

My Viet Nam War: Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: Hải Nguyễn

Interviewer: Andrew Finney, Kevin Liu

Date: November 17, 2021

Location: Irvine, California

Sub-collection: Viet Nam War Oral History Course, Fall 2021

Length of interview: 01:44:42

Field Notes

The interview was conducted in the 200E conference room at the Murray Krieger Hall Building of UC Irvine. Those present at the interview were the Narrator, Hải Nguyễn, and the interviewers Andrew Finney and Kevin Liu. At the start of the interview we signed all of the consent and release forms before we started the interview. Before beginning the interview I took a photo of a map of Saigon from 1968 that the narrator brought in to show us. He specifically noted that the map recognized political jargon at the time, such as the Ho Chi Minh Trail and South Vietnamese identification of landmarks and locations.

Hải Nguyễn was very friendly from the start when I first picked him up from his parking location and escorted him to the building where we conducted our interview. His demeanor stayed the same for most of the interview, he answered our questions very thoroughly while maintaining a lighthearted feeling, even telling a joke or two during our conversation. Although our interview lasted over an hour and a half, I felt like Hải could keep going; he seemed very knowledgeable about the things that happened during his childhood and the war. While he was very open with his interview, his willingness to talk sometimes left us as a team without

questions to follow. This issue could have been addressed in more specific research done beforehand. The main thing we learned from this project and interview was that even though someone has experienced an awful event in their lives, like Hài did with the Tet Offensive, that the human spirit wants to press on and persevere.

This is evident toward the end of the interview when we spoke about the fall of Saigon. Although Hài tried to remain cheery I could see the underlying pain in his eyes as he recounted not knowing what had happened to his family since he was out of the country during the fall, he even spoke of his father who had failing health at the time, and despite it being a very painful memory, he was able to keep composure and not come to tears.

The interview itself had little challenges; Hài was easy to talk to throughout the whole experience. What gave us a challenge was during the pre-interview portion when we initially contacted the narrator to set up the interview and gain some background information to clarify some of the research we performed. Hài seemed like he would not be willing to tell his personal story as it happened, but a more factual historical account, which we didn't want because this whole project is about hearing the truth through those who lived through the war. Fortunately, by the time we got to the actual interview we were able to ease Hài's concerns and it felt like he gave an honest and true personal story. Another challenge we had to overcome is at the last minute before our interview, our narrator had come in contact with someone who was exposed to Covid19 which meant we had to wait an additional 5 days to find out if he was safe to interview. That was a nerve racking experience because we felt the interview would be more personal in person, rather than having to do it virtually. In the end everything worked out and the interview went smoothly. Kevin did most of the speaking so it would be clear who was the interviewer and

who was the narrator, while Andrew wrote down questions that Kevin would ask the narrator during the interview.

In terms of the interview's technical quality, Kevin regards the audio as very low-quality; it picked up a significant amount of background noise and was additionally hindered by the recording iPad's location on the table Hài was sitting on. His leg would bounce up against the table, muffling out what he would be saying sometimes. Backup recordings were of similar quality or had other issues, such as being too far away from the narrator when he was speaking and picking up the banging of his leg against the table.