

Oral History Interview of Retired Foreign Ministry Cadre Luu Doan Huynh
[Luu Đoàn Huynh]
DVD 05
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I – Interviewer Merle Pribbenow
LDH – Luu Doan Huynh

I [In English]: Today is June the 6th, 2007, and this interview is of a veteran Foreign Ministry cadre named Luu Doan Huynh.

I [Switching to Vietnamese]: Now, I have an American procedure we have to do first. I need to ask your permission to use this tape as a documentary at USC, and perhaps other places in the future, for people to use for research and study. Do you give your permission?

LDH nods affirmatively.

I: Yes. Now, your name is Luu Đoàn Huynh?

LDH: Luu Đoàn Huynh – no falling tone. Because I was the oldest child in my family, so my name is Huynh, meaning “older brother”; “elder brother” [in English].

I: I see, like in the word “huynh đệ” [meaning “fraternal, brotherly”].

LDH: I had a younger brother named De [Đệ], but he died in the war.

I: What year were you born, and where were you born?

LDH: 01 August 1929. I was born in Nong Het district, Xieng Khoang province. Nong Het district, Xieng Khoang province.

I: That is in Laos, correct?

LDH: It is in Laos.

I: So your family went to Laos to make their living there, right?

LDH: My family had to move to Laos, because my father's oldest brother was a gambler, and he sold all our farmland. So our land was taken. All we had left was two "sào" of land – one "sao" is 360 square meters. The family kept the two sao of land to worship our ancestors and gave the land to the youngest son to plant crops and maintain the ancestral altar. And the three older brothers then walked from Vinh to Xieng Khoang. There was a road called "Route Colonial 7," French Route 7. They walked there to find work. The two older brothers were tailors, but my father did a number of different jobs. He worked as a clerk recording the names of Lao civilian laborers mobilized to work building roads; they had to work for 15 days and then they could go home. So he worked "construction" for the French, and then he worked for the Post Office, and finally he became a soldier for the French. He studied French language to learn it better, and then he took a test and passed, and he became a warrant officer [thượng sĩ], a "senior non-commissioned officer." His unit was called "Gard Indochinois," it was like "military police." It was not the regular army. They had one company in Xieng Khoang province, and the company had about 120 men. The man in overall charge of was called "Inspector of the Indochinese Guard," and my father was second in command. So he had to do all these other jobs. When I was a boy, my father gradually worked his way up through the ranks to this position. From the time I first started school until I was eleven and a half years old, I went to school in Xieng Khoang.

I: In Xieng Khoang were your studies taught in Vietnamese or in French?

LDH: Oh, the school was in French. The first one or two years were in Vietnamese, but then we had to study French. I studied French. Now, it was a very beautiful city. I still remember it. During the winter it was cold, and when I left water out in a pan, it turned

to ice overnight. Now, in early 1941 the French fought a war against Thailand, and Xieng Khoang was bombed.

I: The Thai bombed it?

LDH: They bombed Xieng Khoang. My mother was very frightened by this, so she took my younger siblings and me to a place about 15 kilometers outside of Xieng Khoang. There was a Vietnamese village there. My maternal grandmother lived there. So I stayed there and just played. But the principal of the elementary school I attended went to see my father and told him that he had to bring me back to school, because that year I was shortly to take the high school entrance examination. So I only stayed up there for two months. My mother kept me there for two months, and then my father came up, got me, and took me back to go back to school. I still remember that in my school book the teacher wrote, "This child made clear progress at the end of the year." So what does that mean about the first of the year? (laughs). The teacher had to urge us to study hard. The teacher used the following method to get us to study. Xieng Khoang city was very small. It was very rural, very backward. But if you went to Vientiane there were two things that everyone liked. First, there was an ice cream shop. They had all kinds of ice cream. In Xieng Khoang no one even knew what ice cream was. Second, in Vientiane you could go to the movies. I went twice. They had all kinds of films, and they were very good. So the teacher would say, "You have to study hard so you can go there."

I: Were there a lot of Vietnamese living in Vientiane?

LDH: Oh, there were lots of them. The bulk of the population was Vietnamese. There were very few Lao living there. In all of the cities in Laos, most of the residents were Vietnamese. There would only be a small section that was Lao, or a few government

officials who were Lao, and everyone else was Vietnamese. Xieng Khoang had over 3,000 residents, and Vientiane had tens of thousands of residents, and they were all Vietnamese. 100,000 residents, all of them Vietnamese. So at that time I passed the test. I didn't think I would pass because I had been out of school for so long. My father had to take me to Vientiane to take the test for admission to the high school there. It was called the "Pavie" School, "College Pavie."

I: Pavie was the one who built the road?

LDH: No, Pavie was the person who helped the French to seize Laos. He worked as "Counselor" there, and later he was "Minister" in Bangkok. So Pavie was the one who seized Laos for the French, and that is why they named the school after him. Now, when I was about to leave for Vientiane to take the test, my father in Xieng Khoang told me about my horoscope. My father had learned the old Vietnamese characters, the "nho" [chữ nho] characters, and when I was born he wrote down the exact date and time of my birth. He asked someone who was a very good astrologer to read my horoscope at the time I was one, and the reading wasn't completed until I was seven or eight. Anyhow, at this time my father told me two things. He said this is your horoscope. Because you are about to move far away from me, I want to tell you your future. First, you are someone who has talent but not morals. That does not mean that you do not have good moral character, but that your morals will not match those of your superiors, your bosses. So they will repress you and try to control you. So if you work for the government, for the apparatus of the State, you will encounter many problems in life. But if you become a teacher, you will be happy. That's what your horoscope says.

I: So your horoscope said that you should become a teacher.

LDH: If I wanted to be happy. If I went into the bureaucracy, I would be miserable. The second point was about my future wife. He said that my wife would be an orphan; she would have lost both her parents. And I was very upset about this second prediction. I said, "That means I am going to marry a beggar?" But my father said no, not necessarily, but that if I married an orphan I would be happy. He said he just had those two things that he wanted to tell me. So now, when I think back, I see that my father had two special characteristics. First, he was very much a Confucian. He followed the religion of Confucius, because he had studied the old characters, he had received the old mandarin schooling. And second, he believed in astrology. Third, he was very serious, very stern. I remember when I was still in elementary school. We had a lesson to learn in French. The lesson was, [French phrase]. That means, "Our ancestors are the Gauls." Everyone learned that. My father said to me, "No. This means that the Gauls are the ancestors of the French, but your ancestors are Vietnamese. They are the Hung kings." I said, "Really?" And then he explained Vietnamese history to me.

I: At school did they teach Vietnamese history?

LDH: They taught it later, but this is what the lesson was. This was a French lesson. So on the day I had to present this lesson in class, the teacher said, "All right, did you all learn it? Recite it for me. Do you remember it?" All the children recited it, saying, "Our ancestors are the Gauls." And the teacher then asked, "Does anyone have any other ideas?" I raised my hand and said, "No. Our ancestors are the Hung kings; our ancestors are Vietnamese." The teacher gave me ten points [a perfect score] for that lesson. So the teacher was a patriot. The teacher came forward that day and praised me. My father said nothing to the teacher about this, and after the teacher left, I said to my father, "You were

the one who taught me that the Hung kings were our ancestors, so why didn't you say something to the teacher?" My father said, "There are things I can tell you but that I cannot say in public, in the presence of others, because I am afraid that if the French secret police found out, I would get into trouble." This meant that he would not get promoted any higher, because the French secret police were really powerful, really scary. So he said that we have to be careful. So these are three things that I remember about my father. And the fourth thing is that he made me study every night. He would check my homework, the lesson for the day, and then I had to put all my books and papers neatly in my briefcase, close it, and then go to bed. So in the morning all I had to do was to wake up. Because I was a child, and children sleep soundly and don't like to wake up, so they had to do all kinds of things to wake me up.

I: How many younger siblings did you have in your family? How many brothers and sisters?

LDH: My father had two wives. My mother was his first wife, and she had me, three daughters, and one other son, my younger brother. So there were five of us. Later my younger brother died, and one of my younger sisters died, and one sister still lives in Vientiane. She is a citizen of Laos. And one sister got separated from us and lives in Vinh Linh – in Quang Tri. And my father's other wife, his little wife, had three children: two sons and one daughter. She lived in Quang Tri. My parents were "separated." They were divorced. She lived in Quang Tri. All three of her children died. She was a member of the NLF.

I: They must have died during the fighting against the Americans.

LDH: She was wounded and later died. And one brother and my father, ah, my father was killed in a French bombing raid. And the last son was a member of the NLF who fought in Hue in 1968 and was killed there. And my sister was wounded and died. So everyone on that side of my family is dead. But my mother lived until 1986 or 1987, and she died in Vientiane. And my sister helped the Pathet Lao. She did not work for them officially; she worked secretly for the Pathet Lao. And so she is considered to be a Lao citizen, and they awarded her a medal. I have friends in Vientiane, and sometimes after a visit to the U.S., on the way home from Bangkok I stop in Vientiane, stay at my younger sister's house, and visit with my friends.

I: So you still remember how to speak Lao?

LDH: Yes, I can speak Lao, but I do not speak it well, because I always get confused with Lao and Thai. As you know, I worked in Bangkok for almost ten years.

I: You worked at the Embassy there...

LDH: I worked in two different agencies [organizations]. One was unofficial, because it had not been recognized as a diplomatic mission.

I: What time period was that?

LDH: From 1946 to 1951. And in 1951 Thailand kicked out our representative office, so we all went back to Vietnam. And then in 1978 I was sent there again, but by that time it was a real Embassy, and I served there that time for five years.

I: Now, let's go back to the time you attended high school in Vientiane. Were you in Vientiane all alone or did your entire family move down there?

LDH: No, I was there alone. The Pavie School was set up to teach children there, but its primary purpose was to train future government officials for the French. So whoever

graduated from the Pavie School could go to work as a secretary, a clerk, for the French government. And some students got scholarships to study there, and we lived in a dormitory. So we were all in training to become government officials. At that time we were all considered to be something like “aristocrats.” We all were very well dressed. Now there were two types of students at the school. One type consisted of the students who had scholarships and who lived at the school, like me. If your father was a government official, then you would be allowed to study there – that is, if you passed the test you could study there. Students of this type came from all over the country. And the second type of student consisted of students who lived in the area. During the day they would go to school and in the evening they would go back home to stay with their parents.

I: Now, were the teachers and the principal French or...?

LDH: The principal of the school was French, but the teachers were Vietnamese and Lao. There were a few Lao teachers, but most of the teachers were Vietnamese.

I: And what years did you study there?

LDH: From 1941 to 1945. I was preparing to take the exam for my diploma when the Japanese carried out their coup overthrowing the French government, and after that no more classes were held.

I: Now when the Japanese carried out the coup, your father was probably arrested by the Japanese, right? Because they arrested the army...

LDH: No. The Japanese only arrested Frenchmen. Vietnamese were not arrested. But this is what happened with my father. After the coup my father returned to Vietnam. At that time my father was working in lower [southern] Laos. He had been transferred. So

my father went to Savannakhet, and he then walked back to Vietnam and returned to his native village with his second wife. My mother had stayed in northern Laos and she was not with my father anymore. Now, when I met my father in Savannakhet, ah, because I had gone there with a friend. The father of my friend had been my father's boss. I said to my father, "Can you find a job for me here?" My father asked me, "Do you want to go home to Vietnam with me?" I answered, "No, because you have 'Auntie,' here, your second wife, so I will not go with you, Father." So he went back without me.

I: Now, after he went back to Vietnam, did he join the resistance?

