



# Vietnam Today

Newsletter of the Australia Vietnam Friendship Society

November 2013

## Charity Centre New Project for Australia Vietnam Friendship Society



*Children at the Thien Phuc enjoying refreshments*

### Visit to Thien Phuc Charity Centre

On Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> October, Kim Sampson, AVFS Treasurer, visited the Thien Phuc Charity Centre in Bac Giang Province, to make a donation of US\$500 on behalf of the AVFS. The main function of the Thien Phuc Charity Centre is to provide support to orphaned children, children with disabilities (including those with dioxin related birth defects), and to those within the elderly population who are in need of support. They also sponsor orphans outside of the community.

The activities include sewing (they make eco-friendly shopping bags for sale), and other arts and crafts. There is a general teaching program, with the aim to equip the residents with the ability to successfully integrate into the community, and hopefully gain employment.

The centre relies on volunteers, is self governed, and very much dependent on the wider community and groups like the AVFS for financial support. There are currently 35 children living at the centre, with a further 47 residing outside of it. The demand for this type of community based centre is enormous, with about 28,000 orphans and disabled people within the Bac Giang Province.

**Kim would like to give special thanks to Miss Duong Thi Thu, Standing Secretary of the Vietnam Australia Friendship Association, and Desk Officer of the Asia-Africa Department of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations. Miss Thu accompanied him on the journey to Bac Giang, and provided invaluable insight into the centre, and the Vietnamese people in general.**

Kim Sampson

18 October 2013



Kim Sampson, representing the Australia Friendship Society on a visit to Thien Phuc Charity Centre receiving a gift in appreciation of the support offered by our society.

## Scenes from Full Moon Festival 2013



The VISA students organised a wonderful Full Moon Festival this year which was enthusiastically supported by the student and a number of others from university campuses as well as members of the Australia Vietnam Friendship society. Women wearing colourful traditional long dresses added greatly to a really enjoyable cultural experience.

## Grandparents Day Stall



AVFS was invited to hold a stall at the Grandparents Day celebration on Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> October. Our display included information about visiting Vietnam along with tourists maps and information about the society. It proved to be a good opportunity to make contact with people who had already visited Vietnam and provide information for those who were planning to travel there including a couple who will have their honeymoon in Vietnam. They are planning to see Ha Long Bay and do a bicycle tour.

## Vo Nguyen Giap - Wikipedia Biography Summary

**Võ Nguyên Giáp** (25 August 1911 – 4 October 2013) was a General in the Vietnam People's Army and a politician. He first grew to prominence during World War II, where he served as the military leader of the Viet Minh resistance against the Japanese occupation of Vietnam. Giáp was a principal commander in two wars: the First Indochina War (1946–1954) and the Vietnam War (1960–1975). He participated in the following historically significant battles: Lạng Sơn (1950),

Hòa Bình (1951–1952), Điện Biên Phủ (1954), the Tết Offensive (1968), the Easter Offensive (1972), and the final Hồ Chí Minh Campaign (1975).

Giáp was also a journalist, an interior minister in President Hồ Chí Minh's Việt Minh government, the military commander of the Việt Minh, the commander of the Vietnam People's Army (PAVN), and defense minister. He also served as a member of the Politburo of the Vietnam Workers' Party, which in 1976 became the Communist Party of Vietnam. He was the most prominent military commander, beside Ho Chi Minh, during the Vietnam War, and was responsible for major operations and leadership until the war ended.

## Early life

He was born on 25 August 1911 (or 1912 according to some sources<sup>[1]</sup>) in Quảng Bình Province, French Indochina.<sup>[2]</sup> Giap's father and mother, Võ Quang Nghiêm and Nguyen Thi Kien,<sup>[3]</sup> worked the land, rented some to neighbors, and lived a relatively comfortable lifestyle.

Giap was taught at home by his father before going to the village school. His precocious intelligence meant that he was soon transferred to the district school and in 1924, at the age of thirteen, he left home to attend the Quốc Học (also known in English as the "National Academy"), a French-run *lycée* in Huế.<sup>[3]</sup> This school had been founded by a Catholic official named Ngo Dinh Kha, and his son, Ngo Dinh Diem also attended it. Diem later went on to become President of South Vietnam (1955–63). At the same school was another boy, Nguyen Sinh Cung, also the son of an official. In 1943 Cung adopted the name Ho Chi Minh. He joined the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1931 and took part in several demonstrations against French rule in Indochina as well as assisting in founding the Democratic Front in 1933.

