



# COUNTERPARTS

## TƯƠNG HỮU ĐÔNG NAM A'

### SITREP

Volume IX

Issue 2

Winter 2006-2007

## 2007 Reunion to Feature CENTCOM, Special Ops Brief

*Counterparts* 2007 Reunion in Tampa FL this April 19-21 will include a tour of CENTCOM HQ at MacDill AFB, capped by special Command Briefings. **Note that the Reunion will begin on Thursday April 19, rather than on a Friday, as has been customary.**

Cost will be \$100.00 per person which includes the VN Buffet, Banquet and Bus to MacDill. Cost will be prorated for those not wishing to attend all of those events.

**Thursday, April 19:** Arrive, VN Buffet, American Legion

**Friday, April 20:**

- 0915: Depart Hotel by Bus
- 1000-1100: Briefing at MacDill
- 1130-1300: Lunch at O Club
- 1330-1500: Briefing
- 1545: Arrive at hotel
- 1830: Happy Hour
- 1930: Banquet at hotel

**Guest Speaker Tommy Daniels**

**PICTURE ID REQUIRED FOR ALL BRIEFINGS!**

**Saturday, April 21**

0800:(about) Breakfast, followed by business meeting.

**A block of rooms has been reserved for us at the Wyndham Hotel, 4860 Kennedy Blvd, Tampa, FL 33609 Tel 813 286 4400 or 800 866 7177. under the name "Counterparts." These rooms, at a \$105.00 rate will be held only until March 1.**

## Our "Counterparts Student" Begins School in Cambodia

By

Rich Webster, PAO

In November of 2006, I traveled to Cambodia to visit our *COUNTERPARTS* Scholarship student, *Broy Makara*, who is just completing his first year of college at the Royal University of Agriculture. Broy is studying to become a veterinarian with the goal of going back to his home in Monduliri Province to help the Phnong people.

Broy is one of 13 college students living at the new student center in Phnom Penh operated by Cambodia Corps, Inc., the small organization devoted to saving the Montagnard culture in the western province of Monduliri that borders Vietnam. These 13 college students came from rural Montagnard villages where they had no hope of a college education until Cambodia Corps entered the picture.

The student center is a large rented house with a supervisor/English teacher who is in charge of monitoring the students and assisting them in their college classes. I was graciously invited to stay in one of their rooms for the month I spent in Cambodia.

The 2000 dollar scholarship pays for Broy's room, board, tuition, books, and transportation to and from school.

To get to classes in Phnom Penh, the students must travel by motor bike or bicycle. To visit Broy's veterinary school, I clung to the back of a motorbike driver for the 30-minute ride though the smog/pollution-filled air to the edge of Phnom Penh. The Royal University of Agriculture was founded by Prince Sihanouk over 50 years ago.

I was impressed with the agricultural school. The students were polite and friendly. Broy's instructor invited me into his embryology class for a short time.

Broy's first association with Cambodia Corps was at the Sen Monorum homeless child center for Montagnard hill tribe students. In rural Cambodia, there is only one junior high and high school for all students.

(Cont d on Page 3)



# COUNTERPARTS SITREP

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## Commander's Corner

2006 was a year of consolidation, progress, and a few stumbles for *Counterparts*. While we didn't reach all the goals we had set for ourselves we can claim some definite accomplishments and at least one "first".

Membership has continued to increase and thanks to the untiring effort and energy of Membership Chairman Jim Simmons, we have the largest number of paid-up (through 2006) members than we have had in some time. In addition to being a sign of good organizational health the money collected has enabled us to assist other organizations, such as the Mike and Marion Little's "Operation Rice Lift", Save The Montagnard People (STMP), Vietnam Vets With a Mission (VWAM), and Tommy Daniels' Cambodia Corps.

For the first time, we are also providing funds for our "*Counterparts* Scholarship". The initial recipient, Broy Makara, is now completing his first year of college in Cambodia. We plan on providing funding for Broy's second year of study and will vote on this subject at the Tampa Reunion.

Rich Webster, our PAO, has made another trip to SEA and gives us the news, good and bad, from Vietnam and Cambodia. Rich and other *Counterparts* members continue to remind us that there are tragedies unfolding among our old friends in that area and that there is a vital need to bring this story to more people in the US and the international community. The situation of the Montagnards is particularly desperate. Today, corruption and economic exploitation are adding to the suffering caused by long standing government repression by Vietnam and Cambodia.

*Counterparts* is an unusual organization in that we are scattered across many states and several continents. In some ways this is a handicap that is hard to overcome. Our members and officers rarely see one another: the Annual Reunion is often the only time we get to see how many new wrinkles and grey hairs our comrades have gained (or lost). It's often a challenge to maintain members' interest, and like most similar organizations, there is always more work than there are volunteers.

There is however, no lack of room for improvement. Many of our Officers' slots remain unfilled. Changing personal situations, competing demands, and "volunteer burnout" by some are limiting our ability to continue to make an impact. To stay alive and well we need the energy and effort of more of our members. We do have momentum, but the laws of Physics tell us that without the addition of more energy, momentum eventually declines to zero.

See you at the Tampa Reunion.

*Ken Jacobsen*

(cont'd from Page 1) Unless the Montagnard students are within walking distance of Sen Monorum (most aren't), their education is over at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The 150 students who live at the homeless shelter are able to continue their education, an impossibility before CCI entered the picture. Next to the homeless child center, the Vietnamese are making plans to build a technical school, so the future doesn't bode well for the traditional Montagnard way of life.

