the ward people's committee, the ward squad, the ward security office with its area security cadres, and the city people's clusters, the number varying according to the size of the ward.

The unofficial structure includes government-operated institutions at the ward level, ward institutions initiated and operated by the ward government (based on the ward economy), and people's organizations under the leadership and control of Party members or cadres assigned to these tasks by the Party and the government.

Elements in the official structure (Chart 1):

Ward commissariat—controls ward affairs; led by Party secretary who is never seen in public.

Ward people's committee—headed by a chairman "elected" by ward inhabitants after his nomination by the ward commissariat and with the approval of the district commissariat. People's committee members' duties are:

Military—recruit personnel for military service.

New economic zones—recruit families for agricultural production in land clearance zones.

Information and propaganda—divulge Party and government information and policies through the ward broadcasting system, wall slogans, public meetings; conduct entertainment programs such as movies and musical shows.

Food—supervise ward food store; insure flow of produce from district supply sources.

Administration—handle ward administrative matters.

Industry—control and promote industrial activities within ward.

Commerce—supervise consumers' cooperative, trading stores within ward.

Handicrafts—supervise and promote craft activities within the ward.

Social—conduct ceremonies relating to births, marriages, funerals.

Ward squad—composed of 30-50 soldiers, mostly young, who maintain a 24-hour guard, carry out such duties as military census, recruitment; work in conjunction with ward security office.

Ward security office—led by North Vietnamese chief; approximately 20 cadres carry out protection, judicial, and surveillance duties; function through committees.

Area security—for security purposes (not administrative), the ward is subdivided into areas of 30-50 households where two cadres, a chief and a deputy, carry out security functions and report to the ward security office. Each area also has an unpaid representative who records the temporary residence and temporary absence of ward inhabitants and their guests.

City people's cluster—this is the lowest governmental level. Each ward is subdivided into clusters of 10-15 households, normally facing each other along an alley or on both sides of a street. Authority within the cluster is exercised by three resident cluster officials, nominated by the ward people's committee, approved by the ward commissariat and elected by cluster inhabitants: the cluster chief; a security deputy who is a government employee, Party member or cadre or member of a "revolutionary family" (i.e., several members have been involved in "revolutionary" activities); and a social deputy. The chief and the social deputy are not government employees and receive no salary.

Elements in the unofficial structure (Chart 2):

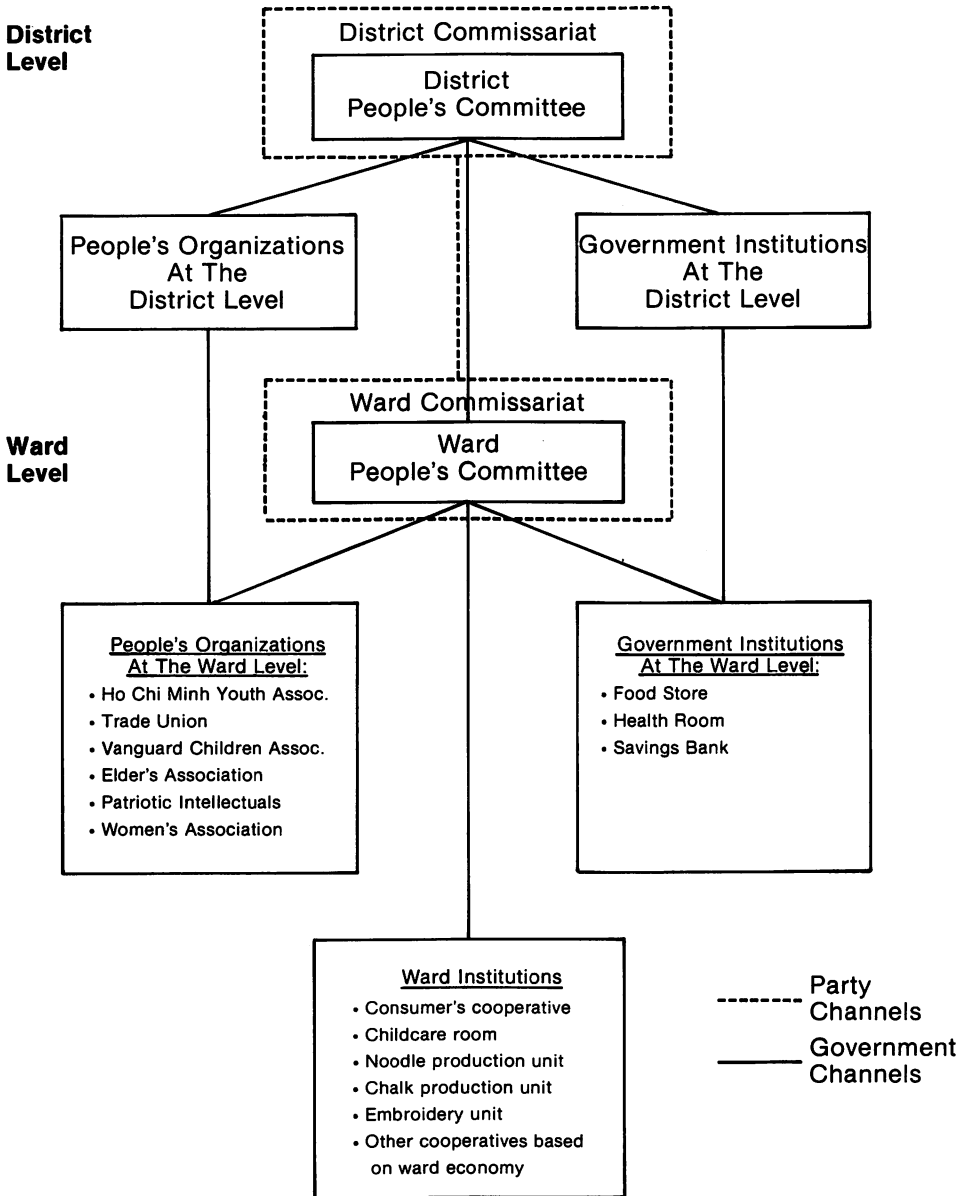
Ward level government institutions—these are ward branches of city and district institutions, typically:

Food store—sells essential foods such as rice, noodles, flour, potatoes, sorghum, and cassava at official government prices.

Health room—provides basic health care for ward inhabitants.

Chart 2

Party and Government Control of People's Economic & Social Organizations



Savings bank—lowest level of the city bank; collects savings for the “construction of socialism.”

Ward institutions (ward initiated and operated)—typically:

Consumers' cooperative—sells essential items such as fish, vegetables, soap, fish sauce, and soy sauce at prices determined by the cooperative board of management whose chairman is a Party member or cadre. Capital for the cooperative is contributed by the ward inhabitants.

Childcare room—looks after children of working parents at prices determined by board of management.

Other ward institutions—based on local economy; these might include units engaged in the production of noodles, chalk, and embroidery.

People's organizations—Ward residents must belong to and participate in at least one people's organization. These are all subordinate to and a part of district, city or national organizations which provide guidance and control. The most common are: Trade Union, Ho Chi Minh Youth Association, Vanguard Children, Women's Branch Association, Elders' Association, Patriotic Intellectuals.

The Security System in Action

An example of tight, local control was Ward 11, Phu Nhuan District, in Saigon. There, the security office occupied a long, two-story villa abandoned by a wealthy family which had fled the country.

Most security agents—secret or uniformed—were newly-recruited young people under the leadership of Party members and Northern cadres. These cadres, when carrying out home searches at night in the presence of the City People's cluster chief, for example, wore the yellow uniform and were protected by several ward squad soldiers. For intelligence gathering tasks, they wore civilian clothes.

Secret agents permeated universities, high schools, and elementary schools. University professors were subjected to public criticism within their classes on their “bourgeois” teaching methods. On every level, from nursery to university, lectures were subject to prior censorship. Educators were thus reduced to teaching machines. All comments made in class were required to be based on the concept of the class struggle. This was not the working-class vs. bourgeoisie-class struggle of the Communist Manifesto but the struggle between the new ruling class and the people from every level of society who failed to keep abreast of and comply with the party's zig-zag policies.

Communist security controls weighed heavily upon everyone, including children. My house, for example, lay at the open end of a dead-end alley 20 feet wide and 160 feet long. Since it was the only open space available in the neighborhood to play children's games, it was heavily used by ward children. Efforts by alley residents to calm their noisy chatter often brought insults from the older children. If chased, they would retaliate by throwing gravel through open doorways and windows. Occasional seizure of soccer balls by the cluster chief or his deputy produced only temporary results. Having endured this situation for more than two years after the "revolution," the residents finally decided to ask for assistance from the ward security office. Two days later the soccer games in front of my house ceased and, except for Sundays when organized games were conducted, only children of alley residents were seen there. The alley became normal. The ward security cadres had used a simple, familiar, but effective method. They had gone to the homes of the offending children to "educate" them and constrain parents to accept responsibility for their children's activities or have them sent to labor camps.

Under the Communist policy of "labor is glorious," no one is free from fear of being sent to a labor camp, especially one in a "new economic zone" deep in the jungles. Persons "awakened by socialism" not only have to do hard labor but also never know when they will return home.

Before my escape in 1979, on late evenings I used to sit on the flat roof of my house in Saigon, sadness in my heart, staring at the huge sky and pondering my inability to find shelter from security agents. Almost invariably as I stepped outside my house, morning, afternoon, or evening, I would encounter area security cadres passing by. I made it a practice always to greet them, pretending to enjoy life under communism to cover up my plans for escape.

Area Security Cadres

From the time the security office was established in my ward in early 1976 until I left in 1979, there was a succession of four different area security cadres in charge of my cluster. One was an unhealthy, chain-smoking youth of eighteen who was unable to conduct the cluster meetings and was probably replaced. He was followed by a woman cadre, Miss Phan, also eighteen, who wore her hair over her shoulders and belonged to a local "revolutionary family." Since I was aware that security cadres were charged with collecting information about the attitudes and daily activities of ward inhabitants I always greeted her warmly with an occasional small joke and expressed my absolute obedience to socialist laws and her task orders.

One day, in 1978, Miss Phan came to my house at 8 P.M. to record the number of members in my family. A census had been under way in other wards for months. All members of each household were required to be at home at an appointed time or, if not, the head of the house had to give a reason and document it with official papers. I did not know why the census of my cluster was that late, but I was pleased because that meant there would be a considerable time before the next. During this interval I could leave home to prepare the boat for my third escape attempt, and my family could be absent for a couple of days to join me without being noticed. Thus, we made it a point for all to be present.

Miss Phan knew that I had ceased to be a professor after the “revolution” and that I was not employed by any government institution. As a citizen of working age under the socialist regime, this made me vulnerable to questioning by the ward government which continually sought to identify unemployed individuals eligible for sending to the “new economic zones” or returning to their native villages. When the ward government began its census, citizens of voting age were instructed to submit certification of employment.

Miss Phan asked to see my employee card issued by the Construction Technology Company of which I had been vice president for more than a year. My reaction requires a brief explanation.

My company had only one job, a land clearance project in the jungle sixty miles from Saigon. The company president, a Communist cadre we had hired to facilitate business with the government, had the official company seal at the camp. Not having a seal to submit on my own letter, I went to my former employer, the Perfection Construction Company, and obtained a letter.

Thus, to cover my action, I expressed surprise at Miss Phan’s request, saying I had already submitted the employee ID letter to the security office. She stopped asking about my job status.

My wife reported her occupation as a bank employee, and our children gave their school status. Miss Phan noted the details in a large book and asked me to sign it.

I wanted to cut short the visit and avoid more questions, but allow her to leave with a friendly feeling. Knowing the invitation would be refused, I offered Miss Phan a cup of hot tea and began asking questions about her tasks. The ruse worked. After a bit, she stood up, thanked me, and went over to our neighbor’s house.

During the first two years under the Communist regime, security cadres made household checks after midnight, checking the number of occupants against the “household booklet” while ward squad soldiers stood guard outside. Any guests found without a travel permit were taken to the security office for investigation.

The Cluster Security Deputy

A second figure in charge of security in my cluster was the cluster security deputy, Mrs. Hoa, who lived at the end of our alley. Since I was at the open end of the cul de sac and she had to pass my house whenever she went out for work or shopping, I met her almost every day. I took more precautions with her than with the cluster chief whose non-Communist attitude I knew quite well.

The cluster security deputy belonged to a "revolutionary family." Mrs. Hoa had the habit of inquiring about small talk within the cluster and making oral reports to the security office. Although play-acting as a housewife and people's representative in community activities she was in fact a security agent. Every year the ward people's committee forced Mrs. Hoa's "democratic and free" re-election as security deputy and chief of the ward women's association in accordance with orders from district authorities.

In her role as security deputy, Mrs. Hoa took note of temporary residences, temporary absences, and reported on all events in the cluster. Before the regularly scheduled weekly meetings she visited each household and reminded the head or his representative to attend. If the cluster chief had already done this, she pretended not to know. If the cluster chief or the area security cadre were absent, she chaired the meetings. Cluster families were wary of Mrs. Hoa because her reports to the security office had resulted in trouble for several of them.

As chief of the ward women's association, early on Sunday mornings when ward residents were trying to rest from their week's labors, she would call at each residence and urge housewives to clean the streets in front of their homes. At the beginning of each month she went from house to house in our alley appealing to each household to deposit money "voluntarily" in their savings accounts for the "construction of socialism." As a result, despite not having enough money to purchase essential daily food, there was no family on the block without a savings account in the ward bank.

Military Census

Young men in the ward were subject to military service and for this purpose were under the control of the military committee which frequently conducted a military census for recruitment purposes. The ward squad performed this function. Since there was no one between the ages of 18 and 25 in my house, I had no cause for concern; but families with young men worried about their safety.

Under the Republic, people complained that the armed forces recruited soldiers off the streets by force. The Communist military authorities not only recruited young men off the streets but also went into their homes and compelled them to join the army. Well-to-do families, anxious to keep their sons from being forced to “volunteer” for military service, spent large sums to send them out of the country.

The measures used in my ward to control young men militarily—household checks, education, threats, and punishment—were generally in use throughout South Vietnam.

Household books maintained by the security office, containing data on each member of every family, were used by the military committee to develop the so-called List of Youths Elected to Join the Army; the names were announced by the ward loudspeaker system every day.

In mid-1976 a young Northern soldier came to my house in the conduct of a military census. He entered the front door without knocking, went through the living room and into the dining room. My nine-year-old daughter, playing at the foot of the stairs, called out that someone was there. As I went down the stairs, I saw him already sitting at the dining table as casually as though he were in his own home. I was startled, but this young man’s conduct brought me face to face with habits that have developed from many years of life under a collectivist regime, which condemns individualism and cares nothing for privacy. A short digression on privacy may be permitted here. In North Vietnam, to overcome serious housing shortages (and to put collectivism into practice) the regime forced several families to live in the same house, sharing a common entrance, the same kitchen, bath, and other facilities. In such a situation entering a house without knocking could not be viewed as a violation of privacy. The Communist cadres liked to brag that people in the North did not use locks because there were no thieves in a socialist nation. They always cited Russia as an example, saying the Russians never needed to lock their homes. Communist soldiers considered themselves the “people’s children,” and maintained that children entering their parents’ home did not have to knock at the door.

My wife’s Northern relatives came visiting from time to time. Instead of waiting for me in the living room, they would go to my bedroom, which I also used as my office, and there they would sit on my bed or a chair by my desk and make conversation. If invited to go to the living room, they would usually say, “Oh, this is quite all right here.”

A knock at the door is a forewarning to the householder that an outsider wants to enter, but Communist security cadres, charged with keeping watch over the people’s daily activities and attitudes, wish to avoid such forewarnings. Forcing people to live collectively, in effect, uses them to

control each other, particularly under conditions of scarcity. If one person is fortunate enough to obtain a bit of good food such as chicken or pork, he has to eat it furtively. If caught, secret agents would question him as where he got it and cause no end of trouble. Southerners, once used to privacy and abundance, have lost both. Most had had no new clothing since the Communists took over. Now, they were learning how to prolong the life of their worn clothing and eat occasional bits of good food on the sly.

Under the Communist regime violations of privacy extend even to love relations and marriage. During a session of the so-called Political Study Seminar for university professors held in Saigon in late 1975, a "university education cadre" from the North spoke with pride about an instance in which a Party member had been forbidden to fall in love with a land-owner's daughter because such a relationship would violate the concept of class struggle. My arguments that the girl had not chosen to be born into the "exploiting class" and that the young man by marrying her would set an example against "class discrimination" were lost on this "education cadre."

After the military-census interrogator had made himself at home in my dining room, he asked questions concerning my personal life but was particularly interested in my education and why I did not serve as an officer in the "false armed forces" (Army of the Republic of Viet Nam).

The fact that I had studied in the United States was generally known in the ward, if not to this young Northern soldier, therefore I did not invite trouble by trying to hide it. Yet he looked at me with surprise when I informed him I had received a Ph.D. from the University of California in Berkeley, and his surprise grew when I added that it was in political science. He found it difficult to believe that a Vietnamese could obtain such a degree from a university of the "leading imperialist country." The soldier's surprise was evidence of the Northern Communists' initial belief that there were few university graduates in South Vietnam. When, after several education censuses, they found the opposite to be true, they realized that their own society was inferior to the South in one of the three key elements of a socialist society, i.e., "socialist intellectuals," the other two being workers and peasants. To remedy that situation they conferred bachelor's degrees on a large number of engineering, educational, medical, and other cadres who had only completed high school and many who had not even achieved this level of education. Some in more responsible positions were given the title "deputy Ph.D." Thus, they hoped to show that the socialist North was superior and, at the same time, make the task of the Northern cadres in the South easier. Even so, few cadres with "deputy" degrees dared presume to possess an honest Ph.D. I talked with a number of these socialist intellectuals and found their level of competence in their particular fields inferior, and limited only to Communist experience. Still, one of my wife's Northern

cousins, a high-school graduate with an instant “bachelor’s” degree is now a professor at Hue University in Central Vietnam.

“Why,” my interviewer asked, “with your education, did you not render your services as an officer in the ‘false armed forces’?”

I replied that I was an educator; that I was given nine weeks’ military training and allowed to return to my university to teach; that I had no further relations to the South Vietnamese Army. In fact, however, following my nine weeks’ military training, I was still counted on the list as the Republic’s effective strength. When the Republic’s armed forces were disbanded after the “revolution” I tore up my military ID card. But this I kept to myself.

After this investigation I was no longer under any military obligation, except the general provision that tacitly assigned all men ages 18 to 45 and all women 18 to 35 to the combat forces of the Communist Defense Ministry. All others were declared to be in the reserve and supply forces, including old men who were designated “white-haired soldiers.”

After the Chinese attack on Vietnam’s northern frontier in 1978, the military census was intensified so drastically that youths dared not venture on the streets on their free days but stayed at home to avoid forcible induction. The military census of young people enabled the regime to recruit them for rear-echelon defense to replace regulars ordered to the northern frontier, Laos, or Cambodia; it prevented them from joining Republic resistance forces in the Truong Son Mountains, a former Viet Cong stronghold; it forced adherence to the “cultural and thought revolution,” which opposed youthful frivolities such as enjoying tea, coffee, and music with friends or strolling idly on the streets; and it forced them to join “youth assault” groups for voluntary labor in agricultural camps. Ultimately, it made it harder for them to escape the country by boat.

A piece of music broadcast noisily three times daily over loud-speakers in every ward portrayed the Communist regime’s ideal young man and young woman. The young man was one who marched unreservedly to the battlefield imbued with ideas, expressed in a “revolutionary” song:

“We take no further interest in our lives,
we are not concerned about our homes,
we are determined to sacrifice ourselves”

in accordance with the Party’s orders.

The ideal young woman of the socialist society was a self-denying “strong general” who, “covered with stinking mud, hands and legs calloused, face sunburned” could spade ten square yards of dirt a day in the agricultural camps. She could also be a “girl soldier” and march shoulder to shoulder with her male counterpart. She was definitely not the beauty-queen ideal of capitalist countries.

The severe controls imposed by the military census constitutes the principal reason why so many young people have been willing to risk their lives in braving the ocean in search of freedom.

The Neighborhood Information Network in Action

Security control of ward inhabitants was exercised not only through the official security system but also through people's organizations, especially the neighborhood information network.

Except for the area security cadres and the security deputy I was unable to determine who else was responsible for security in my cluster of fifteen households. To avoid jeopardizing my own safety and that of my family as we prepared for our escape by boat, I played the role of a good Communist citizen and refrained from asking questions. I had no doubt that the area security office had planted reporting agents in our cluster, in addition to such obvious individuals as the cluster chief, the social-services deputy, and the chiefs or members of professional cooperatives and associations functioning at the ward level. The agents, as they eventually revealed themselves, turned out to be individuals whose personal history made them subject to being pressured by the security cadre into spying on their neighbors.

Son

My next-door neighbors in Saigon from April 1975 until late 1978 were four students of Ho Chi Minh City University (formerly Saigon University). One was the house owner's nephew who later married a girl named Mai; the other three were sons of a South Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF) official, who did not live at the house. The following account concerns 21-year-old Son (pronounced Saun), one of the brothers, who had difficulty with his university education and frequently wandered around the streets or visited friends instead of attending classes.

Education declined rapidly after the Communist takeover of South Vietnam. Adults and children worried much more about how to obtain enough food and clothing than about learning. Son, plagued with mundane problems, sold small items from his house to neighbors, including me, for daily expenses. He even sold imitation gold.

With the establishment of socialism in South Vietnam, robbery, petty thievery, and fraud spread rapidly through the Saigon-Cholon-Giadinh metropolitan district. Bicycles, clothing, household utensils, motorcycles, repair tools, and similar items of daily use were stolen and peddled on the streets. My double-lock motorcycle was stolen on Tran Hung Dao Avenue

while I was in a bookstore for two minutes. In my cluster, several persons were arrested while stealing bicycles. A domestic woman helper who had lived with my family for ten years until 1976 walked off with my wife's jewelry, clothes, and sundry household articles. Our cluster chief came to me for help in establishing a burglar-alarm system, consisting of hand-sounded bells, connected from his house at the end of the cul de sac to mine at the beginning. In each cluster and ward residents were compelled to take turns standing watch, particularly during the Tet lunar new year festival or whenever disturbances threatened because of political maneuvers by ward or district Party committees.

But while we were continually troubled with robberies, Northern cadres assigned to work in the South maintained such crimes were non-existent in the socialist North. Robbery, prostitution, and suicide, they said, were the natural, unavoidable remnants of the Southern capitalist regime, which must be endured during the transition to socialism.

One night in 1977 a burglar entered the house of a tailor who lived next to me. The owner discovered the intruder and cried out. Security cadres, self-defense youths, ward-squad soldiers, and neighbors came out in an effort to apprehend the man. Armed security personnel leaped from roof to roof looking for him, while their comrades searched the alley. But the culprit disappeared.

Three nights later, at 3 A.M., the robber paid a second visit to the tailor's house and was again discovered. Once more the tailor cried out and once more security guards, waving their guns, raced to the rooftops to catch the villain while cluster inhabitants armed with sticks encircled the area. Again the intruder disappeared.

The security office, bewildered and angry at being shown incapable of maintaining security and having their no-crime-under-socialism propaganda exposed, initiated an extensive secret investigation. They theorized that because the thief disappeared so quickly he must live in one of the houses of our cluster.

A month after the burglary, an area security cadre came to my house and asked whether I was suspicious of Son, since I, too, had been robbed once. I replied that I had been robbed by my domestic helper, and suspected neither Son nor anyone else. The cadre asked me to show him the flat roof of my house. There, after an inspection of the walls of the duplex, he found a small window high on the back wall of Son's house. The cadre thought he had found the answer, but I conjectured that if the thief had gone through that high small window he would have to leave marks on the white-washed wall. There was no trace of dirt or footprints.

The security office, however, conducted several interrogations of Son, his brothers, and the house owner's nephew; but no one in my cluster

learned the results. A short time later, Son went to work for the security office as a secret reporter.

It was apparent to me that Son's new assignment was involuntary. Even if he was not guilty of the burglaries—and I am convinced of his innocence—the security cadres had found some other charges which forced him into their service: not attending school, selling household items in the open market, selling imitation gold, and not working at any institution. These alone were sufficient reasons to send Son to a labor camp.

In late 1978 while I was preparing my third escape attempt I became aware that local security cadres were watching my daily activities, but I did not know to what extent. About this time I had started transferring daily-use items from my house to the houses of my father-in-law, cousins, and friends. These items were to be sold later to finance a fourth or even a fifth attempt, if the third or fourth were unsuccessful. These secondary plans were essential because of the high potential for failure of my primary plans. Departure times were never known in advance. Escape planners had to be ready to leave at a moment's notice. Some were alerted by their helpers that the moment was propitious, just as they sat down to dinner; they left their food on the table, locked the doors, and hurried to their appointed place. If the trip was canceled for one reason or another and the security cadres learned about it in time, they would expropriate and seal up the houses leaving the frustrated escapees homeless. Hence, dispersing one's possessions in advance of departure was a necessary insurance.

I had made every effort to conceal my intentions by moving items out one by one early in the morning or at evening meal times, but I did not know whether this activity had been reported to the security office. Early one morning, I had in fact seen Son watching me as I left home with some household goods. Even though I greeted him with a cheery good morning he avoided eye contact and did not respond. At the moment I attributed this to his usually sullen nature and thought no more of it.

One melancholy evening—there were many of those in Ho Chi Minh City—I went to the flat roof top to watch the sunset which is still beautiful in Vietnam despite socialism. There I encountered Mai, the young wife of the house owner's nephew. These two young people, now married a year, had a new-born child, and my wife had given them children's clothing which we no longer needed. Speaking softly, Mai informed me that the area security cadre that morning had asked her, "When will Mr. Long take to the sea?"

I pretended to be amused at Mai's news. "I don't even have enough money to buy food for my family," I said. "How could I ever get together sufficient taels of gold to pay for a sea trip? If I had that much money I would stay home and enjoy a happy life in Vietnam rather than risking my life on such a foolish enterprise."

In numerous public meetings everyone had heard the security cadres recite the dreadful tales, real and imaginary, about refugees who had died of starvation and thirst at sea, about those who had been raped and killed by Thai pirates, of those who had drowned, or of those who had been seized trying to escape and lost all their property. But, in addition, we had also heard factual accounts by listening clandestinely to the Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Corporation. We were well aware of the dangers and the risks.

After Mai's disclosure, I ceased moving objects out of my house and reduced contacts with my friends, especially at my house. I also passed out hints destined for the security cadres' ears that I had sold my housewares on the open market.

The security web, operating through the people's intelligence system, had caught Son in its net and had very nearly caught me too. It became obvious that Vietnam could never be freed from Communist slavery so long as this fear-based security system continued to operate.

Kim Anh

A second informer, after Son, ostensibly a social worker at the ward children's day-care center, was Kim Anh, the 18-year-old daughter of a "false policeman," who had been released from reeducation camp in 1978, but was deprived of his citizenship. Her duties were to help cluster chiefs complete reports, carry out various tasks for the Ward Youths' Association and work at the day-care center.

Kim Anh visited our house twice to invite us to send our children to the center. During her visits she hinted that she was carrying out "ward tasks" so her father could regain his citizenship and her family could remain in Saigon rather than being sent to a "new economic zone." She was forced to do the "ward tasks" to protect her family.

Because Kim Anh promised to take good care of my young son, I was at first tempted to send him to the day-care center. But when I reflected that the security agents would pressure Kim Anh into using her ties with my son to obtain more information on my personal life and plans, I gave up the idea. To keep her supervisors from suspecting the real reason for my decision and to protect her, I used the excuse that sanitary conditions at the school were inadequate, which was the truth.

The Shoemaker

The neighborhood informer who caused me the most trouble did not live in my cluster. Early in 1977 I apprenticed myself to a friend who operated a repair and sales shop for boat pumps and motors in the Tan Binh District, next to ours. My intention was first to earn income to pay for my escape without being tied down to a job subject to control by Party members and government cadres, and second to learn how to repair pumps and motors in case of emergency at sea. The monthly income from my mechanics job was considerably higher than the official government salary for the same work but it carried its own difficulties and risks.

After a year's work as an apprentice mechanic, I used all the capital I could muster to purchase a 10.5 horsepower TS-105 Yanmar motor. The price was two and a half taels of gold or the equivalent of eight years' salary for a 36-dong-a-month government official. I had several objectives in mind: using it as the motor for a small boat which I would have to acquire; using it as a secondary motor in a larger boat as part of my contribution to a trip by sea; or, if these failed, selling it for a profit.

I did not want the security cadres or neighbors to learn of my purchase. Therefore I did not take the motor home or to my friend's store, but to the home of one of my wife's distant relatives, who lived on a busy street.

One afternoon at 1 P.M. my wife's relative and I delivered a 400 pound wooden crate containing the motor to his house. An observer could not have known what was in the box. Even so, I had legal documentation issued by the Material Head Office plus the receipt and title obtained from its former owner. At 4 P.M. two officials—one from the Ward Industrial and Commercial Reformation Office and the other from the District Financial Committee—arrived and seized the motor despite the legality of my papers. It was obvious that they intended at least to obtain a bribe or at most to deprive me of this precious machine.

How did they learn about it? A shoemaker who operated a small variety store across the street from my wife's relative had reported to ward authorities that we had carried "a case of weapons" into the house.

At first I thought the shoemaker was a secret agent using the store as a front, but after contacts with him and the ward authorities I became convinced that he was just a common unpaid informer who reported on his neighbors in return for official favors to facilitate his business.

Under the Communist regime, friends and neighbors can suddenly turn into enemies because of the doubts sowed and nurtured by Party officials and cadres among community residents. Even persons engaged in legitimate business dare not trust anyone. Subsistence wage levels paid young and old, male and female, plus arbitrary exercise of power for graft and blackmail by

Communist officials have turned the people cynical and bitter. There is a popular saying: "Everyone must double his labor to buy radios and bicycles for the cadres."

Cadres as Neighbors

For those planning to escape, the most dangerous neighbors were the families of cadres who lived in houses formerly owned by refugees or expropriated from those who had missed their boats.

On both sides of my short alley, by April 1979 half of the 35 families who had lived there at the time of the Communist takeover four years earlier had fled the country, most of them by boat. Two had used their French nationalities to obtain air passage to France; 14 took the sea route in secret but no one knows how many of them survived. Two families failed in their escape attempts. One of them was able to reoccupy their home because the public officials were on leave; the other returned after three hours to find their home expropriated.

Competition among Party members and cadres for houses left by refugees produced an intelligence force dreaded by those planning to escape or holding attitudes opposed to communism. I avoided new cadre neighbors as much as possible, never invited them to our house, and never accepted invitations to theirs for fear they might use the pretext of friendship to obtain information on my plans. This practice was common throughout South Vietnam. Party members and cadres understood this attitude and avoided unnecessary contact. The "revolutionaries" followed their way of life, and the people followed theirs, with the major exception that in the new regime's fight against the old established order—the issuance of new currency and the elimination of all forms of capitalism—the people lost much of their property to Party members and cadres. Private property had "withered away" or was taken away as happened to my Yanmar motor and in the thousands of similar incidents occurring every day throughout the country.

Our Children

After the Communist takeover of South Vietnam, children in every ward were organized in Children's Vanguard groups. For the first two years the children went to meetings so often they were unable to keep up with their studies. After 1977 they began meeting once a week under the leadership of cadres assigned to work with the Vanguard groups.

At the Vanguard meetings children were asked to talk about their parents, their brothers and sisters, living conditions at home, and what the family had done during the week.

Since our children were young—9 and 10—I had to take precautions to prevent them from innocently giving away our family plans. My daughter caused me no concern. She did not say much and quickly understood my instructions not to talk about family matters. But I had to keep an eye on my son. He was talkative and loved to show off before neighbors by talking about what I had said and done at home. In 1978 when I began moving items out of my house in case our third escape attempt should fail, my son kept asking why I woke up so early in the morning, why I went out to sell household goods late in the evening, and why I had to keep someone as a lookout on the street when I left with goods “to be sold.” His curiosity about my activities was inexhaustible. I explained repeatedly that food was so terribly expensive that to buy enough to eat I had to sell household goods and that I could only sell them at the appropriate times.

Despite my frequent reminders to keep quiet, he remained incorrigible. He was particularly curious about a black-and-white TV set which I had hidden at his grandfather's house. The set was worth a tael of gold, or three years' salary for a 36-dong-a-month public official under the regime. Should my third escape attempt fail, the sale of the set would be a great financial benefit for my fourth try or for meeting daily living expenses.

I told my son I had put the TV set in the ward repair shop and it would not be ready until the Tet lunar new year. This was the date I had set for our departure. Not satisfied with my explanation, he went to the shop on his own to inquire whether the set had been repaired. He did not see it, of course, and I had to say that the repairman had put it in the back room and forgotten about it. I also promised that if the set could not be repaired I would buy him a new color TV so he could enjoy the one-hour color program broadcast every Sunday over the transmitter left by the United States.

Just after we arrived in San Francisco, although I did not have enough money to buy clothes, I persuaded my nephew who had lived here since 1974 to buy us a color TV on a two-year installment plan so I could keep the promise made to my boy a year earlier in Vietnam.

III

The Local Security System

Communist security cadres use the indirect neighborhood investigations discussed earlier more for obtaining information than for specific evidence, but they also make direct inquiries of persons being investigated. At times their approach is under some guise, at times openly brutal.

Communist authorities require no warrant from any court and often make arrests on the basis of vague, circumstantial information. The court system itself is used more for accusations to support political maneuvers than for judging a person guilty or innocent on the basis of evidence debated by attorneys in court procedures. Under the Communist regime there is no advocacy or law profession as in the West because all sentences are passed and executed under the principles of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

For this reason, after the “revolution” most lawyers in South Vietnam became unemployed. If they were fortunate enough to avoid the reeducation camps, arrest, or destruction, they had only one choice for survival: changing their way of life completely and becoming manual laborers. Lawyers were charged with having protected the exploiting and suppressive regimes. Former legislators and advocates of the Republic are considered guilty of enforcing a system of laws that maintained antirevolutionary Southern governments in power and delaying the historic march to socialism.

Hunger Relief and “False Soldiers”

In 1975, the Communist government issued new banknotes to replace the Republic's currency. The replacement rate was one new dong for 500 Republic dong, but the cost of living more than tripled in the process, with some items such as boat motors increasing in price a hundred-fold. The changeover caused extreme economic distress, brought on serious food shortages and even famine. Except for a very few of the former rich who gradually sold off their gold¹ or valuable household goods to obtain food, no one

1. During South Vietnam's long period of economic instability brought on by the war, many people—particularly the wealthy—protected themselves against inflation

had enough to eat. The Communist government, reacting to the desperate situation its policies had created, launched a hunger-relief campaign under the slogan "Let no citizen die of starvation." Flushed with the success of the "revolution," the Communists were anxious to dispel the myth of a blood-bath predicted by American news media and to lessen South Vietnamese fear of Communist brutalities. In effect, however, this flexible policy was designed to facilitate tightening the controls at an opportune moment.

During this period, also, reports of the "Thirtieth Revolutionaries"—opportunists who changed over to the Communist side on April 30, 1975—and other informers led to many imprisonments. Among those affected was my friend Professor Doan Viet Hoat, a University of Miami graduate and once assistant president for management of Van Hanh University. He was arrested because he had taken a firm stand against Communist agitators who had infiltrated the Van Hanh student body under the leadership of Vo Nhu Lanh, a National Liberation Front activist. Under the Party's orders, Vo, who had been a resident of Paris, came to Saigon and registered as a student at Van Hanh. There he conducted student agitation and hunger strikes from 1972 to 1974 and confronted the university administration under Professor Doan. At the time of my escape, Professor Doan had been in jail for almost four years, still not charged with a specific crime.

Many of my arrested friends had struggled for religious freedom and political democracy under the Ngo Dinh Diem family dictatorship and under Nguyen Van Thieu's vacillating government. Most were taken into custody after midnight; but some were arrested en route home in daylight hours.

During this period I managed to remain calm, not upset in the face of these arrests. I had prepared all argument I thought necessary to deal with the security investigators if the occasion should arise. The Communists, however, did not arrest me, but sent agents to my house from time to time to make inquiries.

While the hunger relief campaign was in progress, a group of three "Thirtieth Revolutionaries"—two women and an old man, led by a Northern cadre—came to my house to "relieve hunger." They said they had learned I needed help in feeding "false soldiers" living in my house.

As soon as the group arrived I knew they were posing as humanitarians to make inquiries about my family. Perhaps they had received reports but were unsure whether I was in fact harboring "false soldiers." Actually, I was not. The only possibility might have been my brother, a gentle high-school

by buying up gold, either in the form of gold bars or jewelry. Thanks to this practice, a few could live in relative comfort under the Communist regime while the majority suffered.

art teacher; but he had been denounced by his neighbor and, as a result, was serving a three-year sentence in a reeducation camp in the mountainous plateau of central Vietnam.

