

DECLASSIFIED UNDER AUTHORITY OF THE INTERAGENCY SECURITY CLASSIFICATION APPEALS PANEL.
 E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)
 ISCAP No. 2010-080, document 4

ORIGIN/ACTION

ENRIR-16

EUR	EA	NEA	CU
5	6		
INS	E	P	SO
6			
L	FBO	AID	BY
WIL	SCI		
AGR	COM	FRB	INT
LAB	YAR	TR	AMB
AR	ARMY	NAVY	OSD
5	3	10	34
USA	NSA	CIA	DST
	3		
BYR	NEW		

FABRIDA

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

P140119-0883

Original to be Filed in _____ Declassified Files. (110)

MICROFILMED FILE DESIGNATION A-218

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~ RECEIVED DEPARTMENT OF STATE

TO : Department of State
 E.O. 11652: XGDS-3, Declass 12/31/99 A 30 PM 1974

TAGS: PIR, PIR, PIPT, USFADRE

INFO : Amconsuls Bien Hoa, Can Tho, Phanang, Nha Trang;
 DEPT PASS: Amembassy Seoul; CINCPAC; USDEL JEC Paris

FROM : American Embassy Saigon DATE: October 21, 1974

SUBJECT : Biographic Data on Lieutenant General Pham Kuan Chieu, Ambassador to Korea

REF :

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

1. Prior to the election of September 1967, LTG Pham Kuan Chieu was one of the most important political figures in Vietnam. He has since lost much of his previous importance as a result of the many realignments of power in the 1960's. Chieu, a northerner, has been Ambassador to Korea since mid-1967. He serves concurrently as Chairman of the moribund Vietnam Veterans Legion.

Early Life

- Pham Kuan Chieu was born on November 20, 1920 in Non Khe village, Ninh Binh Province, North Vietnam. He received his education at the prestigious Lycee Albert Sarraut located in Hanoi. During the immediate years preceding World War II until 1943, Chieu attended medical school at the University of Hanoi.
- One of Chieu's classmates at medical school was Nguyen Tan Hong. Hong and Nguyen Cao Ky were to serve together in the 20th Infantry Battalion in the Hung Yen sector near Hanoi in 1951. Ky later appointed Hong Minister of Youth upon the formation of the Quat Government in 1965.
- Chieu's activities during World War II are not specifically known. In 1943 he left Vietnam for China

SECRET

FORM DS-323

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

Drafted by: POL/INT:DMRichardson:lgm
 Drafting Date: 10-21-74
 Phone No.: 7354
 Contents and Classification Approved by: POL/INT:SCLowman

Clearances: POL:AAFrancis
 OSA:CLaGueux
 SAAFO/GJJacobson
 AFMA:Col. Wahle

F740119-0883

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

2

where he attended the Rhamboa Military Academy; some sources say under the sponsorship of the VNQD. In 1946 Chieu returned to Hanoi and resumed his medical studies at the University until 1948. It is not known whether he actually holds a medical degree. He does have a BA degree.

5. Chieu was commissioned a first lieutenant in the Forces Bao Ve Quan (Self-Defense Forces) on May 1, 1951. The BVQ was a provisional Vietnamese force created by the French in North Vietnam. He commanded the 15th Battalion of the BVQ until June 1952. After four months at the Tactical Formation School in Hanoi, he was integrated into the Vietnamese Army as an infantry lieutenant in October 1952, and from that time until July 1953 he served with the General Staff in Paris. On August 7, 1953 Chieu was promoted to captain. Chieu relocated south with his family in 1953; however, one of his sisters remained in the north.

6. From August 1953 until December 1953, Chieu was Chief of Staff of the Soc Trang Sector, concurrently serving under LTC Duong Van Minh as Chief of Staff of the 1st Military Region. (The 1st Military Region at that time contained all of what was once called Cochinchina.) He was promoted to major on August 1, 1954.

