ORGANIZED CRIME IN VIETNAM: BINH XUYEN AND NAM CAM

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ORGANIZED CRIME IN VIETNAM

- Organized crime is involved in gambling, illegal immigration, prostitution, smuggling, bribery and murder. According to the U.S. State Department they "usually concentrate their activities in the manufacture and distribution of drugs and counterfeit goods as well as extortion against businesses.'

- In 2003, five members of a notorious organized crime gang were given death sentences. They had been jailed of colluding with government officials and participating in a murder. The leader of the gang, Truong Van Cam, a former soldier and ship worker, was charged with ordering the assassination of gangster boss, commissioning an acid attack on a rival, giving out bribes and running illegal gambling. See Below.

- Vietnam's northern ports of Halong City and nearby Haiphong are notorious for organized crime, smuggling, prostitution, drug abuse and other vice. On a gangland battle in Halong that left six dead, AFP reported: "A shootout between two rival Vietnamese gangs left six people dead and several wounded in a northern port city of Halong, state media reported. The gunmen shot at each other in a high-speed car and motorcycle chase in a harbour area of Halong City, 160km east of the capital Hanoi, the Lao Dong (Labor) newspaper said in an online report. 'The killings resulted from a conflict between two gangs in Ha Long City,' the report said, adding that several wounded gunmen had escaped while police had blocked the area off for investigation. [Source: AFP, December 15, 2008]

- On why organized crime thrives in Vietnam, Margot Cohen wrote in the Far Eastern Economic Review, "In a state run by poorly paid civil servants, who operate in an economy run largely on cash, organized crime faces few obstacles. Even if severe punishments do come down the road...scaring off some potential rogues, there's a strong chance that the power vacuum will eventually be filled by other godfathers. [Source: Margot Cohen, Far Eastern Economic Review, July 4, 2002 |=|]

Organization of Organized Crime in Vietnam

- According to Sungat.ru, a Russian site on organized crime: "The organization the Vietnamese mafia which has received a nickname "snake". On structure she really reminds the snake as the principle of transnational activity is those: first there is the "head", coming into contacts to imperous national structures, the basic forces - infinite "body" of the snake then are slowly tightened. Inside groupings the rigid hierarchy, iron discipline and the total control over each member of community is established. [Source: Sungat.ru >><<]

- "These organizations have basically transnational character of activity, they are closely connected with ethnic diasporas of emigrants in the European, Asian and American countries. For example, in the United States the Chinese groups named "tongami" and consisting in basic from the emigrants which were members of triads earlier actively operate. Besides the mixed kitaisko-Vietnamese groups, and also the Chinese criminal organization " Green dragons " actively operate. Official bodies reveal a direct communication between the triads which are based in Hong Kong, and the Chinese organized criminals in New York. >><<

- In October 2013, Thanh Nien reported: The Minister of Public Security that crime in Vietnam is becoming a more serious and better organized problem due to rising unemployment and lax law enforcement. Tran Dai Quang said basic crimes like murders and robberies had reduced in number from last year, but they were more serious in nature. He said there were not as spontaneous as in the past but were now operations run by organized gangs. "Protection" rackets, loan-sharking, debt collection, extortion, and gambling were all controlled by criminal organizations now. The gambling problem was particularly bad online and in border areas, he said.[Source: Thanh Nien, October 29, 2013 :::]

- "The minister said the poor economy that sent many people out on the street jobless had complicated the public security situation. He also pointed to a rise in pornographic and violent content on the internet.But he also blamed "limited" capacity of law enforcement forces in preventing crimes. He said they have not met the people's demands. Officials from the Justice Committee at the legislature (National Assembly) said the ministry machine is leaning more towards punishing crimes than preventing them. The committee said there were signs that a number of government officials are protecting criminals in certain areas such as natural resource excavation and transport." :::

Binh Xuyen

- Named for the town south of Cholon where the movement originated, the Binh Xuyen operated clandestinely as a band of river pirates in an area bounded on the west by the Soi Rap River, on the east by the Baria-Long Thanh highway, and on the north by the Phuoc Thanh, Phuoc An, Long Thanh highway until August 1945, when it came into public view. After World War II, the Binh Xuyen began organizing on a territorial basis, finally attaining a position of considerable political and military importance. The Binh Xuyen controlled areas of Vietnam as semi-autonomous fiefs. They collected taxes from the local population and ran local administration systems. Frequently mislabeled a "sect," the Binh Xuyen actually lacked the religious base implicit in the title of sect and fundamental to organizations like the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. Additionally, the Binh Xuyen, unlike the sects, sought no popular support, but derived its funds from banditry and vice racketeering. [Source: Department of the Army, American University, 1965 ***]

- Under the leadership of Le Van Vien (alias Bay Vien), the Binh Xuyen, numbering between 1,000 and 3,000, cooperated initially with the Viet Minh against the French during the Indochina War (1946-1954); but in 1948 they rallied to the side of the French and fought effectively against the Communists. Le Van Vien eventually became director of the "Grand Monde," one of Asia's largest gambling establishments, and was rewarded for his co-operation with the French by receiving a commission as a brigadier general in the auxiliary forces of the Vietnamese National Army. In 1953, the Binh Xuyen, backed by Emperor Bao Dai, reached the zenith of its power when it received nine seats in the National Congress called by the Emperor. By this time the Binh Xuyen had also gained control of the Saigon city civil administration and police force. By 1954, they operated lucrative gambling and prostitution establishments in Saigon and controlled the opium trade, much of the fish and charcoal commerce, and several hotels and rubber plantations. ***

- In the army crisis of September 1954, the Binh Xuyen aligned itself with Premier Ngo Dinh Diem against the Chief of Staff Gen. Nguyen Van Hinh, who was suspected of plotting against Diem and was backed by the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. A few days later, the Binh Xuyen switched its allegiance to Hinh and in March 1955 joined the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao in forming a "United Front of National Forces," a loose coalition. The Front sent a mission to Bao Dai, requesting the resignation of Diem, and issued an ultimatum to Diem, giving him 5 days to form a government of national union. Diem's refusal to acquiesce to the demands of the Front resulted in a Binh Xuyen attack on the presidential palace on March 29, 1955.* The French intervened in the conflict and temporarily halted the fighting, but renewed hostilities broke out a short time later when the National Army initiated military action against the Binh Xuyen. By May 1955, Government troops had pushed the Binh Xuyen from the Saigon-Cholon area into the swamps of Bien Hoa and Phuoc Tuy Provinces. Le Van Vien fled to Paris and the power of the Binh Xuyen had been smashed. According to one source, members of the Binh Xuyen who had escaped Diem's persecution and had been driven underground were included in the National Liberation Front at its foundation in 1960. Subsequent reports seem to confirm that small Binh Xuyen groups are cooperating with the Viet Cong. ***

Evolution of the Binh Xuyen in the 1920s and 30s

- Cochinchina in the 1920s and 1930s featured a criminal underworld based in and around the marshy lowlands southeast of Cholon. This area was traditionally infested with river pirates, bandits and assassins. Their place of refuge was the Rung Sat or "Jungle of Killers" region, from which they launched their sorties. Here gangs and criminal families held absolute sway, forging links through intermarriage, criminal association and anti-French activities with Chinese Triads and Vietnamese secret societies. Several noble gangs and criminal families were located in the region of Binh Xuyen hamlet, to the south of Cholon. [Source: indochine54 ++]

