

= Phan Đình Phùng =

Phan Đình Phùng (1847 - January 21 , 1896) was a Vietnamese revolutionary who led rebel armies against French colonial forces in Vietnam . He was the most prominent of the Confucian court scholars involved in anti-French military campaigns in the 19th century and was cited after his death by 20th century nationalists as a national hero . He was renowned for his uncompromising will and principles - on one occasion , he refused to surrender even after the French had desecrated his ancestral tombs and had arrested and threatened to kill his family .

Born into a family of mandarins from Hà Tĩnh Province , Phan continued his ancestors ' traditions by placing first in the metropolitan imperial examinations in 1877 . Phan quickly rose through the ranks under Emperor Tự Đức of the Nguyễn Dynasty , gaining a reputation for his integrity and uncompromising stance against corruption . Phan was appointed as the Imperial Censor , a position that allowed him to criticise his fellow mandarins and even the emperor . As the head of the censorate , Phan 's investigations led to the removal of many incompetent or corrupt mandarins .

Upon Tự Đức 's death , Phan almost lost his life during a power struggle in the imperial court . The regent Tôn Thất Thuyết disregarded Tự Đức 's will of succession , and three emperors were deposed and killed in just over a year . Phan protested against Thuyet 's activities , was stripped of his honours and briefly jailed , before being exiled to his home province . At the time , France had just conquered Vietnam and made it a part of French Indochina . Along with Thuyet , Phan organised rebel armies as part of the Cần Vương movement , which sought to expel the French and install the boy Emperor Hàm Nghi at the head of an independent Vietnam . This campaign continued for three years until 1888 , when the French captured Hàm Nghi and exiled him to Algeria .

Phan and his military assistant Cao Thắng continued their guerrilla campaign , building a network of spies , bases and small weapons factories . However , Cao Thắng was killed in the process in late 1893 . The decade-long campaign eventually wore Phan down , and he died from dysentery as the French surrounded his forces .

= = Court official = =

Phan was born in the village of Đông Thái in the northern central coast province of Hà Tĩnh . Đông Thái was famous for producing high-ranking mandarins and had been the home of senior imperial officials since the time of the Lê Dynasty . Twelve consecutive generations of the Phan family had been successful mandarin graduates . All three of Phan 's brothers who lived to adulthood passed the imperial examinations and became mandarins . Early on , Phan indicated his distaste for the classical curriculum required of an aspiring mandarin . He nevertheless persevered with his studies , passing the regional exams in 1876 and then topping the metropolitan exams the following year . In his exam response , Phan cited Japan as an example of how an Asian country could make rapid military progress given sufficient willpower .

Phan was never known for his scholarly abilities ; it was his reputation for principled integrity that led to his quick rise through the ranks under the reign of Emperor Tự Đức . He was first appointed as a district mandarin in Ninh Bình Province , where he punished a Vietnamese Roman Catholic priest , who , with the tacit support of French missionaries , had harassed local non-Catholics . Amid the diplomatic controversy that followed , he avoided blaming the unpopular alliance between Vietnamese Catholics and the French on Catholicism itself , stating that the partnership had arisen out of the military and political vulnerabilities of Vietnam 's imperial government . Despite this , the Huế court eventually removed Phan from this post .

Phan was transferred to the Huế court as a member of the censorate , a watchdog body that monitored the work of the mandarinates . He earned the ire of many of his colleagues , but the trust of the emperor , by revealing that the vast majority of the court mandarins were making a mockery of a royal edict to engage in regular rifle practice . Tự Đức later dispatched Phan on an inspection trip to northern Vietnam . His report led to the ousting of many officials who were deemed corrupt or incompetent , including the viceroy of the northern region . He rose to become the Ngu Su , or

Imperial Censor , a position which allowed him to criticise other high officials and even the emperor for misconduct . Phan openly criticised Tôn Thất Thuyết , the foremost mandarin of the court , believing him to be rash and dishonest . Aside from his work in rooting out corruption , Phan also compiled a historical geography of Vietnam , which was published in 1883 .

