

**Oral History Interview of Enemy Proselyting Department Colonel Luu Dinh Mien
[Luu Đình Miện]
DVD 16
13 June 2007, Hanoi,**

LDM – Luu Dinh Mien

I – Interviewer Merle Pribbenow

I [In English]: Today is 13 June 2007, and today we are interviewing Colonel Luu Dinh Mien, who participated in the wars against the French and against the Americans.

I [switching into Vietnamese]: First of all there is one thing – it is an American procedure. I am required to ask you for your permission to use this film as a living document for students and scholars to use to conduct additional research and to gain a better understanding of the Vietnam War, and so the American people can get a better understanding of the history of the war. Do you give your permission?

LDM: I agree.

I: Thank you. Now, Lieutenant Colonel, I mean Colonel – I'm sorry.

LDM: Don't worry about it (laughs).

I: Why don't I just call you "Uncle," to make things easier?

LDM: OK.

I: Please tell me your name and your date and place of birth.

LDM: My name is Luu Dinh Mien. I was born on 13 March 1936. So in our old Lunar calendar I was born in the year of the Rat. Now, my situation is a little complicated. My family is really from Hanoi, but my father went off to work elsewhere when he was 18 or 19 years old, and I was born in Haiphong. When I started to school and reached Level 2 [middle school or junior high school], ah, I attended part of Level 1 [elementary school] at a school in Thanh Hoa.

I: In Thanh Hoa? What kind of work did your father do?

LDM: Back then my father worked for the Post Office. He worked all the way north up in Sa Pa – way up in Sa Pa. And then later he moved down to Haiphong, so I was born in Haiphong. But then when I was going up and going to school, I spent most of my time in Thanh Hoa.

I: Mostly in Thanh Hoa?

LDM: Yes. After half of our country was liberated, North Vietnam, meaning after our victory at Dien Bien Phu [1954], I returned to Hanoi and began my final year of high school at a school in Hanoi.

I: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

LDM: If you count just those who survived to adulthood, I had six siblings, but two were killed during the resistance war against the French.

I: Two were killed? Two older brothers, right?

LDM: Yes. It was my oldest brother, the oldest in the family, and one other brother who was also older than me.

I: At the time of the August Revolution [1945], you must still have been very young, right? Do you remember that day?

LDM: To tell the truth, I have only a vague memory of it. I remember that there were lots of flags and drums, and we all ran out of our houses. I had a child's curiosity, so I ran out to see what was going on. But I didn't have any clear understanding of what was happening.

I: At that time your father was still working for the Post Office, right?

LDM: At that time my father had gone to work for a private French company, “Oxygen Acetylene” [in French] of France.

I: Oh. They used oxygen and gas?

LDM: That’s right.

I: Now, after the August revolution did your father continue working?

LDM: Yes, my father continued to work, and then in late 1945 or early 1946, the resistance war broke out and France occupied Haiphong, so my family evacuated to Thanh Hoa.

I: Really? So when the French attacked Haiphong, you were in Haiphong City?

LDM: Yes, we were in Haiphong City.

I: Do you remember that day? I have heard that French warships savagely bombarded the city.

LDM: I don’t remember very much, because it was over 50 years ago, and I just don’t remember. All I remember is that my entire family – me, my father, my mother, and my two younger siblings fled from the city. But in truth it didn’t seem like much of an evacuation. We just left and finally resettled in Thanh Hoa. At that time I had three older brothers. One had left the family earlier and was working for the Hanoi Public Security Office.

I: Really? That was in 1945?

LDM: He started in 1946. Sixty years ago. And another older brother went off with the headquarters, and another one went to Thanh Hoa and joined the resistance army there. So at that time my family was all split up, and we did not get news of the others until

1949. By that time my family was living in Thanh Hoa. One of my older brothers was working clandestinely here [in Hanoi].

I: That was extremely dangerous work.

LDM: Yes. Then he was killed in 1951, here in Hanoi.

I: Did the French arrest him?

LDM: No. He was exposed as an agent of the resistance, and they chased him to try to catch him, but he refused to allow himself to be taken prisoner, so they shot and killed him right near here, on Hang Duong Street. If you want to read about this incident, you should go to the National Library and read the newspaper, “Dien Tin” [Điện Tín]. The newspaper has a story about how they killed him.

I: When you were in Thanh Hoa, how did your family make a living?

LDM: At that time my family lived on a state farm. It was called the “Gold Star State Farm” [Nông Trường Sao Vàng]. It is now the Gold Star Airfield.¹ When you lived on a state farm, you did whatever work there was that needed to be done. When the rice crop was harvested, the rice was divided up and shared among the workers, and everyone took care of one another.

I: Did you have to go to work, or did you work and go to school at the same time, or what?

LDM: I worked for a while to help the family, and then my mother said, “You must try to go to school and get an education.” At that time the school was ten kilometers from where we lived. It took over an hour to get there, running on foot.

I: Oh? You had to run there on foot?

¹ The Tho Xuan Airfield, used by North Vietnamese MiG jet fighters during the war against the U.S.

LDM (laughing): Yes. And then when classes were over I had to come all the way back home.

I: So when you were young you must have been very strong and fit.

LDM: I don't know if I was strong or not (laughs), but living in that environment that is just what you had to do. No one thought anything about it.

I: So you continued to go to school until you finished high school?

LDM: Yes. I continued to go to school like that until I completed Level 2 [junior high school] at Thanh Hoa. It was in Thanh Tin, about 18 kilometers from my home. So some days I stayed overnight there, like at a boarding school, and I would take food from home to eat my meals there, and some days I would return home to help the family. And after I finished Level 2 and was in my final year, that was 1955, after the battle of Dien Bien Phu, my family moved back to live here [in Hanoi]. I requested admission to a school that was then called the Hanoi Level 3 Public School. Now it is called the Viet Duc [Vietnamese-German] School.

I: The Viet-Duc School?

LDM: Yes, the Viet-Duc School, on Ly Thuong Kiet Street.

I: During the entire time that your family lived in Thanh Hoa, ah, did the French bomb the area or make any military attacks into the area where your family lived?

LDM: No. The area where I lived was considered to be the Thanh Hoa Highlands area. It was several dozen kilometers from the Bai Thuong Dam. That was a remote area, and so we had no problems up there.

I: During that period did your family have enough to eat? Or I imagine that you suffered a lot of shortages of food, right?

LDM: We had enough to survive, but you couldn't call it an ample diet.

I: When you returned to Hanoi in 1955, did your father return as well?

LDM: Yes. By the time my family returned to Hanoi, my mother had a crippled arm. She had been out and she had been running, and she fell and broke her arm. Back then we did not have any medicines or anything, so she had her arm crippled, and she carried it in a sling. So at that time my family had two able-bodied adults: my father and my older brother. They worked for a government agency, and so my family received rations and salary from that source. And when we returned to Hanoi we lived with my father's younger brother in a building he owned. It was supposedly a family home, but it was called the Rabbit Church. Now it's in the [Ba Son?] area, it is now a hotel. The family sold it in 1991. We divided it up and everyone moved out to live in other locations. So that's where my family lived. At that time my younger sibling and my mother and I all lived there, living on the earnings of my father and older brother. I had a younger brother who in 1951, after my older brother was killed, ah, higher authorities reviewed our situation after my older brother was killed and they allowed our family to send one child off to study abroad, so my younger brother was sent off to study at the Que Son School in China.

I: Oh? In China?

LDM: Yes. It was called the School for Vietnamese Students. So at that time there were just my younger sibling and me at home.

I: Now, after 1955, when your family moved back to Hanoi, did your younger brother return from China?

LDM: He studied there until the entire school was moved back to Vietnam, and he came back with the rest of the students. But I had something special happen to me. After my return to Hanoi in January 1955, in June 1955 the principal of the school called me in to his office. He said to me, “The military really needs people with a good education to help build up our army. So I think that you should go join the army.” He asked me, “Do you think that would cause any problems?” I said, “You know the answer, sir.” At that time my mother had just died. My mother had died just a week earlier. So I said, “I don’t have any problems with that.” And so I joined the army, and I stayed in the army until I finally retired.

I: When you joined the army, did you start out as a private?

LDM: Yes. Everyone who joined started out as a private. Back then there was no formal rank structure. It was not until 1958 that the military finally instituted a formal rank structure. So back then, everyone from deputy platoon commander down, ah, everyone from deputy platoon commander on up had a formal position, and everyone else was a private, or a squad leader or deputy squad leader. But when I joined the army I was a special case, different from everyone else.

I: How was your situation special?

LDM: A total of 300 students from my school went into the army together. After one month, after testing our educational level and everything else, I received an order telling me that they were making me a teacher at the army’s first Cultural School [Trường Văn Hóa Quân Đội].²

I: That was in the Hanoi area?

² The Army Cultural School was actually a school that provided supplementary education to army personnel to improve their general educational level by teaching them basic reading, math, science, and other subjects.

LDM: No, it was in Kien An.

I: Kien An? That's near Haiphong, right?

LDM: Yes. So I worked there as an instructor.

I: You were so young and yet they made you an instructor.

LDM: Yes (laughs). Then in 1960, the Director of the School called me in and told me, "The requirement for us to build up our armed forces is going to continue for a long time. I want you to prepare yourself to go back to school. That is on the condition that you pass the entrance examination. If you don't pass the test, you will come back to our school and continue to work here." So at that time I was designated to take the test for admission to the Hanoi Teacher's College [Trường Đại Học Sư Phạm], here in the Cau Giay area. They sent me to stay at the Ministry of Defense's Station 66 [Trạm 66]. So I stayed there about a week and took the test, and then I returned to my unit. And then six months, ah, I mean three months later, the School Director said to me, "Congratulations. You are going back to school, but you must study hard so that you can return to serve the army." So I collected all the necessary letters of introductions and went off to study at the Hanoi Teacher's College.

I: At that time there was a program to send a number of cadres and enlisted men off to "B," to South Vietnam, right?

LDM: I don't remember if that program had started yet or not, because at that time I was concentrating on my studies.

I: So you studied at the Teacher's College...

LDM: Yes, at the Hanoi Teacher's College...

I: From 1961 ...

LDM: 1960.

I: Until what year?

LDM: Until 1963.

I: 1963? And then you graduated and were awarded a university diploma, is that right?

LDM: I don't remember if they gave me a diploma or not (laughs), because they informed me that I had graduated one day and then the very next day I received an order to return to my unit to resume working.

I: What was your rank at that time?