- In the early 1920s these personalities, together with escaped contract laborers from the rubber plantations (on the Rung Sat's northern fringe) and Cholon street thugs, formed a loose coalition some two to three hundred strong. These forces ultimately came under the patronage of a powerful underworld figure named Duong Van Duong, also known as Ba Duong or Bach Ba ("Uncle Three") who made his home in Binh Xuyen. Thus was the "Binh Xuyen" criminal collective born: "Armed with old rifles, clubs, and knives, and schooled in Sino-Vietnamese boxing, they extorted protection money from the sampans and junks that traveled the canals on their way to the Cholon docks. Occasionally they sortied into Cholon to kidnap, rob, or shake down a wealthy Chinese merchant. If too sorely pressed by the police or the colonial militia, they could retreat through the streams and canals south of Saigon deep into the impenetrable Rung Sat Swamp at the mouth of the Saigon River, where their reputations as popular heroes among the inhabitants, as well as the maze of mangrove swamps, rendered them invulnerable to capture." ++

- In the late 1920s or early 1930s a young street hoodlum from the outskirts of Cholon named Le Van Vien ("Bay" Vien) entered the Binh Xuyen milieu and gradually came to prominence under Ba Duong's influence. Hunted by the French in the 1930s and 1940s, Bay Vien and a number of his cohorts were eventually captured and sentenced to confinement in the penal colony on Con Son Island. Ba Duong, meanwhile, had become a labor broker for the Japanese and entered into a relationship with the Japanese secret service. Arrangements were made for the kempetai (Japanese "Gestapo") to free Binh Xuyen personel from Con Son in 1941. Thereafter, under Japanese patronage the Binh Xuyen rapidly grew both in organization and influence. Bay Vien escaped Con Son in early 1945 and returned to Saigon where he engaged in insurgent politics in collusion with Ba Duong and the Japanese. When the Japanese took over from the Vichy administration in 1945, jailing all French police, the Binh Xuyen were given amnesty and Bay Vien was installed as a police official by the newly established government of Emperor Bao Dai. ++

Binh Xuyen Gain Strength in World War II Period

- For centuries it was customary for the Binh Xuyen, who inhabited a desolate, unproductive region south of Cholon, to raid their richer neighbors after harvesttime and steal enough to sustain themselves until the next harvest. The Binh Xuyen were simply river pirates or bandits who operated on a small scale from swamp hideouts. When they moved into urban areas they were chiefly concerned with organizing vice rackets and exacting protection money from wealthy Chinese. However, the breakdown in public security following the Japanese occupation (1940-1945) and the release of prisoners from the Cochin-Chinese prisons afforded them an opportunity to extend their activities.2 In August and September of 1945, the Binh Xuyen first attracted public attention when their representatives participated in ceremonial marches, bearing an enormous green banner on which was inscribed "Binh Xuyen Bandits." [Source: Department of the Army, American University, 1965]

- In August 1945 the Viet Minh's chief of Cochin China, Tran Van Giau, formed an alliance with Bay Vien and Ba Duong against the French. When the Viet Minh called a mass demonstration on August 25, 1945 (when British General Gracey was forced to declare martial law and use Japanese POWs as a police force!): "...fifteen well armed, bare chested bandits carrying a large banner declaring 'Binh Xuyen Assassination Committee' joined the tens of thousands of demonstrators who marched jubilantly through downtown Saigon for over nine hours." [Source: indochine54 ++]

Binh Xuyen Gangsters Join the French Minh Against the Viet Minh

- Following the British supported French counter coup in September, 1945 the Viet Minh withdrew from Saigon, leaving Bay Vien as military commander of Saigon-Cholon with a force of a hundred men. Bay Vien promptly formed an alliance with Lai Van Sang's two thousand man student group, the Avant-Garde Youth. Together with a number of Japanese deserters, they engaged the French. By the end of October, they were pushed back to the Rung Sat in a waterborne retrograde action which displayed as a key element the deployment of some 250 stay-behind agents. The Binh Xuyen stay behind agents promptly engaged in a ruthless campaign of terror and extortion. A constant influx of men, money and materiel quickly established the Binh Xuyen as a well-armed, disciplined force of approximately 10,000 men. ++

- In 1945, the Binh Xuyen leaders—the most renowned of these were: Duong Van Duong (killed in February 1946), Le Van Vien, Duong Van Ha, Muoi Tri, and Tu Ty—imbued with the extreme patriotism which swept Vietnam after World War II, joined the Viet Minh. One of the Binh Xuyen leaders, Le Van Vien (Bay Vien), was made director of municipal affairs and, in this capacity, raised a considerable sum of money for the military activities of the Viet Minh's Nam Bo (Provisional Executive Committee). Impressed by this demonstration of efficiency, Tran Van Giau, the Viet Minh military commander, presented Vien with a list of persons to assassinate. Vien, shocked by the lengths to which the Communists were willing to go to consolidate their position, refused to carry out the assassinations.4 The Binh Xuyen leaders managed to retain a degree of autonomy vis-a-vis the Nam Bo5 and, when the Committee was forced to leave Saigon-Cholon, the Binh Xuyen retreated to their former operational zone. At this time Vien refused to allow his 1,300 armed men to be incorporated into the Viet Minh forces.

Viet Minh Turn Against the Binh Xuyen and Uses Suicide Squads Against Them

- Annoyed by the separatist tendencies of the Binh Xuyen, the Viet Minh, under the new commander Nguyen Binh, sought to eliminate, by means of "suicide squads," members of the group who eluded their control. The conflict between the Viet Minh and Binh Xuyen reached a climax in April 1946 at the time of the creation of the "United National Front," an anti-Communist and anti-French coalition which the Binh Xuyen joined. Nguyen Binh was intent on dissolving this group and reducing the power of Le Van Vien, while the latter remained on his guard against the Viet Minh as well as the French Expeditionary Corps. [Source: Department of the Army, American University, 1965 ***]

- Lured by a promise of promotion within the Viet Minh, Le Van Vien, after much hesitation, accepted an invitation from the Nam Bo to go to the Plaine des Joncs for official acceptance of his new position. On May 20, 1946 Vien left Rung Sat (an area west of Baria under Binh Xuyen control), for the Plaine des Joncs. Still suspicious of Viet Minh motives, Vien took with him an escort of 200 loyal armed men.9 Received with great fanfare and demonstrations of friendship, Vien accepted the position of "Khu Truong Khu 7" (Commander of Viet Minh Military Zone 7 east of Saigon) in the presence of Communist officials from Viet Minh Zones 8 and 9 who had convened for the occasion. All went well until Vien learned that some of his troops east of the Soi Rap River had been disarmed on Nguyen Binh's orders. The latter reassured Vien of his intentions, while making certain that Vien would be detained and his escort eliminated. ***

Gangsters Switch Sides and Help the French Against the Viet Minh

- A dispute arose between Ba Duong and the Viet Minh in January 1946 and in February 1946 Ba Duong was killed in strafing raid by French aircraft. Sensing a shift in the political tide, Bay Vien siezed the opportunity to consolidate his hold on the Binh Xuyen and achieve dominance. He then began secret negotiations with the French Deuxième Bureau (Military Intelligence) for exclusive rights to territory in Saigon, ultimately leading to an agreement formalized in June 1948. [Source: indochine54 ++]