Tommy Daniels, founder of CCI, believes that the only future for the minority hill tribe culture is education. The traditional Phnong homeland in Cambodia is shrinking very fast. Much of the land that they used to roam freely now belongs to someone else. The Chinese have leased 200,000 hectares of land to plant trees, and the Vietnamese have plans to convert 20,000 hectares of land into a tree plantation in the area. I visited the first small rubber tree nursery with 50,000 rubber trees about one foot high (value-\$150,000) to be replanted on a larger farm.

Veterinarians are in demand in Cambodia so Broy should do quite well when he graduates with plans to go back and help his own people.

This incident will show you how education helps in rural Cambodia. It's common practice for rich Khmers to trick the Phnong out of their land despite special laws to prohibit this. Gary "Paco" Gregg, CCI operations manager and Viet Vet, who I traveled with in Mondulkiri visited this poor Phnong family who had been thrown in jail last year.

A wealthy Khmer put a fence around their farmland and proclaimed it as his own. So the Phnong family did what anyone would do, and traveled to the capital of Sen Monorum and protested this injustice. Instead of helping this poor Phnong family, the authorities threw them in jail. That's the way things work in Cambodia-often referred to as one of the most corrupt governments in the world.

This Phnong family didn't know how to read or write and lived in a village remotely removed from modern civilization. For them, there was no world beyond their village. Paco put them in touch with the first female Phnong lawyer in all of Cambodia. The aggrieved family traveled to Phnom Penh and with the assistance of a Montagnard trained lawyer, after a period of months being guided through the correct legal procedure, were able to get their land back.

That's the importance of education in the changing society in the 3<sup>rd</sup> world country of Cambodia. There are 30,000 Phnong in Mondulkiri Province alone, and to the north in Ratanakiri Province there are even more Montagnards who are soon going to be swept aside by globalization and the Southeast Asian countries who want access to their valuable land.

I provided a special chicken dinner for the 13 students at the student center in PP before I left on Dec 7. In a short speech, I told the Phnong students, "Someone can take away your money, your clothes, and your land, but once you have an education, no one can ever take that away from you. It becomes part of you which you will have to better yourself and your people the rest of your lives."

I gave Broy and my law student, Leang Sochoeun, a small leatherman tool/knife as a small gift before I left. Broy wanted me to convey his thanks to COUNTERPARTS for funding his scholarship. There is no way I could put into words how much this has helped him.

Cambodia Corps Inc. is the smallest NGO in Cambodia and operates on a very small budget-it cost about 30,000 dollars a year for the homeless shelter in Sen Monorum and another 30,000 for the student center and expenses for 13 college students. A very tiny portion of the that money goes for salaries. For 2000 dollars a year, one can sponsor a minority student to college, and that includes tuition, room, and board. Only lack of funding is preventing CCI from expanding into Ratanakiri Province to the North.

My last word: If you want to do more than just talk about the plight of the Montagnards in Southeast Asia, get involved with helping the minority tribes in Cambodia. Give to the COUNTERPARTS scholarship fund. Last year we had five *co vans* in San Antonio contribute.

.....Rich Webster



***The author and Phnong college students in Phnom Penh at student center. All graduated from the Cambodia Corps homeless shelter in Mondulkiri Province.***

# ADVISORS IN IRAQ: Reexamining the CORDS' Model

By  
Rich Webster

Three years ago I wrote an article for SITREP championing the CORDS/Advisory program in Vietnam as the model to fight the war in Iraq after Saddam's army had been defeated. Those planning the war now are desperate not only for a new battle plan, but any strategy that would allow a troop draw down from Iraq.

Familiar buzzwords from think tanks and military experts are coming from Washington again. Heated debates rage over Counterinsurgency, "winning hearts and minds", training the Iraqi army and police to stand on their own, nation building, and providing security to the Iraqi people. COUNTERPARTS' members who were advisors in the Vietnam War have heard this all before-- 35 years ago when we were engaged in all of the above in the villages of Vietnam.

I've got news for those who are planning the counterinsurgency program today. The CORDS (Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support) championed by the legendary John Paul Vann in Vietnam after the failed 1968 TET Offensive by the VC and NVA was the most successful counterinsurgency program that the American military ever conducted on foreign soil. CORDS won the war against the Viet Cong, considered the best and the most highly dedicated guerillas in the history of modern warfare.

Vann understood the paradox of asymmetrical warfare, in that the harder the US military tries with larger forces and conventional tactics, the more damage is inflicted on the civilian population, and the farther the US falls behind in the hearts-and-minds battle and in the court of world opinion. Large conventional American military forces have great difficulty separating or even identifying terrorists that easily blend in with the population.

The CORDS counterinsurgency program administered by a civilian with 5000 borrowed military personnel under its umbrella, won the war against the Viet Cong guerillas in the villages and hamlets of rural Vietnam after the enemy's failed TET Offensive in 1968. This unique advisory effort in Vietnam (sometimes referred to as Vietnamization) blended all the civilian agencies in Vietnam with 305 small 5-man advisor teams that went out to live in the villages with the Regional Forces/Popular Forces charged with village security.

Vann also knew the value of local soldiers, policeman, intelligence agents, village officials, and the most important element, the peasants themselves in neutralizing the Viet Cong and the Viet Cong Infrastructure (the ideologues who gave the orders). The people themselves were the intelligence resource that enabled us to pinpoint the enemy's location and turn the battle against the local VC by using the most effective response to terror; the small unit ambush. Advisory teams embedded in local self defense forces, ambushed the ambushers, and preempted them on their own turf.

I was a young Lieutenant at the Advisor School in Vietnam in 1968, and remember Mr. Vann's words well. "You can't win a guerilla war by dropping bombs from the air," he said. "It takes the local soldier with a rifle to eliminate the terrorist. And the American soldier must assist him in doing that." Vann made another unsettling statement about guerilla war that stunned our student advisor class when he said "It may surprise you but if I were a young man living in the villages of Vietnam in the early years of the war, I too would have become a Viet Cong with the way we are fighting this war."