LDM: In 1960 [sic] they awarded me the rank of Second Lieutenant, because I now had a university degree. So then I resumed teaching.

I: You resumed teaching down at Kien An?

LDM: No, it was in Hanoi.

I: Were you still teaching at the Cultural School?

LDM: No. At that time I was sent to the Mid-High Level Military School [Trường Trung-Cao Quân Sự].³

I: Oh, the Mid-High Level ...

LDM: Now they call it the Military Studies Institute [Học Viện Quân Sự].

I: That is for officers ranking...

LDM: ...for middle level and high-ranking officers in the armed forces.

I: Field grade officers?

LDM: I didn't pay any attention to that at that time (laughs); I just went there and went to work.

I: What type of classes did you teach?

³ This school was the Army's Command and Staff College.

LDM: I taught mathematics, mathematics and physics, because in college I had studied math and physics, so that is what I taught.

I: How long did you teach at that school?

LDM: I was assigned to that school in 1963, and I worked there until November 1965.

I: This was after the U.S. had started bombing?

LDM: Yes, the bombing had already started. In 1965 the situation changed, and we were receiving regular briefings on the fighting in South Vietnam. Then I received orders to go to Hanoi for an assignment. Again I went to stay at Station 66. They sent me to attend a one-year English language class.

I: Oh? A one-year class to learn English?

LDM: Yes.

I: At that time were you married yet?

LDM: Not yet.

I: So you were still single?

LDM: Yes. At that time morale was very high. We asked why we were being sent to learn English, and the answer they gave us was very simple. They said, "Would you comrades like to be sent to "B" [South Vietnam]?" Oh, I'll tell you the truth – When we heard we would be sent to the South we were very excited and happy.

I: Everyone wanted to go?

LDM: Everyone wanted to go, and anyone who was not allowed to go considered that to be something that would haunt him for the rest of his life. That is the truth about the way we felt. Then, after studying English for one year, I received an order that said I would not be sent to "B".

I: When you studied English, was it in a special class?

LDM: It was a special program to cram everything in to a single year, to enable us to sit and hold simple conversations and to read books, etc.

I: And the instructor was...?

LDM: The teacher was a Vietnamese. You probably don't know him. He was Professor Dang Chan Lieu [Đặng Chấn Liêu]. He was extremely good in English. At that time he was the best English speaker in the Foreign Ministry.

I: Dang Chan Lieu?

LDM: Yes, Dang Chan Lieu.

I: Had Lieu studied abroad?

LDM: Yes, he had spent 25 years in France, and he spoke both French and English very well. At that time he was considered to be an excellent translator. When I was studying, the thing that made me really happy was that I knew Dang Chan Lieu was a very good teacher, and I heard a lot of praise for him for being an excellent translator from English to Vietnamese.

I: How many students were there in your class?

LDM: There were almost 100 students in my class.

I: Almost 100, and there was only one teacher?

LDM: No, there were many instructors. The primary instructor was Professor Lieu, but there was a teaching assistant for every ten students. I don't know where these other teachers had studied, but they gave us additional practice exercises, question and answer practice, etc. The primary hours of instruction were given by Professor Lieu and

Professor Truyen [Truyện]. Professor Truyen had formerly been a Level 3 [high school] literature teacher.

I: So after you finished studying you got an order telling you that you were staying behind [in North Vietnam].

LDM: Yes.

I: And the majority of the other students were sent to “B” [South Vietnam]?

LDM: Yes, virtually all of them were sent to “B.” I’ll tell you the truth – at that time I was depressed. I said to myself, “I guess I’m just not lucky.”

I: But at that time there was also a war going on in North Vietnam, right?

LDM: Yes, in the North it was primarily what we called the “war of destruction” that had been started by the Americans.

I: The Americans were bombing a great deal.

LDM: Yes, they were bombing. In 1965 most of the bombing was from Thanh Hoa southward. I remember that the first bombing attack was in Quang Ninh-Hon Gai. The first bombing attack was on 4 August 1964, if I am not mistaken.

I: Do you remember the first bombing attack that you personally experienced? That you saw with your own eyes?”

LDM: I don’t remember the first one, but after the American bombing became massive and spread throughout North Vietnam, I can say that I often heard the bombing. And right in Hanoi I remember that I personally witnessed the bombing attack on Hue Street [Phố Huế]. If you go there now you will see a memorial there on Hue Street. And the bombing attack that made the greatest impression on me was the B-52 carpet-bombing of the Kham Thien area, in December 1972 at Kham Thien in Hanoi. Now I will tell you

that I have a comparison to make. I worked up here [in North Vietnam], but occasionally I would be sent south to visit the battlefields. Once I heard B-52s down there, but out in the jungle the sound is different. But in Hanoi, it sounded like popcorn popping, just continuous, “bop-bop-bop-bop,” and everything shook.

I: So occasionally you were sent out to the battlefield on temporary duty assignments?

LDM: Yes. Once every few months, when there was a job to be done, my superiors would send me out to do that job. And after I finished, I would return and report to them.

I: Did you ever go down to “B” [South Vietnam], or were your assignments always within the confines of North Vietnam?

LDM: I went to “B,” but it was what was called a “short B assignment” [đi B ngắn] (both laugh). This meant that I would go for a few months with some delegation, or to perform some specific task they gave me to do, and then I would return.

I: Did you go to Quang Tri, or to the Central Highlands, or...?

LDM: One time I did go to the Quang Tri area. I never went to the Central Highlands then, but then after the liberation [1975] I did most of my work down there.

I: When you went out on these missions, were you given assignments in which you could use your English language capabilities?

LDM: Yes, I used English for part of my job.

I: After you completed your English language training class, what unit were you assigned to? Where did you work?

[Brief exchange about the camera as I adjusts the camera].

LDM: After I graduated from the short-term English class, the Army assigned me to the Enemy Proselyting Department [Cục Địch Vận]. This department's job was to convince enemy soldiers to return to the cause of justice.

I: The Enemy Proselyting Department was part of the General Political Department, isn't that correct?

LDM: Yes, it was subordinate to the General Political Department. One time General Vo Nguyen Giap told us that we had to find ways to fight big battles that killed few enemy troops but instead captured many enemy soldiers – he said that was better.

I: So your job was to persuade enemy troops to surrender or to lay down their weapons, right and demand to be sent back to the U.S., right?

LDM (laughing): Yes. When I was assigned there my main responsibility was to read books and newspapers, summarize and collate my findings, and then send reports up to my superiors. For example, I read the various American newspapers, like Stars and Stripes, etc.

I: What was the source of these books and newspapers? Where did you get them?

LDM: Our people in South Vietnam bought them and sent them to us. From Saigon.

I: So it must have taken several months before you got the newspapers.

LDM: No. It took only around 20 days.

I: Really? That fast? But lots of those newspapers could also be purchased in Hong Kong, in Paris, etc.

LDM: I don't know about that, but I know that once I asked the people at the place that stored these documents and kept them on file. They said, "Oh, our people down there

sent them up here to us.” So that is why I said that, but to tell the truth, I don’t really know exactly where they were purchased.

I: How many people worked in your component? Were there just one or two people or...

LDM: No, I was in an office that had only two people. We specialized in reading these things, collating and summarizing them, and submitting reports to the comrade who was our superior. That’s all.

I: Meaning that you made reports saying what direction should be taken in the work of proselytizing enemy soldiers.

LDM: Right. Based on that, each time, ah, we only participated in providing our opinion on the current situation – for instance, when we had a [combat] campaign that was about to be launched, we would try to predict what the reaction would be. And based on this we would decide what kind of propaganda campaign, what kind of proselytizing actions should be taken.

I: Did you help to write propaganda leaflets and things – ah, there probably times when you had statements read over your radio station – things like that?

LDM: Yes. For instance, there was one man who specialized in writing leaflets. He would come to me and ask, “Should I use this thing or not?” And we would discuss it, and then he would take the ideas and report back to our superiors.

I: At that time what was your rank?

LDM: At that time, let’s see - I was a second lieutenant until 1966 or 1967, I don’t remember exactly. During the time I worked there I rose from the rank of second lieutenant to, ah, until I retired (laughs). Because I worked in that unit up until I retired, so from second lieutenant up to colonel, and then I retired.

I: And that unit was stationed right here in the city, right?

LDM: Yes, right here in the city.

I: So did you ever have an opportunity to meet with American soldiers? With prisoners of war or, ah, because I know that there were a number of delegations of anti-war protestors, or with journalists from the U.S.? Because you were an English language specialist, so did you ever have a chance to meet with people like that?

LDM: I had times that I met them. For instance, with some captured American pilots – we called them “sky pirates” [giặc lái] – American sky pirates who had been captured. That’s all. I would meet them and ask them about their private thoughts and emotions, what they thought about things, etc. To tell you the truth, my English was limited, so many times I had to ask for help from one of our people whose English was better than mine.

I: When you were sent out on your temporary assignments, was it to question sky pirates or to...

LDM: When I went out on assignments, they were primarily general assignments, and not just to meet with sky pirates, because when we talk about enemy proselyting, it was general enemy proselyting. On the battlefield there were puppet troops, and American troops – those were the two main ones. And then there were periods when there were also Thai troops, South Korean troops, etc. During the period when there Thai and South Korean soldiers, I didn’t get to meet with any of those kinds of soldiers. I only heard about them through documents and reports.

I: Was there a component that was responsible for South Korean troops? Or Thai troops?

LDM: I don’t know about that, because I was only assigned there later.

I: What about Australians and New Zealanders? Was your component responsible for them too?

LDM: No. My primary job was to proselytize puppet soldiers and Americans.

I: Puppets and Americans.

LDM: That's all. Primarily I participated in the effort to find ways to appeal to them so that they would understand the policies of my Party and my government.

I: There were two components, and we in the United States sometimes got them mixed up. There was the military proselyting [binh vận] component and the enemy proselyting [địch vận] component.

LDM: Ah, yes (nods his head and laughs).

I: Military proselyting was responsible for the puppets, right?

LDM: No, that is not correct. Military proselyting was the work conducted by elements outside the army, civilian elements, to proselytize enemy soldiers. By this I mean that all Party agencies, government agencies, and all our mass organizations were assigned the mission of proselytizing enemy soldiers. Enemy proselyting was a specialized function of proselytizing individuals serving inside the enemy's ranks that was conducted by our army, just by our military. The mission was both a general support mission and a specialized support mission to support specific combat campaigns. But on the battlefield, two were one and one was two, because it depended on the personnel – anything to increase our strength, so two were one and one was two. But it is true that there were those two different terms: Military Proselyting and Enemy Proselyting.

