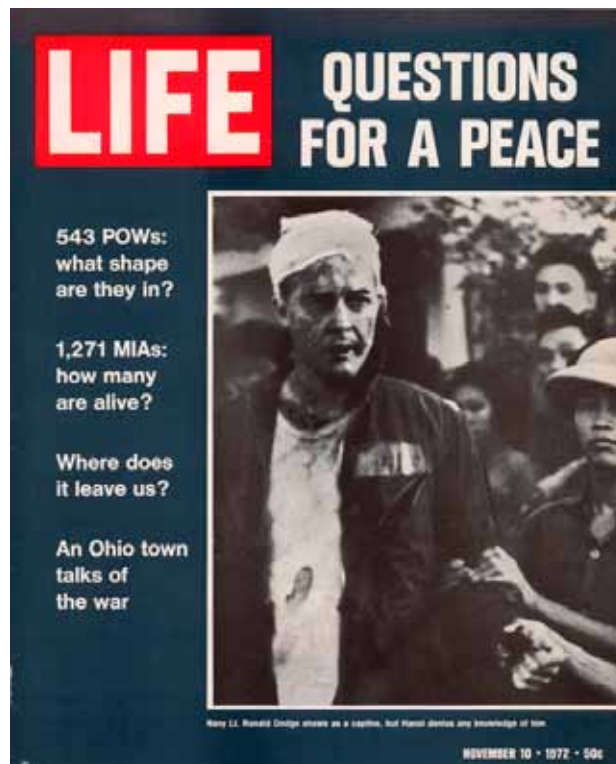


'DID WE GET THE SHOT?'

ALEX VERNON

Odyssey to 'The 17th Parallel'



Paris Match, coverphoto with U.S. Navy Lt. Ronald Dodge, captured after he was shot down on 17 May 1967, issue November 10 1972.

Joris Ivens/Marceline Loridan-Ivens, Film stills le 17e parallèle: stock footage of Captain Michael K. McCuiston captured after he was shot down on 8 May 1967. © CAPI Films, Paris

16 MAY 2013. "FILM MOVEMENTS IN ALL COUNTRIES BEGIN WITH THE DOCUMENTARY," SAID MR. KHUONG THAN HY. WE WERE GATHERED IN AN AUDITORIUM AT THE FILM ART RESEARCH AND ARCHIVE CENTER, HO CHI MINH CITY (7 PHAN KE BINH STREET)—A CONTINGENT OF EIGHT UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND THREE FACULTY MEMBERS FROM HENDRIX COLLEGE IN CONWAY, ARKANSAS, U.S.A.; FOUR PEERS FROM CAN THO UNIVERSITY IN VIET NAM; THE CENTER'S DIRECTOR AND STAFF; AND

THIRTY-ODD MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF VETERAN FILM-MAKERS FROM THE WARS FOR INDEPENDENCE. SOME FAMILY MEMBERS WERE ALSO IN ATTENDANCE, KHUONG THAN HY HAD WITNESSED THE BATTLE OF DIEN BIEN PHU (1954); MOST WORKED ON FILMS BETWEEN 1967 AND 1975. MME. NGUYEN THI XUAN PHUONG, THE VIETNAMESE INTERPRETER AND MEDIC FOR JORIS IVENS AND MARCELINE LORIDAN'S 1968 FILM *THE 17th PARALLEL*, HAD ARRANGED THE EVENT.

That its national film movement began with documentaries was indeed the case in Viet Nam, at least in terms of the official legend and this assembly of former soldiers supporting the northern cause of reunification (*national* is a loaded term in Viet Nam). On 15 October 1947, in the jungles outside Saigon, Mr. Khuong Me and a handful of compatriots resolved to establish a filmmaking society both to record the people's struggles and to make films available to as many audiences as they could reach. Khuong Me, heralded as the father-the "Mr. Lumière" -of Vietnamese film, translated Pierre Boyer and Pierre Fauveau's *Ciné Almanach Prisma* (1947) to serve as an instruction manual. He purchased the first piece of equipment, a second-hand French camera, and six months after its resolution the group had produced its first film.

We heard many stories that day. Of running projectors by pedal power, and packing and scrambling when hostilities threatened. Of relying on lamps, magnifying glasses, and ammunition boxes rather than proper equipment; of developing film under blankets or in enormous urns. Of filming out in front of the combatants, of seeing comrades killed, of being wounded. Of witnessing a bombing during a wedding, with the only remains of the bride and some of the guests the bits of clothes in the trees.