What he was saying is that guerilla wars aren't won from the top down. The only way to defeat the insurgent is from the bottom up with lieutenants and sergeants and enlisted men interfacing with local soldiers, and being allowed to make their own decisions on the ground. A bureaucratic military chain of command can become the greatest deterrent in accomplishing this kind of mission.

Under the Vann model, the 305 mobile advisory teams were partnered with a 400,000 man Regional Force/Popular Force Army. This force finished off the Viet Cong as any kind of viable military threat and took back the villages from VC control. Vann also emphasized getting rid of corrupt government officials and promoting small unit commanders on merit, a necessity to win the counterinsurgency battle at the grassroots level.

It must be emphasized that before this advisor program was implemented or could work, the Viet Cong's mainline units fighting in regiment and battalion size strengths were soundly defeated and eliminated by the American and ARVN military in battle after battle. The US military had to plan for and fight both a guerilla war and a conventional war at the same time.

CORDS was unique in that it had it's own chain of command outside and equal to the military chain of command whereby it could interface with not only American military units, but also all American civilian organizations within the war zone-USAID, USIO, CIA, and all units of the South Vietnamese Army and Police. John Paul Vann himself was a civilian advisor for most of his Vietnam career.

With the advent of the burgeoning NGO community in Iraq, the CORDS model that combined military skills with nation building could have been invaluable there. The new type of military advisor that CORDS created (different than just assigning an American soldier to a Vietnamese main line unit) combined the qualities of a warrior, Peace Corps worker, diplomat, nation builder, civil affairs rep, and an all around facilitator at the local level where the hearts-and-mind battle is waged. The Advisors could also intervene to eliminate local corruption and bring direct aid to the peasants at the level where the real counterinsurgency war must be waged. Similar to the Marine CAP platoons, the MAT teams not only defended the people against the aggressor, they became part of the local fabric of the village. CORDS and Vietnamization allowed US troops to be pulled out of Vietnam so the war could be handed over to the Vietnamese.

*(Continued on page 5)*

(Cont'd from page 4) Why has the CORDS model been forgotten and ignored, even by our own US military? Because the myth continues today that the American military lost the guerilla war, as well as the conventional war in Vietnam. The truth is that we won both the wars. The Viet Cong were a non-factor after 1970 as their organization and forces were basically destroyed. When the North Vietnamese Army attacked the south in the Easter Offensive of 1972, the South Vietnamese ARVN Army backed up by the RF/PF destroyed General Giap's divisions with the help of American air power. (Air power is necessary against a conventional force.) After this disastrous military defeat, General Giap, North Vietnam's most famous general, was sacked by the politburo and put out to pasture. What better evidence that the South Vietnamese Army we left there could fight and win?

Vann's ideas on counterinsurgency could have made a tremendous impact on how the wars are being fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. He understood that to win a counterinsurgency war, it is the local front line police and soldiers who must eventually fight the war, because someday America troops will come home. But first they must be mentored/advised/trained by small teams of American advisors who live with their counterparts, adapt their culture, learn their language, and see the war through the eyes of the locals. That's almost an impossibility under an entirely military command structure.

The terrorist/insurgent forces we are fighting in Iraq never have to win a battle. They just have to sustain their effort and eventually America will become tired and come home. The military and police force we train and leave behind will determine the outcome of the war.

It's ironic that the US Advisory effort eventually won the hearts and minds battle with the Vietnamese peasants, but the hearts and minds battle was lost back home in the streets of America as the psychological will to continue the war in Vietnam succumbed to the anti-war effort in America, just as Ho Chi Minh and his Marxist cadres predicted. The *coup de gras* to our effort came only after congress abandoned our allies in 1975 and the North unleashed 17 military divisions on the south in a WWII style *blitzkrieg* attack.

This sad history has not been lost on our present enemies. Al Qaeda's chief ideologue, Ayman al Zawahiri has said that "more than half the battle we are waging is taking place in the media." What Vann said about the negative affects of dropping bombs from the air and helping the locals separate the bad guys from the good guys is even more vital in today's media connected world where America is losing the public relations' battle.

Vann's ideas of how to win a low intensity conflict are as relevant today, as they were over 35 years ago. We desperately need an army to turn the war over to in Iraq. Vann helped create that army in Vietnam with the unique advisor program called CORDS.

Rich Webster

*NOTE:*

*Maybe they're finally getting the idea. The following quotes are from an article on the new Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in the February 2007 Military Officer magazine. "The PRT concept is not new...early in the Vietnam War CORDS (civil operations and rural development support) teams operated throughout Vietnam". "...in this latest iteration of civil military operations, the new PRTs were intended to have multiple components, such as security, civil affairs, engineering and medical personnel. They would be interagency..."*

*...The Editors*

c

## Membership News

Welcome to new members ROBERT AMON, ROBERT AVONDO, GUY DAINES, JOHN GALLANT, MARVIN NIXON, RICK RICE, HERBERT RIDLON, ARTHUR WILKES. I hope that a reminder in each SITREP will suffice for keeping dues current for the rest of us. We continue to improve in this area. We now have 294 Active, paid up members.

I have always regretted not keeping in contact, after my Vietnam tour ended, with two of the finest people I've ever met; my Interpreter and a very fine Vietnamese Army Doctor. I was close to both and often invited to their homes in Danang. I had their addresses but only once communicated with them. I know all of us had Vietnamese friends. Wasn't it great? Now I get that feeling doing the work of honor as your Membership Officer. Each and every dollar we collect can help those who once helped us. I felt really proud of our organization when our members step forward to help groups like Mike Little's and Tommy Daniels'.

