



COUNTERPARTS

TƯƠNG HỮU ĐÔNG NAM A

SITREP

Volume XI

Issue 2

Winter 2009/2010

2010 Reunion will be in Washington, D.C. April 22-25

Our 2010 Reunion will be held Thursday, April 22, 2010 through Sunday, April 25 at the *Embassy Suites, Dulles Airport* in Herndon, VA. www.dullesairport.embassysuites.com

Bob Boyke has volunteered to be Reunion Coordinator, and has already been busy arranging events in the Washington area. The Embassy Suites is offering us rooms at a special rate of \$89.00, which includes free Breakfast, free drinks each afternoon, and free transportation to and from Dulles Airport. Bob has also arranged for the hotel to provide us with a Hospitality Suite at no charge.

Tentative Schedule

Thursday April 22: Check in. Hospitality Suite opens. Free drink happy hour at 0530-1900 in atrium lobby. Drinks, pizza after in Hospitality suite.

Friday, April 23 Breakfast 0630-0930 atrium restaurant. Bus departs for DC 1000. Visits to the Wall, Mall, Arlington other sites. Lunch at Little Saigon restaurant, Arlington, VA. Return for downtime. Happy hour in atrium. Dinner at Red, Hot, and Blue next to hotel or on your own someplace nearby in shopping center.

Saturday, April 24 Breakfast 0630-930. Business meeting 1000-1200. Lunch. Visit Smithsonian Air and Space Annex at Dulles Airport. Option: Independent time to visit friends in the area. Shopping at Kohls or movies nearby. Banquet at 1900-2100. Adjourn to Hospitality suite for BS and war stories. Group photo.

Sunday, April 25 Breakfast 0630-0930. Check-out/ Hotel Bus to airport for fly ins.

**For Reservations and additional information
see page four of this issue of SITREP**

Counterparts Team Leads Iraq Advisor Symposium At Ft Benning

By

Ken Jacobsen

In August, a team of *Counterparts* members was joined by one of our most distinguished former RVNAF Counterparts, LTC Tran Ngoc "Harry" Hue to conduct an "Advisors Symposium" for members of the Army's 3rd Brigade, 3rd Division, preparing for deployment to Iraq as Combat Advisors.



L to R: Ken Jacobsen, Rich Webster, John Loving, Max Lund, Tran Ngoc "Harry" Hue, Maj. Robert Boone, Jim Coolican, In chair, Pappy Hicks

The event had its beginning in a phone call from Maj. Robert Boone, the Training Officer for the 3rd Brigade's S-TT (Stability Transition Team), in training for Deployment. Maj. Boone had read *Counterparts* member John Loving's book *Combat Advisor* and had already spoken with John, and with *Counterpart* Jim Willbanks, who is Director of the Dept. of Military History at the Army C&GS College.

We agreed on the idea of forming a team of former Advisors and a former ARVN Counterparts to conduct a Symposium for the 3rd Brigade officers at Ft. Benning. My email call for participants quickly produced more than 50 volunteers, all well qualified for the mission. At Maj. Boone's request, the final selectees were chosen to represent a spectrum of Vietnam Advisory experience that spanned the war from the early '60s to the fall of Saigon.

(continued on page Five)



COUNTERPARTS SITREP

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Commander

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Commander's Corner

The opening year of a new decade finds *Counterparts* strong and active. John Haseman, our new membership director has signed on a number of new *Counterparts*, and equally important, has begun an active campaign to collect back dues from the membership. This latter effort is especially important now, since we have just committed to our second "Counterparts Scholar", Romas Phanna.

Counterparts members Max Lund, Rich Webster and Ken Forrester have been back to SEA and have continued their work in helping and defending our former comrades and allies. Through organizations like *Cambodia Corps*, *Vietnam Vets With A Mission*, *Vinh Son Orphanage* and *Save the Montagnard People (STMP)*, we have been able to accomplish a lot.

Our participation in the "Advisors Symposium" at Ft. Benning gave us a long sought opportunity to share and pass on our hard won experience as *Co-vans* to today's generation of Advisors. Events in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places all over the world have proven again that there is a perennial need for the unique sort of military expertise and outlook that the Advisor brings to the field. Human nature being eternally fallible, we've had to learn Vietnam's Advisory lessons again in Iraq and Afghanistan. Hopefully, *Counterparts'* contribution has played a small part in making that job easier.

