

# Vietnam holds state funeral for General Vo Nguyen Giap

150,000 people lined up to pay respects to the so-called 'Red Napoleon'

Monday 14 October 2013, by [SAUL Heather](#) (Date first published: 13 October 2013).

**"The extent of the public mourning was unscripted, as hundreds of thousands lined up over four days outside Giap's house to pay their respects in an outpouring of grief."**

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The death of wartime General Vo Nguyen Giap has triggered public mourning in Vietnam as 150,000 people lined up to pay respects to the so-called "Red Napoleon."

The sendoff for Giap, organised by the ruling Communist Party emphasised his leadership in wars first against France and then United States.

On Saturday, Giap's body was laid in state in Hanoi. The country's top leaders, along with veterans, diplomats and ordinary people paid their final respects ahead of Giap's funeral Sunday in his home province. The country's flag was flown at half-staff, and unrelated public events were cancelled.

"I'm not sure we will have a third leader like Giap and Uncle Ho," said Tran Thi Thien, who rose at 3.00 am to pay tribute outside the Giap family home in Hanoi. "I hope the current leadership would look at how people love and respect Giap to improve themselves and better lead the country."

The mourning period has gone smoothly in a country where very little happens in public without the blessing of the ruling party. State media coverage projects a united nation, bolstering a government whose legitimacy still rests in part on its history of expelling foreign invaders.

But the extent of the public mourning was unscripted, as hundreds of thousands lined up over four days outside Giap's house to pay their respects in an outpouring of grief.

Giap is best remembered for leading Vietnamese forces to victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

His Chinese advisers told him to strike elite French forces fast and hard, but Giap changed plans at the last minute and ordered his jungle troops to besiege the French army. The French were defeated after 56 days, and the unlikely victory led not only to Vietnam's independence, but hastened the collapse of colonialism across Indochina and beyond.

A Vietnamese war veteran (C) cries as he proceeds to the National Funeral House for the funeral service of late general Vo Nguyen Giap, in Hanoi 12 October, 2013

"He was an outstanding general, but he was a very simple man and very down to earth," said

Nguyen Chan, a 78-year-old who fought in Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and on Saturday was gathering in a park watching the coverage of the mourning on a big screen. "For us, he was a commander in chief, a teacher and also a father."

Giap remained commander in chief of the People's Army of Vietnam during the war against the United States, overseeing the expansion of a small crew of soldiers into a significantly larger and more sophisticated army. Giap was credited for his leadership role during the Tet Offensive in 1968, where Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army challenged South Vietnam and US troops in a sporadic wave of attacks. Although many of Giap's army were severely weakened and eventually driven back, the ambush served to change public attitudes to the Vietnam war in America.

A woman holds a newspaper clipping of the late general Vo Nguyen Giap as she stands with other mourners outside the National Funeral House in Hanoi 12 October, 2013

After the wars, Giap maintained his position as Minister of National Defence under the new Socialist Republic of Vietnam, before being made Deputy Prime Minister in 1976.

He retired from the Government six years later, having been side-lined and removed from his post in the Politburo in 1982.

"Giap was a critical figure in contemporary Vietnam history, however one part of his life will always be associated with his question of authority," said Jonathan London, a Vietnam expert at the City University of Hong Kong. "His legacy will be used as badge of legitimacy for the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, but this is occurring at a time when Vietnamese are questioning the direction of their country."

**Heather Saul**

*Additional reporting by Associated Press*

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<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/vietnam-holds-state-funeral-for-general-vo-nguyen-gi-ap-8876047.html>