

Name of Interviewer: William Liu
Method of Recording Interview: Mini-cassette audio recorder
Language of Interview: English
Location of the Interview: Perry-Castañeda Library, UT Campus, Austin, Texas
Date: September 29, 2008
Themes: Immigration; Military; Vietnam
Name of Person Interviewed (or pseudonym): Dao Vu Anh Hung; Hung Dao
Contact Information of Person Interviewed: [address; phone number; email]

Name	Transcript
<i>Tape Damaged</i>	<i>Based on notes and memory recollection</i>
William Liu	Where did you grow up?
Hung Dao	I grew up in North Vietnam; in Hanoi. In 1955, I moved to Saigon at age 12, after Geneva by French boat to avoid Communists.
William	How were you disciplined as a child?
Hung	In Hanoi, I was middle class. My father was in the police force with government and was drafted to join the French. I was supported by my parents, who provided me with a good education. In Vietnam, parents raise children strictly and there is a very important influence by the teacher. The absolute principle for children is to respect everyone – parents, teachers, elders. If you made a mistake, you were well-disciplined. Children have no judgment, so discipline is good. As an example, one day in class, my elementary school teacher heard talking in the class and saw me yawn. He slapped me on the face and made my eye bruise. When I went home, I did not tell my father for fear of what he would do, but my father suspected I fought with other boys. He asked the principal what happened and the principal called my teacher in, who told the story. My father said “If the teacher punished him, that’s ok to me.”
William	What did you do in Saigon, was schooling similar?
Hung	In Saigon, I continued my education. It’s not like in the United States – when you are 15, 16 years old you get a job. I didn’t have to make money for myself. My parents took care of me.
William	What about your friends? Did you keep up with them?
Hung	I kept my relationship with them. I still saw my elementary teacher, a teacher in Hanoi who was a Boy Scout master. There were Boy Scouts in Vietnam. I met him in Houston, the Boy Scouts in Houston. He didn’t recognize me at first, so I asked him “Do you remember the song you wrote?” I remembered the song and sang it to him. All four people there sang. It was an unforgettable moment. We must cherish our past.
William	What jobs did you have in Vietnam?

Hung In 1964, I joined the Vietnamese Air Force, in late 1964, the 1965 class. In 1966, I went to the academy. I was a helicopter pilot on combat missions. I went to the United States in 1966. At San Antonio, I had my training at Laclin Base, staying in the language institute. I went to Fort Worth to learn to fly helicopters and Fort Rutcker in Alabama for advanced training at the end of 1966. I was part of the 215 Trang Nhu from 1966 to 1971 and was promoted to the newly organized Bien Hoa air force until the last day of Saigon, Black April, April 1975.

William What did you do before you went to join the air force?

Hung Before the Air Force, I graduated from high school, went to Saigon University and became a journalist and war reporter for Saigon. In the University, I was a part of the student union. I was also a teacher in Saigon. I was a free lance writer back in Hanoi, talking about the war.

William Were any family members involved in the war? How?

Hung Two brothers in the navy, one in the air force – he was a radio technician. Eleven brothers and sisters. One brother went to France and moved to Seattle. He passed away. Four live in the same place. In 1992, I brought my mother, brother, and sister to the United States. In 1993, I brought my wife's family to the United States. In Black April 1975, my father, in the American delta, was assassinated by Communists. I flew over there and brought him to a doctor friend. He almost recovered. The Communists took over April 30; He committed suicide May 2. My friend sent me a note 2 months later; it was the first time I cried. He [my father] believed Ho Chi Minh. I escaped to Saigon, but lost my father. I spent almost 10 years in war and came out with nothing.

William Why did you decide to become a writer?

Hung My life is guided by the unplanned. Two of the most important things to me when finding a job are [making sure it is] something that I like to do and [making sure it is] something financially stable for family.

William How did you meet your wife?

Hung In October 1970, I married her. I met her in Saigon in 1963. We dated for 6 years.