Despite his prominent position in the Nguyễn Dynasty , little is known about Phan 's personal stance on Vietnamese relations with France , which was in the process of colonising Vietnam . France had first invaded in 1858 , beginning the colonisation of southern Vietnam . Three provinces were ceded under the 1862 Treaty of Saigon , and a further three in 1867 to form the colony of Cochinchina . During the period , there was debate in the Huế court on the best strategy to regain the territory . One group advocated military means , while another believed in the use of diplomacy in addition to financial and religious concessions . By the time of Tự Đức 's death in 1883 , the whole of Vietnam was colonised , henceforth incorporated with Laos and Cambodia into French Indochina .

Upon his death in 1883 , the childless Tự Đức had named his nephew , Kiến Phúc , as his successor , rather than Dục Đức , his most senior heir . Tự Đức had written in his will that Dục Đức was depraved and unworthy of ruling the country . However , led by Thuyet , the regents enthroned Dục Đức under the pressure of the ladies of the court . Phan protested against the violation of Tự Đức 's will of succession and refused to sanction anyone other than Kien Phuc . Lucky to escape the death penalty , Phan was stripped of his positions . Later , Dục Đức was deposed and executed by Thuyet on the grounds of ignoring court etiquette , ignoring the mourning rites for Tự Đức and having affairs with the late emperor 's consorts . Phan again protested the regents ' actions and was briefly imprisoned by Thuyet , before being exiled to his home province .

= = Revolutionary career = =

= = = Cần Vương = = =

Phan rallied to the cause of the boy Emperor Hàm Nghi - the fourth monarch in little over a year - after an abortive royal uprising at Huế in 1885 . Thuyet and fellow regent Nguyễn Văn Tấn had enthroned Hiệp Hòa after disposing of Dục Đức . However , the new emperor was wary of the regents ' behaviour and attempted to avoid their influence , leading Thuyet to organise his execution . The teenage Kiến Phúc ascended the throne , but was poisoned by his adoptive mother Hoàng Phi - one of Tự Đức 's wives - whom he caught having intercourse with Tuong . Kien Phuc was thus replaced by his 14 - year - old brother Hàm Nghi . In the meantime , the French concluded that the regents were causing too much trouble and had to be disposed of .

Thuyet had already decided to place Hàm Nghi at the head of the Phong Trào Cần Vương (Loyalty to the Emperor Movement) , which sought to end French rule with a royalist rebellion . Phan helped the cause by setting up bases in Hà Tĩnh and creating his own guerrilla army . Thuyet had hoped to secure support from the Qing Dynasty of China , but Phan thought that Vietnam 's best chance of effective support came from Siam . Gia Long , the founder of the Nguyễn Dynasty and great - grandfather of Tự Đức , had married his sister off to the King of Siam . He had also used Siam as a base in exile during his quest for the throne in the 1780s . However , direct appeals to the Siamese government only yielded a few pack trains of firearms and ammunition . In preparation for the revolt , Thuyet had been building up an armed base at Tân Sở for over a year .

In any case , the Cần Vương revolt started on July 5 , 1885 when Thuyet launched a surprise attack against the colonial forces after a diplomatic confrontation with the French . Thuyet took Hàm Nghi northwards to the Tân Sở mountain base near the border with Laos after the attack failed . The campaign was launched when the emperor issued the Can Vương edict that had been prepared by the regent .

Phan initially rallied support from his native village and set up his headquarters on Mount Vọng Quang , which overlooked the coastal French fortress at Hà Tĩnh . Phan 's organisation became a model for future insurgents . For flexibility , he divided his operational zone into twelve districts . His forces

upheld military discipline and wore uniforms . Phan initially used the local scholar @-@ gentry as his military commanders . Their first notable attack targeted two nearby Catholic villages that had collaborated with French forces . Colonial troops arrived a few hours later , quickly overwhelming the rebels and forcing them to retreat to their home village , where the retribution was heavy . Phan managed to escape but his elder brother was captured by the same former viceroy of northern Vietnam who had been removed from office as a result of Phan 's critical report . The disgraced official was now a French collaborator , serving as the governor of Ngh? An Province .

