



COUNTERPARTS

THUONG HUU ĐÔNG NAM Á

SITREP

#42

Volume VII

Issue 1

Winter/Spring 2004

2004 COUNTERPARTS REUNION SET FOR ASHEBORO, NC, MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

Days Inn, Asheboro will be Reunion HQ.

The 2004 *Counterparts* Reunion, planned for the Memorial Day weekend (28-31 May) will be based at the Days Inn, Asheboro, NC. A block of rooms has been reserved and special room rates will be available for Counterparts members who wish to stay at the Days Inn. For reservations and more information, contact Days Inn Asheboro, 1 800 222 0519 OR 336 629 2101. Refer to the Counterparts Reunion or to the "STMP Picnic" to obtain one of our reserved rooms.

The reunion banquet will be on Saturday, 29 May in the Days Inn banquet room. Members attending the

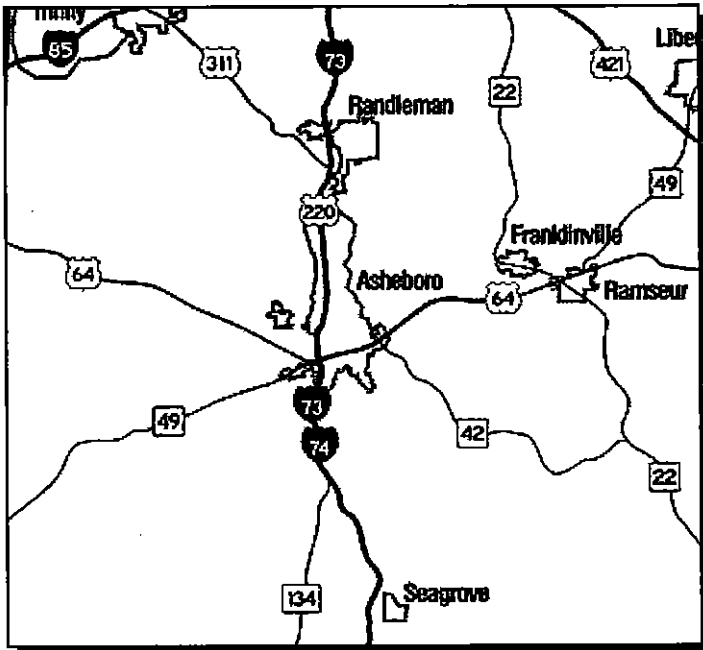
Reunion can sign up for the Banquet when they check-in upon arrival at the hotel. Pappy Hicks has arranged for Rong Nay, of Save The Montagnard People (STMP), to be our Speaker.

There will be a sign-up sheet at the Days Inn registration Desk. The anticipated cost for the banquet will be \$15.00 per person.

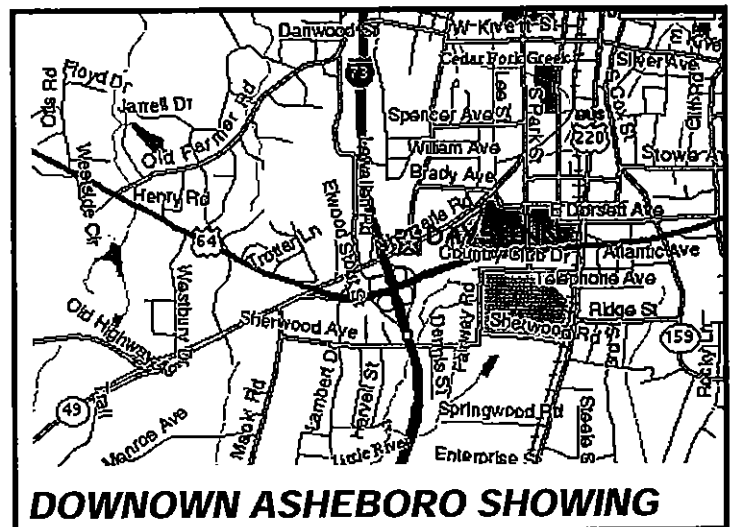
The Annual STMP picnic will feature events throughout the weekend. *Counterparts* members have been invited to attend STMP events. Information on STMP events will be available at the Days Inn.

Because this is an informal Reunion, the schedule will be flexible.

Asheboro is also the location of the North Carolina Zoo, the American Classic Motorcycle Museum, the North Carolina Aviation Museum, and in nearby Seagrave, the North Carolina Pottery Museum.