Xuan Phuong shared stories from the filming of *The 17th Parallel*. Bombs knocked Ivens off his feet twice. Such bombs, she told us, basically liquefied the impacted ground, turning it into something like quicksand. Ivens had to crawl out with great care just to reach solid earth, much less to avoid touching another bomb. Or a corpse. And both times, as others helped pull him up, his ears, nose, and mouth full of dirt, his first concern was for the film: "Did we get the shot?" She also retold a story from her memoir 'Ao Dai: My War, My Country, My Vietnam': when the crewmember Kue was taking the film back to Hanoi for processing, the bombs came. He cradled the film with his body, like a mother protecting her child. He lost his life. His blood can still be seen on the original reels.

One scene of *The 17th Parallel* shows the people of Vinh Linh assembled underground to watch a patriotic play about their lives. But they also, Xuan Phuong told us, loved movies. They would walk by torchlight to the improvised venue, extinguishing them whenever shouts of "Mây bay! Mây bay!"— in an eerie echo of *The Spanish Earth's* "Aviación! Aviación!"—broke the night. (As his writings indicate, Ivens had his experience in Spain in mind as he worked and reflected on this new film³). She singled out the film *The Lighting of the Wind* as being particularly spiritually meaningful to the Vinh Linh community, as the filmmaker was in the auditorium with us that day. Its filming was quite challenging, constantly interrupted by the war and the need to fight. Ivens filmed in Vinh Linh because it was the front line, occupying the north bank of the Ben Hai River, which loosely followed the 17th parallel demarcating the "two" Vietnams. His film opens grandly with a precariously achieved shot from the flagpole of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, looking south, across the river, past the flapping flag. After a long, difficult journey from Hanoi, the crew finally arrived in Vinh Linh, where it was on location from 15 May to 8 June.

II
After a week in Ho Chi Minh City, my group travelled to central Viet Nam, where we spent two days in Hue followed by a week at the Vinh Thuy Commune, Vinh Linh District, Quang Tri Province. It was 40° Centigrade the day we drove up; the day before it had reached 43°, the hottest day in thirty years, we were told. Our stay, from 20-26 May 2013, neatly coincided with the journey dates forty-six years earlier such that we experienced something of the filming conditions. Our friends from the Film Center envied us our journey. Several, including the director, came from Quang Tri. "You will be walking in the footsteps of legends," one of the actors told us, speaking of the war dead. "Their spirits are real. You might encounter their souls in the river." Vietnamese congregate to place flowers and floating lanterns for the sacrificed in the Thach Han River by the old Quang Tri citadel, about 15km south of the Ben Hai, where fierce fighting took place in 1972. The Khe Sanh battlefield is in the province's northwest corner. Quang Tri province also houses the Trung Son War Martyr Cemetery for those killed on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the La Vang Church, where the Virgin Mary appeared in 1798 to console persecuted Catholics. Vinh Linh itself had been razed—every structure we saw, every building and pole and road, had been built in the last thirty-five years. "It is sacred ground."

Ivens and Loridan were neither the first nor the last to report from Vinh Linh. Its contiguity with the foe made it a choice site and source for northern propaganda. The European filmmakers arrived in the middle of a vicious military campaign, with mutual months-long bombardment, initi-

ated by Hanoi. Ivens' biographer Hans Schoots draws a cynical surmise on this point:

From this perspective, it is - to put it mildly - remarkable that the North Vietnamese government had failed to evacuate the civilian population and was exposing it to the large-scale American/South Vietnamese reprisals it cannot have failed to expect. This of course fitted into the theory of people's war, in which every civilian was forced by its own government to participate in the fighting. In fact the theory really did not recognize 'civilian population' as a category at all. In this particular case the population of Vinh Linh was placed in a position in which it could not escape active participation in the war. At the same time, propaganda aimed at Western public opinion would stress that civilians fell victim to brutal American violence.

Schoots can't determine whether Ivens and Loridan fully understood the military situation. "What we can say, is that they don't seem to have asked themselves any questions.... The bombing that the inhabitants of Vinh Linh are subject to [in the film] seems to come out of thin air."⁴ True enough, and while the film does get around to acknowledging attacks on the American bases overlooking the river plain at Doc Mieu and Con Tien, the delayed presentation until relatively late in the film suggests a self-defensive response. We ought, however, to contextualize Schoots' contextualization. As U.S. bombing of the area predated the North's launching of this particular campaign by a couple of years. This specific episode of bombardment arguably does represent a valid perspective of the larger act of self-defense. Another propaganda work focusing on the area, the book *With the Fighters of Quang Binh-Vinh Linh* (1966), for example, discusses the bombing of Vinh Linh's capital Hoxa, which Ivens' film shows already destroyed. Children like the film's nine-year-old Duc were soon sent to live in the relative safety of Hanoi, and according to a number of the elderly citizens of the Vinh Thuy commune with whom we conducted oral histories and spoke informally, the government did enforce some evacuations. The distances and chronologies of these displacements weren't entirely clear from these interviews—they could have signified removal from one's family home to a nearby tunnel village, such as the coastal complex at Vinh Moc.