LDH: It was like this. He did not want to join our army. He went back to Quang Tri and worked as a farmer. He would not join the French, and he would not join our side. He just lived as an ordinary civilian. But in the end he was killed anyway. That day he was delivering un-husked rice to the mill in Quang Tri City. It was rice grown by the ethnic minority tribes in Quang Tri. An airplane flew over, and someone exposed their position. The airplane attacked, and he and one of his sons were killed. He died in 1952. It was 1951 or 1952, I'm not sure, but I think it was 1952. By that time I was working in our embassy in Moscow. I wrote a letter to my uncle in Nghe An, and my uncle sent a letter back informing that my father had been killed by a bomb. That's how I found out. I was in Moscow when I learned this. So that was the situation. Now, in Vientiane they treated us like future officials in the French government. We received scholarships and were given preferential treatment. However, there was still a separation, a gap, between us and the French. This was because the French always looked down on Vietnamese and Laotians. They called the Vietnamese [unclear French word], "stupid," they used that word to curse the Vietnamese. So we saw the way that they treated Vietnamese. So that

raised a question in our minds. It made us think. Even though the French treated us quite well, we were still dissatisfied. So the issue was rather complicated. The story about when I was young, for instance – when my father told me to be careful because if the French secret police found out we'd be in big trouble. And the French secret police also sent a person to the school to keep an eye on us students.

I: After the Japanese coup, the school closed down, right?

LDH: Right. The school closed. It closed for several months.

I: After the school closed, what did you do?

LDH: I went down to the south of Laos, to Savannakhet. I had a friend whose father was my father's boss. He studied at the Pavie School and his father was an official. He took me down there and I stayed with his family for a while. He arranged to get work for me, just odd jobs, while I waited to see what would happen and what to do next. Then the August Revolution [in Vietnam] occurred. Now, at that time there were two armies in Xieng Khoang. There was the Lao Issara army and the Patriotic Vietnamese army. And the two armies cooperated with one another, and they were called the Lao-Vietnamese Allied Army [Liên Quân Lao-Việt]. I was recruited by the Vietnamese army.

I: So you became a fighter [chiến sĩ], a private?

LDH: No, not a fighter. I was a courier – a “messenger boy,” because I was just 16 years old. So I was a “messenger boy, “ a courier, and also, because I knew how to type a little, they used me to do some typing, etc.

I: Was the unit you were with the equivalent of a battalion?

LDH: At that time it had only 300 soldiers.

I: So equivalent to a battalion.

LDH: A little more than two companies. The commander of this unit had previously worked for a tin mill in Takhek. His name was Tam Phuong [Tám Phương]. He had been involved in revolutionary activities and so had fled to Thailand. In 1944 the regent of Thailand, named Pridi Phanomyong, organized a Thai guerrilla group to fight the Japanese and to cooperate with the allies. So he allowed the Patriotic Vietnamese Association in Thailand, meaning the Viet Minh, to set up a small war zone, a training camp, and they trained 100 military cadres. This was in 1944-1945. Now, among the Vietnamese military cadres was one man who had been a sergeant for the French and who had fled to Thailand along with a few of his troops to participate in the national salvation movement. The Thai tested this guy in combat in Cambodia, in Battambang. The Thai decided that he had fought well and had been loyal to them, so they made this guy a first lieutenant in the Thai organization. This guy was in charge of military affairs for the Overseas Vietnamese Association. His name was Vu Huu Binh [Vũ Hữu Bình]. Later he went into the diplomatic service and became our Consul General in Rangoon. This is the man who met with Mr. Byroade in late 1965 during the American “peace campaign.” Mr. Byroade handed a letter to Vu Binh, and this is the same Vu Binh who had previously been the chief of military affairs for the Viet Minh organization in Thailand.

I: And he was the commander of your unit?

LDH: No, he was in charge of all our military forces in Laos. The guy in charge of my unit was subordinate to this guy. My commander later went to Vietnam and fought there. He rose to the rank of major general.

I: Did you have any weapons?

LDH: We had more than 100 guns.

I: Where did the guns come from?

LDH: We took them from the French, and from the Japanese; we got them from all over [makes a hand-gesture indicating money, meaning that some were purchased]. We also had British weapons, American weapons, weapons from all over. However, we didn't have very many weapons, and we did not have very much ammunition. Now, in April 1946, after the French signed a preliminary agreement with Vietnam, they massed their forces to destroy all the resistance units in Laos.

I: I see.

LDH: The French massed their forces to destroy the resistance in Laos. They attacked Savannakhet first. The fighting in Savannakhet lasted one week or ten days, and then we had to withdraw our troops into Thailand.

I: You fought the French and then withdrew across....

LDH: Across the Mekong River to Mukhdahan. We withdrew to Mukhdahan province. So during the battle, I had to go up to the front lines to carry out my duties during the fighting, and I was wounded here (pats his right thigh).

I: You were wounded.

LDH: ...in the leg.

I: by...

LDH: ...by a bullet. Just an ordinary bullet. I went to Mukhdahan for medical treatment, and it took six months for me to recover. So there was no problem in crossing to Thailand. I was only 16. Anyhow, then about 15 days later they attacked Takhek, and

they used aircraft to bomb Takhek, because there were a lot of guns there. So a lot of our troops were killed.

I: A lot were killed?

LDH: Oh yes, a lot of our men were killed.

I: So it was lucky that you had already been evacuated to Mukhdahan.

LDH: Yes. If I had not been wounded at Savannakhet and instead had pulled back to Takhek with the others, I would have been killed. And when the boat carrying Prince Souvanavong, who was commanding the Takhek Front, crossed the river, it was strafed by French aircraft, and he almost drowned. He was wounded. And then after Takhek fell, they attacked Vientiane. Vu Huu Binh was at Vientiane, but after a short time Binh had to withdraw across the river into Thailand. So at all three places where we resisted, our troops were forced to withdraw across into Thailand. At that time the Thai government had a very good attitude toward Vietnam.¹

I: Yes, because Pridi was the Prime Minister of Thailand at that time.

LDH: Pridi was not the Prime Minister. He was the “regent.” The Prime Minister was one of Pridi’s boys, Tawin Nawasawadi [spelling?] or something. He was an admiral. So we went to stay in Thailand. We were former soldiers, so although every day we had to work to grow food to eat, we also had military training every day. And around the end of 1946, a number of around 600 men, 500 or 600 men, all well trained and all armed with weapons, some of which had been purchased from Thailand and some that had been donated by Thailand, left to return to Vietnam, to Sa Dec province, to fight the French.

¹ For an account of the battles of Savannakhet, Takhek, and Vientiane, see Major General Le Quoc San [Lê Quốc Sân], “Chi Đội Hải Ngoại IV (Chi Đội Trần Phú)” [Overseas Vietnamese Battalion-Sized Unit IV (The Tran Phu Unit)], Nhà Xuất Bản Tổng Hợp Đồng Tháp [Dong Thap Combined Publishing House], Dong Thap Province, Vietnam, 1989, pp. 31-33.

This unit was called the Overseas Vietnamese Battalion-sized Unit [Chi Đội Hải Ngoại], and one of the commanders of this unit was my old commander from Savannakhet. His name was Le Quoc San [Lê Quốc Sản], the one we called Tam Phuong. He is dead now, of heart problems.

I: He was a major general, right?

LDH: Major general, that's right. He was deputy commander of Military Region 7. This unit went back to fight. And later three other units went back, three big units, battalion-sized.

I: And the troops were overseas Vietnamese from Laos?

LDH: From Thailand. There were 60,000 overseas Vietnamese in Thailand. They went back to fight, three units went to fight in Vietnam. I did not go with them because my wound still had not healed completely. So I stayed behind and worked in Thailand.

After I recovered completely, around the end of 1947 or so, I went back to being a soldier. Now, during the period 1945, 1946, 1947, I had a friend who fought in my unit and who had graduated and received his baccalaureate degree. He liked me very much, and he taught me English from 1945 or so, ah, no, it was actually from 1946 on.

I: When you were in Mukdahan?

LDH: No. In 1946 I was in Savannakhet. I didn't cross over to Mukdahan until around April 1946. So he taught me, and then in 1947 he was killed. He was hit by bullets and he died. Now, in Thailand the overseas Vietnamese honored and respected us, and they helped me. They found a dictionary for me. So even when I went out to fight, I still was able to continue to study. Then in January 1948 Burma became independent. Now, in November 1947 a number of Thai generals overthrew Pridi, and from that point onward

the Thai government did not treat the overseas Vietnamese movement very well. They opposed Vietnam.

I: They restricted overseas Vietnamese...

LDH: Yes, but they didn't implement those measures until 1950, but from this time onward relations with them were not good. Now, in January 1948 Burma proclaimed its independence. Burma invited the Vietnamese government to send a delegation to visit them to participate in the ceremony celebrating Burmese independence. So Vietnam sent Pham Ngoc Thach to attend. In 1947 Pham Ngoc Thanh had met with U.S. officials in Bangkok to discuss a number of issues. Mark Bradley wrote a book about that. So Pham Ngoc Thach went to Rangoon to represent the Vietnamese government at the independence ceremony. At that time the Burmese government told him, "We will always support the Vietnamese revolution." So they did two things. First, they opened their warehouses to give us weapons to fight the French. Second, they sent a delegation to make a "good will mission" to Vietnam to visit the Vietnamese resistance. Now, Vietnam replied to them, "It is very dangerous to go up to the Viet Bac [the Viet Bac secret zone where the Viet Minh Headquarters and Ho Chi Minh were located], because the French have cut off all the routes to that area." You know the Viet Bac, right?

I: Yes.

LDH: They said, "But we could arrange for you to visit Inter-Zone 4." That was the provinces of Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh, our free zone, which we called Inter-Zone 4." And we said, "The man who leads our forces in Inter-Zone 4 is considered a representative of our government, and he will receive you on behalf of our government." So they were happy with that, and they went. But at that time we didn't have anyone

who spoke English well. So our representative office said, “Hey, that guy Huynh has been studying English, maybe we could send him.” And they said, “OK, send him.” So I was assigned to be their “escort officer.”

I: So you went from Thailand...

LDH: Their delegation came to Thailand first, and then when they crossed into Laos my unit met them, and I was assigned to escort them to Nghe An.

I: How many people did they have in their delegation.

LDH: Five, but then they withdrew one member to stay behind to help Vietnam develop a new battlefield in northern Laos, because the northern Laos battlefield bordered on Burma. It was right next to Burma. So that guy went off to help us there, and they sent one person up to the Shan States to make preparations to help us develop the battlefield in upper Laos. If they hadn't sympathized with us, it would have been very difficult up there. So I met them in Paksane, a little south of Vientiane. I greeted the delegation there and then accompanied them all the way to Vietnam.

I: When you escorted the delegation, how many....

LDH: There were four people in the delegation. All were relatively high-ranking. One was the political secretary to the Prime Minister, one had previously served as the mayor of Rangoon, one was secretary to the Ministry of Interior, and two were cadres of the Burmese Socialist Party. They went to Nghe An and then up to Thanh Hoa. And up there they went to a Thai village, in Nong Cong district, the place where the Inter-Zone Committee was based. The person who greeted them there was Ho Tu Mong [spelling?]. Later Ho Tu Mong served as Government Inspector General. He greeted them, and there

was an honor guard and review of troops, and they were greeted as a delegation representing a foreign government should be. They were received very properly.

I: They were the first foreign delegation to visit, weren't they?

LDH: Yes. I would like to tell you something that made a deep impression on me, an impression that has lasted up to this very day. Everyone knows that Vietnam is led by the Communist Party, but after we declared our independence, not a single socialist country helped us. The ones who gave us direct help were, first, Thailand, ...

I: ...and then Burma.

