

11th December 2018

ANDY HUU NGUYEN.

**SPEECH AT THE UNVEILLING CEREMONY OF THE FRAMED PICTURE OF ARVN SOLDIER
AT AUSTRALIAN VIETNAM VETERANS MUSEUM – PHILIP ISLAND VIC.**

ARVN Ranger – Second Lieutenant Andy Huu Nguyen
Reporting for duty, sir.

Mr. Philip Dressing, General Manger, National Vietnam Veterans Museum,
Mr. David Dwyer, HMAS Sydney Association, *okm*
Mr. Laurie Jones – Vietnam Veteran,
Mr. Hai Phu Nguyen, President ARVN Rangers Association Victoria,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Andy Huu Nguyen

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to talk about our beloved “Mourning Statue or Bức Tượng Thương Tiếc”, sitting at the entrance of Bien Hoa Military Cemetery. This is one of our iconic treasures of Republic of South Vietnam – Việt Nam Cộng Hòa.

Today, I am very pleased to share some more details about our war time treasures with you



Photo Number 1 President Nguyen Van Thieu.

Bien Hoa Military Cemetery project started in early 1965 on a 125 hectare artificial hill, Bien Hoa province. It was initiated by President Nguyen Van Thieu, designed by Architect Mau Van Le, it simulated a honey bee with its needle pointed toward Saigon - Bien Hoa highway.



Photo Number 2: Aerial View of Bee shaped Bien Hoa Military Cemetery.

Referring to this aerial photo, you can see the whole honey bee cemetery, starting from Saigon – Bien Hoa Highway, as follow:



Photo Number 3: Mourning Statue – Thương Tiếc.

1. Mourning Statue or Thuong Tiec, sat at the entrance of the cemetery, in the front end of the bee's neddle) . The statue, designed and sculptured by Sculptor Thu Thanh Nguyen (ARVN Major), depicting the image of a South Vietnamese soldier sitting guard, holding his gun. The statue weighs 10 tons, is 6m tall, on a 3m stone pedestal.



Photo Number 4:

2. Needle of the bee, actually was a road to the cemetery.



Photo Number 5

3. Welcome Gate or Cổng Tam Quan, was built at the head of honey bee, to greet visitors, family members and friends of dead soldiers.

