

Vietnamese book translation gives new perspective on war

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Jana Lipman co-translated a new memoir written by a former member of the South Vietnamese military, repatriate and eventual immigrant to the United States. The book is called *Ship of Fate: Memoir of a Vietnamese Repatriate*. (Photograph by Paula Burch-Celentano)

A little-known memoir that recounts the experiences of a South Vietnamese military officer has been translated into English by [Jana K. Lipman](#), an associate professor of history in the Tulane University School

of Liberal Arts.

Lipman discovered the memoir at the Library of Congress. She enlisted Bac Hoai Tran, a colleague in California, to help translate the book, written in Vietnamese by Tran Dinh Tru. The final product, *Ship of Fate: Memoir of a Vietnamese Repatriate*, was published last year.

The process took years to complete. Lipman and Bac Hoai Tran conducted their translation sessions via Skype, going back and forth over every word until they agreed on an accurate translation. Lipman does not speak Vietnamese. The two later met with the book's author.

"We wanted to make sure we kept his voice, and we wanted to make the story available for an English-speaking audience," said Lipman.

After Tran Dinh Tru escaped Vietnam during the fall of Saigon in 1975, he stopped with other refugees in Guam for processing. Most of the escaped Vietnamese eventually made their way to the United States, but Tran decided to return to Vietnam to find his wife.

Another 1,500 Vietnamese on Guam decided to return to Vietnam, mostly to reunite with their families. The United States gave them a ship, which Tran piloted back to Vietnam. However, the new Vietnamese government feared the repatriates were spies, and Tran spent more than a decade in a forced labor camp.

He and his family eventually immigrated to the United States.

Lipman said stories like Tran's are not well represented in the historical record and that most Americans are unfamiliar with war stories from a Vietnamese perspective.

"The story takes this radical departure, when he decides to not come to the United States in 1975. He becomes this leading figure in the refugee camp, making it possible for the Vietnamese who wanted to return to go back," Lipman said.

***Ship of Fate* is published by University of Hawaii Press as part of the "Intersections: Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies" series.**

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Co-translators Jana Lipman, left, and Bac Hoai Tran, right, pose with memoirist Tran Dinh Tru, center, at a reunion of Vietnamese repatriates in Orange County, California, in 2015. (Photograph provided by Jana Lipman)