LDH: The first government delegation we sent abroad was sent to Thailand. Mr. Nguyen Duc Quy [Nguyễn Đức Quý] was sent to Thailand in July 1946 as the representative of our government. And after Thailand, it was Burma. And Indonesia also helped us. At that time we had absolutely nothing. China couldn't help us, because they were tied down way out in Manchuria. So that was the situation. In Vietnamese we have a saying: "Relatives who are far away are not as important as next door neighbors" [Anh em xa không bằng láng giềng gần]. Next-door neighbors are very good. So now we must ask whether Mr. Palmerston [spelling?] was right. Henry Temple Palmerston [spelling?], the English Foreign Minister, who said, "In international relations there are no permanent enemies and no permanent friends, only permanent national interests that we must pursue." Ever since the 17th century Vietnam and Thailand have struggled against one another for influence in Laos and Cambodia. Thai troops even invaded Vietnam. But in 1945 and 1946 relations between Thailand and Vietnam were very good, because Thailand hated the French too. So Thailand helped Vietnam until the Thai militarists took over, at which time Thailand began to oppose Vietnam, but then Burma helped

Vietnam. Now, I stayed in Vietnam with the delegation until March, and then we returned to Thailand.

I: That was in March 1948?

LDH: Yes, March 1948. I escorted them back to Bangkok, and they went on to Rangoon. I stayed behind. They told me, "You are to prepare to go to northern Laos." I went up to the Shan States. My job was to help with maintaining contacts. Naturally, we had our commander, but my job was to assist with contacts with the Chief of Customs of the province, or district, of Taichilek, in the Golden Triangle. The Thai border is here, and Burma is here, and Taichilek is here. We would have to cross Taichilek and then on to Laos to prepare to set up a war zone [a base] there. And we had to ask for permission to cross there, so we wouldn't be arrested. Then around June or July I was informed that the weapons that Burma promised to provide to us had arrived. So I immediately informed our leadership of this, and they asked that we sent ten of our people to the Burmese Army base to clean the weapons, pack them in grease, wrap them in cloth, and seal them up. And there was a small river from Laos that flowed down to Taichilek. We brought boats in, and at night we had to carry the weapons down to the river and load them on the boats. There were three or four boats. And I had to go along, and if the Burmese stopped our people I would request their release. We had three or four boats, rowed by Vietnamese personnel.

I: How many guns were there?

LDH: 300 guns.

I: 300 guns; were they all rifles, or...?

LDH: There were rifles, sub-machineguns, Tommy guns, Bren guns. The only thing we didn't get were mortars. There were a lot...

I: Did you receive ammunition?

LDH: We got a lot of ammunition, and lots of hand grenades. So we transported them all away, and then my job was finished. I stayed up the whole night. Our guys did not leave until 3 or 4 in the morning. They transported everything away. I did not go to sleep until 4:00 that morning (laughs).² I stayed there for a month and then got new orders. The orders said that the government delegation had requested that I be assigned to them. The orders said, "You will return to Bangkok to become a member of the [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] government delegation there."

I: And that was when your diplomatic career began.

LDH: Yes, but I didn't know it. In fact, I had been working as a diplomat since January 1948, but I didn't know it.

I: You didn't know?

LDH: I didn't know that I was doing diplomatic work. So in August I received these instructions, and I had to prepare to return. But I didn't have any Thai papers at all. I had no papers at all for use in case they searched me.

I: Was the representative a commercial representative?

LDH: No. He was "Special Envoy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Thailand.

So it was, "representative of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Thailand." His

² For brief mention of the Burmese visit to Inter-Zone 4 and Burma's provision of weapons to the Viet Minh, see Ambassador Nguyen Dinh Bin [Nguyễn Đình Bin] (Senior Editor), "Ngoại Giao Việt Nam 1945-2000" [Vietnamese Diplomacy 1945-2000], National Political Publishing House [Nhà Xuất Bản Chính Trị Quốc Gia], Hanoi, 2002, pp. 106-107.

name was Nguyen Duc Quy [Nguyễn Đức Quy]. So I returned there. Now, Nguyen Duc Quy's organization had a number of different elements in Bangkok.

I: In different places?

LDH: Yes. We had several different places in Bangkok. There was an organization called the Vietnam Information Bureau [Sở Thông Tin] – this was the “Vietnam News Service.” And then there was Huy's actual official delegation. It had an administrative section, an economic section, ah, various different sections. It was the main organization, located next to the information office. And there was a component called the Commercial Office [Phòng Mậu Dịch]. This was the business office, for buying and selling things. In fact, that was where we purchased guns from Thailand and then sent them to Southern Vietnam.

I: They were sent by sea, right?

LDH: Yes, they were shipped by sea routes. I didn't know a lot about that. I was brought in to work in the Information Office. I worked in the Information Office. I would listen to Radio Vietnam, write down the Vietnamese text of the news reports, and then we would put out a Vietnamese-language newsletter for the Vietnamese community. Ah, we set it up and published it in Vietnamese, in English, and in Thai.

I: And then this was disseminated to the Vietnamese community?

LDH: It was printed up using a roneo copying machine, and then we sent it out to the different locations using the regular Thai postal service. We sent it by mail to the various addresses for the Vietnamese community, and by mail to the different foreign delegations [embassies], and to Thai agencies and organizations, also by mail. So there were three editions: an English edition, a Vietnamese edition, and a Thai edition. It was printed up

like a little book. So that's where I worked. I had to listen to the news reports on the radio and then type them up. So during the time I worked there I performed a number of different jobs. I did whatever job they gave me. I never complained. When a letter arrived, I would read it first. I would summarize it and then show it to the Director of the Information Office for him to decide how to respond. And he would give me instructions I would use to write the reply. Second, I had to listen to the news reports on the radio, as I described already. And third, when we had to put out a statement, I would draft it and he would sign it. So I began doing all kinds of things. I had to read the press – newspapers sent to us from France. The delegation sent us newspaper clippings to read. When I read one I was shocked. I read that in 1947 the French Parliament had questioned Prime Minister Ramdier. They asked him, “What is the attitude of the Soviet Union toward the war in Vietnam?” This was in a newspaper cutting from 1947. Ramdier replied, “The Soviet Government is maintaining a very correct attitude toward the war in Vietnam – different from that of one of our other allies – *different from that of one of our other allies!*” I know French. I had studied French for ten years, so I understood this. I was shocked when I read in the report from the delegation in Paris that in early 1947 the U.S. had advised France that it should negotiate with the Viet Minh. I was very surprised. I showed it to my director, but he said, “Oh, this is nothing.” But he didn't explain any further. So I knew that. And then in January 1950, 14 January 1950, I listened to the news on the radio. There was a statement issued by the Vietnamese government, by Chairman Ho, that said that Vietnam was prepared to establish state-to-state relations with any and all countries on the basis of equality. He said that we wished to establish relations with all nations. I wrote that down and presented it to my boss.

And my superiors had me I translate it into English, and print it up. And then Mr. Quy wrote a diplomatic note, I typed it up, and he signed it, and we sent copies of this note to all countries to transmit Uncle Ho's words to them.

I: You sent to the U.S. Embassy as well?

LDH: Yes, to the U.S. Embassy, and to the Soviet Consul in Bangkok also. I was shocked. I said, to establish diplomatic relations, two countries get together, just the two of them, and if they agree, they establish diplomatic relations with each other. Right? So why does Uncle Ho have to issue a statement like this? This is not normal. You see? I thought that this was not normal. But when I asked the Director of the Information Office, and Mr. Quy, about it, no one explained what was going on. No one explained anything.

I: How many people were assigned to the Viet Minh delegation in Thailand?

LDH: As I recall, ah, I worked first in the Information Office, and then in mid-1950 they transferred me over to work in Quy's command office [the headquarters of the DRV representative office]. As I recall, there were a total of 26 or 27 people working there, working in his command organization. But when our people saw that Thailand was beginning to display a negative attitude toward us, we began gradually reducing the number of personnel. I worked in the office. I handled contacts with other foreign embassies, I answered the phones, I was learning on the job. And then something happened that surprised me. Because after we established diplomatic relations with Thailand, the U.S. put pressure on Thailand to establish relations with the Bao Dai government. And the Bao Dai government sent a diplomatic representative to Bangkok.

But the Thai did not kick Mr. Quy out of Thailand. It was not until 1951 that they finally asked Mr. Quy to leave the country.

I: Did everyone have to go back to Vietnam?

LDH: No, they scattered all over the place. Some went to the Lao Front, and some went to the Cambodian front, and some went to Northeastern Thailand to operate among the ethnic Vietnamese community there. I was the only person who was allowed to accompany Quy and his wife back to Vietnam - That is me and the Chef d'Cabinet. So it was Quy, his wife, the delegation's Chef d'Cabinet, and me.

I: At that time you were 21 years old, right?

LDH: Around that. I was 21 or 22 years old.

I: You were still single?

LDH: I wasn't married yet. I was completely single. So I went back to Vietnam. Now, for us to return home, first we had to fly to Rangoon. Then from Rangoon we went by ship to Hong Kong.

I: Oh? You went all the way to Hong Kong?

LDH: Yes. And then from Hong Kong we went by train to Gwangzhou – Canton. And from Canton we traveled by train to Nanning, in Gwangsi province, and then from Gwangsi we traveled by car to the Viet Bac. So it took a while. We left Thailand in June and did not arrive in the Viet Bac war zone until August. So it took us almost two months. So this was the first time I had ever had contact with the Chinese People's Republic. They treated us very well, and at that time that was all we knew about them. But there was one thing. When I arrived at what they called the "hotel," the official guest house of Gwangsi Province, in Nanning, they gave us a number of documents, statements

by various people, including one by Mao Zedong. It was titled, “further discussion on people’s dictatorship” [lại bàn về nhân dân chuyên chính] – [LDH then says in English] “discussing again about people’s democracy” [sic]. This was something Mao wrote and that was issued on 30 June 1947, and it was published in French. I read the article, and I found it very difficult to understand. Why did he say that, “It is absolutely essential that China stand completely on the side of the socialist countries,” that is, on the side of the Soviet Union. “And as for the western countries, the best we can hope for is to normalize relations with them, and that’s all.” I asked, “Why do they have to be so hard, so rigid about this? We can be flexible, after all.” I took that article and I read it and re-read it many times during my trip back home. And after I got back to Vietnam and was assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I kept the article.

I: Did you discuss the article with Binh...?

LDH: You mean Nguyen Duc Quy. No. When we got to Gwangzhou, Nguyen Duc Quy received an order instructing him to proceed immediately to Beijing to meet with Hoang Van Hoan, our Ambassador there, to report to him on the situation.

I: And what about you?

LDH: The chef d’cabinet and I returned to Vietnam. We traveled to Vietnam by car. A number of Lao women accompanied us on this trip. Now, when I got to the Foreign Ministry I showed this article to the guys at the Foreign Ministry. I said, “I find this article very strange.” They didn’t want to read it or analyze it. At that time our knowledge was insufficient to analyze the document. Later I learned that this article had been written to support Liu Shaoqi’s visit to the Soviet Union, because he went there on 30 June. And when Liu Shaoqi went to the Soviet Union, he had a lot of issues to discuss

with them. One of these issues was a suggestion that all socialist countries should establish diplomatic relations with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. So this was very strange, and we knew absolutely nothing about all this, because China never discussed it with our country.

I: And China established diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1949, right?