Looking forward to a very large contingent at the Tampa Reunion. From the bottom of my heart, thank you all for supporting this fine organization

.....Jim Simmons

Oh, by the way..... 2007 Dues are now due.

# TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR THE MONTAGNARDS

By  
Rich Webster

The wealthy Khmer and those in power in Mondulhiri Province in eastern Cambodia boast that the Phnong will be gone in two years time.

What is one to make of that comment? Approximately 40,000 Phnong live in Mondulhiri province and make up 80 percent of the population. The great land rush is on there and the Phnong are being tricked out of and forced off their land. A poor Phnong farmer who wouldn't roll over to the land grab of his property died of hunger in the Mondulhiri jail there just recently. This province is also of special interest to us because it is where Cambodia Corps Inc. operates the homeless shelter in Sen Monorum for 150 Montagnard children so they can attend the only junior high and high school in the province. COUNTERPARTS sponsors Broy Makara, a graduate of that school, to a veterinary scholarship in Phnom Penh.

Tommy Daniels, Founder of Cambodia Corps, reported from Mondulhiri in January that the Phnong who don't roll over to the land grab of their property to the police, foreign companies, and speculators go to jail or get run off by the members of the armed forces or the police. There are lots of news stories in the Phnom Penh Post and the Cambodian Daily lately about this.

In the Province of Ratanakiri just north of Mondulhiri, the Finance Minister's Keat Chhon's sister and seven others forced members of the Jarai Tribe from their land in a crooked land deal. Very few of the villagers speak Khmer and fewer still are literate so they are at the mercy of the rich and powerful in the government.

This is why I'm trying to awaken interest in former advisors and the COUNTERPARTS organization to get behind Cambodia Corps, Inc. which is in the forefront of trying to educate the Montagnards in Cambodia to fend for themselves in the 21st century. Without education, they are finished. The commercialization of their homeland is spiraling out of their control.

What's left of the forest homelands of the Montagnards in the parts of eastern Cambodia that border Vietnam is quickly disappearing. The Vietnamese have their design on the land there and the Montagnards are in their way.

A new law passed in Cambodia will now force back all Montagnards who fled Vietnam after 1975. Those who can't prove they lived in Cambodia prior to 1975 will be forced behind the Iron Curtain that has been lowered over the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Vietnam Veterans who follow the Montagnard situation in the Central Highlands know what that means; without some miracle, the Montagnards are finished. Vietnam has a history of subtly making the Montagnards and their culture disappear.

The land of the indigenous tribes is supposed to be protected under the 2001 land law and cannot be privately owned. No one is supposed to be entitled to sell or take the land as private land or for personal ownership. However, the rule of law means little in that part of the world.

I wrote last year in the SITREP about the 200,000 hectares of land (approximately 500,000 acres) leased by China that has since been sprayed and cleared of forest for the planting of pine trees. That land used to belong to the Montagnards of Mondulhiri province.

What can you do to help? Open up your pocketbook a little to help the Montagnards and Tommy Daniels in his Cambodia Corps effort before the Montagnard culture and way of life disappears forever. Sponsor a Montagnard student with a scholarship. Two thousand dollars pays the tuition, room, and board for a Phnong student to attend college in Phnom Penh for one year.

Want to know more about what is going on in that part of the world? Come to the COUNTERPARTS convention in Tampa and hear Tommy Daniels talk about his valiant effort and first hand experience in trying to save the Montagnards and their culture in Cambodia.

**IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY DECIDED TO CONTRIBUTE TO OUR "COUNTERPARTS SCHOLAR" PROGRAM, IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO GET ON BOARD. MAIL CONTRIBUTIONS TO:**



CAMBODIA Corps, Inc.  
915 Goebel Ave.  
Savannah, GA 31404



# BULLETIN BOARD



## *Operation Rice Lift/Vihn Son Orphanage News*

The Vihn Son Orphanage (VSO) annual meeting was held in Richmond, CA on December 28, 2006. The following is a brief summary of the meeting:

1. Sister Marie Dominique provided an update of the orphanage population and events occurring there. She sent money from her personal savings so the children would have a festive Christmas Celebration.
2. Dave Chaix- a great year for us as joint entity - we have sent over \$20,000 to VS 1 and 2, we have verified the data and have receipts; money was well spent. The digital camera at VS 2 is helpful to us for verifying completion of projects and to help overcome the language barrier. The repair of the tractor at VS I was cited as case where a photo would have been good for us to better understand the problem.
3. Dennis Coyne proposed adding a “sponsor-a-child”. page to the web site. Discussion led to another less involved concept that could be called “meet-a-child” page. More work is required plus input from the staff in Kontum.
4. Pat Keegan presented an analysis of our financial situation. Pat stated that income from donations and in-kind donations exceeded the 2006 plan by 56%. 2007 Fund Raising Goal— Based upon the huge success of exceeding the 2006 goal of \$25,000 and reaching \$35,445, the Board agreed that \$45,000 should be our 2007 goal.

The following projects are approved for funding for 2007 at Vinh Son 1 and 2.

### Vinh Son 1

- Basic Needs (food, clothing, shelter, and education)
- Sewing Class expenses
- Computer Class expenses
- Kitchen (buckets basins, bowls, forks, etc.)
- Tractor Repair
- TET celebration for the children
- Children's Bedrooms (mosquito nets, blankets, mats and pillows)

### Vinh Son 2

- Basic Needs (food, clothing, shelter, and education)
- Sewing Class expenses
- Computer class expenses
- School Fees
- Supplemental teachers pay for one year
- TET celebration for the children

Discretionary funding will be taken to address issues identified during the visit, i.e. like the repair of the bakery that occurred during the 2006 visit.

