



# The sound of the bamboo flute ...

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Da Nang Air Base, 1965: On K-9 patrol with Blackie, south of Da Nang Air Base. The sun had dipped beneath the hills, flaming the sky with its afterglow, and converting bruised clouds to shades of rust and blood red. Man's storm brewed luminous bands of colored flares that soon waltzed an aurora borealis over the western mountains.



Through the night, distant arty thumped a rhythmic heartbeat in the earth.

At dawn, rippled clouds of pink fled the molten sunrise as its sunburst fanned upwards from the horizon, tinting, then torching the flat altocumulus clouds a burnt orange to scarlet red.

Soon, the valley is alive with yellow-wing butterflies, on blossomed fields of dew.



Our hilltop provided a spectacular view of two fishermen waist deep in the meandering gentle river below-- their village, on the far bank, is a watercolor of tranquility. Grayish smoke comes out from the rooftop of every house, like a magical veil wafting lazily between heaven and earth.

In the distance, parched elephant grass resembled Montana's amber fields of grain sweeping *to-and-fro* in rippled waves.



Dandelions of hundreds of leaflets surfed and trashed the tranquil fertile valley like

the streets of east L.A. The dawns' aircraft that had scattered the propaganda leaflets was now a speck on the horizon, and yet leaflets still seesawed down from a thousand feet, like maple leaves of New England.

*Animated Butterfly, courtesy of [Cheryl Boswell](#), [Pathways](#).*



Many years passed before I learned the below leaflet was from a letter-poem taken from the body of a Viet Cong soldier, and reproduced as a South Vietnamese propaganda leaflet. Line-by-line translation is provided courtesy of a web friend and scholar:

[Mr. Ba Nguyen](#). Mr. Nguyen, who received a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies at Mary Washington College, Virginia, was sixteen years of age when I was in-country in 1965-1966. His translation (and *three-questions* Vietvet Survey) follows:

To: [Don Poss](#)  
Subject: Re: Propaganda Leaflets translation

Dear Don Poss,

The leaflet in your Email came from the same source [see: [Friendly Flier](#)]. But it is a propaganda one as you identify it. There is an inconsistency in the leaflet though. **The first part** is poem which I translate and explain (in parentheses). This is the story of a North Vietnam soldier who went to the South to "liberate" but found out that the South WAS beautiful and prosperous and no one NEEDED to be "liberated." **The second part** is a recruiting statement which begins with "THE ABOVE LETTER" instead of "THE ABOVE POEM." (IN VIETNAMESE, THO = POEM, THU = LETTER).

### FIRST PART: POEM

- 1) From the time I joined the (North Vietnam) army, separating from you, Mother,
- 2) With other soldiers, I went to Laos, then to the Central Part of Vietnam.
- 3) (I passed through) Green mountains, dark green mountains rolling unendingly,



- 4) I suffered from the heat of the ocean in the morning and forest rains in the evening
- 5) I was of young age (age of Spring), my life was like a flower abloom
- 6) From HOA BINH (name of a province), I went, unafraid of hardship and danger
- 7) Month after month, I slept at night and walked during daytime
- 8) My shoes were worn out and my shirt torn, no longer protecting me from the penetrating cold
- 9) There were many evenings, in TRUONG SON (name of the mountain range), amid mountains and jungles, I felt so lonely
- 10) Oh (gentle) Mother! I suddenly missed our land (the village where I was born and raised)
- 11) (I missed) the grayish smoke in the evening (in the village) and vines of long squash, green with their leaves, covering a wooden scaffold
- 12) I missed so much the little butterflies and the pagoda
- 13) (However) After arriving here, although I was in a strange land and with strange people
- 14) South Vietnam was of the same country
- 15) With its palm trees and its roads
- 16a) Imbued with the aroma of rice ripening sweetly ...
- 16b) And the grayish smoke in the evening ...
- 17) The buffaloes returned to their barns
- 18) *The sound of the (bamboo) flute made me remember*
- 19) After the first moments of uncertainty
- 20) I came to realize that no one wanted to be liberated here

- 21) Here markets are replete with people, happy; paddies green with rice plants
- 22) (From) the vaulted roof of the (Buddhist) pagoda, the bell sounded religiously
- 23) In the school classes, children were, joyfully,
- 24) Singing rhythmically kid's songs
- 25) And in the garden, grew *pak-choy* and yellow blooming flowers
- 26) A school of little butterflies called one another, sucking honey from flowers
- 27) Everywhere, joy reigned overwhelmingly (dizzily)
- 28) Why they (his commanders) made me burn the village, destroy bridges
- 29) lay mines, causing death and sufferings
- 30) Many a time, my hands shook
- 31) when I laid mines then witnessing
- 32) Body parts blew up, blood shedding everywhere
- 33) Whose blood was that? It was of our compatriots
- 34) Of people who were just like me and you
- 35) That night, my eyes were full with tears
- 36) I was sleepless and had nightmares all night.



**SECOND PART:**  
 THIS IS THE TRANSLATION OF  
 THE PARAGRAPH BELOW THE POEM:

The above letter (*yes letter*) was taken from the backpack a VC's body from the recent battlefield of DUC CO. Through the poem, we feel sorry for a person who had recognized his fault (*we were enlightened*), regrettably, it was too late and he had to die painfully. All those who are still with VC's army, take this as an example, hurry to return to the right cause (to the Republic of Vietnam). Don't wait until too late (until you regret that it was too late).

Hope this help you understand the leaflet.

V/R  
 Ba



Post Script:

Dear Don Poss,

It was my pleasure to translate the leaflets for you. I can't remember the last time I translated a poem or anything else. It brings back memories of the time when I began to learn English from the Vietnamese books almost thirty years ago. If you have something else that you want to translate, don't hesitate to send it to me. Thanks for posting my translation on your homepage. Your opening paragraph is just beautiful. It is like picture in the poem or poem in the picture. I will search your writings and read them. Thanks for your kind introductory words, but truly I am more a learner than a scholar. My wife printed a copy of the poem in your homepage and I got one myself.

After the communists took over South Vietnam, I came to live about 3 years with my father in GoCong, a province (now a county), ten miles East of MYTHO which is about 45 miles south of SAIGON. The worst thing to me was that there was no freedom or opportunity for education. I had to attend political indoctrination two or three nights a week. In the States, education network is just like a paradise where I have spent most of my nighttime in the last 16 years and probably many more years to come. My two children, Jimmy and Maria are now a senior and a sophomore at the University of Virginia.

For my Master's project, I have researched on the Healing Phase of the Vietnam War, its effects, and How Does It Work. Many of my friends in Vietnam lost their lives in the war; many of my friends in the United States speak bitterly of the war, of their government and of the people who turn their back on them when they come home. This project concentrated on the ways some Vietnam veterans and their families cope with numerous difficulties after the war.

V/R

Ba