I: Can you tell us a few details about your visit to “B” [South Vietnam], or the times when you were sent out on assignments? Were you ever bombed? Did you ever go out to the front lines during combat? Did you ever run into one of our sweep operations?

LDM: I never had any occasions like that, because usually I worked with a rear area staff agency, at the headquarters command post in the rear, and I was not allowed to go forward to the forward headquarters on the front lines.

I: But you told me that you visited Quang Tri, right?

LDM: Yes.

I: And there was very savage fighting in Quang Tri. There was fighting everywhere. Even the headquarters had to fight, right?

LDM: You are correct, but in that area there were some very strange places where it was quiet.

I: Really?

LDM: It is true that on two occasions I was given advance warning that, “Today B-52s will bomb the area.” And they were right. That night I heard the explosions. They were so loud! But it turned out that the bombing was twenty or thirty kilometers away. If you went out to visit the battlefield you would see there were areas that were very strange. They were areas that it seemed no one ever went to. You guys never went there. So these were usually the places where we stationed our troops.

I: Remote areas?

LDM: Yes, remote areas.

I: What about the occasions when you received advance warnings of B-52 air strikes? The Americans, and especially our Air Force, will be very surprised by that. How could

the puny Viet Cong know in advance where they were going to bomb? You said you were given advance warning of such air strikes on two occasions, right?

LDM: Yes.

I: Do you know how they knew this?

LDM (laughing): I don't have any idea. All I know is that they gave advance warning and that rather good preparations were made, because some units had to evacuate the area that was to be bombed in order to avoid casualties. I think this was evidence of our skill, our talent in the military arts.

I: That indicates great talent. I must admit that there was a long period of time when the U.S. Air Force absolutely refused to believe that you guys had advance warning of B-52 strikes. There were people in U.S. intelligence who informed them of this – “They know in advance” – but the Air Force refused to listen (LDM laughs). They thought that their codes, their radios, were secure, so no one could possibly have advance warning.

LDM: That was very difficult. All I know is that there were attacks about which we received advance warning so that we could take precautions ahead of time.

I: Approximately when did you visit Quang Tri? Do you remember?

LDM: That time, ah, one time in 1969...

I: 1969?

LDM: Yes. That time I went for about three months. And one time...

I: This was after the battle of Khe Sanh, right?

LDM: Khe Sanh, yes.

I: And there was still quite a bit of fighting in Quang Tri then, right?

LDM: Yes. I went one other time, approximately 1971. That time I went for five or six months.

I: Five or six months? You must have gone to visit lots of different places.

LDM: Yes. I went down to the different units to hear what our men had to say. I went to, basically, to observe the situation. My superiors told me to go down there and see how things were going and then come back and report to them.

I: Did you visit combat units? Or did you visit units that were responsible for Americans, or...?

LDM: I visited units about which my superiors needed more information. For instance, there was a battle against puppet soldiers, and there were a number of problems that came up. So my superior told me, "Do what you can to reduce the number of deaths, and we want you to study what their psychology is down there so we can propagandize and proselytize the puppet soldiers to persuade them to lay down their weapons – that's the best solution." So there were many battles in which a large number of prisoners were captured, and we would proselytize them, educate them, and then release them and let them go home. There was no reason to continue to hold them. So that kind of thing happened – it was by no means unknown. You were there – you probably know about this already.

I: Yes, I know that even during the early years of the war there were many battles in which you captured a rather large number of prisoners. For instance, the battle of Tua Hai in Tay Ninh – a large number of puppet soldiers were captured during that battle. And they were educated for a period of time, and then released. And from that time onward,

that kind of thing happened every once in a while. So you were sent off on that kind of temporary assignment at least twice, right?

LDM: Yes, twice.

I: Did you ever get down to the Central Highlands, or...

LDM: No. The farthest I went was north of Hue – northern Thua Thien-Hue. I didn't go deep into South Vietnam. Only later did I go farther south – after South Vietnam was completely liberated (1975). We went down primarily to, one, resolve the problem of the puppet soldiers and puppet government officials who had been captured.

I: The ones sent to reeducation?

LDM: Yes.

I: So the enemy proselyting component was also responsible for that problem as well?

LDM: Yes.

I: Did you participate in any of the prisoner exchanges? Either the exchanges of puppet prisoners of war, or the exchanges of American prisoners?

LDM: I participated in the exchange of sky pirates at Gia Lam.

I: Ah, the one at Gia Lam. You probably already talked about all this to the Americans who are here looking for MIAs, right?

LDM: Not yet.

I: Not yet?

LDM: I haven't ever met with those people (laughs).

I: I thought that, ah, because I am acquainted with a number of people who do that work, so I thought that they had questioned everyone.

LDM (laughing): I have never met those guys, because after the war was over I switched to another job.

I: You did not do enemy proselyting work anymore?

LDM: I continued to do enemy proselyting work, but I was not involved in that particular area anymore. I went to work in a new area.

I: Do you have any particularly special memories of your meetings with the American sky pirates? Do you remember any of the people you met? (long pause) Is this something you can talk about, or...?

LDM: You know that I studied English for only one year, so I couldn't say very much. In general, this is what I think: just before the prisoner exchange, I was very happy to see, and I thought it was very strange also, that all of the American sky pirates, the American pilots who had been captured and were being exchanged, were in very good health, generally speaking. When I asked them about this, they said that their lives had been very orderly and normal. Naturally this was the orderliness of prison life, but they felt that everything involving their humanity, their human rights, had been respected during their time in prison. So the only thing was that, naturally, since they were prisoners, they did not enjoy freedom, but later on they were allowed to receive letters and gifts, that kind of thing.

I: The times that you met with the sky pirates, was it just to do research to decide what kind of propaganda lines you should use? What kind of subjects you should address in your propaganda?

LDM: Yes. And once I also met with them to see whether our state policy for dealing with them was being implemented correctly; whether they were being treated correctly or

not. I think that, from their standpoint we could never satisfy them, but from our standpoint they were being treated rather well, in relation to our economic situation at that time, and living in that kind of situation ...

I: In other words, their food was not up to their standards, but in terms of Vietnamese standards...

LDM: Yes. So I said that from their standpoint we could not make an accurate judgment. One's judgment must be based on the general environment and the specific conditions of the country in question. You see? The customs of our two countries were different.

I: In your work, was the primary focus of your attention on books, newspapers, etc.?

LDM: Yes. That was our main thing.

I: What did you and your office think of the anti-war movement in the United States? Because later on, especially in 1968, 1969, etc., that movement began to spread and grow.

LDM: My child, ah, I did not get married until 1971. At that time the war was still intense, but when my child grew up the war was over. As for my grandchildren, they learned about things through the newspapers, etc.

I: No, I wanted to ask about the anti-war movement inside the U.S. armed forces. That began around 1966 or 1967, right? And there were a number of organizations involved. Up here [in North Vietnam] did you have complete and adequate information and documents about their activities?

LDM: We received a great deal of material. For instance, anti-war pins and medallions, and documents, etc. I don't know the source that supplied us with this material, but we received the materials, and we thought that it reflected correct thinking, so we sent it

down to the American POWs, to the sky pirates, to let them see it, that's all. But as to the source from which we got the material - That I don't know. But we did receive this material. We received a lot of it.

I: At that time, among the American POWs there were two factions, right? A faction that was called stubborn and a faction that was a little bit progressive, right?

LDM: It's hard to call them "stubborn" and "progressive." What does "stubborn" mean, after all? But from our standpoint, I will tell you this so that you understand, in our Army we paid a great deal of attention to this work. Even the privates in our Army had to study this. One of the lessons they had to learn was the implementation of our policies on the handling of prisoners and defectors.

I: Do you remember what the policy was regarding the handling of prisoners and defectors?

LDM: Concretely, the important point was that when prisoners or defectors were captured, they were not to be mistreated or brutalized in any way; acts of revenge were forbidden. And then the individuals had to be quickly taken back to a rear base so that the rear base could send the individual on to a safe place where they could be taken care of. Second, we had to strive to meet their needs and keep them alive within the framework of the existing conditions – they must not be allowed to go hungry or starve, and their wounds had to be treated. So I will tell you, when our men in a unit captured a prisoner, their greatest concern and worry was how to feed the prisoner, because even our own men did not have enough to eat.

I: It was another mouth to feed.

LDM: That's right. We found that our people handled this very well. Virtually no one ever violated these rules. This point is very important: we viewed this issue as a subject of battlefield discipline. Anyone who violated these rules would be disciplined. If we heard that a prisoner had been struck or beaten, the guilty party would be disciplined as soon as they returned. So I will tell you that in our army this was very clear as a matter of policy, and our men were educated about it and given instruction about it. Everyone who entered the armed forces was given this lesson as part of the course of instruction. And this lesson was included in our battlefield discipline. It was a subject of battlefield discipline, viewed on the same level of importance as our policy on handling our own dead and wounded. I will tell you, a company commander whose unit suffered men wounded and who did not try to find them before withdrawing would be disciplined immediately. And it was the same with captured booty of war, captured equipment and supplies. In our army there were three disciplinary subjects that were very clear and viewed as very important. Any items that were captured in battle had to be turned in to the rear services [logistics] component, and rear services then would send it back to the element responsible for such items. And after that the items would be distributed to the appropriate people. The second thing was the disciplinary regulations regarding the treatment of prisoners and defectors. The most important thing was that these people had to be moved out of the area of danger as quickly as possible. I tell you – in battle, if you have three men and you have to use one of them to take a prisoner back to the rear, you can see the effect that will have on your forces, but they still had to do it.

I: Yes, because mistreating prisoners would have negative effects in the future.

LDM: In fact, if you study Vietnamese history, you would see that in ancient times Nguyen Trai [Nguyễn Trãi] also discussed this issue.⁴ So we believed that this was a good tradition for us to follow.

I: So you worked in that component [enemy proselyting] for many years?

LDM: Yes, from 1956 on.

I: Oh? From 1956?

LDM: Yes, after I finished my English class.

I: You mean 1966.

LDM: Yes, 1966. That's when I was assigned to work in this unit.

I: What were the main newspapers that you read? Just *Stars and Stripes*, or did you have other newspapers as well.

LDM: *Time*.

I: The *Washington Post*?

LDM: I never read the *Washington Post*. I don't know...

I: What about magazines like *Newsweek* and *Time*?

