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Memories about the Military Language School



Military School of Languages badge

Nguyen Ngoc Chinh

According to the elder (Captain) Pham Huu Khoat, the first commander of the General Staff English School, he was assigned to set up the school on June 18, 1956 with the purpose of training English for the troops. ARVN employees to prepare for a career in the United States. At the same time, some of the first lecturers were also seconded to the school to be in charge of teaching such as Nguyen Tho Dan, Nguyen Tuan Kiet, Ho Quy Chanh and Nguyen Van Ngoi (with the position of Si. Administration).

In the beginning, the name of the school was English Language School, then known by the name of the Military English School (Armed Forces English Language School) and eventually changed to the Military Language School (Armed Forces Language School) until April 30, 1975. The school also changed its leader three times, from Captain Pham Huu Khoat to Major Phan Thong Trang and finally Lieutenant Colonel Huynh Vinh Lai.

Since the beginning of 1957, the Military English School has opened a class for senior officers preparing to enter a career at Fort Leavenworth Command and Staff School. Among them were many generals in the ARVN who had attended this class such as Generals Duong Van Minh, Nguyen Khanh, Tran Thien Khiem, Cao Van Vien, Nguyen Van Thieu, Tran Van Minh, Le Van Kim, Tran Ngoc Tam, Thai Quang Hoang, Vinh Loc, Mai Huu Xuan, Hoang Xuan Lam, Lu Lan, Nguyen Vinh Nghi, Nguyen Ngoc Le, Duong Ngoc Lam, Truong Quang An ...

My military time began and ended with a single unit, the Military Language School (TSNQĐ). During the period from when I graduated from Thu Duc in 1969 until the fall of Saigon in 1975, I worked closely with English teaching for soldiers sent by the units from all 4 tactical regions. . There, they studied English to prepare for specialized study abroad programs in the United States in the plan to Vietnamize the war, an American 'step by step' withdrawal from Vietnam.

While I was preparing to complete the 4/68 course, TSNQD sent a delegation to Thu Duc to recruit lecturers. In the examination team, there were Mr. Dinh Trong Dai and Nguyen Huu Phu, who were still second lieutenants. When I got back to school, I found out that these are two 'important' characters of the TSNQ.

Mr. Dai, an acquaintance of friends called 'Dai' Dai, because of his effeminate body, feminine voice, but in return he is very strict both with lecturers and students. He was reminded to the jury is understandable because of his very 'rohil' nature, working with fairness, reasoning on emotions. After the fall of Saigon, Mr. Dai remained in Vietnam and until now, as far as I know, he still has 'no room and shadow'!

The second person in the test team of TSNQD was Mr. Nguyen Huu Phu, friends often called him by the nick name Phu 'Gia'. His personality is deep and quiet, but he always has a smile on his lips, anyone who wants to understand will understand!

I still remember, there was a group of young teachers we loved playing scrabble, a crossword type game like crosswords. Mr. Phú does not play but often appears at the scrabble table, walks around, nods whenever strange words appear. Only during stressful times, he would give true-false ideas about strange words like an ... umpire. He is the 'king' ECL (English Comprehensive Level) of the school because every test form from the US sent to him also gets a maximum score, about 98-100.

ECL is a type of English test prepared by the American Defense Language Institute (DLI). Each exam has 100 questions including grammar, vocabulary, conversation ... Candidates must listen to the tape and mark the answers a, b, c, d on the accompanying booklet. The maximum score is 100 and the standard to be judged by the examiner to be a lecturer of the STA is 80 points or more.

I signed up to take the exam and as a result of course 4/68, there were 6 student officers recruited directly from Thu Duc to TSNQ including Nguyen Cong Sang, Nguyen Cuong Nam, Ho Hoi, Luong To, Truong Uncle Chi and Nguyen Ngoc Chinh.