The strategy of attempting to pressure Phan into capitulating was a classical strategy of coercion . The French used an old friend and fellow villager to make an emotional and deeply Confucian appeal for Phan to surrender in order to save his brother , his ancestral tombs and his entire village . Phan was reported to have replied :

From the time I joined with you in the Can Vuong movement , I determined to forget the question of family and village . Now I have but one tomb , a very large one , that must be defended : the land of Vietnam . I have only one brother , very important , that is in danger : more than twenty million countrymen . If I worry about my own tombs , who will worry about defending the tombs of the rest of the country ? If I save my own brother , who will save all the other brothers of the country ? There is only one way for me to die now .

Phan was later reported to have simply retorted , " If anyone carves up my brother , remember to send me some of the soup " . However , he held no illusions about the prospect of successfully driving out the French , stating " It is our destiny . We accept it . "

This incident and Phan 's response are often cited as one of the reasons why he was so admired by the populace and among future generations of Vietnamese anti @-@ colonialists : he adhered to the highest personal standards of patriotism . He identified with a countrywide cause , far removed from the questions of family and region .

Phan 's men were well @-@ trained and disciplined , and the military inspiration behind his rebellion was derived from Cao Thang , a bandit leader who had been protected from royal forces by Phan 's brother a decade earlier . They operated in the provinces of Thanh Hóa in the north , Hà T?nh , Ngh? An in the centre and Qu?ng Bình in the south , with their strongest areas being the two central provinces . In 1887 , Phan concluded that his tactics were misguided , ordering his subordinates to cease open combat and resort to guerrilla tactics . His men built up a network of base camps , food caches , intelligence agents and peasant supply contacts . Phan traveled to the north in the hope of coordinating strategic and tactical plans with other leaders . In the meantime , Cao Thang led a force of around 1 @,@ 000 men with some 500 firearms between them . Cao Thang produced around 300 rifles by disassembling and copying 1874 @-@ model French weapons that had been captured . For the purpose of creating such replica guns , they captured Vietnamese artisans . According to French officers who later captured some of the Vietnamese copies , the weapons were proficiently reproduced . The only details in which they were regarded as being defective were in the tempering of the springs , which were improvised with umbrella spokes , and the lack of rifling in the barrels , which curtailed range and accuracy .

Nevertheless , the weaponry used by Phan 's rebels was far inferior to that of their adversaries , and their inland positions were within firing range of the French Navy . The Vietnamese could not rely on China to give them material support , and other European powers such as Portugal , The Netherlands and the United Kingdom were unwilling to sell them weapons for various reasons . Thus , Phan had to explore overland routes to procure weapons from Siamese sources ? using seafaring transport was impossible due to the presence of the French Navy . He instructed his followers to create a secret route from Hà T?nh through Laos into northeastern Siam ; one such route from Mount Vu Quang was believed to have been created around 1888 . It is unclear if Phan himself went to Thailand , but a young female supporter named Co Tam was his designated arms buyer in Tha Uthen , which boasted a substantial expatriate Vietnamese community . In 1890 , the Siamese Army transported around 1 @,@ 000 Austrian repeating @-@ rifles from Bangkok to Luang Prabang in Laos . However , it is unclear whether the weapons found their way into Vietnamese hands or whether they were related to Co Tam 's activities .

== After C?n V??ng ==

In 1888 , Hàm Nghi 's Muong bodyguard Truong Quang Ngoc betrayed him , leading to the emperor 's capture and deportation to Algeria . Phan and Cao Thang fought on in the mountainous areas of Hà T?nh , Ngh? An and Thanh Hóa . Another 15 bases were built along the mountain to complement the headquarters at Vu Quang . Each base had a subordinate commander leading units numbering between 100 and 500 men . The operations were funded by local villagers , who were levied with a land tax in silver and rice . Local bases were supported by nearby villages and excess funds were sent to Vu Quang . Phan 's men foraged and sold cinnamon bark to raise funds , while lowland peasants donated spare metals for the production of weapons .