LDM: Yes – *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Stars and Stripes*. And I also read puppet books and newspapers.

I: The newspapers published in Saigon?

LDM: Yes. *Dien Tin* [Điện Tín] ...

I: Oh, *Dien Tin* and *Tin Sang* [Tin Sáng]...

LDM: *Tia Sang* [Tia Sáng], yes. Fifteen or sixteen different newspapers.

⁴ Nguyễn Trãi was a famous mandarin and advisor to Emperor Lê Lợi in the 15th century during one of the major Chinese invasions of Vietnam.

I: Yes, there were a lot of newspapers. Did you also read the [South Vietnamese] Army newspapers, like *Tien Tuyen* [Tiền Tuyến], *Dieu Hau* [Điều Hậu], etc.

LDM: Yes (laughing).

I: I remember some of them.

LDM: To tell you the truth, I only remembered those names after you mentioned them. It's been a long time, and I had forgotten them. After the liberation of South Vietnam, when I had some free time I went to visit the libraries and archives and read them. Our victory was so massive and so rapid that when you went down the street there were newspapers everywhere just laying there to be picked up. And when I had free time I would read them. I did this for several reasons. One was to see if the work I had done before had been correct or not, in order to learn lessons. If we were to continue this work, we wanted to know how it should be done.

I: You were responsible for enemy proselyting work. Later on, in the U.S. we saw that the morale of the Saigon Army had begun to collapse. I was in Saigon, and I began to see signs of this shortly after my arrival in Saigon. Up in North Vietnam, had you realized this fact yet?

LDM: If we are going to talk about this subject, I would like to tell you the truth. This is a personal opinion, but in general, in our situation assessments we saw indications of rot and decay on their side. But now, in fact at that time we thought, "Why, in spite of this situation, ah, how could the puppet army last?" They had two million troops. So we thought about that. In my profession, our thoughts were, "The situation is falling apart for them, and they're collapsing like this, so what should we say to them to have the right effect?" Later, after South Vietnam was liberated, I went down there to help our South

Vietnamese brothers build camps to detain puppet soldiers and puppet government officials. At that time I tried to learn more about this question. I asked additional questions about it. Now, at that time it was just kind of like going back over history, that's all.

I: During the war, perhaps the first incident in which you captured a large number of prisoners toward the end was the battle of Lower Laos in 1971, in which you captured Colonel Tho of the Saigon Army's 3rd Airborne Brigade.⁵ Were you able to meet him down there or...

LDM: I met him, but only at the place where he was being imprisoned. It was a short meeting – a little over one hour. The only thing I asked him was, “When you were in the puppet army, what did you think of us? Did you believe you would defeat us?”

I: How did Tho answer that question?

LDM: I don't recall everything he said, but at that time he said he was still very confused and frightened, because he had never thought that he would be captured by us. This was because I met him just a few months later.

I: A few months after he was captured?

LDM: Yes. He said, “To tell you the truth, I am still confused and frightened.” But by that time he was thinking about his family a lot...

I: At that time did you have any kind of arrangements to help prisoners contact their families? I mean particularly puppet prisoners.

LDM: For the puppets, no. They had no contact. For the [American] sky pirates, it was done through the Red Cross and that kind of thing. So we had those contacts. There was

⁵ Colonel Nguyen Van Tho [Nguyễn Văn Thọ], Commander of the South Vietnamese 3rd Airborne Brigade, was captured on 25 February 1971 when his brigade headquarters in Laos was overrun during Operation Lam Son 719.

a regulation that the sky pirates were allowed to send one letter a month home to their families, and their families could send them letters, and gifts, and medicines, in accordance with the overall guidelines that had been agreed upon. I don't remember if the agreement was made with the Vietnamese Government or if it was done through the Vietnamese Red Cross.

I: I think it must have been the Red Cross organization.

LDM: I don't know. I wasn't informed, so I don't know about that clearly. But I do know that at the prison camp the prisoners were allowed to send one letter home each month, and they were allowed to receive letters and gifts. I'll tell you, one time our people called me and said, "We've got this big pile of stuff here, and you haven't given us any equipment to transport it!" (laughs). You know, back then our trucks were assigned to support the battlefield. Up here, mostly we had just bicycles and pushcarts; we didn't have motorcycles like we do today. So I tried to encourage them. I said, "Just take some bicycles and carry the stuff that way. If you can't carry it all today, take some of it tomorrow. Just try to get it all delivered."

I: That must have been for one of the more distant camps. Probably this kind of thing would not have been a problem for the camps in Hanoi, right?

LDM: Even in the city. For instance, every family sends one package this big [gestures with his hands], it would be a big amount. How could you carry it all if you didn't have a motorcycle or a truck to put it on to lighten the load? So our people were worried about that. If they carried it and weren't careful and dropped something, then they would be subjected to criticism (both laugh). So we must recognize that for us to do this in the midst of such a savage war was very good, it was a very precious action on our part.

I: Did your Enemy Proselyting Department make any recommendations to raise the spirits of the American sky pirates? Many of them had been in prison for many years, like Alvarez,⁶ who was held in prison for something like nine years. Probably their spirits had sunk very low, right?

LDM: You say that their spirits had sunk low. I don't agree with the implication. But I will tell you this: We did raise the issue of getting them to understand why we were fighting...

I: Oh! Let me stop the tape here.

⁶ U.S. Navy Lt.j.g. Everett Alvarez, shot down and captured 5 August 1964. He was held in North Vietnamese prisons until his release on 12 February 1973.

Oral History Interview of Luu Dinh Mien [Luu Đình Miện]

**DVD 17
13 June 2007, Hanoi,**

LDM – Luu Dinh Mien

I – Interviewer Merle Pribbenow

LDM: Let me say this to you again so that you understand it clearly. With regard to the American sky pirates, aside from the standards we set for their meals - because they were fed much better than our own civilians and even better than officers in the Vietnamese army – one reason we fed them so well was that we wanted to keep their health from deteriorating.

I: They were not used to the climate...

LDM: Yes, they were not used to the climate, they were not used to the living standards over here, so we needed to do what we could to make sure that they stayed healthy. So you see, it is like I told you earlier: Out at Gia Lam Airport at the time of the exchange, it was not just us who participated in the exchange who commented on this; even the journalists noticed it. I read several newspaper articles about their meetings with the sky pirates after they arrived at Clark Air Base, and they [the journalists] saw this clearly.

But as for the spirits of these men, the only issue we addressed was that we sympathized with them because they were prisoners, and prisoners are naturally under restraints, so we tried to create conditions for them to live under in which they would not feel like there were under restraints. We tried to avoid putting them under constraints. How did we do this? When we talked, all I would ever talk about was why we had to fight them. In this war, whose cause was just and whose cause was unjust? So that they would see this clearly. Naturally, they were Americans, so they were dependent on the U.S., they

belonged to it – their families were in the U.S., there was the question of U.S. law, etc. We understood this. But the issue that we raised with them...

I: They also had the disciplinary regulations of the U.S. armed forces to consider...

LDM: Yes. There was one guy who said to me, “I will only tell you four things: my name, my age, my service number, and my rank.” (laughs). The regulations were very inflexible, very mechanical! So I asked him, “Can you really stick to that? For instance, if I ask you how old your wife is and you answer me, you will have violated those regulations!” So I did not force them, but I did try to make things clear for them, because only if things are clear could we understand one another, and only then could we agree with one another. Second, we gave them what newspapers and press items we could for them to read. And third, there was the radio – the program on the Voice of Vietnam [Đài Tiếng Nói Việt Nam], the program for proselytizing American soldiers; you were in Saigon – you probably listened to it there, didn’t you? The Voice of, ah, at that time it was called South Vietnam’s Liberation Radio [Đài Giải Phóng Miền Nam]. They had two programs. One was aimed at puppet soldiers, and one was aimed at American soldiers. One of the announcers was Miss Huong [Huong], whose official [true] name was Ngo [Ngô ?]; she now lives in Ho Chi Minh City. You know who I’m talking about? Later on, I heard that people called her “Vietnam’s Rose.”⁷ They praised her a lot. Do you remember this?

I: There were a number of newspaper articles written about her, weren’t there?

LDM: Yes. She was a very good announcer. So we let them have all these things. I think that by doing all this we let those prisoners feel that, “Yes, we are still human

⁷ This is apparently a comparison with the female Japanese propaganda announcer, “Tokyo Rose,” during World War II.

beings. We still have our minds, our understanding, and we still have our feelings.” As for whether or not they believed all these things, I think that the facts will tell the story. I think that there were things that they believed, but they did not dare to admit it. After all, they had their [military] regulations and their laws to contend with. And after we released them, they were no longer living in Vietnam, so we understand that. As for the newspapers published by the anti-war movement, they told the facts very clearly, and when we had such papers, we supplied these papers to them for them to read. Later on, occasionally there were movies that we let them watch. When you go back home, you ask them about whether or not this is true.

I: During the later period you organized a lot of things for them, but during the early period, things were rather simple, rather basic, right?

LDM: Yes. Because given the kind of war this was, and with the kind of economic situation we had at that time, that was all we could do. But to tell the truth, we say “protracted” [trường kỳ], but no one knew how long “protracted” really would be.⁸ So throughout this process, we tried to do as much for them as our capabilities allowed us to do. If you had lived in North Vietnam during that period, you would have seen what kind of people we are. There were all kinds of movements then – such as appealing to everyone to fast so that the food could be sent to the front lines, and the people all did it. But some things the people just could not endure. Their homes were destroyed; their children were killed. I think that if you were in their position, you would think the same way. So I will tell you the truth – there were several bombing attacks, like the one on Hue Street, ah, after that attack I went there, and I simply could not hold back my tears.

⁸ This is apparently a reference to the constant North Vietnamese statements that they were fighting a “protracted war.”

I: What year did the bombing of Hue Street take place? Do you remember?

LDM: 1967 or 68, something like that.

I: It was probably 67.

LDM: 67 or 68.

I: Were a lot of people killed?

LDM: More than ten.

I: More than ten?

LDM: Yes. The people said, “The Americans claim that they are not bombing markets and that they are not bombing cities.” I remember one old woman who said to me, “The Americans told me that they would not bomb the cities, but now my home is destroyed and my child is dead.”⁹ It was that kind of thing. So we let them [the prisoners of war] see quite a few movies, and later on there were a number of times when we arranged for them to hold church services.

I: Really?