After explaining at length the government's humanitarian policy and the Party's determination not to let a single person die of starvation, the leading cadre and one of the two women asked whether I had enough food to feed the three "false soldiers" living in my house. If not, they said, they would subsidize the purchase of rice.

I declared that I was harboring no "false soldiers." Then, looking pointedly at two diamond rings on the fingers of one of the women who was dressed in the simple, short black dress called *ba-ba*, symbolizing the change in women's life after the "revolution," I said: "If I am unable to buy food I will sell my house rather than disturb you and your group."

The woman was abashed by my stare but the group stayed on for half an hour asking questions. On departing, they stood momentarily at the front entrance. Speaking in a rather loud voice, the cadre said to the group, "There were distinct reports that three false soldiers were living here but I have not been able to find them. Maybe we are at the wrong house." Pretending not to hear, I said goodbye and closed the door.

Young Man Shops for Motors

When I began work in 1978 as a gasoline-engine mechanic and salesman at a shop operated by a friend, I was keenly aware, as were all those handling motors, that these machines were subject to seizure at any time since they could be used to power boats for escapes as well as to power small farm tractors and water pumps used in agricultural production, which the Communists sought to dominate. Those engaged in the business were forced to maintain a sharp lookout for security agents. Shops like ours operated on commission (bringing buyers and salesmen together), bought motors and resold them for a profit, ran a repair business as a front for trade in motors, or combined all these operations. Almost all motors being traded were old but newly repaired and renovated for sale.

Late one afternoon, I had just finished cleaning up an old 7.5 horsepower Yanmar motor, when a well-dressed young man about 25 years old rode up on a Lambretta scooter and asked the price of the machine, saying he wanted to buy it for his gardening brother. By his looks, clothes, gestures, and manner of speaking, he seemed to be an ordinary customer. I told him I was just a repairman, and if he wanted to buy the motor, I could ask the owner. He promised to bring his brother to see me the next day and drove off. As he left, a doubt crossed my mind. Then, as I watched, he

stopped at another shop a short distance away, and I presumed that there, too, he was inquiring about the price of motors.

When the young man did not return the following morning, I went to the other shop he had visited and learned that our potential customer was an area commercial cadre who had been around several times previously to inquire about the price of motors. With that information I hurried to hide my motor in a different house. Later, after my misfortune with the previously mentioned Yanmar motor as the result of a neighbor's denunciation, I sold this one at a small loss to a registered repair shop and quit working as a machinist. This business had its benefits, but they were outweighed by the pressure I felt after this episode—the pressure exerted by the Communists to eliminate private business. The Communists do not want individuals to conduct business they consider exploitative and nonproductive. They say that, since trading—transferring merchandise from one owner to another—is not production, it is not an important link in the production process. They want everyone to produce more and more material wealth and not to serve as profit-making middlemen.

For these reasons the Communists usually talked about “exchanging” (not trading) merchandise, and took drastic measures to destroy private trading activities. With the two currency reforms before 1978, the elimination of small-shop owners, the gradual destruction of commercial real-estate businesses, and the step-by-step agricultural reforms between 1975 and 1979, private enterprise completely disintegrated. As a result, merchants unable to conduct their businesses any longer were resigned to converting their gold into a trip across the Pacific.

The Communist government used security agents throughout the country to conduct its campaign against private enterprise. The scooter rider who asked the price of my motor was just one of them. Trade for profit has now become the exclusive prerogative of the Vietnamese Communist government, the sole commercial agent in the country. Individuals can conduct business only on isolated occasions, on the sly, and at a very low level.

English Classes

In July, 1978, after giving up the motor sales and repair business, I decided that teaching classes in English and French at my house would be the best means to earn enough money to support my family and still allow myself enough free time to develop my escape plans. With a full time job I could pretend to be a good Communist citizen and keep the security agents from watching me too closely. Still, I anticipated official interference in such an apparently innocent activity.

After the “revolution” the Party and government had taken over control of education and had decreed that English, French, and other foreign languages were to be taught in high schools and universities solely for the purpose of helping students understand Communist tracts, not for teaching them how to speak. In smaller cities, the Party commissariats prohibited high-school students from studying English and French.

Several months after the takeover of South Vietnam, the authorities initiated Russian classes for intellectuals. The first class was organized by the Ministry of Justice of the Provisional Revolutionary Government for a group of lawyers and for professors of law, economics, and political science, mainly of the Saigon University Law School. Although the study of Russian was encouraged in high schools and universities, only a handful of university students took it as a second language, with most preferring to continue the study of English or French. Spoken Chinese was not taught officially at any level.

The students of Russian were dissatisfied with the competence of their North Vietnamese teachers. As I learned from these students, many North Vietnamese had studied Russian in the Soviet Union with the help of interpreters. After graduation they were unable to carry on even simple conversations in Russian. With the exception of a few old scholars who had studied French before 1954, most “socialist intellectuals” spoke no foreign language.

A number of foreigners, including some Americans, were stranded in Saigon after the Communist takeover, but no Vietnamese dared speak to them on the streets. On one occasion a foreigner asked directions in English of a woman professor. As she was answering, a secret agent came up and told her “not to say anything harmful to the Fatherland.” She reacted immediately, asking why he thought she would say something harmful. The agent, who understood no English, instead of answering merely insisted that she should not speak a foreign language on the street.

With the growing popularity of the escape route by sea, more and more people sought to learn conversational English to be able to talk to sailors on ships they might encounter in international waters. However, getting books to study was a problem. Many English textbooks printed before 1975 had been burned or destroyed after the takeover. As increasing numbers of people sought to study English, the few remaining books in the flea markets disappeared at unbelievably high prices.

Similarly, when the Communist government determined to rid itself of the troublesome ethnic Chinese population and let it be known that they could register to “go abroad officially” (this will be discussed further in chapters IV and XII), would-be Vietnamese refugees hoping to go abroad acquired falsified papers certifying them as Chinese and began to study

Cantonese. The few available texts, originally printed in small quantities and not easily reprinted because of strict and hostile censorship, were rapidly snapped up. Taking advantage of the black-market demand, several Chinese merchants in Cholon mimeographed books on conversational Cantonese and sold them at cutthroat prices. I had to pay 15 dong for a text that had originally sold for 20 cents, a 7,500 percent increase.

Many well-to-do families, Vietnamese and Chinese, hired teachers to give English-conversation classes in their homes and paid four to six dong per hour tuition. Unless officially approved, this activity was illegal; but since getting approval was not easy, many teachers readily risked punishment to obtain the extra income. Even so prohibitions against studying of a foreign language were not as strict in Saigon as they were in the smaller cities of Central Vietnam where anyone with an interest in any foreign language except Russian, for whom there were few teachers, was considered an imperialist agent.

The idea of teaching English came to me when I was faced with the prospect of having my children at home for summer vacation with nothing to do for three months. I thought it would be better for them to use the time studying English so they would be prepared for life in the United States if we were able to get there. Then it occurred to me that, being unemployed, I might as well teach other children at the same time. I arranged with the cluster chief to inquire at the ward people's committee what formalities were needed to obtain permission for the classes.

With this information in hand I submitted my application to the information and cultural commissioner. It stated the number of classes I intended to give, the number of students in each class, class hours and days of the week, starting and closing dates, and a detailed explanation of my political responsibilities in each class.

Previously, in 1978, the ward people's committee had refused me permission to establish a small cassava flour mill in my house. This time, in the words of the young information and cultural commissioner, the ward committee had accepted my application "so that I could earn a living;" but he also noted that my classes would be the only ones in the ward with official permission. I could expect to be watched.

After getting the permit I hung up a sign announcing the opening of basic, elementary, and intermediate English and French. Since few registered for French I dropped French and concentrated on English. I opened four classes with a total of 30 paying students. Basic English: a class of fourteen students 12 to 14 years old including my own two children, both under 10; elementary: a class of ten high-school students and two adults; intermediate: a class of four university students; and a class for two 40-year-old teachers.

I set the school fee at 40 dong per month for each class regardless of the number of students; this enabled me to earn a higher income than the average 100 dong monthly salary paid university professors. The students decided among themselves how many could be admitted to each class and how much each would pay. The adults and university students in the basic and intermediate English classes wanted to keep the classes small to allow greater time for oral practice.

Later I learned that out of the thirty students ten were preparing to escape. Each of these told me they would like to take the same boat as I did, if I had a plan. In private conversations with five of them I discussed the conditions under which I would participate and share the costs. Some already had boats awaiting an opportune time for departure; some asked me to organize the trip. All believed I could in some way help them flee abroad. For me, however, these plans were no more than alternates in case my other plan should fail or be postponed too long.

One morning in September 1978 as I was teaching the elementary class for adults, a young woman asked to join. She told me she had a brother living in the United States. I was surprised at her forthrightness. Under the Communist regime no person had ever told me anything of that nature on first encounter. To prevent any further inquiries into my personal attitudes I told her my classes were all full.

Ten days later I learned she was an information and cultural cadre from a different ward but in the same district as mine.

At a Friend's House

Early in 1979, during the Tet celebration, I went to extend New Year's greetings to my friend, Professor Hoang Van Giau, who lived in a ward near mine. Hoang had spent two years in prison because of articles he published before 1975 and because, as a student activist and faculty member at Hue University, he had supported the eviction of pro-Communist students from the Quang Duc Buddhist Student Center of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. The leader of the Center, the Venerable Thich Thien Minh, was killed in prison by the Communists in 1978.

After his imprisonment Giau became an electrician's apprentice in a shop that belonged to his brother-in-law. From time to time he went out on repair assignments to Vung Tau, a resort city on the Pacific coast most used as a point of departure by Saigon escapees and therefore most closely watched by security agents. Giau had let me know he would flee by sea as soon as possible.

Giau and I usually avoided visiting each other to preclude investigation by local security cadres. Even so, the area security cadre in Giau's cluster saw him frequently and tried to pressure him into going to a "new economic zone" for "self-construction." Giau told the cadre he would rather face another imprisonment than leave Saigon. The cadre took no specific action but continued to visit Giau frequently at his home.

On that lunar New Year's Day we were discussing current events while nibbling peanuts and sipping homemade fruit-peel wine, the only food and beverage he could offer friends after four years under the Communist regime. Suddenly in walked the area security cadre, the same man who had tried to force Giau into the "new economic zone." Now he was coming to wish Giau and his family a Happy New Year. At sight of him we shifted from our political conversation to gossip about health.

After sitting with us for twenty minutes and realizing that our lively conversation concerned nothing but our aches and pains, the cadre stood up, uttered some well-wishing phrases, and left.

A month later I took the professor some sociology books I had promised to lend him at the time of my Tet visit. His wife, clearly flustered at my presence, said Giau had gone to Vung Tau on a work assignment. I deduced that either Professor Giau was putting his escape plans put into action or his wife was afraid the area security cadre might think Giau and I were conspiring to escape. Leaving the books and speaking loudly enough for his neighbors to hear, I commented about a couple of chickens in the front yard, then got on my bicycle, and rode away. I never learned whether Professor Giau and his family escaped.

A Party Official's View

The Party maintains surveillance not only over ordinary citizens but also over its own members and cadres regardless of their position in the Party or the government hierarchy. One example was Pham Loi (not his real name), a member of the Central Party Committee, and brother-in-law of my wife's father.

In 1977 Pham visited places in the South where he had conducted secret Party activities during the anti-French revolution. He seemed interested in seeing prisons where he had been locked up before 1954.

In the course of his trip he visited my wife's father and brought along small gifts from his wife to our extended family. At our family dinners I told him about the miseries of the people following the "success" of the "revolution," about the inflated prices and starvation wages for workers, about daily oppression by security cadres, and about deceitful government

policies at every local level. I wanted him to realize that the Party's political and economic policies could not reconstruct our war-torn nation and that we needed better management and leadership.

His answers did not surprise me: All the mentioned difficulties, he said, were inevitable during the period of transition to socialism and were well known to the Party in advance. After the period of transition, the nation would move toward socialism, then toward communism into which the U.S.S.R. is advancing, and the people would be happy. He was simply repeating what the cadres were saying in the economic and political sessions I had attended for two and a half of the first three years of the Communist regime and by the propaganda cadres over all broadcasting systems every day.

Speaking from his experience in the North, he said intellectuals like myself would eventually be employed because the Party and government always esteemed intellectuals who were one of the three, though least important, constituent elements needed to construct socialism. Without intellectuals there would be no socialism. He then encouraged me to apply for teaching English because the Party and government needed teachers of English too.

Whenever this highly placed Party member left his luxurious Saigon government hotel to make even a short visit, he had to give the hotel-management office a detailed itinerary with exact times of the places and persons he planned to visit and when he would return. When I said this formality was a restraint on freedom of movement like that parents place on their children, Pham seemed to consider it normal and necessary so that the "security comrades" could look out for his safety. His reports of each movement indicated that even highly placed Party members and cadres are subject to security control by suspicious Politburo leaders who do not even trust their Central Party comrades, much less those at the middle and lower level.

IV

Pressure Techniques

In Communist ideology, individualism is a negative characteristic, denounced in the newspapers, on the radio and television networks, in speeches, in public meetings, and in all daily cultural, educational, and propaganda activities. The rationale is that a person who thinks of himself first will not make the sacrifices necessary for the common good. Individualism is considered as the main source of crimes; and crimes committed every day in capitalist societies, especially in the United States, are cited in support of the notion that individualism is an evil. The mode of life under communism is the collectivized society.

Yet, in this collectivized society, the people must worship such individuals as Ho Chi Minh in a manner that outdoes all individualism. Communist theory maintains that if this Ho Chi Minh had never existed, other Ho Chi Minhs would have emerged to lead the Vietnamese revolution. But if this is so, why is it necessary to worship the individual Ho Chi Minh? Why, at a time when the North Vietnamese people were impoverished by a prolonged war, did the Communists coerce them into building a tomb for Ho Chi Minh more costly than any imperialist tomb built during the country's feudal history?

No Party member will answer these questions. The subject is taboo.

The cult of the individual among Communist leaders has become so obsessive that it has metamorphosed into ridiculous actions by Party members and cadres. A colleague at Van Hanh University, Professor Tran, once invited his uncle, a middle-level cadre, to his home for dinner. During the meal several members of the household obliquely criticized Ho Chi Minh's leadership. The uncle got very angry. "Ho Chi Minh spent his whole life working for the country," he declared, "so why should he be criticized?" He was furious, banged his chopsticks on the table, and refused to finish the meal.

While the Communists try to destroy individualism, they continue to build and strengthen collective life, which turns men into primitive human herds. Each person, forced to join people's associations, agricultural

cooperatives, administrative units, and state-operated industrial companies, is influenced and controlled by these organizations. They function in accordance with Party policies, but the policies change with the political needs of each historical period, and policies in one period may be contradictory to those in another. In these policy shifts, the collective organizations are mobilized in a spasmodic fashion. In the Communist hierarchy those who wield power manipulate their molded collectivities in zig-zag fashion to maintain tight control over the persons in them.

The Communists have been highly successful in the use of collective pressure techniques.

These techniques, whether moderate or violent, aim at different objectives in varying political situations. The method of criticism and self-criticism is one of the moderate techniques applied in daily life. In extreme cases Communists do not hesitate to take violent measures, in accordance with class-struggle dogma, to suppress individuals. The 1956 agricultural reform in Ho Chi Minh's native village in North Vietnam is an example.

Since taking over South Vietnam, the Communists have confined themselves to using moderate collective-pressure techniques. They wanted to discredit American claims that after the withdrawal of U.S. troops the Communists would start a blood bath; they wanted to strengthen racial relationships between the people of North and South Vietnam; they wished to strengthen family ties between South Vietnamese members of the National Liberation Front and their relatives; they endeavored to calm South Vietnamese fears of Communist cruelties, especially among those who contributed their energies and property toward the defeat of American troops and the regimes of the Republic; and they wanted to arouse world sympathy, necessary for national reconstruction. The following pages illustrate how the Communists have used moderate collective pressure measures in every-day situations to bring persons under control. The first example refers to Van Hanh University, the second to a Chinese family in my ward, and the third to children's activities.

A Letter of Reprimand

Several months after the Communist takeover of Saigon, Van Hanh University was still under the administrative direction of its Republic-era management board, and I was still director of academic affairs. My responsibilities included the coordination of faculty and student relations, and the maintenance of curricula vitae and academic records.

One day the president handed me a letter from the highway security office of the nearby city of Bien Hoa. The letter asked the "leading comrades of the university" to criticize a woman professor who, on her way home, had had an argument with the "security comrades" in charge of highway control.

At that time the security system had not yet been developed at the ward level. Hence, the security cadres could not yet control every detail of the people's daily lives. Meanwhile, the South Vietnamese, especially those in Saigon, still maintained their democratic habits of questioning any official captiousness.

Under the regimes of the South Vietnamese Republic, as elsewhere around the world, drivers who violated traffic rules could be fined. If a driver disagreed with the traffic official he could take the case to court. Under the Communist regime things are different. Here the method of "organic relationship" is applied to censure the evildoer. According to this concept, all things in the world are, in some manner, related organically. As a result, for the Communists, politics affects every phase of human life, including pure mathematics, traffic violations, and everything else. The punishment for the woman professor was to be not a fine but humiliation from the institution with which she was affiliated. The Bien Hoa security office letter to Van Hanh University demanded that the president criticize or reprimand ("educate" or "remold") the professor who had made the "mistake." (The letter was futile, because at that time the university was not yet under the management of an educational member of the Party; this, the highway security office evidently had overlooked.) Under the Communist regime it is common to see a highly educated scholar being "educated" by a stupid security cadre or a foolish Party member in public meetings.

Before moving on to the second example of collective pressure, I wish to elaborate on this system of "organic relationship" and also illustrate it by showing how it worked in the construction industry.

The Communist party is organized in a pyramidal fashion, whereby lower echelons must submit to higher ones, and all committees and branches at horizontal levels carry out definite tasks under the centralized leadership of the leading Party member or cadre who heads an institution. Many of these consider themselves kings in their own realm. These new kings vie with each other for prestige and power.

On the other hand, all workers and officials in a particular institution are bound to that institution's management for many of the physical, social, and spiritual needs of their daily lives. For example, when an official must move from one location to another to carry out his work assignment, the

institution chief, instead of the local security office, will issue the travel permit. The official's food is supplied by his institution. Although he may obtain the same quantity at his residential grocery store, he usually prefers to request his provisions through his institution for the sake of convenience and occasional permission to buy extra amounts. An ordinary citizen cannot get such special favors.

Whenever an institutional member commits an act considered inappropriate to socialist morality, even outside office hours, he will be criticized by his Communist chief much as a parent will reproach a child for some wrongdoing. Censures usually take place in front of his colleagues.

In another area, the Communist chief draws up a list of workers and officials of military-service age to be drafted for the army. The leading Party member of an institution is also responsible for the conduct of his subordinates both during and after office hours.

Thus, within the institution it is the Communist chief who takes the initiative in all activities, from correcting social faults to recruiting for military service.

Being a worker or an official of a Communist institution amounts to devoting one's entire time to it. I did not apply for work in an office because I wanted to avoid being controlled by the chief and his subordinates and to have some freedom to work on my escape plans.

While a member of an institution is controlled by the security section of the institutional commissariat where he works, he is also controlled by his residential area security office; but the latter's authority is superior and institution security chiefs cannot intervene in defense of their subordinates.

Regardless of how seriously Communists violate human rights, they place the security of their government and control of citizens above all other considerations. National economic reconstruction, social problems, education, and many other problems confronting them are secondary. The seizure, maintenance, and strengthening of power by whatever means necessary is the ultimate Communist purpose even if it results in the slaughter of their own countrymen. They state explicitly that the seizure of power is not the end of the revolution. On the contrary, it is said to be the beginning. After they have attained power they intend to carry out two more phases of the revolution: the Socialist phase and the Communist phase. During the Socialist phase nearly all established values are destroyed, and new ones established. Millions of lives have been sacrificed in the process.

Vietnamese patriots who fought on the Communist side for liberation of the country from French and against the Republic governments in the South, or stayed after April 1975 with the hope of giving an enthusiastic hand to reconstructing the war-torn country, now find their lives caught up in Communist oppression because they were unable to distinguish patriotism

from communism. Even now the Party still uses the slogan “Loving the Country Is Loving Socialism.”

The Communists can never trust any non-Communists. During the struggle for power, for tactical purposes and to attain ultimate victory, Communists did not hesitate to accept anyone who agreed with their strategies, including enemies who wanted to cooperate with them for their own reasons.

Once in power, however, the Communists purged or destroyed any collaborators who did not submit to them. The organization that carried out the purge or destruction of these people was—and still is—the security branch.

When the security office finds it necessary to arrest a suspected citizen, its security cadres do the job. If the citizen is a worker or official of an institution, they inform the director concerned about the incident. If the suspect has moved to another city, they will either ask the security cadres of that locality to arrest and return him or arrest and hold him so they can send for him; or they will send agents to arrest and return him with or without the knowledge of agents in that locality.

In both situations a power conflict between the security authorities of the two localities usually develops. This is one reason why the Communists do not want people to move around but to remain bound to a small residential area; such confinement facilitates daily control by security authorities.

If a worker or official commits what is considered to be a mistake in an institution other than his own, the security office or director of that institution may write to the person's institutional director and ask that he be criticized or reprimanded before the assembled colleagues as a method of “educating” and “remolding” him. The same procedure is followed between ward security offices.

After the “revolution” construction companies in South Vietnam usually had two kinds of workers: “permanent” and by job. The new government lacked qualified cadres to take charge of the companies to be nationalized, hence allowed them to continue operation temporarily under their owners. The permanent employees stayed with the company; job workers were hired for the task at hand and then released to seek work with other companies. Job workers were in the majority after liberation, as were private construction companies.

Most construction camps were far from the cities: the Tong Nhat Railroad reconstruction camps were along the rail line which ran from Hanoi, through deserted villages, down the long Vietnamese coast to Saigon. (The company for which I was administrative office chief in 1976 was responsible for the section in Nghia Binh Province in Central Vietnam.) The “new economic zone” construction camps were established in areas so barren that sweet potatoes and cassavas would not grow; and land-clearance camps were

situated in thick forests still full of mines buried by the Viet Cong during the war.

Because the work camps were so distant from the cities, the companies gave each worker a certificate enabling him to obtain an absence permit from his residential security office and to prove his presence to his work camp commanding committee and security office. This, together with his employee card and food certificate, permitted him to buy extra food for heavy labor.

If a worker left his company, for a new job or to return home, he had to turn in all papers, including those which had expired. If for some reason he did not, his former company could ask the individual's local security office to enforce compliance. Since local security cadres control everyone living in their small wards, once they go to a worker's house to inform him of his company's request, he has no choice but to obey.

Chinese "Going Abroad Officially"

We are now ready for our second example of how collective pressure is applied to control, coerce, and even destroy an individual.

In 1978 relations between China and Vietnam deteriorated. China denounced the Vietnamese government for its mistreatment of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and ordered two ships to Vietnamese territorial waters to repatriate the "victims." One went to Haiphong and the other to Ho Chi Minh City.

In North Vietnam, a number of ethnic Chinese had already crossed over into China. Others were blocked at the frontier, where bloody conflicts raged between border guards of the two countries.

During this period I was in touch with Chan Hung, a Chinese in Cholon, who was helping me organize my escape. His family's attitude toward the Chinese offer of repatriation was clear, and it was the same as that of most other Chinese families in the South. Virtually none of them wanted to trade one kind of communism, in Vietnam, for another kind, in China. This was especially true of those with property. The Sino-Vietnamese had learned a bitter lesson from Communist socialization of their property, from the destruction of the economic and commercial system the Chinese had built up in years in Vietnam. They knew there was no way for them to conduct their business in the People's Republic of China.

Since the Chinese government seemed to be making no special effort to evacuate the Sino-Vietnamese population aboard the ships, people began to doubt China's sincerity. Some Chinese merchants in Cholon consulted me on this matter. I warned them that if they went aboard those two ships

they would have no hope of going to the United States, to Australia, to Canada, or any other non-Communist country to continue their business. Most of the Chinese were realistic. They believed that if the Chinese government were sincere in wanting to take the ethnic Chinese home, it could do something more practical than sending just two ships to transport more than a million Chinese residents out of Vietnam.

When the two ships returned empty to China, after having been anchored off the Vietnamese coast for a month, the Chinese in Vietnam were convinced: China had sent the ships solely as a propaganda move against the Vietnamese government; the only way to escape the Communist regime, to continue doing business in their accustomed manner was to pay ten taels of gold per adult and five per child so they could be permitted to take a boat and "go abroad officially." The Communists permitted them to do so for three reasons: To avoid a concentration of Chinese dissenters trying to get out of Vietnam on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier where hostilities had already begun; to relieve internal pressure brought on by the confiscation of Chinese-owned businesses; and to collect gold.

The Chinese were happy to pay that gold, not miserably coerced to do so as I was told when I arrived in the United States. They were much luckier than thousands of Vietnamese who had lost all their property to security agents but still remained in jails for years.

Before the "registration for going abroad officially" began, there were a few Chinese in Cholon who did encourage their children, especially the young men, to use every possible means to go North and join groups crossing the border. Perhaps a few of these young people truly wished to return to the homeland they had heard about but not seen; but the Chinese I talked with in Cholon said they wanted their children to enter China merely as a way to get to Hong Kong, which, at that time, had a rather casual border control. This practice ceased after Vietnam began allowing ethnic Chinese to "go abroad officially."

The "going abroad officially" gimmick provided an official means for the Vietnamese Communist "revolutionaries" to obtain bribes in the form of gold, the bluntest ever in Vietnamese history. Those who benefited most were the high-ranking Party and government officials who dealt most closely with the Chinese merchant classes. They were those responsible for security and the management of sea-products offices, and industrial and commercial reconstruction offices.

The Chinese leaders in Cholon held an all-day consultation among themselves on the offer to "go abroad officially" and then established an organization to deal with the Communist authorities who were prepared to make illegal profits legally, including those who issued false papers such as identification cards, election cards, and birth certificates. I myself paid a tael

of gold for these false papers, a price equal to five years' salary for a government official in 1978.

The only recourse available to those ethnic Chinese who were too poor, who had no gold to pay for "going abroad officially," however, was to submit an application through their local people's committee and wait for official permission to go to China.

The poor Chinese calculated their chances very carefully before taking this step: The Communist government of Vietnam had told them that ethnic Chinese were free to apply for permission to go to the People's Republic of China. This seemingly favorable statement was reinforced by public-opinion pressure from China and around the world. Thus, they did not fear for their physical security and were not afraid of being taken into custody. They were not dangerous to the newly established order. If they had been, the local security cadres would certainly have jailed them, even though the jails were already so full of Vietnamese prisoners that Communist authorities were using facilities left by the American troops and homes of Vietnamese refugees as houses of detention.

Whether they stayed in Vietnam or went to China, they would be poor either way. By registering to go to China they would not only demonstrate their Chinese patriotism but might also have opportunities for a new life. Since they were still poor after two or three generations in Vietnam, sometimes longer, they might even have a better life in China.

They could not hope for a better life under the Communist regime of Vietnam because the Vietnamese themselves were becoming increasingly poor after "liberation." By registering to go to China the ethnic Chinese would also have a chance to meet their relatives or at least see the tombs of their ancestors they had talked about so long. Besides, the drastic political changes in China following Mao Zedong's death and the overthrow of the Gang of Four in which Deng Xiaoping had played a crucial role had given them new hope.

Chan Hung, the head of the Chinese family in Cholon, had compared Deng with one of the three founding mandarins of the Han dynasty. Even so, his son told me that if it were a choice between China and Vietnam, he would rather stay because by staying his extended family could keep their large house and property, including their gold, diamonds, and American dollars. The entire family's choice, however, was to go to Australia to continue their rubber-industry enterprise.

The judgments of the Cholon residents paralleled those of the two Cantonese families who lived on my alley in Phu Nhuan District. Their children, two girls named Doong and Be, were my daughter's friends. When the Communists first established the city people's cluster system, these two families belonged to my cluster.

Doong and Be were third-generation Cantonese and were almost completely "Vietnamized." They could speak Cantonese but could not read or write it. Their families shared a small duplex built of inferior wood, with a corrugated steel roof. There were seven members in Doong's family, including herself, and eight in Be's. Occasionally my family and others in our alley commissioned the children to make purchases at the ward food store and gave them tips.

When the government announced that it would accept applications from ethnic Chinese to go the People's Republic of China, both families submitted theirs at the ward people's committee office.

The officials in my ward did not wish to see this happen in their jurisdiction. They feared it might encourage others to apply, and they wanted to demonstrate to higher echelons and to the public that none of the ward's inhabitants wanted to go to China. But they could not refuse to accept the applications. They began to bring pressure on the two families: they ordered leading members of the people's organizations in the ward, and, especially, the talkative female security deputy of my cluster, to take turns visiting these two Cantonese families on different days and encourage them to withdraw their applications "voluntarily."

First the leading members, acting as ordinary citizens, called on the two families; then they began mobilizing neighborhood sentiment among long-time residents to dissuade them from leaving. Next came the information and cultural cadres, who were in daily touch with the ward people, to do the same thing. No uniformed security cadre participated in the campaign. The garrulous female security deputy, who was also a secret agent, was ordered to play her role as a citizen and not in uniform.

Both Cantonese families refused to withdraw their applications. Doong's older sister came to my house to tell me of the collective pressure that had been mobilized against her family and asked me to teach her English. She hoped to live in Hong Kong or Taiwan someday. She had no money to pay my regular fees, so she proposed to teach me Cantonese in exchange for the English lessons. Realizing that her proposal might jeopardize my own plans for escape, I reluctantly declined. If the security cadres learned I was studying Cantonese, they would conclude I was cooperating with the Chinese dissidents and preparing to disguise myself as a Chinese to take a boat.

At the time of my escape the security deputy of my cluster was still "visiting" these two Cantonese families.

Children's Team Activities

Collective pressure is applied also on children—our third example.

After taking over South Vietnam the Communists began forming children's organizations to train the young in accordance with socialist education policies. Three age categories were established: from 6 to 9 years, the so-called Children's Vanguard teams; from 10 to 15 years, the Youth teams; and from 16, the teams for Young Men and Women.

The weak point in this system was the shortage of cadres to take charge of children. In Saigon, to meet the need, the Ho Chi Minh City Commissariat transformed the Quang Duc cultural center of the Unified Buddhist Church into a training center for cadres in charge of children.

The team activities go on all year: nine months at the schools while they are in session, and three months in the wards during the summer. At the end of June the schools transfer their students to the ward cadres in charge of children; at the end of September the cadres return them to the schools.

In principle, the children of each ward are grouped into 10 branches of 48 children each. Each branch is divided into 4 sections of 12 children; boys and girls are not separated. In my own ward, youth and children's activities took place on the asphalt road in front of our house, which was the only place in the neighborhood large enough and clean enough for them.

Between April 1975 and the end of 1977 children's participation in the teams was based on the principle of discrimination between Party and people. Deciding factors were family political history and the child's performance in school. There were four groupings:

All children of Party members and cadres were admitted, regardless of their performance in school; children of "revolutionary families" or families which "followed the revolution" were admitted providing they were doing well in school; children with poor school records were not admitted, even though their families were "revolutionary" or had "followed the revolution;" children of "false soldiers," of "false authorities," and of reeducated persons were excluded.

Communists are excessively proud of their organizations and think they are giving special favors when non-Party members are admitted into such associations, as though they were receiving grace from God.

Many parents of non-Party children recognized this policy of Party/people discrimination and refused to have the youngsters join the teams. Many of the better students considered the activities of the teams as a waste of time. As a result, the Vanguard children's teams did not have enough members.

To remedy the situation, beginning in 1978, the Communists relaxed their restrictive policy and began to admit non-Party children into the Vanguard teams. But the parents of non-Party children were uninterested in having their children join teams while they lacked food, clothing, and other necessities.

Faced with this situation, the Communists employed their familiar collective pressure tactics to mobilize the children under their control: They induced Vanguard team members to inveigle their young neighbors to join the teams. In addition, to prevent members from deserting the teams during the summer months they made summer-activity certificates, issued by ward cadres in charge of children, a requirement for reentering school in the new academic year and threatened to withhold these certificates unless the children met prescribed levels of participation; team leaders were required to maintain attendance records.

The Communists introduced methods of criticism and self-criticism to make the children control each other. Thus children criticized teammates for failure to attend meetings frequently enough; for failing to maintain proper formation while standing in line; for removing the red scarves (which designated them as Vanguard team members) from around their necks on the way home from school; and for not participating in labor assignments—school gardening for boys, sweeping the playground for girls, and sweeping ward streets on Sunday mornings for both.

Girls tended to criticize boys and vice versa; but team members were reluctant to indulge in socialist self-criticism.

The criticism procedures worked adequately during the school months when teachers acted as arbitrators; but during the summer, because of the lack of supervisory cadres for the ward summer activities, the children criticized and judged each other without guidance. As a result, they frequently wound up quarreling. Since criticism and self-criticism was a required part of every meeting, there was always a quarrel at the end. Children being children, once a quarrel began the team leaders lost control, and the Communist discipline of “lower echelons having to submit to higher ones” fell apart.

The Communists’ most impressive tactic for mobilizing collective pressure in strengthening Vanguard teams, especially in the wards during the summer months, was using the children to coerce each other into attending meetings for gymnastics. Children’s participation in these meetings was not mandatory during vacation periods, but the authorities used group pressure to get them to attend anyway. Members who lived close to each other were made mutually responsible for getting to the meetings; members who lived far away from their meeting place were the responsibility of the sectional team leader or his deputy. If, for some reason, such as homework or just laziness, a member did not respond to the “encouragement” of his

neighbor, the sectional team deputy or leader would "invite" him in person. This system affected not only the children, but the daily life of all people in the ward every Sunday morning and throughout the summer.

All government workers and officials must work six days a week, from 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. In principle, they have Sunday off. In reality, the authorities at the ward, district, city, or central level frequently mobilize them for political or social tasks. Life under the Communist regime is extremely difficult, and many must work seven days a week, 362 days a year, taking off only the first three days of the lunar new year, the Tet holidays. Still, they do not have enough food for themselves and their families.

Sunday is the only day on which adults can relax, get up late in the morning, or have some free time after six long days of "laboring self-forgetfully" according to Communist labor policy.

During the nine-month academic year, children must attend team meetings every Thursday afternoon from 3 to 5; but during the summer they attend on Thursday and Saturday evenings from 7 to 8 and on Sunday mornings from 7 to 8, after gymnastics which takes place between 5 and 6.

Obviously, children assigned to "encourage" their neighbors to get ready for gymnastics had to get up before 5 A.M. In many wards involved in the so-called labor-emulation movement, children had to be out of their homes before 4:30 every morning!

Children assigned to corral others for daily gymnastics would knock at the door or ring the doorbell; this woke up not only the child being called but also the rest of the family.

Others would stand outside the door and in a high, chanting voice call out the friend's name: "Kim, time for gymnastics, wake up. Hurry up, Kim!"

If the child being summoned did not come out, the caller would repeat his wake-up call even louder and in higher tones. If this still didn't work the caller would get angry and begin cursing loudly. This would arouse the whole neighborhood and bring a flurry of abusive epithets from the entire street.

My own two children usually woke themselves up before 5 A.M. and went out for physical culture on the road in front of our house. My daughter joined the Vanguard team a year after the "revolution," my son two years later. During their first several weeks in the teams, Party or cadre members' children came to my door and called them loudly. Then my children took pity on their father and told the other children to stop calling so as not to disturb me early in the morning. Nevertheless, the children continued to call members, in their high voices, at other neighborhood houses from 4 to 5 every morning throughout the summer months.

Even if the neighbors were not aroused by the children's noisy calls, no one in the ward could sleep late. The ward information cultural committee used its loudspeaker system to make sure of that. At 4 A.M. the committee turned on its loudspeakers to "remind" the children and youths to get up and do their gymnastics. The committee's "reminder" applied only to the young people, not to the adults who were supposed to be left alone to continue their morning sleep. This exception was designed to prevent the adults from protesting. But the loudspeakers were indiscriminate; there were so many of them placed strategically throughout the ward, and the cadres turned the volume up so high, that no one, young or old, could sleep through the din. Many times I heard the overlapping voices from loudspeakers in my own ward and in neighboring wards at the same time.

Every time the loudspeakers began the blare, our new-born son would cry out from his morning slumber, and I would find myself walking the floor with him in my arms trying to get him back to sleep.

The loudspeakers continued their "reminding" at short intervals until 5 A.M. and then began transmitting the morning gymnastics program from the Ho Chi Minh City radio station, at even greater volume. The ward rang to the ear-splitting sound of the radio-station trainer as he counted "4-3-2-1, 4-3-2-2, 4-3-2-3" to the accompaniment of martial music, which he speeded up or slowed down to direct the physical movements.