The Binh Xuyen Campaign

7. On April 27, 1955 the Binh Xuyen broke an uneasy truce with the Diem Administration with a mortar attack on Diem's Palace (for more information on the Binh Xuyen, see A-158 of July 25, 1974). LTC Duong Van Minh, then Commander of the Saigon-Cholon-Gia Dinh Military Sub-Division; Tran Van Don, then Chief of Staff of the Joint General Staff; and Do Cao Tri, Commander of the Airborne troops organized the defense of the Palace and then pushed the Binh Xuyen out of Saigon, ultimately defeating them. All of those associated with the suppression of the Binh Xuyen were promoted by Diem. Chieu had served with Minh during the campaign and was promoted to lieutenant colonel on May 1, 1955.

Suppression of the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai

8. During the remainder of 1955 and well into 1956, the principal task which faced the army was the elimination of the private armies of the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai religious sects. In December 1956 many of those involved in this campaign were again promoted. Chieu, still serving with Minh, was promoted to colonel in December 1955 as a result of the successes his commander was scoring in the field.

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

P740119

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

3

9. In December 1956 Chieu was appointed Director of the National Police and Security Bureau (Surete), an extremely important position. The National Police had been the province of the Binh Xuyen until their suppression in mid-1955, and Chieu's appointment was probably a reward for the loyalty he had shown toward the Diem Government in the suppression of both the Binh Xuyen and the religious sects. One report indicates that Chieu was supported for this post by Diem's Can Lao Party, and it is probable that Chieu had established himself with Diem, but he had certainly established himself with Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, because Nhu essentially controlled the Can Lao and played a key role in all appointments of any significance.

Chieu Moves to JGS

10. One report indicates that as Director of the National Police, Chieu antagonized Ngo Dinh Can, another of Diem's brothers, by investigating some of Can's activities in Central Vietnam. Another report reveals that Chieu also locked horns with the Presidential Intelligence Service Chief, Tran Kim Tuyen, whose euphemistic title was Director of Political and Social Research Service of the Presidency. Tuyen was encouraged by Nhu to keep tabs on all intelligence organizations, and Tuyen attempted to dominate Chieu's service. Sketchy reporting from that period suggests that Chieu resisted Tuyen's attempts to dominate his department.

11. In February 1958 Chieu was promoted to brigadier general and assigned as Chief of Staff of the JGS. This movement from Director of National Police to JGS was a lateral one, and it is possible that Chieu's internecine conflicts with Can and Tuyen during the preceding two years were the reasons behind Chieu's transfer. Chieu replaced Colonel Tran Thien Khiem as Chief of Staff, JGS.

12. The Chief of JGS from 1954 to 1963 was LTG Le Van Ty. Ty had received his appointment to JGS primarily on the merit of his political reliability and loyalty to Diem. It is generally conceded that Ty was not a dynamic leader nor an effective administrator. Thus, it was necessary for Ty to have a competent Chief of Staff to carry the JGS administrative burdens. Prior to Chieu's appointment, Ty's Chiefs of Staff had been Tran Van Don and Khiem, both very competent administrators. A NAAG report of the period verifies that this working relationship continued when Chieu became Chief of Staff. It reports that Chieu "... carried the load of the headquarters of the RVNAF," and it describes his role as only nominally subservient to Ty. The reporting officer said, "I have seen him overrule General Ty and the latter accede with no apparent embarrassment on the part of either." In March 1958 Chieu attended the Modern Weapons Familiarization Course at Ft. Bliss, Texas.

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

SECRET

F740119

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

4

Chieu's Rapid Rise

13. In addition to being in the right place at the right time on the right side, much of the credit for Chieu's rapid rise to power is due to his own native ability. It is generally conceded that Chieu was a capable officer, and this was certainly a major factor in his rapid promotion. He was also reported in August 1960 to have been a popular general, ranking with General Duong Van Minh in popularity.