- Vien escaped from the Viet Minh and on June 10 reached Bien Hoa, where he discovered that his fief was occupied by Viet Minh forces and he could not return. Without delay, Vien sent two envoys to French Intelligence with a letter containing two requests: permission to pass through the French-held area to reach the banks of the Soi Rap, and French Army assistance in clearing the Viet Minh out of his domain. In return, he agreed to accept the French conditions to "rally"—e.g., surrender at a price. The first request was granted and the second was to be discussed on Vien's arrival on the scene for the proposed negotiations. After several conferences, Vien agreed to rally to the side of the Bao Dai Government and to recognize the French Union. On June 17, Vien proclaimed himself violently anti-Communist, and a few days later regained control of Cholon as well as his fief. The French had given official recognition to the Binh Xuyen and granted it independent control of the region. A few days later, Tran Van Huu (President under Bao Dai), named Vien Colonel of the Guard of Vietnam, and the Binh Xuyen received the official name of "Binh Xuyen National Armed Forces." The group was marked henceforth by its esprit de corps, demonstrated by its own music and flag (a yellow star on a green ground, bordered in red.) Vien began to enter politics and was soon well known around Saigon. His troops were situated along the roads leading from the capital, where they collected "road safety taxes" on cars and buses and from farmers bringing produce to market. [Source: Department of the Army, American University, 1965]

- The French government announced that it "...had decided to confide the police and maintenance of order to the Binh Xuyen troops in a zone where they are used to operating." Thereafter the French turned over Saigon block-by-block and by April 1954, the Binh Xuyen controlled not only the Saigon-Cholon capital region but a sixty-mile strip between Saigon and Vung Tau, exercising full political and economic control. United States observers of the process laconically refer to the Binh Xuyen in this era as a: "...political and racketeering organization which had agreed to carry out police functions in return for a monopoly on gambling, opium traffic and prostitution in the metropolitan areas." +++

- For the French, this free hand given to the Binh Xuyen proved to be profitable in more ways than one. As Colonel Lansdale, a US intelligence "observer", remarked : "The French accepted the arrangement because Bay Vien offset the Viet Minh threat to Saigon. By 1954, Vien was operating 'Grand Monde', a gambling slum in Cholon; 'Cloche d'Or', Saigon's pre-eminent gambling establishment; the 'Nouveautés Catinat', Saigon's best department store; a hundred smaller shops; a fleet of river boats; and a brothel, spectacular even by Asian standards, known as the Hall of Mirrors...He ruled Saigon absolutely; even the Viet Minh terrorists were unable to operate there." ++

- Thus, the Viet Minh was unable to conduct a single terror bombing in Saigon between 1952 and 1954. What's more, the Binh Xuyen offered a solution to a problem which had recently beset French intelligence. From 1951, under the aegis of the GCMA, French intelligence had tried, very successfully, to establish maquis in the Highlands of Laos and Tonkin. In order to guarantee the loyalty of the Highland populations, the GCMA had to buy their only cash crop : opium. Since the colonial administration had abolished its own Opium Monopoly in 1946, the Binh Xuyen provided an obvious outlet. Furthermore, this also solved most of the clandestine funding problems since both the Deuxième Bureau and the GCMA received a "cut" of the proceeds. The Binh Xuyen controlled Saigon until purged by the Diem government in 1955, when Vien fled to France with many of the Binh Xuyen leadership (and apparently many of the Saigon police files!). At its height, the Binh Xuyen was believed to have around 25,000 armed troops. ++

Binh Xuyen Take Control of Saigon

- In 1949, Le Van Vien headed a consortium which bought control of two of Asia's largest gambling and prostitution concessions—the "Grand Monde" in Cholon and the "Cloche d'Or" in Saigon—and Vien assumed the position of director of the establishments. Lacking a special ideology, the Binh Xuyen was a target for Communist recruitment efforts; to compensate for this, Vien became fanatically anti-Communist in his activities. In 1950, when Viet Minh bombs rocked Saigon nightly, Cholon, policed by the Binh Xuyen (who were paid by the wealthy Chinese), remained quiet. In an effort to stabilize Saigon, the French granted permission to the Binh Xuyen to police the capital; the Binh Xuyen cleared the terrorists out of Saigon. In return, Vien was promoted in 1952 to the rank of Brigadier General in the Vietnamese National Army.In February 1953, Binh Xuyen military activities received an additional boost when Vien was authorized to form a battalion of troops to police the Long Thanh highway from Saigon to the coast. In addition, the Binh Xuyen were allowed to occupy three posts on the Saigon River to ensure the safe flow of traffic along this important artery. [Source: Department of the Army, American University, 1965 +++]

- On July 3, 1953, the French made a "solemn declaration" of their willingness to complete the independence of Vietnam by transferring to the Vietnamese Government (under Bao Dai) the functions hitherto under French control. In return, the declaration invited the Vietnamese Government to settle its claims in the economic, financial, judicial, military, and political spheres. The Vietnamese nationalists, dissatisfied with Bao Dai's conduct of affairs, realized that the negotiations would be completed without regard for their wishes. Although divided by personal rivalries, they sought a means of demonstrating the importance of their claims. Ngo Dinh Nhu seized this opportunity to form an unofficial front of national union to support his brother Ngo Dinh Diem as candidate for the premiership and to demonstrate the desire of the Vietnamese to have a voice in the direction of national affairs. The leaders of the religious sects and the Binh Xuyen gave their support to the plan, and Le Van Vien was persuaded to offer his headquarters as the site for the congress. On September 5, a national congress in support of "national union and peace" met in semi-clandestine fashion. When the discussions turned to violent indictments of the French authorities and Bao Dai, Le Van Vien ordered his troops to clear the hall. The religious sect leaders attempted to quell the ensuing scandal by assuring Bao Dai of their loyalty. +++

- To erase the impression of popular discontent created by the September congress and to ensure his claim to represent the Vietnamese nationalists in negotiations with the French Government, Bao Dai summoned an official National Congress on October 1, 1953. The Binh Xuyen reached the peak of its career at this time: nine seats, more than those reserved for the Buddhists or the ethnic minorities, were allocated to members of the Binh Xuyen. The delegates were instructed to make known to Bao Dai the desires of the Vietnamese people concerning future relations with France "within the framework of the French Union" and to appoint members to assist him in the negotiations. Instead, the National Congress unanimously approved a motion (which was later amended) in support of total independence for Vietnam. +++

- The following April, a member of the Binh Xuyen (Lai Huu Sang) was appointed director-general of the Saigon-Cholon police and security services—presumably the price for Binh Xuyen allegiance to the Government. The group, then in charge of public security, was officially obligated to combat—but in reality protected—activities on which its own power was founded Thus by the end of the Indochina War, the Binh Xuyen, which had gained a following estimated between 5,000 and 8,000, maintained semi-autonomous fiefs to the south and southeast of Cholon, controlled the Saigon-Cholon police, ran lucrative gambling and prostitution establishments, and controlled the opium trade, much of the fish and charcoal commerce, and several hotels and plantations. +++