Nguyen Cong Sang of Long Xuyen, a typical of "Bac Lieu dynasty", is handsome, funny and humorous. In Sang, I still remember the joke: "Thank you for the super-excellent medicine, Goodbye for the bottle of wine" and "Phan cao, sharing" (Cantonese means taking a bath, going to bed). When I studied English Language Instructor Course in Lackland, San Antonio, Texas in 1971, Sang was my roommate for 6 months. In Montreal, Canada, we still contact each other often. (*)

Nguyen Cuong Nam, a migrant from the North, was a small figure, his brothers jokingly called him "Cuong" Nguyen Cuong. This name does not reflect the character of Nam, but because the words Cuong Nam is a bit like 'lewd sex', so it becomes a name. Later, Nam was in charge of military supplies at the school so he added a new name, 'Nam Gao'.

Nam is also in America now, I sent an email to Nam to invite me to see old photos on Flickr, Nam said: "Now you can still keep these pictures! Real Servant. I don't even have a piece of paper anymore. They consider all the foreclosures." The male 'Rice' now holds the position of the 'key holder' of the TSQQ Friendship Association in the United States.

Ho Hoi was from Quang Binh but had been in the South for a long time and was a rowing brother with Dang Thong Phong, one of the masters of Aikido at that time. Expansion from the capital. It is often said that monks and nuns who come out of monkhood are often abnormal! This type of sex is unusual, obsessive about sex, manifested by phrases such as 'lust' as 'Bachelor ... vulva'

Ho Hoi currently lives in the United States and once returned to Vietnam. After 1975 was a man who had to cope with the disease but still kept his humorous voice: "I heard that playing dogs will give birth to a son, but really, I have a son after a doggy time style!". Back in Vietnam, Hoi once told the story of renting a bedroom with her boyfriend, "they do all sorts of things all day." It is true that tu tu!

Luong To is Vietnamese-Chinese with a thick Chinese accent. Even speaking English, he also followed Chinese accent: 'chicken noodle' I read as 'stingy scales'! That gentle person later died in Trang Lon re-education camp. I heard that Tô died because of 'food shortages' when his family members came to visit him. There were also people who said that Liang Liao was "hit by the food" rather than "from food" in the re-education camp. Please light an incense stick to commemorate the short-term companion.

Truong Chi Chi was also Chinese, but he was originally a Chinese who immigrated to the South in 1954. Compared to Luong To and Truong Uncle Chi, I see that Vietnamese people of Chinese origin in the South, although their temperament is very spontaneous but always friendly. In contrast, the Northern Chinese people (Mong Cai people for example) are very profound and discreet.

Truong Uncle Chi stayed at TSNQĐ until 1971. On the occasion of studying abroad in Lackland, Chi stayed in the US, but did not return to Vietnam. Back then, the Americans had anti-war groups that were willing to help those who fought against the Vietnam War by sending them to Canada. In Chi's case, I thought there might be connections with people in China Town, so when he went to San Francisco to prepare for his return home, instead of boarding the plane, he chose to stay in Chinatown. Do not know what kind of life Truong Bac Chi is living now?

The first day of returning to the TSNQ - a group of 6 freshmen who had just graduated from class 4/68 Thu Duc - had a meeting with the commander-in-chief Huynh Vinh Lai, who was then brought to the rank of Major. I still remember his question: "How much do you guys go to school?". He asked this question, implying that the school recruited its teachers according to their abilities, there was absolutely no work to do, and they were running around like rumors. I do not know for 5 of my classmates, but in my case, running to school is completely unavailable.

My ECL score of 89/100 is considered to be 'provisional' while the standard for returning to TSQQ is over 80. In 1969, the fighting situation was tense so most of Thu Duc's new graduates were graduated. were added to combat units. The fierce soldiers like Paratroopers, Special Forces, Rangers, Marines are willing to accept volunteer officers. The remainder was supplemented by the Regional Force units in sub-regions of the four tactical regions, or if they had a professional qualification or COCC

(descendants of their ancestors) could return to non-combat units such as Cong. infantry, Communications, Military Supplies, Military Equipment ...

As soon as I heard the results of the TSR, some of my friends in the platoon platoon praised me for having a 'spawning thing', and immediately returned to Saigon. I found my career life so fortunate compared to my peers who had to cope with guns and guns, and narrowly dying.