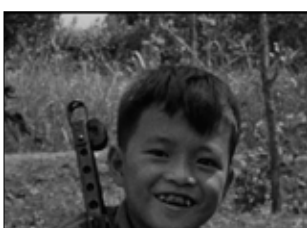
One seventy-five year old woman my group met testified to raising her family underground for ten years, from 1965 to 1975. "During the war, a bomb would explode near the house, like only two meters away, and there would be about twenty-five people in the house, yet no one died. I used to be buried in the tunnels and they had to pull me up. Three to four people were buried in the tunnels like that. They dug the ground up, then pulled me out." Just like the young women in the film, Nguyen Thi Gai worked in the fields during the day, and slept in the tunnels at night. She had no clothes for her babies born underground.⁵

The various articles in *With the Fighters of Quang Binh-Vinh Linh* relate an identical story to *The 17th Parallel*. They describe the barbarous bombing by the American "imperialists", "pirates", and "bandits", and lionize the people's heroic and successful resistance. We read about agricultural gains despite the bombs, about hospitals, theaters, nurseries, and the downing of American pilots. "In the daytime the peasants placidly ploughed, dug, and replanted rice seedlings beside the craters made by the bombs. Some of those huge holes had been turned into ponds where fish were reared....Children went to school, with camouflage boughs on their backs; they discussed various types of aircraft...as if they were playthings." When a jet roaring overhead sent a foreigner into a trench, a veteran of World War II, the kids

Students from Hendrix College and from Can Tho University in Viet Nam.

Xuan Phuong revisiting Vinh Linh for a documentary about *The 17th Parallel* with Duc, 2009

Joris Ivens/Marceline Loridan-Ivens, Film still le 17e parallèle: young Duc training the capturing of a US pilot. © CAPI Films, Paris





Film poster *le 17e parallèle*. Coll. JJA/EFJ

Joris Ivens: 'Did we get the shot', 1967. Coll. JJA/EFJ

Film still *Vinh Linh: The Steel Rampart*, 1970.



laughed at his frightful ignorance: "That was a supersonic plane; when you hear it there is no danger anymore; it's gone already."⁶ The book even excerpts a February 1966 *Événement* article Ivens wrote about his visit the year before.⁷ The Vietnamese documentary *Vinh Linh: The Steel Rampart* (1970) appeared two years after Ivens' film.⁸ It tells a similar story but at less than half the length. Some scenes are stock footage; others are lifted directly from *The 17th Parallel*, such as an early shot looking across the river past the flapping flag and the following explosion and burning house, a shot of an American pilot's severed hand, and the besieged Con Tien (the latter film's past tense narration appears to recognize the use of older footage). Both films have an underground nursery, hospital, kitchen, and command post. Both have people digging out the tunnels and women brushing their hair. Both appear to include the same militiaman, wearing a camouflage shawl tied around her neck over a long-sleeve black shirt. Both films have a loud-speaker sounding to the comrades across the river and craters turned into fish ponds. Both have a cute dog. Instead of a live performance celebrating the villagers' own wartime lives, this film shows a projector team playing a film that includes anti-war protests in the United States.

The Steel Rampart does seem to portray the Vietnamese as more aggressive combatants. It features women firing rifles and anti-aircraft guns, not just as leaders and trainees, and names one woman, Truong Thi Khue, as a "heroine" for shooting down a plane. This emphasis on the women fighters is common among North Vietnamese documentaries like these films and the book, and films like *Cu Chi Guerrillas* (1967). The American imperialists do have a conscience, as they drop leaflets warning of future B52 strikes. For a few seconds toward the end, a captured pilot, hands bound behind him, walks between two women, the one in front carrying his parachute.