Many nights as I lay awake thinking about the drastic changes that had come over my country in my life and of the lack of hope for a better future, I felt I would never get a decent night's sleep. Then, almost before I knew it, I would be awakened by those monstrous loudspeakers, one of which hung, its big mouth agape, from a roof only five meters from my bedroom.

Because it was still too early to get out of bed I would try to go back to sleep. As I dozed I could hear, vaguely, the count "4-3-2-1, 4-3-2-2, 4-3-2-3" resounding in my mind. Eventually, when completely awake, I would usually have a headache. I endured this uncomfortable situation for four years until my escape. For those who remain, the misery continues.

V

Bus Ride to Dalat

The high-school curriculum in my native city of Dalat was limited, so in 1958 my family sent me to Saigon for senior high school. From that time until 1979 my life was tied to that warm, tree-shaded city. My mother and the rest of my family stayed in Dalat, but their lives became very unstable after the Communist takeover.

It is only 195 miles by highway from Saigon to Dalat but after the takeover in 1975 my mother and I were unable to exchange visits more than once a year, except for 1977, when I went to Dalat to inform my mother of my sister's escape. Apart from the time, effort, and expense of travel arrangements, the reason for the infrequency of my visits was the severe restrictions the regime places on a person leaving his residential area.

After April 1975 no "ordinary" citizen was allowed to travel domestically by air. In 1977 the government declared that the people could use airlines, but it is impossible to buy tickets. They are reserved for Party members, cadres, and government officials. The public is not even allowed to enter Tan Son Nhut airport. My house was in the Phu Nhuan district, a third of a mile from the airport gate. I frequently bicycled along the edge of that vast field, but, in contrast to the bustling scene before 1975, I seldom saw civil airplanes on the field or in the tropical blue sky.

Travel by private car practically does not exist. During the first two years of the regime some Saigon residents continued to drive their cars, although they were concerned about being criticized for having private property. But as gasoline became ever more expensive, fewer and fewer Saigon people used their cars. The official price was 5.68 dong per gallon, but on the open (that is, black) market in early 1979 it was selling for 30 dong per gallon.¹ Most of the available black market supply came from government and Party members who, if they owned motorcycles, were allowed six to eight liters a month, to which they added the gasoline they could steal.

1. In 1979, \$1 US = 2.70 dong; 1 gallon official = \$2.10; 1 gallon blackmarket = \$11.11.

The high price of fuel forced people to turn from automobiles and motorcycles to bicycles, but it is almost impossible to exchange a car for a good, imported bicycle. The high price of gasoline made travel between cities dependent on buses, which decreased in numbers because of the lack of spare parts and replacement tires. In any case, the only way for me to visit my mother was by bus.

Restrictions on Individual Movement

Freedom of individual movement does not exist today in Vietnam. No one can casually accept an invitation by a friend or relative to visit and stay overnight, be it across the street, the other side of town, or in another city or province. To do so he must first get official permission to be away from home, and that permission does not come easily, especially if he intends to travel between the North and the South.

Those who have the greatest difficulty are the so-called false soldiers or false authorities just returned from reeducation camps, who still have not been restored to full citizenship. "False soldiers" and "false authorities" are those who served the Republic of South Vietnam.

Even citizens who have received travel permission are subject to restrictions. The Communists rarely give travel permits to entire families to visit their relatives at the same time, unless they travel to the "new economic zones" or return to their native villages for land-development purposes. If a husband goes, the wife must remain at home and vice versa. The reason for this restriction is the Communist fear that families will leave the country. Aware of these realities and not wishing to arouse the suspicion of the security cadres in my ward, I always traveled alone to Dalat to visit my mother.

Timing is also a factor in arranging visits. Since boat people usually take advantage of holidays to escape, cadres are especially alert at that time. People naturally want to use their free time on Sundays and holidays, especially the Tet lunar new year, to visit relatives; but the cadres' suspicion of group visits has led many security officers to deny any travel requests for the new year period.

Because so many escapees flee the country by boat it is easier to get permits to visit the plateau area than the coastal cities. Along the coast, security cadres are quick to jail strangers. Those with travel permits, unless well known and guaranteed by their local relatives, are examined and may be held until their status is verified.

The length of the intended visit also is a factor in the granting of travel permits. Ward security cadres will not give permits for more than a week.

Jurisdiction for longer periods rests with district offices, but applications must be filed with the ward. Until 1978, anyone wanting a permit for more than a week had to apply directly to the district security office.

The purpose of travel influences a security cadre's decision to issue or withhold a permit. Officials are more likely to grant one if the applicant wishes to visit relatives, find land for farming, or carry out government-assigned tasks. For this reason, organizers of large scale escapes by sea usually work under the cover of an organization involved in government construction or transportation contracts in coastal areas.

The fastest way to obtain a permit is to buy one, real or false. The real ones are sold by ward security cadres or members of the ward people's committee, the false ones by private individuals or organizations. Either way, a travel permit for one person for one week costs 30 to 50 dong, nearly the equivalent of a month's salary for a mid-level government official.

Obtaining a Travel Permit

To obtain a travel permit the applicant must prepare a request stating his occupation, destination, length of absence, and purpose of travel. There are no official forms. He must make up his own based on a model, but the information requested is mandatory.

He then takes his request and his household register to the ward security office, where the chief or duty officer notes the decision on the application form. If jurisdiction lies with the district security office, the applicant must then take the form and his household register to the district office for final approval.

At the district security office the official in charge compares the data on the application with the household register and the applicant's employee I.D. card, then issues or denies the permit.

Nongovernment officials such as myself could obtain travel orders from their companies and thus avoid security channels. This sometimes presented problems because security and transportation cadres outside one's residential area would refuse to honor work orders issued by private cooperatives or companies. This was especially true in 1978-1979. Still, the only safe way for private individuals to travel was to go through the ward security office.

Obtaining a travel permit is not the end of the story. He must enter his travel plans in the "Temporary Absence, Temporary Residence" book kept in his household; security cadres issue these books to each household and may demand to see them during house checks. Further, he must show the travel permit to the household cluster chief or his security deputy, who transfers the data to his own records. These cluster representatives observe

and report to ward leaders on the daily activities of ward residents during special meetings convened by the president of the ward people's committee. Then, the traveler must submit the travel permit to the area representative for the registration of temporary absence and temporary residence. He enters details of the planned travel in his book and, in writing, notifies the area security cadres who will finally report to the ward security office.

Buying a Bus Ticket

The bus station for buses to the east and central plateaus of Vietnam is situated on the sidewalks of Hung Vuong Avenue, right on the line between the sister cities of Saigon and Cholon. This and two smaller bus stations in Cholon are the only ones available to serve more than three million people in metropolitan Saigon.

The Hung Vuong station is the busiest. It is always noisy and crowded with would-be travelers as well as with pickpockets and prostitutes, who prey upon them. The sanitation facilities are abominable; ten broken-down toilets must serve all the station's needs. The stench from them permeates the whole area.

In the main station, the ticket office for Dalat and points enroute—Bao Loc, Di Linh, Phi Nom, and others—is a small, square, faded wooden booth. Tickets are sold to different categories of passengers through three wire-netted windows. The first window serves government cadres and officials with work or travel orders, trip permits, and institutional letters requesting priority in obtaining tickets. The second serves senior citizens, pregnant women, or women with infants. The third serves all others.

The Afternoon Ticket Lines

In theory, tickets must be purchased the day before the trip, but practice is different. Ticket windows are supposed to open at 1:30 P.M. but it is usually 3:30 before agents begin selling tickets. Nevertheless, the line usually starts forming at 11 A.M., and by 1 P.M. there is a long line of anxious people standing or sitting in the scorching sun.

Taking turns holding a place in line has become a habit in Vietnam; and forming lines to buy some small, rarely available item is now a way of life. A popular saying expresses public annoyance:

Long Live Ho Chi Minh!
Register to buy a nail,
stand in line to buy a slice of pumpkin.

When a ticket agent, or someone who appears to be an agent, enters the booth for a moment, a mass of anxious passengers surges against the window. Then, when that person comes out, they return to their defensive positions. This occurs again and again. Passengers who have been through the routine before know the ticket agents by sight and laugh at their companions in distress. They know it is not yet time to struggle.

When a ticket agent finally appears, tickets and other papers in hand, the disorderly hustling renews, but the agent locks the door and sits calmly at the counter making preparatory notes while waiting for two other agents and a controller.

In front of the first window, which sells the most tickets, there is always a disorderly column of cadres, officials, and soldiers waiting to buy priority tickets at the official price. Since ordinary citizens cannot normally purchase priority tickets, many go to authorized institutions and, for a sum, obtain letters describing some fictitious job in the city of their destination, thus allowing them to buy tickets. In 1977 a construction engineer and I established the Construction Technology Company of which I was vice president for management. Although I stayed with the company only a year, I retained the connection until my escape; and whenever I wanted to go to Dalat or send my mother back from Saigon, I could obtain the necessary letter and work order to buy a priority ticket.

My usual pretext for travel was that I had to pay workers' salaries or conduct business with a government institution in Dalat, although my company had no workers in Dalat or connections with any institution there. Ticket agents and controlling cadres hesitate to challenge anyone who is going to pay workers. Had they challenged me, I could always have argued that if the workers were not paid my company would be condemned for exploiting them, the worst possible crime under the socialist regime. If the workers were denied their wages because I could not buy a ticket this would be the ticket agent's responsibility, not mine.

The "work connection" with government institutions was the general pretext which I and others used most frequently, but for different reasons. If I were unable to get to Dalat to do my work, the government's annual plan would be delayed, not a small fault. Government work is a national secret, about which the ticket agents have no right to inquire. It was always easy to name some government institution which was supposed to be carrying out the "secret" work. For this reason the first window was always crowded with government cadres and officials on the way to carry out important government tasks.

In front of the second window there is usually a number of old persons, women carrying infants, and pregnant women who can not jostle with the stronger passengers; but they, too, have to stand in the scorching afternoon sun. Since mothers with infants are given priority rights in buying tickets, it is common for women to borrow babies for this purpose.

The third window, which sells tickets to those with travel permits issued by their ward or district security offices, also draws large crowds and the crush is no less than at the first window.

In early 1976, on my first trip to Dalat under the new regime, having had no experience in buying tickets under the new system, I stood in line all afternoon in the tropical sun as any other passenger. The ticket window opened at 3:30 P.M. and closed at 5 P.M. with the agent declaring he was out of tickets and had to wait until the buses returned that night before deciding on further sales the next morning. There were 150 people in the line and I had counted only twenty ticket sales. I was shocked. Like other unlucky passengers, I started to go home prepared to return before dawn; then I noticed that a number of hopefuls remained in place before the ticket windows. Some of them remained in line overnight. They fell into three categories:

First were travelers who lived too far away to go home and return the next morning or who were unable to afford lodging for the night; they usually slept on mats in place in the line.

Second were "professional occupants," scalpers, and would-be escapees. Passengers who did not want to remain in line overnight would, if they could afford to do so, hire jobless or homeless individuals for five to ten dong to hold their places in line. Some families with several older children made good money this way. A family of four, for example, could average 30 dong a night. When compared with the average monthly salary of about 60 dong earned by a mid-level bank employee, holding someone's place in line is an attractive occupation. Since security cadres frown on this practice, the "professional occupants" shift lines nightly and remain only until dawn so they can avoid easy recognition: the paying patron has to get up early to obtain the place. The "professional occupants" also team up with unscrupulous ticket agents to scalp tickets at three to four times the official price. Drivers and their assistants also engage in this activity. It is dangerous if they get caught, but profitable enough to make it attractive. Also, many would-be refugees and organizers of sea trips seek the anonymity of the crowd to complete their arrangements. If things work out they can continue the journey; if not, they can take a bus home again.

Third were families and groups of students or young men going on government-assigned tasks. These people take turns standing in line for one or two hours at a time, with one person using a collective letter of

recommendation to purchase tickets for the whole group. This practice always irritates those behind them in line because it extends their waiting time, and there is no way of knowing whether there will be enough tickets left when one finally arrives at the window.

Some people leave old sacks and go home or to an inn for the night, expecting to return in the morning. The sacks, posing as luggage, usually contain nothing of value. These claims are no guarantee of acceptance by others in the line, especially since some sacks may have been placed there during the night. Passengers usually know from their previous half day in the sun who has preceded and who has followed them in the line. Invariably there are altercations, and they frequently involve cadres and immigrants from the North. These people have lived for many years under the Communist regime and are skilled at winning arguments over scarce commodities such as food, clothing, or a place in a bus line. The struggle for survival in the unbelievably hard life during the long Indochinese war made them experts in crafty tricks. My wife's Northern relatives taught me many methods they had learned from bitter experience.

The Morning Lines

South Vietnam had known the curfew long before the Communists took over. The Communists continued it, but more strictly, especially in the smaller cities. In Saigon the normal curfew was from 12 midnight to 4 A.M. However, those who carried goods to the market or went to the bus stations usually left home before 4 A.M.

Whenever I went to Dalat to see my mother I was up at 3 A.M., and by 3:30 I was riding my bicycle through the quiet streets, darkened because of the power shortage. Usually I left the bicycle at my father-in-law's house and took a pedicab to the bus station. Sometimes instead of bicycling I walked along streets, whose names had been changed: *Cong Ly* (Justice) is now *Nam Ky Khoi Nghia* (Southern Uprising) and *Tu Do* (Liberty) is now *Dong Khoi* (Simultaneous Uprising). As I walked I often remembered a popular jingle about the name changes:

The Southern Uprising has destroyed Justice,
The Simultaneous Uprising has killed Liberty.

The trip usually took 45 minutes. On arriving at the station I took my place in line. Even at that early hour the bus station was noisy and the sight was saddening. Unkempt passengers who had slept overnight on the street on worn army mats or on their pitiful bags of luggage were now arousing themselves. Some still slept soundly at their places in line amid the noise of motorized pedicabs, buses, and street hawkers while others, eyes heavy with

sleep, sat dozing, as all waited for the ticket office to open between 6 and 6:30.

As dawn advanced, my bladder demanded relief, and I asked fellow passengers to hold my place in the line. Later I did the same for them. Since there were no toilets nearby, passengers urinated hurriedly between two parked buses and rushed back to their places.

The scene grew noisier as more passengers arrived. Those standing next to the ticket booths clung desperately to their positions, some even hanging onto the barbed wire over the ticket windows to prevent being pushed back. Those farther back continually jostled forward to gain an advantage.

When the ticket agents arrived, the hustling got worse. The ticket controllers, using a loudspeaker, would ask the crowd to maintain order, but this simply added to the din. The agents contributed to the hubbub as they called out names of applicants whose papers were approved. Applicants whose papers were doubtful were “invited” to go to the bus station for further investigation.

When the priority travelers had all received their tickets, remaining tickets were sold to the people. Some who protested were “invited” to the security office for “resolution.” Those whose citizenship and travel papers were in order were released—but too late to get the bus that day. Those whose papers were not in order were held for further investigation. The Communists are well experienced in the use of public protest as a technique for achieving power, and know very well how to deal with others who protest.

I witnessed two incidents in which protesters were “invited” by cadres to the security office for “resolution.” The first was in early 1977. I was standing in the hot sun at the end of the priority line with two young men who were also going to Dalat. Suddenly, one of them saw an individual enter the ticket office and emerge quickly with two tickets. The young man shouted loudly, “The office is creeping tickets.” (“Creeping” is a new word, which means getting something on the sly—literally, through a small hole. The term is also applied to smuggling.)

Immediately three young men, including a rifle-armed guard, came over and “invited” the protester to the security office. Two hours later he was released. When I asked him how he got off he simply replied, “I’m not afraid of them.” Later, his friend told me he was a “worker” with complete legal papers enroute to a job assignment.

Had this man—irritated at being kept standing in the hot sun while the available tickets were “creeping” out of the office—been an ordinary citizen without the protection of special papers, the security authorities could have held him indefinitely for being a reactionary. They might also have sent a

letter to his supervisors asking that he be “educated,” the Communist euphemism for corrective punishment.

The second ticket line incident occurred later in the same year. This time I was going to Dalat to inform my mother that my second sister had escaped the country in August. Having learned the routine, I had hired a woman the previous evening to hold my place in line and replaced her at 4:30 A.M. Three security cadres maintained order until the ticket office opened at 7 A.M. At that time the three cadres told the people in the first and third lines to form a single line before the second window. They then indicated to a number of soldiers and government officials that they should get at the head of the single line. They excused their action to the others in line by saying the soldiers must provide security for the people and the officials had urgent work orders.

Havoc ensued as passengers from the two eliminated lines tried to gain advantageous positions in the new one, and the ticket controller was forced to intervene to settle the squabbles. Those at the front of the line succeeded in obtaining tickets after the soldiers and officials, but those farther back were left empty-handed, seething with anger at the cadres’ action. But they dared not protest openly.

Angry myself, I protested that I was ahead of those people, and that I also carried official orders. A cadre immediately responded: “We will solve the ticket problem for the comrade.” I showed my work order and quickly received my ticket.

The motive behind the cadres’ action was easy to guess. For reasons known to themselves they wanted certain passengers they had selected to take the first bus. To cover their actions and screen themselves against protest, they shifted the lines and moved the favorites forward. They seized upon my objection as an opportunity to demonstrate “fairness” and thus placate others.

By 9 A.M. it had become obvious that fewer tickets had been sold than there were seats available. Nevertheless, the ticket office was closed and the numerous remaining passengers were told to return in the afternoon.

Buying Scalped Tickets

It is common practice for ticket agents to sell only seven tickets for the Peugeot 203, a ten to twelve passenger bus. The rest are passed under the counter to be sold on the black market. Similar practices prevail for standard-size buses.

This activity is denounced occasionally, but it is difficult to call it illegal because Communist law is less important than Party decisions, which are

enforced in varying degrees according to political needs in each city, district, ward, and even institution. The public, therefore, is subject to arbitrary decisions not only by the top Party hierarchy but at each power level, down to small groups of bus-station security cadres.

Persons who must travel but cannot obtain tickets at the official price must buy them on the black market. Before my departure in April 1979, the official price for a ticket on a small bus to Dalat was 4.50 dong; on the black market it was normally 20 to 25 dong but went up to 30 to 35 dong during the Tet New Year festival. Comparable prices for a standard bus were 3.50 dong official, 15 to 20 on the regular black market and 25 dong at Tet.

I bought black-market tickets most frequently between October 1978 and April 1979 while preparing for my third escape attempt. In November I paid 25 dong for a small-bus ticket to Dalat so I could take leave from my mother and relatives in anticipation of leaving at the end of Tet in February. I usually took the small buses because they were faster and less subject to security inspection. If inspected it took less time than the larger buses.

Buying a ticket on the black market is not easy. It requires getting acquainted with the scalpers or their go-betweens and learning how they function. There are several ways to get tickets:

From the driver's assistant: If asked for a ticket by a stranger he will always respond, "I don't know anything about that." I would explain with a great sincerity that my mother was ill, that I had to attend to urgent matters at home or something similar. If he was convinced I was not a security agent, he would tell me to wait at a nearby shop or refer me to another scalper. The driver himself never sells the tickets at the bus station but lets others handle sales, from which he draws a healthy percentage without taking the risk of denunciation or envy.

From bus-station scalpers: They watch for anxious-looking passengers. If a sale is arranged, they have the prospective buyer wait on a corner or at a refreshment stand, disappear for a while, and return with the ticket.

On the bus itself at premium prices: This is for experienced travelers on standard-size buses. Passengers are required to show tickets to a controller before getting on the bus. A passenger without a ticket can stand next to the door and, in a low whisper, say to the controller, "thirty-five, my friend," and gain access. Later, at a convenient moment he can slip the controller 35 dong instead of the 25 he might have paid on the black market. I used this method in traveling from the An Dong station to Luc Tinh while preparing for my escape. Since I whispered "thirty-five" in Cantonese rather than Vietnamese, the controller took me for a Chinese businessman willing to pay whatever necessary.

Catching the bus on the run: This requires a certain agility. After a bus leaves the station, the driver will slow down at certain places where

passengers can jump aboard. The Saigon-Dalat buses slow down along Phan Thanh Gian street; the Luc Tinh buses at the An Phu crossroads. Passengers tacitly agree to pay the price—usually the black-market rate—set by the driver of a small bus or the driver's assistant in a larger one. Because of the uncertainty of space this method is unreliable.

At gas stations: Drivers must obtain a departure permit before they can buy gas at the authorized government price. When they stop to fill their tanks it is sometimes possible to get aboard, although this is prohibited by the transportation authorities and somewhat chancy.

On the Road to Dalat

Before the Communist takeover of South Vietnam I never felt it necessary to take along gifts for my mother except some money to help out with her expenses. The necessities of life could be obtained cheaply and easily in Dalat. Now, after the takeover, everything was difficult to obtain and prices were incredibly high. Some items went up 2000 percent. Essentials such as milk, sugar, and monosodium glutamate (an important ingredient in Vietnamese cooking) were beyond the reach of most family budgets. In April 1979 one pound of sugar cost 12 dong, good rice cost 18 dong, and monosodium glutamate 200 dong.

I usually took along about 10 kilograms of ordinary rice on each trip. It was not easy. The ward government's permission was required, and the amount being carried had to be shown on the official work order. If it was not shown, security agents and inspectors enroute could interrogate the passenger and seize the rice without compensation. Where the rice went was known only to these men and God, and Communists are not afraid of God.

Passengers were allowed to carry only one or two small parcels aboard; large ones had to go on the roof. I usually hand-carried my gifts and personal items in a small sack. The driver's assistant determined the charges for the large bundles on a pay-it-or-leave-it basis. If passengers disagreed with the charges he would throw their bundles off without qualms. An assistant on a small bus averaged 30 to 50 dong per trip from these fees; on a large bus, he collected 100 to 200 dong per trip, more during the Tet holidays.

On entering a small bus, the passengers had to show their tickets to the driver; on a large bus, to the assistant; then the passengers retained them to show them to security guards enroute. Before the bus departed, one or two cadres would enter the bus and check tickets again, sometimes checking the name on the ticket against the passenger's ID card.

This security check created moments of tension for passengers with black-market tickets or who had otherwise obtained passage; but the check was usually perfunctory unless there was some argument among ticket scalpers, drivers, or drivers' assistants. In reality, however, ticket agents, controllers, security cadres, drivers, and drivers' assistants were all members of a profitable interlocking system either directed by a leader or mutually tolerated. When these people were at variance with each other, passengers who had obtained their tickets through the illegal system could be taken to the security office for investigation. If there were too many illegal passengers occupying seats for which tickets had been sold, either officially or through the black market, the checkers might put them off the bus rather than bother with the security investigation procedure. This happened to me a couple of times when I was preparing for my escape. I simply waited for other buses or took a motor pedicab and caught up at the next stop.

Once aboard the bus the passenger usually felt at once relieved and vexed. He was relieved because his long struggle to get into the bus and get a seat, no matter how uncomfortable, was finally won. In principle the number of tickets sold corresponded to the number of passengers, so each ticketholder had a seat. But a Peugeot 203 minibus, originally built for a driver and four passengers, was modified to carry the driver plus ten passengers—the driver and two persons in front, plus two rows of four passengers each. In a standard bus there were six seats across.

The passenger was vexed because invariably all the space under the seat and for his legs would be stuffed with sacks and bags full of goods. If asked, no one, including the driver, acknowledged ownership. At best the driver would say, "Why are you so concerned? Leave them there." The passengers were left to find space for their own handbags; that usually meant holding them for the duration of the trip.

Once passengers and goods were aboard, the driver would go to the bus office, sign, and receive his trip papers, including a passenger list, to show to the control posts along the way. The Saigon-Dalat buses usually got under way between 8 and 9:30 A.M.

Leaving Saigon

The driver, on his way out of the city, would stop occasionally to take on more passengers. Now pretending a smile, he would ask the other passengers to please sit a little closer so he could fit one more person into each row. If the vehicle was a Volkswagen minibus he would also put two or three more into the extremely narrow space between the last bench and the back door. The vehicle originally built for four passengers was carrying fifteen or seventeen, and whatever relief the passenger felt on boarding the

bus had vanished. In standard-size buses, drivers fitted movable benches into the aisles, and thus could carry 20 or 30 percent more passengers than officially allowed by the transportation authorities.

Most of the additional passengers were the driver's regular customers, women who traveled to and from Saigon buying and selling goods. The amount they paid him depended on the goods carried. Others who met the buses outside the city paid the full black-market price no matter where they got on or off.

The women peddlers were "goods creepers," that is, smugglers. Such goods as noodles, sugar, monosodium glutamate, rice, beans, tobacco, drugs, candy, and plastic toys could not be bought in Saigon and sold in the provinces in a routine way. They had to be *smuggled* out, because shipment of these goods without special permit is prohibited under the new regime. The goods were packed and stuffed into the space under the bus seats before the first passengers got aboard. On meeting the bus, the women carried additional goods which they hurriedly put on the roof or any other available space and climbed aboard to avoid being caught by security agents. Some of the women "crept" gold, diamonds, jade, and other precious items, mostly hidden in their underwear.

Sitting on the bus, the women chatted as naturally as they would at home. Their conversation was mostly about what had happened on the last trip, the profits they had made, or family affairs. Their expressed fears were mostly about the mobile security agents who patrolled the highway looking for smugglers; their goods were subject to seizure, and the owners could be "invited" to the local security office where they could be questioned, fined, or imprisoned.

The Bien Hoa Control Post

Just outside the city, at the entrance to the Bien Hoa highway, the bus stopped at the first control post where the driver showed his trip papers and passenger list. In the two years following the Communist takeover, security at this post was very tight. Security cadres inspected all passing vehicles, examining tickets, trip permits, ID and voting cards. The luggage inspection resembled that of a frontier between hostile nations. The cadres were particularly vigilant about the voting cards.

The Communist government did not begin replacing the old Republic ID cards until 1978, and even then very slowly. I still carried mine when I left in April 1979. Election cards, however, were issued very early, and security cadres always asked to see these. According to Communist law the

voting cards were good for only one election, at which time election officials would cut off one corner. If a passenger did not have his election card with the corner cut off he could be "educated" on the spot for not having fulfilled his civic responsibilities or for not carrying the required legal papers on his trip. At the time I traveled, this vigilance was relaxed. The driver merely had to show the trip permits and the passenger list.

The Bien Hoa control post was close to the city. Smugglers and passengers without tickets had learned to bypass it and catch the bus farther down the road. Also, there were other posts along the way where additional checks were made. However, drivers had become familiar with the cadres' working habits and knew which ones could be bribed into making only cursory inspections. The smugglers were no less adept than the drivers in this matter. Occasionally cadres seized smuggled goods, but this loss to the smugglers was more than compensated by the profits from one or two safe trips. Goods carried from Saigon to Dalat brought 100 to 300 percent profit, and vegetables brought from Dalat to Saigon brought up to 500 percent.

Drivers seldom lost their own goods, which were carefully hidden in tool boxes, under seats, or under the hood; security cadres, for reasons of laziness or some special relationship with the driver, did not search carefully. Even if the goods were found, a small bribe could get them returned.

Bus owners and drivers had many ways to make money. Some examples: smuggling goods on their own, for a percentage, or for transportation fees charged other smugglers; black-market ticket sales and fares charged passengers without tickets, either from Saigon or picked up enroute to replace disembarked passengers; fees for handling mail, delivering goods or carrying messages to people enroute; selling government-supplied gas and oil received for each trip but not all used.

Drivers, of course, had to spend some of their profits on bribes, gifts, and meals for transportation cadres, and security agents in Saigon, Dalat, or at the control posts along the road; but the expenses were moderate compared with their income.

For this reason drivers sometimes sneered at the rates paid them by the transportation authorities, about 55 percent of the income from ticket sales. For example, at a ticket price of 4.50 dong, an 11-seat bus going to Dalat would produce 49.50 dong and the driver would receive 27, out of which he had to cover trip expenses. I never really understood how the drivers calculated their income, but many times as we left the station the driver would hold the trip permits and his official payment above his head for the passengers to see and complain that he always lost because the amount he received was too little to cover the sky-rocketing prices of tires and accessories needed to keep the bus in running condition.

On an ordinary day a driver could make 50 dong, or double the amount paid by the government, by simply picking up two additional passengers and charging them black-market rates. During the Tet holidays drivers collected 35 dong from each extra passenger, if that person was lucky enough to find a narrow seat available.

I sometimes asked, half in jest, why the drivers always complained about their losses but always vied with each other for the trips. The usual answer was: "We resign ourselves to the losses to serve the people," or, more honestly, "We can earn a little along the way."

In fact, by discomfiting their passengers, the drivers earned a great deal on the way. They packed the bus so tightly that whenever we stopped for meals or repairs I got out to relax my aching tendons.

Under the present regime, the drivers have become a new rich class by exploiting travelers. On stopping at inns for meals, the drivers, their assistants, and the smugglers with their relatives and friends would sit at a table laden with meat and fish, which millions of socialist citizens have been unable to afford for the past six years, even for the Tet holidays. Because the driver brings customers to the inn he usually can eat free or at half price; otherwise, next time he might take the passengers to another inn. I have seen drivers who, for breakfast, got a meat pie or a loaf of bread stuffed with fried pork from the smugglers and even complained that the pie was too dry or the meat too greasy. Since millions of students throughout Communist Vietnam were going to school without breakfast, some passengers were irritated by such comments.

Dau Giay to Bao Loc

After a long drive through rubber plantations the bus made a 15-minute stop at the Dau Giay control post, where the Saigon-Dalat highway branches off to Long Hai, a seaport frequently used for sea escapes. Again the driver showed his trip papers and passenger list, and again security cadres entered the bus to examine goods and luggage. Here, roadside vendors sold boiled corn on the cob, fried peanuts, fresh and fried bananas. Many passengers relieved themselves in the heavy undergrowth before beginning the longest stage of the trip to Bao Loc. From Dau Giay on the driver and the smugglers had to be wary of "sudden" patrols conducted by local security guards.

Bao Loc, a high plateau district, specializes in tea which is famous in South Vietnam. As at other places, the driver had to present his documentation at the Bao Loc control post before entering the center of town.

We stopped for lunch at the only inn in Bao Loc authorized to serve rice to travelers. A small dish of rice with an egg, several pieces of vegetable, or a few tiny pieces of greasy pork cost three or four dong. It took at least three such dishes to satisfy a normal-sized man.

Rice, especially white rice, has become a luxury food in Communist Vietnam, formerly one of Southeast Asia's greatest rice producers. Now people must buy sorghum, a very hard, brown cereal previously fed to cattle. They must also buy noodles made from wheat flour imported from Russia. (During the Vietnam War, the United States sold Russia wheat, which the Soviets passed on to North Vietnam. The Communists ate this instead of rice.) Sweet potatoes and cassava have now replaced rice in the people's everyday diet. As a popular saying goes:

“Labor is glorious;
Sweet potatoes are the tonic [for the people].”

Only the driver, his assistant, the smugglers, and a few of the wealthier passengers ate at the government-operated inn. Some of the passengers stayed in the bus and ate lunches they had brought with them, such as dry loaves of bread, rice cakes stuffed with bananas, steamed glutinous rice, or boiled corn on the cob. For drinks they bought weak tea or a glass of sugar-cane juice from a roadside cart. Some passengers went to cheaper inns, which sold no rice, but many bought rice soup sold clandestinely at a nearby house or behind the high tea bushes.

When the Communists took over South Vietnam, they also took over the commercial distribution of tea, and banned private sales. But on our arrival in Bao Loc a number of women and children appeared offering one and two-pound packets of tea, which they carried in old sacks. They had hidden behind the bushes until the bus arrived, then came out and sold their packets of tea as quickly as possible, and dispersed to avoid being caught by the security cadres. I felt angry at the regime and sorry for the women, not being able to freely sell tea produced by their own hands.

Passengers enroute to Dalat seldom bought tea, but those going to Saigon bought it eagerly. It was risky, though. On the one hand, tea made a good gift for friends and relatives in Saigon, or it could be sold for up to 100 percent profit. On the other, tea was subject to seizure by local security cadres along the way, especially before 1978. After that, because of protests, the government relaxed and allowed travelers to buy up to two pounds for personal use or for gifts. It was common for the sellers to fill a packet with inferior tea and top it off with a layer of better-quality tea to obtain a higher price.

After lunch, the driver blew the horn to summon passengers. On one trip, having waited long for the driver, I went to visit my aunt, who lived only a few doors from the Bao Loc Inn. When I returned the bus had gone.

I asked the driver of the next bus to let me stand in the back of his Renault van; he first refused, then agreed when I paid him 10 dong for the remainder of the trip.

Enroute to Dalat from Bao Loc the driver stopped occasionally at houses where he handed the residents letters or packages from their relatives in Saigon. Many of the recipients were people in new economic zones and former Saigon residents who had moved to the countryside.

From time to time small-bus passengers asked the driver to stop at the houses of relatives to deliver letters or goods, but standard-sized buses did not stop.

The RVNAF Resistance Forces

Bao Loc was beyond the half way point. Now we were entering the small, mountainous district of Di Linh, inhabited primarily by Highlanders (hill tribes). The French called them Montagnards.

A small group of former Republic of Viet Nam Armed Forces (RVNAF) soldiers were still hiding in this area. They occasionally entered nearby villages, but their objective was to prove their presence rather than to create difficulties. At times they skirmished with the local security cadres. In effect, these RVNAF soldiers had taken over the Viet Cong role as guerrillas.

In Saigon I heard rumors about this group and others throughout South Vietnam. Bus passengers from the coastal cities of Central Vietnam such as Phu Yen, Quang Nam, and Quang Ngai told me that from their buses they had seen the Republic of Vietnam yellow flag with red horizontal stripes flying on mountain slopes along the highway and that some airplanes parachuted food to RVNAF units hidden in the mountains.

There was some credible information which I was unable to verify. For example, in 1978 in the rubber forests adjacent to Long Hai, Vung Tau Province, the RVNAF troops were said to have engaged in a large-scale, all-night fight with local Communist troops and security cadres. After the skirmish, according to rumors in Saigon, when the RVNAF unit ran out of ammunition they used a loudspeaker to arrange a future engagement with their opponents.

From Di Linh to Dalat

The Di Linh control post cadres gave us no problems. They looked at the driver's papers and waved us on. On the way out of the village the driver stopped at a crossroads to allow the passengers to buy medicine at a nonprescription drugstore and two packs of cigarettes each at a tobacco shop across the road. Since I do not smoke, a young woman smuggler asked me to buy two packs of cigarettes for her, then two for her husband, then two more for her. The third time the salesgirl turned me down. Cigarettes sell officially at 1.50 dong. They can be sold for 6 dong to black marketeers, who resell them for 8, approximately \$3.

Once again in the countryside, the bus continued through cool, beautiful pine forests, the sunlight playing on the thick evergreen foliage. I had passed through this lovely landscape often as a high-school student, always captivated by its natural beauty. Many poems were written about this scenery in earlier years. But nature poetry is not in demand now. The Communists want poems in praise of the Party, Uncle Ho, and their policies.

When we came to Tung Nghia, outside Dalat, the smugglers got off and, with the help of relatives and customers, hastened to remove their goods from the bus. They transferred the sacks hidden under the seats, in the corners, or on the roof to waiting Lambretta three-wheeled motorcycles, and quickly disappeared.

Here as at the other bus stops, poor vendors sold boiled corn on the cob, sweet potatoes, rice cakes, and cassava to hungry passengers.

It was 4:30 P.M., the arrival time for small buses. The standard buses would come later. Some passengers got off at Tung Nghia, others got on heading for Dalat. The bus was again crowded, and the driver again collected extra fares. Then we continued along the winding, ascending Prenh waterfall road to the last control post before entering the center of Dalat.

At the Dalat post passengers without trip permits who had boarded the bus along the road or at Tung Nghia were required by the driver to get off and walk thirty or forty meters up the road past the post. When questioned they usually said they had just returned from gardening or visiting the waterfall. Post cadres examined both the driver's and the passengers' travel documents.

Government cadres and officials had to show their certificates; other passengers showed their travel permits. Young men had to show socialist labor-service papers to prove they had worked in labor camps—fifteen days required for government officials and at least thirty days for ordinary citizens. (Work in these camps was "voluntary" without pay, with the government providing only the meals, mostly sorghum. The "volunteers" even had to use their own tools as a "contribution to building socialism.")

In Bao Loc, a security cadre had put his girl friend, a young government official, on the bus and told the driver he was sending her to Dalat. Neither the cadre nor the young woman paid the bus fare, and she had neither work orders nor travel permit. At the Dalat post the security cadre took the driver to task for carrying passengers without permits. The driver, in self-defense, told what had happened. After the young woman showed her identification papers, the cadre overlooked the infraction. Such actions by security cadres in favor of their friends and relatives take place commonly on roads throughout South Vietnam.