.....(From the VSO newsletter, submitted by Mike and Marion Little)



# BULLETIN BOARD

## ***Boat People Museum Planned in Canada***

On January 28 a number of members of the San Jose, CA Vietnamese/American Community gathered to hear plans for the Boat People Museum Project presently underway in Ottawa, Canada. Dr. Can D. Le, a former president of the Vietnamese Canadian Federation gave the presentation.

## ***Vets With a Mission (VWAM) Update***

In 2006 VWAM continued to sponsor medical and other humanitarian operations in Vietnam. They also provided a disaster relief team in response to Typhoon Xangsane. Among the more unusual projects that VWAM helps supports are the *Bread of Life Coffee Shop* (American sponsored) and the *Love of Arts Centre* (Australian sponsored). In addition to being faith oriented gathering places, the *Bread of Life Coffee Shop* also provides vocational training for young Vietnamese who are deaf or physically handicapped. More info on VWAM's programs can be seen on their web site at <http://www.vwam.com> or from VWAM PO Box 202, Newberry SC 29108.

## ***Save The Montagnard People (STMP)***

In the last year some significant improvements have been made on the site in Randolph County, North Carolina. On December 16, a group representing STMP gathered to wrap toys for the Montagnard refugee children, and as a very special Christmas gift, presented the assembled Montagnards with the deed to the 101 acre site. This was another step forward in the United Dega Asheboro project that was begun three years ago. "The land being paid off is a promise fulfilled to the Montagnards" said STMP President George Clark.

This year about 30 acres of the formerly abandoned farm in the North Carolina mountains has so far been cleared and is under cultivation by Montagnards. 100 Fruit trees have also been planted, construction of a 200'x50' Long house has begun, a new well has been dug and a chicken house has been built. As George Clark noted "The land project is the future for the Montagnards, it guarantees the survival of a noble culture and will leave a living monument to all Montagnards and Special Forces Veterans." STMP can be contacted through its website at <http://www.montagnards.org> or by mail through George Hadelor, Secretary, 481 Almond Drive, Luray, VA 22835-3521

## ***Vietnamese/American to Serve as Advisor to Iraqi Army***

US Army Captain James Van Thach has become the first Vietnamese-American to be selected as an Advisor to the Iraqi forces. In CPT Thach's own words, "I volunteered to join the Military Transition Team (MiTT). This very specialized small team approach of advising security forces in Iraq and Afghanistan is seen as key to handing over full security responsibilities to local authorities."

CPT Thach also noted that "The core goals of the Iraqi Assistance Group foundations are very similar to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam."

In addition to being the first Vietnamese American Advisor, CPT Thach also has the distinction of being a second generation advisor. His father, LTC John W. Perkins, US Army (Ret.) served two tours as an Advisor to ARVN forces. During his second tour he met Thach's mother, Ngoc Thi Thach, a member of the Republic of Vietnam's Olympic team.



# BULLETIN BOARD

## ***Locator Request***

Counterparts member and author Carl Nelson has requested that we pass on the following info;

“From: “Hao The Trinh” <[trinhh@michigan.gov](mailto:trinhh@michigan.gov)>

Date: December 11, 2006 9:37:56 AM PST

To: <[canelson56@cox.net](mailto:canelson56@cox.net)>

Subject: Finding friends of my father.

Dear Mr. Nelson,

I am seeking your help on behalf of my father Trac Van Trinh commander of Yeu Khu Nha Be Tank Farm (1962-1971) and later commander of Dac Khu Rung Sat (1973-1975). He is now in his seventy plus and as his son, I would like to find my father American friends (advisors) while they were in Viet Nam from 1962-1974. He can only remember their first name but not last name. Enclose are two pictures (Ed note: photos not available) of my father with his commando unit and advisor friends (with NR name on his shirts), with the hope that it would help find his friends. I would greatly appreciate if any information that could lead to the reunion of old friends.

Sincerely,

Hao The Trinh”

## ***Watch for New Movie “Journey from the Fall”***

Inspired by the true stories of Vietnamese refugees who fled their land after the fall of Saigon—and those who were forced to stay behind, a new movie, *Journey from the Fall*, due for release in Spring 2007, follows one family’s struggle for freedom.

April 30, 1975 marked the end of Vietnam's two-decade-old civil war and the start of the exodus of hundreds of thousands of refugees. Despite his allegiance to the South Vietnamese government, Long Nguyen (as Long Nguyen) decides to remain in Vietnam. Imprisoned in a Communist re-education camp, he urges his family to make the escape by boat without him. His wife Mai (Diem Lien), son Lai (Nguyen Thai Nguyen) and mother Ba Noi (Kieu Chinh) then embark on the arduous ocean voyage in the hope of reaching the U.S. and freedom.

Back in Vietnam, Long suffers years of solitary confinement and hard labor, and finally despairs that his family has perished. But news of their successful resettlement in America inspires him to make one last desperate attempt to join them.

According to the film’s director, Ham Tran, *Journey from the Fall* is “the untold story about the post-Vietnam war experience of re-education camps, boat people and the immigration process to America. It’s about a family that separated after the war and struggling against all odds to be reunited in the hope of freedom.”

The picture has already won or been nominated for a number of international cinematic awards. Additional information on *Journey from the Fall* can be found at the film’s website [www.journeyfromthefall.com](http://www.journeyfromthefall.com).



# BULLETIN BOARD



## *Republic of Vietnam Army Legend Dies*

Ngo Quang Truong, 77, who was considered one of the most honest and capable generals of the South Vietnamese army during the long Vietnam War, died of cancer Jan. 22 in Fairfax, Virginia.

Ngo Quang Truong was born Dec. 19, 1929 Kien Hoa Province in the Delta. He graduated from My Tho College and was Commissioned into the army in 1954, spending the next dozen years in the elite airborne brigade. In 1966 he became commander of the 1st ARVN Infantry Division in Hue. He left to take command of IV Corps in 1971.