Binh Xuyen When Ngo Dinh Diem Take Power

- Among the most pressing problems facing Ngo Dinh Diem when he was called to office by Bao Dai in June 1954 was the existence of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen, who held sway over vast quasi-autonomous territories. Charged with the task of unifying southern Vietnam, Diem realized he had to break the power of the sects and the Binh Xuyen, whose interests conflicted with his own. He had two alternatives: he could either eliminate these groups or integrate them into the body politic. In either case, he needed a strong loyal army. [Source: Department of the Army, American University, 1965 +++]

- The Army Chief of Staff at the time was Gen. Nguyen Van Hinh, a French citizen, whom Diem suspected of conspiring against him. On September 11, 1954, Diem demanded Hinh's resignation, initiating a 7-week army crisis. Hinh refused to accede to Diem's order and barricaded himself in his headquarters. Fear of a coup d'etat or an attempt on his life forced Diem to withdraw to his palace. Ironically, Diem's guards were under the control of the Binh Xuyen, of whom he strongly disapproved because of its affiliation with gambling and prostitution. The Binh Xuyen, however, were willing to defend Diem, at least temporarily, for two reasons: loyalty to Bao Dai, and therefore to Diem, his appointee; and rivalry with the National Army. General Hinh's father, Nguyen Van Tam, had organized the Security Service and controlled the police. When the Binh Xuyen gained control of the police, many security investigators joined the Vietnamese National Army. +++

- During the crisis, Diem's administrative power was reduced to impotence when Hinh demonstrated the strength of his position by ordering troops to patrol the capital. It was evident in the beginning that Hinh could execute a coup d'etat with considerable ease, but he showed reluctance to do so and instead sought to temporize. Less than a week later, the Binh Xuyen switched allegiance and joined the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao in support of Hinh. In a manifesto dated September 16, the sects and the Binh Xuyen officially dissociated themselves from Diem and declared the need for a democratic government, liberation of the country from foreign domination and enactment of measures to eliminate poverty and illiteracy. In order to appease Hinh, Diem appointed Gen. Nguyen Van xuan—one of the Binh Xuyen leaders— to the Ministry of National Defense. Pleased with the appointment, Hinh agreed not to take action and asked Bao Dai to arbitrate the disagreement between the sects, the Binh Xuyen, and Diem. The U.S. Embassy now intervened in Diem's favor and warned Hinh that a military coup d'etat would result in the halting of economic and military aid. Bao Dai, hoping to end the crisis, sent for Le Van Vien and ordered him to form a coalition government with the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao leaders. The sect leaders, however, made demands unacceptable to Le Van Vien, who accused them of selling their services to Prime Minister Diem. +++

- The accusation was well founded, for on September 24 Diem persuaded the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao to accept four seats each in his new Cabinet. Nine of Diem's ministers had resigned on September 20, further weakening his position. Cao Dai and Hoa Hao unwillingness to concede leadership in the coalition government to Vien, and the refusal of the latter to finance Cao Dai and Hoa Hao activities after their loss of French subsidies, caused the leaders of the religious sects to defect, at least nominally, to Diem. The Binh Xuyen, however, since they still controlled the National Police, refused to enter the new Government. The army crisis ended when Hinh was finally dismissed, and a temporary calm reigned over the country. +++

- Diem dealt another blow to the power of the Binh Xuyen when, in his campaign against vice and corruption, he refused to renew the licenses of the "Grand Monde" and "Cloche d'Or" when they expired on January 15, 1955. The equivalent of over $200 million had changed hands in these establishments over the preceding 8 years. Vien, who personally had received about $14,000 a day in "taxes" from the "Grand Monde" alone, was charged, as head of the police, with the task of closing these gambling and prostitution centers. Vien apparently accepted the decision, regretting only that the Government was willing to lose such an important source of revenue. +++

Ngo Dinh Diem Defeats Binh Xuyen

- Meanwhile the Cao Dai, Hoa Hoa, and Binh Xuyen maintained an uneasy truce, broken by frequent clashes when one group trespassed on another's domain. Fearing that sectarian differences would result in the weakening of their resistance against Diem's demands, Bao Dai urged the three groups to unify. On March 5, 1955, the three groups, totaling 25,000 men, formed a "United Front of National Forces," an anti-Government coalition to promote the formation of a democratic government. The Front requested Bao Dai to dismiss Diem and to turn over the reins of power to them; on March 21, they issued an ultimatum giving Diem 5 days to form a "strong, honest, democratic government of national union." Diem refused and took the precautionary measure of ordering three battalions of militia troops to Saigon. Under U.S. pressure, Bao Dai reaffirmed his support of Diem. At the expiration of the ultimatum, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao representatives resigned from the Cabinet. [Source: Department of the Army, American University, 1965 +++]

- In retaliation for Diem's refusal to comply with the ultimatum, the Hoa Hao held up food supplies for Saigon-Cholon, and the Binh Xuyen established themselves in the police and security headquarters and in other buildings in the twin cities. Diem ordered paratroops to occupy the police and security headquarters. They ousted the Binh Xuyen from the police headquarters without difficulty, but could not force the commandos from the Security Service building. On March 28, Diem ordered Col. Cao Van Tri, the paratroop commander, to attack the building. The French intervened in the attack, causing the postponement of hostilities until the night of March 29-30. Unable to bury their differences, the religious sects soon accused the Binh Xuyen of forcing them into open conflict with Diem. Sensing an impending showdown, the Cao Dai and most of the Hoa Hao backed out of the conflict on March 29, leaving only the Binh Xuyen to confront the National Army. On the night of March 29-30, fighting broke out between the Binh Xuyen and the Army. The French soon arranged a cease-fire, to Diem's annoyance. The Prime Minister accused the French of secretly supporting the religious sects and the Binh Xuyen; rumor was rife that the French had given the Binh Xuyen tactical advice during the affray. It was known that the French obstructed Government forces by denying them fuel, transport, and ammunition. +++

- An article which appeared on April 14 in the French newspaper L'Observateur alleged that no attempt had been made by the French to retrieve the arms they had lent the sects during the war against the Viet Minh, though the conditions of the loan stated that the arms must be returned after the hostilities. The increase in the power of the sects and the Binh Xuyen was in large part attributed to the French. +++

- By April 1955, Diem was prepared for a showdown with the Binh Xuyen and the remaining dissident Hoa Hao. Meanwhile, the Binh Xuyen commando units under Vien, who now proclaimed himself "Commander in Chief of the Opposition,"still held the Security Service building in Saigon and interrupted the routine examination of passports at the airfield and port. The New York Times (April 1, 1955) reported that Vien had 8,000-10,000 men under arms. The Ministry of Finance (adjacent to the Security Service headquarters), the police headquarters, and the port office were under National Army occupation. At first Diem tried to break the Binh Xuyen power by means of verbal persuasion. On April 3, he made a radio appeal to the members of the Binh Xuyen, encouraging them to desert the armed organization and promising them amnesty. The Binh Xuyen lifted their 3-day food blockade, but they refused to relinquish the Security Service building. When no Binh Xuyen soldiers deserted to the Government, stronger measures were enacted. Plainclothes operatives of the Binh Xuyen were to be searched for illegal arms caches, and a psychological operations program, a "murmuring" campaign, was to be initiated against the Binh Xuyen militia. Binh Xuyen soldiers were to receive 5,000 piasters ($142) if they surrendered to the Government with their arms. Meanwhile, a 6-day truce had been arranged with the Binh Xuyen so that no known Binh Xuyen strongholds would be attacked. The French promised to induce the organization to hand over the Security building to the Government by peaceful means. When none of these measures proved effective, Diem dismissed the Binh Xuyen director-general of the Security Service, Lai Huu Sang, and ordered members of the Service to report to the new director within 48 hours or face court martial. Furthermore, by the end of this same period, Binh Xuyen troops would no longer be permitted free circulation in Saigon-Cholon. +++