The checking procedures completed, the driver advanced up the road, picked up his walking passengers, and continued on to the terminal at the edge of Dalat Lake.

Arriving Home

My mother looked well. She seemed pleased to receive my small gifts but lamented the necessity for me to bring items which always before the "revolution" had been readily available on the Dalat market.

After a short rest, my first chore was to note down in my mother's household book for "Temporary Absence, Temporary Residence" the details of my presence: my name, birthdate, profession, ID number, family ties, reason for and date of arrival, and date of intended departure.

Until 1978 I would ask my younger sister to take the book and my travel order (or travel permit) to the household cluster chief. He would sign the book and transfer the information to the local security-agent's register. Since 1978, however, the authorities have insisted that travelers do this in person.

When I went through this procedure in late 1978 the cluster chief, in the presence of security cadres and other visitors such as myself, noted the details in his register and then asked me about my occupation, about my mother, and her house. My mother's residence was one of five houses in a row which the Communist government wanted to expropriate for its production cooperatives. (In 1979 we sold the house at one-tenth of its value to avoid expropriation and to get money for living expenses.)

Had I failed to complete the registration formalities I could have been "invited" to the security office for investigation or for "education" on my civil responsibilities. Or, after I had returned to Saigon, my mother would have been criticized in one of the frequent people's public meetings for not reporting my arrival. Security agents could and would create many difficulties of the type old persons most fear, such as threats to dislodge them from their homes or to cut off their meager food rations.

Everybody dreaded security agents coming to his home, even for an ordinary check. This fear derives from the Communist practice of taking suspects into custody after midnight to undisclosed places.

Having no other choice, I complied with all chicaneries, and thus finally earned my right to spend "legally" a few days with my mother.

This was the last time I saw her. Six months after my escape and before my first gift from San Francisco reached her, she underwent an operation on her stomach. The hospital's supply of anesthetics was inadequate. She died suffering on the operating table.

VI

Interlude at Lake Dalat

Dalat Lake lies only 700 feet from the center of Dalat city in the Central Vietnamese highlands where altitude and generous rainfall give the area natural beauty and a pleasing climate. Grassy undulating hills slope upward from the lake's banks to the surrounding evergreen forests. Tall pines line the left bank from which a strip of land projects out into the lake. It is occupied by a wooden kiosk, for many years a privately operated refreshment stand but now managed by the City Tourist Office. In front, at the water's edge, gaily colored tables with chairs, a small fish pond, two short wooden bridges, and pots of flowers invite visitors to enjoy the scenery.

On the bank opposite the kiosk a French-style bath house and the magnificent Palace Hotel recall times gone by when French colonial administrators used Dalat as a resort town to escape the tropical heat of Vietnam's coastal plains. Now the hotel is nationalized and Party members use it to entertain each other and their foreign visitors.

As a boy, I loved to ride my bicycle along the lake road during the early misty mornings while Dalat still slept, or to sit dreamily at the foot of the pines composing romantic poems. Though I have traveled in many countries since that time, Dalat's scenery, for me, still surpasses all others, including that of Japan and Hawaii.

Before the Communist takeover, Dalat was famous as a center for tourists who came to enjoy its picturesque landscapes, its clean plateau air, flowers, fresh vegetables, and delicious fruits. During vacation periods, particularly the Tet lunar new year festival and the hot flatland summers, visitors poured into Dalat from Saigon and other Vietnamese cities, thus stimulating the development of hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops.

After the Communist takeover, nearly all kiosks and small shops were closed in accordance with the new government's program for industrial and commercial reconstruction. People engaged in trading were told to take up "productive work" to create material wealth for the society instead of "exploiting the people" as intermediaries. Trading became the monopoly of the government.

The family-operated businesses, which once thrived on the sale of gifts, souvenirs, and local products were nationalized or closed. The nationalization program and travel restrictions virtually eliminated Dalat's tourist business.

Dalat citizens reacted to the restrictions in a passive way. Every evening, particularly in good weather, they would pour into the streets around the old market and around the lake, walk themselves tired and then return home. Walking around the lake is a familiar pastime in this city; but pouring out into the streets and around the lake until late evening while the Communists were giving such strong emphasis to productive work seemed strange to many visitors. Unfortunately, walking was the only form of entertainment the people of Dalat could afford.

A Slow Waitress

On the occasion of my described farewell visit to my mother in December 1978 I also visited Lake Dalat. I also wanted to say good-bye to this scene of my youth before leaving the country. Perhaps there I could find a few brief moments of seclusion from the ever-present security cadres. I sat at a small table by the kiosk looking out at the water's green surface, waiting for a young waitress to sell me a bottle of beer and two cakes.

The weak and watery beer was scarce and was rationed at two bottles per family per month. It would cost me, with the cakes, two dong—more than the daily salary of the kiosk waitress.

To become a waitress in a restaurant managed by the City Tourist Office, particularly one which serves "foreign comrades," a girl must come from a "progressive" family, pass an examination, and agree to take birth-control pills in case she becomes too intimate with foreign visitors. This condition is a blunt violation of the sense of modesty of girls who have grown up in the traditional Vietnamese families where concepts of male-female relationships remain strong. Many girls, after being chosen for jobs and informed of this requirement, have become frightened and withdrawn their applications.

There were ten visitors at the kiosk. Three young men sat at the table next to mine. They were about twenty years old and, judging from their dress, manner, attitude, and small talk, they were apparently students. I was astonished at their long hair and clothing. After living under the Communist regime for more than three years they still looked "American." The only persons who still dressed in this manner were sons of some rich families who could not understand the "revolution," regretted the absence of the old "sponging" type existence, and were not afraid of being criticized at

meetings of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Society. Even under the Republic, conservative Dalat people considered this type of dress to be unacceptable.

After I had waited quite a while, the waitress finally came to my table and sold me a ticket. I took it to the counter and received the beer and cakes. The Communists call this system "goods exchange" and they are using it to undermine the concept of monetary trade. Even in a tourist restaurant the government functionary takes the money first, and patrons get their food in "exchange" for the tickets, or "goods."

The waitress took her time selling the food tickets. She, like other workers in the South, evidently had learned that it was unwise to work too hard for the small monthly salary which is in no way adequate to maintain oneself.

Extremely low wages and artificial limitations on consumer goods have contributed to the collapse of Communist production despite the Party's control of the most numerous work force in Vietnam's history and despite the incessant propaganda emphasis on production. As expressed by the chairman of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee at a mass meeting held in 1978 at the Phu Tho race track: the workers' first responsibility is production, the second responsibility is production, and the third responsibility is also production. Even so, the more than one million members of the Communist party, with its oppressive security system spread throughout the country, make up an unproductive national work force.

The three young men were fidgeting because the waitress had not yet sold them tickets. The youngest—I gathered his name was Tam—wearing old-fashioned blue jeans, went to the counter and asked why they hadn't been sold tickets. At the same time he demanded that the music be turned on saying it was for the whole restaurant to enjoy.

An Aside on Music

Music has received major attention by the Party apparatus, and some background on what has happened since April 30, 1975, may contribute to the rest of my story. Right after the Communist takeover of South Vietnam, all "false music"—the hundreds of Vietnamese and foreign songs that became so popular under the Republic—was declared illegal and its further circulation prohibited. Records and tapes of this music were destroyed by security cadres or thrown into garbage cans by the owners for fear of being caught. Restaurants were allowed to play only "revolutionary music," martial tunes which were poor in quality and limited in quantity. Furthermore, musical equipment which was widely available under the Republic became

extremely scarce and very expensive. Most of the approved “revolutionary” music had come from North Vietnam, but only ten passably good compositions had been produced during the 50 years since the birth of the Vietnamese Communist party. Communist musical cadres in the North were trained to sing it in a high tone that sounded monotonous to Southern ears. In the South the imported music was transformed to more agreeable tones—with a consequent counter-influence on the Northern cadres—but approved songs were still limited to the ten pieces, which were played ad nauseam over radio and TV networks, in restaurants, and at all public functions. Music producers, for a time, attempted to evade the proscription against “false” music by recording the tunes without words for use in restaurants and tea houses where young people liked to gather; but security cadres seized the tapes and “invited” the culprits—producers and listeners alike—to the security office for “education.” Thus, the “false” music without words abruptly ceased. Public pressure for greater musical variety eventually induced the Party to allow the broadcast of foreign music on the Ho Chi Minh City FM station but only for private listening. Restaurants and public places are still compelled to play only “revolutionary” music. Curiously, Communist soldiers and cadres who seized the contraband tapes have shown their own fondness for “false” music by playing them openly without reprisal.

Immediately after the Communist takeover in 1975, electronic equipment, abandoned by Americans and refugees, proliferated on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City at extremely low prices. As those who stayed behind ran low on funds, they too brought out their TV sets, radios, hi-fi sets, fans, air conditioners, even refrigerators, for sale on sidewalks of the main thoroughfares of Saigon and Cholon. Many Northern cadres had never seen such strange and beautiful electronic equipment as now became available to them at low prices. Many had only dreamed of owning a radio (or “station,” as they were called) or a bicycle. Few dared even to dream of owning a motorcycle, let alone a car. The Northern party cadres and government officials quickly bought up everything available and transported it north by truck, bus, and plane so that by early 1976 prices began to rise astronomically. With the abolition of the capitalist compradors (importers’ agents) and the commercial bourgeoisie, that is, the small Vietnamese merchants who thrived in the capitalist Republic, once abundant electronic equipment became either unavailable or was offered at a price out of reach for all except top Party cadres and officials. A five-year-old mono radio cassette recorder like a JVC RC 204 or an RC 323, which had cost 60 to 80 dong in late 1975, cost 1,000 to 1,200 dong by early 1979. Receivers and loudspeakers used by the Party to equip public propaganda systems and meeting rooms became even more expensive. A person who owned a simple AM/FM stereo cassette-receiver with record changer and two speakers (priced about \$400 in the United States) could consider himself rich. Thus any government

institution or private citizen who had such equipment used it with utmost care.

For these reasons, when Tam asked the counter attendant to turn on the kiosk cassette system, she looked out at the scarce number of visitors and refused. The money the kiosk earned from the sale of beer to Tam and his friends would not even pay for electricity to turn on the machine.

Comrade Manager

Tam returned to his table and the conversation with his friends. After fifteen minutes, the waitress grudgingly sold them tickets for two bottles of beer and three small dishes of fried peanuts. They ate slowly, waiting for the music to be turned on, but the counter attendant pretended not to notice. Tam became vexed, returned to the counter, and once again asked the attendant to turn on the music. On her refusal, he demanded to see the “comrade manager.”

I was astonished to hear Tam use this phrase. Young Southerners seldom use the word “comrade” in conversation and almost never so strongly. The attendant replied that the “comrade manager” was busy, but Tam insisted on meeting him for “constructive criticism.” He said he would be waiting at his table.

I pretended to pay no attention, leaned back against the wall, and looked out at the lake. The breeze from the distant forest whistled through the pines around the restaurant.

After twenty minutes “comrade manager,” a man of about forty-five, appeared. He was not a Dalat native but from Saigon. Like other Party cadres “in service of the people” he wore a white shirt hanging loosely outside dark trousers. I can think of only one reason for Party members and cadres to dress this way: to appear casual to the public while wearing a pistol in their belts, according to the principle of winning the hearts of the people but keeping a watchful eye on them. Their manner of dress differs from that of the former Republic officers who displayed their guns as a sign of power. In the end, the method, whether used by the crafty Communists or the arrogant generals, is the same: domination by force; but by concealing the gun the Communists show they are more dangerous. “Comrade manager” sat at Tam’s table, and Tam began raising his voice to “construct” (constructively criticize) the waitress for not “serving the people” appropriately and the restaurant for not satisfying a legitimate request by three visitors—comrades at arms on duty. He then introduced himself as a “people’s security agent” and showed his secret-service card.

The manager took a quick look at the card and, glancing around hurriedly, urged Tam to put it back in his wallet. No experienced secret service agent would think of identifying himself in the presence of strangers. Tam had shown his true colors in public. The manager explained in a low voice that he would “construct” the waitress, and that the restaurant had so far played music only when the restaurant was crowded.

I stood up and left. I was depressed by the thought that even in this small restaurant, in this resort city with its romantic landscape, one could not escape the pervasive presence of security agents. Had Tam kept his status to himself I would never have guessed that he and the other two young men, whose attitude, gestures, and dress were those of boys, were all Communist secret agents.

Who else among the restaurant visitors, I wondered, was a secret agent? Was it not possible simply to relax with a glass of beer and enjoy natural beauty without security agents? The sky was still the same sky of my youth, the white clouds flew on as before, the water was still the same green water in which I had splashed after school. But life under that blue sky, beside that same green water had changed drastically under the new regime. As I left the kiosk restaurant many of the worst things of a free society seemed preferable to me than the best promises of this dictatorship which had devoured my country.

VII

The Vegetable Smugglers

I arose very early to get my return ticket to Saigon. The station was only one kilometer from our house, and my mother always accompanied me on my walk through the quiet streets in the cold, dense morning fog. As we walked we chatted, as mother and son will, of family affairs. These were to be my last moments with her.

Much of the scene at the Saigon bus station was repeated in Dalat, though on a lesser scale. Here the passengers carried local produce—vegetables, fruits, flowers, resin pine—ostensibly as gifts. Most, however, would be sold in Saigon to cover expenses of the trip.

Dalat specializes in the production of vegetables, fruit, flowers and wood products. The Dalat bananas are sweeter smelling and better tasting than any I have eaten in America, Japan, Taiwan, or Indonesia. The Dalat pineapples surpass Hawaii's in flavor. Dalat flowers are equal in beauty to those anywhere.

The people of Dalat live mostly on horticulture and forestry. Since the Communist takeover of South Vietnam, however, the people are no longer permitted to cut wood, to produce charcoal or to sell pieces of rich resin pine as kindling. Hence, these people who live in the midst of immense forests have to pay high prices for firewood, charcoal, and resin pine.

Gardeners have been forced "voluntarily" to join cooperatives which must sell vegetables to the government at prices lower than their production cost. From April 1975 until early 1978 the local government prohibited private shipment of vegetables to Saigon or neighboring cities except in small quantities and then only at the official price. As a result, vegetable growers went bankrupt while people in Saigon lacked fresh food for daily use. Since 1978, the local Communist government has relaxed this policy and now permits the shipment of vegetables to Saigon and encourages the growth of more crops.

Despite the slow improvement, the price of vegetables in Saigon is still normally 200 percent above that of Dalat; but the price differential increases to 500 percent during times of political insecurity or during the Tet holidays.

Animal manure used for horticulture, formerly imported, is no longer available. The Communists have encouraged the manufacture of "green fertilizers," or compost from fresh leaves and plants, and the use of human excreta; but the quantity is insufficient to meet requirements. Growers now produce only enough vegetables to keep their land from being seized, to exchange for fertilizers and insecticides, to sell surreptitiously in Dalat, or to smuggle to Saigon and the nearby coastal regions.

Formerly, people throughout Vietnam enjoyed the Dalat flowers; but since "liberation" they have had to spend their scanty resources for food and clothing. Few can afford the lovely flowers of Dalat. Gardeners are now producing only the limited quantity they are able to sell on special occasions to the Communist hierarchy for use at public meetings such as on Uncle Ho's birthday, or that they can smuggle to Saigon for sale.

Passengers bound for Saigon or neighboring cities usually buy their vegetables the day before departure; but early every morning, even before the curfew is lifted, peddlers carrying bamboo baskets of vegetables, flowers, and resin pine on their shoulders gather around the bus station hoping to sell their produce to the travelers. Chased by security cadres from one place, they run to another, usually assembling in an open space across the road from the station. Most of them hide additional produce in nearby houses or in bushes to be brought out as needed.

Arranging Merchandise

Having bought their tickets, the passengers prepared to board the bus for Saigon. Some passengers had hired licensed porters to bring their goods to the station. These men were new on the Dalat scene. They were the so-called false soldiers and false authorities whom the Communist regime had refused to give any other kind of work.

Every time I came to this station I encountered a former lieutenant of the armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam in disreputable dress, carrying a bamboo yoke across his thin shoulders from which hung two baskets loaded with vegetables. This was how he earned money to feed his family. Looking at his bony face, my heart went out to him.

After his release from reeducation camp, rather than go to the "new economic zone" leaving his family behind, this man had asked for but was refused a porter's license. Despite the government's denial, some passengers mercifully hired him anyway. Eventually the authorities relented and gave him the license.

Besides the licensed porters, other "helpers" gathered around to lift the passengers' luggage and goods atop the bus. They charged half a dong

for a small bag and one dong for a large one. The smugglers' goods were also loaded on the roof at this moment.

The Goods Inspection

After all luggage and merchandise had been loaded but before the passengers were allowed aboard, security cadres climbed up on the roof, searched bags of vegetables and flowers and ordered the driver's assistant to drop some of them to the ground. Many were damaged in the process; and not only was there no thought of compensation, the owners were subject to being "invited" to the security office for investigation. If this happened, the driver dared not reload their goods, even if they were regular customers.

Because of these inspections, the safest way for passengers to transport vegetables by bus was to put them in small bags weighing less than 20 pounds and pretend they were being taken to Saigon as gifts from Dalat.

Since the security office was only thirty feet from the bus parking area, the vegetable examination process occurred frequently. Drivers did not mind losing the transportation charges at the station because they could recoup them from other smugglers as soon as the bus passed the first control post.

Meeting the Smugglers

Shortly after leaving the station, just across the short Dalat bridge not 500 feet from the security office, the driver stopped while more passengers climbed aboard the bus. These were smugglers with whom the driver claimed kinship, a frequently used guise to avoid protests by passengers. Their goods had not yet been loaded into the already crowded bus. That would come later.

Our bus was designated as a mail carrier, so the driver stopped at the post office to pick up a postal cadre and several sacks of mail before leaving the city. Mail was usually carried in mini or standard buses and a seat was always reserved for the postal cadre on the first row next to the door. In this case I was in the middle between him and the driver.

Passengers without tickets could at times catch a bus somewhere between the Dalat bridge and the first control post; but our driver paid no attention to them, not because he was afraid of being caught by the mobile security guards but because he wanted to save room for his own smugglers.

On the Road to Saigon

After a routine check at the first control post, the bus continued along the small, meandering asphalt road through cool, fragrant pine forests. It was early morning and the sun's rays illumined the morning dew which still covered the hills on both sides of the road.

Suddenly the driver stopped and parked the bus.

Out of the undergrowth three people emerged carrying heavy sacks of vegetables. The driver quickly got out and climbed on the roof of the bus. There he received the sacks, tied them to the railing, and got back in followed by one of the smugglers. The others disappeared through the bushes.

These were vegetable farmers who worked the land in the valley near the Dalat-Saigon highway. They had grown the vegetables in their own gardens. If their own crops were insufficient for a trip, they acquired enough from other farmers to make up a load. The vegetables varied according to the season and location, but at this spot they were mostly cabbages, cauliflowers, and carrots. Loading sites, of course, were prearranged with the driver.

Another stop. A vegetable-smuggling young woman, just getting aboard the bus, greeted the driver as "Dad." Her black Vietnamese dress, soaked with highland dew, set off her rosy cheeks. She may have been sitting silently at the edge of the pavement for hours, keeping a lookout for security cadres while waiting for the bus. She may also have stayed up late or gotten up early to prepare her sacks of vegetables, each weighing about 50 pounds for easy handling. This scene, with only minor variations, was repeated several times as we continued along the highway. Some smugglers piled their sacks of vegetables atop the passengers' luggage on the roof. Others crammed their sacks into the bus, at times so hurriedly they bumped into passengers. Each time the driver feigned a smile, asking everyone to make allowances for his "cousins."

Several miles beyond the Lien Khuong Waterfall the driver picked up another smuggler and squeezed him in between the two of us. With the postal cadre, there were now four persons in the front seat. This was usually the last stop for loading vegetables. Many passengers were vexed because of the frequent stops, but these had become a regular routine since the Communists took over South Vietnam. Some people actually upheld these illegal practices as necessity that knows no law. It was better to smuggle goods to keep body and soul together, they said, than to stay at home dying of starvation.

Going downhill and the bus picked up speed, giving us the feeling that our trip would not be held up any longer. Nevertheless, after some 12 miles, we stopped again. The driver said there was something wrong with

the engine that needed fixing, but I had noticed nothing to this effect.

He got out, lifted the hood, and pretended to fiddle with several parts for a few moments. Then he and one of the smugglers climbed atop the bus and, using knives, cut the strings from the large vegetable bags without regard for ownership and emptied them into the square formed by the baggage. Next, the two men proceeded to rearrange the whole load to make the vegetables appear as inconspicuous as possible.

The driver had devised an efficient method for hiding vegetables on the roof. Before picking up his passengers at the station, he had covered the roof with heavy tent canvas—handed down from the Republic's armed forces—on which he had stacked their luggage. Now, to hide his contraband goods, he leaned the luggage against the roof rails, forming a rectangular framework wherein he placed two layers of vegetables with a layer of canvas between and another on top covering both vegetables and luggage. Finally he tied the top canvas firmly to the roof rails, making a neat package which protected the vegetables from both the hot sun and the prying eyes of security cadres. The whole arrangement now stood only two feet high on the roof of the bus and looked quite orderly. With a straight face the driver announced the engine had now been repaired and we could continue on to Di Linh.

On one of my trips back to Saigon while approaching this high-plateau district the two rear wheels of the bus came off. The bus dragged along for about 50 feet before grinding to a stop while the two wheels spun off into a nearby chasm. Thanks to the driver's years of experience on this winding road, all passengers escaped injury and possible death. Even so, the accident had been caused by inadequate maintenance and heavy overloading.

Vietnam's vehicular transportation today is in a quagmire because the government has been unable or unwilling to import repair parts from the capitalist countries for its many makes of cars. Besides, they have transferred many cars and trucks, along with their spare parts, from the South to the North. Hence the price of spare parts, tires, tubes, and accessories in the open market has risen from 500 to 2000 percent since 1975.

Drivers are authorized to purchase tires, parts, and accessories from the nationalized stores at the official price, but administrative red tape makes it extremely time consuming. As a result, many buses run on threadbare tires. On one of my trips we had two flats within 12 miles, and the driver finally had to borrow a tire from an auto repair shop to continue the journey.

According to one story I heard, the Communist government once ordered a shipment of old tires from Japan with the idea that discarded tires from capitalist countries would be in much better condition than those in common use in Vietnam. Whoever ordered the tires failed to specify the condition, however, and those received had all been split down the center so they could not be reused.

In effect, there is no guarantee of safety for passengers who ride the buses of the regime, especially along the high plateau where the road becomes slippery in the evening rain or in heavy fog.

The Sudden Patrols of Bao Loc

In Di Linh at the edge of the Bao Loc district a bus driver enroute to Dalat informed our driver of a "sudden" patrol ahead. In this area the intercity road snakes its way through hills covered with tall tea trees. Since the driver knew where the patrolmen would be, he decided to drive on a little further. As we rounded a bend, he saw the patrol group stopping all cars about 600 feet ahead. He stopped the bus and invited the passengers to use this as a rest stop and relieve themselves. Then he opened the engine hood, got out his tools and spread them out on the ground as though he were making repairs.

Local people passing by told us the patrolmen had been conducting intensive searches of all vehicles for nearly two hours. Our driver kept hoping the patrol group would finish their task and go somewhere else. After half an hour's wait, they were still searching, so he decided to go ahead, reasoning that if he had seen them, they had probably also seen him, and if he were caught trying to evade the patrol there would be a heavier fine.

As we stopped at the patrol site, a group of security cadres came up to our bus. Most were young, post-1975 recruits and undoubtedly from "progressive elements," meaning they were sons of Party members, cadres, or of workers and peasants with a trustworthy past according to the standards set by the Party and government.

The group of security cadres "invited" the passengers off the bus. Two cadres climbed onto the roof and searched the baggage and goods, though not very carefully. They seemed to be acquainted with our driver, who inquired about their families as they searched. They finished quickly and jumped down. Several others inspected the interior of the bus.

This group of "sudden" patrolmen were apparently searching for tea—the local product—plus rice, salt, sugar, and monosodium glutamate. They ignored the vegetables, not because transportation of fresh foods through this area was allowed, but because control of them was the responsibility of the next post.

One of the cadres found a two-pound bag of tea belonging to a young Vietnamese girl of Chinese descent. He took it to his group chief for a decision whether to confiscate. Asked by the chief, the girl said she had bought the tea for her dressmaking cooperative in Cholon, not for profit. Her confused face and nervous response to the chief's questions told me she had

intended to sell the tea. Almost all passengers do. But I spoke up and told the chief she was a worker and had bought the tea for her comrades; the amount was too small to make a profit. Apparently realizing the girl was not a professional smuggler, the chief asked his comrades' opinion and then decided to let her go.

In the meantime, the real smugglers dispersed around the bus, keeping an eye on their goods, which included tea hidden under the seats or in some corners.

I was astonished at the failure of the patrolmen to search the bus more carefully. A large quantity of confiscated goods were piled in a heap next to their patrol car, so they had not been lenient with others. The chief wasted fully ten minutes questioning the Chinese girl whose tea was clearly visible in the leg room between the seats. During this time, had they wanted to, the security cadres could certainly have conducted a more intensive search of the bus and found hidden goods. Except for their chief, the security cadres seemed well acquainted with our driver. It was apparent that our driver's friends were protecting him.

During the entire trip I saw no security cadre examine the postal cadre's mail bags, undoubtedly the safest place to hide smuggled goods. Many Party members, cadres, and government officials use official pouches for smuggling while they travel on government business, especially those going from the South to the North.

The Vegetable Control Cadres

The patrol released the bus to continue to the Malagui control post, 75 miles from Saigon. In the past, Malagui had been a Montagnard (highlander) village. In recent years ethnic Vietnamese had moved in, building houses and stores along both sides of the road and transforming the village into a busy community where buses made short stops.

Having just escaped the "sudden" patrolmen, here our bus met vegetable-control cadres. This was a permanent control post with many cadres and scales for weighing vegetables. In the past, contraband goods were seized without compensation. Now, regardless of whether they were smugglers or ordinary passengers, the owners were compensated at the official price, which was usually one-third to one-half of that on the Dalat open market. For those whose vegetables were seized, it meant a loss, not only of capital but also of time and energy spent on the trip.

On that particular day the local security cadres had begun a systematic search for goods all along the road from Bao Loc province to the Tuc Trung crossroads. Few buses carrying smuggled goods were able to escape.

As soon as our bus stopped, two cadres climbed on the roof and without concern for ownership, began throwing the vegetables down into large bamboo containers. The smugglers watched silently. The bus driver occasionally identified the cabbages as belonging to this passenger, the carrots to that lady, but did nothing else. I noticed that the cadres threw down vegetables belonging to both smugglers and passengers from the top layer, but did not touch those on the bottom, which belonged to the driver and his "relatives."

Meanwhile, two other cadres searched the interior of the bus, seizing several bags of carrots but leaving untouched other sacks and handbags which the driver said were bought by passengers for family use.

Experienced travelers on this route avoided the use of green sandbags, which the armed forces of the Republic had formerly employed for building bunkers and were now commonly used by smugglers for transporting vegetables. Rather, they used carefully tied hemp bags or bamboo baskets in the hope that the control cadres could distinguish between smuggled goods and those bought for personal use. The smugglers were undoubtedly familiar with this ruse, but because of the quantity and the speed with which they had to operate, they were unable to be as careful as the passengers.

Nevertheless, the inspection cadres seldom seized smuggled goods in the bottom layer, or those mixed with passengers' goods on top. Since the driver could easily mislead the cadres about which goods belonged to whom, passengers usually lost more than the smugglers. Also, smuggled goods inside the bus, mingled with the passengers' small sacks and handbags usually remained safe, including gold, precious stones, and American dollars.

The seized vegetables were weighed, the losers compensated at the official prices, and we were allowed to continue our journey. The search and seizure had taken half an hour. I asked the driver how much he and the smugglers had lost.

"Not much," he said. "Those two cadres on the roof were my 'brothers.' They carried out their duty quite reasonably."

A woman passenger, who had not been acquainted with the driver, had lost two sacks of carrots and half a dozen cabbages. She showed us her small compensation and bemoaned her loss. I had not recognized her as a smuggler before. She was due to lose even more when we reached the Saigon boundary.

The bus arrived at the Phuong Lam agricultural products and merchandise control post in mid-afternoon. It was a thatched wooden building 20 feet long, adjacent to the pavement in a deserted area. There were two sections: one an office, the other a depository for seized goods. The office had a large window and a simple desk where two young women secretaries sat

receiving papers and writing records. Behind them hung a curtain to which was attached a small "no admittance" sign. On the other side of the curtain decisions on seized products were made.

As the bus arrived I saw a group of passengers, mostly women, in the office. A woman cadre carrying a roll of fabric, followed by a woman passenger, walked from the depository through the curtain. It was apparent that cadre and passenger were about to reach a favorable resolution concerning the fabric in question.

The inspection cadres seemed unconcerned about the bus or its passengers. The driver stood before the window chatting amiably with the two secretaries for 15 minutes before one of them coyly asked, "What did you bring us from Dalat?" At this the driver, speaking openly before the passengers, told one of the smugglers to give her a couple of cabbages. Then, following the usual presentation of trip papers, we resumed our trip to Saigon.

At the Thu Duc Crossroads

Shortly after we entered the district of Thu Duc, the bus stopped at a crossroads in the open country. It was an illegal unloading zone. A motley collection of vehicles—three-wheeled Lambrettas, carrier tricycles, pedicabs, and push carts—surrounded other buses already stopped there. Drivers, passengers, and buyers were engaged in hectic activity. Traders, who bought products on the spot, dealt in tea, beans, sweet rice, pine kindling, cigarettes, and anything else the passengers had to offer. Numerous children, ranging from tiny tots to aggressive teenagers, darted in and out of the crowd glean- ing vegetables and stealing anything left momentarily unguarded.

As soon as we stopped, the driver and two of his "relatives" climbed on the roof to unload the vegetables while about ten persons who had been waiting for this particular bus gathered around. Most of them looked young and shabby. Several caught vegetables, tossed down by the driver and his two helpers, and passed them on to others who put them in bamboo baskets. Those not actually handling vegetables stood guard to prevent the children from snatching any that might fall to the ground.

The unloading process was indiscriminate as to ownership and included any vegetables not actually tied up in sacks or handbags. Passengers had to be wary of the driver selling their vegetables on one side of the bus and of the thieves running off with their luggage on the other. I had one sack of vegetables on the roof and another in the bus, so I stood outside keeping a watch. Passengers whose baggage was not on the roof stayed inside the bus

and closed the door, despite the heat, to avoid being robbed.

To refresh ourselves we had the option of buying red tea, slices of watermelon, or pieces of sugarcane—stuck umbrella-like on bamboo sticks—all of which were covered with dust that permeated the area.

Two incidents occurred at this moment. First, the young woman smuggler whose carrots and cabbages had been seized at the Malagui control post now realized that the driver, in rearranging the vegetables back at the Lien Khuong waterfall while the passengers had sat waiting in the bus, had emptied two other sacks of her carrots into the layer of vegetables which he was now unloading. She watched dumbfounded as her precious goods disappeared with all the others into the bamboo baskets and were dragged onto motorized pedicabs, which promptly sped away.

Second, the postal cadre now opened his mail sacks, took out several bags of tea and sold them to the local traders at a profit of 10 dong each. Just three bags brought him almost the equivalent of his monthly salary of 36 dong. He could have made a much higher profit by selling them in the open market himself, but he undoubtedly found it more expeditious and safer to dispose of them here.

Having unloaded the merchandise, the driver continued on to Bien Hoa, where we quickly cleared the last control post before Saigon. From Bien Hoa to Saigon's Hung Vuong bus station we heard only the sobs and protests of the unfortunate carrot smuggler as she berated the bus driver for cheating her and sought the sympathy of her fellow passengers. I got the worst of it because she sat immediately behind me. When I asked her why she hadn't stopped the driver when she saw what he was doing, she wept even more saying the driver had too many allies, and she dared not protest for fear of being dominated by them.

The driver was unsympathetic. He told her harshly that he bore complete responsibility for any trouble on the bus. If the woman wanted to, she could go to the station security office and sue him for the loss. At that she said nothing more. She was well aware the driver and the station security cadres were "comrades" in the service of the people's transportation and that they would be "reasonable" with one another. Going to the security office would also mean informing on herself. Besides, nothing remained to prove her accusation. The vegetables were gone and no passenger would be willing to testify in her behalf, including myself, since I knew she could not win.

Arrival in Saigon

No passenger was permitted to get off the bus between the Bien Hoa control post and the Saigon bus station, a distance of six miles. The station is at the end of Hung Vuong Avenue, and all buses are required to stop at the security post before entering the fenced in station area. To ensure compliance rolls of barbed wire cover half the street in front of the post leaving a single lane for incoming and outgoing vehicles. Pedicabs are not allowed to enter the station grounds to receive or discharge passengers.

Our bus stopped in front of the security office and a cadre with a red arm band guided us to a parking spot immediately inside the fence. After the driver made his official arrival report, we were allowed off the bus. There was no further inspection, but no passenger escaped the watchful eyes of the security cadres as we carried baggage and merchandise outside the enclosure to catch pedicabs homeward.

The events I have described occurred along the Saigon-Dalat highway, but they are characteristic of all inter-city roads since the Communists took over South Vietnam. There is a vast difference between travel today in Vietnam and that before April 30, 1975:

Under the Republic one could buy bus tickets at any time of day, from early morning to late evening, and there were frequent buses from Saigon to Dalat. I needed only to arrive at the station half an hour before my planned departure time, buy my ticket, and be ready to go. Having checked my baggage, I could relax over coffee before boarding the bus. One could also get his ticket a day in advance for an early morning departure.

Even when the security situation worsened, drivers stopped only at one or two control posts to show passenger lists. Personal papers and luggage were seldom examined. No one had to get permission from the security office to make the trip. Getting a trip permit under the Communist regime is as difficult as getting a passport to go abroad was under the Republic and certainly more troublesome than traveling between two capitalist countries.

No person can feel secure while traveling in Communist Vietnam. It is not just the bad roads and poor condition of the vehicles, not just the trip permit requirements, the incredible difficulties in buying tickets, the frequent and overly zealous examination of personal documents, or even being subject to seizure of goods without compensation. Worse than all these hindrances is the constant molestations by local security cadres wherever one goes, even if it is just to visit his mother in his childhood home.

VIII

“Money Lost, Disease Remains”

The Communists have nationalized all hospitals and pharmacies in Vietnam and classified them according to Communist protocol. Owners who refused to turn their medical establishments over to the Communist government were imprisoned. This happened to the director of the French-managed Saint Paul Clinic in Saigon.

The new government renamed all institutions and reserved the best ones for highly placed cadres, Party members, and their families. The Vi Dan (For the People) Hospital became Thong Nhat (Unification) Hospital and the famous French Grall Hospital became Children's Hospital No. 2. The gates of the hospitals are under heavy guard day and night. The public is not permitted to come close, even though, living under the so-called People's Regime, they are supposed to own collectively all national properties.

Low- and middle-level cadres, officials, and ordinary citizens can be hospitalized in such medical centers as the Cho Ray Hospital in Cholon. This facility is separated into different sections in which the quality of care and nutrition vary considerably.

Complicated and time-consuming bureaucratic procedures make it difficult for ordinary citizens to be admitted to hospitals. Relatives who want to visit a patient must get a permission slip from the watchman at the gate, after they have provided the patient's section, room, and bed number, and have established their legal status by showing ID cards, voting cards, and letters of introduction from their household cluster and ward authorities. This process may take half a day of waiting and negotiation.

Within one, two, or three years after assuming power, depending on the locality, the Communists established two major types of health facilities: a "health and maternity room" for each city ward, and an "area health room" for a group of three or four wards.

If neither of these two facilities can help the patient or if drugs and equipment are lacking, he is referred to the district health room. If his condition is more serious he is transferred to a city or specialized hospital.

With so many administrative procedures and complicated papers, the condition of sick persons may deteriorate and they may even die because of the delays. One of my nephews died of this "administrative disease."

Pharmacies suffered the same fate as hospitals. They were confiscated and their names were changed to numbers. For example, the Ben Thanh Drugstore and the Binh Dan Pharmacy became Drugstore No. 5 and Pharmacy No. 3. By 1978 each ward in the Saigon-Giadinh metropolitan area had a drugstore selling medicine at a price fixed by the government.

The Ward 11 Health Room

The Ward 11 health room occupies a house which formerly belonged to a family who escaped in 1975. It is divided into two sections, the larger for Western medical care, the smaller for Oriental medicine and acupuncture.