LDM: Yes. I remember that Pastor Le Dinh Bien [Lê Đình Biên] came to the camp to conduct services, as did Pastor Bui Hanh Tu [Bùi Hành Tử - spelling?] – Protestant minister.

I: Two Protestant pastors?

LDM: One “Catholic” and one “Protestant.” He came into the camp and held services there. And do you know who were the singers in his choir? The sky pirates! The only thing missing in this service was the organ, but they knew the tunes of the songs. And

⁹ According to “*Thủ Đô Hà Nội: Lịch Sử Kháng Chiến Chống Mỹ Cứu Nước, 1954-1975*” [Hanoi the Capital: History of the Resistance War Against the Americans to Save the Nation, 1954-1975], People’s Army Publishing House, Hanoi, 1991, page 140, the bombing on Hue Street took place on 22 August 1967. According to this account, 48 people were killed and 175 wounded in this incident.

our people told me that they [the prisoners] were very moved by this gesture. I will tell you that the prisoners at all the camps considered this kind of thing to be very important. It was no problem for us.

I: In regard to your enemy proselyting work, the attack to try to rescue the sky pirates at Son Tay probably had an effect on your work, didn't it?

LDM: I will tell you the truth – I only heard about the Son Tay raid later on.

I: Oh? You only heard about it later?

LDM: Yes, because it was not something that affected my job, my responsibilities. So I didn't go up there to see what happened. But later on I was informed about it. And later, I read the book, "*The Son Tay Raid*" [Vụ Tập Kích Sơn Tây].

I: The book written by an American?

LDM: Yes, by an American writer.¹⁰ I was amused, because, excuse me for saying so, because it was not true. I will admit to you that your technology was very advanced, but it is hard to believe this kind of stuff. Later I asked our people about it, and they said, "We have not read the book, so why are you asking us about it?" I let them borrow the book, and they read it and laughed. They said, "No wonder the Americans lost." There must have been some special, secret purpose behind this raid. But the raid was not successful. That is very clear.

I: Yes, but the raid probably had the effect of showing you just how much interest and concern the U.S. had for the prisoners of war, and the level of importance that the prisoner of war issue had in U.S. society and in U.S. political circles. Isn't that right?

LDM: That is correct. But it was still a rather rash, risky operation.

¹⁰ LDM is referring to the book, "*The Raid*" by Benjamin F. Schemmer.

I: Naturally something like that is a very dangerous, risky operation (LDM laughs). But the problem was that it was based on information that was not precise, not totally accurate, so they did not know that this camp had already been evacuated.

LDM: I read about it, and I know that these guys trained for the operation at Clark Airbase in the Philippines for three or four months, and they then went to Thailand and rehearsed things over and over again.

I: They trained in Florida. It was Florida.

LDM: I had the impression that it was in the Philippines. It was Florida?

I: Yes, in Florida. They trained at a special base there. The base is still there; it belongs to the U.S. Special Forces.

LDM: But I will admit that you guys trained your sky pirates very carefully. One of them told me that before being sent to Vietnam he spent three months undergoing survival training at Clark Airbase. So I believe that the training was very complete, but it just goes to prove that if your cause is not just, then it is very difficult for you to succeed.

I: So you had opportunities to talk to American prisoners quite a bit, right?

LDM: Yes, I met with a number of them, and we had a little conversation and I asked a few questions. It was mostly about their personal thoughts and feelings. One guy asked me, "When will I be allowed to go home?" I don't know how you would have answered him if you had been in my position. "When the war is over." (laughs). That's all anyone could say. And then he asked, "When will the war be over?" That was an even more difficult question. I said, "When the U.S. withdraws totally and is no longer involved in my country – that is when the war will end." That was correct, right?

I: In your job, was your main focus on the American prisoners of war, or was it on the puppet prisoners of war?

LDM: That depends on the time frame we are talking about. Sometimes it was the American prisoners and sometimes it was the puppet prisoners. Later on, we had the Southwestern Border War, against the Pol Pot group [in Cambodia], and then I had to plunge in to study the Pol Pot genocidal clique.

I: That was a big subject.

LDM: Oh, I tell you – you never visited Tuol Sleng Prison, right there in Phnom Penh City. When I entered the prison, I was appalled. I could not understand how they could have killed so many people who left behind so many skulls there. I was there [in Cambodia] in 1987, and our people told me to go visit that place. And when I visited it, it scared me. Stacks and stacks of skulls – I just couldn't understand it.

I: Most Americans don't know anything about your Southwestern Border War. Most Americans believe that after 1975 Vietnam enjoyed peace, but that is not true. There was still more struggle and sacrifice for an additional period of time, right?

LDM: The war to defend our southwestern border continued until 1989. I remember 1977. In April 1977 Pol Pot's forces attacked into our country in the Vinh Te Canal area in An Giang province. And then the war just went on and on.

I: After I retired I did some research on that period and I wrote an article about the border war, especially about the attack that overthrew the Pol Pot regime in 1979.

LDM: Yes, it was in 1979.

I: After the American prisoners were released in 1973, did you focus your efforts entirely on the puppet army?

LDM: Yes, then I concentrated totally on the puppet army. At that time the working conditions were easier, and I went down to Hue.

I: Really? You went to Hue?

LDM: Yes. I went down to Hue because there had been a number of battles in which we captured a large number of prisoners, so I went down there to meet with them. And then in 1975, after the liberation of South Vietnam, around the end of 1975 I went down to Saigon. At that time my main job was to resolve the problem of the former puppet soldiers and government officials.

I: During the period following the Paris Agreement,¹¹ you focused your attention on the puppet army, but you still had to worry about whether the U.S. would jump back in, isn't that right?

LDM: That's right, because in this war the puppets were just lackeys, and we didn't know whether they might ask their master for help, and if their master got a little overheated about the situation, who knows what the master might do.

I: So Enemy Proselyting continued to read the newspapers?

LDM: Yes, we continued to monitor the situation, but, ah, we had to continue to monitor this, but during this period we concentrated our attention on how we should appeal to, how we should proselytize the puppet army. To tell the truth, during this period we recognized that the puppet army had deteriorated tremendously, because they had lost their source of backing, the support on which they depended. And I will tell you the truth – my superiors at that time gave me permission to listen to Saigon Radio, and I heard that [South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van] Thieu had turned over the Presidency to [Vice President Tran Van] Huong.

¹¹ The Paris Peace Agreement was signed on 28 January 1973.

I: That was the last week of the war.

LDM: Yes, that happened during the last week of the war. When we heard that Thieu had stepped down, all of us said to one another, “The end is at hand.”

I: In *Enemy Proselyting*, about when did you realize, when did you finally predict that the Saigon army no longer had the will to fight and that the war would be over soon? Some of us at the U.S. Embassy predicted in 1974 that it would not be long and that the collapse would happen very rapidly. On your side, about when did you begin to see signs that there would be a rapid collapse?

LDM: As to that, after the Paris Agreement was signed we believed that it would be over quickly, but we didn't know the exact date. So I would like to tell you this: In 1969 Chairman Ho Chi Minh published a poem to wish our nation a happy Tet Lunar New Year, and that poem included the following lines:

“Fight to make the Americans withdraw,
Fight to make the puppets collapse.”

[Đánh cho Mỹ rút, đánh cho ngụy nhào]

That meant that once the Americans withdrew, the collapse of the puppets was inevitable. No matter how many weapons and how much ammunition and food you poured in, you still could not save them.

I: But the year 1973, after the Paris Agreement was signed, was still a very difficult year. There was a lot of fighting, big battles, and a lot of casualties, right?

LDM: I don't know about the level of casualties, because I didn't monitor that aspect, but I will tell you this: After the Paris Agreement was signed, do you know the thing that I was happiest about? It was that we could travel from here [in Hanoi] all the way down to

the Ben Hai River [the De-Militarized Zone] in broad daylight with no problems or worries (laughs). I could travel by car, even though the road was very bad, from here down to Vinh in just a single day. It felt so good to be able to travel during the daytime. If you ever traveled along the coast, and you went over the Ca Pass [Đèo Cả] and the Ngang Pass [Đèo Ngang],¹² ah, I remember a poem from when I was still in school:

“The road down to the Nghe [Tinh] area is very winding,

The green mountains and the vast waters are like a beautiful painting.”

Oh, when I got to the Ca Pass and the Ngang Pass, I saw mountains on one side and the ocean on the other – it was really breathtaking! And the road really was winding. After the Paris Agreement I traveled down that road and I felt wonderful. So at that time I thought we should limit losses, so I raised with our people the question of what we could do to awaken the consciences of the opposition soldiers.

I: At the time of the Paris Agreement there was a big battle at, ah, Dong Ha or someplace around there...

LDM: Dong Ha was earlier.

I: It was at Cua something...

LDM: Cua Viet.

I: That's it. That's correct.

LDM: No, Cua Viet was in 1967.

I: But there was also a battle there in 1973, against the Marines...

LDM: That was before the Agreement. It was before the agreement, not after it. There is a difference.

¹² Both these passes are on National Route 1 down the coast. The Ca Pass is in South Vietnam between Tuy Hoa and Nha Trang, while the Ngang Pass is in North Vietnam on the border between Ha Tinh and Quang Binh provinces.

I: But a number of prisoners were captured during that battle.¹³

LDM: I don't remember that. I don't remember if we captured prisoners there or not, because those prisoners would have been captured in South Vietnam, and so our people in South Vietnam would have handled them.

I: But if prisoners were captured in Laos or somewhere else...

LDM: In Laos, for instance, when the Lao Party, the Lao Government, and the Lao Army raised this issue with us, we gave them our assistance. But with regards to South Vietnam, although we were two, we were also one; and although we were one, we were also two, but I will tell you that our comrades in South Vietnam were very, very good. They were very innovative, because they understood the situation better than we did. That's the reason. But when you talk about Cua Viet and whether we captured a lot of prisoners or not, I just don't know anything about that. The truth is, I just don't know about that.

I: But I remember that during the period following the signing of the Paris Agreement, the area where the fighting quieted down the most was the Quang Tri area. Along the front lines there, between the South Vietnamese Marines on one side and North Vietnamese units on the other, the Marines seemed as if they did not want to fight anymore. They just held their positions and did not try to push forward into your area. So Enemy Proselyting must have had a special plan aimed at that unit, right?

