Hello and welcome to As It Is from VOA Learning English! I'm George Grow in Washington.

Today we tell about the research that won three scientists the 2013 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine.

But first, we hear about a Vietnamese general who sometimes has been called one of the best military leaders of the 20th century. Vo Nguyen Giap is perhaps best known for winning his homeland's independence from France.

Remembering Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap

One of Vietnam's most celebrated war commanders died a week ago. Vo Nguyen Giap was 102 years old. People throughout Vietnam have been remembering General Giap and mourning his loss. But his long career remains an issue that could incite disagreements, not least among Vietnamese political activists. Bob Doughty has our report.

Social media reported the news of General Giap's death last Friday. People reacted quickly -- and with different opinions.

The general is said to have plotted the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. That battle led to the end of French colonial rule in Indochina.

He has also been described as a major influence in the defeat of South Vietnam in 1975. That ended what the Vietnamese call the American War.

Vo Nguyen Giap taught himself how to plot military campaigns. He is also considered to have launched the Vietnam People's Army. And, he was a close friend of celebrated Communist revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh.

Jonathan London is a Vietnam expert at the City University of Hong Kong. He says the passing of General Giap makes many Vietnamese think about the performance and record of the country's present leadership.

After the war, the general raised concerns about the quick acceptance of economic reforms and foreign policy that were like those of the old Soviet Union. He retired as deputy prime minister in 1991.

Professor London says Vietnam's leadership wants to control the official story of General Giap. He says the leadership wants people to remember his military victories. But that may prove difficult because of the political positions he took in later years.

Professor London notes that the general spoke about issues like the mining of bauxite in Vietnam's Highlands. And he called on the country's leaders to show more responsibility to the public.

Some activists who expressed support for the general's way of thinking were targeted by the government.

Anti-China protesters demonstrated in Hanoi two years ago. Some of the marchers carried pictures of General Giap's face.

One of those activists was Nguyen Quang Thach. He believes the Vietnamese people should embody General Giap's spirit -- but not just oppose China. He says this should include making economic and educational reforms and improving the army.

Not all activists, however, agree with him. General Giap remained an influential voice in Vietnam during his 90's. But some say his influence was reduced in recent years while he was hospitalized.

Professor London says the general was in the hospital for three or four years, and that his death was expected.

"In the meantime, I think Vietnam's own political culture has changed a lot in a very short period of time. And so while the general himself just a few years ago was an individual of great interest among those struggling for political reforms, institutional reforms, in Vietnam by the time of his death just recently, the country had in respect moved on."

For those who fled to the United States after the war, the reactions to the general's death are very different from those in Vietnam's capital.

Duy Hoang is a spokesman for the group Viet Tan, which is banned in Vietnam. He disputes the idea that General Giap caused the American fighting forces to leave Vietnam.

He says it is important to recognize the general's part in the independence movement against the French. I'm Bob Doughty.

Cell Transport System Research Wins Nobel for Medicine

Three researchers based in the United States have won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. James Rothman, Randy Schekman and Thomas Sudhof studied how cells organize and move the molecules necessary for them to operate.

Tom Kirchhausen is a cell biologist with Harvard University in Massachusetts. He was asked to explain the work of the Nobel Prize winners. He suggests that we think of every cell in our bodies as a tiny city.

"You have people that are moving from one place to the other to do whatever function they do. And then you move from one place to the other, in these carriers, the containers. That's the bus, the motorcycle, the train."

In his comparison, the people are the enzymes, hormones and other proteins and chemicals that do work and carry messages around our bodies.

If the transport system breaks down, they cannot get to where they need to go and cannot do what they need to do. The results are diseases -- from diabetes to disorders of the nervous system.

The Nobel Prize-winning researchers discovered how the cell's buses, motorcycles and trains get to the right place at the right time. The process is so important that evolution -- development and change over time -- has not changed it much from the microorganism yeast to people.

University of Utah neuroscientist Erik Jorgensen praises the work of Randy Schekman at the University of California at Berkeley. Professor Jorgensen says most neuroscientists would never imagine that the yeast cell would be a good model system for the brain. He says Randy Schekman discovered in yeast the genetic plan for the proteins that make up the delivery system of cells.

"We then subsequently found that the proteins involved in this process that allow us to think, that allow nerve cells to communicate with one another, are precisely the same ones that were found in yeast."

Erik Jorgensen says a list of players came from Randy Schekman's work.

But he adds that another Nobel winner, James Rothman at Yale University in Connecticut, showed which player was interacting with another.

Professor Rothman discovered how each little cellular bus takes its passengers to the right station.

The third-prize winner is Thomas Sudhof of Stanford University in California. He discovered how nerve cells release their passengers quickly and exactly. They do so in reaction to a signal.

Speaking to reporters, James Rothman said that he was lucky to start his research at a time when a young scientist could take chances on an idea. But he said times have changed.

He says government financing for scientific research has dropped in recent years. And he says that decrease threatens American leadership in science and technology.

This is George Grow wishing you all the best. Join us again tomorrow for another As It Is from VOA Learning English.