In the Western medical section a pharmaceuticals cabinet serves as a divider between the areas reserved for consultation and for reception. In the outer area, a nurse sits at a reception desk and registers patients on a first come, first served basis; and a medical assistant sits at a second desk and sells or delivers medicines prescribed by the consulting physician.

Each household must buy and maintain a health-examination notebook in which the names of each member are inscribed on the first page and certified by the ward Health Room. This book must be submitted to the nurse whenever a house-hold member comes for medical care. After the doctor has seen the patient the nurse writes down his name, condition, and drugs prescribed, and affixes a stamp.

After the examination, if the medical assistant has not either sold or administered the prescribed medicine, the patient or a relative takes his prescription and health-examination book to his ward drugstore or a designated pharmacy in the neighborhood. Most patients go to the ward drugstore for medicines.

When the Ward 11 Health Room was established in 1976, a former military doctor who had spent a year in the "reeducation" process, was given responsibility for health examinations. He was later transferred to the Third Area Health Room and replaced by Dr. Duong, a fifth-year Saigon Medical School student.

When Dr. Duong was busy with other tasks, a very young medical assistant, who had studied medicine only several months, took his place.

Dr. Duong's parents were French citizens; and in April 1979, when I left, he was preparing to join them in France. Ward 11 Health Room was in a quandary because there was no replacement. This situation is common in wards and villages throughout South Vietnam because so many doctors and

pharmacists have escaped. In that same month, the Communist authorities publicly asked members of the medical profession to stay in Vietnam for the service of the people and the Fatherland, an appeal seldom before made. Previously, when speaking of the boat people, the Communists had denounced them as lazy, labor-fearing elements of society, prostitutes, pimps, or servants of the Americans.

I got well acquainted with Dr. Duong through my many visits to the Health Room when I took my children to see him, and especially when I gave him mimeograph paper, used only on one side, for prescriptions. Thanks to these donations and our various exchanges of knowledge about books in French, my family and I were favored by his kind attention.

The Ward Health Room personnel examined patients in the morning; they gave injections or held meetings in the afternoon and evening. When the ward conducted special campaigns, such as rat extermination and inoculations, the Health Room was closed. All its members—Dr. Duong, the nurse, the medical assistant, an unpaid young helper, and the practitioner of Oriental medicine—had to take part in these campaigns. The patients had to await another day for treatment.

“People” and Medicines

Patients are divided into three categories: 1) the public or “people,” 2) workers and officials, 3) Party members and cadres.

“People” are all citizens, young and old, male and female, not working for the governmental system. Workers and officials are those who work for the government but do not belong to the Party; many are former South Vietnamese government employees whom the Communists have not yet been able to replace with their newly trained personnel. Party members and cadres are the elite.

Examinations are free. The “people” receive free medicine from time to time but generally must pay for it unless certified as poor by the ward people’s committee. Workers and officials, cadres and Party members receive medicine free.

The pharmaceuticals of the Ward 11 Health Room, like those of other wards, government institutions, factories, companies, hospitals, and pharmacies, are divided into three categories:

Medicines reserved for the people: These are few, and generally the least effective. They include aspirin and sulfaguanidine. The most popular antibiotic the public can buy, not cheap and not always available, is tetracyclin. Most medicines for the public are manufactured in Vietnam.



Street scene in front of Central Market, Le Loi Street, Ho Chi Minh City, May 1980. (Photo: Terry Schmitt)



Large portraits of Ho Chi Minh displayed on all public places manifest the Vietnamese cult of the individual. Here Uncle Ho's portrait dominates a street in Danang. (Photo: T. Terzani/SYGMA)



“Labor heroes” engaged in socialist construction on a Vietnamese state farm, May 1980. All citizens must participate in this activity under the slogan “labor is glorious.” (Photo: Terry Schmitt)



Ho Chi Minh Vanguard Youth team leader reviews troops to drum roll, May 1980. (Photo: Terry Schmitt)



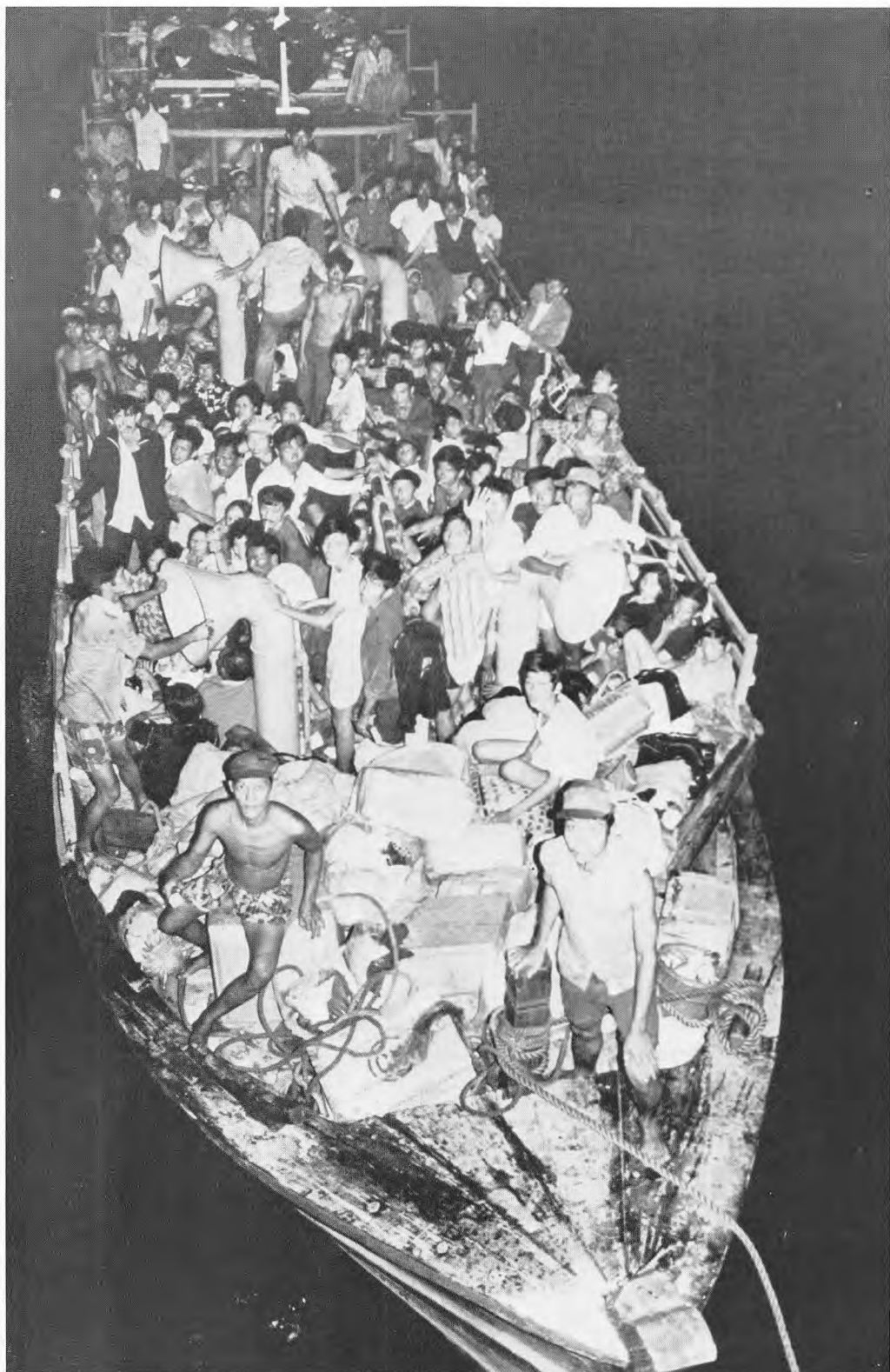
An information cadre gives an indoctrination lecture to Lang Son district children before they go to work in the fields. (Photo: Penelope Chauvelot/SYGMA)



Children and their shelter on a street adjacent to Independence Palace. Ho Chi Minh City, May 1980. (Photo: Terry Schmitt)



Before the Vietnamese government began authorizing ethnic Chinese to “go abroad officially” many fled northward into the People’s Republic of China. Here Sino-Vietnamese cross the 12-kilometer no-man’s land (neutral zone) at the Huu Nghi (friendship) border crossing which was the busiest between the two countries. (Photo: MT1/SYGMA)



A refugee boat arrives in Indonesia. (Photo: UNHCR/10123/V. Leduc)



Life in a refugee camp. (Photo: UNHCR/7134/D. Jamieson)

VIỆT NAM CỘNG-HÒA
ĐÔ-THÀNH SAIGON

TRÍCH-LỤC BỘ KHAI-SANH

Quận: 5
PHƯỜNG

Lập ngày 26 tháng 5 năm 1969

Số hiệu: 1320

Tên họ đứa trẻ	CHU-TIÊU-AN
Con trai hay con gái. .	NỮ
Ngày sanh	Ngày mười bốn tháng năm năm một ngàn chín trăm sáu mươi chín hồi 8g.
Nơi sanh	314, Nguyễn-Trãi,
Tên họ người cha. . .	CHU-KHÀNH-LONG
Tên họ người mẹ. . .	LƯU-A-MUỐI
Vợ chánh hay không có hôn-thú	Vợ chánh
Tên họ người đứng khai.	



TRÍCH-LỤC Y BẢN-CHÁNH

Saigon, ngày 20 tháng 6 năm 19 74

Viên Chức Hộ-Tịch

Nguyễn Kim Ba
Tham Sự Cảnh-Cố

Republic of Vietnam
Capital--Saigon
District 5
Ward
Registry Number 1320

BIRTH CERTIFICATE

Issued: Day: 26 Month: 5 Year: 1969

Name, Family Name of Child: CHU-TIEU-AN
Male or Female: FEMALE
Birth Date: 14 May 1969 at 8 A.M.
Birth Place: 314 Nguyen-Trai
Father's Name: CHU-KHANH-LONG
Mother's Name: LU'U-A-MUOI
Principal Wife or
without Marriage Certificate: Principal Wife
Name of Witness

COPY OF THE ORIGINAL


Saigon Day: 20 Month: 6 Year: 74

Legal Officer

Nguyen Kim Ba

Chief Clerk

False Birth Certificate

Thành phố HỒ CHÍ MINH	CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM
Quận, Huyện <u>5</u>	Độc - Lập - Tự - Do - Hạnh - Phúc
Phường, Xã <u>12</u>	
Tờ bầu cử số <u>137</u>	THẺ CỬ TRI
Họ và tên cử tri <u>Chu - Khanh - Long</u>	số <u>4097</u>
Tuổi <u>37</u>	
Nam hay nữ <u>Nam</u>	
ĐA BẦU	<u>Hoa</u>
IS - CHỖ ở hiện nay <u>527, Nguyễn - Trãi</u>	
Chữ ký của cử tri	 năm 1977
	PHAN - THANH - TỰ

City: HO CHI MINH
District: 5
Ward, Village: 12
Voting Cluster: 137

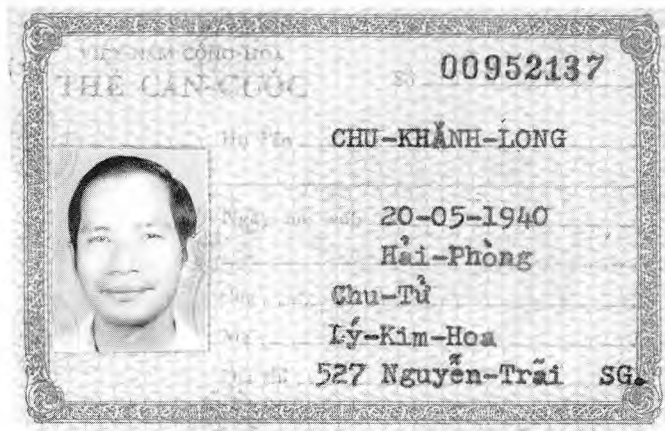
SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
Independence Liberty Happiness

VOTING CARD
No. 1097




Name and Family Name of Voter: Chu-Khanh-Long
Age: 37
Male or Female: Male
Race: Chinese
Present Address: 527 Nguyen-Trai
Signature of Voter Day: 8 Month: 5 Year:
1977

People's Committee
Chairman
Phan-Thanh-Tuu

False Voting Card



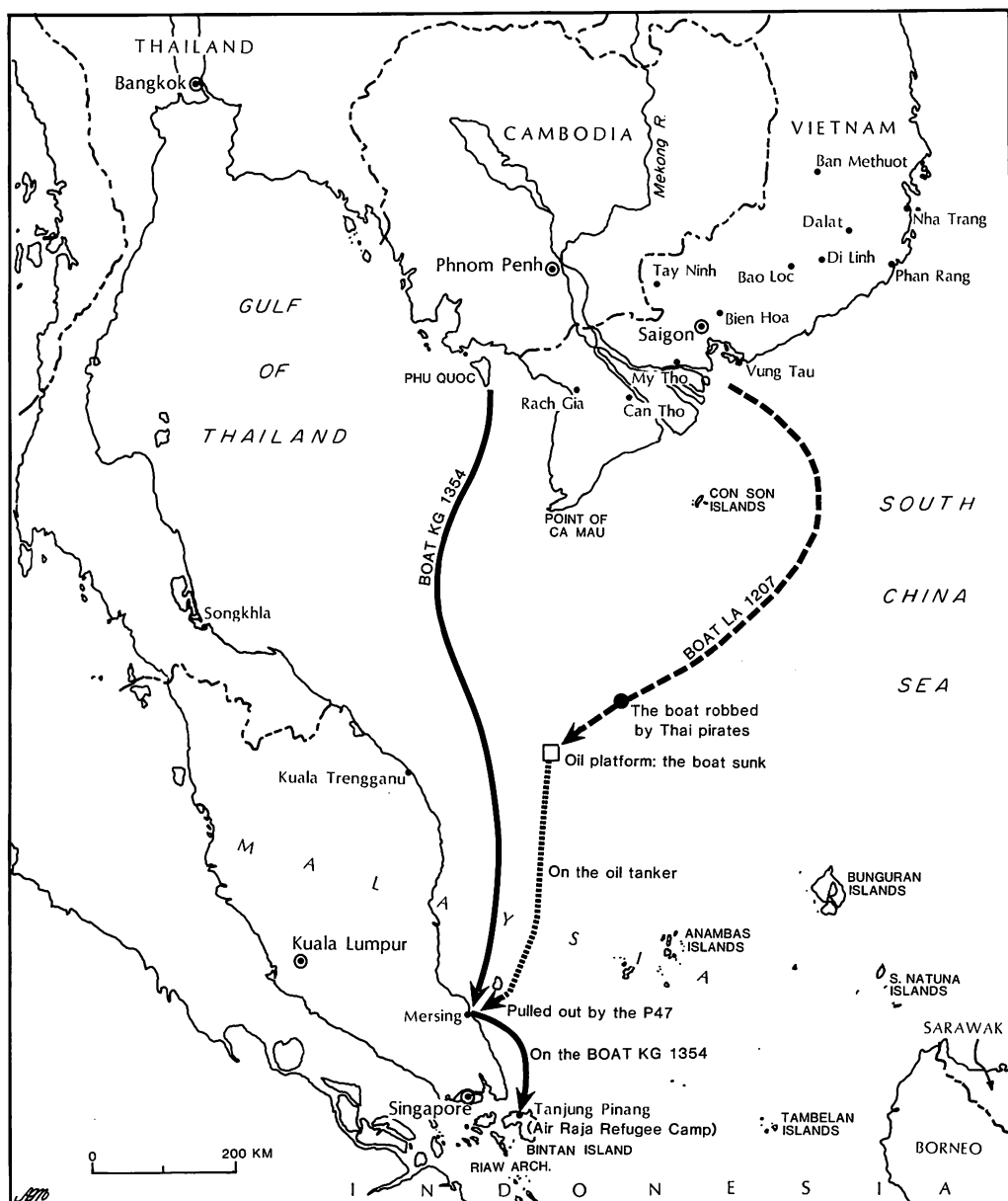
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
 IDENTIFICATION CARD No. 00952137
 Name, Family Name: CHU-KHANH-LONG
 Date, Place of Birth: 20-05-1940
 Hai-Phong
 Father: Chu-Tu
 Mother: Ly-Kim-Hoa
 Address: 527 Nguyen-Trai, Saigon

Dấu vết răng: Nốt ruồi nhỏ 4		Cao: 1 m 62
đuôi sau khỏe mắt phải.		Nặng: 58 Kg
Chữ ký đường sự:		Ngón trỏ mặt  Ngón trỏ tay 
SAIGON ngày 12-09-1969		
TUN. GIÁM-ĐỐC CẢNH-SÁT QGĐT		
Phó Trưởng-Ty CSQG Quận 5		
 PHẠM-NGỌC-TRÍ		

Personal Marks: Small mole under
 right eyelid
 Signature: (faded)
 SAIGON day: 12-09-1969
 By Order of the Director of
 National Police
 in the Capital of the
 Republic
 Deputy Office Chief,
 District 5
 (signature)
 Pham-Ngoc-Tri

Height: 1 m. 62 cm.
 Weight: 58 kg.
 right
 and
 left
 index
 fingerprints

False ID card purchased by author for his escape from Vietnam. Address given is actually in Cholon.



Our Escape Route



Refugee boat at sea. Author's boat was of similar construction though larger than this one.



Author Nguyen Long (extreme right) and his family with fisherman Truong Van Luong (left center, partially hidden by his wife) and family at Air Raja refugee camp in Tanjung Pinang, Indonesia, in front of a shelter the two families built and occupied during their stay in the camp. Long and his family accompanied Truong's four-generation family (19 members, 2 not in photo) from Malaysia to Indonesia. Long's friend Hiep is sixth from right. The Truongs have been resettled in West Germany.



Author Nguyen Long and family at Air Raja refugee camp, Tanjung Pinang Island, Indonesia, a week before their departure for resettlement in the United States. Left to right: To-Lan, Hien-Long, wife Ai-Lan, Hy-Long, and the author.

Medicines reserved for the workers and officials: These do not differ from those for the public in quality or quantity. However, in serious cases people in this category can obtain medicines imported before April 1975, including such antibiotics as tetracycline, aureomycin, and penicillin.

Medicines reserved for the cadres and Party members: These are the best, usually imported, medicines. They are in sufficient supply for all kinds of diseases, especially in the Party hospitals such as Thong Nhat and Children's Hospital No. 2.

I asked Dr. Duong why the Health Room divided its medicines into three categories, the bacteria in the bodies of the people, workers and officials, cadres and Party members, being, in my opinion, the same.

Dr. Duong answered seriously because his subordinates were present and there were patients in the waiting room. "A tubercle bacillus in anybody is still a tubercle bacillus," he said, "but the medicines are divided into different categories in accordance with the provisions of the government. Our Health Room must carry out orders from higher echelons."

Getting Prescriptions Filled

In order to see Dr. Duong, the patient or a member of his household had to submit the health-examination notebook to the nurse's desk when the Health Room opened at 8 A.M. Monday through Saturday. The nurse would take the notebooks as patients checked in and call the householder's name and address on the cover in turn. After the examination the patient or a relative went to the indicated ward drugstore to buy medicine.

From early 1976 to early 1978 these drugstores were always crowded. Anyone needing medicine had to get up early in the morning. Lines were always disorderly, and service was extremely poor. Sometimes one had to wait all day and still not get his prescription filled, so one had to come back a second or even a third day to get medicine that was supposed to be used within three days.

I had to endure this chaotic situation many times to buy medicine for my year-old child. After the first couple of times I began sending my nine-year-old daughter with our health-examination notebook to hold a place in the line. Two or three hours later I would replace her so she could return home and look after her younger brother while I waited in the tropical sun to buy medicine. Sometimes I returned home on the verge of sunstroke. This whole state of affairs led to our hiring persons to occupy a place in line to buy medicine.

Later on, drugstores began accepting health-examination books and filling the prescriptions in the order received. At one time the area

pharmacy in my ward tried issuing number cards to its customers so they could return for their orders later, but this didn't work out because people came back late or lost the cards, so the pharmacy canceled its initiative.

I usually left my notebook in the morning and came back in the afternoon or evening to pick up my medicine. If it was ready, good; if not, I came back the next day.

Many times, especially after 1976, after having stood in line for many hours, customers would finally reach the counter, happily show their notebooks and prescriptions only to find the required medicines were not available. The long wait was for nothing.

Generally speaking at least one member of each household had to take charge of buying food and medicine and going to meetings, so that those who were fending for a livelihood would not be disturbed. There were five members in my family. My wife worked in the city bank all day; my two older children went to school; my youngest was only one year old, so I took charge of the household affairs.

Communist governing techniques keep people occupied with obtaining food, clothing, medicines, and taking part in political studies or social activities from morning to night; and this prevents them from realizing how wasteful and destructive the dictatorship is. Everybody is busy all day, every day, including holidays and Sundays; if a person stops and looks back on what he has accomplished in a day he will become aware that all his labor has gone for nothing really significant. The natural outcome is a collapsed economy, the outgrowth of a long-standing managerial system which is, at once, communism's greatest and least correctable fault.

The Ward 11 Health Room once established a so-called people's cooperative medicine cabinet. After examination, patients could buy medicine from the cabinet instead of going to the ward drugstore. The cooperative cabinet sold only a limited number of the most popular medicines. Others prescribed had to be obtained in accordance with regular procedures.

The people's cooperative medicine cabinet was a Health Room initiative to assist ward inhabitants, but its main purpose was to raise a small amount of money—by means of a 10 percent surcharge—to pay the medical assistant and the unsalaried young helper. It existed only a short time because district health authorities did not provide adequate supplies.

At the Drugstore

When customers reached the drugstore counter, they showed their prescriptions and their health-examination notebooks to the clerk. Before 1978 they also had to show their household-member books, but this requirement was canceled because drugstores were afraid of losing them. Loss of the household-member book was very troublesome because it is a family's most important legal document, the one most often requested by the police, security agents, and government officials, and the most used in every matter concerning family members.

The health-examination notebook and the prescription had to indicate the types and quantities of the prescribed medicines and to show the doctor's signature and the stamp of the Health Room. If any one of these requirements was missing, the patient had to return to the Health Room before he could get his medicine. Fortunately, it was not necessary to stand in line again; he only had to work his way through the crowd to the counter and show the clerk the completed requirements.

Since 1978 many area and ward drug stores have been posting lists, with prices, of medicines which they are authorized to sell to the public. There are about sixty items on this list, including remedies for headaches, diarrhea, colds, coughs, and constipation. What the lists do not indicate, however, are the quantities available of the various medicines.

People in other wards of the Phu Nhuan district as well as in mine brought this matter up for criticism in their weekly household cluster meetings and asked that drugstores be requested to provide information on the quantities of medicines on hand. I have never seen any drugstore carry out this request by the people.

The drug clerk, who might be an undismissed pharmacist of the former South Vietnamese regimes or a newly trained druggist, could sell any of the medicines received from the district pharmacy.

Most drug clerks I met were women who changed the prescribed types and quantities of medicine of their own accord depending on what they had on hand. Many times I saw them frown when they encountered prescriptions for some unavailable medicine. Either the ward doctors had not been told they were unavailable or had forgotten, or had known but still prescribed the medicine with the hope that somehow the drugstore would have it. Dr. Duong had given me such would-be prescriptions in order to please me because I wanted to test my luck.

After filling the prescription, the clerk would place a checkmark or the word "sold" beside the Health Room's entry in the client's health-examination book. If the medicine was not on hand, the clerk would write in "unavailable" even though the posted list of available medicines indicated

the contrary. Clients could wait for another day or be sent to drugstores in neighboring wards, which were often in the same situation because all were supplied by the district pharmacy.

If the neighboring drugstores were also out of stock, the patient had various alternatives:

He could return to the ward Health Room, ask the doctor for a new prescription, then try to get it from the drugstore. He could keep the prescription and try his luck another day. I kept many "unavailable" prescriptions in my health-examination book and tried from time to time to get them filled, but drug clerks refused to fill those more than a week old.

He could borrow medicine from relatives or neighbors; but if they had the medicine, they would be hesitant to say so because of their own future needs. Hardships under the regime have forced the Vietnamese to reduce their traditional generosity to relatives and friends.

He could wait to see the doctor at the area Health Room, explain his trouble, and try his luck at getting medicine at this level.

He could get a referral to the district health room or drug store where pharmaceutical supplies are more ample than at the area and ward levels.

He could use traditional treatments such as a vapor bath with medicinal herbs, Oriental scarification, glass cupping, massage, acupuncture, and especially "national medicines" administered by the Oriental medicine room.

Disease-causing bacteria have a field day in these situations. Facing no medical resistance they thrive; since the patient must go through time-consuming procedures—from the ward, to the area, to the district or to the city hospital—they have ample time to develop.

A medicine counter has at least two clerks. One fills the prescriptions, checkmarks or writes "sold" or "unavailable" in the health-examination notebook, and keeps the prescription slip while placing the medicine on top of the notebook and passing these to the second clerk. This clerk writes down the type, quantity, and price of the medicine on a slip of paper, and affixes a stamp to the notebook. After these four procedures are completed the patient pays his money, receives his medicine and goes home.

The first clerk often cheats the patient out of his medicine by giving him less than the amount prescribed and reporting to the district Health Room the types and quantities noted on the accumulated prescriptions. The buyer, though receiving insufficient medicine, is still happy. Little is better than nothing. The second clerk can, of course, rewrite the slip to agree with the prescription at a convenient moment after the patient leaves.

Medicines, Old and New

Even after the patient obtains his medicine, there may be problems. When the Communists took over South Vietnam, the warehouses were well stocked with pharmaceutical products. But additional supplies were not imported, and by 1977 stocks had become badly depleted. Drug imports were eliminated to save foreign exchange (to pay Vietnam's debts to Russia and other Communist allies) and to compel people to use up their hoarded supplies or ask relatives abroad to send medicine to Vietnam.

Dr. Duong told me that the Communist authorities were using old formulas and producing medicines with inadequate amounts of the required ingredients. As a result, it became necessary to take larger dosages; a three-day supply might be used up in half that time. This happened to me many times. I still have two small bottles of an ointment bought just before I left in April 1979 to illustrate my point.

The over-all result of government policies concerning medical supplies can be summed up in this way:

Imported medicines are very rare and today cost up to twenty times as much as those produced locally under the Communists; those produced under the former Vietnamese regimes cost three to five times as much as Communist products. Communist-produced medicines can occasionally be found in flea markets; there they cost twice as much as those bought at a government drugstore. Supplementary buying in flea markets is often necessary, because people are allowed to buy only a limited quantity of medicines in government drugstores, no matter how serious the illness. Besides, the ingredients of the dosages are not in accord with the manufacturing formulae.

For about a year after the takeover there were enough medical supplies and doctors to meet the demand; for another year, there were still enough doctors, but supplies became scarce; the following year both doctors and supplies were scarce; thereafter, the shortages became very serious because the remaining medicines became badly diluted and because so many doctors escaped.

To make up the deficiencies, the government began using Oriental medicinal herbs to manufacture medicine in Western forms. Pills or liquid medicines so manufactured had a foreign look, but the ingredients were herbs from the Vietnamese medicinal plant gardens, which the Communists have encouraged.

I can illustrate the efficiency of these adapted medicines from my experience: I could stop a cold by taking about six aspirin tablets—but I could not with a whole tube of 20 pills of the newly adapted medicines,

despite their high price at the government drugstore. There is a Vietnamese proverb: “Money lost, disease remains” (*tiền mất tật còn*).

I once witnessed an old man return a bottle of the new-style medicine to the nurse at my ward Health Room saying angrily, “I give it to you.” He felt deceived because he had paid for the medicine believing it to be Western. The nurse could only answer: “The government sold it to you, not I.”

In Case of Illness

If an ordinary citizen falls seriously ill, needs medication, and has to be hospitalized, he first must comply with all administrative formalities, that is, he must go through the ward, area, and district health-room procedures before he reaches the city or specialized hospital. There he is treated, fed, and cared for in accordance with the regime reserved for the public, which is vastly different from that reserved for cadres and Party members.

He can try to get advice from a doctor on the sly, but private doctors are officially prohibited from practicing their profession; or he can buy medicine on the black market where all types of good medicine, both imported and domestic, are available.

He can see an Oriental medical practitioner, or have acupuncture, which has been specially developed since 1978 to compensate for the shortage of doctors and Western medicines.

If he has relatives who have escaped abroad, he can ask them to send him medicines. In free countries escapees can arrange with professional organizations and commercial companies to send money, supplies, and medicines to their friends and relatives in Vietnam. (Within a month after I arrived in San Francisco I received letters from three such companies asking me to send money and medicine through their organizations.)

The Fate of Disease-Causing Bacteria

The fate of disease-causing bacteria under the Communist regime in Vietnam depends in which kind of citizen's body they live. If they are fortunate enough to develop in the body of an ordinary citizen, they have the most secure place for a parasite to live. They will be nurtured in the citizen's undernourished and overworked body, just as the cadres and Party members have been nurtured since the war, until today they enjoy all the best conveniences of life, ruling the people under the largest police and public security system in Vietnamese history.

It is very unfortunate for disease-causing bacteria to become lodged in the body of a cadre or a Party member, because they will have to combat the toughest, 100 percent American and European imperialist medicines imported into Vietnam before 1975, and carefully controlled by the government. Besides, they will have to cope with carefully selected doctors and the most modern medical equipment left by the reactionary South Vietnamese false government, the American imperialists, and their allies in the most efficient hospitals in South Vietnam; that is to say, in all Vietnam, because such things do not exist in the socialist North.

In a regular evening meeting of my household cluster a citizen bravely asked: "Why are all the best foods, clothes, medicines, and supplies reserved for the cadres and Party members?"

The presiding cadre coolly answered: "Because they should be spared worries about their material life, in order to enable them to devote their time, energy and zeal for the people. What else do the people expect?"

IX

The New Language

The Vietnamese people under the Communists have adopted a new language to express artificial happiness with a regime they hate. Such expressions as “very glad” (*ho hò*), “excited” (*phan khoi*), “thanks to the Party and Uncle we have this day” (*nho co dang va bac, ta moi co ngay nay*), and “our Party” (*dang ta*), can be heard frequently between two persons on chance street encounters or over weak coffee served in cafes.

The two words “people” and “democracy” predominate in Communist propaganda output; but one also hears frequently over radio and television, and reads incessantly in newspapers, magazines, or in student text books the words “liberation,” “revolution,” “patriotism,” “happiness,” “freedom,” and “independence.” Every official document must carry the national name “Socialist Republic of Vietnam” (*Cong Hoa Xa Hoi Chu Nghia Vietnam*), and underneath this must be inscribed three key words “independence, freedom, happiness” (*doc lap, tu do, hanh phuc*). If an application for admission to a school, for example, does not carry this heading, it can be rejected. The heading is so habitually used that it is not uncommon to find it on love letters mailed through the postal system.

The real meanings of such words as “democracy,” “freedom,” and “republic” were established by Western society, where these concepts developed. Persons living in Western societies or those influenced by the West are inclined to attribute their own values to these words when used by the Communists. And when faced with the deteriorating qualities of freedom and democracy in their societies, some people may be inclined to attach to the words “liberation” and “revolution,” as skillfully manipulated by the Communists, even stronger values than those attributed to them by their own societies and thus be lured into dreams of a Communist paradise.

The Communists bait their traps with words that have established meanings and values. However, once in power their governing principle becomes “Who defeats whom” and “Who destroys whom”. For them, the struggle between communism and noncommunism dominates all aspects of life, from the concrete to the abstract, from the material to the spiritual.

With the Communists in power, the phrases “Who defeats whom” and “Who destroys whom” have only a single meaning: “Communism defeats all that is non-Communist” and “Communism destroys all that is non-Communist.” That is to say, the new Communist values destroy all established values, which were used as lures in the struggle for power.

The Vietnamese Communists have set about methodically destroying old values, a process which they call the “revolution of production structure” (*cach mang quan he san xuat*) and the “revolution of culture and thought” (*cach mang tu tuong va van hoa*). The production-structure revolution is supposed to transform agriculture from “backward” private farming into large-scale collectivized agriculture, and the consolidation of piecemeal small enterprise into large-scale socialist mechanization, emphasizing heavy industry. The cultural and thought revolution is attempting to force people to give up their “sponging” way of existence inherited from feudalism and colonialism and to adopt the socialist way of life which would transform them into “new socialist persons.”

In this process many people have been killed, including those who believed in the Communist dogmas and those patriotic citizens who fought on the Communist side against the French for the independence of Vietnam.

The most concrete examples of this destructive process in today's Communist Vietnam are the reeducation camps—in fact, concentration camps—for the so-called false soldiers and false authorities; the excessively numerous and overcrowded prisons for political dissenters; the political-economic Marxism-Leninism study sessions designed to brainwash intellectuals, including educators who believe that education has no relation to politics; and the weekly meetings for the people of every household cluster.

The Communist security system is the institution charged with carrying out this process by force and terrorism. This system controls all social activities and seeks every means to infiltrate the family, at any time of day or night without court warrant.

Under the continuous attacks by the security and propaganda cadres the Vietnamese family, the fundamental unit of society, is now partly or completely fragmented. Persons are forcibly withdrawn from the family and thrown into collectivized labor life, herded by Communist commissars. A few months after the “liberation” of Saigon in 1975, many boys and girls were assembled into a corps designated as “Youth Escaping Family Ties” and imbued with such ideas as “We are not concerned about our house, we take no further interest in our lives, we are determined to sacrifice ourselves.” Of course, the Party drilled them with its slogan “Loyal to the Party, Pious toward the People” to supplant the traditional Vietnamese concept of being loyal to the country and pious toward parents.

Family life has changed drastically through a process the Communists call “life conversion” (*doi doi*)—from capitalism to Communism.

The Communists denounce capitalist societies as places where “human beings exploit human beings” and maintain that their revolutions have established socialist societies in which all property is nationalized and each citizen is given according to his needs. Without going into human needs, which are endless while national property is very limited, let us consider a society’s common property in Communist terms. According to the Communists:

“The Party leads, the government manages, the people are the masters.”

Thus, while the people are supposed to be the collective masters of nationalized properties, the government manages these properties, but the government is, in turn, dominated by the Communist party. This, in effect, means that all nationalized properties are out of reach of the people except the goods which the government rations as decreed by the Party.

The Party establishes the priorities which determine how all goods will be rationed, which households will get how much and at what price. The criteria for decisions is social class. Party leaders enjoy first priority, government managers get second priority, and the “collective masters” last priority. In other words, goods are distributed according to social class in a society which, by its own account, maintains class distinctions because mankind has not yet attained a classless, i.e. Communist, society. But the Party leaders have never yet answered the question when the classless Communist society will be established.

A popular ditty renders the people’s judgment of the ration priorities:

[In the Communist party]

“Central crews eat like kings,
cadres and employees like miserable dogs.”

[In the socialist society]

“High-ranking Party cadres consume the supplies,
low-ranking cadres eat from the black market,
common citizens eat at the back door.”

“Central crews” refers to leading Party members, especially those in the Politburo and the Central Committee. “High-ranking cadres” buy their rations at supply stores which sell medium-quality produce. Low-ranking cadres and common citizens are not allowed to buy at these stores, and stringent security measures are taken to keep them out. Inadequate rations allocated to low-level cadres and their families force them to buy necessities on the black market. There is so little rationed produce at official prices left that common citizens must buy waste food and goods smuggled through the “back door.” They do not have enough money to buy on the black market.

From the time food rationing began after the Communist takeover, common citizens were allowed to purchase 17.6 pounds of food per month at the official price. In April 1978, the amount was reduced to 13.2 pounds. Rations of civil servants were reduced from 26.4 to 19.8 pounds and rations of laborers from 35.2 to 26.4 pounds. The bulk of these rations are potatoes and sorghum.

In the Middle Ages, slaves were kept reasonably healthy and provided with just enough food, clothing, and shelter to keep them alive so they could labor for their masters. Under the Communist regime's food policy, similar conditions prevail. But even the poor rations are subject to manipulation. A number of mid-level cadres proudly told me stories of how they had forced "reactionaries" to obey orders by depriving them of food rations. In effect, they were implementing Party and government policy by using food as a weapon to control the populace.

The spiritual and material life of every Vietnamese is kept in turmoil by the rapid destruction of nearly all established values for which the Communists summoned the people to fight, and by the life-in-the-herd characteristic of collective ownership. To each person, however, is reserved the right of working "self-forgetfully" in accordance with the slogan "labor is glorious," so far as he is able under the physical limitations of the food policy.

Life in the family has become a succession of hypocrisies necessary to protect its members, with the husband hiding his real feelings from his wife and children for fear his family might unwittingly reveal them in public. Contact with neighbors and the community has been reduced to using officially structured language to falsify emotions and protect oneself from the inquisitive security agents.