- The truce ended April 28 and fighting between the Binh Xuyen and the National Army broke out once more. The French Commander urged Diem to call for a cease-fire, but the Prime Minister, who believed that the power of the Binh Xuyen would have been smashed in March had fighting been allowed to continue, refused. In order to ensure the defeat of the Binh Xuyen this time, Diem ordered 4 battalions of paratroops and an armored car squadron into the battle, keeping in reserve 14 battalions plus an unknown number of reinforcements from central Vietnam. The Binh Xuyen, estimated to number 2,000, were entrenched in various buildings throughout Saigon-Cholon. Anticipating French intervention, Le Van Vien refused to call on his 4,000 reserves and failed to organize an effective resistance. Accordingly, the high school, the cinema, and the printing works—the last three centers of Binh Xuyen resistance—fell to the paratroops early on April 29. By midnight the Binh Xuyen resistance had collapsed, paratroops occupied Vien's headquarters, and the Binh Xuyen, including Vien, had fled. The eviction of the Binh Xuyen from Cholon was attributed to their neglect of military training, incompetent officers, outdated arms, and the willingness of the National Army to defend Diem. +++

- Fearing that the Binh Xuyen might reorganize, the Government sought to expel Vien and his remaining battalions from the swamp hideouts in the Rung Sat area south of Saigon-Cholon, where they had retreated after their eviction from the twin cities. In May, Government troops blocked the approaches to the Rung Sat area, and awaited the desertion of soldiers capable of providing information on the military strength and location of the Binh Xuyen. By September 1955, the remaining Binh Xuyen troops were cleared out of the Rung Sat area. Le Van Vien escaped to France with French assistance. Government troops were now free to continue their offensive against the remaining dissident Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups. By October 1955, the power of the sects and the Binh Xuyen had collapsed. +++

Binh Xuyen After Their Defeat by Diem

- Since Diem's defeat of the Binh Xuyen in 1955, little information has appeared concerning the group's activities. Former Binh Xuyen members were included in the Committee for Liberty and Progress, the "Caravelle" group, which issued a manifesto to Diem on April 26, 1960, requesting a liberalization of the regime. A week after the overthrow of Diem in 1964, Gen. Nguyen Khanh released seven leading members of the Binh Xuyen and Cao Dai who had been imprisoned by Diem. [Source: Department of the Army, American University, 1965 +++]

- The Binh Xuyen will probably never regain the power they once had. Remnants of the group, however, are known to remain hostile to the Government. Most accounts of Binh Xuyen activity refer to incidents of individual rather than organized banditry. According to one source, members of the religious sects and the Binh Xuyen who escaped Diem's persecution and were operating underground were included in the formation of the National Liberation Front in 1960. At present an undetermined number of Binh Xuyen are known to be cooperating with the Viet Cong.

Nam Cam

- Truong Van Cam, also known as Nam Cam, is arguably Vietnam's most well-known gangster. Based in Ho Chi Minh City and executed in 2004, he ran a criminal empire complete with gambling dens, hotels and restaurants that fronted for brothels. He was reportedly so well connected to police in Ho Chi Minh City that authorities from other provinces had to be brought in to arrest him.

- According to the BBC: Nam Cam has been portrayed as Vietnam's version of the Godfather. The 56-year-old mafia boss is said to have been at the heart of a 15-year killing spree in Ho Chi Minh City - as well harbouring fugitives and being involved in gambling, bribery and prostitution rackets. [Source: BBC, June 3, 2004]

- Associated Press reported: Nam Cam "had been accused of heading a vast criminal empire whose influence extended into the ranks of the Communist Party. Over his decade-long reign in Vietnam's largest city, he bribed dozens of law enforcement and government officials to protect his network of gambling dens, hotels and restaurants that fronted for brothels. The highly publicized case, with its sordid exploits of murder, vice and bribery, has riveted the country since his arrest in December 2001 for ordering a hit on a rival gang member. [Source: Margie Mason, Associated Press, June 4, 2003 >>>]

Nam Cam's Life

- A former dockworker, nam Cam was born in Saigon in 1947 and served in the South Vietnamese army before establishing gambling rackets in his hometown. Ben Stocking wrote in The Mercury News, "With an eye for flashy suits and diamond-studded jewelry, he cut a striking figure as he moved about town from his network of casinos and karaoke bars to the several ornate mansions he built for his family. He has been in and out of jail and was most recently sentenced to a three-year term on gambling charges in 1995. Some of the public officials on trial in this case, including the former director of Voice of Vietnam Radio, are accused of helping him get out one year before his three-year sentence was over. [Source: Ben Stocking, The Mercury News, February 24, 2003 \=\]

- The BBC reported: "Born to a poor family in the former Saigon in 1947, Nam Cam's first brush with the law came at the age of 15, when he was arrested for killing a man during a fight. He spent more than two years in jail, and then joined the South Vietnamese army in 1966. At the end of the Vietnam war, he is said to have reverted to a life of crime in Ho Chi Minh City. He was arrested again in May 1995 for his criminal dealings, but was released early following an intervention by senior officials alleged to be on his payroll. The father of eight children, Nam Cam is known throughout the city's underworld as an inveterate gambler and womaniser. [Source: BBC, June 3, 2004]

- AFP reported: "Nam Cam was first arrested in May 1995 and sent to a re-education camp, but was released after 2 ½ years following intervention by senior officials alleged to be on his payroll. Re-arrested in December 2001 by a special police taskforce brought in from outside the city, Nam Cam's detention triggered a series of exposes in the state press about the beneficiaries of his network, which encompassed activities from prostitution to illegal gambling. [Source: Agence France Presse - January 25, 2003]

Nam Cam's Criminal Empire and Government Official Friends

- In his heyday Nam Cam considered one of the most powerful figures in Vietnam. Margot Cohen wrote in the Far Eastern Economic Review, Nam Cam,"according to local press reports, rose to become a widely feared mob boss at the heart of a web of underground casino operators, cockfighters, loan sharks and debt-collectors. Nam Cam, so the stories go, raked in protection money from club-owners while keeping a firm grip on his main business-gambling. Back in the mid-1990s, he was confined to a "re-education" camp for just over two years, but that proved to be merely a blip in a flourishing career. His network kept spreading from its Ho Chi Minh City base to other southern provinces and the capital, Hanoi, attracting partners from Taiwan and Cambodia. [Source: Margot Cohen, Far Eastern Economic Review, July 4, 2002 |=|]