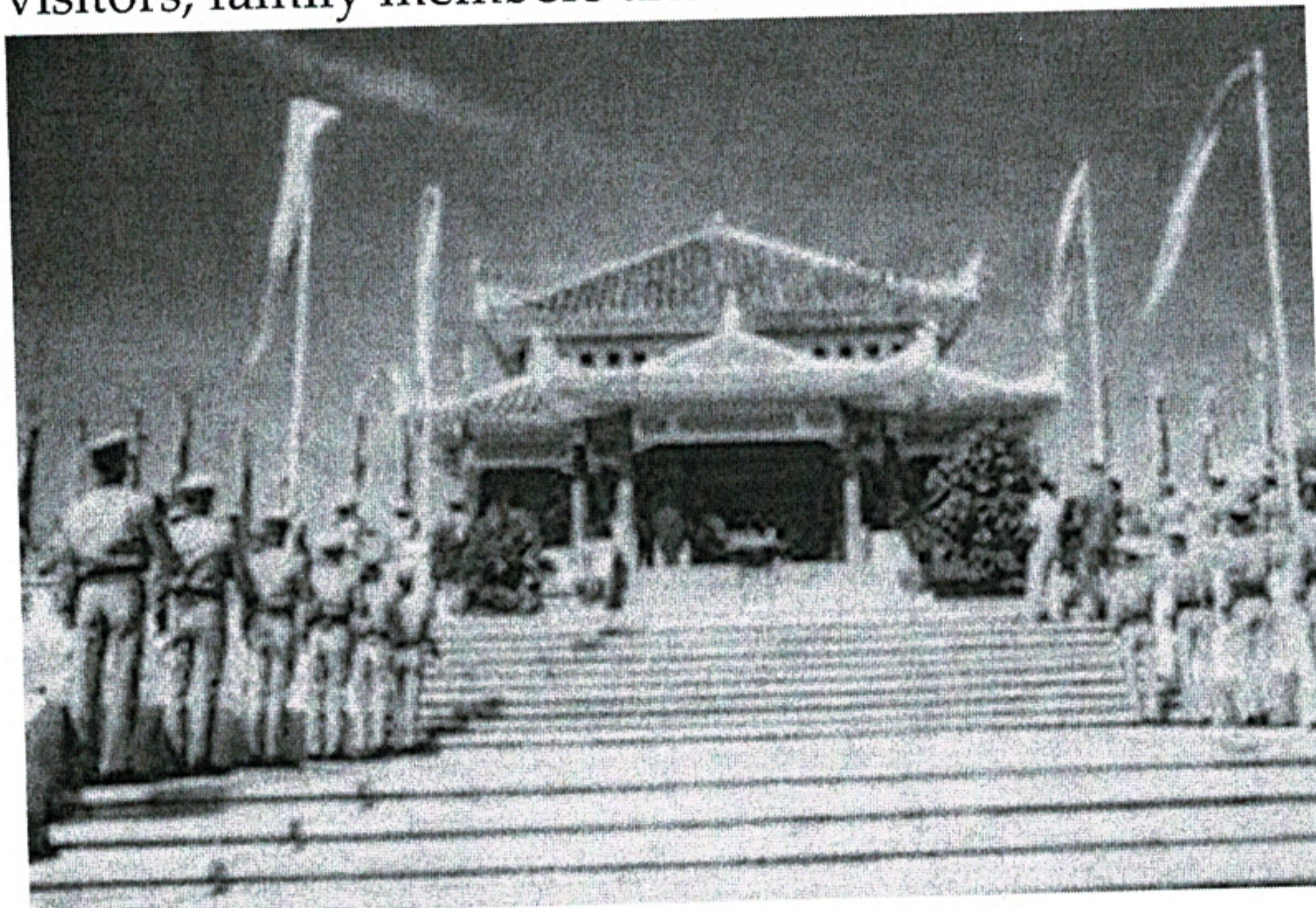


Photo Number 6:

4. Ceremonial Hall or Đài Tử Sĩ, Rank Promoting & Medal offering ceremony to honour the warrior and funeral ceremony was held here.

