



# Vietnam Today

Newsletter of the Australia Vietnam Friendship Society  
May 2014

## Visit of VAFA Delegation to Adelaide December 2013

**The Members of the Vietnam Australia Friendship Association delegation Dr Hung representing the Ministry of Education and Training, Mr Long from the Institute of Science and Technology in Hanoi and Ms Duong Thi Thu from the office of VAFA.**



VAFA delegation with Adelaide city in the background

Visits to both Adelaide University and the University of South Australia had been arranged as well as an opportunity to meet with Vietnamese students studying in Adelaide as well as members of Vietnamese International Students Association and members of AVFS.

*In the discussions at Adelaide University and the University of South Australia a number of significant issues emerged, in particular the free trade agreement that had recently been concluded between Vietnam, Australia and New Zealand which included the provision for 300 places for young people to have working holidays and earn money to study English in either of the latter two countries.*

However, the students involved needed to be reasonably proficient in English, that they needed to be at IELTS level 4.5 or better. (IELTS refers to the International English Language Testing System.)

The use of E learning was another issue raised especially for English for Masters Students, especially in engineering. This

fits in well with move towards blended learning – using the internet and viewing lessons on line along with a variety of other approaches. It emerged that Vietnam was keen to offer land to overseas universities to establish technology parks or similar facilities. It was noted that RHIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) had made use of a government grant to establish a university campus in Hanoi. Land is very expensive in Vietnam, especially in the larger cities, but construction costs are relatively cheap.

Much construction work is taking place in Vietnam at the moment. There is a growing need for infrastructure (roads and bridges) so there is a great need for engineers and technologists.

*Dr Hung from the Ministry for Education and Training expressed Vietnam's enthusiasm for teacher exchanges such as summer camps that could be arranged for Australian teachers to spend time with Vietnamese English language teachers especially as a recent survey carried out by Dr Hung revealed that. Exchanges in language learning as well as cultural experiences were recognised as a really valuable possibility.*

It was recognised that AVFS may be able to help with accommodation and employment arrangement for Vietnamese students.

It should be noted that a memorandum of understanding exists between the University of South Australia and the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training. Both parties are interested in the concept of “blended learning”, already mentioned, which allows for the designing of programs for individual students using a variety of means that modern technology has made possible.

Since the meetings in December, the Adelaide University has undertaken a visit to Vietnam to build upon the connections already made and the good-will that has been established.

Plans are also underway for a school exchange to take place involving an Adelaide and Hanoi secondary school. Another interesting outcome from the delegation's visit is a fire truck that has been sent to Da Nang from Adelaide. In addition, assistance with ambulances is being considered.

## Battle of Dien Bien Phu

On 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1954, 60 years ago, one of the most significant victories in Vietnamese military history, the triumph at Điện Biên Phủ, occurred.

The **Battle of Dien Bien Phu** (French: Bataille de Diên Biên Phủ; Vietnamese: Chiến dịch Điện Biên Phủ) was the climactic confrontation of the First Indochina War between the French Union's French Far East Expeditionary Corps and Viet Minh communist-nationalist revolutionaries. It was from the French view before the event, a set piece battle to draw out the enemy and destroy them with superior French firepower. The battle occurred between March and May 1954 and culminated in a comprehensive French defeat that influenced negotiations over the future of Indochina at Geneva. Military historian Martin Windrow wrote that Dien Bien Phu was "the first time that a non-European colonial independence movement had evolved through all the stages from guerrilla bands to a conventionally organized and equipped army able to defeat a modern Western occupier in pitched battle."

As a result of blunders in French decision-making, the French began an operation to insert then support the soldiers at Dien Bien Phu, deep in the hills of northwestern Vietnam. Its purpose was to cut off Viet Minh supply lines into the neighboring Kingdom of Laos, a French ally, and tactically draw the Viet Minh into a major confrontation that would cripple them. The Viet Minh, however, under General Vo Nguyen Giap, surrounded and besieged the French, who knew of the weapons but were unaware of the vast amounts being brought in of the Viet Minh's heavy artillery (including anti-aircraft guns) and their ability to move these weapons through difficult terrain up the rear slopes of the mountains surrounding the French positions, dig tunnels through the mountain, and place the artillery pieces overlooking the French encampment. This positioning of the artillery made it nearly impervious to counter-battery fire.

When the Viet Minh opened fire with a massive bombardment from the artillery, the French artillery commander, Charles Piroth, committed suicide (with a hand grenade) in shame for being unprepared for and unable to structure any sort of counter-battery fire. The Viet Minh occupied the

highlands around Dien Bien Phu and bombarded the French positions. Tenacious fighting on the ground ensued, reminiscent of the trench warfare of World War I. The French repeatedly repulsed Viet Minh assaults on their positions. Supplies and reinforcements were delivered by air, though as the key French positions were overrun the French perimeter contracted and air resupply on which the French had placed their hopes became impossible, and as the anti-aircraft fire took its toll, fewer and fewer of those supplies reached them. The garrison was overrun after a two-month siege and most French forces surrendered. A few escaped to Laos. The French government resigned and the new Prime Minister, the left of centre Pierre Mendès France, supported French withdrawal from Indochina.