- Kay Johnson wrote in Time Magazine, "Saigon is a notoriously freewheeling place where everyone seems to be hustling for a buck. But no one has worked the angles like Truong Van Cam, a.k.a. Nam Cam (Fifth Orange), who reigned for 15 years as the Godfather of Saigon. The 56-year-old former dockworker and soldier ran card games and cockfights, restaurants and brothels, collected protection money and loan sharked. He raked in an estimated $2 million a month—small potatoes for other Asian dons, perhaps, but unheard-of wealth in Vietnam. Cam needed money to buy protection, which he did wholesale. A few times a year, he'd throw cognac-fueled parties for senior police officers, offering girls along with the snacks. He once bought a new car for a police reporter. Cam was a generous friend to those he needed. [Source: Kay Johnson, Time Magazine, March 3, 2003 ^^]

- Nam Cam had many friends in high places. Among the 153 people that were tried with him were high-ranking Communist Party officials and members of the police. In fact his connections were so close to the local police department that officers from other provinces were sent in to arrest him. Cohen wrote: "Media attention "focused on Nam Cam's friends in high places-the officials and law-enforcement officers accused of protecting the alleged gangster in return for bribes and who helped him gain release from detention in 1997. So far the crackdown has sucked in dozens of police officers, officials at the Ministry of Public Security, two high-ranking prosecutors, and even two members of the central committee of Vietnam's Communist Party. |=|

- Johnson wrote: "One of the accused, Bui Quoc Huy, was Ho Chi Minh City's police chief for years. Another, national-radio chief Tran Mai Hanh, is accused of writing a letter in 1996 that helped secure Cam's early release from a reeducation camp for a previous arrest. ^^

See Corruption, Nam Cam Trial

Violence Associated with Nam Cam

- Margot Cohen wrote in the Far Eastern Economic Review,"It's a gangland story with something for everyone—midnight slayings, crooked cops, a vengeful lesbian... The unmistakable theme from The Godfather snakes through the thudding techno-beat at the Metropolis disco. On this rainy night in June in Ho Chi Minh City, only a few dancers are gyrating beneath video screens that dissolve into kaleidoscopes of color. Things haven't been the same here since last August, when a man was murdered outside the club's door. It wasn't a random killing. The murder was a visible manifestation of the power of organized crime in Vietnam, a world that normally remains largely hidden. Nor was it the first such killing: In preceding months Vietnam witnessed two other shocking gangland murders, one of them claiming the life of a casino boss-a reputed lesbian with a penchant for unleashing rats against rival gangsters. Eventually, last December, police moved in and arrested Truong Van Cam, better known as "Nam Cam" (Fifth Orange), proclaiming a crackdown on gangland activities. [Source: Margot Cohen, Far Eastern Economic Review, July 4, 2002]

- Kay Johnson wrote in Time Magazine, "Cam allegedly neutralized a rival gangster, Le Ngoc Lam, by having henchmen pour acid on the upstart's face. His most famous feud was with a crime queen in the northern province of Hai Phong: Dung Ha, better known as Dung the Lesbian. The two fell out in 2000 after she tried to expand her empire into Saigon. The rivalry escalated after Dung sent Cam a taunting "present" for one of his soirées: a gift-wrapped box filled with live rats smeared with feces, which upset Cam's party guests. A month later, Dung Ha was gunned down at an outdoor beer stall in Hai Phong. Cam reportedly threw another bash to celebrate. [Source: Kay Johnson, Time Magazine, March 3, 2003]

Assassination of Nam Cam's Lesbian Rival

- The BBC reported: Among the more sensational charges Nam Cha faced was the alleged assassination of a rival gang boss, Dung Ha. At one stage the two worked together, with Dung Ha joining forces with Nam Cam in the hope he would get her to run his underground gambling dens. But the pair fell out when Dung Ha tried to create her own gang, and she once sent a box full of rats to one of his restaurants to annoy him, Vietnamese state media reported last year. In return Nam Cam is said to have ordered her death. Dung Ha's body was found shot through the head in October 2000 [Source: BBC, June 3, 2004]

- Margot Cohen wrote in the Far Eastern Economic Review, "Dung Ha, a reputed lesbian gangster from the northern city of Haiphong, a notorious criminal hot spot, made her way south to Ho Chi Minh City in 1998 after a stint in prison for a gambling conviction. She was welcomed by Nam Cam, who hoped she would eventually serve as his emissary in expanding his casinos up north. Dung Ha initially seemed keen, and began working together with a third player, Lee Han Hsin from Taiwan. He had come to Vietnam in 1994 with experience in running casinos backed by the Taiwanese mafia. Together with Nam Cam they broadened their operations in Ho Chi Minh City, particularly in seedy District Four. There, their pale-pink Tan Hai Ha karaoke parlour and discotheque fronted for an underground casino with multiple escape routes, and was a center for peddling the drug Ecstasy.[Source: Margot Cohen, Far Eastern Economic Review, July 4, 2002 |=|]

- "But the wily Dung Ha had her own plans: She wanted to carve out her own independent territory, leading to clashes with Nam Cam. In her most outrageous fit of pique, Dung Ha ordered the unleashing of excrement-covered rats, disguised in a gift box, on guests attending a September birthday party at one of Nam Cam's restaurants. After this humiliation, Nam Cam is said to have given the order to rub out his troublesome partner. And so, on October 2, 2000, after a midnight coffee break with some gal pals at the Z Cafe, Dung Ha was shot in the head. All it took was $20,000 and an assassin brought in from Hanoi. Dung Ha's funeral in Haiphong attracted thousands of mourners. Lee subsequently fled to Cambodia, fearing revenge after his bodyguard allegedly gunned down a Nam Cam ally last August in front of the Metropolis discotheque." |=|

Police Crackdown After the Assassination of Nam Cam's Lesbian Rival

- Margot Cohen wrote in the Far Eastern Economic Review, "Even though Nam Cam survived at the top, Dung Ha's killing proved to be a turning point. After years of basking under the protection of various local police officers and public security officials, Nam Cam found himself faced with two determined southern gang-busters. The first was Nguyen Viet Thanh, described by the local press as a squeaky-clean cop from southern Tien Giang province who was promoted in 1999 to a powerful position in the Ministry of Public Security with jurisdiction over all of southern Vietnam. No bribes for him, the press concluded-he still zipped around on an old Honda motorbike while his wife labored on the farm back at home. The second crusader was Nguyen Minh Triet, promoted to secretary-general of the party committee in Ho Chi Minh City in January 2000 after winning kudos for spurring industrialization in neighbouring Binh Duong province. His political clout is believed by many to have been key in the push against Nam Cam: "As far as I know, without Mr. Triet this case would not have been handled so promptly," says one local reporter.[Source: Margot Cohen, Far Eastern Economic Review, July 4, 2002]

- Kay Johnson wrote in Time Magazine, "In December 2001, the government sent police from Hanoi to arrest Cam at his mistress's house, and then widened the net, trumpeting the nation's biggest organized-crime bust. Since Cam's tentacles reached far into the government, the case simultaneously became Vietnam's biggest corruption crackdown. Two of the 18 government officials on trial with him this month were members of the élite Central Committee, the Communist Party's 150-member main decision-making body...More than 100 police officers and other officials have been suspended from duty because they are suspected of being on Cam's payroll. [Source: Kay Johnson, Time Magazine, March 3, 2003 ^^]

- "Cracking down on gangsters and corruption appeals to a population that has resigned itself to these twin evils, and following Cam's arrest, Saigon's newspapers went into a muckraking frenzy, openly asking how far the corruption went and who might be the next government figure to be arrested. After 6 months of that, the government decided that openness about official corruption might not be in the Party's best interest. On June 2002, Vietnam's ideology chairman, Nguyen Khoa Diem, ordered newspapers to tone it down. "They're afraid people are losing their faith in the government," explains a Vietnamese journalist. ^^