Director Ngoc Quynh's most interesting sequence appears a minute later. A group of soldiers play a folksong on homemade instruments, the music persisting as we watch a montage of artillery rounds shoved into breaches, of a line of babies swinging in baskets, of the destruction at the other end of the artillery's trajectory (against Con Tien). Babies and sprouting rice finish the film. It otherwise lacks a plot, though its brevity, its brisk editing pace, and its musical score quicken it.⁹

The 17th Parallel, on the other hand, insists on lingering, on the dragging along of daily life. Ivens crafted his film precisely to resist an imposed progression:

To screen two hours in which nothing actually happens, a chronicle in which people continue nevertheless to be interested, fascinated, that for me...That is Art with capital A...Someone once said to me: after ten minutes I'd forgotten it was one of your films. That pleases me enormously, that the author doesn't intrude in his work. Art isn't an alibi to produce whatever you want. It's also not so important if Ivens has been able to speak his mind...In a couple of years' time, when the conflict has passed, the film will return as a historical documentary. Only then will its qualities be apparent.¹⁰

Or as he expressed this notion more succinctly: "It's a very strange film. It's not really one of my films. It's actually not a film at all."¹¹

One might suspect Ivens' hand in overemphasizing the collective monologic patriotism, or see him as faithfully documenting the heaviness of the sanctioned message however much that message smuggled up with his own politics. How else do we expect these citizens to portray themselves in a Hanoi-supported film and with local party cadre and fellow comrades looking on? Ivens was himself perhaps more

ideologically committed than some of his subjects: "I understood that to carry out my task: make a film worthy of our common people's war, the film director and his team must completely integrate themselves into this war, that the director himself becomes a combatant, and more than before with my shootings in Spain, China, Cuba, I was aware that our camera had to be a weapon."¹² Yet we should take care to avoid simplification. This statement by Ivens curiously situates him at once, per Christina Schwenkel's framework, as a globe-trotting foreign correspondent whose work "parallels that of anthropologists" as well as an "insider" documentarian-ethnographer like his Vietnamese counterparts. Schwenkel's article on Vietnamese wartime photojournalists sensitively contends that

"socialist journalism" ...transcends conventional discussions of "propaganda" and "ideology" and challenges commonplace assumptions that knowledge production in a socialist context is the "soulless" work of servants of the state...[The Vietnamese p]hotographers' self-positioning as artists and historical agents, in their quest to represent particular truths about the war through a more ethnographic and humanistic approach, called into question the often dehumanizing and objectifying tendencies of "objective journalism" as practiced in the west.¹³

Schwenkel, I think, helps us understand Ivens' pride in a film that isn't a film, in a visual record whose import will increase with the passing of time beyond political urgency. *The Steel Rampart's* brief shot of a uniformed Vietnamese photographer, as a subject within the documentary, embodies this doubled position as recorder and recorded (Schwenkel titles her essays by quoting a source: "The Camera Was My Weapon").

We do experience some narrative lines besides the self-defensive military operation, especially as the film highlights the successive generations. It opens with the elders discussing their displacement and suffering, it then focuses on the younger adults engaged in managing the community and participating in the militia, and it finally turns to the children's education as future combatants and even present contributors to the fight: "Hands up!" they repeat after their teacher, as the film ends. And if *The Spanish Earth's* narrative unexpectedly loses the Julian thread (after the film crew lost touch with him), *The 17th Parallel's* narrative unexpectedly gains a thread with the capturing of the American pilot. It's as if he drops out of the heavens on any odd day, and the film, already approaching two hours, decides it's high time to wrap up.

III

It was Captain Michael K. McCuiston's twenty-first mission flying his F105D "Thunderchief." He thought he went down on 7 May 1967; he was later informed it was the eighth.¹⁴ It happened just as he hit the pickle button to drop his ordnance.

He continued to fly, leveling out around 5000 feet. Eventually another pilot pulled up alongside and told him to bail out: "You are on fire!" He tilted his right canopy mirror back into position (during combat he angled the mirrors so the reflections wouldn't distract him) and saw the fuselage fire. He pushed the mirror back, turned down the left mirror, saw the fuselage fire on that side, and pushed that mirror back. His stick finally went dead. There was nothing left at the other end.

The official "loss coordinates" for his ejection are 181100N 1054900E, in Ha Tinh, two provinces above Quang Tri and Vinh Linh.¹⁵ According to McCuiston, the image of two pilots going down in Ivens's film notwithstanding, no one else was shot down that day. The Vietnamese organized

POWs by their capture date, and he was the sole member of his group. U.S. records confirm that his was the only loss on the 8th. McCuiston recalls that a few weeks before, another pilot had been shot down in same "hole," though he was never heard from again.

He had been brought down by 37mm anti-aircraft fire. "Two of the other F-105s made strafing runs on enemy troops who were approaching the downed pilot while the other aircraft, flown by Maj. Al Lesinski..., climbed to altitude to provide radio relay to organize the SAR effort." A-1s replaced the F-105s, but the helicopters did not arrive in time.¹⁶ McCuiston later heard from a buddy that someone in Saigon cancelled the helicopter mission even though there was plenty of daylight left.