Interpersonal life has become so compulsively hypocritical that the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee felt obligated to issue a resolution prescribing appropriate terminology for people to use in addressing each other and in referring to Party officials. The word *bac* (uncle, father's elder brother, or anyone to whom reverence should be paid) is used exclusively to refer to Ho Chi Minh and President Ton Duc Thang. *Chu* (uncle, father's younger brother, or anyone considered inferior to father) is commonly used to refer to any Party member—including Le Duan, secretary general of the Party—cadre, soldier, and security agent. *Chau* (nephew, niece, or grandchild) is for children to call themselves when speaking to uncles and for the young cadres to call themselves before the people. Older women are called *ma* (mother), but, except in the case of one's parent, the husband of *ma* is usually called *chu* instead of *ba* (father). *Thang*—not identical with the name Thang—(that fellow, a person held in contempt) is used to refer to an enemy such as *thang* Thieu (that fellow Nguyen Van Thieu), *thang* Duong Van Minh (General Duong Van "Big" Minh), or *thang* Hoan Van Hoan (a

member of the Central Party who defected to the People's Republic of China in 1979).

In public life, particularly in public meetings, everyone is obligated to use the proper terminology to express his political viewpoints which, of course, must be socialist. To reveal true sentiments in accordance with the old morality would attract the attention of security agents and could bring about unfortunate consequences. For this reason people living under the Communist regime must be able to lie for self-protection and follow the principle, which everyone understands, of "saying so but not so" (*noi vay ma khong phai vay*).

It took only a few short weeks after April 30, 1975, for the South Vietnamese to learn this maxim. Their first and most important lesson was the communique ordering all "false soldiers" and "false authorities" to prepare food and personal belongings for ten days' use in the reeducation camps. At first even the former soldiers and officials of the Republic thought the "revolutionary government" was showing tolerance in giving them only ten days "reeducation" preparatory to life under the new regime. Many families even encouraged their "false" members to turn themselves in to the Communist authorities.

At this writing, six years have passed since that unforgettable day, and almost all "false soldiers" and "false authorities" are still imprisoned without hope of being set free, while outside the concentration camps their blood brothers and sisters live anxiously within the increasingly larger net of the Communist security system.

After nearly ten years in power, President Nguyen Van Thieu left nothing but this sentence to the South Vietnamese, which he reportedly lifted from *J. Edgar Hoover On Communism*: "Don't believe anything the Communists say, look carefully at what they do." From time to time, in the intimacy of their private thoughts about the Communists, South Vietnamese quote this sentence. However, they have reasons to be bitter about Thieu's use of it.

Thieu had the J. Edgar Hoover quote translated and repeated frequently on his propaganda networks, but his government did nothing significant to impress South Vietnamese consciousness that Communist words should be disbelieved and their actions examined. This was a failure of the Republic's information officials, who squandered the people's money and talked nonsense under the leadership of ministers ignorant of the role of ideology and of techniques for using it in the spiritual mobilization for the life and death struggle against communism. They simply had no political philosophy to guide them in their tasks. In dealing with the people, their lack of experience and frequently arrogant attitudes were, at least in appearances, in direct contrast to the Communists.

Before the South Vietnamese people began to understand the difference between Communist words and actions, they had already paid the price of falling into Communist slavery, living in an environment of continuing fear and disappointment. They have not forgotten that Thieu and his subordinates showed the Communists a clean pair of heels before April 30, 1975, and now live abroad relieved of any responsibility for their failures.

Communist liturgy used in political and economic study sessions speaks of freedom only by repeating this Marxian idea: "Freedom is the necessity to be recognized," i.e., to be free, man must recognize the necessity for transition from primitive communism to scientific communism.

I restated this concept at the concluding meeting of an 18-month long political and economic study session for Southern intellectuals held under the auspices of the Social Sciences Committee of South Vietnam, 1976-78. Then, to determine the opinions of the participants, I asked: "If I recognize the historical necessity of the transition from primitive communism, to feudalism, to capitalism, to socialism, then to communism, but if I am jailed by the fascists who pay no attention to justice, including that of fascism itself, would I still be free?"

The leaders of the meeting said simply that they would note the question for transmission to their superiors for subsequent explanation. The Communists use this technique to evade direct answers whenever they are faced with truths contradicting their dogma. During the closing ceremony when the authorities gave "common answers to questions raised" my question remained unanswered.

Under Communist law no door is open for protest against communism. As a result, verdicts of guilty or not guilty are made not in accordance with the truth but with political need. Thereby, during the past six years, the death penalty has been inflicted on minor criminals.

In a claims case of my construction company against the "new economic zone" building committee of Dau Giay, a leading cadre stated: "The building committee is a government institution; the judging committee is also a government institution. Do you think the 'government' would judge the 'government' in a manner favorable to you?" We had no alternative but to resign ourselves to a loss. The Communist regime not only destroys human justice as it has been formulated since the dawn of history, but also negates the newly established justice of communism itself.

"Why," asked a Communist intellectual in a Hanoi radio program, "should it be necessary for the Communist regime, which already has the dictatorship of the proletariat, to establish a judicial system to satisfy Southern intellectual desire for an independent or autonomous judicial branch?"

Before 1975, the Vietnamese people supported the Communist party's fight for national independence because the Party was most efficient in terms

of ideology, and political and military organization, as well as in ability to deceive the populace. The people have since found the Party's dictatorship of the proletariat intolerable.

The Vietnamese can put up with the daily agitation for the class struggle in its present moderate form, with the restrictions on personal movement and travel, with high-cost food and starvation salaries, or even get along without adequate medical care. What they cannot stand, however, is the pervasive public and secret security system which the Communists have imposed on every aspect of their daily lives.

The Communists lost no time in developing their repressive security network after taking over South Vietnam. The more repressive the security system grows, the more people try to escape because they cannot destroy it.

As their 4000-year history has shown, the Vietnamese people have great capacity for enduring and overcoming the most wretched hardships in order to cling to their native land. For almost a millenium, from the first to the tenth century, the Vietnamese struggled against succeeding Chinese dynasties, but never left their country as their descendants are doing today to escape communism.

Then, for almost another thousand years, without ever deserting their homes, the Vietnamese coped in fierce wars with powerful Chinese feudalist empires and with the Mongolian and Manchurian conquerors of China.

More recently, in their 80-year struggle against French colonialism, the Vietnamese remained in their country except to seek help in their fight for national independence. Ho Chi Minh was one of those seeking outside assistance.

Yet in 1954, when the Communist party took over North Vietnam, more than a million Vietnamese fled south.

Since 1975, when the Communists took over South Vietnam, freedom-loving Vietnamese have had no choice but to risk their lives crossing the sea, in small wooden boats, scattering over the world to escape the plague of communism.

X

The “Battle” of Bien Hoa

The sun still shone brightly that late afternoon in February 1977. Saigon's offices had just closed, and the streets seemed noisier than usual as people made their way homeward.

I had just come home from my office at the Construction Technology Company and was trying to relax while awaiting dinner with my wife and children. It would be frugal. Like millions of other South Vietnamese, after just two years of Communist rule both our material and spiritual well-being had declined drastically. We had been living in anxiety, uncertainty, and expectancy—a very slender expectancy.

Suddenly immense detonations shook the city. The thunder of exploding ammunition rolled across Saigon sounding as though several divisions had begun a simultaneous attack.

I gasped. For two years the Vietnamese people had hoped for an uprising, for an armed attack to throw out the avaricious Communist dictators whose iron hands exacted blood, sweat, and tears from all Vietnamese. We had seen the true nature of their falsehood and wickedness. Previously, blinded by patriotism, we had not perceived their deceptive character and had paid a painfully high price for our inaccurate judgment of their so-called socialism: two years of living in uncertainty, in shame, and in fear with no hope of escape.

The artillery-like explosions and repetitious low-detonations, like those of machine guns or M-16's, resounded from the outskirts of the city, shaking the glass windows and doors of my house. The explosions continued, as in a fit of anger, without interruption.

Before I knew the nature of these detonations two alternatives crossed my mind: They might signify a sudden attack by resistance forces on this resplendent city of Saigon, forcibly renamed Ho Chi Minh City in the same manner that Petrograd was renamed Leningrad by the Leninists. If there were such an uprising I would certainly join. But reviewing the security conditions in mind, I wondered if such an armed force could exist. The Communist security system had been established down to the hamlet or ward

level, and cadres were in strong control of every small household cluster.

Second, the explosions might have been caused by the Communists themselves in a false uprising designed to destroy, in an apparently legal fashion, opposing elements of the former Republic governments who were still hiding out, or to jail those who had publicly disobeyed Communist orders. Some of those were the leaders of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam such as Venerable Thich Thien Minh who was killed in jail one year later; Venerable Thich Quang Do, deputy chairman of the Vien Hoa Dao; Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, secretary general of the Vien Hoa Dao; Venerable Thich Thuyen An, general commissioner of Dharma Propagation; and many religious leaders of the Catholic Church, of the Cao Dai sect, and of the Hoa Hao sect. Perhaps the power-hungry Communists were doing away with their discontented comrades-in-arms, especially those in the disbanded National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, who had resigned themselves to silence after having been deprived of all rewards of bringing their leaders into power.

These reflections passed my mind as the sounds of exploding ammunition continued to echo from the outskirts of Saigon. They seemed to grow increasingly clear. Although shock waves seemed to jog me into action, I was in no hurry to make imprudent inquiries as my neighbors were doing excitedly in front of my house. After two years under the Communist regime I understood all too well the cadres' expertise in deception.

I ran up to the flat roof of my house and looked out toward Bien Hoa City where the explosions seemed to originate. It looked as though a battle was raging there.

Hundreds of exploding bombs were shooting huge columns of black smoke high and wide into the sky. Despite the bright Saigon sun, flashes from the explosions reflected off the clouds into my eyes.

I studied the Bien Hoa City "battle" at length, trying to determine its exact location. It seemed to be taking place in the Long Binh area, about six miles from Saigon. Long Binh had been one of the largest American bases in South Vietnam. On leaving, the Americans had left huge depots of ammunition and weapons there. Was a unit of Republic resistance forces attacking this area?

My neighbors, too, climbed onto their flat roofs, looked at the columns of dark smoke, listened to the thundering detonations, all the while discussing loudly the meaning of this event.

The darker it grew, the wider and higher the columns of black smoke rose; the more fiercely the ammunition exploded, the louder its sounds echoed and reechoed across the city. I gazed awestruck as the explosions illuminated the Bien Hoa horizon, reflecting from the clouds back onto Saigon.

As I was watching this scene my wife returned home from work, and about the same time my two children came back from school. My wife said that a fierce battle was raging in Bien Hoa and asked me to prepare a quick dinner while she went upstairs to get our tote bags ready.

Early in 1975, following the battle of Banmethuot which led to the downfall of the Thieu regime, I had prepared tote bags for emergency use in case fighting in Saigon made it necessary for us to flee the city. There were two large bags for my wife and myself and two smaller ones for our daughter and son. They had shoulder straps and strings to attach them to the waist. Each one contained two suits of clothing, a water canteen, a nylon bag filled with dry (cooked) rice, a small packet of dehydrated fish sauce, and a first-aid kit. Although we had not found it necessary to use them when Saigon fell, I had kept them ready for an emergency.

My wife took out the four tote bags, added a small packet of salt to each, filled the canteens with fresh water, replaced the dehydrated fish sauce, and placed the bags in easy reach at the head of the stairs. She did not take them downstairs for fear that area security cadres might search the house without warning. Nor did we want the neighbors to know of our preparations although we had no doubt they were doing exactly the same thing. Living under the Communist regime almost everybody took the same precautions but scarcely anyone told anybody else about them.

I told my daughter, who had proved herself intelligent and dependable, to go out on the street to see what she could learn. All she could find out was that "there is shooting going on somewhere in Bien Hoa." This information was being transmitted from mouth to mouth by people returning from work in Bien Hoa and vicinity, but no one knew precisely the nature of the "battle."

After a hurried dinner, but ample enough to carry us through a night of fleeing the city should that become necessary, I asked my wife and children to stay in the house while I went out to get information myself.

The People Celebrate

The folks in our cluster, children and adults, mostly women, had gathered at the open end of the alley next to my front door to talk about what was happening. Contrary to the practice of keeping their front doors closed to prevent security agents from snooping into their private lives, this evening the residents had left their doors wide open.

As I stepped outside the house, I noticed the cheerful faces of my neighbors who stood outside discussing the event. The expectation that a revolt against the regime may be underway was written all over their faces.

Heading toward the cluster chief's home at the dead end of the alley I greeted my neighbors casually to hide the joy in my heart. As I passed a neighbor talking with a cadre in the latter's government-supplied house I gave the cadre a joyous smile—to me it meant the slavish life under his sway might one day be changed. He did not smile back.

For a year I had been observing persons and families in my alley to see who might cooperate with me in case of an uprising against the Communist masters. I was interested in learning from their language, behavior, and attitude how dissatisfied they were with the regime. I went no further than that, never taking the risk of expressing any intention to unify them. As a boy I had absorbed the Oriental philosophy that regards human life "as short as that of mayflies." Yet never had I guarded my life so cautiously as I did during four years under the Communist regime. Thanks to the measures I took I am able to write these lines today.

The alley population's hidden opposition to the regime led me to the conclusion that if an armed uprising should occur, the task of mobilizing them and grouping them into an organization to destroy the local Communist hierarchy could be accomplished rather easily. A timely opportunity and a courageous appeal could do the job. I had already formulated the appeal in my mind and heart in preparation for an opportunity to voice it. Was the "battle" in Bien Hoa this evening to be that opportunity?

The area security cadre was nowhere to be seen. Usually at the dinner hour, when people had just come home from work, he toured the alley to find out about our day's activities and our attitudes before reporting to his security office.

I returned home, told my wife and children not to go out, then taking my bike I rode past several rows of two- and three-storied villas where the Communists maintained their offices. These were once the most luxurious homes in my ward. The owners had escaped after the "revolution" and the Communists had taken over their property to be used as offices and boarding houses for cadres.

As I passed by the villas I noticed something unusual. Almost as a rule the security cadres, the soldiers, the ward squad youths, and a number of secretaries of the ward people's committee who lived in these houses or nearby would, after their collective dinner, meet at the yard gates for a chat in the fresh air. But today there were no security cadres, no soldiers, and no secretaries standing at the gates. Even the guard usually sitting in the sentry box was missing. All doors were shut.

Later I learned from my cluster chief that the security cadres had been among the first to take to their heels, especially those from the North assigned to lead the ward security office. The ward commissariat had found safety in flight even faster than their security comrades. Because the

“battle” burst out so suddenly they had not known exactly what was happening. Therefore, on hearing the first detonations, they hid quickly, saving their lives to “serve the people.” They knew the people had been awaiting an opportunity to destroy lower-level tyrants at the ward level.

I rode my bike toward my sister’s home on Yen Do street, passing enroute along Cong Ly (Justice) Avenue, now re-named Nam-Ky Khoi Nghia (Southern Uprising) Avenue.

Just as in my ward, the people’s homes on both sides of Cong Ly were wide open. Children were happily playing on the sidewalks. Small refreshment shops were full of people talking and laughing while the noise of exploding ammunition resounded and bright flashes illuminated the Bien Hoa horizon. It looked as if the people were celebrating a new revolution, the one for which they had been waiting for two years.

On arriving at my sister’s house I met her son, a serious youth who had received a good education from school and family. Although he had been elected leader of his ward youth group and assigned to lecture to its members on “revolutionary morals,” it was he who led his friends in fights with children of Party members and cadres in other wards. In this way the youngsters vented their anger against a regime which had down-graded them to the role of petty cadres living off their families, doing “volunteer” work for the Party.

My nephew had a long stick ready to use against Communists if whatever was happening in Bien Hoa should turn out to be a revolt. He told me each of his friends had a stick ready to challenge the Communists.

I asked the boy if he had received any information about the “battle,” and he answered: “The soldiers of the Republic are attacking Bien Hoa,” but he gave no details to back up such an answer, and I knew no more than before.

Saying goodbye to him I rode my bike to the nearby Tan Dinh Market. Here the people celebrated as if the new revolution was a confirmed fact.

As I arrived at the scene and saw the joyous crowd, I sat down at a table with two young people and asked if they knew what happened. They said, “Happy! Just happy!” and continued drinking beer which cost four dong a bottle.

In other shops across Hai Ba Trung Street, especially the Chinese roast duck shops, many people sat around large tables eating, chatting, laughing, and even drinking champagne. At that time some of the foreign products imported before the fall of the Thieu government were still available, including Salem cigarettes and champagne. A Salem cigarette was worth 1.5 to 2 dong, a bottle of champagne more than 100 dong. It was clear that if these people dared to drink champagne at that price their joy must have been

great. They knew at least one thing: at the first sound of the “battle,” the area security cadres had disappeared and that the people could now enjoy a bit of freedom.

I had, by now, been away from home for quite some time and, knowing my wife and children would be concerned, I headed home. I arrived without incident but not the wiser and soon went to bed.

The blaring sounds from the propaganda loudspeaker across the alley from my house woke me up at 5 A.M. as usual, broadcasting the same daily programs as always without a word about the evening before. It was just as though another tedious “labor-is-glorious” day was starting again.

Instead of going to work at the construction company I bicycled to the shop where I had learned how to repair boat motors. I knew that every morning a Communist soldier named Thanh came there to sell black-market gasoline and I intended to ask him about the incident.

Thanh was at my friend’s shop when I arrived. After a brief greeting I asked casually, “Where did your troop drill that mock battle yesterday? You soldiers sure shot up a lot of ammunition!”

Thanh answered blandly: “It wasn’t a mock battle. The Long Binh arsenal blew up. I don’t know why.”

So it was an arsenal in Bien Hoa which blew up! But why? Who did it?

I left my friend’s shop and cycled on to my construction office. At that time my company had a work camp in Bien Hoa, so I sent an employee there on a routine job and asked him to find out.

In the late afternoon he returned and reported that a number of arsenals at the former American military base of Long Binh had blown up, but nobody knew the cause. The local people told him that no “false soldiers” had been seen the previous night.

It was a curious tale. Was it possible that soldiers of the Republic destroyed the arsenal and beat a safe retreat?

The information my company employee brought back from Bien Hoa left me frustrated. There had been no armed uprising. All the other employees of the company, who were as “false” as I was, felt the same. Our joy had indeed been short-lived.

“We Destroyed the Arsenals”

Three days after the incident the people of Saigon and neighboring communities were convened in a series of special meetings to hear explanations. My cluster, of course, was one of those convened.

At the beginning of the meeting the cadres denounced us, the people, in violent language for lacking revolutionary spirit during the incident. Then they informed us that the government itself had destroyed the arsenals in Long Binh because they were superfluous. "We destroyed the arsenals left by the Americans and 'false authorities,' " they told us. "There was absolutely no group of 'false soldiers' who had the ability to do so." The cadres said those who still retained reactionary spirits should not think that a few "false soldiers" hiding in the forests could plunder the government; guerrilla warfare was not the forte of the "false" forces but of the revolutionary government.

It never became known how or why the incident occurred. The leading cadres of Ho Chi Minh City were as loud as the Long Binh detonations in blaming each other for what happened. The Communist newspapers, radio, and TV networks never referred to it.

XI

Last Preparations

In September 1978 I tried for the third time to find a way for my family to get out of Vietnam. This time I was destined to succeed.

I laid my plans carefully, calculating every detail, convinced that it would be better to endure the Communist misery a little longer, even a couple of years if necessary, rather than risk another failure. I would be extremely hard pressed to finance a fourth attempt.

Any escape preparation has a major impact on the family of the prospective refugee. It devours their resources. Many families find themselves at the end of their tether after just one unsuccessful attempt. If a family misses a boat or if their planned trip is canceled and they are unable to return within two or three days, they may find their home sealed and be forced to flee to another area for safety.

The world is now well aware of the thousands of refugees who lost their lives in the waters of the Pacific, but many more have met their fate on inland waterways as overloaded boats sank *enroute* to the sea.

The Vietnamese who attempt to cross the sea are willing to perish rather than hover between life and death in a situation which the Communists describe as "180-degree life conversion." Nothing is more important than freedom. As for losing their homeland, the Vietnamese regard the loss as temporary.

The expense of a boat trip in relation to the income of a citizen living under Communist rule is enormous. Normally, the cost for a place on a sanctioned boat, whether organized or permitted to be organized by the Communists ("going abroad officially") or by a private group, is ten taels of gold for adults and five taels for children and minors up to 18; babies in arms go free. (Of the ten taels six are supposed to go to the government, and four to the organizers to cover expenses of the trip, which includes lavish entertainment for security officers.) In 1978 a tael of gold—1.23 ounces—was worth 1800 dong. At the rate of \$500 an ounce, a tael would be worth \$615. The annual income of a university professor was about 1,000 dong.

Even if an person or a family is registered to “go abroad officially” the plan must be kept secret from the residential security cadres who would bring enormous pressure on them to withdraw, as discussed in Chapter IV. Furthermore, the head of the participating family must conceal the information from his wife, his children, his relatives, his friends, and most especially from his neighbors. At the time of departure, even if it means getting up and leaving in the middle of a meal, he simply tells his wife and children to follow him and goes to the boat.

These movements from the family’s home to the point of departure, for Saigon residents, particularly, are complicated and dangerous. Although Saigon is a major port, it is situated on the Saigon River, 75 miles inland; and most sea trips begin from Vietnam’s coastal cities or riverine areas near the coast. Many escape attempts have failed at the outset because security cadres detected families in the process of leaving.

Chan Hung

One of my partners in preparing my third plan was Professor Duc, a graduate of the Institute of National Administration who taught at Minh Duc University in Saigon. We got to know each other well during 1977-1978 when we both attended an 18-month seminar on Marxist-Leninist thought.

From time to time we visited Vung Tau or Long Hai on the coast, the river ports in the south, or the Rach Ong arroyo in Saigon to inquire about buying a boat. We agreed that, although we were working together, if either of us found a suitable boat and could get away he should not feel constrained to wait for the other.

Professor Duc introduced me to his godfather, Chan Hung, a Chinese businessman in Cholon. He was a self-trained industrialist and a prestigious minority group leader in Cholon.

In mid-1978 Duc found a boat for his escape and invited me to go along with him and his wife. But I wanted to take my whole family, and since I could not raise enough gold I had to decline. Duc and his wife left, leaving me behind with a deep sense of sadness.

In early 1978, as a countermove against ethnic Chinese families who were sending their sons to China and to nullify criticism from the People’s Republic of China about maltreatment of this minority, the Communists began authorizing the registration of ethnic Chinese to “go abroad officially.” This policy was designed to facilitate the confiscatory collection of their gold and property and, at the same time, to lessen dangerous Sino-Vietnamese tensions which had already produced bloody conflicts between border guards of the two nations.

The registration policy caused me to see Chan again. He and his friends were leaders of the Chinese community and considered the most reliable trip organizers.

"If you should register to go abroad officially," I told him, "perhaps you could name me, my wife and my children as members of your extended family so that we can accompany you. However, if you don't feel you can do this, I would appreciate your introducing me to colleagues organizing trips."

Chan agreed. His help eventually enabled me to escape.

The Boat

Chan Hung and a practitioner of Oriental medicine by the name of La Truyen had formed a company and joined their capital to buy a large wooden vessel for going abroad officially. They registered the boat with the city security office of My Tho, 25 miles from Saigon. The boat was under the official patronage of Anh Ba, a high-ranking Party member. Ba handled all the governmental administrative procedures. The boat was 72 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 10 feet deep. It had two decks with compartments for passengers and a fish-storage section in the hold.

Chan's wife and two of his Chinese partners were helping with the organization, but he lacked connections with the Saigon and My Tho security authorities. However, La had two sons who kept in touch with security cadres in both Saigon and My Tho. They also collected gold from family participants.

At this time local Communist authorities were competing with each other in the collection of gold and currency from the ethnic Chinese who wanted to register to go abroad officially. They ordered the construction of new boats or the repair of old ones rather publicly and let them put out to sea with no common plan. Any city which had boats and could collect enough gold immediately exported Chinese boat people.

The competition produced disputes, at times very heated, between local Party commissars. Those in one city would permit an officially registered boat to set out, only to have their comrades in a neighboring city stop it as the boat moved into their territorial waters. Both civil and military officials were authorized to detain boats for security reasons in their area of jurisdiction; and the exportation of boat people at times led to skirmishes between cadres and soldiers who disagreed about their shares of the gold and money collected.

In late 1978 the Communist government established a more orderly schedule for local authorities to follow in letting the boat people go abroad

officially. This action regulated the number of boats going out to sea. It was taken in response to protests from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Singapore over the influx of boat people, but also aimed at reducing the internal conflicts among competing Communist officials. Party members told me that the national income from the exportation of boat people was exceeded only by the production and sale of goods.

The decision to regulate the exportation of boat people forced Chan and La to delay the departure of our boat by six months. Later, this delay led to a series of misfortunes.

Arranging for the departure of the boat was enormously expensive. The company was required to pay the Communist government 1050 taels of gold plus 230,000 dong (more than US\$750,000); provide fourteen of the best available automobiles valued between 6,000 and 8,000 dong each, including several Mercedes; purchase and equip the boat at a cost of 560,000 dong; and pay for entertainment and other social expenses for Communist authorities, at a cost of 200,000 dong from the time the plan was initiated until the boat departed. The overall cost came to more than three million dong.

Neither Chan nor La ever told me how much gold and currency they had received from the 312 officially registered boat people. The amount was not entered into the accounts book Chan turned over to me, but the number of people registered continually changed until the very last minute as some withdrew and others were added. The thirty members of the Oriental medicine practitioner's extended family paid nothing for their passage; their only contributions were their organizational efforts. They also managed to get their cut from what was paid to the "revolution." Some twenty members of Chan's family also went free. However, in Chan's favor it should be said that he did not assess his customers equally. Of those less able to pay or closely related to him he asked only six taels for adults and two or three for youths, just enough to pay the "revolution." My family was one of those favored.

During this period only Chinese were permitted to go abroad officially and, hence, were allowed some freedom in buying boats, even though it was forbidden for them to discuss publicly the purchases or their planned trips.

At the same time the government continued to arrest Vietnamese whose escape plans were discovered by security cadres. Consequently, the Vietnamese tried to arrange for false papers certifying them as Chinese, using such family names as Vuong, La, Quach, or Chu. Thus, the Communists continued to take bribes, and at the same time "made revolution" by eliminating unwanted elements.

“Official” vs. Secret Escapes

Many nights I lay awake turning over in my head whether to follow the official route of escaping or try once again to go in secret.

Until late 1978, all boats registered to go abroad officially sailed safely and crossed the seas to ports of refuge with little trouble except engine breakdowns. If a breakdown occurred off the coast of Vietnam a boat could return to its departure point for repairs. Some returned for repairs several times but in the end were allowed to resume their voyages after paying the added expenses. Going abroad officially was time-consuming but safe.

In some rare cases Vietnamese posing as Chinese to take the officially registered boats were unable to respond to questions in Cantonese and were caught during the checking process, but this did not bother me. My Cantonese was adequate to handle the few short sentences the security cadres had learned to carry out their work.

Vietnamese who required false papers could acquire them easily in Cholon where Chinese groups specialized in producing official-looking documents with equipment they had built themselves or had stolen from government security offices when the former Republic collapsed.

The management and control of our boat convinced me that the company was sincere in its organization of the escape plans and not simply collaborating with the “revolution” to cheat its customers. The leading members wanted to get their families away from communism and, at the same time, make a profit from the trip. Chan and La both told me they wanted to settle in Australia and continue their professions. La had the advantage over his colleague, because some of his children had escaped to Australia a year earlier.

Although I had known Chan for less than a year, my knowledge of Chinese history and literature and my respect for him as a person had gained me his sympathy. This, together with his godson’s friendly introduction led him to trust me in such matters as examining the account books, assisting him in weighing gold to be paid to the “revolution,” and going to My Tho to check on the progress of the boat. Likewise, I had faith in him.

Despite the government’s policy of allowing Chinese to go abroad, a number of Chinese as well as Vietnamese preferred to leave secretly so they could take along their gold, American dollars, and other valuables.

Secret escapes were usually cheaper than sanctioned ones. If prudently organized, secret escapes would cost each participant two or three taels of gold, which would go toward purchasing the boat, oil, food, and—if necessary—“buying the landing.”

To “buy the landing” meant oiling the revolutionary palms of the local Communist security officials with a bargained amount of gold, usually one tael for each adult and half a tael for each youth or child. In return, the refugees would be allowed to depart secretly from a landing or site within the cooperating official’s area of jurisdiction. At the appointed time the participants would give the agreed upon sign or password and would be allowed to embark.

“Selling the landing” became a popular and competitive money-making practice among local security officials and soldiers. Unless security authorities in neighboring areas reached a mutual understanding, refugees who “bought the boat landing” in one locality could be arrested as they moved toward their departure sites and their whole costly plan could collapse. If this occurred, the would-be refugees had to find their own way to escape imprisonment; this usually meant the payment of one to five taels of gold on the spot or at the jail, depending on how well they were able to “communicate” with the security police.

Chan asked only six taels of gold each for my wife and me and nothing for our children because they were all under ten. This price was about the same or even less than a clandestine escape. With Chan, mutual trust between organizers and participants was no problem; the chances of being arrested at the embarkation site were reduced 90 percent; and safety at sea was more assured. Until late 1978 none of the officially registered boats, usually 60 feet or more, had been wrecked, although many had been forced to wait days or even weeks for landing permission. But landing was a matter of time rather than of safety. For my family safety was more important than time.

Raising Funds for the Escape

After Chan agreed to let me register as a member of his extended family, I anxiously began trying to figure out means of raising the gold and money for this third escape attempt. The expense of two unsuccessful tries plus four years of underemployment under the Communist regime had left me with no money; and the completion date for the list of officially registered boat people—when their gold payments for the “revolution” were due—was only a week away.

I sold everything of value in my house, including my wife’s jewelry and clothes I had brought from the United States in 1973. With all the money and gold I was able to collect plus our two small wedding rings, I had just four taels, not enough for either my wife or me to register. The in-laws of my wife’s brother loaned me three taels, bringing our total to seven. One

would have to go for the false papers. The remaining six was just enough for one of us to register.

Confessing my plight to Chan, I proposed to deposit six taels with him for my wife's registration and asked him for the loan of six taels to get me registered on the due date. I would try to repay him before we actually set out to sea; however, if I were unable to do so, I could replace my wife on the list, take the children with me to the United States, and find some means to send money for her to join me. Alternatively, if he could lend me the six taels, I would repay him after my wife and I reached the United States. This is one of the methods which trip organizers, boat owners, and especially Chinese businessmen in Cholon employ for transferring gold and money abroad through trusted participants in the exodus.

Chan trusted that once in the United States I would be able to repay the debt; so he accepted my alternative proposal and loaned me the six taels on the due date. At the moment he was almost out of gold himself because of high living expenses for his large family and because he had shared the costs for a boat in which some of his children had escaped secretly. If, at the last minute he did not have the gold, he would register me and my children for the six taels I had deposited and smuggle my wife aboard.

Besides the gold paid to the "revolution," I still needed money for daily living expenses until we departed at some still unknown date. Therefore, my wife and I decided to sell our two-storied house and furnishings for four taels of gold. We would keep a radio cassette-recorder, a refrigerator, a 19-inch black-and-white television set, and some miscellaneous items which I intended to leave with my father-in-law or relatives as insurance against failure in this third bid for freedom.

Apart from needing gold for official registration there were several reasons for selling the house. If we succeeded in our escape attempt, the house would be confiscated anyway. If our escape failed and neither my wife nor I could get back home fast enough, the commissars would confiscate the house; however, if somehow the house were not confiscated I would have to sell it to help fund a fourth try. The "revolutionaries" either knew when an owner was absent from his house or had his absence reported to them. They would wait one night, and if the owner did not return they would seal his house. If our attempt failed and the house were confiscated, I would send my wife and the children to live with her father, then go underground myself, and try to find another way to get out.

Officially the ward people's committee must authorize all house sales and will do so only for families returning to their villages or moving to a new economic zone. Further, the people's committee decides who will be allowed to buy and names the price. The process is complicated and time consuming. Obviously, I was not interested in seeking permission to sell our house. It would have to be done secretly.

Selling a house in Saigon is very difficult because few people have enough money to buy one. Even those who have the money do not wish to invest in real estate in this proletarian period. Nevertheless, there are two possibilities: the best is to sell to a Party member or cadre who dislikes living in collective houses or those provided by the government and wants to own a house; a number of these people bought houses in my alley and even hired maids to look after their children, cook, and do the housekeeping. The second was to a private citizen from outside Saigon who is looking for an easier and freer style of living than the provinces affords or to someone who has come to Saigon to establish a legal residence preparatory to organizing an escape, which can take a year or more. Many would-be refugees come from highland cities such as Dalat, Banmethout, and Kontum and pay large sums to get "cut off household rations" at their former residences and to be "added to household rations" at their new homes.

The most common procedure for selling a house is for the buyer to bribe the security cadres to add his name to the ward's household ration list corresponding to the house he wants to purchase. When this is accomplished he moves in with the vendor. Then one or two months later the vendor asks that his name be dropped from the ration list so it can be added in another ward where he has been accepted. That done, the vendor gives the buyer a handwritten note stating that during the period under consideration he borrowed a specific sum of money for living expenses from the person who has been sharing his home; now, unable to discharge the debt, he is mortgaging the house to that person and moving to another area for "socialist production work." The amount of money mentioned in the note is usually one-third the amount actually received. Under the socialist regime nobody is supposed to have sufficient money to buy a house.

Party members and cadres can get cut off or added to household ration lists easily on the basis of Party or government transfers. But it is very difficult for a common citizen to move into or out of an area unless he is willing to contribute a thousand dong or so to the "revolution."

Those who most frequently buy houses are mid-level Party members and cadres, especially former members of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front. High-ranking Party members and cadres occupy most of the luxurious villas left by the Americans, officials of the Republic, and rich escapees. These villas are always under guard. The public is not even allowed to walk along the sidewalks in front of them and must cross the street to pass by.

My efforts to sell our house were fruitless. Party members and cadres offered me only unacceptable amounts. Ordinary citizens who wanted to buy it were unable to complete the socialist procedures fast enough for my needs. A week before my departure date I gave up the idea of selling the house, and merely made arrangements to protect it as long as possible.

Preparations

Although I did not have enough gold for the official registration, I still went ahead with preparations for leaving, trusting Chan's assurances. First I had to get two false identity cards—a Republic ID card and a voting card—for myself, and false birth certificates for my older children, making them “Chinese.” The security cadres would not be likely to require legal documentation for my two-year-old second son.

Fortunately my wife did not need false ID cards. Her name, Chu Lan (Vietnamese women keep their own names after marriage) sounds the same in Vietnamese and Chinese. She was born in the North and came south after the 1954 Geneva armistice agreement. The commissars in the bank where she worked suspected her of being of Chinese descent, and the bank's security cadres questioned her on this matter at the time of the Sino-Vietnamese border conflicts. This worked out to our advantage in the official registration of Chinese nationals and descendants to go abroad.

After nearly four years in power, the Communist government still had not replaced the ID cards of the former Republic. Procedures for doing so had been under way for a year, but excessive concern with individual security checks had delayed the process. Hence the Republic ID card was still the most important personal document in use. It is a plastic-covered card measuring $3\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. On one side are the bearer's photo, full name, identification number, place and date of birth, and names of parents; on the other are his or her two index fingerprints, indication of special markings, height, weight, signature, and name of the issuing office and official. When the Republic collapsed, a supply of blank ID cards fell into the hands of a few Chinese in Cholon, perhaps employees of the former government, who were now selling completed cards for 800 to 1200 dong each.

Voting cards issued by the Communist government for the National Assembly election of May 17, 1977, are of poor-quality yellow cardboard and easily falsified. Completed ones sell for 120 to 150 dong. One side carries the name, Socialist Republic of Vietnam; the words “Independence, Freedom, Happiness”; the voting unit, e.g., Ho Chi Minh City, followed by numbers identifying the voter's district, ward, voting cluster, and the card itself. The other side carries the voter's name, age, sex, race, address, and signature; and, finally, the date, and the name, seal, and signature of the ward people's committee president.

The most important detail of my Communist voting card was the race of the voter—Vietnamese, Chinese, or other minority. I became a Chinese. The two false birth certificates for my children did not show my wife's name, for reasons to be explained presently, but a popular Chinese name, Luu A Muoi.

My wife decided to register separately to throw the security cadres off our trail when they began investigating our political background after receiving our applications to go abroad. The address on her ID card was not our current home but a modest house in the poorest residential neighborhood of Phu Nhuan where we had lived when we were first married. Therefore she signed up with the Chinese from that district; and I registered myself and the three children as being from the address on my false ID card, the most disorderly and crowded section of Cholon.