LDM: Do you remember at that time, Lam [Hoàng Xuân Lãm] was ...¹⁴

¹³ The battle of Cua Viet involved a combined South Vietnamese and armored task force that tried to gain a foothold at the Cua Viet harbor just as the 28 January 1973 ceasefire was about to take effect. The South Vietnamese forces were pushed back by North Vietnamese forces with considerable losses on both sides. The history of the North Vietnamese 304th Division (*Sư Đoàn 304*, People's Army Publishing House, Hanoi, 1990, page 221) states that the division's 24th Regiment alone captured 83 South Vietnamese prisoners of war during this battle.

I: No, Hoang Xuan Lam was...

LDM: No, not Lam...

I: It was Truong [Ngô Quang Trường].¹⁵

LDM: Yes, Truong was at Da Nang; he was the commander of I Corps, but up to the north, from Hue northward, it was Lam. I remember Lam. I read in the newspapers and heard on Radio Saigon statements made by Lam that indicated that he had lost his [fighting] spirit.

I: That was in 1972.

LDM: In 1972, but the same thing happened after the Agreement was signed. So I tell you: in the spring of 1975, after the loss of the Central Highlands, I Corps suddenly was shaken to its core, do you remember? I recall that General Truong issued a statement vowing that they would defend Da Nang to the death [tử thủ]. At that time we thought, “What kind of ‘defense to the death’ is he talking about?” When we heard that word, we decided we needed to study this very carefully in order to be able to come up with the correct slogans to use to appeal to the enemy soldiers. But then, in the end, as soon as our attack started, Truong ran away! And Toan [Nguyễn Văn Toàn] in II Corps also ran away...¹⁶

I: It was Phu [Phạm Văn Phú] ...¹⁷

¹⁴ South Vietnamese Lt. General Hoang Xuan Lam commanded South Vietnamese military forces in I Corps 1968 to May 1972, when he was relieved of command following the defeat of South Vietnamese forces in Quang Tri province during the 1972 communist Easter Offensive.

¹⁵ South Vietnamese Lt. General Ngo Quang Truong took over command of South Vietnamese military forces in I Corps from General Hoang Xuan Lam in May 1972 and held that command until the collapse of South Vietnam in 1975.

¹⁶ South Vietnamese Lt. General Nguyen Van Toan commanded II Corps 1972-1974, when he was relieved for corruption. General Toan was appointed commander of III Corps in January 1975 and held that position until South Vietnam fell on 30 April 1975.

¹⁷ South Vietnamese Major General Pham Van Phu took over II Corps in 1974 when General Toan was relieved and held that position until the North Vietnamese overran all of II Corps at the end of March 1975.

LDM: No, Phu came in to replace Toan after Toan ran away.¹⁸

I: At the time of the evacuation in 1975, I was flown by helicopter out to the 7th Fleet, and when I got out there I found that several of the generals who had proclaimed that they would fight to the death, people like Nguyen Cao Ky, and Toan, etc. – they were already aboard the ship (LDM laughs). They got there before I did. That made me a little angry (both laugh).

LDM: I remember that when Phu left, Nghi [Nguyễn Vĩnh Nghi]¹⁹ from IV Corps arrived to take his place.

I: Nghi went up to Phan Rang.

LDM: Nghi went up there to take over III Corps, and later Nghi was captured. I remember that at that time we captured several people. There was Nghi, Sang...

I: Pham Ngoc Sang [Phạm Ngọc Sang].²⁰

LDM: And the guy from 23rd Division, the name was Cam [Cẩm] or something like that.²¹

I: Cam?

LDM: They were all captured at Phan Rang.

I: There was also an American – an American advisor.

LDM: I don't know about any American advisor.

He abandoned his post and was placed under house arrest by President Nguyen Van Thieu. General Phu committed suicide when North Vietnamese forces entered Saigon on 30 April 1975.

¹⁸ LDM's memory is faulty on the details of these events.

¹⁹ South Vietnamese Lt. General Nguyen Vinh Nghi had been IV Corps Commander up to mid-1974, when he was relieved in command. In early April General Nghi was sent forward to Phan Rang to command the III Corps Forward Headquarters there. He was captured 16 April 1975 when Phan Rang was overrun by North Vietnamese forces.

²⁰ South Vietnamese Air Force Brigadier General Pham Ngoc Sang commanded the 6th Air Division and was captured at Phan Rang on 16 April 1975 when Phan Rang was overrun.

²¹ LDM was apparently thinking of South Vietnamese Brigadier General Tran Van Cam [Trần Văn Cẩm], the Deputy II Corps Commander, who was captured 1 April 1975 at Tuy Hoa when North Vietnamese forces captured that city.

I: He was released about six months later.

LDM: At that time Hue had already been liberated.

I: When you were performing your enemy proselyting duties, besides reading newspapers and books, and talking with sky pirates and that kind of people, did you have any other sources of information to help the people in the Enemy Proselyting Department do their jobs better? For instance, in that line of work people also often receive intelligence reports from people like Pham Xuan An [Phạm Xuân Ân].²² Books written later, after the war, have said that An provided very clear and accurate analyses of the status of the morale and the strategy of the former regime. Were you guys allowed to read those reports?

LDM: No, because we were just a small component, and our primary mission was to come up with ways to appeal to and to proselytize enemy soldiers. So we got only the spirit of, the essence of, An's reports, and we were not allowed to read them or analyze them directly. We were not given any concrete details.

I: Yes, that is a principle of this kind of work. It must be kept absolutely, totally secret.

LDM: For instance, someone told me this: "This sentence of yours is not accurate." I asked, "What part of it is not accurate?" He said, "It is that you do not understand the puppets' situation." So we had to go back and study it. That was all.

I: So that is what your superior told you?

LDM: Yes. So we had to go back and redo it.

I: Often one's superiors will have read something...

²² Pham Xuan An was a famous communist spy who worked as a journalist for *Time* magazine. See Larry Berman, "*Perfect Spy*," Smithsonian Books, Washington D.C., 2007.

LDM: that's right. So at that time I had to go back and do more research and then submit another report, saying, "This is the situation." For example, after the attack on Phuoc Long – because Phuoc Long was the first place that we liberated, in January 1975. At that time we studied the situation very intensely – we studied the situation of the puppets at that time. And at that time we really did consider the question of whether or not the U.S. would intervene once again, because at that time a lot of the puppet generals were making a lot of noise and complaints. And [President Nguyen Van] Thieu said, "If we aren't careful, they're going to abandon us." Do you remember that? It was in 1975 – January 1975. Not later on. So we heard that kind of thing – the stuff in the press...

I: At that time the Saigon press was under tremendous restrictions, because the Thieu regime had imposed very strict censorship. Many newspapers were completely banned from publication, or if they were allowed to publish, there would be big blank spaces on the pages where the stories had been cut out...

LDM: Yes, that happened to *Dien Tin* newspaper many times (laughs).

I: And by that time *Tin Sang* newspaper had already been closed down.

LDM: Yes, *Tin Sang* was gone.

I: And even newspaper's like Tran Van Don's *Cong Luan* [Công Luận] were also censored, and it even happened to *Chinh Luan* [Chính Luận] newspaper.

LDM: (After long pause) I remember the name now – Nguyen Vinh Nghi [General Nguyễn Vĩnh Nghi].

I: Nguyen Vinh Nghi, that's right.

LDM: He had previously been assigned to IV Corps, and then later he was assigned to III Corps.

I: Yes. He was only up in II Corps for one or two weeks before...

LDM: Yes. As for Phu [General Phạm Văn Phú], he moved from III Corps up to replace Toan [General Nguyễn Văn Toàn] in II Corps.

I: Did you have a chance to meet any of these guys?

LDM: I met Nghi once. I asked him, and he said, "I lost!" (laughs).

I: Was that before Saigon was liberated, or afterward?

LDM: It was before. At that time we were preparing to attack Saigon. At that time I was accompanying our troop column, and I met him [Nghi] in Phan Rang. I asked him, and he said, "We're beaten!" I asked him, "Where is [General] Toan? Did he run away, or is he dead?" He said, "How do you know about this?" I said, "I read the newspapers." I asked about Truong [General Ngô Quang Trưởng], because no information had been released about him fleeing. Some newspapers said that he had run away, and some said he was hiding out somewhere. No one knew.

I: At that time Truong was under house arrest at Tan Son Nhat.

LDM: And at that time there was also a question about Cao Van Vien [General Cao Văn Viên], the Commander of the Joint General Staff. People said, "Vien has already fled." I asked Nghi, "Has Vien fled yet?" He answered, "I have no idea." I asked him, "How can you guys fight with your organization in such a mess?" He said, "Just take a look outside." And I also met with a brigadier general who had formerly been a pilot, ah, Sang was his name, he had formerly been [President Ngo Dinh] Diem's personal pilot.

I: Pham Ngoc Sang.

LDM: Sang said, "I never dreamed that anything like this might happen."

I: The generals in Saigon were shocked and stunned. They could not understand what was happening. It was as if they were standing on a hill and diving off headfirst.

LDM: I asked Nghi this question: “If you want to reduce the amount of blood that will be shed and prevent anything else from happening, tell me how we should make our appeal to the puppet soldiers and officers.” He said, “What’s the point of putting out appeals? The army has already fallen apart.”

I: So at that time you were accompanying the troop column?

LDM: I was following in the rear.

I: At that time was there a cell of you guys accompanying the column, or was it just you?

LDM: It was a cell, just two or three of us. They told us to accompany the troops and to send reports back. Because at that time there was another thing that we were concerned about - We were wondering how we would be able to print up our leaflets. That was going to be a problem. And loudspeakers and radios was a problem. So we had to think about these things. So at that time we told our people to concentrate their efforts on using hand-held bullhorns, and to tell puppet soldiers who surrendered to them, “Just go back home and spread the word to your buddies.”

I: What day did you depart? Was it when Hue fell?

LDM: No, I went down there for ten days and then received an order telling me to come back home. I tell you – on 30 April, I don’t know if it was a premonition or what, but I turned on Saigon Radio and listened to it constantly. At that time I had a Chinese-made radio to listen to Saigon Radio.

I: By that time you had already arrived back in Hanoi?

LDM: Yes, I was back here already. I heard the day's first news broadcast on Radio Saigon. [President Duong Van] Minh had invited the Provisional Revolutionary government of South Vietnam and the South Vietnamese Liberation Army to come in so that he could turn over the reins of government. And there was also an order issued to all their troops to stay in place and wait to turn over things to the Liberation Army. So I immediately reported this to my superiors. And I'll tell you the truth, what they said was, "What is it that they have left to turn over to us? Nothing." My superiors just told me to continue monitoring the radio. We were just monitoring the information on the public, overt radio broadcasts, not the other kind...