After hitting the ground, Capt. McCuiston found himself cornered in rocky terrain as a group of Vietnamese approached wearing militia hats, brandishing AKs, and shouting "Hands up!" One of them slid down the hill toward him. McCuiston took cover behind a rock as the other man shot off a full banana-clip's worth of rounds on automatic. When he stopped to reload, McCuiston stepped out and fired four rounds, killing him. The other militiamen acted as if it had never happened. They walked up to the American, he dropped his pistol, and they led him away.

On the walk, one of them struck him from behind in the head with the butt of his AK, swinging it like a baseball bat, knocking McCuiston to the ground. He couldn't see the man; the blow came out of nowhere. He was unconscious for about thirty seconds. He thought he had been bayoneted as well because of the blood covering one of his sleeves. They secured him in a back room, something like a storage closet or cold cellar built into the earth, in a home about 1000 yards from the capture site. The house itself wasn't underground; it had a roofed porch in the front.

A day or two later he heard a crowd outside. The locals hadn't mistreated him, yet this new commotion scared him. He was brought out to the porch, where the crowd had gathered on the sloping ground below.

At some point he became aware of the filming. "I didn't see any gringos," he told me on the telephone, "Only Vietnamese." If Ivens and Loridan were present, they didn't show themselves. As neither Ivens nor Loridan mention the significant event of witnessing the capture of a pilot in any of their published accounts, Ivens most likely used footage from another source.¹⁷ Indeed in a 1974 letter to Debbie Litt of Detroit, Michigan, he admits to including footage of a captured American pilot taken by a Vietnamese cameraman in a "1967" film. The pilot in question is U.S. Navy Lt. Ronald Dodge, who was shot down 17 May 1967 (after Ivens departed Vinh Linh). He could not have appeared in the found footage film *Le ciel, la terre* (1966), and he does not appear in *Loi du Vietnam* (August 1967). Presumably Ivens has McCuiston in mind.¹⁸

McCuiston mugged for the camera; he wanted his picture taken. He recalled a woman in the front row with bad betel nut blackened teeth, holding a baby in one hand while shaking her other fist and shouting at him. All the while her baby smiled and waved, trying to make a new friend.

The next morning his captors woke him, gave him a conical "coolie hat," and without binding him in any way walked him some distance away. He had no idea where they were leading him. That's when the locals staged his capture for the camera albeit without the dramatic violence of the actual event. The flight helmet they handed him belonged to a pilot with a much bigger head, and McCuiston had the astonishing presence of mind to pull it as far down as possible to call attention to this other lost pilot for whoever might see the footage.



Joris Ivens: 'Did we get the shot', 1967. Coll. JJA/EFJ

Sometime during these two or three days in the house, a woman came into the room, handed him an unloaded .38, and pointed it at him. He nodded to confirm it his. She took it back and counted from one to six in Vietnamese as she pointed at each chamber. As she repeated the process, he assumed that they weren't going to report the killing of the militiaman, that it had never officially happened, because an American POW was more valuable than a killed comrade. Maybe, he reflected when he told me the story, he made this assumption to give himself some peace of mind. A regular army officer with a jeep and a driver took him to another demonstration. This time the crowd started throwing rocks. One of the rocks hit the Vietnamese officer as he ran McCuiston back to the jeep before they managed to pull out of range.

The journey to Hanoi took two to three weeks, on foot and in trucks and jeeps.

He tried to escape once. At first they had strapped him side-saddle to a wheel, then they tied him to the canopy frame. "I was bounced all to hell!" Though after he managed to untie himself, he just sat there. There was nowhere to go. The officer laughed good-naturedly. On a later day, when the officer was shaving and McCuiston gestured that he would like to shave as well, the officer gestured back that he wanted to but couldn't. That razor had to last him the rest of the war. "He was good to me," McCuiston said. "Just doing his job, getting me to the next place."

Once on the journey north McCuiston was subjected to a rope torture. It was the middle of nowhere, and for no apparent reason. McCuiston has suspected that the Vietnamese soldier might have just been practicing. He bound Mc-



Affiche: 'Que le peuple Sud Vietnamien héroïques se lèvent', 1966. Coll. EFJI.

Joris Ivens and president Ho Chi Minh, 1966. Coll. EFJI.

Students from Hendrix College and from Can Tho University in Viet Nam.

Cuiston's arms to cut the circulation, and when he released the binds the blood rushing back was excruciating. There was also a mock firing squad. McCuiston was only giving his name, rank, and service number, so they tied him to a tree, leaving his arms free. Two Vietnamese soldiers faced him. He pointed at his forehead with one finger, asking them to make it quick. They released him and continued on. He hadn't been particularly worried, as he assumed he was much more valuable alive than dead.