When Phan returned from the north in 1889 , his first order was to track down Hàm Nghi 's betrayer Ngoc . When he was found , Phan personally executed Ngoc in Tuyên Hóa . He then began a series of small @-@ unit attacks on French installations through the summer of 1890 , but these proved indecisive . The French relied mostly on district and provincial colonial units to man their perpetually increasing line of forts , which were usually commanded by a French lieutenant . In late 1890 , a French effort to move into the low @-@ lying villages and isolate the populace from the mountainous rebel bases failed . In the spring of 1892 , a major French sweep of Hà T?nh failed , and in August , Cao Thang seized the initiative with a bold counterattack on the provincial capital . The rebels broke into the prison and freed their compatriots , killing a large number of the Vietnamese soldiers who defended the penitentiary as members of the French colonial forces . This caused the French to intensify their efforts against Phan , and a counteroffensive was conducted throughout the remainder of 1892 , forcing the rebels to retreat back into the mountains . Two of their bases fell and steady French pressure began to break their covert resistance links with lowland villages . This compounded the problems of securing food , supplies , intelligence data and recruits . A ring of French forts continued to be erected , increasingly pinning down Phan 's men . The only notable gain for Phan 's forces during this period was the acquisition of gunpowder supplies from Siam . This enabled them to mix foreign and local powder in a 50 : 50 ratio , rather than their previous weaker mixture of 20 : 80 .

Late in the year , the burden on Phan increased after the loss of two Can Vuong allies . In September , Tong Duy Tân ? who led the royalists in Thanh Hóa ? was captured and publicly executed . Nguyen Thien Thuat , who had been active in the northern provinces of H?ng Yên and H?i D??ng , fled to Guangxi in China . The supporters of Tan and Tuat moved south and integrated into Phan 's force .

In mid @-@ 1893 , Cao Thang proposed a full @-@ scale attack on the provincial seat of Ngh? An and the surrounding posts . The plan proposed to Phan included diversions to the south and the training of almost 2 @,@ 000 men in conventional military tactics . Unconvinced of its viability , Phan reluctantly approved the plan . The troops were eager , but after overpowering several small posts en route , the main force was pinned down while attacking the French fort of No on September 9 , 1893 . Along with his brother , Cao Thang was mortally wounded while leading a risky frontal attack with 150 men , and the forces retreated in disarray . Phan regarded the loss of Cao Thang as a significant one , admitting as much in delivering the eulogy and funeral oration . According to the historian David Marr , there was evidence that Phan clearly realised the advantages and limitations of prolonged resistance . Although Phan had previously stated that he was not expecting ultimate success , the guerrilla leader thought that it was important to keep pressuring the French in order to demonstrate to the populace that there was an alternative to what he felt was a defeatist attitude from the Hu? court .

== Downfall ==

Hoàng Cao Kh?i , the French @-@ installed viceroy of Tonkin , perceived Phan 's intent to a degree that his French masters did not . Khai was from a scholar @-@ gentry family from the same village as Phan . He became the main backer of a determined effort to crush Phan 's forces , using every means available : political , psychological and economic . By late 1894 , relatives and

suspected sympathisers of the insurgents were intimidated and more resistance commanders had been killed . Communications were disrupted , and the rebel hideouts became increasingly insecure . In an attempt to force Phan to surrender , the French arrested his family and desecrated the tombs of his ancestors , publicly displaying the remains in Hà T?nh .

Khai delivered a message to Phan via a relative . Phan sent a written reply , allowing their exchange to be studied . Khai recalled the common origins of the pair and promised Phan that he would lobby Governor @-@ General Jean Marie Antoine de Lanessan and other French officials for an amnesty in return for Phan 's surrender . Khai credited Phan with righteousness , loyalty and dedication towards the monarchy .

The situation has changed and even those without intelligence or education have concluded that nothing remains to be saved . How is it that you , a man of vast understanding , do not realise this ? ... You are determined to do whatever you deem to be righteous ... All that matters indeed is giving of one 's life to one 's country . No one therefore can deter you from your goal .

