

First Armed Unit In Viet Nam Traced Back To Trung Sisters

By TRAN VAN DINH College Press Service

WASHINGTON (CPS) -- The existence of the first armed unit in Vietnam can be traced back to a militia organized by the Trung Sisters in their rebellion against the Chinese administrators in the year 39 AD.

That year, Trung Trac, daughter of the chief of the district of Me Linh (North Vietnam) and whose husband was killed by the Chinese governor To Kinh, raised a militia with her sister Trung Nhi to fight the Chinese.

They founded an independent kingdom but it lasted little more than two years. The powerful Chinese troops under Ma Vien defeated the Vietnamese army led by the Trung Sisters who committed suicide by throwing themselves into a river.

During the eight centuries of independent imperial Vietnam, the Vietnam army not only defended the country but had contributed to the extension of the Vietnamese borders southwards.

The Nam Tien (March to the South), a slow and systematic penetration into the South brought the Vietnamese people from the delta of the Red River in the North to the Mekong River delta in the extreme South where they reached exactly 200 years ago, after 800 years of marching 800 miles.

The Nam Tien was a combination of peaceful penetration and military conquest, and was the patient work of the soldier-peasant. The soldiers moved with the pioneers, defended them, helped them clear the land and set up the Don Dien, (garrison-ricefield). The peasant-soldier indeed was the founder of Vietnam and its defender.

A study of the historical development of the Vietnamese Army before the French occupation reveals the following characteristics:

1. It has been always an army of peasant-soldier, peasant in peacetime and soldier in wartime. It has been always an integral part of the nation which it helped to build, and defend by blood and tears. The soldier was no stranger to the peasant because he was one of them. He protected and defended the peasant and was loved and respected by the peasants. In other words, it was truly a people's army, the peasantry being the largest majority of the people. (90%)

2. Discipline in the army was maintained through the principle: "Phu Tu Chi Binh", the commanding officers acting as parents and guardians of the soldiers. This was well demonstrated in the famous Van Te Tran Vong Tuong Si (funeral oration to the dead officers and soldiers) composed by Marchal Mgyuen Van Thanh in 1802. The oration remains a masterpiece of Vietnamese literature by the beauty of its expression. These two sentences are typical:

... "Now under decorated tents, amidst splendor and wealth, I remember the cup of wine poured at the edge of a desolate cliff,

"Now in the home with shining uniform, I am nostalgic of the sight of the torn leather vest blown to the four winds..."

3. The leadership of the army was recruited among people well versed in literature and liberal arts through competitive examinations.