Also, I asked Chan to submit our names only at the last minute to minimize the time available to the cadres to check into our status. He agreed to tell them I was a peddler of plastic toys and rubber sandals who had been selling his wares for many years on the streets of Cholon, that I knew nothing about politics, and that I was going abroad to try to improve my luck in trade.

If questioned by the security cadres at embarkation time, I planned to reply in Cantonese that my Vietnamese wife had died giving birth to my second son and because this had left me despondent, I was taking the three children abroad to start a new life. My wife would say her husband had died and that, having no children, she was going to Hong Kong to place herself under the protection of relatives.

To prepare the children, I had the two older ones memorize the details on my false ID and voting cards and on their false birth certificates. We went over these details together many times to make sure we gave identical answers to the security cadres.

Document counterfeiters were aware that among each group of registered refugees some would need false papers, so they maintained contact with the trip organizers. Likewise, refugees needing papers quickly learned that they could contact the forgers or their intermediaries along Khong Tu Avenue and neighboring streets in central Cholon.

As soon as I expressed my intention to get false papers, one of Chan's nephews sent out for a counterfeiter who appeared within the hour. He was Chinese, well-dressed, about twenty years old. He said he was in the business to make enough gold to take a boat himself. Since I had been introduced by Chan, he offered to prepare all the necessary documents for "just" 1280 dong—1000 for my ID card, 120 for my voting card, and 80 each for birth certificates for my two older children. The youngest did not need papers. I knew that other forgers charged less, but they were at no fixed location, and finding them would take time. The papers were due within several days, and so I agreed to pay his price.

It would take me a day to get the required photos made—one 2-by-3 centimeters for the false ID card and two 3-by-4 centimeters for the security cadres. I was enroute home after having the photos made when I suddenly

realized that the ID card photo should be four years old to coincide with its pre-1975 date—a detail not mentioned by the Chinese counterfeiter. I would just have to take the chance the security cadres would not notice the age difference.

The counterfeiter met me the next afternoon at Chan's house. From his shirt pocket he took a blank, carefully wrapped Republic ID card—two outside plastic layers and an inside paper card. He said the blank card had cost no more than two cents before 1975 but that he had had to pay 600 dong for it. Later, another counterfeiter told me they could be obtained for 300 dong. My assumed name was misspelled on the card. It required the prints of my two index fingers and my signature. For the fingerprints the counterfeiter used xerox ink which blurred. The ink from his ballpoint pen, which I used to sign the card, faded away several months later as did the poorly developed photograph. Had I stayed on in Vietnam much longer the false ID card which cost me 1,000 dong would have become worthless.

I now gave Chan a xerox copy of each of my false ID cards and of my children's birth certificates, along with two photographs of myself, for the My Tho security cadres. My wife submitted two photographs and a xerox copy of her ID card but not of her voting card, which showed our correct address. The security cadres were satisfied. They did not watch their female customers very closely.

Essential Trip Items

Travel Packs

I designed and had made four special travel packs, similar to the day-packs used by American students, to carry emergency items for the trip. A former air-force sergeant of the Republic who operated a shop in his home on Ly Thuong Kiet Avenue made the packs for me. I told him I was the leader of a government archeological team and we needed them for mountain climbing; but he seemed to understand my real purpose and gladly sewed the packs according to my specifications and at a minimum cost.

Each pack was 12 by 13 by 7 inches, had a zipper opening, and was made of American mailbag fabric with an inside nylon layer for waterproofing. I put the emergency items into strong plastic bags which fit inside the travel packs. In the mouth of each plastic bag I tightly tied one end of a long plastic tube which extended through the pack's zipper opening and was then doubled and clamped to make it airtight. Thus, in case the boat sank, we could inflate the plastic bags to serve as temporary life buoys. Outside flap pockets, one on each side of the packs, were filled with

medicine, emergency food, and drinking water. They were accessible, even afloat, without the need for opening the pack. A 3-by-8 inch zippered front pocket contained an inflatable lifevest, two plastic bags for supplementary buoys, and several clamps to seal air tubes for the main bags. A cord, passed through two small rings on the back of the pack, would secure it to the bearer while he was afloat, thus freeing arms and hands for swimming. An adjustable shoulder strap could be used around the neck temporarily for the same purpose.

The packs for my two older children were the same as mine but contained less food and thus were lighter. My own pack carried a long cord which would serve as a towline for my family in case we had to swim. I also included a clasp knife for self-defense and other uses.

When the packs were completed I took them home and tested them by inflating them, immersing them in water, and leaving them to float overnight. They proved completely satisfactory. If we were shipwrecked, even if the packs were not needed as life buoys, they would have the emergency food, medicine, and drinking water necessary to survive for some time.

Life Vests

A small lifebelt for a child to practice swimming would cost up to 150 dong; for an adult, up to 250 dong. My family needed four. I could carry my youngest child in case of emergency. Besides the expense, it would not be easy to find life vests in the short time available; therefore I thought of making vests for all five of us.

Before I left the U.S. to return to Vietnam in 1973, one of my fellow students at Berkeley gave me a waterbed as a farewell gift. I had brought it home but never had the chance to use it. The waterbed had a very good, thin plastic casing—not available in any Vietnamese store in 1979—which could be cut into ten 14-by-18 inch air pillows. By attaching two of them together, one in front and one in back, and using a single tube to inflate both, one could fabricate a very suitable life vest.

Getting someone to convert the plastic water bed into air pillows was a problem. Shop owners who worked with plastics were wary of being charged with helping reactionaries escape. Therefore, I told the operator of a shop near the Truong Minh Giang market that I wanted to cut the plastic sheet into ten air pillows to send my imaginary brothers and nephews who had “just enlisted in the army to serve the Party and the people.”

The shop only delivered eight air pillows, smaller than the agreed-upon size, with the excuse that inadequate electrical power had caused some damage in cutting the plastic. Even so, these would meet my minimum requirements. I commissioned one of my nieces to sew them into four life vests.

Although important, the life vests alone were inadequate preparation for a long and dangerous sea trip. My wife could swim but my children could not. So before we took the boat on April 30, 1979, I taught them long-distance swimming at the Chilang swimming pool in Ho Chi Minh City.

Clothes

Each of us took along one set of clothing in addition to those we wore. We chose fast-drying polyester trousers and shirts with long sleeves, both for easy washing and to protect us from the tropical sun. All of us wore light walking shoes and cloth hats to avoid sunburn.

Food

The food most treasured by the boat people was sugar mixed with dried lemon juice. The sugar provided necessary food energy while lemon juice provided vitamins. The combination of the two would help prevent thirst and had a pleasing flavor. Every would-be refugee considered the preparation of a lemon-sugar supply, usually about 2 pounds per person, an essential element in his escape plans. However, the increasing scarcity of sugar, even on the black market, made this more and more difficult.

Ordinary citizens were not allocated government sugar rations. They were allowed to buy so-called liquid sugar, an unsweet, sooty-looking residue—similar to molasses but of much inferior quality—from the sugar-making process which the Communist authorities chose to sell rather than discard. But even this stuff was scarce, and an ordinary household could purchase it only once every two or three months. In fish and meat dishes Vietnamese use a dark-brown sugar sauce usually obtained by boiling sugar to the desirable consistency. Lacking either white or brown sugar, people found the dreggy, liquid sugar to be a useful, even if not appetizing substitute.

In 1979, the official monthly sugar ration for each government employee was half a kilogram (1.1 lbs.) of semirefined brown sugar priced at 5 dong per kilo. Black marketeers bought it at 14 dong per kilo and resold it on the open market for 20 to 25 dong. Thus, throughout South Vietnam on the first day of each month government employees would sell part of their sugar rations to black marketeers to obtain extra money for other food. The potential for high profit resulted in widespread theft of government-owned sugar stocks by Communist party members and cadres who sold it on the open market. As a consequence, sugar available at the official price became increasingly scarce while half-kilogram and one-kilogram bags of sugar were being sold on every main street in Saigon.

I bought the sugar needed on the open market at 20 dong per kilogram and lemons at 20 cents each.

To make “lemon sugar” one squeezes lemon juice onto the sugar and dries the mixture in the sun until it coagulates into small pieces. This normally takes two or three days.

Because lemon sugar was used so commonly by boat people, security cadres were on the lookout for families engaged in the process of preparing it. I became aware of the escape plans of my neighbor across the alley when I saw his wife drying lemon sugar on the roof. When she saw me looking she quickly moved the mixture into the house. Her secret was secure with me; but in January, 1979, when this family attempted to escape, local security agents advised the authorities and their plan failed. Their house was confiscated and occupied by a Communist party member. The couple and their three children had to go underground and live miserably, without their official household rations, among the Chinese in Cholon.

For these reasons, instead of making our lemon sugar in our own house we arranged to have my father-in-law prepare it for us in his enclosed back yard, which was free from the prying eyes of the security cadres. Once completed, I divided it into portions adequate for a family of five, put the portions into small plastic bags and then stored the bags into each of our travel packs so that if we became separated each would still have enough lemon sugar to survive. Thanks to this lemon sugar, my entire family—particularly my two-year-old son—was able to hold out against hunger and thirst during our long days at sea.

Pressed Cookies and Biscuits

At that time powdered milk was relatively cheap and plentiful, and each people's household was allowed to buy four or five pounds a month at the official price. We mixed the powdered milk with sugar, pressed the mixture into small square molds and then dried the squares over hot charcoal to make pressed cookies. Ten cookies provided sufficient calories for an adult for a full day. In addition to the cookies I purchased two pounds of biscuits.

Dried Rice

I also bought ten half-pound bags of rice. It was cooked, dried, and packed in plastic bags. To eat it, one simply opened the bag and added water.

Ginger Sweetmeat and Sesame

One of my cousins gave us a two pounds of ginger sweetmeat mixed with sesame, which she said helped against sea sickness. The ginger was cut into small slices, first mixed with boiled sugar and then with sesame. Unfortunately, we did not get to test its nausea-fighting qualities because it was stored in my wife's bag, which was stolen just after she boarded the boat.

Medicines

Every refugee tried to get a supply of sea-sickness pills to take along. Before 1975 South Vietnamese pharmacies did not stock any large quantities of these pills because few people used them. After the Communists took over, even if they had the necessary ingredients on hand, they gave no priority to making the pills. As a result, sea-sickness remedies were scarce and very expensive. Whatever was available had usually been sent by Vietnamese nationals abroad. Searching for them in the Saigon black market was a frustrating and time-consuming problem. Fortunately, a friend who had been studying in Australia since 1973 sent 40 seasickness pills to his wife, who gave me 20 of them. Later, she asked me to give half of them to one of her relatives, but I still had 10 of these treasured items for our voyage.

The second most important medical item for refugees was sleeping pills, especially for those departing from river cities and towns. The numerous security cadres kept a sharp watch on boats headed downriver, and the slightest indication that the boats might be carrying passengers instead of freight or might be headed somewhere besides on a fishing trip would stimulate a check and possible arrest of those aboard. For this reason, the boat people were required to sit tightly packed in the boat's fish hold with the hatches closed, until safely out at sea. There were many watch stations to pass on both banks of the river, and the fish holds were dark and suffocating. A baby's cry on an escaping boat could mean failure for the escape plans of everyone aboard as in fact happened on many occasions. Therefore, small children taken aboard were normally given sleeping pills to keep them quiet.

The small sleeping pills were as scarce and expensive as the ones for seasickness. I had purchased ten of them in the Nguyen Hue street black market in preparation for my second escape attempt and kept them for this third effort. Of course, since we were now going abroad officially it would not really matter if my two-year-old boy cried, as indeed he did throughout the night and day before and after we left.

In addition to the seasickness and sleeping pills I took along a number of medicines I had purchased for my first escape attempt. These included remedies for diarrhea, headaches, colds, and fever, plus mercurochrome,

antiseptic cotton, band aids, and eucalyptus oil. The fever-reducing medicine was particularly important for the children. Many children became feverish during the difficult sea trip and died for lack of medicine. This occurred even with the children of medical doctors. Among oriental medicines, eucalyptus oil was the most popular as a remedy against seasickness.

The sanitary conditions on the boat and, later, in the refugee camps made anti-diarrhea medicines essential.

Storing “Dry Food”

Although this third escape attempt had greater potential for success than the earlier ones, I still took precautions against possible failure by storing some of our household possessions with relatives. These items were called “dry food.” If a fourth try became necessary this “dry food” could be sold to finance it.

It is important to remember that after the “success of the Revolution” such worthless bric-a-brac as a ream of paper used only on one side, an old magazine, or a few rusty bolts could be sold for the equivalent of a worker’s salary for one day. Any household in financial difficulties could sell, at any time, such items to the numerous flea-market vendors who would display them on the sidewalk for sale at a higher price.

For two years following the Communist takeover of South Vietnam, from 1977 to 1979, I was one of these flea-market vendors, selling my own household items to buy food for my family. Often I encountered my former students from the university who had also joined this new force of traders. When this happened, we would look at each other and laugh. They taught me the tricks of the trade, how to sell items faster and at better prices. Nearly always, on parting, they would ask, “When will our Republic army return, professor?”

But if everyone was selling, who were the buyers? Apart from people acquiring such necessities as clothing, most buyers were Party members and cadres, particularly Northerners who had come to the South on special assignments. For them, going south was equivalent to going abroad.

During the two decades from the time the Communists took over North Vietnam in 1954 until their victory over South Vietnam in 1975 many Party members and cadres had saved large amounts of money because there was nothing to spend it on. Now, on going to the South, they were impressed by the numerous consumer goods displayed on the sidewalks of Saigon’s main streets, particularly during 1975-1977. They spent their money freely, buying wrist watches, clocks, radios, tape recorders, bicycles, clothes (both new and second-hand), fabrics, sewing equipment, sun glasses,

neon-light bulbs, and especially plastic toys for their children. In Saigon before 1975 plastic toys were so cheap, no child was without them. Not so Uncle Ho's children in the socialist North. Now parents tried to compensate for their own deprivations by buying all the toys they could carry back North with them.

Many Northern Party members and cadres, soldiers, or ordinary citizens fortunate enough to travel South would spend a fortune on a tape recorder, a wrist watch, or a bicycle which may have been the dream of their families for decades. Whatever they purchased could easily be sold in the North to pay for the cost of the trip.

As an educator who loves books, I stored these first, including those which the Communists considered "debauched" left by the Americans or the "false authorities." They included such books as *The New Class* by Djilas and *J. Edgar Hoover On Communism*. Pessimistically I thought if I were doomed to live the rest of my life under the regime, these would be my companions. Of course, such "depraved" books were not available to the public in any library. Should a scholar wish to study them, he was required to obtain a special permit from the cultural commissar. Even so, the supply of these books was very limited.

Next I stored small items we could do without, such as extra rice bowls, tea cups, rolls of paper or recorded cassette tapes, and larger items such as our TV set and our refrigerator.

To move these items I chose times when I was least likely to be noticed—at five o'clock in the morning, at one in the afternoon when my alley was usually deserted as the inhabitants took refuge from the scorching noonday sun, or at eight in the evening while my neighbors were having dinner. On Sunday mornings, when we usually bicycled to visit my parents-in-law—Chu Lan and I and our small son on one bicycle and the two older children on another—each bicycle would also carry a bag stuffed with "dry food" items. The total value of the items we stored probably did not exceed 3,000 dong, but it was insurance against failure.

One day my next-door neighbor told me the ward security office had learned I was moving "dry food" from my house. I immediately stopped. However, since it was common for people to sell such items in the flea markets to buy extra food, the security office did not investigate my activities.

My Public Image

To cover my escape plans, I had to convince the security cadres that my only ambition was to live happily under the Communist regime and labor enthusiastically to build socialism.

Security cadres were intensely interested in identifying persons seeking to escape because that would enable them to legally appropriate private property. After the Communist takeover, every person sought to hide his property. Women stopped wearing jewels and changed into simple pajama-style dresses in the “revolutionary” fashion. Men dug out old clothes and put away their good ones, especially fine suits and ties. Living rooms which had formerly displayed the family’s best furnishings became bare, as homeowners hid their belongings to give the appearance of austerity. In effect, people strove to give all aspects of their lives a stern, disreputable appearance, to demonstrate to the new rulers that in accordance with Communist propaganda they had been exploited by the “false” government and the Americans. Under the new regime, owning property, being rich, became a social crime. After all, how could you have property, how could you have become rich if you had not exploited the people?

One thing people could not hide was their houses. This was my case. My standard of living had been average. My wife and I both worked and we had saved enough money to buy a relatively comfortable two-story house. My wife’s Northern relatives, who visited us, could not believe I was just a modest-income educator. Neither did the security cadres assigned to work in my ward. I was considered wealthy, and this alone led the security office to categorize me among those likely to leave. Some of my neighbors were convinced that sooner or later I would say goodbye to the Communist paradise.

Therefore, I made it a practice to reject and criticize any of my neighbor’s comments about sea trips I might take, even those made jokingly. I always argued that my family was happy under the revolutionary regime and proud of living in a Vietnam which enjoyed “independence, liberty and happiness” under the leadership of “Uncle and Party.”

I also used several tactics to reinforce my image as a satisfied citizen. Because my wife had regular office hours and I did not, I usually purchased food for the family. At the market I would always buy a bundle or two of greens—morning glory—at ten or fifteen cents apiece and put them on top of the food basket which hung from the handlebars of my bicycle. Returning home I would always pass by the ward security office. Morning glory was the cheapest vegetable available, hence the popular student saying: “In the morning I eat morning glory and potatoes, in the evening I eat potatoes and morning glory.”

My wife's sister Zung, whom we called Mother Zung because of her six children, was an elementary-school teacher who supplemented her small teaching salary by purchasing sundry school supplies such as notebooks, rulers, pencils, and erasers which she and her eight-year-old daughter resold for a small profit at school gateways. My daughter, then nine years old, imitated her young cousin, selling school supplies obtained from her aunt, and thus helped me demonstrate to the ward security office that we were so impoverished that I could not possibly finance an escape. Naturally, I always spoke proudly to the neighbors about how my daughter helped us to make a living.

I also wanted to convey the impression that I was trying to build socialism right in our ward. Here, the city people's cluster chief unwittingly served my purpose. The cluster chief was an electrician who had been smart enough to hoist the NLF flag right in front of his house on April 30, 1975. This convinced the ward Party commissariat that he was the first progressive worker in the cluster. He was straightforward, talkative, and habitually spoke loudly and cheerfully to everyone, especially me because of my status. After the "Revolution" he became chief of a cooperative producing chalk. When it went bankrupt, he became chief of a noodle cooperative. During a discussion about management of my construction company and his experiences as an electrician, we agreed to establish a ward-level electricity and water cooperative. He proposed me as cooperative president to handle administrative management and public relations while he would be vice president in charge of technical matters. Membership would be composed of electricity and water workers both in and outside the ward. I accepted his proposal to keep my name on the security office's list of "good" socialist citizens.

A week before my escape we were still meeting, writing plans and regulations to be submitted to the ward people's committee for official approval. The committee needed such cooperatives to prove to the district commissariat that, in accordance with the Party's orders, the committee was working to solve unemployment problems within its jurisdiction.

In the frequent cluster meetings and other assemblies, I never passed up an opportunity to illustrate my belief in socialism, the Party, and Uncle, or to express my views about matters affecting our cluster. Since few individuals spoke up in these meetings the cluster chief and his female security deputy were pleased at my active participation. They even proposed me as the cluster people's representative at the ward consumer's cooperative, the only one which sold extra food to the entire ward populace. The president had to be a Party member or cadre, and its first president had been dismissed for stealing the people's money.

Of course, I always gave the area security cadre a salute and a cheerful smile whenever we met.

The Refugee Flag

Orders emanating from the My Tho security office caused our boat numerous delays in between the time I registered to go abroad officially in October 1978 until we actually left on April 30, 1979.

After my official registration I terminated all my activities. I left the construction company, stopped repairing and selling boat motors, and gave up my private English classes. However, I had to keep on selling household items in the flea markets to buy food for my family. This left me much free time.

In January 1979, Chan asked me to teach conversational English to some members of his family. He set aside a room on the third floor of his house for this purpose. My new students were at different levels, so I divided them into two groups. Those with some knowledge of English on the elementary-intermediate level, I taught in the evenings after dinner. They were Chan's niece and three of her girl friends—Hoa, Muoi, and Ling—all Chinese and all expecting to leave on the boat. Beginners I taught in the afternoon, from three to five o'clock. They were Mrs. Chan, her daughter-in-law, and two of her nephews.

One of these nephews, Phong, was a Communist youth cadre. His father, Chan's brother, called, in Communist fashion, "Uncle" Sau, was a middle-ranking Party member in charge of Chinese mobilization in Cholon. Uncle Sau and Chan lived in adjoining houses. Phong had been drafted, spent several months in military training, and deserted. His mother, also a Party member, hid him on the third floor of Chan's house (where my English classes were being held) and was arranging for him to escape on the boat. Phong's father frequently ate dinner with the Chan family on the first floor, as I did between the two classes, but Phong's name was never mentioned in our mealtime conversations. Nevertheless, I had the impression that this Party member knew where his son was hiding and that Phong planned to escape the country. Chan himself had been involved in NLF activities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Republic governments had jailed him twice for contributing funds to the NLF and for protecting ethnic Chinese cadres working in Cholon.

I taught English at Chan's house without incident until March, 1979. Then, one evening, Mrs. Chan informed me that Wong, one of the boat passengers, who taught in a Chinese-language high school, had been arrested by Cholon security officials for making a boat flag bearing the word "refugee" in preparation for their departure.

Wong knew nothing about navigation laws. He had learned about marine flags from an English dictionary and hit upon the idea of sewing a "refugee flag" for the boat. He had designed a flag and asked one of Mrs.

Chan's nephews to get it sewn. The nephew asked Mrs. Chan for a decision. She knew nothing about marine flags either, or of the proposal's significance, and told her nephew to go ahead if he thought it necessary. The nephew took the design to a nearby sewing shop and asked the owner to produce the refugee flag.

The Communists are past masters in the art of government subversion and carefully control all items which have potential use for protests or demonstrations, such as flags, banners, seals, posters and even ink and paper. A company wishing to get a seal engraved, for example, had to get a permit from the security office, and security officers even designated which engraving shop should do the job. The engraver, in turn, was required to report to the officials all details concerning the work before turning the seal over to the customer.

Flags were given special political significance, especially at the time of the Sino-Vietnamese border conflict, and the Party was concerned about the potential for political demonstrations among the Chinese in Cholon. It was not necessary for sewing shops to report on customer requests, but the owner of the shop asked to sew the refugee flag turned out to be an undercover security agent and he reported the flag job to his boss. When the nephew went to get the flag, security cadres picked him up. He gave them the name of the Chinese high school teacher, who was immediately jailed as a reactionary.

In its statement concerning the arrest, the Cholon security office said that under the Communist regime, since all citizens live in "independence, liberty and happiness," there could be no refugees. Anyone who called himself a refugee was, in effect, calumniating and cursing the regime and therefore a reactionary against the Party and the government.

Mrs. Wong, the wife of the teacher who had proved too far-sighted for his own good, went crying to Chan to save her husband from jail. At first, Chan did not think the matter important. The refugee flag, as such, could not arouse political excitement; besides, it was to be used only when the boat reached international waters, not in Vietnam itself. He had registered the boat with the security offices in both My Tho and in Ho Chi Minh City and thought he had every right to make all necessary preparations for a safe sea trip. Furthermore, he had thrown lavish parties for the leading Party security officials and cadres in both cities.

Chan was confident of his own influence and said he could get Wong out of jail within three days. Three days passed but the unfortunate teacher was still in jail. Chan tried to "redeem" Wong for eight taels of gold, but the office demanded a larger amount without specifying how much larger. Nevertheless, he told me to continue teaching conversational English as usual.

Having become well acquainted with the security comrades' system of making revolution with gold, I thought Chan would be able to resolve the problem. I kept on teaching the classes even though I knew something unusual was going on.

One evening, a week after the flag incident, I was in the midst of a class on the third floor when suddenly the Cholon security cadres surrounded Chan's house. No one was permitted to enter or leave. When I was informed of the encirclement it was too late to leave. The security cadres were already on the first floor.

I was not afraid of being caught teaching English without permission, but I was afraid that the Cholon security office would learn my true identity and of my disguise as an ethnic Chinese registered to go abroad officially.

The only safe exit was through Sau's house, but the door was locked from the other side. Fortunately, Phong's eight-year-old cousin, Li, at that moment unlocked the door letting me and Phong escape. Phong planned to climb up on the roof and hide in a neighbor's house; but when he looked out in the alley he saw security cadres who would have detected him, so he decided against it. Besides, neighbors were already out on their balconies watching the action. Unable to get away, Phong climbed over a partition, open at the top for air circulation, and into his father's bedroom which was always kept locked when his father was away. He hid under his father's bed. The room appeared empty.

Like Phong, I looked for an exit but could not find one. I hit on the idea of disguising myself as a member of the Sau family. A pair of shorts and a faded white shirt hung outside the door leading to Sau's bedroom. I changed into them hurriedly and looked at myself in a small mirror on the wall. Then I realized my identification papers would give me away.

At that moment I heard the security cadres next door asking who owned the adjacent house. A voice I recognized as that of Chan's nephew Vien replied: "It belongs to Uncle Sau. He is in charge of Chinese mobilization in this district." My heart skipped a beat. Then Vien added: "The two houses do not connect. We'll have to go downstairs to enter."

I would have to act fast. Seeing Li still standing by gave me another idea. I quickly changed back into my clothing, then sat Li down at a table next to the rear balcony, took a spelling book off a nearby shelf, and told him to read a lesson aloud. As he read, I corrected his mistakes in a leisurely fashion. Li had just begun the second lesson as the security cadre and Vien appeared at the head of the stairs. Without acknowledging their presence, I rebuked Li for laziness and failing to study his lesson. Only then did I turn my head to greet them with a nod.

The security cadre, a young man of 25, asked who I was. Vien responded, "Oh, he is the tutor for Uncle Sau's grandchildren. He comes here every day to give them lessons."

The cadre then asked about the bedroom where Phong was hiding and Vien replied, "That's Uncle Sau's bedroom. He always locks the door and takes the key with him when he goes to work."

The security cadre pondered this information a moment, apparently reflecting on Sau's party status, then descended the stairs with Vien behind him.

I resumed chastising Li, telling him to be sure to study the next day's lesson more diligently. Then I said, "Get your books together. Your mother cannot pick you up today so I'm going to take you home."

As we walked down the stairs we discussed the solution to a mathematical problem, but at the door a security cadre asked for my identification papers.

Speaking as naturally as I could I said, "I just showed my ID card to the comrade leader. The class is over. We have to go home." The cadre insisted. I pretended disdain while showing him my Republic ID card and "revolutionary" voting card. "Of course," I said, "I showed them before and I'll show them again."

Looking at the cards the cadre asked, "Why do you come all the way from Phu Nhuan to Cholon to teach?"

"I need the money," I replied. "I'm not concerned about the distance. If a family hires me to teach, I'll go, no matter how far."

The cadre let us go. Had I emerged from Chan's house I would have been arrested.

That evening the security cadres arrested Mrs. Chan for having ordered the fabrication of the refugee flag; but following Communist practices, they would not reveal where she was being held. Sau, her brother-in-law, dared not intervene. He stayed away from home on the pretense of official business. After three days he did find out in which jail Mrs. Chan was held, so her family could take her food and clothes.

The high-school teacher, Wong, continued to be held pending investigation of "a plot to sabotage the security of the Party and government."

Chan's initial anger turned into despair. He became ill and lay in bed all day, unable to eat. People who had paid him for passage on the boat began to demand repayment so they could register with other boats.

La, the medicine practitioner, was also jailed by the Cholon security cadres; but, as I learned later, his two sons persuaded the My Tho security officials to intervene and were able to redeem him for ten taels of gold.

None of La's boat passengers demanded their money back.

One night, a week after Chan's house was searched, I sneaked in for a visit. Chan had lost his voice, but he pointed at his mouth and his heart and I guessed that his health was even worse than I had suspected.

Chan's illness and Mrs. Chan's imprisonment did not hinder preparations by the My Tho security office for the departure of the boat. However, La's two sons now took over full responsibility for managing it.

These events, of course, made my plans extremely precarious. We had paid Chan only six instead of ten taels of gold for my wife, and I still owed him for my own passage. If this were discovered either my wife or I would be unable to go. Furthermore, if the La brothers should cheat both the Chan family and their passengers, as was happening frequently in these ventures, we might even lose the six taels.

With this in mind I asked my three Chinese students—Hoa, Muoi, and Ling—who lived in Cholon and were experienced in evading security cadres, to keep a close watch on all actions of the La family and movements of the boat. I knew I could depend on them.

Instead of helping us escape, the refugee flag had plunged us into serious trouble.

XII

Escape to Freedom

Hoa, my Chinese student, brought me the news at 10 P.M. on April 27. That morning, she said, the My Tho security office had ordered all registered boat passengers to assemble for departure.

I was taken by surprise. Something was wrong. I had seen Chan only two days before and he had known nothing of the impending order.

Hoa did not know the departure date but was certain the boat would not leave that night. Passengers for registered boats normally were allowed two days to assemble from Saigon and other points.

Passengers registered with the La family had already arrived, thanks to advance information given them by La's sailors. Those hired by the Chan family had informed only their close relatives, and word had not been passed on. Hoa had learned of the departure order by chance from a member of the La family.

In October, Chan and La had each hired ten young men to serve as sailors and to guard the boat. The men had been living aboard the boat for six months and were to travel free of charge. When Chan became sick, the two La sons took over control of the sailors he had hired.

Chan had two assistants who had contributed capital to the venture, but they had been unable to cope with the La family. As a result, Chan had lacked adequate contact with the My Tho security office and was unable to keep his passengers advised of developments.

To avoid a last-minute rush and possibly miss the boat, many passengers, especially youths, had moved to My Tho where they lived with relatives or in three old houses rented by the company. Some had been there since October. Others had gone to My Tho, had run out of money or become frustrated, and had returned home, only to dash back at each rumor of an assembly order. Some had had their homes confiscated in the process, had run out of money, and were forced to ask the company for food. My Tho security cadres gave them no trouble as long as they stayed in the rented houses, but local soldiers usually found ways to squeeze money out of

them. Of course, those awaiting the boat in My Tho were all Chinese or Sino-Vietnamese. As an ethnic Vietnamese I would have been quickly detected and in trouble with the security police.

After Hoa left my house, I desperately wanted to talk to Chan, but the two-hour round trip to Cholon by bicycle would leave me out past midnight curfew. I could not risk an arrest.

I told my wife to prepare to go to My Tho the next day. She wrote out an application to her bank for two days' sick leave.

An Exploratory Trip to My Tho

By dawn of April 28 I was at Chan's home. He and his large family were depressed by the developing events. Chan tried to resolve the situation, but not even his trusted nephew Vien seemed able to help. Therefore I proposed that Vien go immediately to My Tho to delay the boat's departure for two days by whatever means necessary and allow the Chan passengers time to assemble. I also recommended that Chan ask his brother Sau's assistance in getting Mrs. Chan released by the Cholon security police and be prepared to pay the maximum redemption price. I said I would go to My Tho that morning to determine the departure date and time.

Chan then disclosed that the My Tho security office had told him the amount of gold he had paid the "government" did not correspond to the number of his passengers and that they had demanded an additional 70 taels. When he had been unable to pay this amount they had asked him to go to My Tho on April 27 to review the list of passengers.

Chan said that my name and those of my three children were on the list of those who had paid enough gold, but the My Tho security office had removed from the passenger list the names of twenty members of his extended family who they maintained had not paid their six taels of gold to the government. Among them was my wife and my student Ling. Chan said he had put my wife's name back on the list, but he could not assure me it would be honored.

The My Tho security office did not inform Chan of the departure date. He had learned of the urgent assembly order the same day I had but was unable to inform me. His assistants and their families had all moved to My Tho and there was now no one to help him except two of his nephews and myself.

By 9 A.M. I was in My Tho. Both Chan and La passengers had assembled in the company's houses on a deserted street near the My Tho Market. A number of people had come to bid farewell to their relatives. Some would try their chances at getting aboard.

After conversations with passengers, sailors, Chan's two assistants, and the two La sons who were now in command, I realized the bitter truth. The My Tho security office and the La family would defraud the Chan family and those passengers whose names were not on the official list, even if they had paid Chan or his wife.

Departure would be in the evening of either April 29 or 30. The exact time and place were not given. Passengers were instructed to be assembled in the rented houses by 5 P.M. April 29 for a roll call by My tho security cadres.

I returned to Saigon, reported to Chan what I had learned, and hurried home.

That night I borrowed six taels of gold from the in-laws of my wife's brother. My wife Chu Lan and her younger sister Kim would follow me to My Tho, each carrying three taels. Chu Lan would bribe the security cadres into including her name in the roll call so she could get on the boat. Kim would do likewise. If the cadre held out for more gold, Kim would pass her gold to Chu Lan so she could offer six taels; Kim would then return to Saigon and await another opportunity. If my wife was unsuccessful, she would return the gold.

With the borrowed gold in hand, I headed for the house of my parents-in-law to alert Kim to prepare to leave with us. I also asked Mother Zung, my wife's older sister, and her six children to move into our house the next day.

Mother Zung Moves In

Zung's husband had agreed to the two weeks' "reeducation" imposed by the Provisional Revolutionary Government immediately after the Communist takeover of South Vietnam. Four years later he was still in the reeducation camp. The Provisional Revolutionary Government had evicted his wife and six children from the home they had purchased on credit from the government of the Republic, and they had been sharing her parents' small home. Although my wife and I had invited them to live with us, Zung had not wished to disturb our lives. Her employer, the Ho Chi Minh City education office, had not responded to her request for a "socialist house."

Now we would be leaving, and we wanted her to take over our house rather than have it confiscated. In preparing for this event, I had already completed arrangements for the move. Two weeks earlier I had entered Zung and her children on my household rations. With her and the children there, the security cadre would not be so likely to notice our absence and confiscate the house.

As soon as Zung and her family moved in, I sent my two older children to their grandparents' home to await our departure for My Tho. I then took Zung to report officially to the cluster chief and the cluster security deputy. The cluster chief was not in, but the security deputy was.

After writing down the details about Mother Zung's family in her register, the security deputy said: "This lady was entered on your household rations two weeks ago. Why are you so late in reporting?"

"She has been so busy with work for the Party and government she hasn't had time to move in," I replied. "Today has been her first opportunity, and so I am reporting to you today."

There were no more questions. The security deputy was familiar with my arguments from our weekly cluster meetings.

It seemed clear that the security deputy and, hence, the ward security office were unaware of my escape plans. Otherwise I would certainly have been in trouble.

We returned home. I prepared a statement certifying that I had mortgaged my house to Mother Zung for 2000 dong and, being unable to repay, I was surrendering it to her. After my escape, she would use this certificate to prove her claim on the house to the ward government.

A Travel Permit to Visit my Mother

My next step was to arrange to be absent from the cluster long enough to escape without being noticed.

Liberation Day on April 30 and Labor Day on May 1 were usually accompanied by an evening cluster meeting for the people to "study the meanings of the great holidays." The cluster chief or the security deputy would check attendance in the same manner a primary school teacher calls the class roll. For four years I had represented my family at weekly cluster meetings. My absence would certainly be noted.

If the trip were delayed beyond the two holidays, my wife would have to return to Saigon to keep the house and report to her office on May 2. If she did not go to work, the bank's security section would ask the ward security office to investigate. Institutional security cadres were particularly alert after holidays for the disappearance of government employees. Further, it might be necessary for me to stay in My Tho up to five days to keep an eye on the boat's movements.

The presence of Mother Zung and her family alone would not be sufficient cover. I needed official permission to be away. I went to the ward security office, taking all the necessary documents, and applied for

permission to visit my mother in Dalat.

I was received by the security office deputy, a Party member from the North who had been working in the ward for a year.

"Comrade," I said, "I would like to request a travel permit to visit my mother in Dalat on the occasion of these two great holidays. I have not seen her for six months."

I showed him my "temporary residence, temporary absence" booklet in which the dates of my last visit to Dalat were noted.

He did not answer, but read my application, then looked at the booklet.

I continued, in the sincerest tone I could muster: "Comrade, could you please allow me to stay in my hometown for a week? To tell the truth, I need only four days, one day enroute, two days with my mother, and one to return. But as the Comrade knows, the number of holiday travelers makes it difficult to buy a ticket, so please give me a week so I will have enough time."

Silently he wrote out a travel permit allowing me a week's absence and handed it to me.

"Thank you very much Comrade," I said, restraining my joy. Then I casually gathered my papers and left to complete the procedure with the area representative for temporary residence, temporary absence.