I have always been taught that superior men should consider the care of the people as fundamental ; who has ever heard of men who were loyal to their King but forgot the people 's aspirations ? ... As of now , hundreds of families are subject to grief ; how do you have the heart to fight on ? I venture to predict that , should you pursue your struggle , not only will the population of our village be destroyed but our entire country will be transformed into a sea of blood and a mountain of bones .

According to Marr , " Phan Dinh Phung 's reply was a classic in savage understatement , utilizing standard formalism in the interest of propaganda , with deft denigration of his opponent " . Phan appealed to Vietnamese nationalist sentiment , recalling his country 's stubborn resistance to Chinese aggression . He cited defensive wars against the Han , Tang , Song , Yuan and Ming dynasties , asking why a country " a thousand times more powerful " could not annex Vietnam . Phan concluded that it was " because the destiny of our country has been willed by Heaven itself " .

Phan placed the responsibility for the suffering of the people at the feet of the French , who " acted like a storm " . After analysing his own actions , Phan concluded with a thinly veiled attack on Khai and his collaborators .

If our region has suffered to such an extent , it was not only from the misfortunes of war . You must realise that wherever the French go , there flock around them groups of petty men who offer plans and tricks to gain the enemy 's confidence . These persons create every kind of enmity ; they incriminate innocent persons , blaming one one day , punishing another the next . They use every expedient to squeeze the people out of their possessions . That is how hundred of misdeeds , thousands of offenses have been perpetrated .

Khai 's appeal was rebutted with an appeal to history , nationalist sentiment and a demand that the blame for death and destruction lay with the colonial forces and their Vietnamese assistants . Phan raised the stakes above family and village to the entire nation and its populace .

With Phan 's rebuke in his hands , Khai translated both documents into French and presented them to de Lanessan , proposing that it was time for the final " destruction of this scholar gentry rebellion " . In July 1895 , French area commanders called in 3 @,@ 000 troops to tighten the cordon around the three remaining rebel bases . The insurgents were able to execute ambushes at night , but Phan contracted dysentery and had to be carried on a stretcher whenever his unit moved . A collaborator mandarin named Nguyen Than , who had previous experience in pacification in Qu?ng Ngãi and Qu?ng Nam , was drafted in to isolate the insurgents from their supporters in the villages . Cut off from their supplies , the insurgents were left to survive by eating roots and occasional handfuls of dried corn . Their shoes were worn through and most were without blankets . Phan died of dysentery on January 21 , 1896 , and his captured followers were executed . A report submitted by the de Lanessan to the Minister of Colonies in Paris stated that " the soul of resistance to the protectorate was gone " .

= = Legacy = =

Phan 's remains were disturbed after his death . Ngô ?inh Kh? , a Catholic mandarin and father of Ngo Dinh Diem ? the first President of South Vietnam ? was a member of the French colonial

administration . Kha had Phan 's tomb exhumed and used the remains in gunpowder used for executing revolutionaries .

Phan is widely regarded by Vietnamese people as a revolutionary hero . Phan Bội Châu , regarded as the leading Vietnamese anti -@ colonial figure of the early 20th century , strongly praised Phan in his writing , with particular emphasis on his defiance of Khai . During Phan Bội Châu 's career as a teacher , he strongly emphasised Phan 's deeds to his students . In 1941 , after returning to Vietnam after decades in exile , the Marxist revolutionary Ho Chi Minh , then using the name Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen the Patriot) , invoked the memory of Phan in appealing to the public for support for his independence movement . Like Phan , Ho was a native of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh . In the 1940s , Ho 's Vietminh named their self @-@ produced style of grenades in honour of Phan . Since then , Ho 's communists have portrayed themselves as the modern day incarnations of revered nationalist leaders such as Phan , Trạng Quỳnh and Emperors Lê Lợi and Quang Trung , who expelled Chinese forces from Vietnam . Both North and South Vietnam had prominent thoroughfares in their capital cities (Hanoi and Saigon , respectively) named in Phan 's honour .