ASHEBORO AND VICINITY



DOWNTOWN ASHEBORO SHOWING

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Commander's Corner

(Reprinted from the last issue of SITREP)

I was very honored to have the assistance of President Reagan in 1986 and Vice President Quayle in 1992 to bring the first two groups of Vietnamese Central Highlands Mountain people to the US. The French called them "Montagnards," but the real name for all of them is Dega. I also had help from two outstanding people, who I also call my personal friends, Mike Bengue and Jack Jarnigan. We received 212 refugees in the first group and over 400 in the second group.

Both my little brother, Y Pat Buon Ya, and a leader in the exile group, Nay Rong, were in the 1986 group. Since one person could not sponsor the groups, Lutheran Family Services in Raleigh, North Carolina was asked to sponsor them. One of their people, Kay Reibold, had been going to Vietnam to care for the Dega with Hansen's Disease. The times were tough for the Dega but with the help of the Family Services and a few friends, they persevered. As usual, the Dega helped each other and were never a burden to the State of North Carolina or to the United States. Only a very few of the oldest and most infirm ever went on welfare.

Senator Jessie Helms supported the new state arrivals and has become a personal friend of Nay Rong. In the summer of 2002, another 900 Dega were brought over here by the efforts of many, with the main work being done by Carl Regan and his wife.

I also belong to Save The Montagnard People (STMP), a group that was started to help our friends who stood with us and fought at our side in Vietnam. We have bought 10 and 1/2 acres of land 12.5 miles outside Ashboro, North Carolina. Every year on the Memorial Day weekend we hold a "Yard Picnic," where we eat, drink and enjoy our Dega friends. It is a great time and most of us try to be there every year.

We decided at our last *Counterparts* Reunion to hold our 2004 Reunion in Ashboro and to enjoy the company of the Dega people. The time will be from 28 to 31 May 2004 and we'll stay in the Day's Inn.

We are trying to add to the land we already have with the goal of setting up a Dega village with Long Houses and a farming area for the people to come and grow crops. The Dega are a farming people, and although they have learned to work in a new environment, they still long for a piece of land to grow their crops. We should help; *Counterparts* was among the first to assist the Dega when they arrived in the US.

..... Pappy

From the Editors: This issue of SITREP has fewer pages than usual in order to get it to the printers quickly and publish info about the reunion ASAP.

From the XO

First of all I would like to thank Jack De Boer for his work in getting that great Counterparts ID Cards made up. First Class. Thank you Jack and crew.

This year history was made, our Government (crying, wailing and gritting their teeth all the way) decided to correct an injustice that dates back to the Civil War Era; the law that prevented a retiree from collecting both his / her retirement and respective Veteran's Disability. First checks for these hit the banks on / about February 2nd. Many of us received notice that we were going to get a few extra dollars; surprise ! my money was in the bank before I got the notice. I don't consider this battle over nor a total victory for the Veterans, the present concurrent pay only address those 50 to 100% disabled. There are a numerous Veterans out there who should be entitled to this compensation also. As a bit of history on this legislation, we have been trying for many years to get it passed; and it was never popular with those in power, when I asked a certain AZ Senator in 1994, if he would co sponsor a bill then his answer was, " No, too costly we can't afford it." Strange after a few thousand letters, post cards and mailed to the folks in Congress, there seemed to be a change of heart. Like Ooops these people vote! Thank to everyone who took time to write or call their Senator and their Representatives to get this legislation passed..

Our work isn't quite done yet, now we need to start calling and mailing to get tALL Veterans who qualify on board.

Looking forward to seeing a lot of folks at the Reunion in May.

.....Darryl Nelson

Noted in Passing

Why Ho Chi Minh could have found a job as an Enron accountant: Ho Chi Minh rightfully condemned rural poverty under French colonialism and promised to bring a golden age of prosperity and democracy to Viet Nam. But...as of 1995, per capita income in Viet Nam was one-tenth that of the surrounding non-communist SE Asian countries, and rural, i.e., farmer income, was one-fifth to one-eighth of this lower figure, meaning Viet Nam's farmers earned 1/50th to 1/80th of what their fellow SE Asians earned. Worse, some farmers have had to sell their land, manufacturing the problem of landless peasants of decades before.

???