Fall Out of the Crackdown on Nam Cam

- Margot Cohen wrote in the Far Eastern Economic Review, "Party loyalists insist that the raids on crime dens and dismissals of police and officials burnish the credibility of both the party and the police force. But in some circles, the belated campaign has left the damaging impression that top officials were either powerless to stop long years of mafia activity, or nursed their own motives for holding back. "Everyone is struggling over power, but no one is in power," notes one Hanoi intellectual. Even party leaders seem to be growing worried that the Nam Cam affair could prove a Pandora's box. On June 20, Nguyen Khoa Diem, chief of the party's Central Ideology and Culture Board, urged reporters covering the case not to "expose secrets, create internal divisions, or hinder other key propaganda tasks." [Source: Margot Cohen, Far Eastern Economic Review, July 4, 2002 |=|]

- "The warning came at a key juncture in Vietnam's politics. In 10 days of meetings from July 5, the party's central committee is expected to finalize new cabinet appointments. Those will almost certainly be rubber-stamped by the national assembly, the nation's highest legislative body, at its opening session on July 19. Insiders say that the central committee meeting was delayed to let the party's Politburo to discuss just how far the crackdown should go. For many party watchers, the timing of the affair reflects a struggle over upcoming cabinet appointments. For instance, Triet, the Ho Chi Minh City official who helped galvanize the campaign against Nam Cam, was once touted as a contender to replace Prime Minister Phan Van Khai, who is now expected to retain his seat for the next two years. Paradoxically, some say the Nam Cam affair was initially stirred up to make Triet appear ineffectual on his home turf. |=|

- "As the affair yields up its heroes and villains, the credits and debits pile up within the political patronage system. One of the most sensitive issues raised by observers is whether Nam Cam's network is being gutted to prevent further political blackmail. Police acknowledge that the gangster was often a useful informant. Did Nam Cam and his followers merely cough up dirt on rival criminal operations? Or did they also foil political promotions by fingering officials who engaged in illegal activities? No one expects those questions to be answered in Vietnam's secretive communist society. Besides, many ordinary Vietnamese don't care all that much about possible political skulduggery. What seizes their attention is the juicy chronicle of life in gangland, as dished out by the local press. |=|

- "As for the public, its reaction ranges from relief that organized crime is apparently being tackled to outrage at the number of senior people who are reported to have been caught up in it. "I feel angry and disappointed with those police officers," says Nguyen Duc Truc, a receptionist at a hotel a few steps away from where one of Nam Cam's alleged victims died. "As ordinary citizens, we really hope the government punishes them." Whether angry or relieved, few can resist reading the extraordinary tales that have emerged over the past seven months. (And conveniently for Vietnam's media, Nam Cam and other detainees are unable to offer any self-defense, since they won't have access to lawyers until charges are filed.) Take, for instance, the allegations of how Nam Cam attempted to protect his gambling operations from potential rivals. |=|

- Nam Cam's "arrest marked the start of an apparent campaign against organized crime that has been assiduously followed by Vietnam's state-run media. In the past few months, readers have been treated to a remarkable flood of lurid news reports in normally staid state-run newspapers revealing details of Nam Cam's colorful criminal career. Few analysts believe the media would have had the guts to pursue the Nam Cam story without a green light from above. The widespread view is that the Communist Party hoped to use the case to prove to the public that it is serious about purging official corruption along with organized crime. "The party is getting stronger and stronger, so it dares to disclose these cases," argues a former high-ranking police officer and party member in Ho Chi Minh City. "If the party were weak, it would hide these cases." |=|

Nam Cam's Trial

- Nam Cam's trial in Ho Chi Minh City's People's Court has been one of the largest in Vietnam's history. The seven charges against his were: 1) Murder, 2) Assault, 3) Gambling, 4) Organizing gambling, 5) Organizing bribery, 6) Abetting criminals and 7) Organizing illegal emigration Margie Mason of Associated Press wrote: "Vietnam's most notorious underworld boss has appeared in court with 154 others in what could be one of the Communist country's most important trials. Nam Cam has been charged with seven counts. He faces death by firing squad if convicted. His co-defendants include two expelled members of the Communist Party's powerful Central Committee, 13 senior police officers, three former prosecutors and three state journalists. [Source:Margie Mason, Associated Press, February 25, 2007]

- The BBC's Vietnam correspondent,Clare Arthurs reported: " Wearing green and white-striped prison pyjamas, Nam Cam was led to the front of the court with some of the other accused to describe his background and past criminal convictions. He looked ageing, gaunt and grey as he stood in the dock listening to the presiding judge, Byi Hoang Danh, read the charges against him. "In the past I was a dock worker and before my arrest I worked in the restaurant business," he said. The trial, being held in a freshly painted courtroom in the 19th Century People's Court in Ho Chi Minh City, is the one of the largest to ever reach the Vietnam courts. There are three judges on the case, a jury of three, 80 lawyers and 30 witnesses. Those on trial include Nam Cam's first wife, Phan Thi Truc, as well as his son, daughter, son-in-law and cousin. [Source: Clare Arthurs, BBC, February 25, 2007]

- I wanted to come here myself to soak up the atmosphere and witness this unique event Nguyen Hoang Anh, bystander It took about an hour for the charges to be read for all of the defendants. Together they face more than 20 different charges, ranging from murder to revealing state secrets. TV screens were erected outside the court to allow the reading of the charges to be witnessed by defense lawyers and journalists. Foreign correspondents have also been granted rare access, although only to the opening and closing days.

- The case has attracted huge interest in Vietnam, and a crowd of about 500 people waited outside the People's Court on Tuesday morning for their chance to see the infamous mafia boss. "I was here very early to make sure I had a glimpse of Nam Cam," said local man Nguyen Van Kim, who arrived outside the court early on Tuesday morning. "I will come here all 55 days (of the trial). I think he will be sentenced to death," he said.

- Those following the case outside Vietnam say it could have wide implications for the country as a whole. "The Nam Cam trial involves institutional corruption of a very serious nature," said Carl Thayer, a Vietnamese expert at the Australian Defence Force Academy. He said the trial was a positive indication that the Communist Party was serious about cracking down on corruption. The party has already acknowledged that public impatience with corruption could threaten its power, and has vowed to punish the guilty, "regardless of social status".