The war ended shortly after the Battle of Dien Bien Phu and the signing of the 1954 Geneva Accords. France agreed to withdraw its forces from all its colonies in French Indochina, while stipulating that Vietnam would be temporarily divided at the 17th parallel, with control of the north given to the Viet Minh as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh, and the south becoming the State of Vietnam nominally under Emperor Bao Dai, preventing Ho Chi Minh from gaining control of the entire country. The refusal of Ngo Dinh Diem to allow elections in 1956, as had been stipulated by the Geneva Conference, would eventually lead to the first phase of the Second Indochina War, better known as the Vietnam War or War in Vietnam (1959–1963).



A Vietnamese soldier raising a flag over a destroyed French bunker

Sources: Wikipedia and Vietnam: A Historical Sketch



## AVFS Vietnam Visit February 2014

Following the Vietnam Australia Friendship Association visit to Australia in December 2013, Ron Hall the secretary, accompanied by his wife, Bev who is also a committee member of AVFS, took the opportunity to visit Hanoi and renew friendships and strengthen ties with VAFA (Vietnam Australia Friendship Society).



Tet, which celebrates the lunar new year, introduced 2014 as the Year of the Horse.

### Tet in Hanoi

It was just before Tet when we arrived, so we had a chance to catch up with our friends in Hanoi before it was necessary to undertake a series of meetings. Just two previously we had been in Hanoi on a family visit. The changes that have taken place in that relatively short period are quite remarkable. A number of overpasses within the city area had been well and truly completed and noticeable increase in vehicular traffic seemed to have occurred, though the preferred mode of transport remains to be the motor cycle. Motorways leading out of the city have been expanding and the presence of large enterprises and housing estates on the outskirts of Hanoi are quite noticeable.



Tet decorations in Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi

**Ha Long Bay and Tam Coc** Ha Long is Vietnam's outstanding tourist attraction. Overnight boat cruises are available along with kayaking and dinghy rides through caves in the limestone towers and into some of the lagoons within. A recently discovered cave system adds to the wonder of it all. To the south of Hanoi in Ninh Binh Province lies Tam Coc, sometimes described as Ha Long Bay on land. A small riverboat ride takes you through several caves beneath the huge limestone towers just like the ones at Ha Long.



Tam Coc – Ha Long Bay on Land

### Museums

Two of Hanoi's museums are ranked within the top 10 in Asia. They are the History Museum, incorporating the History of the Revolution, and the Ethnology Museum, which celebrates Vietnam's 54 ethnic or indigenous groups.



The Women's Museum in Hanoi

### CGFED (Research Centre for Gender, Family and the Environment in Development)

The research centre was founded by Professor Tuyet over 40 years ago to ensure that social and environmental concerns would not be overlooked in the pursuit of development. Currently its carrying out research in remote communities where there is a

constant threat of abduction of young women as brides or more often as sex workers. AVFS made a modest donation of \$150 towards their work.

### IPD (Individual Potential Development)

This organisation comprises quite a number of experienced educators academics who are interested in the functioning of the two hemispheres of the brain to raise human potential. Their work has relevance not only to the gifted but also to those with certain disabilities involving brain functionality. A donation of \$500 was made to IPD on behalf of AVFS.



Meeting with CGFED Committee

### Thien Phuc Charity Centre

Most of the children who live at the centre were at school at the time of our visit. We were shown the garden, the sewing room with around 40 machines, and large hall and other facilities. The scope of their work is quite impressive, especially in helping disabled and orphan children.



Ms Song (far left) founder of the Thien Phuc Charity Centre

### Meeting with VAFA

Our meeting with the Vietnam Australia Friendship Association was most productive. Student and teacher exchanges, reciprocal visits between VAFA and AVFS, the procurement of fire engines, language courses and a memorandum of understanding were some of the issues that were discussed. We learnt that as a consequence of the 2013 delegation's visit to Adelaide Da Nang received a modern fire engine. Negotiations have already commenced with an Adelaide high school for a student exchange to take place in July or August of this year. A memorandum of understanding has been prepared for both parties, VAFA and AVFS, to consider. Letters of introduction were also considered and agreed to be something useful for visitors from either country to the other and would serve as an advantage to AVFS members.



Enjoying Tet celebrations with VAFA Representatives in Hanoi.

In the feed-back we received about the delegation's visit to Australia. VAFA was very pleased with the level of support that was shown by the Maritime Union of Australia and the possibilities of establishing firmer ties. The Adelaide visit helped in strengthening links with the University of South Australia where there is an MOU relation to education with Vietnam. In the case of Adelaide University, a visit has been arranged with Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam.