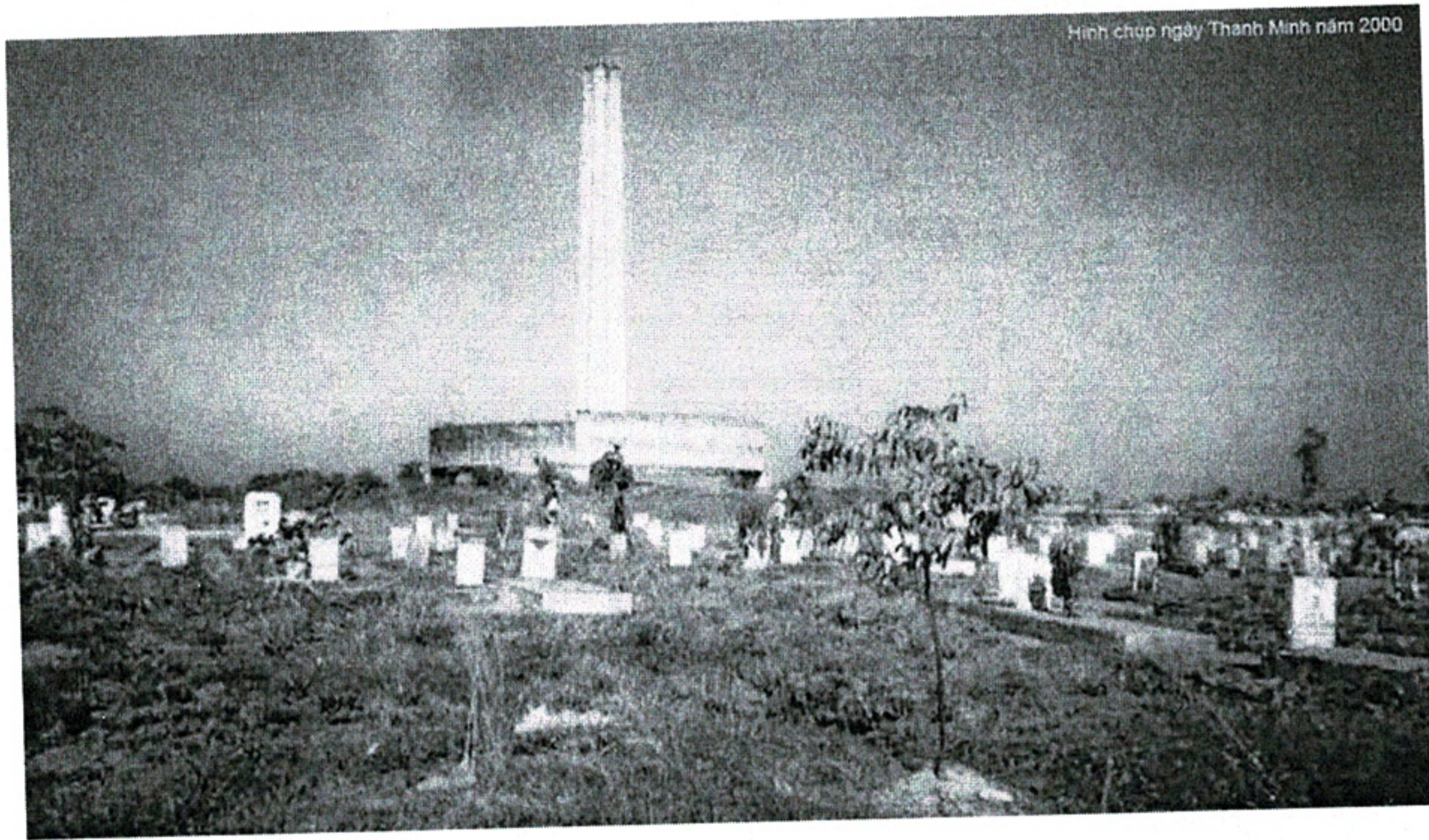


Photo Number 7:

5. Valiant Tower or Nghĩa Dũng Đài, at the stomach of the bee. it was built in the shape of a broken sword (without pointed head, stand for dead soldier), 43m height, surrounded by grave yards, divided into eight zones from A to I. After funeral ceremony, casket was brought here to burry.

According to plan, the cemetery has a capacity of 30,000 graves. Pick time was the Tet Offensive in 1968 and the Heated Summer 1972 Offensive, the cemetery received over 10,000 bodies. Up to 1975, the cemetery was the burial place of 18,318 soldiers, occupying one third of the cemetery area.



Photo Number 8: Sculptor Thu Thanh Nguyen.

THE SCULPTOR.

President Thieu knew Sculptor Thu Thanh Nguyen through his other sculptural work in the past. When working on the new military cemetery, he invited Thu to his office to discuss the project.

At the meeting, President Thieu told Thu that, at the entrance of the cemetery he wanted to have a big and meaningful statue, to remind, to educate people about the heroic sacrifice of the South Vietnamese soldiers.

Thu asked President Thieu for 7 days to work out a model to represent his meaningful thought.

To put that idea into reality, Thu went to Go Vap Military Cemetery to observe the life and death of the soldiers.

Every day, he saw medic helicopters carrying caskets to the cemetery, families mourning when burying their loved one.

Six days went off but Thu still couldn't figure out the meaningful picture as requested.

