



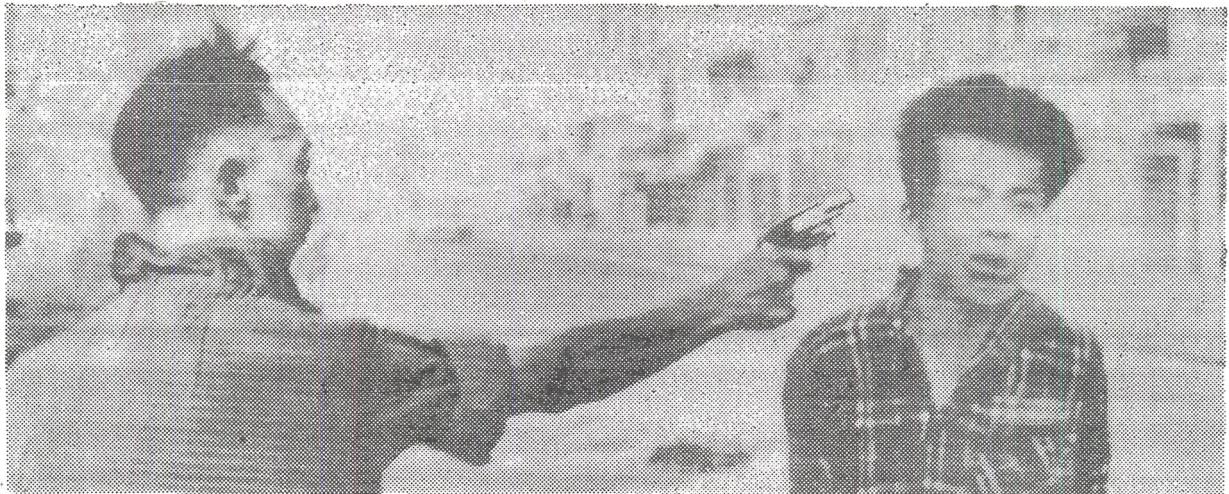
Loan and his wife in the small restaurant he manages in northern Virginia

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The 1968 photo of police chief Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting a prisoner

# Saigon's Killer Cop in U.S.



## Washington

Nguyen Ngoc Loan smiles continuously and chats pleasantly with teenagers and laborers who buy hamburgers and pizza at the restaurant he manages in suburban Burke, Va. Few recognize him as the South Vietnamese police chief who was photographed shooting to death a prisoner at point-blank range on a Saigon street in 1968.

Loan, who became known because of a Pulitzer Prize-winning Associated Press photograph of the shooting, says he is not trying "to think about the present and the future of my children. I have no time to think back or for regrets."

Of the impact of the photograph and the change in his life Loan said, "What can I do about it? You tell me what I can do about it."

Loan says he now works 12-hour days as a secretary for an unnamed private company in Washington and as manager of Les Trois Continents restaurant, which serves Vietnamese dishes as well as American and European fare.

He spends his time in the restaurant greeting customers, chatting and telling them to "have a good day" as they leave the small red and dark-brown cafe, located in the middle of a shopping center.

For two years, from 1966 to 1968, Loan was commander of the national police in South Vietnam and a close friend of former Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky.

Loan was a tough general, known for his ruthlessness in suppressing Buddhist riots in 1966 when it was thought Ky's regime might be toppled. While he was police chief, thousands of people were tortured and many executed.

But Loan would still be relatively unknown by most Americans had he not been photographed during the 1968 Tet offensive, firing his snub-nosed revolver at the head of a man who was reported to be a Viet Cong prisoner. The photograph shocked many Americans.

Loan said that, to him, the picture was an instance of "the newspaperman bringing (photographing) what he thought would make him famous. "It just happened that it was me in the picture."

The former general said it was erroneously reported that the victim was a Viet Cong prisoner.

"It happened in a war on a street where there was fighting," Loan said. "But this was no fighting man. He was a civilian who robbed and killed. We were under martial law. What could I do?" He said that the picture "belongs to the past," but that he had accepted its presence as his fate.

Sitting at the counter in his restaurant, Loan had little to say about his term as police chief, and could only describe it as "a difficult time."

"It was hard work," he said. "I got that position, but I didn't ask for it. I only tried to help. If I had to do it all over again, I would refuse. I would never do police work again."

About a month after the photograph was taken, Loan was wounded in the leg during another offensive while trying to rescue a soldier. He later lost his leg, but is able to move around without a cane or crutches, though he said it is "still very painful."

Loan lives with his wife, four daughters and one son in Dale City. His wife works as a cook at the restaurant, and on weekends his children also work, helping in the kitchen and at the cash register.

"We don't have much," Loan said. "We have a simple life. It's not so difficult because we have friends who can spare for us."

"Right now, my children are doing well at school. We have the necessities. My wife and I have jobs. We've been more lucky than the average refugee, because our children don't have many problems." His children,

aged 16, 14, 12, 10 and 4, learned some English while in Vietnam, he said.

Former Prime Minister Ky also lives in northern Virginia, but Loan said he does not see him.

"I have some friends who come and visit and some I talk to on the phone," he said. "I don't have time to go around."

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