



Yale Vietnamese Studies Group

Taming the Tiger, Charming the Commissar: Underground Interviews with the Other Vietnam Veterans

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The presentation describes conducting underground interviews of 100 veterans of the People's Army of Vietnam (NVA) and the National Liberation Front (VC) as part of the research for a PhD dissertation. Such interviews are highly sensitive because the current government of Vietnam discourages anything but a collective memory of the events leading to the unification of the independent nation. All media were controlled by the state, including filming, interviewing, and all form of publishing activities. Vietnam War veterans must be interviewed face to face, carefully avoiding interference from both national and local political officers. Operating underground under communist systems and in foreign cultures requires a distinct skill set. In explaining this, the study will suggest new scholarship on the theory, methodology, and practice of collecting the voices of conflict. Hopefully, these memory narratives will complement a rich understanding and fill gaps in the history of the Vietnam struggle of the 20th century; and the outcomes from the fieldwork can serve as primary source materials for the production of dissertations,

The non-fiction writer, filmmaker, journalist, and scholar **Hai Nguyen**, pen name Van Cam Hai, was born Quang Binh Province, Central Vietnam. Over the last decade he has worked in conflict lands, including Tibet, Xinjiang, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. He has wrote and made televised documentary films about the history of Vietnam and other Southeast Asian, European and Central Asian countries. His work has appeared in many U.S. publications, both literary and historical, including *The Literary Review* and *Vietnam Inside-Out: Dialogues* (2001), and *The 91st Meridian* (2008). In translation, he appeared in *Three Vietnamese Poets* (Tinfish, 2001).

A member of the Vietnamese Association of Writers and of the Vietnamese Association of Journalists, Hai Nguyen has received three national Gold Prize medals for his work on documentary films. He is the author of *Man Who Tends the Waves* (1995), *Winging to the Mild Zone* (2003, reprint 2016), *Gesar Blossoms Dropping in the Tibet Sunshine* (2004, reprint 2016), and *The Wild Shakyamuni Land* (2016). He was named to the International Course Broadcast for Journalism in the Netherlands (2001), the International Writing Program Fellowship at University of Iowa (2005), International Writer Workshop Fellowship at Hong Kong Baptist University (2007), The Poynter Fellowship Program at Yale University (2008) and Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship at William Joiner Center for the Study of War and Social Consequences at the University of Massachusetts in Boston (2008). He won the Best Paper in Military History at the Northern Great Plains History Society (2013) and presented at the Society for Military History (2014), and the Association for Asia Studies (2015), McCormick Research Center at Cantigny, Illinois (2016), West Texas A&M University (2016), University of Massachusetts in Boston (2016), and Middlebury College (2016), and Oral History Association (2016).

He completed the project *Memory of Conflict: A Study of the U.S. First Infantry Division from Vietnamese Perspectives* by conducting underground interviews with 100 Vietnamese veterans, sponsored by the First Division Museum McCormick Research Center at Cantigny, Illinois (2015-2016).