Hoa Nyut Thao (left) shoots his documentary “The Last Lullaby,” for Vietnam’s national television broadcaster VTV, about massacres of civilians by South Korean forces during the Vietnam War.

Unusual honor for film about South Korean forces who massacred hundreds of Vietnamese civilians in 1966

“The Last Lullaby,” a documentary on massacres of civilians by South Korean forces during the Vietnam War, won honorable mention honors in its category at the Dec. 24 awards of the state-run Vietnamese network VTV, it was reported on Jan. 2.

The filming of a locally produced documentary on civilian massacres by South Korean soldiers and its selection for honoring by a state-run broadcaster are both seen as unusual. The Vietnamese government has regarded ethnic unity and reconciliation as top priorities since the war's end and maintained a stance of not publicly mentioning issues involving past massacres by South Korean forces.

“The Last Lullaby” centers on a 1966 massacre perpetrated by South Korea’s Blue Dragon Marine division in Binh Hoa, a village in South Vietnam’s Quang Ngai Province. A total of 430 civilians were slain. Just six months old at the time, Doan Nghia (now 50) narrowly survived after being covered by the body of his mother, who had been fatally shot, but was left blinded by ammunition carried in
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- Rainwater. His story became the basis for the Vietnam Pieta, a sculpture showing a mother tightly cradling a child.

The documentary also includes footage of a group of around 30 South Koreans who arrived in Vietnam on Nov. 30 last year for a six-day long "peace journey" to pay respects to the victims. Members paid a visit to Doan on Dec. 2, the date of a 50th anniversary memorial ceremony for the Binh Hoa massacre.

"It hurt so much to stand before the victim's grave," one tearfully said, prompting Doan to reach out to take the members' hands - sending a core message of reconciliation and comfort.

Also featured in the documentary are Ku Su-jeong, director of the Korean-Vietnamese Peace Foundation, which has organized a "We're Sorry, Vietnam" campaign over the past 16 years; Nguyen Tan Lan, who in 2015 became the first survivor of a Vietnamese civilian massacre to visit South Korea; and artists Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung, who sculpted the Vietnam Pieta.

Around 80 massacres of civilians were committed by South Korean soldiers during the Vietnam War, leaving an estimated 9,000 dead. The South Korean government has yet to acknowledge any massacring of Vietnamese civilians by its forces.

By Hwang Keum-bi, staff reporter

Please direct questions or comments to [english@hani.co.kr]

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