## Young activist

Giap's busy political activities took a toll on his postgraduate studies, and he failed to pass the examinations for the Certificate of Administrative Law. Unable therefore to practice as a lawyer, he took a job as a history teacher at the Thăng Long School in Hanoi. Soon Giap became active in the Communist Party but when the French outlawed the Communist Party Giap fled to China where Giap joined up with Hồ Chí Minh, the leader of the Vietnam Independence League (Việt Minh). In China he adopted the alias Duong Huai-nan, learned to speak and write Chinese, and studied the strategy and tactics of the Chinese Communist Party. In September 1940 the political situation in Vietnam changed when the Vichy regime allowed the occupying Japanese forces to 'protect' Indochina.

## Young commander

In 1942 Giap and about forty men moved back into Vietnam and established themselves in remote caves near the village of Vu Nhai. By the end of 1943 several hundred men and women had

joined the Viet Minh. In September 1944 the first Revolutionary Party Military Conference was held and it was agreed that the time was now right to take the military struggle forward into a new phase. The formation of the Vietnam Liberation army was proclaimed, with Giap as its commander. Ho Chi Minh decided that for propaganda purposes, the Armed Propaganda Unit had to win a military victory within a month of being established, so on 25 December 1944 Giap led successful attacks against French outposts at Khai Phat and Na Ngan.

Through the first half of 1945, Giap's military position strengthened as the political position of the French and Japanese weakened. On 9 March the Japanese removed the titular French regime and placed the emperor Bao Dai at the head of a puppet state, the Empire of Vietnam. By April the Vietminh had nearly five thousand members, and was able to attack Japanese posts with confidence. In one of the paradoxes of history, between May and August 1945 the United States, keen to support anti-Japanese forces in mainland Asia, actively supplied and trained Giap and the Viet Minh. On 28 August 1945 Giap led his men into Hanoi, and on 2 September Ho Chi Minh declared the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. He formed a new government, with Giap as Minister of the Interior.<sup>[23]</sup> Unknown to the Việt Minh, President Harry S. Truman, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Premier Joseph Stalin had already decided the future of postwar Vietnam at a summit meeting at Potsdam. They agreed that the country would be occupied temporarily to get the Japanese out; the northern half would be under the control of the Nationalist Chinese and the southern half under the British.<sup>[24]</sup> On 9 September the Nationalist Chinese forces crossed the border and quickly took control of the north, while on 12 September the British Indian Army arrived in Saigon.<sup>[25]</sup> By October French forces had begun to arrive in Vietnam, and the British handed control of the south back to them and in May 1946 an agreement between the French and the Chinese saw the Chinese withdraw from the north and the French move in there as well. Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap pursued lengthy negotiations with the French, seeking to avoid an all-out war to cement their independence. Giap led the Vietnamese delegation at the Dalat conference in April 1946, which yielded nothing, and, returning to Hanoi, he was made Minister of


Defence. Ho Chi Minh departed for France on 31 May to negotiate with the French at Fontainebleau, and he remained in France until November.

### **First Indochina War**

The first few years of the war involved mostly a low-level, semi-conventional resistance fight against the French occupying forces. Võ Nguyên Giáp first saw real fighting at Nha Trang, when he traveled to south-central Vietnam in January–February 1946 to convey the determination of leaders in Hanoi to resist the French. However, after the Chinese communists reached the northern border of Vietnam in 1949 and the Vietnamese destruction of French posts there, the conflict turned into a conventional war between two armies equipped with modern weapons supplied by the United States and the Soviet Union.

When it became clear that France was becoming involved in a long drawn-out and so far not very successful war, the French government tried to negotiate an agreement with the Việt Minh. They offered to help set up a national government and promised that they would eventually grant Vietnam its independence. Hồ Chí Minh and the other leaders of the Việt Minh did not trust the word of the French and continued the war.



 *Võ Nguyên Giáp (left) and Hồ Chí Minh in Hà Nội, October 1945*

French public opinion continued to move against the war. In December 1953, French military commander General Henri Navarre set up a defensive complex at Điện Biên Phủ, disrupting Việt Minh supply lines passing through Laos. He surmised that in an attempt to re-establish the route, Giáp would be forced to organize a mass attack on Điện Biên Phủ, thus fighting a conventional battle, in which Navarre could expect to have the advantage.

Giáp took up the French challenge. While the French dug in at their outpost, the Việt Minh were also preparing the battlefield. While diversionary attacks were launched in other areas, Giáp ordered his men to covertly position their artillery by hand. Defying standard military practice, he had his twenty-four 105mm howitzers placed on the forward slopes of the hills around Điện Biên Phủ, in deep, mostly hand-dug emplacements protecting them from French aircraft and counter-battery fire.

With anti-aircraft guns supplied by the Soviet Union, Giáp was able to severely restrict the ability of the French to supply their garrison, forcing them to drop supplies inaccurately from high altitude. Giáp ordered his men to dig a trench system that encircled the French. From the outer trench, other trenches and tunnels were gradually dug inward towards the center. The Việt Minh were now able to move in close to the French troops defending Điện Biên Phủ.