So worried about his promise, the depressed sculptor walked to a small refreshment shop next to the cemetery to have an iced tea drink and to refresh his mind.

Next to his table, a young Airborne soldier with a very sad face sitting alone, quietly and motionlessly, his ragged uniform and worn-out boots proved that he was lucky to survive many fierce battles. He perhaps just attended his mate's funeral at the cemetery and came here for a drink before returning to his barracks.

On the table, there were two bottles of beers and two glasses.

To Thu's surprise, the soldier poured beer into his glass then grabbed the other bottle to fill up the second glass.

Holding his glass, he tapped to the other glass, saying "DZÔ" (Cheer in Ausiess) then emptied his glass.

Putting his glass down, he grabbed the other glass, poured its beer to the ground then filled it with new beer while mumbling to someone assumed sitting in front of him.

AH! Thu understood now: That soldier drank beer with his dead mate! Properly the one just buried in the nearby cemetery.

Thu went to see the strange soldier, asking his permission to sit down and have a chat. The strange soldier got upset, he took a fierce look at Thu, implicitly that he was disturbing him, go away.

Suddenly, without looking at Thu, the soldier took out his wallet and handed to Thu his military ID card. He probably mistook him as a Military Police - while still concentrating on his dead mate.

Thu glanced at the ID card: Airborne Corporal Hai Van Vo.

Not wanting to disturb the soldier anymore, Thu tried to remember his details then walked away.

That evening, Thu drafted 7 different drawings, depicting different battlefields with soldiers under heavy enemy bombardment.

In the morning of the 7th day, Thu was driven to the President's Palace. President Thieu was busy, so Colonel Cam Vo - The President's Chief of Staff took him to a waiting room. In there, Thu had a chance to go through his 7 draft paintings one more time. Hmm! They were all meaningful but with so many details on them, how can he sculpture all of these into a single statue?

So, he got another thought: Why not carve just Hai Van Vo? Just himself!

Thu sat back to the red couch, tried to recall Hai Van Vo's face. Got it, he looked around for a piece of paper, he found nothing except an empty cigarette pack. Never

mind, he opened the pack and used its cover as a paper, quickly drafted Hai in a sitting position on a small rock.

At the meeting, Thu presented to the President his 7 big draft paintings only, not his new drawing.

President Thieu went through all 7 paintings then asked Thu which one he like the most?

Hesitated for a while, Thu told the President that the one he like the most wasn't there but on his shirt's front pocket.

"Show me". The president asked him anxiously.

"Sir, I have just done it few minutes ago, when waiting for you, but on a cigarette cover, but it is . . . not appropriate to show you a drawing on a peace of paper like this."

"I don't care what sort of paper you used, as long as it is a meaningful drawing." President Thieu replied.



Photo Number 9: Sad Face of Hai Van Vo.

Thu handed him the cigarette paper, explaining who was that soldier, how he met him and why he got a very sad face like that.

President Thieu liked Thu's new drawing very much, he approved it quickly and named it "Mourning – Thương Tiếc".

President Thieu reminding Thu that, Bien Hoa National Military Cemetary' second stage will be unveiled on 1st of November 1966, the National Celebration Day, and he want "Thuong Tiec" to be displayed there on that very special day.

Thu look at the calenda, to day is 14 August 1966, just two and half months to complete the work.

Sculptor Thu Thanh Nguyen worked days and nights with his unqualified model but professional airborne corporal Hai Van Vo. It was completed on time for the National Celebration Day.

WHAT HAPPENED TO PEOPLE INVOLVED WITH MOURNING STATUE?

