

# VIETNAMESE FACES COAST TRIAL IN KILLING OF COLLEGE TEACHER

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## **Body**

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A 20-year-old Vietnamese immigrant is to go on trial Monday in the death by shooting of a California State University professor who had close professional and political ties with Vietnam.

Minh Van Lam, of Westminster, faces a murder charge in the Oct. 13 shooting of Edward Lee Cooperman, a professor of physics at the university's Fullerton campus. The police found Dr. Cooperman dead in his office when they responded to a call from Mr. Lam, whom they later arrested.

Alan May, Mr. Lam's attorney, has suggested in pretrial hearings at the North Orange County Municipal Court that Dr. Cooperman's death was accidental or even a suicide, while Dr. Cooperman's family, friends and colleagues maintain that the 48-year-old professor was the victim of an anti-Communist political assassination.

20-year-old Vietnamese immigrant Minh Van Lam is to go on trial in Los Angeles in October 13 shooting death of California State University Prof Edward Lee Cooperman, who had close professional and political ties with Vietnam (M)

"We still have no verifiable indication that this is a political shooting," said Capt. James Bankhead of the Fullerton Police Department.

Foundation to Aid Vietnam

But Dr. Cooperman's supporters say they are convinced that his activities in connection with Vietnam led to his assassination. Dr. Cooperman advocated normal relations between the United States and Vietnam, and was the founder in 1979 of the Foundation for Scientific Cooperation with Vietnam.

Mr. May, citing documents taken from Dr. Cooperman's office, has asserted that the professor had shipped nuclear testing equipment and computer components to Vietnam, which prompted an investigation by Federal agencies.

The United States forbids the shipment of anything but emergency relief aid to Vietnam.

"He had received death threats since about 1977, but in the last weeks before his death he was terrified," said Klaaske Cooperman, Dr. Cooperman's widow.

Friends have said that Dr. Cooperman had bought guns for protection and changed his daily routine in the last weeks of his life.

Anthony Russo Jr., a close friend of Dr. Cooperman's, cited the shooting last summer in San Francisco of a Vietnamese couple, Ngu Yen Van and Pham Ti Luy, who were friends of the professor's. A group calling itself the Vietnamese Organization to Exterminate Communists and Restore the Nation said it was responsible for the shooting.

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Mr. Russo, a former employee of the Rand Corporation, was charged, with Daniel Ellsberg, with espionage in the Pentagon Papers case, which ended with the judge's declaring a mistrial.

### Lam's Version of Shooting

Mr. Lam has said the shooting of Dr. Cooperman was accidental. Police reports show that he telephoned Mrs. Cooperman three days later and told her the gun had discharged while he was engaged in a "playful tussle" with his former teacher.

According to Mr. May, Mr. Lam was with Dr. Cooperman on the morning of the shooting. After the .25-caliber pistol went off, Mr. May said, Mr. Lam left to see a movie with a girlfriend. He returned three hours later and called the police. Mr. Lam has pleaded not guilty to the murder charge.

Mr. Lam and Dr. Cooperman met in 1983 when Mr. Lam was a student in one of Dr. Cooperman's physics classes, and became friends.

At the pretrial hearings witnesses testified that Dr. Cooperman had befriended several Asian students and had occasionally been seen wrestling with some of them in his office.

The witnesses also stated that Dr. Cooperman had bought Mr. Lam and two Asian students black leather jackets. Dr. Cooperman's friends angrily disputed allegations by Mr. May that Dr. Cooperman had felt a homosexual attraction toward Mr. Lam.

Mr. May subpoenaed the financial records of Dr. Cooperman's Vietnam foundation in an effort to establish that financial difficulties might have led him to suicide.

Mrs. Cooperman testified at a pretrial hearing that her husband had often taken as much as \$55,000 with him on his trips to Vietnam, and had lent tens of thousands of dollars to friends, but denied that they had financial problems. She said Dr. Cooperman earned \$38,000 a year and that she did not know the source of the money he used for traveling and to make loans.

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