It was a particular honor for me to meet LTC Tran Ngoc "Harry" Hue, an American and Vietnamese hero in the deepest sense of the word. Anyone who has ever doubted the meaning of the Advisor's role or the bond between comrades needs only to spend a few hours with a man like Harry to renew their faith. (For more info on Harry's story see Book Reviews, page 11)

Although our April Reunion in Minneapolis produced no volunteers to host the 2010 event, one member, Bob Boyke, has stepped up and taken on the job of planning our next Reunion in the **Washington D.C.** area. *Counterparts* has many members within moderate traveling distance from D.C. so we're hoping for an excellent turnout in April. The nation's capital has a special significance for we veterans. It contains some of the most deeply important shrines of our nation's history and it's military monuments are a powerful testimony to the sacrifice of those who have gone before and to the ideals which we ourselves have all fought to defend.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Dick Roller
Michael S. Magill
Tim Davenport
William A. Ickles

See you all at the 2010 Reunion

..... Ken Jacobsen

COUNTERPARTS NEW MONTAGNARD SCHOLAR-2009

By

Rich Webster

For the last four years, COUNTERPARTS has sponsored Broy Makara, a Phnong Montagnard student from Cambodia's Mondulakiri Province in his studies at the Veterinary College in Phnom Penh. This year Broy graduated and has taken a job in Mondulakiri. Broy will provide veterinary services for ELIE (Elephants Livelihood Initiative Environment www.elie-cambodia.org) an NGO run by an Englishman devoted to saving the Asian elephant and the environment in Eastern Cambodia. COUNTERPARTS members can be proud that their membership dues have gone to this effort. The impact of Broy's service to the ethnic minority Phnong will extend decades into the future.

Our new Montagnard scholar is Romas Phanna, a 19 year-old Jarai student from Oyadau district in Ratanakiri Province, Cambodia. Romas, whose mother is a farmer, will study information technology at SETC university in Phnom Penh and will stay at the student center operated by Cambodia Corps Inc. Cost of the scholarship for one year is 2000 dollars which includes tuition, room, board, and transportation.

Ratanakiri is the province in the northeast of Cambodia that borders Laos and Vietnam and is where Pol Pot and the Khmer rouge began their revolution in the early 1960s. I traveled to Ban Lung the capitol of Ratanakiri last spring to look for Montagnard students who were going to the high school there. There were only 10 Montagnard students in the high school program in the whole province in Grade twelve and only two passed their graduation exams. The way of life is changing in Ratanakiri with the building of a new paved highway by the Vietnamese that will provide direct access into Vietnam from the Central Highlands. The Montagnard land there is being ravaged and stolen by outsider big business and crooked Cambodian politicians aligned with the military and police. Soon, the Vietnamese communists who control the business in Vietnam will begin to exploit the Montagnard land in Eastern Cambodia as they have done in the Central Highlands.

Counterparts member Max Lund and his wife have agreed to sponsor the other Jarai high school graduate, Sev Pak, who will study veterinarian medicine in Phnom Penh. Max has stated that he feels strongly about sponsoring a Jarai student to college considering his background in Vietnam working with the Jarai for two years in the Central Highlands. Max and other members of his CHIO RIO advisory staff have been frequent contributors to our scholarship in the past.

The student that I have sponsored for four years, Leang Sochean, has graduated from law school and he also has gone to work for ELIE in Mondulakiri.

All this has been made possible by Cambodia Corps, Inc., (CCI) <http://www.cambodiacorps.org> is run by retired Green Beret Tommy Daniels who is a member of COUNTERPARTS. To DATE, 33 Montagnard kids have started college with 13 graduating and there are presently 20 students in college. Now CCI is turning its focus to Ratanakiri where several hundred thousand Montagnards live and only a handful have high school educations and none have a college degree. An educated leadership is the only hope for the future of the ethnic minorities in Eastern Cambodia.

Rich Webster

November 24, 2009



Your generous support has raised \$92,000 so far in 2009! The Vinh Son children express their warmest THANKS and wish you SEASON'S GREETINGS!

DON'T WAIT! MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS NOW

2010 Counterparts Reunion
April 22-25, 2010

Embassy Suites Dulles Airport Herndon, VA

13341 Woodlawn Park Drive

Herndon, VA 20171

703-464-5134 Fax: 703-464-4699

Email: Amanda.Sellman@[Hilton.com](mailto:Amanda.Sellman@Hilton.com)

Special Rate available under "COUNTERPARTS" Reservation code

For additional information contact Bob Boyke, 2010 Reunion Coordinator, Robert Boyke boyke@aol.com, Tel 703 742 7983

Advisor Symposium *(continued from Page One)*

We were joined by John Loving and Jim Willbanks. Tran Ngoc "Harry" Hue was an especially valuable addition to the team. Harry is a former ARVN LTC who was *Counterparts* member Jim Coolican's Counterpart and a true hero of the Vietnam War who earned the US Silver Star and was personally decorated by Gen. Creighton Abrams. (A review of *Vietnam's Forgotten Army*, which tells LTC Hue's story, is in this issue of SITREP)

The Symposium itself was held in a conference room at Ft. Benning's new Infantry Museum. Our presentation began with a summary of the *Counterparts* organization and its goals, followed by introduction of the team members. Each introduction was accompanied by a slide of the *member* "in action" in Vietnam. Harry Hue led off with a moving tribute to America, and his former US Advisors, who had made his emigration to the US possible. He then provided insights into the Advisory experience from the perspective of the "Advisee". LTC Hue emphasized the importance of Understanding the customs and language of the local people, knowing your counterpart's strengths and weaknesses, and recognizing that your counterpart has the same enemy and the same goals as you. "Most importantly" he noted "I prefer to have a friend whose willing to help me rather than a commander who orders me to do this or that."