Fom another CoVan: "I served two years in Viet Nam, 18 months as a battalion commander, but the first six months of my first tour were as the senior U.S. adviser to an ARVN airborne task force. Those troops were as courageous and dedicated--and skilled--as any Americans I served with. They carried incredible loads on their backs without the air and artillery or logistical support U.S. units enjoyed, yet fought just as hard and kept their sense of humor. I realize some will say these were elite groups and regular ARVN forces were not that good. Well, I also saw many other ordinary ARVN units fight, and I disagree. Sure, there were some ineffective ARVN units, but there were also some U.S. units of all services I wouldn't want to brag about either."

-Maj. Gen. G.S. Meloy, US Army (ret.), from Viet Nam magazine, October, 2003.

COUNTERPARTS ORAL HISTORY

COUNTERPARTS members are invited to share their own in-country experience. Your work doesn't need to be a literary masterpiece; we will edit for grammar, spelling and clarity. Your submissions can be handwritten, typed, or sent via email. Each issue, we will publish as many items as space permits.

COUNTERINSURGENCY; The John Paul Vann Model

By

Rich Webster

In November of 1968 I can remember the legendary John Paul Vann speaking to our graduation class of newly trained advisors at Di AN, South Vietnam. "You can't win a guerilla war by dropping bombs from the air," he said. "You may kill some of the enemy, but you will alienate the people you are there trying to help, and they will turn against you."

John Paul Vann was our Lawrence of Arabia in Vietnam. He spent 10 years there, first as an American infantry officer, then later as the main architect of the Vietnamization/Pacification program.

Other words of his I remember were, "You need to go after the guerillas with a rifle at the village level and kill them face to face. And to do that effectively, you need local soldiers from the area to assist you. If the locals are properly led and equipped, they will do the job."

What Vann was saying seems to me to be applicable to Iraq today. You need the support of the local population and indigenous troops to combat the guerillas/terrorists/thugs on their own turf. Large conventional American military infantry units aren't necessarily best suited for this task.

Most think that it was just the Special Forces who were conducting counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam. Very few have heard about the Co Van Mi's (Vietnamese for American Advisors) and the mobile advisory teams (MATs). After 1968, fewer than 5000 US Army personnel assisted, advised, and to use a recently coined term, were embedded with a 500,000 Regional Force/Popular Force Army that took the war to the enemy at the local level for a period of over 5 years.

There were 354 mobile advisory teams each made up of 5 U.S. Army personnel (two officers and three NCOs). The MATs were really a scaled-down Special Forces team with one of the NCOs being a medic and there was a Vietnamese interpreter for communication purposes. As a young lieutenant, I served with a number of Popular Force platoons and Regional Force companies while a member of Advisor Teams 49 and 86.

Very little has been written about this little known aspect of the Vietnam War. In the book about John Paul Vann and the advisory effort, "A Bright and Shining Lie" the big lie is what the author, Neil Sheehan, leaves out of the book. Most of the book deals with the South Vietnamese Army and the advisory effort up to the Tet Offensive in 1968, and very little if any detail or mention is given to the many years afterward where the Regional forces and Popular Forces gave quite a good accounting of themselves against the enemy.

Sheehan spends the first 700 pages of his book detailing how bad the South Vietnamese Army was up to the end of 1967 (parts of which are true), then spends several pages on the Tet Offensive in early 1968, in which he fails to emphasize that the main fighting units of the Viet Cong army including their commanders and NCOs were eliminated, never again to become a viable fighting force. Some interpret this sound defeat of the Viet Cong as a deliberate attempt by the Hanoi Leaders to eliminate their comrades in the south.

Sheehan then skips 5 years of the war effort where the Regional Forces/Popular Forces held their own against the NVA/VC and defeated them in most of the smaller unnamed battles of the war at the village level. Then he picks up again with the 1972 Easter offensive where Vann was killed, not by enemy contact, but by a helicopter crash during the monsoon rains.

Barely 30 pages of Sheehan's book are devoted to Vann's success with Vietnamization. There was hardly any

mention of the Regional Forces/Popular Forces-the home militias, the little guys in tennis shoes, who inflicted over one-third of the casualties against the enemy.

I spent almost 9 months with these little guys as a lieutenant taking the fight to the VC at the hamlet and village level. Not all the RF/PF's were great soldiers, but many of them were if properly led, just as Vann had told us at the advisor school.

Nicknamed the "Ruff-Puffs", they were not configured to stand up against a large force of NVA regulars, but they could provide security for the locals in a hamlet or village. The soldiers either had their families living with them, or in the nearby village. Who better to know when the enemy was coming into a village than those who lived there?