I: The other transmitters...

LDM: Then at 12:00 I heard a voice say, "I, President Duong Van Minh of the Republic of Vietnam hereby announce our unconditional surrender," etc. That was at exactly 12:00 noon on 30 April 1975. Do you know how we felt at that time? We were extremely happy. I, ah, my family was living about 15 kilometers away.

I: You had started a family by that time?

LDM: Yes, by that time I had two children. My youngest was just over one year old.

I: So you got married rather late.

LDM: Yes. I didn't get married until 1971.

I: Not until 1971?

LDM: In 1971 I was 36 or 37 years old. The reason I hadn't gotten married yet was that I still hoped that I would be sent to "B" [South Vietnam]. At that time, I don't know why, but young men all really wanted to go to "B," and if you weren't allowed to go to "B," you were not considered to be truly a young man.

I: But you had been able to go to “B” a few times, even though you hadn’t gone there for long.

LDM: No. To go to “B” meant that you had to belong to “B,” you had to be assigned to “B.” Going to “B” didn’t just mean visiting “B.”

I: So going to “B” for a short trip didn’t count?

LDM: No. So at 1:00 that afternoon an order was received saying that no one was allowed to leave their place of work. Then at 2:00 my superior said that we would loosen up the duty watch schedule and reduce the staffing to only 50%, but we had to be back at the office by 7:00 the next morning, to change over and whatever. That day I was so happy. They told me, “Today you can go home.” (both laugh)

I: Return home to ...

LDM: Return home to my wife.

I: ...to your family.

LDM: I will tell you: At 4:00 I left to go home. But they told me this: “At 5:00 P.M. the Voice of Vietnam Radio will announce the news, and there will be fireworks.” Oh, I was so happy. I didn’t go home. Instead I took my bicycle and rode all around Hanoi, because I wanted to do everything I could to make sure that at 5:00 I would still be in Hanoi. Then at exactly 5:00 I heard the theme music, “Kill the Fascists,” signaling the beginning of the Voice of Vietnam news broadcast. Everyone came out into the streets, and I stopped my bicycle to listen. There was a sentence read that I have always remembered: “Compatriots, you are invited to listen to a special Victory announcement.” And then they gave the news that we had won. And this was followed by the Pham Tuyen song, “If Only Uncle Ho Was Still Here With Us On This Happy Day of Great

Victory.” Oh, before that I should tell you that at 4:00, when I left work, I went to visit my father. He was still alive and he lived only about one kilometer from here.

I: Really? At that time your father was still alive?

LDM: Yes, my father was still alive. So I went to his house and I told him, “Father, we have won.” He said, “What do you mean? What kind of victory?” I said, “They have been completely defeated. We are now in control down there.” He sat down and he cried. He told me, “I have been waiting for this news for so long.” Then he said, “So, have they given you permission to go home?” I said, “My unit has granted me leave to spend the night at home.” He searched through his cabinet – I don’t know who gave it to him, but he gave me a package of [unclear word] and said, “Take this home for your children.” Because at that time my wife was still living 15 kilometers away. She was still in the evacuation area.

I: The evacuation was still in effect?

LDM: Yes. Most people had returned to the city, but a number of people were still living in the evacuation area.

I: Were they still afraid that the U.S. might resume the bombing?

LDM: I don’t know, but there were still a number of components and agencies that had not yet moved back here to the city. So my wife stayed out there to continue to work. Anyhow, I told my father, “Well, I’m going to go out and see what is going on.” And I will tell you that at 5:00, when the news was announced, people screamed with joy. Then I pedaled my bicycle 15 kilometers to get home. I looked at my watch – it took an hour. When I got home I asked my wife, “Did you hear the news?” She answered, “Your two

children are laying in bed over there.” My kids were sick. So that was the end of that. But I tell you that the victory was glorious and it was stunning.

I: Everyone was stunned, even us. By that time I was aboard a warship out at sea. Our only source of news was from listening to Radio Saigon. Now, I would like to return to one issue. During the 1972 period...

LDM: 1972, meaning after the Paris Agreement was signed?

I: No. Before the agreement. After Kissinger negotiated with Le Duc Tho...

LDM: Ah, 1972. You're right. The Paris Agreement was in January 1973.

I: Yes. After Kissinger reached an agreement with Le Duc Tho, he then went to Saigon to talk to [President Nguyen Van] Thieu about signing the agreement. And there was a conflict between the two sides, and the two sides could not reach an agreement and Thieu refused to sign the agreement for three months. During that period, what was the Enemy Proselyting Department's assessment of this situation, and did you believe you could exploit this conflict?

I: It was like this: All of us got our information from the radio and from the newspapers. So we knew about this information. We sat down together, just those of us in our office, to discuss it. We said, “If the big shots have...” ah, we considered this to be a contradiction [disagreement]. We did not consider it to be a conflict. Because there were two viewpoints. So we said, “If the big shots have this kind of contradiction [disagreement], this presents an opportunity for us.” At this time we were just sitting and talking amongst ourselves, because at that time my job was just to make recommendations about what kinds of appeals we should make toward enemy personnel. But the decision was in the hands of our superiors. At that time we were very happy, but

we didn't know what we should do. I'll tell you the truth; at that time I said, "We need to find out exactly what the situation is." At that time we did not even have TVs. So all we could do was to listen to Radio Saigon, and read the newspapers, and to tell the truth, at that time we got very little from the newspapers, because this was happening so fast. So through this, and by listening to other radio stations – ah, I was allowed to listen to the BBC.

I: The BBC had some pretty good reports.

LDM: I thought about this, and I asked a number of our guys who had been involved in enemy proselyting during the war against the French. I asked them, "After the battle of Dien Bien Phu, what did we do?" They answered, "Oh, after that we were going through the enemy like a knife through hot butter [like slicing bamboo], so we just waited to see what would happen." So I will tell you the truth, from my standpoint, I could not think of anything to do. But after that, we got an order to monitor the situation very closely. And then suddenly the Paris Agreement was signed, and the agreement contained a sentence that said that the [American] sky pirates must be informed of the agreement not later than 30 days after the agreement was signed. Isn't that right?

I: Yes.

LDM: So at that time I just supervised and pushed our people to get the job done. We had to ask for a copy of the agreement in English – the complete text. Then we printed it up and we took it down to them [the prisoners] to let them read it.

I: Now, you were in Hanoi during the period of the B-52 bombing raids.

LDM: Yes.

I: So you have some memories during that period, so I would like you to tell us about this. What was the feeling in Hanoi at that time? What things happened to you personally, or to your family? Did anyone flee? Ah, at that time your family had already evacuated from the city, right?

LDM: At that time my family was living 15 kilometers from here. I was doing my job, and I didn't go outside because I had to sit at my desk the whole day to follow the situation. I sat there listening, and reading documents that were brought to me so that I could follow what was going on.

I: And you listened to the radio, too, right?

LDM: Yes, I also listened to the radio. So I learned that on 18 December the U.S. would launch B-52 bombing attacks. We knew this; this was no surprise.

I: You knew ahead of time?

LDM: Yes. We read the newspapers, and this was reported. So I knew. All I could do was to make preparations, to protect our documents and other things, and they passed on information, one step at a time. Then that night, at 8:00 – ah, about ten minutes before that Radio Hanoi broadcast, ah, we had a good system in that before a bombing raid, when enemy aircraft penetrated the Hanoi area, a warning was always issued. So the radio reported, “Enemy aircraft are X kilometers from the city. Citizens are requested to go to their air raid shelters.” Then at exactly 8:00 the bombs began falling. The first bombing attack was against Kinh No, up at Dong Anh. Everything shook a lot. And then it happened over here...

I: At that time you had taken cover in an air raid shelter, right?

LDM: No. We stayed there, sitting at our desks. We saw flashes of light from the explosions. But we stayed sitting at our desks. This was because we had tremendous confidence in our superiors. If they told us to run, we would run; if they told us to go down into the bunker, we'd go down into the bunker. I'm telling you the truth. We sat there calmly at our desks. This was the attack at 8:00. There was another attack at midnight, and yet another one just before dawn – a total of three attacks. And I don't remember what day it was, but one day we heard a report that a B-52 had crashed.

I: That was the first day, wasn't it?

LDM: I don't remember the date, but I informed my commander of this report, and I asked him, "Let me sneak out of here and go see it" (both laugh). He said, "That's your own business. Wait until your workday is over." And when work was done that day I went out to the place in the Ngoc Ha area [Ba Dinh district of Hanoi] where the aircraft wreckage was located. So I knew all about this. Now, at that time I met a journalist. He said, and I overheard his comment, because he was using an interpreter. He asked, "Is this really true?"

I: Was this an American journalist?

LDM: I didn't pay attention. I only know that he was a journalist.

I: A foreign journalist?

LDM: Yes, a foreign journalist. I asked him, "Who are you?" He replied, "A journalist." I asked this guy, he didn't know me. I was curious, so I listened to his interpreter. And I noted that they had suspicions that this was not really a B-52.

I: Really?

LDM: Yes. And there is another thing I want to tell you. I don't remember if it was the 20th [of December, 1972], or just what day it was, but late one afternoon, just before dark, a press conference was held to present the B-52 sky pirates to the press. This press conference was held at what used to be called the International Press Club; now it is called the International Convention Center or something – it's right here on Hung Vuong Street. I want to tell you this. I was surprised, and when I went back to the office I told the others, "They still don't believe that we scored this victory." When the sky pirates were being taken out of the hall and loaded aboard a truck to take them away, a number of the journalists chased after them and shouted a question: "Are you guys really B-52 crewmen?" (laughs).

I: This was because never before had you ever been able to hit a B-52.

LDM: Yes. People viewed it [the B-52] as if it was something sacred, almost god-like. So the journalists asked that. And I was right there when they asked the question.

I: So that battle had a tremendous impact on morale in North Vietnam, isn't that right?

LDM: Yes.

I: Being able to shoot down a B-52...

LDM: So I tell you, at that time that's what people thought. So this made me very proud, because I'll tell you – at that time I didn't really know what a B-52 was. I had never actually seen one. I had only seen photographs in the newspapers, and out of curiosity I looked up its characteristics, dimensions, and capabilities.

I: But you probably know that in the U.S. there are a number of people who maintain that the B-52 bombing campaign was an American victory – not a Vietnamese victory. And they say that it was only because of the B-52 attacks that North Vietnam finally agreed to

sign the Paris Agreement. So what is your answer to these statements? The people who believe that – on what points are they mistaken?