Hue's comments were followed by short presentations by each member of the *Counterparts* team, in order of the dates of their in-country experience. The floor was then opened to a general discussion and Question and Answer session.

After the panel discussion, we were treated to a personalized tour of the new Infantry Museum. The day was capped by Dinner at the museum with the Transition Training Team Officers, which provided another opportunity for discussion and exchange of information.

The 3rd I.D. 3rd Brigade's last deployed to Iraq in 2007. Their upcoming deployment however will be focussed on training and assisting the Iraqi Army and police. As Maj. Boone described it "the whole idea is to work ourselves out of a job." The Brigade will deploy as a unit tasked with Advisory efforts as their primary mission, a significant change from advisory organization in the Vietnam War and in the early years of the Iraqi war. The designation as the "Third Heavy Brigade Combat Team Stability Transition Team" describes this new role.

Team Chief LTC Greg. McAfee thanked *Counterparts* members for their contribution, and each member of the team was presented with a Letter of Appreciation by Maj. Boone.

We were proud to have the opportunity to make even a small contribution to defeating today's enemies, just as we remain proud to have been part of an effort to help the people of Vietnam to defend their small nation.

Subsequent to the Ft. Benning Symposium we were contacted via email by LTC Curtis, a Battalion Commander from the 162nd Brigade at Ft. Polk, LA. We offered our services in September and there does appear to be interest in a follow-on event. The determining factor at publication time is Army funding. If funds become available and another event is approved we



The Counterparts presentation included photos of members "in action" as Advisors and fighters in Vietnam



Harry Hue and Rich Webster share their experiences with 3rd Brigade Officers during Dinner at the Infantry Museum

hope to be able to involve some of the many volunteers who could not participate in the Ft. Benning event.



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Lg-XXL)

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Please send orders prepaid (include a \$6.00 shipping charge) with a US Bank Check or Money order payable to:

**Frank Norwood
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Dallas TX 75243**

For more information please call 214-575-5980

NOTE CHANGE TO SHIPPING CHARGE!

BULLETIN BOARD

A Thank You to Vietnam Vets from a Marine in Iraq

"A guy gets time to think over here and I was thinking about all the support we get from home. Sometimes it's overwhelming. We get care packages at times faster than we can use them. There are boxes and boxes of toiletries and snacks lining the center of every tent; the generosity has been amazing. So, I was pondering the question: "Why do we have so much support?"

"In my opinion, it came down to one thing: Vietnam. I think we learned a lesson, as a nation, that no matter what, you have to support the troops who are on the line, who are risking everything. We treated them so poorly back then. When they returned was even worse. The stories are nightmarish of what our returning warriors were subjected to. It is a national scar, a blemish on our country, an embarrassment to all of us"

"After Vietnam, it had time to sink in. The guilt in our collective consciousness grew. It shamed us. However, we learned from our mistake."

"Somewhere during the late 1970s and into the 80's, we realized that we can't treat our warriors that way. So, starting during the Gulf War, when the first real opportunity arose to stand up and support the troops, we did. We did it to support our friends and family going off to war. But we also did it to right the wrongs from the Vietnam era. We treated our troops like the heroes they were, acknowledged and celebrated their sacrifice, and rejoiced at their homecoming instead of spitting on them."

"And that support continues today for those of us in Iraq. Our country knows that it must support us and it does. The lesson was learned in Vietnam and we are better because of it."

"Everyone who has gone before is a hero. They are celebrated in my heart. I think admirably of all those who have gone before me. From those who fought to establish this country in the late 1770s to those I serve with here in Iraq. They have all sacrificed to ensure our freedom. But when I get back, I'm going to make it a personal mission to specifically thank every Vietnam Vet I encounter for their sacrifice. Because if nothing else good came from that terrible war, one thing did. It was the lesson learned on how we treat our warriors. We as a country learned from our mistake and now treat our warriors as heroes, as we should"

"I am the beneficiary of their sacrifice. Not only for the freedom they, like veterans from other wars, ensured, but for how well our country now treats my fellow Marines and I. We are the beneficiaries of their sacrifice."



A Return to Vietnam

U.S. Navy CDR. Hung Ba Le is seen in front of his ship USS LASSEN, off the Tien Sa Port in Danang, Vietnam, Saturday, November 7, 2009. When the Republic of Vietnam was defeated in 1975, Hung Ba Le's family fled his homeland in a fishing trawler crammed with 400 other refugees. He was five at the time. Thirty-four years later, he made a proud homecoming as the commander of a U.S. Navy destroyer. (AP Photo/Chitose Suzuki)



BULLETIN BOARD

MEMBERS IN MEMORIAM

WO 2 Glenn Scally RA Inf

(AATTV 09 JUN 65 - 10 Jan 66 & 3 RAR 12 Feb 71 - 06 Oct 71): November 15, 2009

COL Lewis L. Millett, Sr. (Ret).