Gen. Creighton Abrams once told subordinates that Gen. Truong was fully capable of commanding an American division and Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf called Gen. Truong "the most brilliant tactical commander I'd ever known..Simply by visualizing the terrain and drawing on his experience fighting the enemy for 15 years, Truong showed an uncanny ability to predict what they were going to do," Schwarzkopf wrote.

"He did not look like my idea of a military genius: only five feet seven, in his mid-forties, very skinny, with hunched shoulders and a head that seemed too big for his body," Schwarzkopf added. "His face was pinched and intense, not at all handsome, and there was always a cigarette hanging from his lips. Yet he was revered by his officers and troops -- and feared by those North Vietnamese commanders who knew of his ability."

Unlike some generals who grew rich as they ascended the ranks, Gen. Truong led a Spartan, ascetic life. Retired U.S. Army Lt. Gen. John H. Cushman, who became his close friend after working with him, said Gen. Truong didn't own a suit and his wife kept pigs behind his modest quarters in the military compound where they lived.

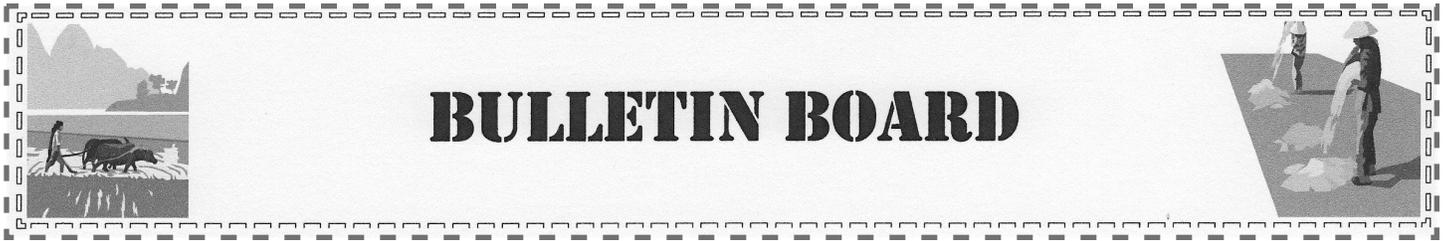
Gen. Truong held the heart of Hue against the North Vietnamese during the Tet Offensive of 1968, in what is often regarded as one of the longest, bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War.

Two nights before the Tet Offensive Gen. Truong apparently sensed that something would happen and put his troops on alert. When the first night passed quietly, Gen. Truong dismissed his advisers but kept his troops ready. That night brought the attack and several weeks of desperate fighting.

"He survived with the enemy all around him," LTG Cushman said. "They never took his command post, but they took the rest of the citadel. . . . He was imaginative and always looked for ways to improve [his troops'] living conditions and their family life."

Gen. Truong returned to Hue in May 1972 to command the northern military region. That return to Hue calmed the panicked refugees and allowed him to regroup the troops who fled Quang Tri.

Three years later, as the North Vietnamese drove south in the massive 1975 offensive, Gen. Truong was ordered to evacuate all the military personnel from the tactical zone around Da Nang. "This Herculean task failed, but Truong should not bear the blame for failure in such a difficult situation," the 1996 Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War said. Under barrage by North Vietnamese artillery and tanks, and running out of ammunition, his units were gradually overwhelmed.



# BULLETIN BOARD

Gen. Truong swam to a ship off the coast of the city and reestablished his headquarters as Da Nang fell. Flown to Saigon, he was hospitalized for a nervous breakdown, the press reported.

A U.S. Army officer who had worked closely with him heard what happened, tracked Gen. Truong down and arranged for his family to leave on an American vessel as Saigon fell.

The general's family split up: His wife and older son made it to Fort Chaffee, Ark.; his daughters and middle son fled with a State Department employee to Seattle; and his youngest son, a 4-year-old who spoke no English, was at Camp Pendleton, Calif., for several weeks before his identity was established.

Gen. Truong moved to Falls Church that year and wrote military history books, including "Easter Offensive of 1972" (1979), "RVNAF and US Operational Cooperation and Coordination" (1980) and "Territorial Forces" (1981). He moved to Springfield in 1983, the same year he became a U.S. citizen, and was a computer analyst for the Association of American Railroads. He worked there for about a decade until he retired in 1994.

## ***Financial Report***

The *Counterparts* financial report for calendar year 2006 is currently in preparation. When completed it will be posted on the Counterparts website. The report will also be presented at the 2007 Reunion in Tampa

## ***Village Market***

Due to the resignation of the Quartermaster, the Village Market is not presently accepting orders for merchandise. Volunteers for the Quartermaster/Village Market position are needed if we are to continue this capability. Some Village Market merchandise will be available at the Reunion.

## ***Counterparts member data base.***

At various times we've had questions from members about accessing the "Members" data base on the Members Only section of the Website. Here's some info that should answer most of the questions (or at least suggest some new ones).

▲ To get to the Members Only section of our Website at [www.counterparts.net](http://www.counterparts.net), click on the Vietnam Service Ribbon on the left side of the home page. This will get you to a little box that asks for your **email address** and your **Password**. This is where problems start. If the email address that *Counterparts* database has is out of date or incorrect, this is as far as you'll get until you correct it. Assuming your **email address** is up to date and correct, you then enter your **Password**. This is another problem area. Some of us have forgotten the **Password** originally assigned, others have never gotten a **Password**.

▲ If you encounter any of the problems described, click on the "forgot your Password?" phrase which will take you to a blank email form addressed to the Webmaster, Jim Alkek. Describe the problem, including your correct current **email address**. Jim will respond with a new **Password** and you should be OK (at least until the next time you forget it or change your email address).