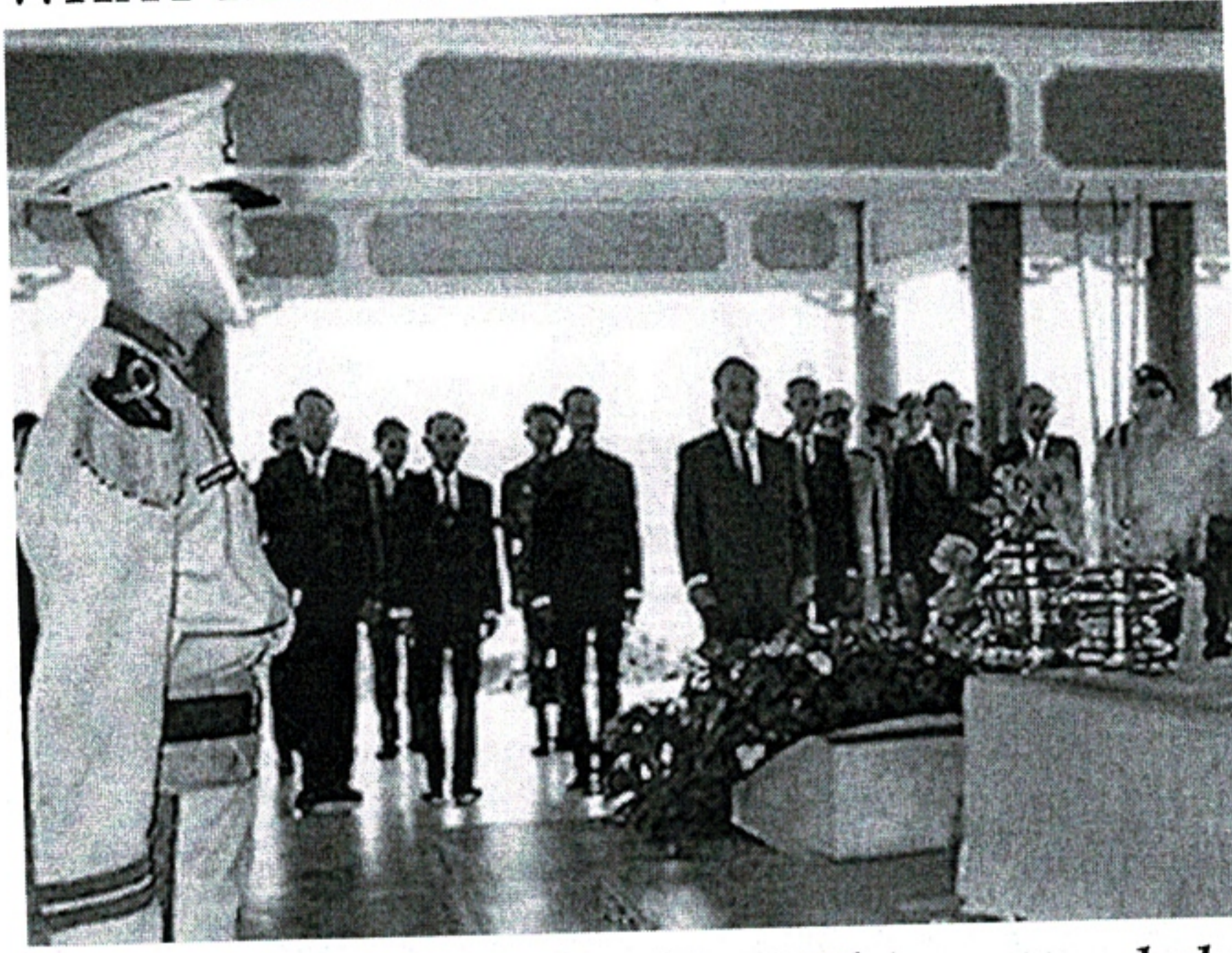


Photo Number 10: President Thieu attended the ceremony to honour the fallen soldier.

At the end of 30th April 1975, at the 25th hour, bundles after bundles bodies of dead soldiers were brought to Bien Hoa Military Ceremony. No time left, grave registration team couldn't carry on their normal procedure, so they dug up a mass grave, lure all dead bodies down, saluted them for the last time then disappeared quickly as their newly appointed President Duong Van Minh had surrendered to the North.