Korean War Medal of Honor Recipient: November 14, 2009.

Keith Francis (Budda) Mc Donald WO2 RA Inf

(AATTV AUG 64 - JUN 65, HQ 1 ATF NOV 67 - OCT) passed away December 2009. "He was great soldier, a good mate and a loyal and admired Team member.

1stSG Paul Lyzek. Paul served on Adv. Team 87, and was attached to the 4th Battalion, 43rd Regt, 18th ARVN Inf. Div in Xuanloc: 20 September 2009, a victim of Agent Orange

Village Market end of Year Report

Submitted by Frank Norwood, Quartermaster. January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2009

CASH BALANCE FORWARD	\$309.58
INCOME FROM SALES	\$605.
EXPENSES FROM SHIPPING/POSTAGE	\$137.18
NET FOR YEAR	\$467.82
TOTAL WORTH OF VILLAGE MARKET DECEMBER 31, 2009	\$777.40
DISPOSITION OF FUNDS:	\$777.40
TRANSFER TO JC FISHER	\$465.00
CASH ON HAND IN QUARTERMASTERS WORKING FUND	\$312.40

(This does not include value of the inventory on hand. Some items ,the black tee shirts, are becoming unsalable because of age and consideration should be given to disposing of these shirts.)



BULLETIN BOARD

It's time to remind everyone that annual dues will be due soon. Traditionally, Counterparts annual dues become due at Tet. Therefore, 2010 dues are "due" on or about 14 February 2010.

We have done a fairly tight review of the data base and find that many members did not pay dues for 2009 and 2008. We are not going to dun anybody for back dues – we would rather have you remain with Counterparts and become "active" with payment of your 2010 dues. Of course, if anybody wants to 'fess up and send a few extra dollars for past dues, we'll be happy to accept!

Annual dues are \$25.00. Checks should be made payable to "Counterparts" and mailed to the membership chairman:

**John B. Haseman
555 West Saddle Drive
Grand Junction, CO 81507**

John will update the files and send the checks on to J.C. Fischer for deposit to Counterparts account.

Just to remind – a significant part of your dues goes to support our several efforts to assist young students in Southeast Asia as well as other support of our former counterparts in need overseas. So your dues payments do good work for the people we worked with so many years ago.

Thanks for your continued membership and support of Counterparts. And don't forget to register for our 2010 reunion!



A Note from The XO/Adjutant

I was contacted recently by a local judge who served in Vietnam. He was hearing the case of a man who claimed his problems were caused by his having been a POW in Vietnam. The judge asked if I could find out if the man really had been a POW. It turns out he was not a POW nor had he been in Vietnam. There have been several instances in our area of people who have made false claims to be ex-POW's and or Nam Vets with Awards & Decorations. Do you know of any one this making suspicious claims like this?

An organization known as the P.O.W. NETWORK out of Branson, Mo has taken up the mission of exposing these frauds You can contact **Chuck or Mary Schantag** at info@pownetwork.org or URL www.pownetwork.org. tel. 417-336-4232 or write 102 Vixen Circle Unit C, Branson, MO 65616. They have exposed over 3,000 frauds since they began this quest and have the knowledge and means to verify the status of those making claims of P.O.W. or Veterans status. They may also be contacted at PO Box 68, Skidmore, MO 64487-0068, phone 660 928 3304 or FAX 660-928-3303. They do pursue these phonies and expose them for what they are. If you suspect you have a phony in your area, contact them.

I recently attended an Awards Ceremony for a friend who served in Vietnam and was Service Connected for Agent Orange. He was presented with The Order of the Silver Rose. The mission of this organization is to recognize the Courage, Heroism, and contributions of American service personnel found to have been exposed to Agent Orange Dioxins and chemicals in Vietnam and other places across the globe who are currently receiving compensation for these chemical and biological illnesses and deaths but are receiving NO Honors or Recognition for their sacrifices. We are losing Vietnam veterans due to Agent Orange related cancers and sicknesses at the rate of 300 a day nor more. If you were exposed to Agent Orange or know of a Veteran who was exposed to Agent Orange and is/are Service Connected you can get more information about The Order of the Silver Rose thru GOOGLE.

Holiday Greetings from Iraq Advisor

(The following greeting was emailed to us by MAJ Robert Boone, who arranged and hosted the Advisory Symposium at Ft. Benning. He is now on station in Iraq)

“Gentlemen,

I hope this email finds you all doing well and that you both had a wonderful Christmas and Happy New Year. I am finally settled in on the border of Iraq and Iran where I am advising the Department of Border Enforcement Commando Battalion. When I met with my counterpart I asked him what is the selection criteria for becoming a Commando. His response was simple, “Commandos are just infantrymen who know more, and there is no selection criterion.” I also advise the Region Operations Officer. It is funny to think all the cultural training I went through and that it is suppose to take a long time to get an Iraqi to talk business, within 10 minutes of my introduction to he was talking business.