The next day they linked him up with a Navy A4 pilot, Bob Wideman, a lieutenant junior grade who in his early twenties was the youngest pilot POW. His plane had gone down two days before McCuiston's.¹⁹

The only real scare for McCuiston and Wideman came from their own. They were chained in the back of a dump truck along with a fifty-five gallon fuel drum and a couple of guards when flares lit up the trail. The Vietnamese stopped the truck, shut off the lights, jumped out and ran, leaving them in the truck. U.S. jets open up on this target-of-opportunity; a few rounds hit it but did little damage. Anti-aircraft guns chased the planes away. The guards hopped back in the truck and they continued on.

Along the way McCuiston forgot the name inside the helmet his captors had him wear for the reenactment. It was a short name; it started with a G.²⁰

IV

Upon his arrival at the Hanoi Hilton, the torture began. The Vietnamese handed Captain McCuiston paper and a pencil to sign a confession. He wrote "Did not" in front of every sentence, and returned it. The next morning they woke him at 0500. He fully expected the torture to continue. But they moved him to another cell, and left him alone. It was sheer chance, he believes, that they never discovered his negating of the confession. He soon learned that seven to ten planes had been shot down shortly after his arrival—he figures he owes those pilots for sparing him more torture because the Vietnamese had new people to beat.²¹

He, Wideman, and Major Richard "Dick" Vogel (USAF) were cellmates. Vogel had been shot down and captured on 22 May. One day during their captivity a couple of East German cameramen arrived to report on life at the Hanoi Hilton, eventually producing the 1967 pro-North propaganda documentary *Pilots in Pajamas*. They were particularly interested, according to McCuiston, in Lt. Cdr. Richard "Dick" Stratton of the "Stratton incident" (who famously blinked T-O-R-T-U-R-E in Morse code while being filmed), and Douglas Hegdhal, a sailor who in April fell overboard in the Gulf of Tonkin and was picked up by a Vietnamese fisherman. At nineteen he was the youngest Hanoi Hilton POW and the only draftee.²² McCuiston and his two cellmates watched through peepholes as the Germans filmed Stratton and Hegdhal doing chores. They were then pulled out and told to dig in the garden, shamming their daily activities. The Germans trotted over and turned their cameras on them, ignoring the North Vietnamese soldiers waving and shouting them away. McCuiston, an avid golfer, held his shovel like a golf club to help himself be identified—which his father was able to do.²³

Four years after his arrival, doing exercises in his cell by lifting a bucket, he noticed a protuberance in his bicep. On the day of his capture he hadn't been stuck with a bayonet after all—a bullet must have ricocheted off the rocks and had finally worked its way to the surface. Captain McCuiston was released on 3 March 1973. American doctors removed the bullet, which he still has. He completed an air force career, retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 1981 and then entering a second career as a commercial pilot.

Xuan Phuong's inspiring work with Ivens led to a new career as a filmmaker for the Ministry of Information and Culture that lasted until her retirement. In the early 1990s she opened The Lotus Gallery in Ho Chi Minh City for emerging artists. She achieved all her successes without ever joining the communist party. In July 2011, the French ambassador Jean-François Girault bestowed Xuan Phuong with the title Chevalier de la Légion D'Honneur. The certificate and a frame of ceremony photos hang in her small if overabundant art gallery on Pasteur Street in Ho Chi Minh City's District 1.

Nguyen Thi Gai had only ever wanted an education. Her family's poverty precluded it, requiring her to work at home and in the fields and at home so her five younger siblings could attend school. After marriage, the war kept her in the fields. She never became literate. Her husband was reticent about his service—he helped shoot down three U.S. jets, he captured one pilot (whom they treated like a family member before passing him along, he assured me), and he travelled to fight in the south. In her interview, she gave her husband more credit for actively protecting the American captive from those who wanted to beat him. He reminded them to blame the leaders not the soldiers, she said, "they were just doing the jobs they were given." Speaking for herself, she said that "Previously, when I still didn't know how to think, then say for example, the country of Vietnam, or the U.S., for example, would be said to be two enemies, but in actuality that is not true. We have to say it is just one leader, only the leaders, they were wrong, but the people all prefer to love, to respect one another."

Forty years later, in their lovely home in the Vinh Thuy Commune of Vinh Linh, just up the road from where my students and I helped build a bathroom for a nursery, this couple hosted our group to an amazing lunch and a siesta every afternoon for a week. Speaking about us, Thi Gai observed that "it's fun, but for example in the past no one would visit one another at all. But nowadays, people are moving increasingly closer, generally the international community in general is uniting together, shaking hands with us." Life is a "hundredfold" happier now.