▲ Once you have entered a correct **email address** and **Password** you are in the Members Only page of the Website.

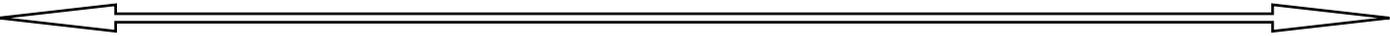


# BULLETIN BOARD



You can search for other members info, look at the list of all members, and change the information listed for you. You cannot change or delete info for other members unless you are one of the *Counterparts* Officers who use and maintain the database. Be careful when changing or updating your data. Some members have accidentally deleted info by hitting the wrong keys or similar computer screwup. Read the instructions and think twice before you hit the keys.

▲ Please report any continued problems to Jim Alkek, the Webmaster. Don't expect our website to be perfect. It's an all volunteer, no advertising operation and we do the best we can.



## **SITREP Editorial Policy and Procedures**

### **Copy:**

- *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 encouraged. If you run across something that might be of interest to Counterparts on the Internet, forward it, and if possible we'll publish it.*
  - *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 or TIFF*
- Letters to the Editor, agreeing or disagreeing with SITREP content or Counterparts matters are also welcome. Open debate is a good way to throw light on an important issue.*

### **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 as content permits, but no less than twice a year. Deadlines for manuscripts and photos are flexible;*
- *Send Submissions To:*

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# The Betrayed, The Neglected

By

*R.J. Del Vecchio*

In late February last year I climbed off a plane in Tan Son Nhut airport to set foot for the first time in 38 years on the soil of Viet Nam. Many Viet vets have gone back to visit in the last 20 years, some to try to heal themselves, to lay ghosts of their past to rest, to reminisce with other vets on a tour, to show their families where they spent the most intense time of their lives, to enjoy the beauty of the country and its many attractions.

But I did not go halfway around the world for any of those reasons. I survived the war perhaps better than many of us who served there, I was older when I went, had studied the country and the conflict for years, was in some ways more prepared for the experience. And I was lucky, I was in battles, saw men die, lost good friends to the enemy, was wounded myself. But I did not have to endure as much as many others did, and carried home less pain from the war than some others.

There was one pain that only began after I left Viet Nam, and that was the shame that grew over the years after 1968. It was then that I saw the slow abandonment of the Republic of Viet Nam to the might of a massive Northern conscript army equipped by the Soviets with mountains of supplies, while the ARVN supplies ran lower and lower as Congress choked off the flow year by year.

Many vets recall the ARVN as not being a good ally, and in truth South Viet Nam, its government, and its military had many problems. There was poor training and leadership in some units, there was corruption in the upper officer corps, there were even VC sympathizers in the ranks, along with drafted men who were not well motivated to fight. But there were also some really good units, which fought hard, like the Vietnamese Rangers that had part of the line at Khe Sanh beside the Marines.

What only a few US vets realize is how much Tet '68 changed that. The violation of the truce and the atrocities the attacking communist forces made it really clear what kind of war they were fighting, and sympathy for the VC dropped like a stone. Most Southerners decided that they really did not want to be taken over by the North. No more Buddhist monks burned themselves up in protest of the war. Enlistments for the Vietnamese military went up threefold, training got better, weapons supply from the US got better, corruption and incompetence declined. It took time, but by 1970 when Vietnamization started, it proved possible for the improved ARVN forces to take over the fight as our units left the country, one by one.

And fight they did. There was a major invasion of the South in '72, nothing remotely guerrilla about it, 200,000 NVA regulars with modern tanks, excellent Russian artillery, and antiaircraft missiles. Horrendous battles went on for months, including a siege of An Loc that was like the Alamo, except even though the city was largely overrun, the South Vietnamese soldiers hung on like bulldogs and eventually won the day. In the end, the NVA divisions retreated back over the DMZ and the border into Laos, having taken an incredible 40% casualties.

But politics in America had undercut support for the war, even the material support we'd promised the South. The ARVN began to run short of spare parts, fuel, medical supplies, and ammunition. They fought on through '73 and '74, with things getting worse month by month. Eventually, what US indecision and weakness had made inevitable did occur, and Saigon fell. With it fell a night of suppression, repression, and vindictiveness as the communists broke every promise to "liberate" the South and offer "reconciliation" to those who had opposed them. Thousands died, hundreds of thousands went to "re-education" camps, other hundreds of thousands went to "New Economic Zones", and the standard of living fell to one of the lowest in all of South East Asia. Hunger was rampant, despair was common, and millions of Vietnamese left the country every way they could, even though the risks of even trying to leave were high, and the risks of the journey included an appreciable chance of death. This was the fault of my own country, which had not kept all its promises to RVN. And I knew that good people, many, many good people, were paying a heavy price for our failure to support them. Since I could do nothing about it, I tried hard for years to not think about it too much.



But last year, I heard the stories about the RVN soldiers who could not leave Viet Nam, as some others were fortunate enough to do. They are marked for their past patriotic service, and suffer various kinds of discrimination that makes life more difficult. And of these, the worst off are the disabled ones, those veterans who suffered major injuries, lost arms, legs, eyes, hearing, and health. They receive no pension, there are few if any jobs for them, their lives are terribly hard. The thought of this suffering, going on for decade after decade under the revengeful Hanoi government, bothered me greatly and I could no longer avoid thinking about it.

So I went to Saigon, where through the help of some Vietnamese immigrants to the US, I made contact with local people there who would help me do a small survey of disabled RVN veterans.

And over several days I met 21 of these men, saw their military papers, their broken bodies, the tiny apartments or shacks they live in, and heard their stories through an interpreter. One man is blind, missing a leg, deaf in one ear, living all alone in a bare concrete room no bigger than the walk-in closet of a nice house in Raleigh, dependent on friends to keep him from starving.

