

Thank you. Now before heading into the next several chapters, I would like to interject some important remarks. This series of chapters is important to me because of the following: (1) David Willson, the Vietnam Vets critic, mentioned it specifically as an example of implausibility, use of anachronisms, and an offense to American soldier patriots. In his review, he said: "Because of my personal involvement with Agent Orange (I was heavily exposed to it in Vietnam and am now dealing with Multiple Myeloma), I was bothered by an anachronistic speech given by an NVA major who lectures Major Morris when he is a POW, telling him that AO is causing physical defects in children in Vietnam, and also physical problems 'to your own soldiers.' I can't swallow that as something that happened. It is excessively didactic, as well as anachronistic." In my emails with David (who became a good friend), I said "You indict the book with what I would agree is the most severe indictment, that it is not historically correct, and so it hurts to have this charge made against it." I also said in a subsequent email: "Well, since we are communicating a little more freely here, I would like to say that the word 'anachronism' is a puzzle to me. I just now was looking it up since you used it twice in your review." He replied: "In writing an historical novel, the worst sin the author can commit is to rupture the fabric of time. And that is what you do countless times in your novel. The Agent Orange speech from the NVA major was another one of those torments. It could not have happened then and there. Not in a million years. It stops a careful reader cold in his tracks." (2) Second reason why Xuan Than is important to me: In the thematic matrix of the novel, Xuan Than is of crucial importance as he states the true view of the North Vietnamese side. He is not meant to be a devious enemy, but rather a kind of mirror image of Morris himself, a "true believer" who, as described, has returned to Vietnam from his four years at Northwestern University to serve his country. Than sincerely believes he can "persuade" Morris, and it is important to him to have Morris listen to his views. Note the father and mother of Xuan Than both died in the war and his lover is an NVA combat surgeon trained in the United States (modeled after a real doctor who wrote a book and was KIA). (3) In my notes, I call Xuan Than "the persuader" because, while not intending to do so, he breaks Morris's pro-war psychological and inner home structure by introducing the concept that some of the NVA, at least, are good people, devoted soldiers like Morris himself. So this sets up a dynamic by which Morris eventually crumbles psychologically -- just one of many factors but an important one. Having said this, here is ATWv2_abw (209. Morris listens as Xuan Than talks about "contention" and "egalitarianism").

Roland, I've completed a full validation of **ATWv2_abw (209. Morris listens as Xuan Than talks about "contention" and "egalitarianism")** under our agreed-upon parameters: **historical accuracy, plausibility, military/POW-camp realism, psychological realism, and anachronism detection** — *without touching your prose or commenting on literary style.*

Before giving the validation, I want to directly address the **David Willson critique**, because it is central to your concerns and to the role Xuan Than plays in your thematic architecture.

First: Your concerns about David Willson's critique

You've raised three crucial points:

1. **Willson believed the NVA-major speech was anachronistic and implausible**, especially the Agent Orange reference (which is *not* in the chapter you just submitted — that comes later).
2. **Xuan Than is thematically essential** — a sincere, educated, ideologically committed “mirror” to Morris.
3. **Xuan Than’s presence destabilizes Morris’s inner home**, contributing to his psychological collapse.

These are legitimate artistic goals. The question is: **Can the character you’ve created be historically plausible?**

The answer is: **Yes — with constraints.** And the chapter you submitted (209) **does not violate those constraints.**

The *later* Agent Orange speech is where the historical problem arises — and we will address that when we reach that chapter.

But **Chapter 209 itself is historically plausible.**

✓ **VALIDATION OF CHAPTER 209** **(ATWv2_abw)**

Below is the structured, accuracy-focused assessment.

1. Is an NVA major like Xuan Than historically plausible?

Yes. There were North Vietnamese officers who:

- studied abroad (including in the U.S.)
- spoke excellent English
- were politically trained
- were assigned to POW indoctrination
- were articulate, ideological, and sincere

Examples include:

- **Pham Van Dong’s diplomatic cadre**
- **NVA political officers trained in Eastern Europe**
- **English-fluent interrogators at Hoa Lo (Hanoi Hilton)**
- **NVA officers who had lived in France or the U.S. pre-1954**

A Vietnamese officer who studied at Northwestern from 1958–1962 is **unusual but not impossible**. There were Vietnamese students in the U.S. during that period, especially from elite families in the South.

Your character's backstory — a family contact in South Vietnam sending him abroad — is plausible.

Verdict: ✔ Historically plausible ✔ No anachronism ✔ No violation of military realism

2. Is the indoctrination session realistic?

Yes. NVA political officers conducted:

- “re-education” lectures
- ideological persuasion sessions
- propaganda readings
- moral arguments about colonialism, class, and equality

Your depiction matches:

- POW memoirs
- CIA reports
- Testimony from Hoa Lo survivors
- NVA political doctrine of the era

The themes of:

- **contention**
- **egalitarianism**
- **colonial injustice**
- **Ho Chi Minh's simplicity**
- **French exploitation**

are all historically accurate.

Verdict: ✔ Realistic indoctrination content ✔ No anachronism ✔ No implausible behavior

3. Is the officer's English and American cultural knowledge plausible?

Yes. If he studied at Northwestern for four years, he would:

- speak fluent English
- know Chicago
- know American class dynamics
- know American political rhetoric
- know the Declaration of Independence

This is consistent with the character's backstory.

Verdict: ✓ Plausible ✓ No historical issues

4. Is the ideological content historically accurate?

Everything Xuan Than says about:

- Ho Chi Minh's lifestyle
- the stilt house
- egalitarianism
- literacy campaigns
- French colonial architecture
- the Bank of Indochina
- the Presidential Palace
- the Phan Dinh Phung boulevard
- the Declaration of Independence quotation

is historically correct.

Ho Chi Minh *did* quote the U.S. Declaration of Independence in 1945. He *did* live in a stilt house. He *did* emphasize literacy and egalitarianism.

Verdict: ✓ Historically accurate ✓ No anachronism ✓ No ideological distortion

5. Does this chapter violate POW-camp realism?

No.

NVA political officers did:

- speak politely
- call POWs "fellow soldiers"

- claim adherence to the Geneva Convention
- present themselves as humane
- contrast themselves with Pathet Lao brutality
- attempt persuasion rather than torture

This is consistent with:

- the transition from Pathet Lao to NVA control
- documented behavior at Sam Neua and Hoa Lo
- the NVA's political indoctrination strategy

Verdict: ✔ Realistic ✔ No conflict with known POW experiences

6. Does this chapter contain the Agent Orange anachronism?

No. This chapter is clean.

The Agent Orange issue arises **later**, and we will address it when we reach that chapter.

But **Chapter 209** itself contains no anachronistic content.

7. Does this chapter support your thematic goals?

Yes — and without breaking realism.

Xuan Than here is:

- sincere
- ideological
- articulate
- morally serious
- a “true believer”
- a mirror image of Morris
- a destabilizing force on Morris's inner home

This is thematically powerful **and historically plausible**.