(After my escape, the Northern security official avenged himself for this deception by leading a gang of security office cadres to my house, accusing Mother Zung of crimes against the socialist state, evicting her and her six children from the house and from the ward, and confiscating the property in violation of legal documents which he himself had signed. Mother Zung and her children went back to live with her parents.)

Getting Ready

Having bid farewell to Zung and her children, my wife and I prepared to bicycle with our small son to her parents' home where we would pick up the other two children. As I approached our front door I saw someone standing outside.

My heart jumped. I signaled to my wife to see who it was while I pretended to dust furniture.

My wife opened the door. It was Hai, the neighbor's domestic helper, carrying the infant son of her Communist Party employer who had recently moved into a nearby house the government had confiscated from Dr. Yen and his family. The Yens had failed in their escape attempt and were hiding in Cholon awaiting another chance. Hai had worked for the Yen family for

ten years. At first the Party member had told Hai to leave, but he later allowed her to return to cook and look after the child in exchange for a place to live. Having experienced the Yen family's escape attempt, she appeared to know we were about to leave. In ambiguous words she said good bye to my wife.

I feared Hai would be overheard by our nosy next-door neighbor or by ward cadres at a tea shop only twenty feet away.

Chu Lan tried to divert the conversation into talk about food prices and the "illness" that had caused her to stay home from work.

After fifteen painful minutes, Hai left. No damage had been done, but I chided my wife for not getting rid of her sooner.

At my in-laws' house, we said farewell and left separately—the two older children together with Kim, Chu Lan, and our small son following, while I went in a different direction. Each of us carried our belongings in our specially designed sea bags hidden inside other bags normally used by people visiting their native villages.

We met at a Lambretta (three-wheeled motorcab) station where I rented two of the vehicles. As we left, three in each Lambretta, I saw my father-in-law on his bicycle across the street ready to signal us in case of danger.

It was 12 noon. The avenue was very busy, so I felt secure for the moment.

The An Dong bus station in Cholon was as always, noisy, dirty, and crowded. There would be no problem with security agents there.

My family waited at the station while I took a Lambretta to Chan's home to inform him of our departure for My Tho and to pick up two more bags we had left there six months earlier.

The initial plan for the passengers of our boat had been for them to assemble in Cholon for transfer to My Tho by bus, but the refugee flag incident had forced its cancellation, leaving passengers to get to My Tho on their own.

Chan advised me to leave my wife at home. He was now certain the My Tho security office had removed the names of his entire family and passengers such as my wife from the official list, and was concerned that my home would be confiscated, leaving her without shelter.

I had not told him of my bribing scheme or my arrangements with Mother Zung.

Since time was so short, I told him simply that I had a plan. Then I said good bye to his family, grabbed the two bags and hurried to the bus station.

For more than an hour I drew on all my experience with Saigon buses trying to get my family aboard one, but failed.

In desperation I rented two more Lambrettas to take us to the Trung Luong crossroads where we would try to catch a bus on the highway.

Two tired-looking security cadres were on duty in the hot sun, guarding the crossroads. Their job was to check the baggage of travelers and to prevent the many buses which passed there from picking up passengers.

Bus drivers could not stop at the crossroads but they could slow down a hundred feet beyond the cadres and pick up fleet-footed passengers. Our Lambrettas were not allowed to take us beyond the cadres without stopping for a check. The drivers, familiar with the situation, let us out 50 feet before reaching the crossroads. Getting past the cadres was our next problem.

I tried to flag down an oncoming bus, knowing the driver would not stop at that point. Then as he passed, I ran frantically after him, carrying my small son and tugging at the older boy while my family and sister-in-law, burdened with luggage, followed.

The security guards, familiar with such scenes, let us pass.

Fifty feet beyond the cadres we slowed to a walk and stopped near a refreshment stand where other travelers were also trying to catch a bus.

A bus slowed down. I jumped aboard and pulled in the two older children; but then the bus speeded up, leaving behind Kim and Chu Lan, who was now carrying our small son. I shouted for the driver to stop but his assistant, standing at the back door, said calmly that there would be other buses. Besides, he said, at this crowded hour no bus could take on six passengers at once. Realizing that he was right, I gave up.

It was 5 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon when we entered My Tho. Highway security had been lax. There were none of the familiar yellow-uniformed cadres in sight, either on the streets or at the bus station. Perhaps they had been ordered to let Saigon passengers arrive unmolested.

I took my two children to the company houses and left them with Hoa, then returned to the bus station to meet my wife and son and Kim. They had managed to get a ride in a My Tho transportation-office truck carrying rocks. The driver had arranged for them to sit behind the cab, covered them with a tent, and then dropped them off at the city limits. His price was the same as that for black-market bus tickets.

By now I knew that our boat would not depart before midnight.

At the Houses

Since we had arrived much later than other passengers, my family and my three Chinese women students—Hoa, Ling, and Muoi—were relegated to a dirty corner in the kitchen of one of the three houses. I asked the three girls to keep their identity to themselves.

The passengers were gathered in small family groups. At the door of each house, two persons served as guards.

At 8:30 P.M. the elder of the two La sons, who had now been designated Captain La, checked passenger arrivals by reading out names from the official My Tho security office list. Chu Lan and Ling were not on the list.

I protested: “Mrs. Chu (my wife) deposited the required amount with Mrs. Chan. Why isn’t her name on the list?” This was not true but I knew that Mrs. Chan was still in jail and my words could not be checked. Since we had registered separately, the La sons did not know “Mrs. Chu” was my wife.

Captain La was evasive: “This is the official list. You can check Mrs. Chu’s case with Mrs. Chan.” He, too, knew Mrs. Chan could not be reached, but did not know I had lied.

“Could you arrange for Mrs. Chu to meet Mrs. Chan to resolve the case right now?” I asked. “It’s late already.”

“Mrs. Chan hasn’t come down yet.” Captain La replied. “She is still in Ho Chi Minh City.”

My protest was to serve my wife well later when the My Tho security official called out names for passengers to board the boat.

Ling wept all night. Her dream of living in freedom was over. Hoa and I advised her to stay around to the last minute; but early in the morning, without saying a word, she left for Saigon.

An Island on the Mekong

At 8 A.M. on April 30, a My Tho security official ordered us to prepare to depart for a small island in the Mekong River which flows by My Tho. Our boat would be anchored near the island. This location enabled security officials to maintain maximum control of embarking passengers and prevented any unregistered persons from sneaking aboard. Captain La asked those who had come to say farewell to leave and then divided us into groups of five or six each under the supervision of leaders he had appointed. All baggage was to be left at the houses to be checked by security cadres.

Our house became very noisy. My family and two Chinese formed a group. My students, Hoa and Muoi, and three other Chinese formed another next to us. Many passengers donned an extra suit of clothes, hiding what they could under them. They had heard from previous groups that at the last minute the security cadres would keep back luggage to save weight with the excuse that they wanted to make room for more passengers. As a result, many refugees went abroad with only one suit of clothes. We followed their example and put on extra clothes.

Outside, security cadres carrying sidearms and rifles were deployed along the streets leading to the three houses. Several bursts of gun fire resounded from somewhere nearby, followed by loud cries. The security guards had shot into the air to frighten away a group of local thugs seeking to rob the passengers of small handbags which might contain valuables.

Kim's hope for escape dimmed. Her name was not on the list. Ling had already given up and returned home. Kim secretly placed a tael of gold in my wife's hand, wished us good luck, and remained in the house until we had gone and our luggage was on its way to the boat. Then she returned to Saigon. (She was to join us in San Francisco two years later.)

I told my wife that when we reached the island she would have to contrive every possible way to get aboard if we were to stay together as a family. Since we were not registered as husband and wife, I would have to take the children aboard without her help.

The procession began, the passengers in a line, half running, half walking through the busy streets as we headed toward a crowded ferry landing near the My Tho market. I carried our small son on my back; my wife and the other children followed close behind.

Security agents in civilian dress, spaced 25 feet apart, urged the passengers on. "Come on," they repeated, "hurry, step faster. Keep up with the person ahead of you."

At the ferry landing, as I was about to get in the small boat which would take us to the island, a Chinese youth stopped me and said something in Cantonese. I was about to answer him when Hoa, close behind, cried out, "He's OK. Let him get in."

My family and Hoa with her young brother and two sisters, one of whom was carrying a child, got into the boat. The sister with the child had not registered to go but was hoping to go on board.

I watched My Tho gradually recede in the distance as the small boat cut through the choppy river waters toward the small island. Rays from the tropical sun in a bright blue sky were reflected on my wife's hair. I wondered anxiously if these were to be our last moments together.

We landed on the small island and were led to a spacious country-style house situated in a large garden with fruit trees. Nearby, at a small open market, island people sold fruit, rice cakes, and soups. I affected a Cantonese accent as I bargained with them.

In the late afternoon another group of passengers landed and stood in lines in a separate corner of the garden.

Boarding the Boat

At dusk My Tho security cadres encircled the garden. One of them gathered the Saigon passengers under a tree and separated us into two groups, youths—mostly young men—in one, families with children and elders in another. As the passengers stepped forward, he compared faces with the photographs we had submitted and asked questions based on details from the ID and voting cards. Everyone in my group answered correctly.

It was now quite dark. I was no longer afraid that I would be recognized as a Vietnamese rather than a Chinese.

One of Captain La's assistants informed me that, because of the intervention of Sau—Chan's brother (the Party official)—the Cholon security police had released Mrs. Chan temporarily so she could go to My Tho; but the My Tho security office had refused her request to delay the boat's departure, and forced the Chans to acquiesce.

Captain La's assistants told us to move toward the river bank. There, at a table lighted by a kerosene lantern, sat the leading security cadre with several assistants. Captain La and another cadre holding the passenger list stood alongside.

I had seen Chu Lan and Hoa's unregistered sister trying to approach the list-holding cadre but had not seen them actually talk to him.

The cadre began reading out names. As each individual stepped forward, Captain La would seize him or her by the collar, hold the lantern close to the person's face, and shout "Yes." The leading security cadre sitting at the table then waved the passenger on to the landing area.

"Chu Khanh Long," the cadre called.

"Yes! Here, sir!" I shouted in Cantonese as I threaded my way through the crowd, small son on my back and tugging the other two.

Captain La looked at my face and shouted "Yes." The cadre called out my three children's names and the leading cadre signaled me onward.

We moved fast. I did not want to stay there another second.

At the bank, two security cadres helped us into a small boat, and a girl rowed us toward our vessel anchored in the middle of the broad Mekong.

As we pulled away, I heard a security cadre shout an oath followed by, "Now I've got you! I've been watching you for three days. You won't get away this time."

My heart jumped.

Looking back, about thirty feet from the landing area, I saw a security cadre chasing a man. Under cover of darkness and in the general disorder, he had been trying to take a small boat out to reach the vessel. How many other such incidents occurred that night I do not know, but as we approached the boat I heard a rifle shot from another area on the bank.

As we boarded in the dim light from the boat's generators, the sailors showed us where to sit. The elders and families with children were taken to compartments on the second deck, youths below to fish-storage compartments on the third deck. The thirty members of the La family got the roomier compartments on the main deck, the pilot's cabin, and choice outside locations. My children and I were seated on the wooden floor on the left at the entrance to one of the second-deck compartments. In Vietnamese fashion, we left our shoes at the door.

After all the company's 312 passengers had come aboard, I looked at the faces of my three children. They were on the verge of tears. I hoped my wife would be somewhere aboard.

The noisy boarding had ceased for only fifteen minutes when I saw another group of passengers approaching. They were the people who had landed on the island in the late afternoon. They were called "passengers sent by the My Tho security office," which meant they had paid their gold not to the Communist government but to the security officials and the La family. There were more than a hundred.

Now I understood the scheme worked out between the My Tho security office and the La family.

The Chan family may not have paid the full amount demanded by the My Tho security office, but the officials had taken advantage of the refugee flag to arrest Mrs. Chan and bilk the family and passengers who had registered with her. These were replaced by a hundred "passengers sent by the My Tho security office."

For a hundred persons consisting of fifty adults at 10 taels each and fifty children at 6 taels each, the conspirators obtained 900 taels. Later I learned that of the one hundred people sent to replace the victimized Chan passengers, the My Tho security office had sent sixty, the La family forty.

This manipulation explained the urgent order for the boat's departure. The Chan family not only failed to escape and lost the gold, money, labor,

and prestige they had put into the venture, they also had to repay those, like Ling, who had paid for their passage and were left behind.

The boat, 72 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 10 feet deep, now carried 412 men, women and children.

It was midnight, April 30, 1979. The vessel bore off down the Mekong River.

Ba, the chief of the My Tho seafood office, and several security cadres in a small motor boat accompanied us a short distance, flashing light signals to security posts along the river banks.

After the cadres left, Captain La continued the light signals until our boat put out to the open sea.

From Vietnam to Malaysia

After the boat got under way I tried to look for my wife, but the sailors did not allow any movement. We were so confined we had to sit hunched up on the floor, no room even to cross our legs much less stretch out. This was to be our position for four days and five nights.

Suddenly, in the dim light on the opposite side of the compartment, I saw a familiar figure stand up momentarily to adjust her position. She was not more than ten feet away.

“Your mother!” I said excitedly.

My children looked where I pointed but she was no longer visible among the numerous heads.

Ignoring the sailors’ orders, I stood up. “Lan! Lan!” I shouted, “We’re over here!”

She jumped to her feet. It was indeed my wife.

“Where are the children?” she shouted back.

“Here, mama!” they cried all together.

Chu Lan clambered over protesting fellow passengers toward us.

The children and I hugged her passionately.

“I saw you as in a dream,” I said.

That was, indeed, the rebirth of our dream to seek freedom together with our small family.

Then Chu Lan told her story.

She had spoken to the security cadre with the passenger list as soon as he had entered the garden on the island. She lied as convincingly as she could that she had paid Mrs. Chan 10 taels of gold five months earlier, so

she could go to Hong Kong to live with her relatives. But at the last minute Chan had removed her name without saying a word about it.

The cadre checked his records but said nothing.

Chu Lan gave him a tael of gold, asking him to call out her name. The cadre at first held out for six taels "to deliver to the government" but finally settled for three.

He did not call out my wife's name from the list of passengers. Rather, at the end, he signaled her to approach the leading security cadre.

"I paid my gold to Mrs. Chan," she told the cadre. "Why wasn't my name called out?"

The cadre with the list asked her name again, looked over the list and said, "Chan took her name off the list on the last review. Perhaps she paid Mrs. Chan."

The leading cadre asked Captain La for advice.

Captain La remembered Chu Lan and my protest from the previous night. Without hesitation he said: "She is Mrs. Chan's passenger."

The gamble had been won.

Hoa's sister returned to Saigon. Her name had not been on any list and she had no gold to bribe the cadres.

The First Day—At Sea

Seasickness struck as soon as the boat reached the open sea. Passengers started vomiting, some urinating where they sat. Quarrels broke out among the overcrowded refugees, and sailors settled them rudely with abusive language. Exhaustion set in the first day and many were unable to eat.

During the four days at sea we had one meal a day: a piece of rice cake and a slice of *cu dau* (jicama, a white, fleshy root). The My Tho security office had insisted on provisioning the boat to make sure the company hid no gold, jewelry, or American dollars in the food, and had charged four times the open-market price for the rice cakes.

The security cadres had also conducted a complete search of the boat, but this did not prevent company members from making private arrangements with the cadres to overlook their secret hiding places for gold and valuables. I had noticed a member of the La family slipping a small packet to a woman cadre who had rowed him and his wife to the boat. She thanked them and wished "Mom and Dad" a nice trip.

On our first morning at sea, I laboriously made my way below through the dark fish-storage compartment to find our luggage. We needed the sea sickness pills, the medicines, and the extra food I had stored in the bags.

Most of the dark compartment was occupied by young people who lay side by side like canned sardines on the sloping hull.

In their hurry to get the passengers aboard, the My Tho security cadres had not examined our luggage, and now it was dumped haphazardly in the hold.

The heat was intense. After a 30-minute search, I found three of our bags—Lan's had been stolen—and then collapsed. No sailor lifted a hand or offered me a drop of water.

The company had told us we need not bring water; there would be plenty aboard for everyone. Since Chan had confirmed this, I brought only two liters for my family of five. On the fourth day, my small son nearly died because of this mistake.

We kept hoping we would encounter a rescue ship in international waters. None appeared.

Late in the evening of the first day we approached a Taiwanese fishing vessel whose captain held up a sign in Chinese saying "rice, water, oil" and signaled our boat to stop. Captain La signaled "Thanks," and ordered the helmsman to continue.

I protested: "Why don't we get some water?"

"We have enough water," he answered. "We must keep on going to save time."

In fact, each passenger received two small cups of water on the first day, but many were unable to eat the rice cakes because they were seasick. The cakes went on the floor or overboard. I mixed our lemon sugar with water and we drank it to conserve our strength.

The Second Day—The Pirate Ship

On the evening of the second day Captain La saw a ship and ordered the helmsman to steer toward it. As we approached, he recognized the ship to be not an international merchant vessel but a Thai fishing boat. We tried to get away but it was too late.

The Thai boat rammed us. Four hundred people screamed in terror. Someone on the Thai vessel fired a carbine. Then, fifteen pirates, armed with long knives and hammers, rushed aboard our boat and began terrorizing and robbing the passengers.

My wife passed me the tael of gold Kim had given her, and I hid it in a heap of shoes. A Chinese woman sitting next to me saw my movement.

Chu Lan, the children and I, like the other passengers, sat still with our hands held high as ordered by the pirates.

Passenger by passenger the pirates, holding knives at our throats with one hand, with the other searched our bodies, seizing pieces of gold, necklaces, rings, earrings, and watches.

The woman sitting next to me cringed as a pirate with a pock-marked face thrust his hand into her bra, around her waist, and under her slip. He found four rings and, in fierce shouts, threatened to cut her throat if she didn't give him more.

Panic-stricken, the woman pointed at the heap of shoes. The pirate found our tael of gold and laughed heartily.

Curiously, my family remained untouched. Perhaps, because we were sitting by the compartment doorway, they assumed we had already been robbed, and concentrated on those sitting inside. One after another they passed through our compartment, searching some people as much as ten times.

After an hour's pillaging they withdrew and ordered the La family members standing on the main deck to throw their luggage aboard the pirates' vessel. They searched the bags, but finding no more gold, they shouted angrily and backed away.

Suddenly our wooden boat shuddered. We had been rammed again.

"Everyone on deck cry out for mercy," I shouted.

They rammed us again, even harder.

Frightened cries came from all over our boat.

Captain La sent his English interpreter and his father to beg for some show of humanity.

The senior La now agreed to give the pirates 20 taels of gold he had hidden away—his last, he informed me later.

The pirates were not finished with us yet. Amidst penetrating cries of anguish, they rammed us again.

I prepared my life vests.

Apparently convinced by our frightened faces and hapless manner that we had no more gold, the pirates gave us two blocks of ice and left.

No one slept that night.

After the robbery and La's failure at communicating with the pirates, he realized his interpreter's spoken English was inadequate. Hoa told him of my ability and I became the boat interpreter.

The Third Day—Engine Trouble

On the afternoon of May 3, the boat's two engines—one 40 horsepower and one 10 horsepower—broke down. Three mechanics went to work on them. They would get the engines to run sporadically for a short time, then the motors would stop again. I went to the engine room and tried to give a hand but was refused.

Captain La declared we were running out of water and reduced rations to one cup per day, but continued giving extra water to his own family and to other passengers who begged ardently enough.

I protested to the captain's father. "We are your passengers, not beggars. Why do you treat us this way? Before we took the boat you told us you carried enough water for everybody. So, where's the water you promised?" The protest was, of course, to no avail.

A Chinese businessman who had invested capital in the venture picked a nasty, hour-long quarrel with La over the family's leadership and treatment of passengers.

The boat stopped again. The air was deathly still. My compartment was stifling. The businessman who had quarreled with La demanded that the cabin's wooden outer walls be torn down to admit air. They were actually dismantled and thrown overboard. We found ourselves sitting only inches above the water level. A mild squall would have sunk the vessel.

A number of youths tried to escape from the overheated fish-storage area into our compartment. The sailors pushed them back. There was, indeed, no room for them.

The only uncrowded spots on the boat were the helmsman's cabin and the top deck where only the La family was allowed.

The Fourth Day—Desperation

On May 4, despite assistance from able mechanics among the passengers, the engines failed completely. Many passengers became completely dispirited and some wanted to commit suicide. Some, thirst-crazed, began to behave irrationally. Some went berserk.

La family members dared not drink water openly any more and stopped delivering water to the other passengers altogether.

Chu Lan mixed our small son's urine with powdered milk for him to drink. For lack of water we were unable to use any of the dried foods we had brought along.

An elderly passenger and a child died that evening.

At dusk there was a downpour onto the motionless boat. I rejoiced as I caught rainwater in my plastic bags.

As the sunlight gradually faded from the horizon, I looked at my exhausted wife and children and at the worn-out boat people and asked myself if this spot in the Pacific ocean was to be our final resting place.

When darkness came we saw a light in the distance. It was an oil-drilling platform. Captain La built a fire on the roof of the helmsman's cabin hoping to attract attention of the oil-rig workers.

Nothing happened.

The Fifth Day—The Oil Rig

At one o'clock at night, as May 5 began, a passenger who was a mechanical engineer and former professor of Saigon University succeeded in repairing the boat's auxiliary engine. It was now capable of forward movement only. We inched along.

At dawn we reached the oil rig. We shouted until the rig's chief engineer came down.

Representing the boat, I informed the engineer that our engines had broken down and the hull, cracked by the pirate attack, was leaking. We were in danger of sinking. I asked permission for our passengers to move onto the platform until we could get help. The engineer refused. He told us to continue on to Malaysia and signaled to our helmsman to back away. Since the auxiliary engine could not back up, we made a forward U-turn, circled twice with difficulty and stopped again at the platform.

Again I explained our engine problem. The engineer looked at the miserable condition of our half-dead, half-alive passengers and was convinced.

He dropped a rope ladder for me to climb to the platform to discuss what to do. Oil-rig workers of various ethnic origins snapped pictures of the boat and its people.

Finally we were allowed to remain at one leg of the platform until help came.

With an oil-rig crane the workers lowered canned food, water, and biscuits to our people. Never had we feasted more joyously.

A high-school teacher, pointing at a can of biscuits, said happily, "I haven't seen you for years. Now I will eat you."

I drank a big bottle of water without stopping. It ran through my empty stomach, my bowels, and onto the floor like water through a hose. I was aghast. Others had a similar experience.

At 10 A.M. an oil tanker arrived. The captain said he would take sick persons aboard for treatment, but the rest of us should stay on our boat until he finished pumping the tanker full of oil. Nevertheless, when the sick persons were moved, we all followed, carrying our luggage. No one wanted to remain aboard our disabled boat.

Never have I felt more comfortable than I did stretching out at full length on that tanker's steel deck.

At noon a Malay patrol ship arrived. The chief tried to force us to return to our boat so he could tow it to Malaysia. We refused, saying the boat was too badly damaged. He said he would return within an hour with a repair crew.

To avoid further problems, Captain La ordered his sailors to scuttle our boat. It was an easy task. The ancient vessel's rotting hull, already battered by the pirate ship, gave way to the crew's sledge hammer blows so quickly several sailors barely missed going down with their ship. As we watched it slide into the depths we marvelled that it had brought us this far.

The tanker's crew now gave us hot rice and other food. I watched as Captain La's younger brother filled a basket with some delectable items for his family. Catching my questioning gaze, he said, "I'm taking this to the sick."

In the afternoon the tanker took us to the port of Mersing in Johore, the southernmost state on Malaysia's east coast. There, we were moved onto small boats abandoned by previous refugees, and left floating in the bay while the tanker headed for Singapore.

That evening we were allowed to land at the port where we lined up and waited to be transported by police trucks "to the good camps in the city." Our request for water went unheeded.

I looked at a Red Crescent (Red Cross) car parked near where we had landed and asked myself how a free country fighting communism could be so callous in its treatment of people who risked their lives to escape communism.

(At that time I was unaware of the tenuous racial balance in Malaysia where the 50 percent ethnic Malay population strives to maintain political control over the 35 percent population of ethnic Chinese who dominate the nation's economy. I was also unaware that nearly all of the Communist guerrillas who had kept the country in turmoil for more than 20 years were ethnic Chinese. These factors made the Malay police jittery about the influx of refugees of Chinese ancestry and influenced their treatment of us.)

Finally, police trucks arrived and took us into town to a small five-room schoolhouse where 800 earlier arrivals were being held.

At Mersing, May 5-12

I will not dwell on the humiliations the Malay police imposed on the 1200 Vietnamese boat people in that schoolhouse, May 5-12. We were reviled, beaten, punished collectively and individually. The place was a prison and we were prisoners, cut off from the world, with no communications in or out.

In our search for freedom we had no desire to disturb the Malaysian government and people. We did not leave our country to live at the expense of others. We had no choice but to land there temporarily in order to survive.

In any case, despite the conditions we encountered, we thank the government and the people of Malaysia for allowing us to stay in their beautiful country for a week.

During our time at the Mersing schoolhouse, the emergency food supplies we had brought in our travel packs constituted a major portion of our diet.

On the evening of May 12, I was cooking our dinner in two biscuit cans given me by the men on the oil tanker when the police lieutenant in charge of the camp ordered us to line up to be taken to "refugee camps operated by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)."

Everyone was delighted.

I hurriedly assembled our bags and rushed my family to the schoolyard. We had learned from our week's experience that if we were tardy the Malay police would hit us with their military belts.

We waited in line as police trucks shuttled back and forth, carrying refugees to the Mersing harbor. There was no attempt to group us according to arrival dates. Those first in line went first.

When my family arrived at the port, two small boats had already been filled, and passengers were being loaded on a ship which carried three hundred people. The memory of sitting hunched up, arms around my knees, on our now scuttled boat was still fresh in my mind when I spotted another police lieutenant directing the loading activities. He was speaking English.

I went up to him and said: "I am a university professor. My wife and children are sick. Would you let us take a less crowded boat?"

He responded good-naturedly: "Sure, professor. Your English is good." And pointing to a small boat nearby, he said, "Bring your family over here."

The Phu Quoc Fishing Boat

We boarded a 30-foot refugee fishing vessel (KG 1354), powered by a 20-horsepower marine motor, which had just arrived from Vietnam. It was owned by a family of nineteen Vietnamese who had been waiting to follow other boats to the “islands under the auspices of the United Nations.”

The Malay lieutenant gave us our supplies for the trip: an earthenware oven, a bag of rice, a bag of salted fish, a bag of salted radish slices, two bags of cookies, and a 10-gallon can of water. The ship with 300 refugees received no more than twice as much. For some reason unknown to me I had gained the lieutenant's sympathy.

As we settled in our places, I recognized the warm benevolent faces of men and women from the Mekong delta region in South Vietnam, a strong contrast to the La family, who were all Cholon merchants.

Truong Van Luong was the boat's owner, and there were four generations of his family aboard: his 80-year-old mother-in-law who was a great-grandmother, Truong and his wife Muoi, their children and grandchildren. Truong's oldest son Hiep, 22, became like a brother to me.

Everyone in the family was a professional fisherman or woman. Even the youngest, a 4-year-old, accompanied his grandparents for days as they fished in the open sea.

When the Communists took over Saigon, Truong had moved his family from the Delta province of Kien Giang where they had lived for generations to Phu Quoc Island at the southern tip of Vietnam. Their life in Phu Quoc had been happier than mine in Saigon. They had never experienced “stuffed eating,” that is, all carbohydrates and no proteins, as we had in Saigon.

They were not learned people. The best-educated member of the family was 20-year-old Son, who had finished the eleventh grade. None of them knew English. They had left Vietnam because they couldn't get along with the Communists whom they called “the greatest liars in the world.”

When Truong and his family left Phu Quoc they brought all their household furnishings with them, including an iron barrel full of old paper and tattered popular novels, and a stone rice grinder—which required two strong men to lift—so they could make rice flour cakes on the boat. In contrast to our hectic departure from Saigon, they seemed to have moved all their possessions.

Thai pirates had robbed Truong's boat four times, but he still had a month's supply of water, rice, dried fish, and of Phu Quoc fish sauce which Vietnamese consider the world's best.

They had arrived in Mersing that morning, May 12, and none of them had set foot on Malaysian soil.

On their arrival, a Malaysian policeman had taken their compass. Unable to speak English or make himself understood in Vietnamese, Hiep used sign language to indicate he needed the compass to continue the journey, and the compass was returned. After this experience, they were pleased to have someone aboard who spoke English.

From Malaysia to Indonesia

The departing refugees were now crammed into four boats which were to be towed out to the open sea by a Malay patrol ship, the P-47. Two small boats carrying 30 passengers each would be in front, followed by a medium-sized boat with 100 and the larger vessel with 300. We would be the fourth.

How many of the original, scuttled boat passengers were aboard these vessels I never knew. They carried 465 out of the 1200 at the camp. I could only assume the remaining refugees were towed out to sea as we were. I only know we never again saw Hoa or many of the other passengers from that ill-fated refugee boat.

The police lieutenant in charge of the school supervised two port policemen as they double-roped the boats together. As the two men worked on our boat, they shed tears, which I did not understand until later.

The lieutenant checked the heavy fiber, wrist-thick ropes on each of the five boats. As he left ours, he saluted, gave me a wicked smile, and said "good luck."

Bright yellow evening sunlight played over the blue waters of the Malay port as we moved out.

Darkness set in. Muoi prepared us a dinner of rice and grilled dry fish seasoned with Phu Quoc fish sauce, my tastiest meal since the Communist takeover.

A strong night wind arose. Muoi invited my wife and our small son to share a sleeping platform in the steering cabin with her mother and two of her grandchildren. The rest of us sat on the deck or on the roof of the cabin.

I asked about each of them, and when I told them of my teaching profession, they responded happily with "please teach us English." After that, they decided I should be their group leader.

When we reached open waters, the P-47 increased its speed so much that the two small boats in front were tossed up and down as though in a

violent storm. I had heard on Voice of America and BBC broadcasts that this treatment by Malay patrol ships of refugee boats had submerged some of them and drowned many people. We were now being subjected to this outrage.

Suddenly, the rope between the P-47 and the first boat broke, nearly wrecking the small vessel. The P-47 stopped, and sailors tied the first two small boats alongside the patrol ship. During the night, refugees on the two boats were taken aboard the P-47, stripped of whatever gold, jewelry, and watches they had managed to keep, and some of the women were raped.

After this occurrence, the P-47 towed us even faster. Its wake and the wakes of the other vessels ahead of us caused our boat to jump about frantically. I was afraid, but Hiep said: "Don't worry. I've been through typhoons in this boat. Even if it should turn turtle, it won't sink because the fish compartment is so tight."

We consulted Truong Van Luong and decided to cut one of the two ropes which tied us to the large ship just ahead. Then, if we appeared to be in danger, we could cut the other. Hiep and his brother sawed and chopped through one rope and left their tools at the bow ready for use again if necessary, knowing that if we did cut loose we might be shot by the sailors on the P-47. The night was frightening, but it was not necessary to take the emergency action.

The Indonesian Cruiser

As May 13 dawned, we were far from Mersing. I judged we were near Indonesian waters because the P-47 was stopped by an Indonesian cruiser.

We were kept ignorant of communications but we saw that the P-47 sailors kept their machine guns trained on the refugee boats.

After half an hour the Indonesian cruiser left, leaving the P-47 crew angry at something. We could only speculate, but whatever it was their plans for us had evidently been foiled by the Indonesians. We did not eliminate the prospect of being shot or scuttled in the open sea.

The P-47 clustered our four boats together, released the tow rope, and then with machine guns continuously aimed at us, raced around the refugee boats at maximum speed creating waves which shook the small vessels violently. We feared the sailors might shoot us in their madness. But if they had originally planned to destroy us they dared not do so now because they would be under the surveillance of the Indonesian cruiser.

After 20 minutes of this terrorizing action, the P-47 headed north letting us go free.

The four boats steered southward. One of the smaller boats carrying young men whose appearance I did not like approached us, and the men asked if we had a compass.

“No, we don’t have a compass.” I shouted back, while signaling Hiep to steer clear of them. “The Malay police took it yesterday. Just go south.” I was afraid they might try to deprive us of our compass or even our boat.

The four boats took four different headings southward. Only three of them arrived in Indonesia. The smaller one which had approached us went southeast and was missing.

Kijung

I told Hiep to steer straight south in the expectation that we would reach either Singapore or an island in the Indonesian archipelago.

Excitedly, Hiep and his younger brothers and sisters cried out: “Let’s go to Singapore, Brother Long.” They did not know that the government of Singapore was also turning refugees away.

That afternoon we sighted a large ship. We pursued it for two hours. It was white and mountainous in comparison with our tiny boat. It displayed no flag. As we came closer, I saw that its name was in Cyrillic characters and that passengers were observing us through binoculars. I told Hiep to get away as quickly as possible. I had heard that a number of refugees picked up by Russian ships had been returned to Vietnam and turned over to security officials.

In the evening we saw islands in the distance, and encountered two fishermen in a ten-foot boat. I asked in English where we were. They did not understand. Pointing at myself, I said, “Vietnam, Vietnam,” then pointed my finger at them. They laughed, saying, “Indonesia, Indonesia.”

So instead of Singapore we had arrived at Indonesia.

The two fishermen then pointed to an island on the distant horizon and said “Vietnam, Vietnam.” This I took to mean a Vietnamese refugee camp was situated there.

As we moved nearer the island we met two more small fishing boats. The water was shallow, full of seaweed, and I could see a white sand floor beneath. Heavy rain began to fall.

We were at a loss for direction when one of the two boats approached and the two fishermen in it signaled for us to follow.

The island was Kijung, of the Bintan Island group southeast of Singapore. I shall never forget the clemency in the warm, dark brown faces of the men.

It was dark when we docked at the Kijung wharf. We were not allowed to disembark, but a policeman told me to come to his post and file a report on our boat.

I take great pleasure in writing about the warm sympathy the local Indonesians showed me that night in Kijung, especially the singer who stood on the wharf, sang a Vietnamese song, gave my little son a packet of cookies, and invited me to have a cigarette.

During the night the boat carrying 300 refugees and one carrying 30 also arrived in Kijung.

Tanjung Pinang Bay

It was noon on May 14 when the Kijung harbor police ordered us and the other two refugee boats to follow them to another camp, saying that the camps in Kijung were full.

I was wary. While there was no effort to tow us, I was still obsessed with a fear of being taken out to the open sea again.

My fear proved groundless. The Indonesian police ship led us to the entrance of Tanjung Pinang bay, then left without a word. I told Hiep to steer to the middle of the bay.

Surprisingly, the boat carrying 300 refugees chose to run aground so as to land illegally, without consideration for the women, children, and many passengers aboard who could not swim.

The boat beached in water seven feet deep, 30 feet from the shore.

Passengers who had become divided into factions came to blows over what to do about this precipitous action. After half an hour, two members of the dominant faction swam over to us and asked to be pulled out, to refloat the boat.

I chastised them for their foolish action, but my words fell on deaf ears.

Our boat was not powerful enough. We had to join forces with the other small boat to get the larger one afloat.

All three boats then proceeded into the bay of Tanjung Pinang. We anchored but the other two kept moving back and forth as though uncertain what to do.

Late in the evening the chief of the Tanjung Pinang social office and several aides arrived aboard a police ship to investigate us. The chief told me the Indonesian government could accept no more refugees and advised us to go to Australia. I objected, saying our boat was too small to cross the

Timor or Arafura seas. He ordered us not to go ashore and requested that I tell the other two boats to anchor.

We slept aboard our boat again that night.

Air Raja—On the Shores of Freedom

At 10 A.M. on May 15, the chief of the social office and a group of police came to our boat and told us to leave for Australia. They did not bring the water they had promised the day before.

We decided not to obey the order.

Hiep said he had two uncles in Australia. If we got enough water, food, and fuel, we could grope our way there along the Indonesian islands.

When I reminded him that the sea was dangerous, that it would take several months at minimum, and that the boat was not strong enough for the seas we would have to cross, Hiep fell into silence.

In the late evening a police second lieutenant came out to announce: "The province chief will allow you to go ashore." There was no further explanation but we needed none.

The three refugee boats followed the police ship to a landing area six miles from the bay of Tanjung Pinang, and there we landed.

As we disembarked, a group of armed Indonesian soldiers, men and women, searched us for weapons and gold. They found neither. Then we boarded military trucks which took us slowly through rubber forests to the Air Raja refugee camp ten miles from Tanjung Pinang.

We were in Air Raja from May 15 to August 30, 1979. Then we flew to San Francisco.

In my mind's eye the waters of the southern Pacific continue to sparkle in the evening twilight. The waters may have threatened our lives, but they also carried us to freedom. Now we wait for the day when my beloved country can once again live in liberty and progress.

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