LDH: No. This was the 14 January statement issued by Chairman Ho. I only learned about all this later. In early January 1950 Uncle Ho left for China to request aid. That was all; that was the entire purpose of the trip. But China said, “If we do not establish diplomatic relations, then it will be difficult to give you any aid. So you should go ahead and establish relations.” This was because, at this time, France was trying to persuade China to establish diplomatic relations with France. Vietnam needed aid, but Chairman Ho did not want to establish diplomatic relations [with China] yet. This was because, as Chairman Ho put it, “If we establish diplomatic relations with the socialist countries right away, then Vietnam will instantly become a point of conflict between the United States, along with the western camp, and the socialist camp. And if that happens, it will be hard for us to maintain our independence.” [LDH then says in English] “The Vietnamese issue will become a dispute, a point of dispute, between the socialist camp and the western camp and we will have great difficulty.” [LDH switches back into Vietnamese]. So he only went to request aid, not to request establishment of diplomatic relations. But the Chinese insisted that we had to establish relations. They said that if we did not, it would be very difficult for them to provide aid to us. So what they were saying was, “If you don’t establish relations with us, we won’t give you any aid.” And Vietnam needed weapons to fight the French. So the people of Vietnam only knew this as a great victory;

they did not know that this was not what Chairman Ho had intended. So I will tell you the truth about this: I worked in the Foreign Ministry until April 1952, at which time I was sent to work at the Vietnamese Embassy in Moscow.

I: Really? But at this time you still did not speak any Russian...

LDH: I did not speak Russian. When I got to Moscow I had to study Russian. I worked in the office. Anyhow, one afternoon in 1953 I asked the Ambassador about this. I said, “Big Brother [Anh Cả]” – the ambassador’s name was Nguyen Lam Bang [Nguyễn Lâm Bằng], but people who liked him called him “Big Brother.” I asked him, “From the diplomatic viewpoint, why did Chairman Ho have to issue a statement like that? If you want to establish relations, you just establish them; that’s all. Why did he have to issue a statement like that?” Nguyen Lam Bang is the one who told me that China had insisted that we establish diplomatic relations with them - That Ho Chi Minh had not wanted to, but in the end he was forced to do it. I knew he was telling me the truth, because this man was Chairman’s Ho’s right-hand man. Chairman Ho valued this man very highly. So when he told me this I knew I could believe it; I knew it was true. And I said to myself, “Oh! Now I understand!” I had raised this question before: “Why was this statement issued? This is very strange!” You see? He explained to me why this had happened, and I wrote all this down. This was because I was someone who had not received any diplomatic training. I was a soldier who had been transferred into the diplomatic service. So I had to be curious and dig into things to try to understand them. And I remember that my other bosses had not been able to explain this to me, when I was in Thailand. It was the same with the Korean War. When I was in Bangkok, I would follow the developments in the Korean War on the evening news reports. I asked the

representative [Nguyen Duc Quy], “Why are the North Korean troops able to advance so quickly? They are advancing 40 or 50 kilometers in just a single day! How can they be that good?” And I asked, “Is it really true that it was the United States that started the Korean War?” My bosses answered, “Certainly the United States started the Korean War. How could you think anything else??” But when I asked, “Then how could they [North Korea] be able to advance so quickly?” they couldn’t explain it to me. So there were a lot of things like this. I would read the papers, I would be surprised by something I read, and I would ask questions. Now, after I went to the Soviet Union and worked there for a few years, I learned a number of things.

I: How long did you work in the Soviet Union?

LDH: I worked there until 1954; June or July of 1954.

I: That was the time of...

LDH: At that time the talks in Geneva were going on. Then I was sent back home so that I could take part in the land reform program. Because I had been a petit bourgeois high school student, so I did not know anything about the rural countryside, farming, etc. A good cadre had to know the rural countryside like the back of his hand. So they said, “We have to send you home so that you can learn about the land reform program, and learn about the rural areas, and then you can go back to your regular job.” I left in June and arrived in the Viet Bac in July [1954]. By that time the French had stopped bombing us. So I participated in the land reform program for more than one month, and then I received an order recalling me to headquarters to make preparations to move in to take over control of the city of Hanoi. We had to make a number of preparations for taking over. We had to form a “Foreign Relations Bureau” [Sở Ngoại Vụ], [LDH gives name in

English] “Office of Foreign Relations of Hanoi.”

I: Oh, for just the city.

LDH: Yes, to take care of the different foreign embassies, foreign news correspondents, etc. So that meant I was moving into yet another new kind of job. We figured we had several months to prepare before we moved in. So I did this kind of work in Hanoi for several years – I’m sorry, several months, and then I returned to the Foreign Ministry. Hanoi got their own people and they took over to this job themselves, and then I went back to the Foreign Ministry. I worked at the Foreign Ministry for a while before, ah, because I was one of a very small number of people at the Foreign Ministry who could speak English.

I: Did you speak English well at that time?

LDH: My English was passable; it was good enough to get the job done, that’s all. English and French are somewhat similar, so if you study hard, you can learn it. And every time I went to translate, if there was something I didn’t understand I asked questions, and so I learned. Now, there was a man assigned to the Foreign Ministry who had studied English in Paris. There was a cadre who had studied English in Paris. His name was Dang Chan Luu [Đặng Chân Luu]; he was a professor. His English was very good. He gave me additional instruction in English. And then in late 1955 I was sent to India with a delegation from the Vietnamese Ministry of Commerce and Industry. We went for two reasons – first, to attend an Indian industrial exhibition in Delhi; and second, to conduct negotiations to sign a commercial treaty with India and Burma. I went with the delegation to serve as the delegation’s interpreter and secretary.

I: At this time, what department of the Foreign Ministry were you working for?

LDH: I was working in the Asia 1 Bureau. [recording ends].

Oral History Interview of Luu Doan Huynh [Luu Đoàn Huynh]

**DVD 06
Hanoi, 6 June 2007**

**I – Interviewer Merle Pribbenow
LDH – Luu Doan Huynh**

LDH: ... my horoscope. I was surprised. It was like this. I arrived back in the Viet Bac in July. I arrived in the Viet Bac in July, and I had to change vehicles and wait at a way station to catch a vehicle that would take me on to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I had to wait to catch a passing vehicle that was going to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I waited there for five or six days, just waiting for a car, because the other vehicle I had come down in stopped at this station and would not go any farther. Now, my wife was working there. She was working in that area.

I: What kind of work was she doing?

LDH: She was working for an office subordinate to the Office of the Prime Minister; it was an office specializing in supporting our Chinese advisors. Now, every morning we would all go down to a stream to wash our faces. That's where we met and got to know one another. That's where I met my wife. And when she found out I was a cadre just back from the Soviet Union, well, everyone in the Viet Bac was very impressed with that! (laughs). Then after I moved down to the office in Hanoi after we took over the city, she also moved down to Hanoi, working in the Hanoi security agency. She looked me up, and on Sundays we would see each other, we would go out together. But I did not raise the issue of marriage yet. I wanted to think about it some more. For one thing, I thought she was a little too beautiful for me – I was afraid that marrying a beautiful wife could result in all kinds of trouble. I got to know several other women, but I just did not

think that they were compatible with me. Now, in 1954, after we moved back into Hanoi, everyone was getting married. Almost everyone who was in the resistance and who was not already married started getting married. I also wanted to get married, but I had these concerns. So all through 1954 and 1955, I never raised the question of marriage. We just went out with each other, but I never said anything. And she just waited; she did not raise the issue with me. She waited very patiently for me. I said to myself, "This is a matter of one's fate; this is not something to fool around with." Then I was sent off on the trip to India. I worked in India for twenty days, and then I went on to Rangoon and worked there, holding talks, for almost one month. And then I returned home. While I was in Rangoon, I began to think about it. I thought to myself, "I'm almost 27 years old now. I'm 26 or 27 years old, and if I don't get married, I'll be too old." I began to think that I needed to get married. And suddenly I was stunned when I remembered, "This girl is an orphan! Both of her parents are dead." Both parents were dead. She had told me the story. Her father had been a gambler, and he had lost all their family farmlands. So the three children had to be sent out to live with other families since he couldn't support them. She had been sent to work as a servant for a woman who had a son who was one year younger than my wife. This woman wanted to adopt my wife, to raise her with the woman's own son so that her son would have a sibling, so he would eat and would have someone to play with. Now, this woman left her home in Hung Yen and went up to the Viet Bac to do business there. She did not want to work with the French. She followed our government up into the Viet Bac, where we went to fight the resistance war. But she did not go to work for one of our resistance government agencies, she just went up there to do business, to buy and sell things. My wife had to stay at home, tend to the crops,

cook meals for the woman's little boy, clean the house, etc. But in the evening she was allowed to go to school. This was a resistance school that held classes at night, not during the daytime. This was done as a precaution against French bombing attacks. So my wife was a servant for someone else's family, but she was still allowed to go to school. This was because the revolution required that every resident of the village must go to school. She went to school up to the seventh grade, and then the Office of the Prime Minister came through recruiting people to work in the Prime Minister's office, and the local government introduced her as a candidate to work there.

I: And at that time a seventh grade education was enough?

LDH: It was temporarily sufficient. This was Phu Tho. Phu Tho was a free zone area, a liberated area. So she went up there, and that is why I was able to run into her there. So she really was an orphan, someone who had lost both her parents. She had told me the story. But I was still a little afraid of marrying such a beautiful wife (both laugh). I thought that someone unattractive, or at least moderately unattractive, would be easier to live with. Now, when I got to Rangoon and had some free time to think things through, I said to myself, "Well, this fits with what was said in my horoscope. This is the woman that the gods have chosen for me. The gods have brought us together. I will marry her as soon as I get back home." (laughs). She is a very happy person. We have had no problems. She is "a simple minded person" [in English]. So we got married in April 1956. We got married in April, and in June I got an order sending me to India again, this time to work there permanently as the "secretary to the Consul General" [in English]. We had a Consulate General there. India did not establish full, formal diplomatic

relations with us because Vietnam was not yet unified, so they called this “de facto recognition” [in English].

I: So who was consul general?

LDH: Nguyen Co Thach was sent out to be the Consul General There.

I: So you worked directly under Nguyen Co Thach, right?

LDH: Yes. So I went there first. I went ahead with the deputy consul general. We went first to buy a house, or to rent a house, and set up our offices in preparation for Thach’s arrival. When I worked in Delhi I worked both as an interpreter and as a researcher, a “research officer” [in English]. And when I was in charge of the office it was very busy. But during this period, they gave me permission to bring my wife over, and so my first child was born in India. My child was born in 1958. And that same year, 1958, Chairman Ho visited India, so there was a lot going on. Now, during the time I worked in India I noted three things that surprised me – several things that surprised me. First, the Indian governmental apparatus and the Indian government officials were very “erudite” [in English]. They were very good. They had a very scientific way of doing their jobs. They were extremely good. I said, “We have to learn from them. We should not look down on them and disregard their achievements.” I thought that we should study and research things; we should not just go out and shoot off our mouths willy-nilly, we shouldn’t make statements without thinking. For example, English was the language used in the Indian Parliament. In the Indian Parliament all statements and all debates are in English. Several people in our consulate said, “That demonstrates a low spirit of nationalism. They should speak Indian.” I asked several of my Indian journalist friends why they had to use English. They replied, “Our country speaks 50 or 60 different

languages. People could not understand one another.” And these are very “literary languages” [in English], very developed, advanced languages. English was used as the “lingua franca” [in English]. This was not a demonstration of a lack of nationalistic spirit. This was simply based on the nature of the country – this is what had to be done because of the nature of the country. Second: Did the Indians have a high spirit of nationalism? Initially, we thought that their non-violent struggle method indicated a weak spirit of nationalism. They didn’t want to fight, so their spirit of nationalism was low. But then the press published a story about how the Indian Ambassador in Moscow had read a speech on National Day. In his speech he said that in previous years Stalin and the Soviet Union had called Gandhi a puppet of the British imperialists. He said that this was a slander against India’s honor and that the Indian people would not accept such a slander. The Indian Ambassador dared to say such a thing in a speech that he gave right there in Moscow. I read that and said to myself, “This is a nation that understands self-respect.” The Soviet Union said they were wrong. And third, the third thing I noticed was that India had great respect and admiration for China. This was during the period I first went there. I first went there in 1955. Oh, they rated China very highly. But by 1958 the relationship had cooled. In 1958 the relationship cooled. Then I discovered that the Soviet Union had established a strategic relationship with India. How did I find this out? An Indian journalist told me.

