



THE MASTER MIND

Vietnam's General Vo Nguyen Giap, one of history's legendary commanders, faced the full might of the U.S. military—and won. Twenty-five years later, in a rare interview, Giap reveals how he beat the odds.

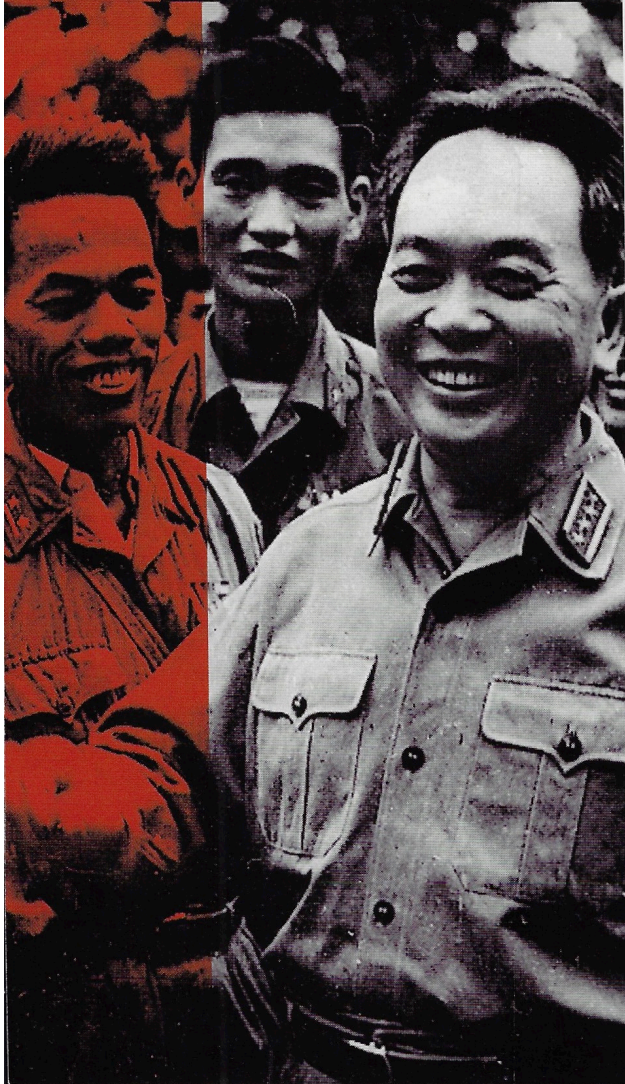
By **John Kennedy**
portrait by **Robert Curran**

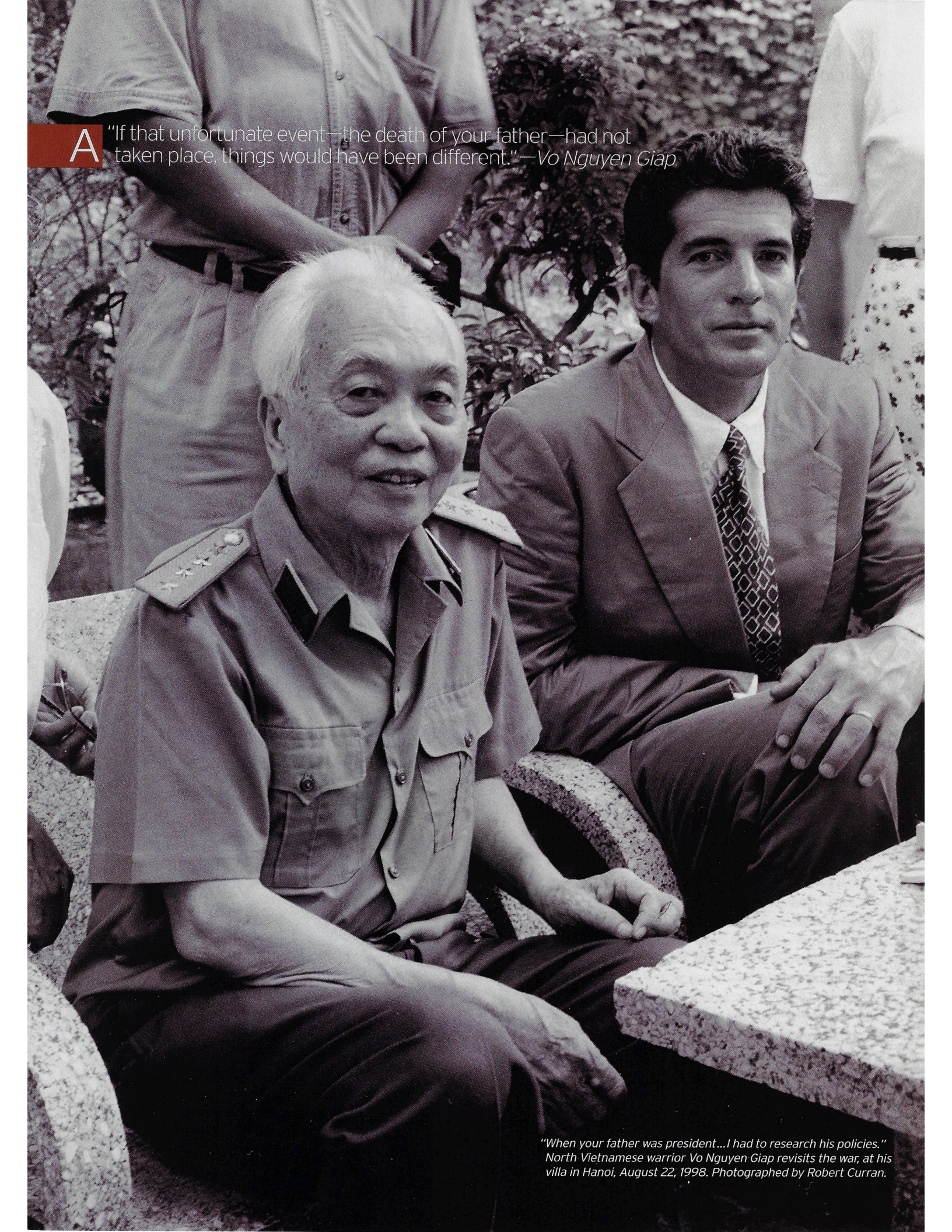
In the heart of Hanoi, in a rambling French villa enveloped by hydrangea and ginkgo trees, lives the diminutive, elderly man who broke the mighty armies of France and the United States and sent them packing, battered and bewildered, from his country.

Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap is the founder and former leader of the People's Army of Vietnam, the man who prevailed in one of the most unlikely victories in military history by crushing the French at Dien Bien Phu and, years later, confounding the Americans at Khe Sanh. "All people must fight," says Giap of the traditional Vietnamese philosophy of warfare. By mixing that principle with the relentless political indoctrination of his troops, he forged a potent fighting force that consistently triumphed against overwhelming odds. It remains among the elite infantry forces in the world today.

Giap was born in one of the poorest areas of central Vietnam to parents of modest means. His father was a scholar who had for years been active in anti-colonialist politics against the French. By the time Giap was ten, his father had died in a

Left, from top: **General Giap**, as Vietnam's defense minister, in the early 1970s; Giap visiting soldiers in 1972. Right: The elderly general at his Hanoi home in August.





A "If that unfortunate event—the death of your father—had not taken place, things would have been different." —*Vo Nguyen Giap*

"When your father was president...I had to research his policies."
North Vietnamese warrior Vo Nguyen Giap revisits the war, at his
villa in Hanoi, August 22, 1998. Photographed by Robert Curran.