LDM: I have read those reports. I just laughed at this idea, but, ah, my nation has a saying: “Only when you lie down under the blanket will you find out whether there are bed-bugs.” I thought about this and I talked about it to several of the other guys who worked with me. I said, “Truly, too many things have been hidden from them. Too many things have been covered up. They suffered such a heavy loss and yet don’t even realize it.” So I thought about this, and I also thought that we must figure out a way to convince our leaders that just because we won a victory didn’t mean that they would believe we had won. We had to continue to work to make people see the truth. So I tell you – such a massive cover-up makes things really difficult. I thought they had made the B-52 into something magical, mystical – no missile could touch it, and it could carry two tons of bombs [sic] in a single bomb-load. I had already seen the effects of B-52 carpet-bombing on the battlefield. It was frightening. I saw it down in Vinh Linh.

I: Where?

LDM: In Vinh Linh.²³ I saw it myself in Vinh Linh. I said to myself, “Truly, anyone who comes down here has to be afraid.” But it is strange – my nation, my people, saw this thing [the B-52], but they also knew that, first, it wasn’t so terrible. And it was true – it wasn’t so terrible. Second, it also had a weakness. In victory you realize where the enemy’s weaknesses are located. So that was it. So through this I came up with a

²³ Vinh Linh was the Vinh Linh Special Zone, which was a military region comprising the southernmost part of the North Vietnamese panhandle, just north of the De-Militarized Zone.

thought about how to do my own job. So, after the American carpet-bombing of the Kham Thien area, I went out there to see it for myself. It was tragic.²⁴

I: A lot of people died, right?

LDM: Yes [I says the tape is running out and stops the tape at this point]

²⁴ The Kham Thien residential area in Hanoi was hit by a string of B-52 bombs on the night of 26 December 1972. Around 250 people died in this attack.

**Oral History Interview of Luu Dinh Mien [Luu Đình Miện]
DVD 18
13 June 2007, Hanoi,**

LDM – Luu Dinh Mien

I – Interviewer Merle Pribbenow

LDM: After the American carpet-bombing of Kham Thien, I went out to see it for myself. Alongside the pain and grief, I must also say there was an atmosphere of great anger and hatred. And as I said to you, the U.S. had said that they were not attacking residential areas. The people said, “So did they think this was a military base? It was the Kham Thien Marketplace!” That is what people said to me. When people saw me standing there wearing a military uniform, they called to me: “Soldier! Soldier! What do you think about this? You don’t think we’re supposed to surrender to them, do you? Look at me! My children are dead! My house is destroyed! What do you think we should do?” The atmosphere was very heated. So I tell you – our guys who were responsible for handling the prisoners of war were very afraid when prisoners were captured and they were bringing the prisoners in. They were afraid because the people were so angry. People knew where the prisoners were being kept. They would assemble outside, waiting. They said, “Let me at them! Let me hit them, let me beat them to relieve some of my anger!” But our men stopped them. We wouldn’t let the people attack the prisoners. So I will tell you this – at that time I felt a great deal of pain, because these were my own countrymen, my own flesh and blood, who had been killed. You see? I lost two older brothers in the war against the French colonialists. And my mother – when we brought her back to Hanoi [in early 1955], ah, my older brother had been killed in Hanoi. And my family, my distant relatives actually, had learned of his

death, and somehow they had managed to have the body turned over to them and they had buried him. But do you know what? My mother went to visit his grave, and she cried. But she was very angry and filled with hatred. I found it strange – She cried and sobbed, “My child! My child!” But she was also filled with rage. She said to me, “I want you to think about this. You must do something to take revenge for the death of your older brother.” That’s how it was. She was a mother, a woman – and my mother was very thin, a tiny woman, very small and thin. But that is what she said. So perhaps this nation already had a tradition of this. We only wanted to defend our country; we only wanted to defend our way of life. Our people could not endure allowing any power to interfere with and destroy our way of life. That’s what I think. I always had a lot of work to do, and the work would sweep away these thoughts, but when we had time we would sit down and talk to each other, and we would recount these stories to one another. If you had been there on Kham Thien Street, you would have known what I am talking about. All the way from the far end of Kham Thien Street, right where it met Hang Bot Street, which is now called Ton Duc Thang Street, and stretching all the way to the “barrier” at Le Duan Street – you had to see it. If you go down Ton Duc Thang Street, it is on your right. You would have seen all the houses destroyed, left in rubble. And we had no equipment back then. Many families were digging through the rubble with their bare hands, brick by brick, trying to find their loved ones. And whenever anyone heard even the faintest cry for help, everyone was overjoyed and people rushed in from everywhere to save the survivor. And you don’t know – If you had gone to the Bach Mai Hospital, you would have seen.²⁵

I: I heard about it.

²⁵ Bach Mai Hospital was hit by B-52 bombs on the night of 21-22 December 1972.

LDM: The Americans said they weren't attacking hospitals and schools! I also visited that place. I found a powerful atmosphere of anger and hatred there. Later on I heard, and I don't know if it's true or not, I heard that Kissinger visited Vietnam one time, after the peace agreement was signed. And he went there to see the damage, isn't that right?

I: I believe that was in February 1973.

LDM: I recall that Kissinger went down there to see it, right?

I: Yes.

LDM: I don't remember if anyone briefed us on this or not, but I wonder what Advisor Kissinger thought about this incident.

I: I don't know about Kissinger. There is one thing: In the U.S. they say that this was a bombing error. Kham Thien was not supposed to be the area to be bombed. They were supposed to hit another location, but because of some error inside the aircraft, or maybe because the aircraft was trying to evade your missiles, that is why the bombs were dropped in the wrong place. On your side, in Hanoi, did you think that they intentionally bombed that location?

LDM: Do you think that it was unintentional?

I: As I understand it, it was a bombing mistake. The bombs were supposed to hit a location farther from the city. But I have to admit this: The U.S. knew that in war, when we were bombing, that naturally there would be destruction and losses. In English we say – ah, I mean losses among the civilian population – Americans call this, in English, “collateral damage.” This means damage that is not intended but that is inevitably going to happen. They know it is going to happen.

LDM: I do not agree with you on that point. I tell you, if you make a bombing error, it is only going to involve one or two aircraft. But this was an entire area, a long stretch of city blocks that was hit. A little later, after we are finished here, you go out there and see just how many meters the area that was bombed covers. Even the sky pirates said, ah, I asked our people. I asked why the bombs did not cross the Kham Thien “barrier.” They had calculated this – they had planned it. In front of this area was a lake. This is what we now call Unification Park. Have you been there?

I: Yes.

LDM: That was the limit, the aiming point. They had to drop a certain distance from this lake. They were not allowed to go past it. That means that this was planned, right? How could this be a mistake? If it was a mistake, it was a mistake made by the big shots, the men in charge. This was intentional. The mistake they made was that they did not anticipate the reaction this would cause among the Vietnamese people and among international public opinion, among the peace-loving peoples of the world. Isn't that right? So when you say it was a mistake, I cannot agree with you on that point. Secondly, what was the other point? That this was not the intent? If that is what you truly think, that goes too far. Excuse me for saying this...

I: Yes.

LDM: If one has a conscience, one cannot say that this was a mistake. You had big maps; the U.S. was very good at this. How could this happen? You were very accurate – you hit what you aimed at. I do not agree with you on this point.

I: You probably don't know this, but back then we had to use old French maps, and often even the American pilots would complain, "This map says that there is this thing and that thing in this area, but when we fly out there, we find nothing at all" (laughs).

LDM: Not, that's not...

I: Many times in war there are things...

LDM: OK, that's enough. We can talk about something else.

I: When you heard that the U.S. was going to stop the bombing and that the U.S. would return to the conference table, what was the feeling in Hanoi, and in your office. Did you think that you had won, or what? Or perhaps you didn't know what the eventual outcome would be?

LDM: I cannot speak for my agency, for my office, but as for myself personally, when I heard that the Paris conference would be started up again, I thought that this would be the end, because I always thought that if they used B-52s to bomb Hanoi, that would be the final act, and that this would lead directly to an end to the war. I won't say that it was the death-rattle, but I thought that sooner or later, the end was inevitable. But I did not have any idea how long it would take. I tell you the truth – when I saw that they were using B-52s, I said to myself, "This is a sign." So you should pay attention to this. Recently our newspapers wrote that our Uncle Ho told Phung The Tai [Phụng Thế Tài]²⁶ and our other military leaders that the bombing of Hanoi was inevitable. He said this five or six years before the event, not just a couple of months. Uncle Ho said this before he passed away, and he passed away in 1969. We must also understand this concept – if the U.S. attacked Hanoi, this meant that the U.S. was being forced to bring the war to an end. Therefore I will tell you that at that time I felt very happy and excited, but as for how long it would

²⁶ In 1969 General Phung The Tai was the Commander of North Vietnam's Air Defense Command.

take, that is truly something that none of us could have anticipated. I tell you, in January 1975, I mean on 30 April 1975, this was such a great and glorious victory – who could have ever predicted it? I was so happy on 30 April 1975...

I: I have heard many other people say the same thing. No one could have foreseen that, after waiting for so many years, that day had finally arrived.

LDM: Is that it?

I: I think this is enough. I want to thank you very much for giving us your valuable time.

[Both exchange small-talk about grandchildren, LDM asks that if anything is written based on this interview that a copy of the article be sent to him, just for his information]

I: Oh, there is one thing I forgot: In 1975, what was your rank? Major? Senior Captain?

LDM: I think I was a major, but I really don't remember.

I: Major?

LDM: Yes, but I really don't remember. Oh, wait a minute. Now I remember. I was a senior captain, not a major.

I: When you were sent down to South Vietnam in 1975 to accompany the advancing troop column, did you travel by vehicle or by air? I have heard that a number of your people were sent down by air.

LDM: I traveled primarily by vehicle.

I: By vehicle. Not by train?

LDM: If one traveled by train, one could only go as far as Vinh, and not past that point.

We traveled in stages, one leg at a time. We had a number of commo-liaison stations.

Wherever I went, I would stop at one of those stations and wait for the next leg. If it was a high-priority mission, they would arrange to send us on ahead quickly.

I: On that trip you must have been very happy.

LDM (laughing): On one of my trips I was away from home for six months. Most that time was spent traveling. Not much of the trip was spent actually doing work.

I: You traveled all on foot, right?

LDM: I went on foot (laughs). OK, that's it, then.

[LDM and I say goodbye to one another]