I: An Indian journalist?

LDH: Yes, an Indian journalist. Oh, I had a lot of journalist friends. Vietnam had a very special place in India. Our Vietnam had tremendously high prestige among the Indian people, because we had dared to take up arms to fight against the French. Our prestige

was very high. Ho Chi Minh commanded great respect there. The Indians respected us greatly. When we established our office, several university professors, lecturers, came to visit us and to discuss things with us. They were very worried about Vietnam's future. They talked about the book, "*The Quiet American*," that told about the evil, vicious American policy that would be difficult to defeat. So Indian intellectuals had a very high opinion of Vietnam, and that is why they told us that the Soviet Union had established a strategic relationship with India. And the first goal of this relationship was to oppose China – to oppose China! They [the Soviets] had just signed a treaty of alliance and mutual assistance in Moscow. That was in 1950, but by 1953 or 1954 they [the Soviet Union] had already begun to build a strategic relationship with India. This meant that they [the Soviets] and China were suspicious of one another. So things were not all sweetness and light between them. So I was shocked and surprised by this. But at this time Vietnam was not a democracy. If one said something like this to our leaders, our bosses, that person would have been disciplined. If we had directly said something like this we would have been disciplined. So I just wrote this down in my notebook [journal], and I thought, "I will only refer to this indirectly, every once in a while." I'd say, "Oh, the Soviet Union and India value each other very highly." And [Nguyen Co] Thach would respond, "Oh yes, I have noticed that." And the fourth thing I learned was this: a progressive Indian told me privately, in confidence, that the Korean War had started as the result of a direct order that the Soviets had issued to North Korea to attack. Stalin had given the order over the telephone. This information fit with the guess I had previously come up with on my own, but if I had reported this back to the embassy, I would have

been severely disciplined. So I wrote this down and told myself that when I got back to Vietnam I would research this further.

I: So you just wrote this down for your personal use.

LDH: These were just my personal notes. People say, “discretion is the better part of valor” [in English]. That is the saying in English, right? I read that and I said, oh, I like that. So in reality, life is not so simple. I loved my country very much, and I believed in and trusted the Vietnamese Communist Party, but internally we were not very democratic, so I had to be careful. I had to explore this information further.

I: So you couldn’t make an objective report...

LDH: I could not just accept this information at face value. I had to go back and investigate it, and research it further. So these are the things that I brought back with me from my years in India. And I also studied English more while I was in India – first, by reading the newspapers; second, during the course of my work; and third, by taking a “correspondence” course from the “British Institute of Bombay.” So I studied English more so that I could become really good at it.

I: Did you go to Bombay?

LDH: No, I worked in Delhi, and just wrote to Bombay. Now, there was also this. In 1957 I attended an “anti-tuberculosis conference.” A delegation from Vietnam came to attend, and I had to accompany the delegation and assist them. At the conference, during a reception, I met the head of the Conference’s interpreters group. He interpreted while sitting in a closed room [simultaneous translation] for all the delegates to hear, interpreting from French into English and from English into French.

I: So he had to have been really good.

LDH: Oh, this guy had previously worked as the chief of the interpreters at the United Nations. So that night we talked. I said, "I would like to ask you a question. I am new to diplomacy, so there are many things I need to learn. In the entire world, what is the language that has the greatest future? What language in the world has the best future?" He told me straight out, "The most important language in the world is English." I asked about Russian. He said, "Oh no!" Chinese? No. He said, "Only the Chinese speak Chinese."

I: In the past people used to say that French was the language of diplomacy.

LDH: I asked about French. He said, "Today only 100 million people speak French. Only 100 million speak French, so even though French is a very good language, English is the most important language." And from that point on I said to myself, "I will invest in English, no matter what the cost." If I had not gotten this kind of information from someone as knowledgeable and as expert as this man, my thinking would still have been vague. I had studied English "instinctively," because instinctively I thought that English was important, but that was just a gut feeling. But he gave me the exact, precise answer, with facts and his analysis. He gave me the data about how many people spoke English around the world, the percentages, etc. He sent me a book with all this in it. I gave him my business card, and he mailed me a book. So I knew, and I decided, "From now on I will concentrate on English, no matter what the cost." So the years I spent in India opened my eyes a great deal. I was very surprised. India was a very poor country. When you went out into the streets, you could see how poor the people were. And there were demonstrations every day. So why then did the Nehru government remain standing, still strong and resilient? It was because they were very good. I read all kinds of books and

newspapers in English. I studied very hard. And after I returned to Vietnam, based on what I read there and everything, I concluded that the Geneva Conference had been very damaging, very harmful for Vietnam. This was the 1954 Geneva Conference. All kinds of problems arose during the effort to implement the agreement. I was in charge of that issue at the Embassy. Monitoring it, and talking to them, and arguing with them, and they just ignored everything.

I: Are you talking about the International Control Commission?

LDH: India was one of the members, and it approved of the long-term division of our country into two parts. Khrishna Menon himself went to Geneva in 1954 to support that solution. So the Soviet Union wanted to divide our country; China wanted to divide us; Britain wanted to divide us; France wanted to divide us; India wanted to divide us. In the end, the U.S. was the last country to agree to the division of Vietnam. Finally, in May or June, the U.S. finally agreed. This was the story. So the Geneva Agreement was very dangerous. The situation became very protracted and caused a lot of suffering. Then in early 1959 I was informed that at home we had issued Central Committee Resolution 15.

I: At that time were you still in...?

LDH: I was in New Delhi. My child was just over a year old. I read this and I said, "This is good. The Vietnamese revolution now has a way out of its dilemma." I was very happy. But during this same period I also read the book, "*The Ugly American*." An Indian intellectual had given me this book as a gift. He said, "I want you to read this. I believe that your country and the U.S. are going to fight each other." When I read it, I saw that the Americans were extremely determined to fight communism. The Vietnamese were determined to liberate South Vietnam, and the Americans were

determined to fight communism. So sooner or later we were going to fight each other, you see? I discussed this problem with my wife. I said, “This means that there will be war. What should we do?” My wife said, “We will have only this one child. We will not have a second child...”

I: Really?

LDH: She said, “This is so we will be able to participate in our resistance struggle, to fight until we gain success. That is the first thing. Secondly, I want to go to college.” She was working as an accountant for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She needed to get a university degree in order to get ahead in her accounting career. So we decided to have only the one child. We knew that sometimes an only child could become spoiled, but we decided that we would just have to deal with that problem. So we were happy to go back home. When we went back to Vietnam in 1961, in January 1961, it was with the understanding that we would have only the one child and that we would have to study and work to participate in the resistance war against the Americans, to participate in the diplomatic sphere, until we finally achieved victory.

I: So you had predicted long beforehand...

LDH: The Geneva Agreement had left me with many painful feelings, so when I got back to Vietnam, and after I saw that India and China had begun to come into conflict ever since 1959, I said...

I: You are talking about the border conflict?

LDH: Yes. To tell the truth, the border conflict was only an excuse designed to create trouble with the Soviet Union. He [China] has all kinds of tricks up his sleeve. So when I got home, I said to myself, “I must do whatever I can to get myself assigned to the

component that studies China, because the better we understand China, the better we can help our cause of liberating South Vietnam.” This was because I knew, based on my study of books and documents I had read, that China was the one that had come up with the idea of dividing Vietnam - at the Geneva Conference, I mean. China was the one pushing this idea; the Soviet Union just went along and supported it, that’s all. But when I got home, in spite of my repeated requests, they refused to assign me to the China desk. They assigned me to this bureau and that, and then in 1961 I went off to Geneva. A short time after I returned to Vietnam, they sent me off to attend the Geneva Conference on Laos. The best thing about the Geneva Conference on Laos was that I discovered that China had a lot of people who had studied in the United States (laughs). There were a number of personnel assigned to the Chinese delegation, and in the Chinese Foreign Ministry, who had previously studied in the United States. They were very smart. One day at the Geneva Conference the Chinese were insisting that the U.S. answer the question about whether the U.S. had troops in Laos, whether the U.S. had worked to overthrow the Lao government, etc. [Averell] Harriman [U.S. Assistant Secretary of State] replied, “Your Excellency, I know that in your delegation, the acting chief of your delegation, Mr. . . .” um, ah, I forget the name now, but Harriman said to him, “You studied in the U.S. for many years. You know American sayings.” It was a question that could not be answered “yes or no.” “Have you stopped beating your wife?” (both laugh). That kind of thing. I was surprised and I said to myself, “We should not be under the illusion that China and the U.S. are 100 percent opposed to one another. In the future, one day they may become friends, because these two know each other so well.” And Chen Yi [the Chinese Foreign Minister who headed the Chinese delegation] held a

reception to celebrate China's National Day. I saw that the Americans came and attended that reception. I went to the reception myself, and I saw the Americans there. I said to myself, "Aha! This is not so simple." But I had to wait for the right opportunity to say these things to my Vietnamese bosses, because I knew that they would immediately criticize me.

I: At that time China and the U.S. ...

LDH: On the surface, they were very strongly opposed to one another. But when [Dean] Rusk [President Kennedy's Secretary of State] came I could see that things were very different. When Rusk came to the conference, he greeted them [the Chinese] very politely. This was very different than the way that [John Foster] Dulles [President Eisenhower's Secretary of State] had acted. Dulles had refused to shake hands with Zhou Enlai [the Chinese Prime Minister]. But when Rusk met Chen Yi he shook hands very politely. And two Americans came to attend the reception for Chinese National Day. And then during the conference there was also the thing they had said to that guy – Ah! Now I remember his name! Truong An Phu [Zhang Hanfu] – he was the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister. What he [Harriman] said was "Zhang Hanfu, you spent a long time in the U.S. You must know the phrase, 'Have you stopped beating your wife?'" (laughs). I listened to this and I said to myself, "When I get back home to Vietnam I'm going to have to look into this." Then in 1964 I read the book, "*The Other Side of the River*," written by Edgar Snow.

I: Ah, Edgar Snow, who wrote the book about Mao Zedong.

