

CHRIS HERLINGER

Mourning General Giap

General Vo Nguyen Giap, the hero of Dien Bien Phu, died at 102. In his illucid languor, sclerosis and glassy-eyed movements, did he remember the French defeat and the *Bánh mì* he ate in celebration with Ho? Did he think of McNamara, who, in the end, couldn't muster or master his own numbers, and shook the general's waxy hand anyway? Was Giap angry, befuddled or serene as the young gays took to the streets of Ho Chi Minh City in tight jeans for their rainbow parades—a queer and homo-sexy twist on old Saigon's flaming spirit? Did Giap regret what he said about war's singular trap: that losing tens of thousands means little, a valedictory no American could ever utter, but perhaps believed. And on that score, was he right, this stooped, slight and ruthless man, still wearing the gold and red amulets of his triumph? Moulded and molted by the failures of his foes, did Giap come to see past the horizon of history's rock-strewn path of trench-wire and scablands?

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