I think we as an army forget that we have been here for almost 6 years now and not only do we understand the Iraqi culture, the Iraqis understand ours. Anyway I just wanted to give you a short little note to let you know how things are going thus far. We all very much enjoyed your visit at Ft. Benning.

Warmest Regards,

Major Rob Boone
STT OPS Cell
Border Commando Advisor
Wasit, Iraq”

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.

Forsaken Warriors Robert L. Tonsetic. Havertown PA Casemate Publishing; 2009 .256pp, \$32.95

The author served as a US Army advisor during 1970–71. It was the period when US will to prosecute the war had slipped, and transferring responsibility to the South Vietnamese was the only remaining hope for victory. The ARVN Rangers (BDQ) and Airborne units that the author advised spearheaded several campaigns in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos as US combat units withdrew. Often outnumbered and outgunned, these elite units fought Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units in some of the most difficult terrain in Southeast Asia.

The role of US advisory teams is well described. With little support from higher headquarters, these teams accompanied the Vietnamese units on highly dangerous combat operations over which they had no command or control authority. When US advisors were restricted from accompanying South Vietnamese forces on cross-border operations in Cambodia and especially Laos, the South Vietnamese forces were badly mauled, raising concerns about their readiness and training and their ability to operate without their US advisors. As a result, a major effort was placed on training these forces while the clock continued to run on the US withdrawal. As most former Advisors can attest, the true ability of the RVNAF to carry on the war without major US involvement was never really tested. The sudden withdrawal of promised US resupply and logistic support left the Republic of Vietnam without ammunition, spare parts, and fuel to operate their US supplied equipment. Once that support was denied, the defeat of the RVNAF became inevitable, regardless of the Vietnamese' courage or combat skill.

Col. Gordon Keiser, USMC (Ret.), in reviewing this book for the US Naval Institute *Proceedings* observed "Having served as an advisor to both Vietnamese Ranger and Marine Battalions, I was especially taken by *Forsaken Warriors* account of the gratification and frustration that faced advisors some 38 years ago. Soldiers and Marines training for Advisory duty in Iraq or Afghanistan would do well to read this excellent work."

Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN Andrew Wiest. New York University Press; 2008. 347pp. The history of The Republic of Vietnam's Army mirrors the tragedy and underlines the many misconceptions that still pervade our view of the war. This book offers rare insight into the ARVN as it really was, told through the stories of two extraordinary officers, both exemplary leaders, both heroes, both dedicated to their service, but who were lead to remarkably different fates. Phan Van Dinh and Tran Ngoc Hue both grew up in the Hue area and both came from Catholic nationalist families that, like so many other Vietnamese families in the last years of the French Colonial period, were opposed to both the French and the Viet Minh.

The war was an early intruder in the lives of Both Dinh and Hue. One of Dinh's brothers, a Viet Minh, was killed shortly after the fall of DienbienPhu in 1954; Hue saw the Viet Minh bury captured Vietnamese soldiers alive had a cousin raped by French soldiers. These experiences and the two young men's sense of family and duty forged a deep commitment to the young Republic of Vietnam. Both Dinh and Hue followed family tradition and became officers in the new ARVN and their careers moved along remarkably parallel lines. At various times they both commanded the elite *Hoc Bao* quick reaction force of the 1st ARVN Division. Both distinguished themselves in the Battle for the Hue Citadel during the '68 Tet Offensive; Dinh commanded the ARVN Battalion that raised the RVN flag over the Citadel and Hue's *Hoc Bao* was the lead ARVN unit in the Citadel's recapture, earning him a US Silver Star, and his Counterpart, Jim Coolican, a Navy Cross.

As the war continued, both Dinh and Hue continued to distinguish themselves in combat and as leaders. The changing character of the war brought them both into positions of more importance and as the US presence decreased and "Vietnamization" came into force they, like the RVNAF as a whole, were faced with new tests and challenges. In early 1971, Hue led his Battalion in Operation Lam Son 719, the failed ARVN incursion into Laos. Hue's unit was under heavy attack and he was badly wounded. He refused MEDEVAC and insisted that his men leave him, and save themselves. On March 20, 1971, he was captured and his long imprisonment began. Dinh was spared in 1971, but in the 1972 NVA Easter Offensive his Regiment was surrounded at Camp Carroll, with little hope of relief. Dinh then made a decision that caused his and Hue's lives so closely paralleled until then, to diverge forever. He Surrendered his unit and within a month, had defected to the Communist side.

In the end, Hue's steadfast courage was rewarded. After twelve years in the Brutal "Reeducation Camps", he was released in 1983. In November 1991, though the tireless efforts of his former Counterpart, John Wiseman, Tran Ngoc Hue and his family, boarded a plane for the United States and began the first step of a journey to become a US Citizen. In 1992 his sacrifice for the Republic of Vietnam was recognized by the Commandant of the US Marine Corps, who presented him with the Bronze Star and the Silver Star he had won during the Tet Offensive of 1968.