Another lives with a wife and child in a shack he built in an alleyway, where the authorities could throw them out any time, and scrapes out a very bare living doing repairs on the street to motorbike tires.

Still another is missing both legs just below his hips, has one arm partially paralyzed, cannot speak well any more, and lives in a shack with a scrap metal roof on the edge of the river, with his wife and children taking care of him and selling vegetables from the river to support them all.

I gave away all the money I brought to Viet Nam, and sent home and got more money from my family and some Vietnamese friends and gave that away too. We got one man a wheelchair, another a cart so he can sell lottery tickets, arranged some house repairs for a family whose home was flooding all the time. We gave everyone at least 500,000 dong (\$32), which will help them for a little while with food, medicine, maybe some rent. It was not enough, but it was all we could do, and it will help for a while. And the men thanked me, sometimes with tears in their eyes, not only for the money, but as one man (with no legs) said, "We have been forgotten and disgraced in our own country for over 30 years, and now someone comes to see me and try to help. The money is important, we need it badly, but to me it is more important that I am remembered, that somewhere I still have honor."



Those 21 men are just a tiny fraction of all the disabled veterans in the South. Over 2 million men served in the RVN forces, and many thousands of those became disabled. There is no doubt that any search for disabled veterans will find plenty of them, starting around Saigon and then going into the countryside, and into every other city in the South. They are the saddest victims of the war, they and their families have suffered and keep suffering, even more now as they get older and their health declines. I wish I could make the antiwar activists, who were so proud of supporting the North and disrespecting American vets, go and see what they really helped achieve.

I am American and these men are Vietnamese, but we shared in the fight for freedom, and I feel we are related somehow. They are my former allies who are hungry, and sick, and worried every day about how they can go on. I want to help them, and a small charity has been started, called the Vietnam Healing Foundation, to raise some money for them. We will do what I can, and the good news is that a dollar goes a long way in Viet Nam. I will go back again, to find more, and give more help. It will not be enough, but I believe it is an important duty to give something back to these men, the betrayed, the neglected, the forgotten. To make them feel remembered, and recognized for their sacrifice, and to give them another day's food is all so worthwhile that I thank heaven for the chance to do it.

Some have said to me "But what about our brothers right here, the American vets who have problems?". Heaven knows I support them, and want the VA to do as much for all injured and disabled vets as possible. But regardless of how imperfect the VA is, for every American vet just living in this country makes him a thousand times better off than the men I saw in Viet Nam. Sending a few dollars to help those forgotten soldiers will make zero difference to American vets here, but will make an enormous difference to them. Our politicians betrayed the promises made to South Viet Nam, and we cannot fix that. But I can try to make a difference, however tiny, for those men who have been treated so badly for so long.

**NOTE: R.J. Del Vecchio is the co-author (with Bill Laurie) of the new book *Whitewash/Blackwash* reviewed in this issue of *SITREP***

...Ed.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Reviews of Books, new and old, relating to the Southeast Asia experience. Members are encouraged to submit reviews. All reviews will be published as space permits.

**Combat Advisor: How America Won the War and Lost the Peace in Vietnam** John C. Loving, 184 pages, iUniverse Inc., New York [www.iuniverse.com](http://www.iuniverse.com) \$16.95, 184p with photos

Counterparts member John Loving was a *Covan* with the RF in Tay Ninh province 1969-70. He has written a thoughtful and honest account of his journey from commissioning as a 2nd Lt. in 1967 through the end of his tour as an Advisor. *Combat Advisor* does a good job of recreating the day to day rhythm of the war at the village and hamlet level, a war about which most Americans know little, and understand even less. As the author shows, even US forces operating in the same countryside as his RF/PF sometimes had little awareness of the “other war” that flowed around them.

Loving encountered both sacrifice and venality, courage and cowardice in the Vietnamese and in other Americans. Like many of us then, *Truong Uy* Loving was young and idealistic, with little patience for laziness or weak leadership. As his tour progressed, he learned how to motivate his Counterparts and the PF soldiers, and also learned the limitations on what one Advisor can do in one year.

His conclusions about the Advisory effort in Vietnam and his observations on Vietnam and Iraq are balanced and incisive. Not everyone will agree with John Loving’s views, but unlike many contemporary “experts”, his opinions are backed with experience on the ground. A worthwhile read, and a good book to recommend to someone wanting to learn what Advisors did in the Vietnam War.

.....Ken Jacobsen

**Whitewash/Blackwash: Myths of the Viet Nam War** Bill Laurie and R.J. Del Vecchio, 60 pages, available at [TechConsultServ@Juno.com](mailto:TechConsultServ@Juno.com) \$9.95

The preface to *Whitewash/Blackwash*, written by former Senator, and former POW RADM Jeremiah Denton, notes that this book begins to counter the historical atrocity “which is the lack of truth about the facts and significance of the Vietnam War era.” The authors do not attempt to present a complete account of the war in this compact work, but rather to focus on those aspects of the war that have been most grotesquely distorted by academic subjectivity and a news media that became progressively more biased as the war went on.

Laurie and Del Vecchio’s technique is to examine 16 common myths about the war, then refute those myths by presenting historical fact. It’s an effective technique that highlights the weaknesses of many of the popular “Mythic” beliefs about the war by placing them side by side with the facts.

The authors intention was to produce a work that was brief and accessible enough to be used at the high school level. This goal inevitably limits the amount of space available for detailed examination of some of the complex questions raised by the war. For those who want to pursue various topics in more detail however, the book offers an excellent annotated reading list. We can only hope that this valuable work does indeed find its way into some classrooms across the country.

.....Ken Jacobsen

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