14. One report in 1960 prepared by a senior US officer who had close contacts with Chieu reports that "... I have often observed him make both administrative and operational decisions as soon as he heard the problem" and that Chieu was "... alert, conscientious and intelligent ... with considerable native ability." A later report reveals that Chieu "... is an intelligent and capable officer who was valuable ... as a man with a gift for compromise and negotiation and one who had lines open to many factions." It is probable that these connections with "many factions" and Chieu's gift for "compromise and negotiation" helped promote his rapid rise.

The 1960 Coup

15. On November 11, 1960 Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi led his paratroopers in an unsuccessful effort to overthrow Diem. The coup attempt was put down by Colonels Tran Thien Khiem and Nguyen Khanh. After the failure of the coup, Thi went into exile with a number of his coconspirators, and a number of military men and civilian politicians were arrested by Diem.

16. Among those arrested were Tran Van Don's brother-in-law, BG Le Van Kim. At the time of the coup, Kim was the Commander of the National Military Academy at Dalat. Duncanson in Government and Revolution in Vietnam attributes Kim's arrest to a VNQDD plot to set up a government after the coup, with Kim as its Prime Minister.

17. It is possible that Chieu's name may also have been bandied about by the VNQDD plotters as a member of the new government. One early report cryptically refers to Chieu's membership, along with Nguyen Chanh Thi and Le Van Kim, in a "revolutionary committee" which led the coup. It is possible that this report refers to a "Manifesto" drawn up by the VNQDD "United National Front" and issued over the names of 18 people. Most of these people were later to assert that their names had been used without permission, and this seems possible, although it is also probable that many of those people named approved

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

of the attempted overthrow. In any event, whether he was sympathetic toward the abortive coup or not, the use of Chieu's name in connection with the "United National Front" seemed to cause Diem to be considerably suspicious of Chieu. One Naval Attache report of December 1960 reports that "Chieu's activities at the General Staff with General Ty during the coup were most suspicious from [Diem's] standpoint. As a supposedly loyal Can Lao Party man, better things had been expected of him and ... it has lost him the President's [Diem's] trust completely."

18. Following the events of November 1960, Chieu was assigned on January 1, 1961 to replace Le Van Kim as Commander of the National Military Academy at Dalat, a traditional roost for officers in political eclipse. He was not to remain at the NMA long, however, in May 1961 he was relieved and assigned to attend the regular course at the US Command and General Staff College, a most coveted assignment. Le Van Ty was still Chief of JGS, Nguyen Khanh was Chief of Staff of JGS, and Tran Van Don was Commander of I Corps. It is possible that one of these men obtained Chieu's appointment to the C&GSC.

19. The only other Vietnamese member of the 1961-62 regular course at the C&GSC was Le Minh Luan, a major in the Air Force. Members of the 1961-62 Associate Course were:

LTC Dam Quang Yeu
 LTC Tran Thanh Phong
 LTC Pham Ngoc Sang
 LTC Nguyen Van Thien
 Major Pham Dinh Tung
 LTC Nguyen Ho
 Major Le Van Tho
 Major Vu Ngoc Tuan
 Major Pham Quoc Thuan

20. After his return to Vietnam, Chieu remained unassigned for a year before being named as an inspector for the Strategic Hamlet Program in July 1963. A DOD report states that "... considerable progress was made toward combatting subversion while Chieu was [in this position]."

21. In August 1963 President Diem proclaimed martial law at the urging of several important military figures who were then plotting a coup. The major coup plotters at this point were:

Tran Van Don
 Duong Van Minh
 Le Van Kim
 Tran Thien Khiem

F740119

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

6

22. The coup plotters saw martial law as a means to allow the military to control the steadily deteriorating political situation in Saigon and to help pave the way for a coup. During August Chieu was named Assistant to the Acting Chief of JGS, BG Tran Van Don. The Chief of Staff of JGS was Tran Thien Khiem. It is probable that Don and Khiem brought Chieu into the JGS to assist in the staff planning of the coup.