Believe in your fate but it's not natural that there are 'happy numbers'. Without English, my life would go in a different direction. For example, a unit will be selected close to home such as the 23rd Infantry Division or the Dak Lak Sub-Area right in Ban Me Thuot. If in that direction, maybe I could soon 'sit on the altar' and now it is ... quiet, beautiful tomb!

In this life, sometimes I think about it, I feel sad, happy and miserable. It's sad but fun is also. Out of extreme bouts of anger to the future. I officially wore the 'globe and the book above had 7 stars' badge after graduating from Thu Duc. It was the insignia of the Military Language School. This badge is mounted on the left shoulder of the military uniform.

The school's main campus is part of the General Staff Department, but it only teaches students from infantry and non-commissioned officers' class.

At 4 Nguyen Van Trang Street, District 1 (which now seems to be the base of Minh Duc University), there is a branch for Air Force cadets student students, and another is located on Dong Khanh Street. , Cho Lon, specialized in training non-commissioned officers and soldiers who are also members of the air force. Later, the school opened a new branch in Hoan Cau hotel (Mondial) on Phan Thanh Gian street (now Dien Bien Phu street) exclusively for the navy.

The first job of the 6th group of our 4/68 Lieutenant Class was to attend a one-week course called PST (Pre-service Training) led by Lieutenant Nguyen Van So, Dean of the Secondary English Department. blame. Second Lieutenant Department was later transferred to the National Vo School, brothers in the school told each other that he went to Dalat to have a more future in TSNQD. I think so too because Vo Vo school has created favorable conditions for him to continue his higher education journey abroad.

After the PST, I was assigned to the branch of Nguyen Van Trang, in charge of a squad of air force trainees but not directly in class. The work was too leisurely, only taking care of the student cadet student, cutting up the cleaning of the upper floor ... But it was also because I was too leisurely that I was sentenced to 4 days of solemn punishment in the General Staff Prison!

It was also very simple: I was assigned to take care of the one-floor cleaning floor, including the command of the mid-class student to clean the toilet so that it would not smell and affect the classrooms! Unfortunately, one day a US Army colonel came to visit the classrooms while the smell from the toilet came out. The commander, Major Huynh Vinh Lai, was humiliated with the guests and vented his anger on First Lieutenant Nguyen Ngoc Chinh ... but now he was watching a movie at Vinh Loi cinema, I remember it was Lady Hamilton! The next day, I wrapped up the melon in the car of the soldiers in the General Staff to execute the 4-day ban. I still remember, in prison, the lower teeth were inherently shaky, so I ended up plucking! How unlucky, both imprisoned and lost chewing teeth! An unforgettable memory before officially becoming a lecturer!



The teaching material at the TSQQD is the American Language Course (ALC) series, which was prepared by the American Institute of National Linguistics (DLI). The series includes the basic course for the lowest level students, who study the numbered materials ALC 1100, 1200, 1300 and 1400. For our teachers, the most tired is to teach ALC 1100, a beginner's document for new English learners. In the military environment, returning to Saigon to study English was considered a privilege not to face guns, so most students considered this a long-term vacation. The time at the school is only one session a day, the rest of the day is free so the majority of courses are less than play more!

After completing the basic course, students will take the ECL, if they pass the exam, they will continue to study intermediate materials, from books ALC 2100, 2200, 2300 and 2400. Usually officers and non-commissioned officers of the infantry army who have completed intermediate education, about 6 months, will prepare to go to study in the United States according to the specialized branches of the army, such as information transmission, military engineering, military equipment ...

When they came to the United States, they continued to study specialized English. If they are students of Air Force officers, after completing basic English in Vietnam, they will continue to learn flight training at air training centers in the US, if they are non-commissioned officers, they will study professional subjects. such as aircraft, radar, aerial photography ...

Unlike infantry, the air force was "favored" not having to gather pants, so the air force was most afraid to have to "gather the pants", a saying that just dismissed from the air force to combat infantry. The air force can be thought of as a 'troop soldier', only around airports or bases, having little direct confrontation with war - unless the airfield is bombarded or attacked. Therefore, many young people have degrees but still sign up in the air force, not in Thu Duc to wear a standard infantry lieutenant, easy to climb to the altar! Writer Duong Hung Cuong (Goat hustles in Sadness at the airport) or Nguyen Thuy Long (Loan of velvet eyes, Black water Kinh) are typical examples in this case.