From the next day, Viet cong considered Bien Hoa Military Cemetery as a military zone, forbidding people from entering the site. Graves being hammered or destroyed mercilessly.



Photo Number 11: Fallen Soldier.

Mourning Statue was knocked down and carried away without trace, probably being thrown into the furnace.



Photo Number 12: President Thieu resigned.

President Nguyen Van Thieu resigned from his president post on 23rd of April 1975, he passed away in Boston USA on 29 September 2001.

Major Thu Thanh Nguyen was sent to re education camp on May 1975. Viet cong's commander told him that:



Photo Number 13: Sent To Dark Room.

"Your crimes are very serious, more brutal than a general's. When the war ended, the general stayed there, did nothing, but with you, your work continues to affect people's mind."

They questioned why he did it? Didn't he CIA in disguise? They beaten him harshly, made him deaf, then sent him to dark room for 22 months.

After 8 years in prison, Major Thu was released on 1983. Four years later, he escaped to Thailand and was accepted to migrate to US and still dream about recreating his work.

Corporal Hai Van Vo, not long after November 1966, during a tour of duty, Hai was hit by enemy's artillery, his body was never been found, assumed dead.

THE RUMOUR WAS:

NO, Hai never died! Woken up from a coma with no body around, he found his way home. Here he is . . . he was sitting there, quietly at Bien Hoa Military Cemetery.



Photo Number 14: Hai Van Vo.

Believe it or not, it is up to you, but the Mourning Statue became immortal to Vietnamese, especially to people living around his sitting post. Just last year, my wife went back to visit Bien Hoa Military Cemetery and the famous Mourning Statue. He was nowhere to be seen, even his stone pedestal, because people built their tin shed for working and living all around his barrack. By some unknown reasons, my wife found his pedestal. Looking closer, she saw a small altar with some fresh water cups and an incense sticks holder full of incense sticks. She asked people around:

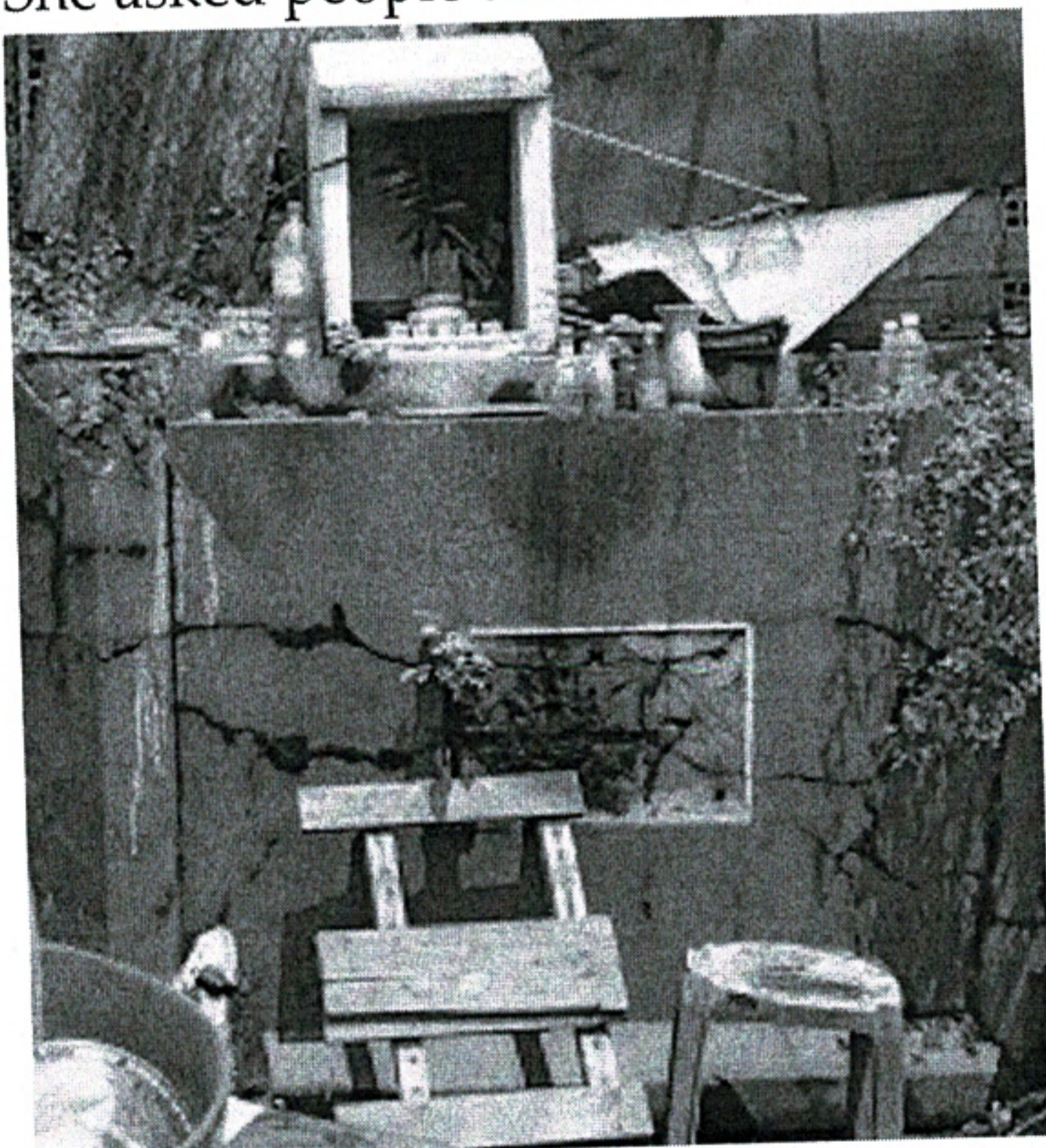


Photo Number 15: Small Altar

"What that for?"

"For the ARVN soldier who stationered here. We had nowhere to go, just built our tin shed here for living. At night, we heard his boot patrolling around our house and some time he knocked at our door, asking for water. That why we leave fresh water there for him, offer insence stick to him. He protected us, we kept his soul warm.

Vietnam war is over! Yes, long time ago.

But, Soldier, whenever you are out and hear the the sound of whirring helicopter rotors. Didn't you look up to see what kind of chopper was that? And where does it fly to?

Yes, I bet you did it, because, the helicopter whirring sound was an unofficially representative of The Vietnam War. Whenever you hear it, you feel you are still in Vietnam and that chopper come to pick you up to drop you at Vung Tau, Nui Dat or Long Tan. Vietnam war still something in your mind, in your heart.

How do you feel whenever you seen a Cross built by your suvived mates in Long Tan?

Didn't it remind you of your mates never come home.

So do we whenever seeing our Mourning Statue.

Our young generations from 1956 to 1975 mostly joint army to protect our country.

More than 300, 000 of us never came home.



Photo Number 16: Mother By Her Son's Grave.

The mourning statue represented our beloved one, our mates. They are gone but in our mind, our heart still with them. Seeing Mourning statue, we feel seeing our mates again. The Mourning Statue is immortal to us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Rangers Association of Victoria and Active Veterans & Friends Mutual Assistance Association, thank you Mr. David Dwyer and Mr. Laurie Jones of The

HMAS Sydney Association who passed on a Framed Picture of an ARVN to Australian Vietnam Veterans Museum.

Thank you Australian Vietnam Veterans Museum who have accepted that framed Picture and displayed it at the museum, giving us a big opportunity to see our beloved monument once again.



Photo Number 17: Sunset on Mourning Statue.

Ranger – Second Lieutenant Andy Huu Nguyen - Duty completed, sir.