

Fall 12-1-2017

## Fall of Saigon, 30 April 1975

Karen Owen  
*College of DuPage*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Owen, Karen (2017) "Fall of Saigon, 30 April 1975," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 40 : No. 1 , Article 44.  
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol40/iss1/44>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@COD. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Light Review by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@COD. For more information, please contact [orenick@cod.edu](mailto:orenick@cod.edu).

# Fall of Saigon, 30 April 1975

Karen Owen

Instead of doing homework, I watch the fall of Saigon to the Viet Minh. I'm not able to tear myself away from the TV set, loaned to me by my Uncle Robert, then Commanding Officer of the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. I watch the people lining the streets waving welcoming flags. I had to believe that some of them were, in fact, welcoming a new reunification under a government not tainted with the colonialism of the past. I wondered, though, how many were apprehensive about their fate under a communist government, how many were just relieved to have the fighting, the constant shelling, and the random deaths, ended at last.

The newscast begins a review of the war: August of 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin Incident. Do we know yet what really happened there? All I know is that suddenly our trip to Grandmother's was cancelled. Uncle Robert, commanding a destroyer in the Pacific and due home on leave before a rotation of duty, wasn't coming home just yet.

A clip of a report is followed by a statement from Walter Cronkite: this was the last report filed by that reporter, a friend, gone missing, presumed dead. I recall the wedding of the neighbor boy. He'd just graduated from Annapolis and his colleagues in uniform made the traditional arch of their swords for him and his bride. All newly made officers, all headed for Vietnam. One was his roommate, like him a naval pilot. Both would fly rescue missions. Another was the first boy I'd ever dated. He'd gone to Annapolis as well, but had decided to be a Marine.

Now Cronkite alludes to growing doubts about the war. In college I became active in the anti-war movement. Moved by the civil rights movement, I'd first joined Campus Friends of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee and, when the war escalated, Students for a Democratic Society, the pre-Weatherman, non-violent SDS. That had evolved, on our campus, into the Draft Resistance. I switched my major from Math to Sociology, it seemed more relevant. It was hard on my family, especially when I married a man who'd returned his

draft cards and was under indictment for refusing induction. They believed I was merely rebelling against them; I believed the war was a terrible mistake.

Now there's a clip of General Westmoreland explaining how we'll win: the tactics, the strategy, the necessity of our involvement. My father is a retired Army Colonel, my mother a former First Lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corps, veterans of World War II. Two of my uncles are career Navy. The one who has lent me the television had served as attaché to then Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird. The other had roomed at Annapolis with Thomas Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Nixon. I remember when Adm. Moorer had to explain to Congress how we came to bomb our Air Force base at Danang by mistake. I mentioned feeling sorry for him in a phone call home. Relations were strained but we kept in touch. The TV is now showing the protests at home. I was in some of those. They don't mention the Gutknecht Decision, but I feel again the profound relief I'd felt when I'd heard of it. The Supreme Court had ruled that the Selective Service could not cancel a deferment or speed up an induction solely because someone had returned his draft cards. My husband's conviction was invalid and I could escape a marriage I was unhappy in without feeling so guilty about abandoning a draft resister. He was to once again refuse induction and spend six months in a minimum-security prison, but by that time he was married to someone else.

The scene flashes to US Marines on a search and destroy mission near a village. I think about meeting up with my old boyfriend, home on leave. We went out drinking and he told me about being an Acting Company Commander in Vietnam; told me about a village he and his men had stayed near. The villagers had offered them food and, not wishing to offend them, he'd let his men take it. Two days later, after they'd left the area, the Viet Cong killed the children in retaliation. He'd wished he'd known: he would have refused the food. So much agony. A difficult time in my life, but so much more agonizing, terrifying, horrendous for others. So many dead: my neighbor's roommate, shot down, his bride, a suicide, while he completed his tour

of duty. The boy whose funeral we sang for, another suicide, found dead beside his induction notice. So many wounded: my brother's friend in the full body cast, that hot Fourth of July. He was walking point when a landmine went off. The arguments, the pain, the suffering, the endless delays in the peace talks, the politicians who lied, who callously used those young men, all the horrible means of destruction. I would always respect the men and women who served there, but never, ever the men who sent them to die. For what? Saigon has fallen, those hearts and minds are lost, so many forever.

The war's officially over now. It's late and I have an early class, Group Theory. I turn off the TV and remember that in returning back to Math, I'd rediscovered a world where there are certainties. Things can be proven to be correct. "Ratios" recall rational numbers, not "kills." Irrational numbers are pi or e, not those ever mounting numbers of dead and wounded. "Complex" means merely the square root of negative one, not a deadly, irreconcilable disagreement with right and wrong, honor and dishonor, valor and greed, on all sides. My classmates look at me blankly the next day when I tell them why my problem set isn't complete. They're younger. I'll find that, through the years, certain people will cautiously share what they did during this war. What their lottery number was. Whether or not they served, in Vietnam, in the service, in a hospital, or in jail. I always listen, wanting to hear all sides. My family and I, however, tacitly agree never to mention it again; neither do we forget it.