LDH: That's the guy. When I read that book, I found a sentence that said that China had invited Edgar Snow to come visit in order to ask Snow to help build a few bridges for

Sino-American relations – “a bridge between China and the U.S.A.” [in English]. I read it and I immediately noticed this sentence. I took the book home to read and I saw this sentence immediately. And there was another sentence in the book that said that in 1935 Edgar Snow had gone to Xian [phonetic], had conducted extensive interviews with Mao Zedong there, and had written a book titled, “*Red Star Over China*.” These two statements struck me, and they made me even more eager to request a transfer to work on Chinese matters. Our people misunderstood the situation. In late 1963, or perhaps mid-1963, or early 1963 – anyhow, a debate was held within the Foreign Ministry. I was not allowed to participate in this debate. It was a restricted debate regarding the Sino-Indian border war that had taken place in October 1962. But they did not debate the issue until early 1963. This was because there were many different factions, and they simply could not agree with one another. Then one day I was invited to attend. And at the meeting I said, ah, because someone in the meeting had said, “India is the one that is expansionist, so naturally China had to fight India. Because India has expansionist ideas, and so they had to fight India.” I spoke up. I said, “I worked in India for several years. Relations between India and China were initially very good, but later they worsened. As I see it, China made a promise to India. They promised that even though we disagree, we still recognize the MacMahon border line – the MacMahon ‘line.’ Then later Zhou Enlai wrote a letter to Prime Minister Nehru in which Zhou Enlai said China had never recognized the MacMahon line.” You see? So there were these two pieces of information that contradicted each other. But I had read in the newspaper that they recognized the MacMahon line. So why did they later deny it? I said to them, “This means that China is not sincere. It appears that China is not sincere, that they are not

telling the truth about this. So to you guys who say that India is the expansionist country and that China is not expansionist, I say that I do not believe that you are correct. With respect to the other countries of South Asia, Pakistan and Nepal for example, India is expansionist. I visited Nepal. India runs the Nepalese Post Office. India has a military delegation in Nepal. But with respect to China, India is not expansionist, because it is weak. It is weaker than China.” Someone else in the meeting said, “If socialist troops take a piece of land that belongs to a capitalist country, that’s good. There’s no problem with that.” I answered, “No. No matter whether a country is capitalist or socialist, we still must respect the country’s borders. We have to respect their territorial integrity.” I said to this guy, “That is probably an argument that you heard from the Chinese, right?” That was the argument that day. So that day I said that China was expansionist. Implicit in what I had said was that China was expansionist. After the meeting, when we went back to our offices, the other people I worked with said, “You had better be careful. You may be disciplined for what you just said, because we are very close to China.” I said, “Are you serious?”

I: It was around late 1963 that there was a resolution....

LDH: Yes, there was a resolution! [Referring to Central Committee Resolution 9 on opposing “modern revisionism”]. The atmosphere at that time was very pro-China. I said, “Well, if I get disciplined, I get disciplined.” I waited and waited, but I never was disciplined (laughs). So I will tell you this: The Vietnamese Communist Party is different than the Communist Party of China. As long as you don’t attack the Party, you’re all right. If you give a broad opinion about the rest of the world or something, people will only criticize you up to a certain point. So nothing happened to me. So I

continued working until late 1965 or early 1966, and then I was transferred to the American Bureau. “American Affairs” [in English]. In 1966 I went to work in the American Bureau. I was surprised, because they told me that I was to supervise a team of six people that would work on assembling files and documents to support talks between the U.S. and Vietnam. They told me that in 1966! So there were two separate routes. I said that Vietnam advocated holding talks right from the beginning, but we couldn’t be soft. We had to be very tough, or else the U.S. would have tried to intimidate us right from the start. But ten days after you guys started bombing North Vietnam, in February 1965, Vietnam began to put together its Four Point Program. The “Four Points” [in English]. And the program was announced in April. So we started early. In 1966, when I was transferred there, we began preparing the necessary documents in preparation for a future point in time when we would begin talks with the Americans. I worked on that, and I worked so hard that I became exhausted and got sick. So arrangements were made to send me to Beijing for medical treatment.

I: So you went to Beijing...

LDH: I stayed at the Embassy.

I: What year?

LDH: 1967. August 1967.

I: So you worked in the Americas Department during the period ...

LDH: 1966-1967.

I: This was the period...

LDH: ..The period of the heaviest bombing.

I: This was the period when the U.S. Ambassador in Burma, um, ...

LDH: Byroade. That was Ambassador Byroade. That was in late 1965. I was sent to Beijing as a cadre assigned to the Embassy, but the real purpose was for me to receive medical treatment. But the Chief of the China Bureau told me, “I am happy to have you go there, and you can go there and rest for a few months, a year, whatever you want, and you can come back anytime. But when you return, you must return to my bureau, the China Bureau.” That’s what he told me. I was very happy to be assigned to the China Bureau, because this was an assignment I had wanted for a long time, and I had lobbied for it very hard but had never gotten it. Why did I want to be assigned to the China Bureau? To support the successful liberation of South Vietnam.

I: But didn’t you have to be able to speak Chinese?

LDH: No. I read the Xinhua news bulletin, the news bulletins they put out, and that was sufficient. They translated the bulletins into English very exactly, very fully and correctly. The Chinese are very good at that. I would read the news bulletins and I would understand immediately. And it was during the period I was there, ah, I was there for about two years; I didn’t stay there very long, because the climate in China was very harsh.

I: In Beijing the weather is very....

LDH: While I was there I had liver problems, and a kidney problem, but I came home. I saw that the situation was very dangerous, and so I had to return home. But while I was in China I discovered a number of things. I was very pleased to have found out about these things, so I returned. I discovered that while we were holding the talks with Harriman in Paris in May 1968, China constantly told us that we were wrong to be having such talks. “You are wrong,” they said. They said holding such talks meant that

we were betraying the South Vietnamese people, they said it was wrong, etc. Chen Yi even threatened to cut Party-to-Party relations between the Chinese and us. Then, suddenly, in November 1968 Nguyen Van Linh and Pham Van Dong visited China, and Mao Zedong received them. And Mao said, “It’s all right. China approves of Vietnam’s “talk-fight” policy. Your policy of talking while fighting is correct.” So this was completely different than what these other guys had said before. It was completely different from what Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi had said. Mao Zedong said he approved. And he even said that the signing of the Geneva Agreement [1954] had been a mistake. But he just said the same things over and over again. Mao was very skillful in his way of speaking. So why did Mao change his policy? Why did they change their attitude like that? About ten to 15 days later, in late November 1968, the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that China now wanted to reestablish the ambassadorial-level talks between China and the U.S. government. This meant with the Nixon government – with the Nixon Administration, because Nixon had just won the election. He had just won the election. So if China wanted to open the door to talks with the U.S., what reason could they possibly give to forbid Vietnam from having talks with the U.S.? You see? So he weighed the two positions, the two sides, to influence the talks. Now, when I returned to Vietnam I was sick. Because of my liver problem, I was only able to work four hours a day. I was very weak. But I really liked to work. I was very surprised when I went back to the China Bureau, because all the guys there said, “We can cure your liver problem right away. In Vietnam we have a medicine, “Ten [unclear word]” that is specifically designed to cure liver problems. It is traditional Vietnamese medicine [thuốc nam - as opposed traditional Chinese medicine – thuốc bắc], made from leaves grown in Vietnam.

So they sold me this stuff. So ever day I took the medicine and I worked at the office.

And after a while I was able to work eight hours a day.

I: Was your liver problem hepatitis, or was it...?

LDH: they said it was because I had malaria before; that was the cause. And then when I went to China it exacerbated it. The Chinese have a lot of liver problems, because of the effects of their climate.

I: And there are lots of poisonous chemicals ...

I: So I took this traditional Vietnamese medicine from 1970 to 1977, and finally I was cured. By 1975 or 1976 I was just about cured already. It cured both my liver and my kidney problems. This traditional Vietnamese medicine was able to cure me. But the one all of this was hardest on was my wife. She had to go to work, and she had to care for and feed my child and me, and she had to prepare my medicine. When she cooked my medicine, it made her cry. So it was very hard on my family. But when my wife saw me, she was always happy and pleasant, as if everything was normal. Now, I worked there for a while and then I got a promotion. I returned in 1970, and in 1971 I got a promotion. I got promoted because I correctly predicted Kissinger's secret trip to China (both laugh). The increase in food ration was what was decisive. Because at that time Vietnam was socialist, and the amount of meat issued to each government rank was set - higher amounts were issued to higher ranks. So the rank to which I was promoted was authorized one kilogram of meat a month. That was extremely important, because previously I was authorized only 300 grams per month, and my child got only 100 grams. So my entire household got only a total of 700 grams of meat each month. But now, with my promotion, I got one kilogram of meat per month. Do you know what my wife said?

She said, “Oh, this is very good news. We will give the one kilogram of meat to our child, OK? So our child can grown strong and go to school.” She didn’t think about herself at all; she only thought about me and about our child. I was second in her thoughts – our child was first, I was second, and she was last.

I: Yes. That is what Vietnamese women are like.

LDH: That is why I say that our women made an enormous contribution to our country’s victory over the U.S. I was very moved by this. Anyhow, I continued to work.

I: After your promotion did you continue to work in the China Bureau?

LDH: I worked in the China Bureau continuously from 1967, when I was first assigned to Beijing, until 1977 – for ten years straight. I worked there continuously, and all the personnel there liked me, and I got several raises in my salary. Now, to tell the truth, there were a lot of different opinions within the China Bureau. I don’t know why it is, but many Vietnamese people are entranced by China. They think that everything Chinese is automatically good. And this was particularly true of Hoang Van Hoan [Hoàng Văn Hoan], our Ambassador to China.³ So in the China Bureau, there were a number of personnel who all read Chinese, the Chinese characters, and they read all the Chinese newspapers, and it seemed as if they had been mesmerized by China. They thought that China’s policies and ideas were always correct. But I was someone who read English. I didn’t read Chinese. I read British studies and other reports, and I compared the Chinese news reports with the British reports. For instance, Laos used to put out a report, a Pathet Lao news bulletin called, “Khao San Pathet Lao.” That came out every Friday. So I would take their report [the Chinese report] and compare it with the Pathet Lao reports,

³ Ambassador Hoang Van Hoan became a member of the Vietnamese Communist Party Politburo. When the Sino-Vietnamese conflict began to develop, Hoan defected to China in 1978.

and I found that they were very different. When you used comparative techniques, you recognized this immediately. But these other guys did not use comparative techniques.

I: Because they could not read the other languages?

LDH: Because they could not read the other languages, and because they did not know that technique. I had served in India, so I had learned these techniques there. The Indians gave me a great deal of guidance in how to conduct research and analysis. I told them but they criticized me. I compared things and I learned. I said, “Aha! Look at this.”

I: But I thought that during this period you were part of the delegation...

LDH: That went to Paris? No, no. I was not a member of the delegation. I stayed at home and monitored things. I was monitoring Chinese foreign policy. The “Foreign Policy of China” [in English], but...

I: That aspect of things...

LDH: Yes. But the reason that my Bureau Chief wanted me to come back home was that he was afraid that the U.S.-Chinese relations were about to begin developing. He was very worried, but when I came back and began looking at things, he was very happy. You see? There were many “signals” involving the U.S. and China; signals that only someone who read both American and Chinese documents carefully could see. So when I compared news reports, oh, he liked that very much.

I: When Kissinger made his secret trip to China, did China give Vietnam any advance notice of his trip?

LDH: No, no. We didn’t know anything about it. They kept it secret. But then we discovered it. We were certain. Because they put out a list of the places that Kissinger

was to visit, and I had a guy who told me, “Look! Pakistan is the middleman, the intermediary between China and the U.S.” So I said, “I’m sure he’s going to Pakistan to meet with the Chinese.” I told our leadership, but they didn’t believe it. And then, boom! He went over there. So we predicted that correctly. Either he was meeting the Chinese in Pakistan...So after they met in Beijing, Zhou Enlai suddenly asked us if he could come to Vietnam to talk to us. Our leadership asked us, “What is he coming here for?” I told them, “I am certain that it is connected with Kissinger’s trip.” My Bureau Chief was still not sure. He told this to our superiors, but he was still hesitant. Then he went out to the airport with [Prime Minister] Pham Van Dong to greet Zhou Enlai, and he saw that Chang Wenchin, the Chief of [China’s] Americas Bureau, was accompanying Zhou. And he turned to [Pham Van] Dong and said, “We were right! We were right! He’s come to talk about Kissinger!” So there were a lot of issues involved, but the small role that we played in this was that we located the needle in the haystack – “the pin in the straw” [in English]. I told this to my superiors, and my superiors were very impressed. In Vietnam, while blood was flowing and the struggle was going on, the higher-ups and the lower levels were very, very close to one another. They even said to us, “Please, tell us everything that you are thinking – everything in your head. We will never get angry with you for saying what you think. If you say something wrong, we won’t criticize or reprimand you.” That’s what they told us. So we told them the truth, about many different things. Then we could tell them the truth. But previously, in the early 1960s, we couldn’t. However, while we were fighting the Americans and when the situation was boiling over, they needed us to tell them all our thoughts so they could come up with new ideas. So even if we said something contrary to what the leaders were saying, they

would still listen to us. Only after we won victory did our leaders begin to grow distant from the rest of us (laughs). But while things were hot, they valued our ideas greatly. I could speak directly and frankly to my leaders, to my Bureau Chief, to the Deputy Minister, and to the Minister. I told them the truth.