William Where did she stay while you were in the military?

Hung She always stayed in Saigon. In 1970, I was promoted to second lieutenant and kept my promise to marry her at 21. She moved with me. She felt comfortable and she adapted well. I brought her to Nhu [Air Base]. She was lonely, so I brought her home to Saigon to see her family sometimes.

William How did you get out of Vietnam?

Hung In 1975, I was commander of helicopter squadron. I didn't want to [leave Vietnam]. I asked the pilot to follow me and told him, "Don't do a stupid thing like leave and abandon me." At Bien Hoa, we were attacked by communist rockets. I flew helicopter squadron to Saigon morning of 29th

of April to a place south of Saigon, Nhu Be, and left the squadron. General Kee, then vice president of South Vietnam, told me to leave the squadron to Mekong Delta but I had to fly back to Saigon to find my children, so I flew over Saigon with a helicopter filled with weapons caches. [The Communists] set up rocket launchers to fire at me. At 7 am, General Kee asked me to follow him with gunships to a manufacturing company to attack the Communists because [our troops] were overrun, so I told [the gunships] to follow him. After 10 minutes, they returned with full tank of gas. They said, "We contacted the air base and Gen. Kee; no one was on the radio, so we returned." Gen. Kee said be quick about returning and I had to land. In a Huey Chinook helicopter, only 15 soldiers with full gear or 20 civilians can sit inside at maximum capacity. About 30 jumped aboard and it almost crashed. All the warning signs lit up. In the helicopter, I had my wife and children. One of my friends's wife cried, "My husband pushed me into helicopter, but he dropped onto the ground." I flew the helicopter back and my pilot said, "It's too dangerous, the Communists will definitely capture you if you land." About 11:30 in the morning in Nhu Be, there was only one Vietnamese navy controlled fuel station, which was closed. I knew friend with money and I asked him to bribe them so they opened [the fuel station]. I acted like a police officer because I was the only commander. I said, "I will be the last to get my helicopter refueled." The first people in were the first people out. We put fuel in ammunition containers. By noon, no one flew out, so I said, "I'll fly out," and I asked [the pilot] to direct us to Kon Sun Island, far from Saigon. I knew how to fly over the ocean, but others were scared; they had never flown over the ocean before. I used the international frequency for the U.S. fleet. Under my air division, the United States wanted to get helicopters. I called and heard an American voice; "Can we land on 7th fleet?" [I asked]. He asked where we were. I said, "We're almost to Kon Ju on Mekong." He said, "Fly to Vung tau, a U.S. Chinook will pick you up." As soon as I landed, the U.S. Marine core let me land. On 4 helipads, about 6 helicopters landed. The commanders had been waiting for 18 days. They first demanded weapons and radio and they pushed our helicopters into the sea. I asked about it. He said, "We don't need them anymore," and asked us to do an evacuation. I remember, for one man, his parachute did not open, so he got killed. This was a vivid memory. At first, I didn't believe Saigon fell so quick because Cambodia stood for 2 months before it fell. My family was on deck; I lost the chance to pick up my immediate family, my parents and my brothers and sisters. We left 29th of April and stayed in Vung Tao before the 5th of may when we went to Shoebing Bay in the Philippines. I remember my 7-months pregnant wife fell once. I had a small bag with all of my documents fall onto the ground and dust covered it.

William

What was the hardest thing about starting a new life?

Hung A sponsor took me. I knew life in U.S.; I could speak English; I knew way of living here. I could adapt for my family, but my wife couldn't speak English. The hardest things about my new life were language barrier and the ability to drive.

William Who helped you find a home?

Hung A Dallas church sponsored us.

William How did you find a job?

Hung I worked with International Rescue Service (IRS) in the Cross Cultural Program. I got about \$1000/month in Dallas. I helped refugees rent and purchase homes. I taught people to use the computer; I thought of the idea of learning to drive using a computer and we taught refugees in the camp using my idea. The Dallas church helped me get driver's license and with the academy school for a flying job. It was lucky for me to find a job.