The TSNQ also taught English to the navy, often with the task of taking over small US Navy ships or practicing at the Seventh Fleet. Sailors are the most lame soldiers in the army. Wearing flared jeans, the head wearing a hat resembles Tripitaka when it comes to reciting sutras, so it is often called ... Tripitaka. However, naval officers have a luxurious suit during the ceremony. They may be regarded as the most 'intellectuals' in the ARVN. In addition to teaching English, TSNQD also has a Vietnamese Language Department, teaching Vietnamese to the troops of the combatant countries in Vietnam such as the United States, Australia, Korea, Philippines, Thailand ... However, the number of candidates belongs to the group. This study at TSQQ is very small because each



country has its own Vietnamese language course, sometimes they learn Vietnamese from their home country before coming to Vietnam. Therefore, some Vietnamese language teachers at the school were later sent to study in the United States to become English teachers when the number of students increased.

In addition to Vietnamese lecturers, TSNQĐ also strengthened a number of American lecturers recruited from the air force continental army. They are American soldiers with high education but they do not exclude cases of COCC (descendants of father and grandchildren) being sent to teach languages to avoid deaths on the Vietnam battlefield. Thinking after all, in every society is the same. COCC differs only in the degree and method of implementation in each country, but in general, it still serves a final purpose: "The king's son becomes a king, the monk in the temple swept the multi-leaf"!

The biggest difference is that American lecturers come to teach but always embody their M16 password as a reminder that even in Saigon but Vietnam is still in a state of war. There was a famous American lecturer at TSNQĐ, we still jokingly called him 'Big' because of his good, fat body. Smith seemed to only enjoy playing with Vietnamese instructors, someone told him that he was 'Pê De' but there were also rumors that he was a CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) inserted into the school!

Whatever Smith is, but the conduct of a non-commissioned officer has proved he is a good friend of our teachers. I still remember, when the Long Binh base of the US Army cleared up, somehow Smith had brought a Shuffle table from Long Binh to the school for lecturers to have fun with.

Just like a billard, a shuffle way of playing is to compute 'coffee', that ball shuffle, but the shuffle has a flat circle rather than a sphere like a billard. Another difference is that the shuffle player uses his hand to push the ball, while the billard uses 'muscle' every time he moves the ball. That day there were some young people who were fascinated by Smith's shuffle table and brought back to the Lecture Room, at 'coffee break' time, some lecturers gathered around the shuffle table for entertainment.

Smith's affection for Vietnamese lecturers was not only limited to his time in Vietnam, but was also shown after his return to the United States. TSNQĐ always sends lecturers to train at Lackland Air Force Base (Lackland AFB), San Antonio, Texas. Smith did not mind the distant roads, driving to Lackland just to visit his old friends. It was so touched by the sincere feelings of an American friend.

I also have an American friend, as kind as 'kind' Smith. When I was teaching Navy students at Mondial branch on Phan Thanh Gian (now Dien Bien Phu) I got acquainted with Tronvig, a lecturer of the US Navy who strengthened TSNQĐ. In 1971, I went to Lackland for a training course, so Tronvig introduced his family living in Oakland, very close to the Travis base in San Francisco, where I stayed to wait for the plane to San Antonio. Tronvig gave his family phone number and told me to visit his house in Oakland anyway.



Travis is a transit station of the US military, receiving soldiers on trans-Pacific flights to wait for domestic flights. For the first time, I was surprised by the new scenery, so I phoned the Tronvig family. About half an hour later, the Tronvig grandparents drove right away.

Amazingly, they were intimate as if they had known me for a long time. They took me home and then drove me around San Francisco until dusk to return to Travis to take the flight to San Antonio the next morning. I returned to the United States for the second time in 1973 and the Tronvig family was one of the addresses I was familiar with in my exile days.

Oriental people often think in the West people often favor individualism. They are cold on the street but once you enter their private world, you will discover an unexpectedly openness. I will always remember the first impression when I came to America through the Tronvig family even though they were only a small corner of American life.

(Source: Blog nguyennhocchinh)