### Visit to Vo Nguyen Giap's House

This visit was largely made possible through a member of IPD who is a relative of General Giap. Bev and I were privileged to meet, Nam, the youngest son of General Giap who welcomed us to his father's house. In our discussions with VAFA the concept of having photographic or cultural exhibitions that could travel to each Australian state was discussed with the

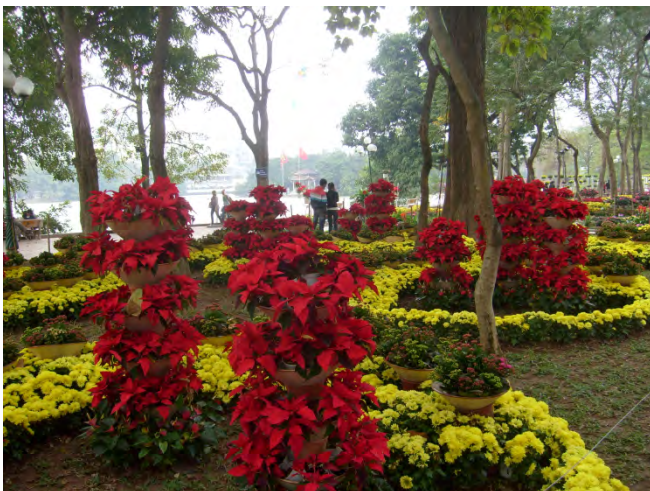


suggestion that one could be prepared on the life and achievements of General Giap.



In the foyer of General Giap's house – his son Nam is on the right.

Tet is certainly a wonderful time to visit Hanoi. By day crowds flock to the Hoan Kiem District to visit pagodas and temples, as well as other monuments. Colourful floral displays abound and at night there are all the bright lights to behold.



Floral displays along Hoan Kiem Lake during Tet.

Overlooking Hoan Kiem Lake is the monument commemorating Ly Thai Ton, a great leader in the establishment of the Vietnamese nation. It is a popular gathering place for families. People including many young ones meet one another or stroll around the lake during the Tet holiday period. Tet celebrations are a key part of family life in Vietnam.

Visiting Vietnam at Tet offers an irresistible opportunity to taste the amazing variety of food that the country has to offer, including much that is traditional such as banh chung, a type of glutinous rice cake filled with green bean paste and pork, beef or chicken mince, that is always served during Tet.



Ly Thai Ton monument in the centre of a beautiful park



At night around Hoan Kiem Lake illuminated decorations welcome the new and the springtime as well



Light reflected in the waters of Hoan Kiem Lake add to the glamour of Tet celebrations in Hanoi.

### Conclusion

This visit certainly helped to strengthen the friendship between our two organisations and extended our horizons as far as the scope of our activities is concerned, with an emphasis on people to people exchanges.

# News and Notes in Brief

## AVFS Face Book Page

Now AVFS has a new Face Book page

[www.facebook.com.australianvietamsociety](http://www.facebook.com.australianvietamsociety)

Our old Face Book page will close by the end of the year.

## VietFest 2014

Vietnamese International Students at Adelaide University have organised a grand cultural event at the university cloisters. Adelaide members of AVFS have a wonderful opportunity to meet the students, taste Vietnamese food and enjoy Vietnamese culture.

## AVFS President To Sign MOU in Hanoi

The president of the Australia Vietnam Friendship Society will fly to Hanoi this month to meet with the Vietnam Australia Friendship Society and sign a memorandum of understanding between the two societies. This is a move that has been welcomed by both parties and will help to create a stronger sense of purpose to our activities.

## Oil Drilling in the South China Sea

Early this month China commenced an oil drilling operation in the South China Sea much to surprise of many Vietnamese people because the area chosen has been the subject of a dispute between China and Vietnam for a long period of time. In fact a number of nations have claims to large areas of the East Sea as the Vietnamese call this large body of water. Apart from Vietnam and China, other stakeholder nations involved in this region, include the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei. The Spratly Islands in particular have continually been a subject of dispute, especially between Vietnam and China. As could be expected in Vietnam there has been a strong reaction to the oil drilling that has taken place just 160 kilometres from the Vietnamese coastline. Public demonstrations have targeted foreign concerns but the Vietnamese authorities have obviously seen that such actions could be counter-productive. Vietnam is very reliant on overseas investment to promote national development now and into the future.

In such a dispute situation, negotiation and the rule of law, in this case international law, is the most

reasonable way to go. This is what has happened recently in the Timor Gap dispute and the controversy over whaling in the Southern Ocean. International comment so far has been limited with United States issuing a cautionary remark about the actions taken to date.

## May Day 2014

The Vietnamese International Students Association joined with the Australia Vietnam Friendship Society to hold a stall at the May Day Rally in Adelaide this month. Each year the stall has been very popular, especially for serving spring rolls. A feature this year was a display of Vietnamese culture, especially colourful traditional costumes. These were worn by the students during the rally. There were also small trinkets and other novelty items for sale.



VISA Students May Day 2014

# VIETFEST 2014

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2014

12.00 noon to 8.00pm

**At the Cloisters in Adelaide  
University**

*Food Exhibitions Games*

*Featuring a boutique market*

For more information Google VietFest 2014