On 13 March 1954, Giáp launched his offensive. For 54 days, the Việt Minh seized position after position, pushing the French until they occupied only a small area of Điện Biên Phủ. Colonel Piroth, the artillery commander, blamed himself for the destruction of French artillery superiority. He told his fellow officers that he had been "completely dishonoured" and committed suicide with a hand grenade. General De Castries, French Commander in Điện Biên Phủ, was captured alive in his bunker. The French surrendered on 7 May. Their casualties totaled over 2,200 men dead, 5,600 wounded and 11,721 taken prisoner. The following day the French government announced that it intended to withdraw from Vietnam. The victory at Dien Bien Phu marked the beginning of a new era in the military struggles against colonialism for national liberation and

independence movements in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and other colonised countries. After 1954 the name of Vo Nguyen Giap was closely identified throughout Africa and Latin America with the defeat of colonialism.

### Interwar years

After the French surrender, Giap moved back into Hanoi as the Vietnamese government re-established itself. He expanded and modernised the army, re-equipping it with Russian and Chinese weapons systems. On 7 May 1955 he inaugurated the Vietnamese Maritime Force and on 1 May 1959, the Vietnamese People's Air Force.<sup>[36]</sup> During the late 1950s Giap served as Minister of Defence, Commander in Chief of the People's Army of Vietnam, Deputy Prime Minister, and deputy chairman of the Defence Council.<sup>[37]</sup> In terms of his personal life, he was also able to move back in with his wife, from whom he had been separated for eight years during the war. She was working as a professor of history and social science at this time.<sup>[38]</sup> Together they raised two boys and two girls. In the little spare time he had, he said in interviews that he enjoyed occasionally playing the piano, as well as reading Goethe, Shakespeare and Tolstoy.<sup>[39]</sup>

During the late 1950s the top priority of the re-established Vietnamese government was the rapid establishment of a socialist economic order and Communist Party rule. This involved collectivisation of agriculture and central management of all economic production.<sup>[40]</sup> This process did not go smoothly and it led to food shortages and revolts. At the 10th Plenum of the Communist Party, 27-29 October 1956, Giap stood in front of the assembled delegates and said:

*'Cadres, in carrying out their antifeudal task, created contradictions in the tasks of land reform and the Revolution, in some areas treating them as if they were separate activities.....we indiscriminately attacked all families owning land. Many thousands were executed. We saw enemies everywhere and resorted to widespread violence and terror. In some places, in our efforts to implement land reform, we failed to respect religious freedoms and the right to worship..... we placed too much emphasis on class origins rather than political attitudes..... There were grave errors.'*

The departure of the French and the de facto partition of Vietnam meant that the Hanoi government only controlled the north part of the country. In South Vietnam there were still several thousand guerillas, known as Viet Cong, fighting against the government in Saigon. The Party Plenum in 1957 ordered changes to the structure of these units and Giap was put in charge of implementing these and building their strength to form a solid basis for an insurrection in the South. The 1959 Plenum decided that the time for escalating the armed struggle in the South was right and in July that year Giap ordered the opening up of the Ho Chi Minh trail to improve supply lines to Viet Cong units.

### Vietnam War

Giáp remained commander in chief of the People's Army of Vietnam throughout the war against the United States. During the conflict, he oversaw the expansion of the PAVN from a small self-defense force into a large conventional army, equipped by its communist allies with considerable amounts of relatively sophisticated weaponry, although this did not in general match the weaponry of the Americans. Giáp has often been assumed to have been the planner of the Tết Offensive of 1968, but this appears not to have been the case. The best evidence indicates that he disliked the plan, and when it became apparent that Lê Duẩn and Văn Tiến Dũng were going to push it through despite his doubts, he left Vietnam for medical treatment in Hungary, and did not return until after the offensive had begun.<sup>[44]</sup> Although this attempt to spark a general uprising against the southern government failed militarily, it turned into a significant political victory by convincing the American politicians and public that their commitment to South Vietnam could no longer be open-ended. Giáp later argued that the Tết Offensive was not a "purely military strategy" but rather part of a "general strategy, an integrated one, at once military, political and diplomatic."<sup>[45]</sup>

Peace talks between representatives from the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the NLF began in Paris in January 1969. President Richard Nixon, like President Lyndon B. Johnson before him, was convinced that a U.S. withdrawal was necessary, but five years would pass before the last American troops left South Vietnam.

In October 1972, the negotiators came close to agreeing to a formula to end the conflict. The plan was that the last U.S. troops would withdraw from Vietnam in exchange for a cease-fire and the return of American prisoners held by Hà Nội. It was also agreed that the governments in North and South Vietnam would remain in power until new elections could be arranged to unite the whole country. Although the casualty rate in the *Nguyễn Huệ Offensive* during the spring of 1972 was high, PAVN was able to gain a foothold in territorial Southern Vietnam from which to launch future offensives.