William What are some of the similarities between your old community and your new one here?

Hung I organized people [in U.S.] for Black April Day. I helped set up music, performances in 1977. There was about 1500 in the audience total from Austin, Oklahoma. It was completely free. There was also time for refugees to gather for New Year's, Autumn Festival.

William What were the differences?

Hung The differences were the language. Also, [in Vietnam] we're closer to each other. We live separately here in U.S. You can't knock on door to visit.

William When did you become a U.S. citizen?

Hung I became U.S. citizen in 1981.

William Do you think of yourself as American or Texan first?

Hung American first because I owe this country. We should repay the U.S. hospitality.

William Do you keep in touch with your family or relatives in Vietnam?

Hung For my friend in re-education camp, I send money.

William Have you ever been back?

Hung I never go to Vietnam because of Communists. I send money to people, my family in Vietnam.

William What kind of traditions or celebrations do you maintain for the ancestors?

Hung I teach my children. They know how to read and write Vietnamese. I teach them to never forget Vietnamese New Year, autumn festival, ancestor altar. My youngest daughter, born in Dallas, has a job in New York. One day she came home and wrote a note in Vietnamese. I was emotional. For her birthday gift, she said, "Give me a Vietnamese-English dictionary."

William In your opinion, what will become of Vietnamese culture in the U.S.?

Hung It will be fading, but we try to get them to cherish, to maintain, and to preserve [it]. We (Vietnamese) have values – of family, of people. In the U.S. there's the church. In Vietnam, there are two things missing [from U.S. culture]. [One is the] morality teachings, models on the wall, must learn courtesy and morality, public morality.

William What's the other moral?

Hung The youth help everyone, respect for elderly. There's a Boy Scout motto, but it's hard to translate from Vietnamese.

Post-interview notes

The interviewee seemed very much at ease during the interview. Though there was much formality during the interview, the moments afterwards made me feel at ease. I treated him as I would interview a grandparent, somebody I attempted to respect both with my body language and my pen. He had many extensions especially to the stories of his military experience.

Excerpts

Subject: Nostalgia

Name	Transcript
<i>Tape Damaged</i>	<i>Based on notes and memory recollection</i>
Hung	I still saw my elementary teacher, a teacher in Hanoi who was a Boy Scout master. There were Boy Scouts in Vietnam. I met him in Houston, the Boy Scouts in Houston. He didn't recognize me at first, so I asked him "Do you remember the song you wrote?" I remembered the song and sang it to him. All four people there sang. It was an unforgettable moment. We must cherish our past.

Subject: Irretrievable Losses

Name	Transcript
<i>Tape Damaged</i>	<i>Based on notes and memory recollection</i>
Hung	In Black April 1975, my father, in the American delta, was assassinated by Communists. I flew over there and brought him to a doctor friend. He

almost recovered. The Communists took over April 30; He committed suicide May 2. My friend sent me a note 2 months later; it was the first time I cried. He [my father] believed Ho Chi Minh. I escaped to Saigon, but lost my father. I spent almost 10 years in war and came out with nothing.

Subject: Cultural Preservation

Name	Transcript
<i>Tape Damaged</i>	<i>Based on notes and memory recollection</i>
Hung	I teach my children. They know how to read and write Vietnamese. I teach them to never forget Vietnamese New Year, autumn festival, ancestor altar. My youngest daughter, born in Dallas, has a job in New York. One day she sent home a note in Vietnamese. I was emotional. For her birthday gift, she said, "Give me a Vietnamese-English dictionary."

Subject: Casualty of War

Name	Transcript
<i>Tape Damaged</i>	<i>Based on notes and memory recollection</i>
Hung	In a Huey Chinook helicopter, only 15 soldiers with full gear or 20 civilians can sit inside at maximum capacity. About 30 jumped aboard and it almost crashed. All the warning signs lit up. In the helicopter, I had my wife and children. One of my friends's wife cried, "My husband pushed me into helicopter, but he dropped onto the ground." I flew the helicopter back and my pilot said, "It's too dangerous, the Communists will definitely capture you if you land."

