

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Pham Thien Khoc
Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Immigrant Stories Oral History project
Interview # IM-V-L-2015-006

Pham Thien Khoc, A Vietnamese boat person who was finally able to immigrate to the United States in 1998, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Immigrant Stories* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Feb 23, 2015 Location: IL Information Service Studio, Springfield, Illinois

Date: Mar 2, 2015 Location: IL Information Service Studio, Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital video, HD Wide screen

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Technical Support: Mark Suszko, Greg Lipe and Tony Bateman, IIS videographers

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Total Pages: _____ Total Time:

Session 1: Experiences in Vietnamese Army (ARVN) and in Reeducation Camp

Session 2: Hiding from the Vietnamese authorities, escape from Vietnam and emigration to the United States

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on May 13, 2015.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Pham Thien Khoc, *Immigrant Stories*, IM-V-L-2015-006

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Pham Thien Khoc was born Pham Thieu Khoc in June, 1944 in Saigon, and South Vietnam. He grew up in nearby Phuoc Tuy province in a Catholic family. He graduated from high school in 1966, and soon was drafted into the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN). He was sent to an officer candidate school and became an Engineer officer in December, 1967. He was assigned to the 10th Engineer Regiment, which was headquartered in DaNang, South Vietnam. During the next few years he operated in the northern portions of South Vietnam, and met and married his wife, Nguyen Thingoc Quy, in 1969. In January, 1973 he was stationed in Quang Tri Province at the time the Paris Peace Accords were signed. That event was an emotional experience for Mr. Pham due to the unfavorable terms the South Vietnamese government was forced to sign. In 1974 he attended the Engineer Officer Advance Course in Saigon, and then was assigned to the 30th Engineer Regiment at the time when the North Vietnamese were beginning a major offensive to topple the South Vietnamese government. In April, 1975 the South Vietnamese government collapsed, but rather than take part in the formal surrender, Mr. Pham left the Saigon area and took his family to Bin Tuy province, trying to scrape out a living on very marginal land.

Within a few months, a neighbor turned Mr. Pham over to the authorities, who took him to a reeducation camp for those they deemed “enemies of the state.” The conditions there were brutal, and the diet was barely enough to keep them alive. He worked in the fields all day long, and attended indoctrination classes at night. Those who attempted escape were killed, and then hung in the wire as a lesson to others. He was released one year later (1976) because he was too weak to work in the fields. After a year of constant harassment by the authorities, he decided to change his identity, taking a new name and a new birth date, moving the family to Bac Lieu (in southern Vietnam). A few years later they moved to a suburb of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). Still living in constant fear, Mr. Pham decided to flee Vietnam in 1989, taking his oldest son along, but leaving the rest of the family behind. He escaped across the border into Cambodia, and then went by bus to Phnom Penh, then to the coast where they were put on a boat. After a day on the water they landed on an island off the Thai coast, and a few days later to a run-down refugee camp named Long Ngop. They were soon taken to another more established camp in Phanat Nikhom, where he remained for the next four years. They moved to yet another camp, and then started to hear rumors about others being sent back to Vietnam. He finally agreed to go back in 1996, but only after he had assurances that American officials would help him and the family immigrate to the United States. The family finally emigrated to the U.S. in 1998, living first in Salt Lake City, then in North Hollywood, then to Springfield, Illinois in 2000, where his second son operated a nail salon. After ten years in the U.S. he became an American citizen.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Vietnamese reeducation camps after fall of South Vietnam; fall of South Vietnam in 1975; Army of South Vietnam (ARVN); life in post-war Vietnam; Vietnamese boat people; emigration to the United States; Phuoc Tuy reeducation camp; fleeing Vietnam; life in the Phanat Nikhom refugee camp; 1973 Paris Peace Accords; Tet Offensive; American Embassy officials’ help to refugees; Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City); 10th Engineer Regiment; 30th Engineer Regiment

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