

Ly Tong



Ly Tong, a South Vietnamese Air Force veteran who dropped anti-Communist leaflets over Vietnam from hijacked planes long after the war's end, playing out the fantasies of many defeated soldiers of the south, died on Saturday in San Diego. He was 74.

His family said the cause of death was lung disease.

A man who never accepted defeat, Mr. Ly Tong considered it his personal mission to take

back his country from the Communists, who have ruled it since winning the Vietnam War in 1975.

Mr. Ly Tong became a hero to many Vietnamese refugees in 1992, when he hijacked a commercial airliner after takeoff from Bangkok, ordered the pilot to fly low over Ho Chi Minh City — known as Saigon, South Vietnam's capital, before the Communist victory — and dumped thousands of leaflets calling for a popular uprising.

He then [strapped on a parachute and followed the leaflets down](#) to certain capture. He was released six years later in an amnesty and returned to the United States, where he had become a citizen after the war.

In 2000, under the guise of taking flying lessons in Thailand, Mr. Ly Tong made a second trip over Ho Chi Minh City, sending down a new cascade of leaflets, which he had signed "Global Alliance for the Total Uprising Against Communists."

He was arrested on his return to Thailand and spent six years in prison for hijacking.

As word spread that his health was failing, visitors converged on his hospital room in San Diego — as many as 200 people on one recent weekend.

Mr. Ly Tong joined the South Vietnamese Air Force and served in its elite Black Eagle fighter squadron. As the war neared its end, he was shot down and sent to a re-education camp.

He was accepted as a refugee in the United States, where he worked as a security guard and earned a degree in political science from the University of New Orleans. He published a 300-page autobiography, "Black Eagle," which made him a celebrity among overseas Vietnamese.