There were many times when I knew when the Viet Cong were coming into the village at night to recruit or create havoc. And then instead of being the ambushed, I and my little band of Popular Force soldiers became the ambusher. We beat the guerillas at their own game. We took the night away from them. We no longer patrolled endlessly and aimlessly looking for a needle in a haystack, waiting for the enemy to initiate contact.

We waited for them in the darkness of the night, and kicked hell out of them. In today's military vernacular, we preempted them. That's how you fight the guerilla and the terrorist and beat him at his own game.

I cringe now watching news clips on TV as young American soldiers in Iraq are ambushed by snipers and blown up with the new version of the command controlled booby trap, the IED (improvised explosive device). But how would the young American soldiers be able to distinguish the al-Qaida terrorist from a local Iraqi civilian? The simple answer is, they can't.

And how do they find the IED? The answer is they can't, unless an informer warns them beforehand as to the location.

I believe the answer to this problem is found in the type of force that Vann created in Vietnam, coordinated by CORDS (Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support). So different was this approach to conventional warfare tactics that Vann insisted it be operated under civilian control on equal footing with the military hierarchy. Vann really wanted the U.S. military advisors to be in command of the Ruff/Puffs instead of being advisors, but Robert Komer, the first director of CORDS, resisted this idea.

Vann's approach to counterinsurgency was the blending of all civilian agencies in Vietnam under CORDS with a loan of 1800 US military personnel to serve as advisors to local soldiers to provide security for all aspects of the US effort in Vietnam. These were the front line guys who made up the mobile advisory teams, who moved from one RF/PF unit to another accompanying them on day and night time operations.

It seems to me we are always waiting for the enemy to ambush us in Iraq. The first strike is always thrown by the terrorist, and then we react by sometimes killing Iraqi civilians as the sniper fades away into a crowd. This unfortunate response is in itself, a tactic of the terrorist/insurgent/enemy combatant.

Don't we need to pre-empt the terrorist as he is preparing the IED to blow up an unsuspecting US soldier, and don't we need to know that a terrorist cell from outside Iraq has begun operating in a neighborhood? To do so, we need intelligence from the local civilians and soldiers from the area who understand the language, customs, and dynamics of the local situation, who can easily point out strangers in the area even though they speak the same language, but look different.

The best of the MAT teams helped perform all of the above missions because they lived with their Vietnamese counterparts 24 hours a day, ate their food, got to know their families, and developed friendships that last even today 28 years after the war. The Co Vans did not retreat back to a secure base camp far removed from the people they were trying to help and defend.

So where do we get the local soldiers in Iraq to perform this mission? As a former Co Van, I sat in astonishment when I saw the 500,000 man Iraqi Army being disbanded and sent home immediately after Saddam's main army collapsed. For the most part, they surrendered without firing a shot. Why send home a trained army, al-

though obviously not well trained according to Western standards, but surely parts of them could have been used along the guidelines of the MAT team concept in Vietnam?

I realize that all of Saddam's army could not have been used like we used the Regional Forces/Popular Forces in Vietnam, but surely some of them could. It was obvious that a large number of Saddam's conscripted forces were not loyal to him.

We could have had local Iraqi soldiers patrolling under the command of small military advisor teams to help flush out enemy combatants and newly arrived in-country al-Qaida terrorists. The advisor teams would provide the coordination and communication with the larger American units in the area. This would enhance security for the civilian efforts and NGO's in Iraq. The Iraqi civilians must feel safe and secure before a new form of government can develop without the imprint of a terrorist stamp.

I believe that what Vann said in the 1960's in Vietnam is relevant today in Iraq as it relates to counterinsurgency. All the high tech gadgetry and firepower that our military has today, leaves us relative helpless when it comes to fighting the insurgent who blends in with the civilian population. An innocent civilian killed translates into a win for the terrorist. To avoid this, it takes the soldier on the ground with a rifle taking the fight to the terrorist, in an area that he previously thought was a safe sanctuary. And to do that, you need local soldiers familiar with the terrain, the language, and the customs of the area. John Paul Vann understood that.

The Vietnam War has been misremembered, misunderstood, and misreported in regard to John Paul Vann's effort with Vietnamization and the fighting ability of the South Vietnamese soldier. Sheehan has done them a great disservice in his book, "A Bright And Shining Lie", from which the movie of like title was made.