Subject: The Escape

Name	Transcript
<i>Tape Damaged</i>	<i>Based on notes and memory recollection</i>
Hung	About 11:30 in the morning in Nhu Be, there was only one Vietnamese navy controlled fuel station, which was closed. I knew friend with money and I asked him to bribe them so they opened [the fuel station]. I acted like a police officer because I was the only commander. I said, "I will be the last to get my helicopter refueled." The first people in were the first people out. We put fuel in ammunition containers. By noon, no one flew out, so I said, "I'll fly out," and I asked [the pilot] to direct us to Kon Sun Island, far from Saigon. I knew how to fly over the ocean, but others were scared; they had never flown over the ocean before.

Reflection on Oral History Interview with Hung Dao

When talking with Mr. Hung Dao about his experiences as a boy Vietnam, a young pilot during the Civil Conflict in Vietnam, and a father in the United States, I was struck initially by the fact that he brought his own notes and had printed out his answers as if prepping for a movie script. The fact that he brought his notes reflects the idea that Mr. Dao probably had a scripted narrative that he wished to tell based on what he was willing to tell and what he thought I wanted to hear. Therefore, this first clue illustrated the idea of scripted self-presentation in oral histories.

After the interview, although I had recorded the interview in an audio microcassette tape, I realized when I attempted to transcribe the contents that the tape itself was damaged. Therefore much of the content of the transcript was derived from notes I had scribbled down during the interview and through memory recall. In a typical oral history transcription, stories relayed enter one filter, the transcriber's deletion and inclusion of specific parts of the interview while transcribing the audio recording of the interview. For me, the interview entered two filters, my memory recall and note-taking as well as the actual written transcript from my memory and notes. As a result, the transcript does not necessarily carry the same weight as a true word-by-word transcription of a recorded oral history.

Nonetheless, the interview itself revealed much about the narrative frames through which Mr. Dao operated to tell his story. The fact that Mr. Dao spent a significant portion of the interview discussing his wartime experience shows that he feels it the most significant and most dramatic aspect of his life. He tied much of his interview to his or his family's experience to the Civil War in Vietnam because he felt that the war and his involvement shaped his life experience and his family the most.

When I asked about his wife and their relationship, Mr. Dao was comparatively brief. He talked about how he had kept his promise, about how his wife was lonely at times, but for the most part that his wife was adaptable to the situation. In this light, Mr. Dao operated very much in a patriarchal way in that he saw his role as the breadwinner, while his wife served the role of supporting him.

With his family and the Vietnamese community in general, Mr. Dao showed much passion in regards to preserving a Vietnamese culture in the United States. He spoke at some length about his involvement with the Vietnamese cultural celebrations in the United States. In one anecdote, Mr. Dao reflected on how grateful he was that his American-born daughter wanted a Vietnamese-English dictionary for her birthday. This shows his desire for his children to preserve the different aspects of Vietnamese culture. In this case, Mr. Dao views Vietnamese language as a cultural marker.

During the interview, I felt two conflicting power dynamics at work – one in which I acted as the interviewer able to articulate and interpret Mr. Dao's words and the other in which I felt a generational submissiveness to the elder Mr. Dao. Both were at work in that I guided the conversation to a certain extent based on the set of questions I asked, but he was able to delve in some topics more than others. In some aspects, I felt unable to steer the conversation when he spoke in depth about specific topics. Ultimately, because I now carry the ability to reinterpret the aspects of the interview I find most insightful, I recognize that I still carry the privilege of choosing the information that I present in this interview of one Vietnamese American who physically immigrated to the United States. In doing so, I attempted to make some minor grammatical revisions to help legitimize his story for a mainstream white American audience.