Their six children have all achieved graduate degrees. Among them are two teachers and a prominent artist, my friend Vo Xuan Huy. He spent the first six year of sleeping and hiding underground. Recently he has turned to grappling with the war in his work. He and I are talking about a future project where U.S. and Vietnamese students collaborate on a site-specific piece of art that recognizes the old Quang Tri battlefield but transforms those hostilities into an act of creative friendship.

Hanging in my dining room is a gorgeous lacquer piece of his, a rough black circle on a textured cerulean blue field, inspired by an image from his wartime childhood. Sometimes I know it as *Bomb Crater*. Sometimes, *Fish Pond*.

1 Though President Ho Chi Minh did not officially establish the industry until his decree of 15 March 1953.
2 Xuan Phuong (with Daniele Mazingarbe), *Ao Dai: My War, My Country, My Vietnam*, 2001 Ashland.
3 In addition to the general parallels of an earthbound civilian-at-heart population victimized from the air and fighting intruders, the later film has minor echoes. Women and girls receiving food through a window recall the bakery window in Fuenteduena; caring for the wounded in both films occurs near the end; etc.
4 Hans Schoots, "Entanglements at the Seventeenth Parallel: Joris Ivens and European views on the Vietnam War." Lecture at the Congress on Europe and the Vietnam War at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, December 2000 (<http://www.hansschoots.nl/engels/parallel.html>).
5 Interview conducted by Dr. Anne Goldberg, Hendrix College, at Nguyen Thi Gai's home in the Vinh Thuy Commune (23 May 2013). Interview transcribed and translated by Hendrix student Giang "Gaby" Le. All further quotations from Nguyen Thi Gai are from this interview.
6 *With the Fighters of Quang Binh-Vinh Linh*, Vietnamese Studies No. 9 (Democratic Republic of Vietnam, distributed by Xunhasaba: Hanoi, 1966), 41.

7 Joris Ivens, "Heavens and Earth," in *With the Fighters of Quang Binh-Vinh Linh*, 19-20.
8 *Luy thep Vinh Linh*, directed by Ngoc Quynh (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-uziN-Ssmg>). Awarded a gold medal at the International Film Festival in 1971 in Moscow and Golden Lotus at Vietnam Film Festival in 1973.
9 There is also a fictional film, *17th Parallel: Nights and Days* (1973), filmed in Vinh Linh, Vinh Moc, and other locations during the last years of American military operations. See Ninh Loc, "War Movie Golden Memory for Lead Actress Days and Nights," *Viet Nam News: The National English Language Daily* (26 April, 26 2010) (<http://vietnamnews.vn/sunday/features/199030/war-movie-golden-memory-for-lead-actress-sand-nights.html>). The new-mother-turned-revolutionary, whose baby is cared for collectively, appears to be a basis for the French film *Indochine* twenty years later.
10 Joris Ivens in conversation with B.J. Bertina, in *De Volkskrant*, 16 November 1968; quoted in Stufkens, cite.
11 Quoted in Stufkens, cite.
12 Ivens and Loridan, *17e parallèle, la guerre du peuple: Deux mois sous la terre* (Paris 1967), 8.
13 Christina Schwenkel, "The Camera Was My Weapon": Reporting and Representing War in Socialist Vietnam, in *The Anthropology of News & Journalism: Global Perspectives*, edited by S. Elizabeth Bird (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010): 86-99, 88-89. Given their similar content but different authors and audiences (European for Europeans and Vietnamese for Vietnamese), these two films about Vinh Linh would make for an excellent study of ethnographic representation.
14 Unless otherwise noted, McCuiston's story comes from a telephonic interview with the author conducted 29 June 2011 and a follow-up on 28 August 2013 after he reviewed a draft of this section.
15 This is north of where McCuiston thought he went down—although not being the flight leader, he wasn't as aware of his position. Apparently lat/longs in official reports are notoriously unreliable, yet Mary Schantag from the POW Network informs me that "Ha Tinh would have been from the text of the incident reports" and is more trustworthy than coordinates (personal email 16 July 2013). In this case the lat/long and the incident report text both land him in Ha Tinh.
16 Chris Hodson, *Vietnam Air Losses: United States Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps Fixed-Wing Aircraft Losses in Southeast Asia 1961-1973* (Hinckley, England: Midland Publishing, 2001), 99.
17 Two of the militiamen wear near-white uniforms; no one else in the film wear such clothes.
18 Folder 421, JJA. Litt's letter is dated 26 August; the copy of Ivens' reply is not dated. Litt had seen the photo in *Paris Match* ("Hanoi sous les bombes: un cineaste temoigne," 9 September 1967); she was active in MIA recovery efforts. The photo also appeared on the cover of *Life* (10 November 1972), identifying the pilot as U.S. Navy Lt. Ronald Dodge and noting that the Hanoi government claims no knowledge of his whereabouts. Ivens told her it was an enlarged still from the Vietnamese operator's footage. (On Dodge, see <http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/d/d054.htm>).
19 Though Loridan does write about being informed by the village doctor that two planes were shot down and their pilots captured in Ha Tinh, where she was nursing an injury, and where McCuiston was shot down: "One of them is wounded. He was immediately treated by the farmers who found him" (34). It's hard to date Loridan's travels precisely, but this event probably occurred in the first two weeks of May—again, when McCuiston was shot down. McCuiston's head injury from the rifle-butt was indeed banded by his captors.
20 The chronology is a challenge. A few paragraphs later, Loridan writes, "It is Sunday." She departed that evening around 1700 for Vinh Linh. This would be either Sunday 7 May or Sunday 14 May. Three U.S. pilots were shot down and captured on 5 May outside Hanoi. Five were shot down on 12 May, and the last known location of two of them, Maj. Robert A. Stewart and Capt. Peter P. Pitman (USAF), was Quang Binh province between Loridan's location and Vinh Linh (both MIA and presumed dead). But they were flying in the same plane. And on Sunday the 14th, Lt. Cdr. Charles Everett Southwick and Lt. David John Rollins, in the same Navy F-4B, went down and were captured while attacking the Than Hoa Bridge (Hobson 100). I suspect the doctor was referring to Stewart & Pitman or Southwick & Rollins, with discussion of two pilots at some point in the communication chain misunderstood as two planes.
21 Few paragraphs later Loridan is delayed a probably a night or two on her journey south to rejoin Ivens, but then she writes that she "met up with Joris two days ago" and they "should have already been in Vinh Linh" and writes as if he is arriving with her for the first time. But leaving on 14 May and being delayed would put them in Vinh Linh on the 16th at the earliest, when all other documents tell us that filming began on the 15th.
22 POW Network (<http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/w/w068.htm>) and Hobson (99).
23 Three pilots with monosyllabic last names beginning with 'G' went down in the same general vicinity. The closest both geographically and temporally was Lt. Dany Elloy Green (USN), lost near Ha Tinh (21 Dec 1966). He became a POW and was released 4 March 1973, a day after McCuiston. Lt.