- Kay Johnson wrote in Time Magazine, "A crowd of about 200 gathers outside the Ho Chi Minh City People's Court to hear the scuttlebutt on Vietnam's spiciest trial in memory. Nam Cam, Vietnam's most powerful and vicious gangster, is in the dock on seven charges, including murder, along with at least 154 co-accused. He will probably face a firing squad. Suddenly, police throw seven women into a jeep and drive them away. "A threat to the peace," one policeman explains. The women's crime: they were trying to sell fans and cold drinks to the spectators. [Source: Kay Johnson, Time Magazine, March 3, 2003 ^^]

- "When Cam's trial finally began two weeks ago, the government faced a quandary. Should it maximize coverage to prove its seriousness in cracking down on gangsters and their dirty friends in high places? Or would that merely publicize the scale of official corruption? Hanoi chose a middle course. The opening hours of the trial were broadcast live on national television, with Nam Cam shown handcuffed and in striped prison pajamas. (Reporters weren't allowed in the courtroom; they viewed the proceedings on a closed-circuit- television monitor. "That's so they can cut the feed if they need to," one reporter speculated.) The trial itself will not be open to the press, and for good measure, a party official recently warned journalists to report "only what is good for the nation." ^^

- "Cam is behind bars, but his businesses have been taken over by other gangsters with names like Xuan Leprosy and Dat Long Hair. Outside the courtroom two weeks ago, a 67-year-old retiree named Nguyen Thi Vinh professed renewed faith in the party and said she came to the trial "so I can tell my children." Well, that was one reason. The other was evident in the stack of colored papers in her lap: Nguyen was hawking lottery tickets." ^^

Nam Cam Convicted and Sentenced to Death

- In 2003, Nam Cam was found guilty of ordering the assassination of gangster boss, commissioning an acid attack on a rival, giving out bribes, running illegal gambling and sentenced to death. Margie Mason of Associated Press wrote: "A Vietnamese court convicted a major organized crime kingpin in a case seen as a test of the communist government's fight against corruption. Truong Van Cam, better known as Nam Cam, was found guilty of murder, assault, gambling, running gambling dens, sheltering criminals, bribery and helping others to flee the country. He is among 154 defendants put on trial for mob charges. Several Communist Party officials are among them.[Source: Margie Mason, Associated Press, June 4, 2003 >>>]

- "With the seven crimes committed, Truong Van Cam is the most dangerous element to society. His crimes have caused fears among the public," said Judge Pham Luong Toan. Toan said Nam Cam netted $153,300 in gambling proceeds from 1999 to 2001 and used $26,500 from that stash to bribe law enforcement officials to cover up his crimes. Toan said Nam Cam also distributed $33,400 in bribes to government officials through his large ring of associates. >>>

- "While sitting in the front row of the main courtroom, the silver-haired Nam Cam, 56, looked frail and tired, slumped over in his green-and-white striped jumpsuit and handcuffs. "This trial has been impartial and free from prejudices," Nam Cam said to a group of foreign journalists surrounding him. Nam Cam's wife, Phan Thi Truc, was found guilty of giving bribes, loan sharking and sheltering criminals, which carries up to 20 years in jail. His son-in-law and daughter also were found guilty of giving bribes. He could be sentenced to life in jail, while she faces up to 20 years behind bars. >>>

- A few days later, Nam Cam was given the death penalty and executed a year later . Associated Press reported: "Vietnam's reigning mafia boss was given the death sentence in the dramatic conclusion to a trial intended to showcase the communist government's resolve in fighting corruption. Truong Van Cam, 56, known as Nam Cam, will face a firing squad after being convicted of murder, bribery and five other crimes in the country's largest-ever criminal trial. Nam Cam was convicted of all seven counts, but presiding Judge Bui Hoang Danh said he was given the death penalty for murder and bribery. Nam Cam stood with his hands clasped behind him and showed no emotion as the sentence was read in the Ho Chi Minh City court. A police officer placed his hand on the gangster's shoulder to comfort him. His defense attorney Nguyen Dang Trung said he plans to appeal the verdict and sentence, which were widely expected. "He is well prepared spiritually to receive this," said Trung during an earlier interview. Five other gang members were also given death sentences for murdering three people, including Nam Cam's rival gang member. [Source: Associated Press, June 6, 2003]

- Nam Cam was executed by firing squad in has brought an abrupt end to a violent but colorful life. [Source: BBC, June 3, 2004]

Vietnamese Government Officials Associated with Nam Cam Convicted

- Margie Mason of Associated Press wrote: "The trial, which started February 25, 2003, also involves several former high-ranking officials, including a vice minister of public security, the director of state radio and a vice national chief prosecutor. Tran Mai Hanh, the former head of state radio, was found guilty of receiving bribes of $6,000, plus an Omega watch valued at $2,500. Pham Sy Chien, a former deputy national chief prosecutor, was found guilty of receiving a stereo worth $1,800. [Source: Margie Mason, Associated Press, June 4, 2003 >>>]

- "The two men allegedly had sought Nam Cam's early release in the 1990s from a labor camp where he was serving time on earlier charges. Bui Quoc Huy, who was Ho Chi Minh City's police chief from 1996-2001, was found guilty of negligence for allowing Nam Cam's illegal gambling business to flourish. He was fired last year from his post as vice minister of public security. >>>

- Pham Sy Chien, a former deputy national chief prosecutor, was given six years in jail while Tran Mai Hanh, the former head of state radio, was given 10 years. Both were found guilty of receiving bribes to help Nam Cam get an early release from a labor camp in the mid 1990s. Bui Quoc Huy, former vice minister of public security, got four years behind bars for turning a blind eye to Nam Cam's dealings when Huy was the police chief of Ho Chi Minh City. All three former officials were banned from taking government jobs for up to five years. [Source: Associated Press, June 6, 2003]

Nam Cam Deputies Arrested After Nam Cam's Execution

- In August 2004, Associated Press reported: "Police in southern Vietnam have arrested the No. 2 man in the country's most notorious underworld gang after he spent nearly three years evading authorities, state-controlled media reported Wednesday. Nguyen Van Tho, better known as "The Captain," was arrested Sunday as he climbed onto the back of his mistress' motorbike in front of a cafe in Dong Nai province, the People's Police newspaper said. [Source: Associated Press, August 18, 2004 \:\]

- "Tho is the nephew of Nam Cam. Tho went into hiding in January 2002, when police issued a special arrest warrant for him. The mob was exposed, leading to a trial with 155 defendants, including police officers and high-ranking government officials. Four of those associates also were executed. Tho allegedly ran a large gambling network for his uncle and was wanted for the murders of a police officer and another man in Ho Chi Minh City, the paper said. \:\

- In November 2007, AFP reported: "A Mafia leader in Vietnam, one of the key figures in the network of executed mafia boss Nam Cam, has turned himself in to police after five years on the run, state media said. Nguyen Van Thang, alias Thang 'Tai Dau', 51, surrendered in Hanoi, eliminating rumours that he had been killed for having known too many secrets about the underworld, the Thanh Nien or Youth daily newspaper said. Thang surged to the leadership of the northern mafia network in 1990, and had worked directly under Nam Cam, the country's most notorious mafia boss who was sentenced to death in 2003 and executed a year later. [Source: AFP, November 28, 2007 *-*]

- "Working under Nam Cam, Thang is believed to have organized illegal gambling and was suspected of fixing several football matches by giving money to some leading players, the Thanh Nien newspaper said. He was also thought to have had links with some senior sports officials in Vietnam and to have used money to control football activities. He escaped overseas to hide from a special police search warrant in March 2002. *-*

Image Sources:

Text Sources: New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Times of London, Lonely Planet Guides, Library of Congress, Vietnamtourism. com, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, CIA World Factbook, Compton's Encyclopedia, The Guardian, National Geographic, Smithsonian magazine, The New Yorker, Time, Newsweek, Reuters, AP, AFP, Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic Monthly, The Economist, Global Viewpoint (Christian Science Monitor), Foreign Policy, Wikipedia, BBC, CNN, Fox News and various websites, books and other publications identified in the text.

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