Few know that the Viet Cong lost the war, and that they were no longer a viable force after 1968. The Viet Cong could not have won the war and bested the South Vietnamese Army in battle. The advisory effort in Vietnam wasn't perfect, but the South Vietnamese forces held their own in the 1972 Easter Offensive by the North.

The South Vietnamese Army was finally defeated in 1975 when they were invaded by the 5th largest Army in the world. They were invaded by 17 Divisions of the North Vietnamese Army to include over 700 tanks that steamrolled everyone in front of them. The North Vietnamese were still being supplied with war materials by their Allies, the Soviets and the Chinese, while the Allies of the South Vietnamese, the United States, abandoned them in their hour of need.

The ARVN were also disadvantaged and vulnerable because they had to defend everywhere, and the NVA could concentrate superior forces at weak points in the South.

The myth perpetrated by the anti-war media was that the South Vietnamese military was no good. I returned to the province capital of Xuan Loc, Vietnam, in 2002 and visited the large communist cemetery there filled with 5000 North Vietnamese graves. This is where the last battle of the Vietnam War was fought, where the 18th ARVN division defeated three NVA divisions before finally being overrun by 40000 of the enemy.

Would Vann's model of counterinsurgency work in Iraq today? That's a good question, but what is the alternative? Our soldiers now are getting tired, and our forces are being stretched too thin to continue the mission indefinitely.

The architect of the 1975 invasion of South Vietnam, North Vietnamese Tien Van Dung, in an indirect manner, gave Vann a complement for his conduct of the pacification program. In his book, "Great Spring victory", he never once mentions revolutionary warfare or the guerilla tactics of the Viet Cong as aiding him in his final assault on the South. That's because Vann's program of Vietnamization, had basically wrested control of the south from the guerillas who were no longer a viable fighting force.

That's rather ironic isn't it? The myth exists today that peasants wearing rubber tire sandals employing guerilla tactics won the war in Vietnam.

Our officials in Iraq are saying it will take 3 to 5 years to build an Iraqi Army. With Vann's model, we could have taken the best of the 500,000 former Iraqi military, and put them under the control of US military advisors. Instead of young American soldiers patrolling the streets of Baghdad and the smaller cities around the country, surely we could have used Iraqi soldiers advised by several thousand American military personal. Instead we sent them home to do what?

Unlike Vietnam, there is no outside Army that is going to invade Iraq in division-size strength and overwhelm our military units there. Our powerful and well-trained military units, with the aid of the British, have already won the big battles of the war. Now we need small units of local soldiers taking the war to the enemy at the village level. I see no other way to preempt the terrorist before he has the time to act.

The small suitcase bomb, the suicide bomber, chemical and germ warfare, and the IED, all weapons used by the terrorists in the 21st century, make it necessary to defend everywhere. The terrorist will always go for the target of opportunity, searching for the most vulnerable target.

And this appears to be the difficulty of the war of the future-the preempting of the terrorist before he can strike. Or, even before that, having the will and knowledge of how to preempt the terrorist.



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- Articles, letters and other news items are welcomed from all members and other subscribers. Copy should be typed double spaced using standard manuscript fonts like Courier, Cobb, or other "plain vanilla" fonts that can be easily OCR scanned. If you don't have a typewriter legible handwritten copy is OK.
- Electronic submissions via email or on disc are also welcome. Microsoft Word or Word Perfect is preferred.
- Submissions should not exceed "Column length" pieces, i.e.: no longer than 600-1000 words. Members shouldn't hesitate to send short (50-100) word contributions. Remember, brevity is the soul of wit.
- Photos or pictures can be submitted by mail or on the internet. For Internet material use one of the standard graphic formats like JPEG, TIFF, MIX, or GIF.

Editorial Policy:

• We will edit for grammar, spelling and clarity. If we feel the need to edit for length or content we'll contact the author whenever possible. We will NOT edit for political or philosophical content unless it's obscene, illegal, or libelous.

• **SITREP will be published quarterly, in January, April, July, and October. Deadlines for manuscripts and photos are the first of the month before each publication date, but we can be flexible if there's late breaking news.**

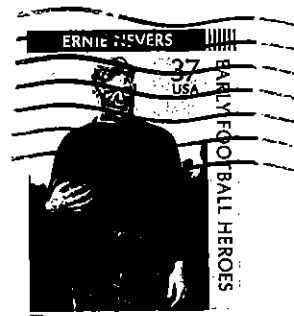
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