Vo Xuan Huy, *Bomb Crater / Fish Pond*, lacquer piece.

Cdr. Harold Edwin Gray Jr. (USN) was lost near Dong Hoi in Quang Binh province (7 Aug 1965) and believed killed in action. Capt. Wilmer Newlin "Newk" (USAF) Grubb was also lost near Dong Hoi in Quang Binh (26 Jan 1966), was captured, and died in captivity. Most Air Force pilot helmets were camouflaged, so the unknown owner was probably a naval aviator.
21 As McCuiston and Wideman's story evidences, the arrival date at the Hanoi Hilton does not equate to the loss or capture date, so it is difficult to determine when these 7-10 arrived. One good candidate is 19 May or a day or so after. On that day, "Black Friday" for the navy, twelve pilots were recorded as losses—ten from the navy, one from the marine corps, and one from the air force. Eight of those were captured and sent to infamous prison; three of those eight died in captivity (Hobson 101-102). If this is indeed the same group that interrupted McCuiston's interrogation, his transit time from capture to imprisonment would have been roughly twelve days.
22 Hegdhal was released on 5 August 1969, as a humanitarian display for the North Vietnamese, but with the blessing of the POW chain-of-command because Hegdhal had memorized the names of the other 250 or so captives.
23 McCuiston's parents identified him on 16 October 1967 while seeing a clip from *Pilots in Pajamas* of him walking into a building aired on NBC. Two days later they were interviewed on the network's news program (Owner: NBC News, Clip Name: 5112772197_s01, Date: 10/18/67, Title: PARENTS OF DOWNED FLIER IN VIETNAM INTERVIEWED, Media ID: 0274E95, Ardome ID: 1100100610047920122. See http://www.nbcuniversalarhives.com/nbcuni/clip/5112772197_s01.do) The POW Network has an online transcript of Pilots in Pajamas: http://www.pownetwork.org/nvp/pilots_in_pajamas.pdf. Decades after his release, watching television in a Canadian hotel room, he watched himself walk across the screen in a war documentary, presumably this same clip from the East German film.

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