Although U.S. troops would leave the country, PAVN troops could remain in their positions in the south. In an effort to put pressure on both North and South Vietnam during the negotiations, President Nixon ordered a new series of air raids on Hà Nội and Hải Phòng, codenamed Operation Linebacker II. The operation ended in success in 27 January 1973, after 12 days with heavy casualty and destruction of both sides. Both U.S. and North Vietnam agreed to sign the Paris Peace Accords that had been proposed in October. This time, the advantage was in the hand of Hanoi.

The last U.S. combat troops left in March 1973. Despite the treaty, there was no let-up in fighting. South Vietnamese massive advances against the Viet Cong controlled territory inspired their opponents to change their strategy. In March, communist leaders met in Hanoi for a series of meetings to hammer out plans for a massive offensive against the South. In June 1973, the U.S. Congress passed the Case-Church Amendment to prohibit further U.S. military involvement, so the PAVN supply routes were able to operate normally without fear of U.S. bombing.

### Fall of Saigon

For the final attack on Saigon the field commander, was the chief of the general staff, General Van Tien Dung. Victories by the North spread panic in the South with many desertions from the army. General Lê Trọng Tấn's force was first to enter Saigon and Tấn captured Dương Văn Minh alive. Minh was the president of South Vietnam until 30 April 1975 and was also the last

president of South Vietnam. Soon after the fall of Saigon, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was established. In the new government, Giáp maintained his position as Minister of National Defense and he was made Deputy Prime Minister in July 1976. In December 1978 he oversaw the successful Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia which drove the Khmer Rouge from power. In retaliation, Cambodia's ally China responded by invading the Cao Bang province of Vietnam in January 1979 and once again Giap was in overall responsibility for the response, which drove the Chinese out after a few months.<sup>[50]</sup> He finally retired from his post at the Defense Ministry in 1980 and retired from the Politburo in 1982. He remained on the Central Committee and Deputy Prime Minister until 1991.

In 2010, Giáp became a prominent critic of bauxite mining in Vietnam following government plans to open large areas of the Central Highlands to the practice. Giáp indicated that a 1980s study led experts to advise against mining due to severe ecological damage and national security.

### Death

On 4 October 2013, a government official announced that Giáp had died at 18:09 hours, local time, at Central Military Hospital 108 in Hanoi, where he had been since 2009, at the age of 102.<sup>[54]</sup> He was given a state funeral on 12 and 13 October 2013 and his body lay in state at the national Morgue in Hanoi until his burial at the Vũng Chùa - Đảo Yến in his home province of Quang Binh.



*General Vo Nguyen Giap at 102.*

## **Noted Vietnamese Historian Visits South Australian University.**

The Flinders University will host Dr Nguyen Hha, a specialist in the history of the Spratly Islands, a disputed archipelago in the South China Sea. His expertise and interests include the History of Vietnam, in particular history of the establishment of Vietnam sovereignty on Paracel and Spratly Archipelagoes. Dr Nguyen Nha special interests also include Vietnamese cultural traditions, in particular, kitchen and folklore music. As an educator he has a strong interest in educational methodology.

**The Association of Vietnamese Students have arranged a seminar for Dr Nha Nguyen on Paracel/Spratlys in Flinders University, at 7.00 pm Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013.**

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### **Vietnam Australia Friendship Assoc.**

Both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City have associations for friendship with Australians. Both also have Unions of Friendship Organisations. There is also a Central Vietnam Australia Friendship Association. Among the aims are to strengthen and promote mutual understanding, multifaceted cooperation, friendship and solidarity between Vietnamese people and people in general, in particular Australian people.

The Ho Chi Minh City's Association's scope of activities are to:

- Coordinate governmental institutions, people's organizations and societies in organizing activities to boost friendship between the peoples of Vietnam and Australia.
- Promote Vietnam to the Australia people; introduce foreign and domestic policies of the Vietnamese government.
- Inform the people of Vietnam about current issues in Australia.



**Light refreshment will be provided. Members of AVFS will be most welcome but for catering purpose please confirm your attendance by Monday 9<sup>th</sup> December or earlier if possible.**

*For more details contact Ron Hall, phone 08 8264 3763*

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- Build and develop friendship and cooperation with Australia -Vietnam Society and other Australia socio-political organizations through exchanging delegations and documents, such as photographs, films, publications and other activities.
  - Support trade and economic links, as well as cooperation in science - technology, education - training, culture, sports, tourism, between Vietnamese organizations and individuals, and their Australian partners.

**Between 15<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of December a delegation from the Hanoi Vietnam Australia Friendship Association will visit Australia.**

**Details of their itinerary have yet to be finalised but members will be kept informed of opportunities to meet our guests. They will probably spend most of their time in Melbourne and Adelaide.**