The Post-1963 Coup Era

23. Chieu was a member of the Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council which overthrew Diem. Its composition was as follows:

MG Duong Van Minh	Chairman
MG Tran Van Don	1st Deputy Chairman
MG Ton That Dinh	2nd Deputy Chairman
MG Le Van Kim	Secretary General and Commissioner for Foreign Affairs
MG Tran Van Minh	Commissioner for Economic Affairs
MG Tran Thien Khiem	Commissioner for Military Affairs
BG Pham Xuan Chieu	Commissioner for Security Affairs
BG Do Mau	Commissioner for Political Affairs
MG Mai Huu Xuan	Member
MG Le Van Nghiem	Member
BG Nguyen Huu Co	Member
BG Nguyen Van Thieu	Member

24. In December 1963 Chieu was appointed head of the Intelligence Coordinating Committee and promoted to major general. The Prime Minister of the new Government was the former Vice President, Nguyen Ngoc Tho.

The 1964 "Realignment"

25. On January 30, 1964 Major General Nguyen Khanh, Commander of I Corps, staged a bloodless coup which overthrew the Minh-Tho Government. Khanh organized his Government with himself as Prime Minister, and General Minh remained as titular Chief of State. Chieu supported Khanh's takeover of the Government in January, and in February 1964 he was assigned as Deputy Commander of II Corps. The Commander of II Corps at that time was LTC Do Cao Tri. In March Chieu was named Third Vice Chairman of the newly reorganized Military Revolutionary Council.

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

F740119-1189

~~SECRET~~/NOFORN

7

The Dai Viets and Young Turks

26. Khanh never succeeded in fully consolidating his own power position. In early 1964 Khiem was supposed to be Khanh's closest associate, but he was soon involved in an alliance with BG Nguyen Van Thieu (then Chief of Staff of the JGS) and some Dai Viet Party members in the Cabinet to reduce Khanh's authority. With the support of the so-called "Young Turks", including Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Chanh Thi, Khanh stood off the Khiem-Thieu challenge to his authority.

27. In July 1964 Chieu was suddenly appointed Ambassador to China. This assignment coincides roughly with the height of the Khanh-Khiem-Thieu confrontation, and it is probable that Chieu had been aligned with Khiem and Thieu and was an early victim in this power struggle. On September 5 Khiem resigned as Minister of Defense, and Nguyen Van Thieu left his post at JGS on September 12 and was reassigned. Chieu arrived in Taiwan on August 27, 1964, the first Vietnamese Ambassador to the Republic of China.

Return to Vietnam

28. In February 1965 the military group in power finally agreed that Khanh had to be replaced. Nguyen Van Thieu was recalled from IV Corps, where he had been sidelined since the previous fall, and named Deputy Prime Minister under Phan Huy Quat. Chieu was immediately recalled from Taiwan and named Chairman of the newly organized National Legislative Council. (He was replaced as Ambassador to Taiwan by Khiem in October 1965.) It would appear that Thieu had established himself as Chieu's patron.

29. On June 19 Quat and the National Legislative Council announced in a joint statement their decision to turn power over to the Armed Forces, and the National Leadership Council (NLC) was formed. The composition of the NLC was:

Nguyen Van Thieu	Chairman
Pham Xuan Chieu	Secretary General
Nguyen Cao Ky	Commissioner for the Executive
Nguyen Huu Co	Member
Linh Quang Vien	Member
Dang Van Quang	Member
Nguyen Chanh Thi	Member
Cao Van Vien	Member
Vinh Loc	Member
Le Nguyen Khang	Member

~~SECRET~~/NOFORN

F740119

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

8

30. During a conversation with an Embassy officer following Chieu's appointment to the NLC, Chieu did not directly criticize NLC members, but he gave the impression of regarding some of them rather poorly and said that "... revolutionaries are always very young." The reporting officer construed this to mean that Chieu believed that impetuous and inexperienced young generals were about to "embark on an extremely dangerous adventure."