Pham Van Dinh served the Communist government in various capacities until the '90s. Author John Weist's impression of Dinh when he interviewed him for the book was that the former ARVN hero "...could find true peace in neither a transformed Vietnam or the United States."

... Ken Jacobsen

WINNING COUNTERINSURGENCY WITH A TENNIS SHOE ARMY

THE POPULAR FORCE PLATOONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

By

Rich Webster

The winner of a guerilla war is the force that can either protect the villagers or terrorize them. In South Vietnam that winning force was the local militias that evolved into the Popular Force Platoons, a poorly paid tennis shoe wearing army that would eventually defeat what was left of the Viet Cong guerillas after their failed 1968 Tet Offensive. They, along with their big brothers, the Regional Force Companies, administered the coup-de grace to what was considered the best guerilla force in the world, the Viet Cong. The Popular Forces were a lightly equipped local force platoon size militia that lived in or near the villages with their families and were partnered with American Five-man Mobile Advisory teams. Created in the fall of 1968 under the general mobilization act where every able-bodied male in South Vietnam was drafted into the military, the PF's tour of duty would last until the end of the war.

By 1969 there were 3000 PF (30 member) platoons under the control of the village and district chiefs providing 24-hour protection to the peasants. Their bigger brothers, the 800 Regional Force (100 member) Companies were under the operational control of the Province Chiefs. By 1973, there were 8,186 PF platoons and 1,810 RF companies. The "Ruff Puffs" were the unsung heroes of the Vietnam War, yet few articles have been written about them

The PF soldier's salary was less than 30 US dollars a month and it included a bag of rice and a measure of salt on which to survive. The PF soldiers had one army green uniform, the one they wore. The luckiest PF's were issued black "BATA" boots, a black sneaker-like canvas boot with rubber soles. During the rainy season in the Mekong Delta, it was common to see the PFs wearing their shower thongs and carrying their canvas boots, tied together by the laces around their necks. Militia were initially equipped with obsolete US weapons: the M1 rifle, M2 carbine, the BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle), and the 30 caliber machine gun. Until they received the M 16 rifle in 1969 the RF/PFs were outgunned the Viet Cong with their AK 47 rifles.

The 305 Mobile Advisor Teams partnering with the "Ruff Puffs" (405 teams by 1971) were the ultimate in the decentralization of command. Decision making was placed in the hands of lieutenants and sergeants along with their Vietnamese counterparts at the village level. Many former advisors describe this unique tactical situation for a front line soldier in that, "They fought their own war," mostly unencumbered by the rear echelon. With 1000s of unrecorded ambushes and small battles, they took the night away from the Viet Cong guerillas and stalked them in areas that were once their safe havens. Although the RF/PF received only 2 to 4 per cent of the war budget in Vietnam, they accounted for 30 per cent of the VC/NVA casualties and provided the village security necessary to win the guerilla war.

Only local soldiers and militias like the RF/PF with instant intelligence from the people can protect the villagers from the terror of the guerilla who strikes at night, or preempt the planting of IED's by enemy forces. The only tennis shoe army I see in Afghanistan now is the Taliban, a lightly equipped force carrying AK 47's and RPG's (rifle propelled grenades) who strike in the middle of the night and then disappear. Their footwear is the Nike jogging shoe. In some of the Provinces of Afghanistan the Taliban have their own shadow government-Province Chiefs, District Chiefs, and local enforcers who execute people on the spot, operating like the Vietnamese Communists and their shadow government referred to as the Viet Cong Infrastructure.

President Obama was wrong in his recent address to the Nation when he said that America could not win the Vietnam War because it was a popular uprising of the people. The people of Vietnam did not ally themselves with the Vietnamese communists; they ran in fear from them when they could. US MAT teams partnered with the RF/PF won the war in the villages from 1969 through 1972 in Vietnam. After the failed Viet Cong 1968 TET Offensive, the "Ruff Puffs" were winning the counterinsurgency war in thousands of small unreported battles and ambushes that wrested control of the villages back from the Viet Cong and eliminated them as any kind of effective fighting force. The ARVN with American Air Support defeated the North Vietnamese in the 1972 Easter offensive.

Tennis Shoe Army (from Page 11)

Ultimately the war was lost when the US congress cut off all aid to The Republic of Vietnam. In 1975 South Vietnam was overrun by a Russian/Chinese funded 21-division size blitzkrieg from North Vietnam. Viet Cong guerillas and a popular uprising of the people (which never happened) had nothing to do with winning the Vietnam War, except to provide a false picture to the peace movement in America and the reporting media who barely scratched the surface of what was really going on in the villages.

The lesson to US war planners should be that the Vietnam War was lost, not because of the war the US military fought there, but from a lack of commitment by the United States. Defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory; even the North Vietnamese war planners thought they had lost the war after their failed 1972 offensive. The communist leaders also concluded that the Vietnamization/Pacification program administered by the CORDS (Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support) program had eliminated their control over the people in the southern villages.