I: At that time the Minister was Nguyen Duy Trinh [Nguyễn Duy Trinh], right?

LDH: Nguyen Duy Trinh. That's correct. Up to that point there were differences of opinion inside the China Bureau. There were those who were pro-China, and there were those like me, who said these kinds of things. People said that there were two factions within the China Bureau – the Sinologists and the Westerners; those who spoke Western languages like French and English, and those who spoke Chinese. The two factions had differing opinions. But after Kissinger's visit to Beijing, which we had discovered ahead of time, everyone was in agreement. From then on we trusted each other and were all in agreement. That was because of our love of country – every one of us was doing what he was doing because of patriotism. So the situation stayed like that for several years, until the revolution achieved success and the war in Vietnam was over. The day that Saigon was liberated, 30 April [1975], my heart was bursting. I was happy. I had never been so happy, and everyone around me was happy and celebrating as well. But at the same time I thought about my friends, my old classmates from school. I thought of my old classmates on two occasions – two major occasions. The first was the day on 10 December when I accompanied our troops in to take over the city of Hanoi.

I: In 1954?

LDH: Yes, in 1954. That day everyone was happy. I was happy too, but my happiness was tinged with a little sadness. Perhaps it was because I had read so much French

literature. But in truth, that day I was happy because half of our country had been liberated; but I was also sad. Why was I sad? First, I was very concerned about the Geneva Agreement. Second, my father was dead, and I had lost contact with my mother and my younger siblings. When would I ever be able to find them again?

I: So throughout this entire period you had no contact with them?

LDH: I had no contact with them. Third, I had friends who had fought and died, so now that we had won victory, I grieved for them. And fourth, I had a number of classmates, ah, the majority of my classmates had joined the revolution, but a number of my classmates had joined the French, and later they had probably joined the Bao Dai government. I knew we would probably never see each other again. You know how close school classmates are to each other. At school we sometimes fought, but we were all very close to one another. So I remembered them at that time, but I remembered them and missed them even more on 30 April 1975. I thought that if they followed the Saigon government they are in big trouble and there is no way I can save them. If I wanted to save them, I would not be able to do so. I didn't know what to do. So that day I had a number of different emotions, happiness and sadness all mixed up together.

I: Were you ever able to locate any of your old classmates?

LDH: Yes, I found some of them later. In late 1975, in October or November, my superiors gave me permission to go to Vientiane to visit my family. In Vientiane I was reunited with my mother and my younger sister, so that made me a little happier. I then returned home and went back to work. As for my classmates, in 1978 I was sent to Bangkok to serve as Counselor at our embassy in Bangkok. I worked there until 1983 and then returned home to Vietnam. After I returned home, I went looking for my old

classmates, the ones living in Hanoi. When we got together, I asked where the ones who had followed the Saigon government were, and I made notes in a little notebook. Then during my visits to the United States I was able to contact them over there.

I: About how many students were there in your class?

LDH: You mean the number who followed the Saigon government?

I: No, the overall total number.

LDH: My school had four grades. First year [freshmen], second year [sophomores], third year [juniors], and fourth year [seniors]. So the total for all four grades was about 200.

I: The grand total?

LDH: Yes, 200 students. But in our two classes, ah, initially my class had 40, ah, 40 to 60 students, and we were divided into two classes, with each class having around 30 students.

I: And the majority of them joined the revolution?

LDH: The vast majority joined the revolution. Only a very small number followed....

I: And out of the majority that joined the revolution, I imagine that a large number were killed, right?

LDH: Yes, a number of them were dead. But of those who joined the military, the highest rank attained by any of them was colonel. There are still several of them that live around here and I go visit them occasionally. Only a few went into the diplomatic service; only just a very few. Now, when I went to Bangkok I served as the chief of the political cell, meaning I was “head of the political section” [in English] of the embassy. We read the newspapers, analyzed the situation, that kind of thing.

I: There were a lot of upheavals in Bangkok – coups and things.

LDH: Naturally. Those kinds of things happen all the time in Thailand (I laughs). But they are very good at economics [at making money]. They are very smart. Now, during that period, in 1978 or 1979, we received an order from Hanoi that from that time on our Embassy in Bangkok would be the point of contact between our government and the U.S. government. The two ambassadors, ah, when instructions were received from the U.S. government, the two ambassadors would meet and hold a discussion. The two ambassadors would each represent his respective government. Now, my Embassy assigned me the job of receiving lower-ranking [American] guests, those who were not of ambassadorial rank or higher. So I was the one who worked with all those kinds of Americans, people like journalists, scholars, those working with the Amerasian children in Vietnam, etc. I had to work with all of them. I was the “liaison officer” [in English].

I: And also with the delegations involved in finding American MIAs [missing in action], right?

LDH: Yes, they would stop by and see me briefly. Now, the U.S. Embassy had its own “Political Section” [English], and there was a man who specialized in Indochina, and he would come to see me. He would occasionally meet with me.

I: What was his name?

LDH: Desaix Anderson.

I: Oh, Desaix Anderson!

LDH: And then there was another man who replaced Anderson, but I have forgotten his name.

I: Was it Tim Carney? He was responsible for...

LDH: That's it! Carney! That's right. So in addition to my duties with the Political Section I had to handle this job as well. And the Ambassador told me that this job [these contacts] had to be kept secret. Now, during the course of this work I was surprised. I would look at the Americans and tell them, "I will help you, but you must follow my instructions to the letter. If you don't, it will cause problems." This was because the situation in Vietnam at that time was very complicated, very difficult. They did exactly what I told them, and when something came up they would come back and ask questions. They were very sincere, very honest. I said, "We get along so well, and yet we fought a war against each other!" (laughs). That's very strange. We are very sincere with each other, and yet we fought a war." Oh, there were a lot of complicated situations with the Americans. So, based on my observations there, I decided that I needed to restudy the Vietnam War, to re-analyze it. They [the Americans] gave me books, and I read more about it. And then when I went back home, I decided what I wanted to do. I asked to be assigned to the Institute for International Relations (IIR). When I was still in Bangkok, around 1979 or so, there were evenings, ah, oh I was very busy, but I would have one evening free. Why? Because it was the day the diplomatic pouch was sent back home. The night before I would have to work very hard – you know, the diplomatic pouch; "diplomatic pouch" [in English]. The pouch was sent out every Friday, so Friday evenings I would have some free time. So that evening, when I didn't have a lot of work to do, I would "relax" and go out and sit in a chair in front of the Embassy. I'd sit there and think to myself, "This year I am 50 years old, and I am Counselor of this Embassy." But I always argued with my superiors, so I said to myself, "You will never get an 'ambassadorship' [in English]; don't have any illusions about that!"

I: At that time, who was the Ambassador?

LDH: Hoang Bao Son [Hoàng Bảo Sơn].

I: Hoang Bao Son?

LDH: He was formerly the Chief of the China Bureau, my old boss.

I: And the American Ambassador was Dean, right? John Gunther Dean?

LDH: Dean came later. First there was a guy who had formerly worked in the Defense Department. He had been a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense.

I: Oh, you mean [Morton] Abramowitz?

LDH: That's him. Abramowitz! That's him. Anyhow, I thought to myself, "After I finish my tour in Bangkok I'll probably have to request to be assigned to work as a professor, to teach at a university." I knew that if I stayed in the diplomatic service I would never be promoted to ambassador. I was very leery of my future, because I frequently argued with my superiors.

I: But back then...

LDH: So I thought that, and then six months after I submitted my request the Director of the Institute for International Relations came to visit Bangkok. He came to my office and said, "After you finish your tour in Bangkok, how would you like to be assigned to the Institute for International Relations when you return home?" So these two things came together – what I was thinking and what he did. I remembered my horoscope (I laughs). My horoscope said that if I gave up a career as a mandarin [government official] and became a teacher instead, I would be happy.

I: How long ago was the Institute for International Relations established?

LDH: It was formed in 1975 or 1976, something like that.

I: So it was new...?

LDH: Previously we had the Diplomatic School, but then we formed the Institute and merged the Diplomatic School with the Institute to form the Institute for International Relations.

I: So it is also a diplomatic training school?

LDH: Yes, it teaches and it also conducts research – it does both. It is like a university. So he said he wanted me, and when I thought about my horoscope, I said, “I have to take it.” So in 1983 when I returned home to Vietnam, I was supposed to immediately go to work at the Institute. But the Ministry said, “You have to go to Australia.” The Labor Party had just taken over the government, and the Labor Party was very friendly with Vietnam. So I had to go. Even though we had an ambassador there, we also needed a counselor of embassy who was skilled at research and who spoke English. So I went. I had to go there in early 1984. When I got back home in 1983 I had to begin preparing to leave for Australia. So I was in Australia for three, ah, four years. After I had been there for two years the Ambassador became ill. The Ambassador was Hoang Bao Son, the same guy, he had asked for me to be sent to Australia. He fell ill; he had cancer of the bone marrow. Shortly after he returned home, he died. He died in December 1985. So they told me to stay on as chargé d’affaires, so I was the chargé there from 1985 to 1987, and then I returned home. I asked to come home in 1987, and as soon as I got home I immediately was transferred to the Institute for International Relations. The years I worked at the Institute for International Relations were very good for me. When I arrived there, they put me in charge of International Relations with Asia and the Pacific. In 1988 there was a conference; it was organized by Jane Werner – Professor Jane Werner from

the United States. She came over and organized a conference in Vietnam on the history of the Vietnam War. This was in 1988.

I: She published a book...

LDH: Yes, she published a book. But that was later. She hadn't published it yet in 1988. So she came over to Vietnam. And for the conference they got people from the Ministry of Defense, people from the Ministry of Social Welfare, and they also sent me to attend. The conference went relatively well and they liked it. And I decided that the history of the Vietnam War was something that suited me very well, because I had studied it while I was in Bangkok. I had studied it there, so this is how it began. And then in 1990 Jane organized another conference in New York. She invited two generals, but they only allowed one general to go – that was General Tran Van Tra [Trần Văn Trà]. And the U.S. refused to allow the woman who became Vietnam's Vice President to enter the U.S. for the conference.

I: Oh, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh [Nguyễn Thị Bình]?

LDH: The U.S. would not allow Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh to enter the U.S., so in the end the only ones who got to attend the conference were General Tra and me. And from then on, in addition to researching Asia and the Pacific, I began very careful and meticulous research on the Vietnam War. I worked on that constantly, and have worked on it all the time since I retired. So that is my life. This opened up a new window for me that allowed me to better understand the U.S., and it has also helped me understand Vietnam better...

I: During the Vietnam War both the U.S. and Vietnam had many things that they misunderstood about one another, isn't that right?