Vietnam Veterans Legion

31. In September 1965 Chieu was elected Chairman of the Vietnam Veterans Legion (VVL). The VVL is ostensibly the principal veterans organization in Vietnam, and it serves as an umbrella organization for other veterans' associations. (One year after Chieu's election to the Chairmanship of the VVL, Nguyen Tan Hong, Chieu's medical school classmate, became Commissioner for War Veterans.) Chieu has not provided dynamic leadership for the VVL, and it is ineffectual to the point of being moribund. On November 16, 1965 the Vietnamese general officer rank structure was revised in order to equate with that of the United States. As a result Chieu's rank was automatically raised to that of lieutenant general.

32. Chieu served on the NLC during 1965-67. One of his primary responsibilities during 1967 as Secretary General was to develop a new constitution for Vietnam through a negotiation process with the Constituent Assembly. The main issues were the division of power between the executive and legislative branches, what transitional powers the Assembly would have, whether or not province chiefs were to be elected and what role the military would play in the new government.

33. The Constituent Assembly approved the constitution on March 18, 1967 after a behind-the-scenes agreement with Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky. On March 27 the Armed Forces Council approved the legislation, publicizing, however, objections to some provisions and its general acceptance "in the spirit of democracy." Although many military leaders put a good public face on their collective dissatisfaction with the new constitution, privately many were harshly critical of those responsible for the outcome of the negotiations. When the new government was announced in October 1967, Chieu's name was not included in the leadership. There is some conjecture that the NLC used Chieu as a scapegoat to placate the dissatisfied members of the military. Since that time Chieu's significance has greatly diminished.

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

P740119

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

9

Ambassador to Korea

34. After two years of unassigned hiatus, Chieu was assigned as Ambassador to Korea in 1969. He replaced Do Cao Tri. The Embassy in Seoul reports that morale is low at the Vietnamese mission. According to Chieu's secretary, the general spends his time dreaming of past political days, saving his money and enjoying his perquisites as Ambassador. The Embassy does little more than entertain visitors and respond to requests from Saigon to make specific representation to the Korean Government and third-country missions. Chieu's close associates describe him as completely uninterested in his job. A 1969 memorandum states that:

"When he was in the government, Chieu was a useful contact; he seems to be now very much among the "outs" and apparently has little to offer. Chieu is intelligent, will sometimes speak very frankly, but seems to lack drive. He has done virtually nothing effective with the Veterans Organization (VVL)."

35. Chieu's staff includes his brother-in-law, LTC Mai Bac Dau, his personal secretary, Major Nguyen Huy Thanh, and only one substantive diplomatic officer, a third secretary. Chieu is affable and fairly well liked by his diplomatic peers. He often voices a desire to leave the Foreign Service, but he reportedly enjoys the comforts of his position and needs the money to support two of his sons now living in Canada.

Family

36. Chieu is married to Nguyen Thi Ha who was born on May 9, 1924 in Viet Tri Province, North Vietnam. The couple has eight children: three sons and five daughters. Reportedly, Mrs. Chieu met her husband in China during World War II. The US Embassy in Korea reports that Mrs. Chieu rules over the Vietnamese Embassy with "an iron hand and a vicious tongue." She speaks Chinese and limited English. Her speech in Vietnamese is loud, vulgar, and coarse, and she frequently berates employees and their families for not showing her proper respect. SRF sources report that she presides over nightly mah-jong games lasting until dawn.

37. Madame Chieu is also a believer in the occult. She is well known for her yearly performance of a dance to exorcise the spirits (len dong). SRF sources say she frequently lapses into trances and has a great fear of religious articles, becoming ill in the presence of a crucifix.

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

TELEF:

P740119

Saigon A-218

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

10

Personal Data

38. Chieu understands English, but is self-conscious when speaking it with foreigners. He speaks fluent French. His hobbies include dogs (perhaps more his wife's hobby than his) and collecting cactus plants. Chieu generally dresses casually. He has a slight stutter.

EXEMPT BY ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION, JOSIAH W. BENNETT

MARTIN

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~