In the fall of 1969 in Di An, South Vietnam, William Colby, the second director of CORDS, offered these words of wisdom to my graduating Advisor Class, "We can't expect to win this guerilla war by allowing the peasants of Vietnam to be controlled by the Viet Cong in the villages during the night-time hours." Colby said up to that time in the war, America war planners had been fighting a WWII/Korean war strategy and they needed to study the revolutionary total war doctrine advocated by Mao Xe Dong and Ho Chi Minh. The ARVN Military was being trained as a replica of the American Army. The CORDS approach to counterinsurgency changed that in Vietnam in late 1968.

* * *

We need militias in Afghanistan to partner with small advisor teams in the villages to combat the Taliban terrorists at the "Tennis shoe" level. Can our high-tech army defeat the lightly equipped Taliban insurgent roaming the hills and mountains of Afghanistan? And what kind of force will America leave behind to carry on the battle against the Taliban terrorists, since our President has set a time line on our withdrawal in 2011?

John Paul Vann's message to my advisor class in Vietnam in November of 1968 was, "The only way to win a guerilla war, was to kill the guerrilla with a rifle up close because then you know who you are killing. This eliminates the killing of a civilian. First we must train the locals, then assist the local soldiers in that mission, until they can operate on their own which leads to the defeat of the enemy and the winning of the war. Then we can come home."

In the end, the outcome of the Afghan war will depend upon who controls the power in the villages and districts far removed from the walled compounds in the rear. Who can protect the Afghan civilian 24 hours a day in remote villages long after America withdraws and where is the "tennis shoe" force to do it even now? It will take a soldier on the ground aligned with a local force militia lightly equipped like the army Popular Forces in Vietnam to win the day.

I still grieve today, along with all advisors who belong to our COUNTERPARTS organization, for the betrayal of our Vietnamese allies, the Regional Forces/Popular Forces. These men put their lives on the line for their country and won the guerilla war only to be betrayed and forgotten by history as if they had never lived. These soldiers and their families and grandchildren are still prevented from getting any kind of job or services by the Vietnamese Communist party that owns and controls everything in Vietnam. Many of our South Vietnamese comrades, the leaders of the RF and PF, were executed by the Northern conquerors after the war and countless others died in the concentration camps there. This too should be a considered factor in the present day Afghanistan War. A sad illustration of what happens when you desert friends who have given their allegiance to you.

December, 2009

REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT CADRE

The Antidote to the Viet Cong

By

Dick Roller

(New Counterparts member, Major Dick Roller, spent his second tour of duty in Vietnam assigned to MACV Team 96 in charge of the RD Cadre teams in IV CORPS from Nov 68-July 1970 where he served with the legendary John Paul Vann. From MACV, Dick was detailed to the Agency (OSA) and subsequently to CORDS when it took over the RD program. To blend in with other civilians and to avoid curfew restrictions, he was required to dress in civilian clothing.)

“It was my job to run around with the 59-Man RD Cadre Teams,” says Roller. “The CIA was paying for the program and wanted assurance the Cadres were out in the villages where they were assigned and in the numbers required. I spent nights out on the ground in most of the provinces west of the Bassac River. I had to sleep on the ground, eat rice and fish, and pull ambush duty with my little brothers dressed in black pajamas.”

“I had a Vietnamese translator with me but otherwise I was operating alone and without a radio. I depended entirely on the Cadre for my security and communication with their small, H-1 hand-held radios. I eventually ended up with the responsibility for all the RD teams in all the 16 Delta Provinces.”

The idea for the RD program came from a former Viet Minh officer, Major Nguyen Ben, who ran the training program for the Cadres in Vung Tau. The teams were composed of 59 men wearing black pajamas who would go back to the villages wearing the peasants garb and become agents of social change in the villages trying to win the peasants back to the GVN side. Their primary job was to overcome the lack of credibility of the South Vietnamese government by repairing roads, digging wells, building bridges, providing village security, and stamping out corruption.

Dick relates this most memorable experience with a Cadre Team, “I visited a team at the tip of the Ca Mau Peninsula that had been in place for several months. Ca Mau was known as ‘the end of nowhere.’ For the Vietnamese assigned there constituted a punishment. The team leader was local by birth and raised by relatives when his parents had been killed by the Viet Minh when he was an infant. These relatives lived in the Province capital where he received a high school level education. This leader was well motivated to do the best he could for his villagers and ran a well-disciplined team.”

“I met farmers that had returned from refugee status to reclaim their rice paddies, till their garden plots and manage their fruit trees. They spent their days working their farms, while spending nights in the village center where the Cadre provided security. Their families had also returned to live in the village as well. While the neighborhood VC/VCI were still somewhat active, they were largely ineffective. A few Cadre rifle shots launched in their direction, sent the local VC on their way.”

How successful was the pacification/Vietnamization program in the Delta? “Except for a few hard-core areas near the Cambodian border, the war in the Mekong Delta was won in Mar-May 1969,” says Dick. “Once the Popular Force platoons were trained, and the villagers organized into an armed PSDF (People’s Self Defense Force), the local VC were put out of business.”