LDH: There were a tremendous number of misunderstandings. I will tell you this very directly – when you ask Vietnamese why the U.S. fought Vietnam, they all say that the U.S. fought Vietnam for the same reason that France fought Vietnam. But why did France fight Vietnam? First, to seize land to rule [as a colony]; second, to gain raw materials; and third, to gain economic markets. But the U.S. had none of those three motives! (laughs). So if you think that is why the U.S. fought in Vietnam, you misunderstand the situation; your “perception” is wrong. And secondly, it was because of U.S. domestic politics. Foreign policy developed out of U.S. domestic policy. What was it in U.S. domestic politics? It was the existence of a crazy, an insane anticommunist movement in the United States. That was the reason that a series of American administrations followed a policy of fighting Vietnam. They could not accept Vietnam. So I said that this would take a very long time to research and study. It is easy for us Vietnamese to make accusations against the Americans. It is easy for us to “condemn” you, but we do not understand you very well at all. So I felt that I had to understand the U.S., so I have focused my attention on studying the Vietnam War. Why did you attack us? And why, in the end, did you lose? We need to know what happened; we need to come to a clear understanding of this, so that in the future we can build a relationship between our two countries. It is not that I am “pro-American.” I am not. It is not that I like the U.S. – It is instead the question: What were the reasons that led the two sides to fight each other? We have to avoid those things in the future, because only in that way can our two countries have friendly relations. We have to correct the “perceptions” of both sides. The “perceptions,” the understanding and the mindset of both sides must be corrected in order for us to become friends. Naturally, we must look at this very

carefully. We cannot simply say, “Because you caused so many deaths, so much suffering, so much destruction to my country, you therefore must be my enemy.” If you say that, then countries cannot develop. I will give you an example. I ask this question: “Does this mean that the U.S. is the permanent enemy of Vietnam, or was it just a temporary enemy?” You see? One has to dig deeply and understand these things deeply first. I felt I had to study this issue carefully, so ever since 1988 I have specialized in researching the history of the Vietnam War.

I: Do you plan to write a book about the Vietnam War? Because many people have written ...

LDH: I have written a number of things for the Americans. When they published a book, I would write something to be included in the book. I contributed to that book and several other books as well. What was my purpose in writing these things? I wrote in order to have a debate with the Americans in order to find the truth. I dispute what they say, and they dispute what I say, and gradually both sides reach agreement and I can understand them. Just like recently there was an “exchange” on the “internet” site of the Journal of American History, which belongs to Indiana [University]. I raised a question on that site to debate whether or not the “decent interval theory” was correct. I did this so we could have a debate, and then I can use that debate as the basis for explaining this to other Vietnamese. The first thing I have to do, though, is to understand the Americans.

I: Americans are now arguing about whether the “decent interval” idea is true or not.

LDH: This is the kind of big issue that Vietnamese need to understand so that they can then understand the United States. So through this I have gained a better understanding of the United States. I believe that my contacts and relationships, while I was working in

the Foreign Ministry, and while I was in Bangkok, and the ones I have made during the different conferences I have attended, have helped me to understand the United States a little better. I wouldn't dare to claim that I understand it well, because the U.S. is very difficult to understand. But I understand you better. You see?

I: Yes. Let's stop here because the tape is running out.

Oral History Interview of Luu Doan Huynh [Luu Đoàn Huynh]

**DVD 08
Hanoi, 6 June 2007**

**I – Interviewer Merle Pribbenow
LDH – Luu Doan Huynh**

LDH: ...I followed the path of the Vietnamese revolution in order to liberate my country, and I made a small contribution of the cause of liberating my country, and I am proud of that. During the time of French colonial rule, no Vietnamese could ever dream of becoming a diplomat, because a colony could not conduct diplomacy. Only an independent nation can conduct diplomacy. You see? But I joined the revolution, and I became a diplomat, and I represented my country abroad. So that was a great honor. So the fact that I did not attain high rank was not important. Second, the Vietnamese Communist Party has strengths and it has weaknesses. The Party is not perfect. But it does have something from my standpoint – the Party did not trust me entirely, and because of that I was not able to attain the rank of ambassador, but at least when I had a disagreement with them and I spoke out, they didn't kill me; they didn't throw me in jail; they didn't discipline me. They only asked one thing of me - They said, "Don't publish these things in the press. You can't express these views in the public press." If you oppose the Party, you can't do this. But in private conversations, or in meetings, you can say whatever you wish, even if you disagree with the leadership. They will criticize you, and you will argue back, but nothing will happen to you. So that has been a source of happiness for me – that I have been able to enjoy at least a small degree of freedom of speech, even though it is restricted, even though it is not very much, but still I enjoyed at least some freedom of speech, within the confines of the Vietnamese state apparatus.

This is different from the Chinese government. If I had been a member of the Chinese Communist Party, if I had been a member of the Chinese state apparatus, I would have been killed long ago. I would have died a long time ago, during the Cultural Revolution. Even though my government has a number of shortcomings, and there are things about it that are not good, still, I am satisfied with my country, because life, our standard of living, has now become pretty good here, and because we have a little democracy now. It is relative democracy; it is not a high level of democracy, but still it is democracy, and I personally have enjoyed the benefits of democracy since 1960. Because even back then, in a meeting my leaders said to me, “Go ahead. You can say anything you want. Don’t worry. No one will do anything to you.” You see? I could even express a daring, bold idea, like when I said, “China is an expansionist nation,” even though at that time Vietnam was on very friendly terms with China. So you see? If I were to summarize my life, I would have to conclude that I am happy. No one can have perfect happiness, and there will always be things with which one will be dissatisfied, but overall, in the broad sense, 70% I am satisfied – with my leadership, with the Vietnamese Communist Party, and with the country of Vietnam. So I am relatively happy, and I enjoy respect in our society.

I: Now, what about your son?

LDH: He is a construction engineer. He has his own company. It is what is called a “limited liability company” [in English] working in construction.

I: That’s good.

LDH: His wife has a PhD in economics.

I: So they have good jobs, good professions.

LDH: They have good jobs, but it's just that I don't like it when anyone is lazier than me. My wife is very hard working, but they are lazier than me. And I have a third source of happiness, and that is that I have an old wife who takes very good care of me. She is what you would call a traditional woman. A traditional woman – not a modern woman!

I: Where is your wife from? Where is her native village?

LDH: She is from Hung Yen, 17 kilometers from Hanoi. She got a university degree in accounting and worked as an accountant for all that time. I am a person who did not have a high position in the Vietnamese government – I just had a medium level position – but I have been happy. So the only thing is that I worry about my grandchildren. My grandchildren are so lazy; they just refuse to study. (Everyone laughs). This year my grandson takes the test for his Level 3 diploma, for “graduation from senior secondary school” [in English].

I: That's good.

LDH: No. The test for Level 3 is to allow you to graduate from school and go to work. He's not taking the test for admission to the university. The test for admission to the university would kill him (laughs). I tell him, “You're a lazy young man. You're going to end up working as a street sweeper. That's going to be your job – sweeping the streets.” (Everyone laughs)

I: You never know, because many years ago I was also lazy about studying, especially, ah, I did all right in high school, but when I reached the university, I learned about, ah, back then perhaps America was a little too free – I learned to drink alcohol, I learned about girls, and I loved it. (Everyone laughs). I was a lousy student.

LDH: My generation was a “fanatical” [in English] generation – we were a generation of fanatics. We were very serious. We were very serious about our work, and we lived very pure lives.

I: Because you had to deal with such big, national problems...

LDH: Because we had to fight. We had to fight the enemy, so I had to remain pure. Did you know that back when we were in the Viet Bac [during the war against the French] we would sleep at night with our doors open. We wouldn't close or lock the doors. We were so poor – who was going to steal from us? But things are different now. They're more complicated now.

I: You worked up in the Viet Bac area for two or three years, right?

LDH: No. I was only in the Viet Bac for eight months before I was sent off to Moscow. But eight months was enough to learn what life was like there, to learn about the hardships. And before that I fought as a soldier in Laos, and that life was even harder. We had only sticky rice and salt to eat, just sticky rice and salt! At night, when we were out on an operation, we could not sleep on the ground. If you slept on the ground, tigers would come up, and then there'd be trouble. If a tiger came, we would have to shoot it, and then the French would know that we were in the area. But if you didn't shoot it, the tiger would eat you. So we had to climb up into the trees at night to sleep.

I: At that time there were a lot of tigers, weren't there?

LDH: Oh, there were a lot of tigers.

I: And there were cobras...

LDH: Yes, there were snakes. And there were also, what do you call them, leeches.

I: Oh, there were lots of leeches.

LDH: When you went through a forest of bamboo they were everywhere. Oh, up in the Viet Bac, during the eight months I was there, one attached itself to my leg and it just died there, dug deep into the flesh of my leg. I didn't even know it until I felt a little pain. But I just ignored it (both laugh). But that is what life was like. I had to travel many times to understand. I loved my country and felt so sorry for it. My country was a "pariah" [in English]. It was not just that France and the U.S. fought against us – the Soviet Union did not like us, and China didn't like us. So there were many things that made me feel sorry for my country and love it so much. I wanted to do whatever I could to make my country strong economically and strong militarily so that it could be independent and self-reliant. That was my goal – that was my "ideal." I wanted to be friends with China, but as I saw things, they always wanted to pressure us and to push us down and suppress us.

I: But in the past, Vietnam had to know how to choose a path in between the various big powers, how to go down the middle and to choose it's own path.

LDH: And that was very hard.

I: You were under pressure...

LDH: ..and it was very hard. We had to take it one step at a time. So we have to know what Vietnam is. It is an ordinary country that had to learn the lesson of what was right, what was just, and that could only be learned through hardship and adversity. It was not a lesson that could be learned easily. In English they say, "to learn things the hard way." It was always hard for Vietnam. It took great hardships and adversity for us to learn these lessons. When I went to India, I learned that the Soviet Union had an alliance with China, but it also had an alliance with India. So I said, "That means that 'proletarian

internationalism' [in English] is outdated"! I could not reach a definite conclusion at that time, and only many years later was I able to draw conclusions about it. Our "analytical minds" were weak, so I had to find ways to do research properly.

I: Initially, when you joined the Viet Minh in Laos, you probably didn't know what the Viet Minh were, did you?

LDH: No, no! In Thailand there had been an organization called the Overseas Vietnamese Patriotic organization ever since the 19th century. Since the 19th century! There was an old man named Dang Thuc Hua [Đặng Thúc Hứa]. Every year he would walk on foot from Thailand to Vietnam, to Ha Tinh Province, and he would find four children, four or five children, and then take them back to Thailand on foot. The smallest he would carry on his shoulders. He took them to Thailand so that they could go to school and study so that in the future they could fight to save our nation. Vietnamese have a strong sense of patriotism.

I: There were a number of overseas Vietnamese from there who went back...

LDH: In Thailand. Later, when the Vietnamese Communist Party came into existence, and after Ho Chi Minh went over there, there was a revolutionary organization over there. This revolutionary organization was later called the Overseas Vietnamese National Salvation Association of Thailand and Laos – open parentheses "a branch of the Viet Minh". This organization was already in existence in 1944 or 1945. It was there in 1945. So in August [1945] two representatives of the overseas Vietnamese association in Thailand and Laos returned to Vietnam and went up to the Viet Bac to attend the Tan Trao Conference, where preparations were made for insurrection, for the revolution. And they met in Thailand to lead the uprisings in Laos. At that time there was already a

movement in existence. I didn't know about it yet, since I was going to a French school. But in October 1945, when I joined the Liberation Army, that was the Viet Minh. It was the Viet Minh. I didn't know about all this at that time, but gradually I learned about it. So, is that enough?

I: I think that's more than enough. Thank you very much. I will stop the tape now.