The American media missed what the war was about in the villages. Most Advisors in COUNTERPARTS have this similar experience that Dick relates about his counterpart on his first tour beginning in June 1966. He was the District Senior Advisor in Nhon Trach District, Bien Hoa Province until Nov 1966, then heading to Province level as the S4 until his DEROS on June 67.

“My counterpart was the District Chief, a Dai Uy Trong, who was in his mid fifties. He was a grandfatherly type of person, who had joined the Vietnamese Army as a teenager to fight the Japanese in WWII when they invaded Vietnam. He had been trained by the French, and spoke French fluently. He had fought against the Viet Minh, hated the communists and wanted to see his homeland free of the agony of war. He had little formal education, and wasn’t part of the serf-serving political elite. His sons were PF troopers that lived in the village neighboring our compound. And he had beaucoup grandchildren running around all over the place. The village and hamlet chiefs would readily seek his counsel. On our many trips to the hamlets and villages, I never once witnessed anyone approach him with anything that resembled fear; respect, but not fear. The children would freely gather around him, while he laughingly told them stories they found entertaining.”

“After I was replaced, and had moved to Province, he was killed by local VC in a village where we had spent several RONS together. My replacement was a coward and never left the safety of the district compound. If I had been by his side, we would have had the additional firepower of three Americans, plus the M-79 grenade launcher and a radio carried by our Vietnamese house boys to call for fire support. This addition would have been sufficient to overcome what the local VC could muster. He was a noble person and his loss still causes me grief.”

Revolutionary Cadre

Dick offers this honest assessment of the RD teams. “Some were good, some bad, and many at best were marginal. At their worst, they were rifles on the ground and motivated by self protection, they would fire at the VC. Even the less effective teams bought the GVN the time necessary to recruit and train RF/PF troops. They were instrumental in organizing, arming and training hamlet and village PSDF. Many of the Cadre were city street wise and had joined to avoid being drafted into the ARVN. Many were bored and out of place being stuck out in the countryside.”

The Vung Tau training center was started by the Agency for the Phoenix, Census Grievance, and RD Cadre teams. Once these programs were firmly underway, USAID and other civilian agencies chimed in and funded a major expansion of facilities and programs. As more of the countryside came under the GVN control and the need for trained personnel to secure/pacify/govern the newly secured territory became a never ending demand. The RD Cadre eventually grew to 47,000 members-750 teams with 59 men each.

“The RD Cadre deserve a measure of credit for living outside-the wire providing hamlet and village security so that other pacification programs could be initiated,” says Dick. “The Cadre teams were assigned to a newly secured village for a 6-month period. One of their tasks was to recruit PF and secure the area while the PFs were away for their basic training.”

Dick talks about the overall Vietnamese and US strategy. “At the time US units were to operate in VC/NVA controlled areas long enough to destroy or drive out unit-size enemy opposition. Then an ARVN division or elements of one would take-up residence to keep large enemy units from returning to the area. An RF company and an RD Cadre team would be assigned to provide the in-close and continuous security for the hamlets making up the village where they operated. Once PF platoons and PSDF elements were trained and armed, the RFs and Cadres would move on to another contested village.”

“To the best of my knowledge, the PF platoons received all of their training at a province level training center. By law, once their training was completed and they returned home, they couldn’t be assigned outside of their home district. Cross-district or inner-province operations were the arena for the RFs. The PF platoon leaders attended an OCS-type academy. RF and PF rifle carriers received the same basic and small unit tactics training at the province training center. The province level RF SI, S2, S3, and S4 personnel were sent to an ARVN school for their MOS-type training. “

Fighting a conventional war against large units can be devastating to a peasant population. That’s one of the major goals that the CORDS/ADVISOR approach tried to change. Dick relates this experience when he took a RF company on patrol with the 11th Armored Cavalry troop near their Bear Cat area of operations. “I had respect for the firepower they could deliver, but I also saw how they tore-up rice paddies and the peasants’ cultivated plots of land. No maneuver damage was paid in the early days of 1967, so the locals with heads hanging and tears in eye, stood by helplessly watching the results of their hard earned livelihood being destroyed. This was an ugly sight that I deeply regretted.”

“At one point, I went eyeball-to-eyeball with the Troop CO I over this avoidable destruction. This was his first experience working with Vietnamese troops and he couldn’t grasp the concept of ‘tactical patience.’ Being a tanker, all he knew was shock, firepower and mobility. When he told me that the safety of his troops came first, I told him that I had to write an after action report that would pass upward through MACV channels and that his Regimental CO would have to answer for the careless damage he was causing. This seemed to get his attention, as I noticed that his M-113s were no longer rampaging wildly through the hamlets. “

When asked what John Paul Vann would have done in Afghanistan, Dick answers, “I am convinced he would insist that security remain the first priority. All other programs are secondary and can only flourish once security is established. He would push for armed groups-modern day RFs, PFs, CIDGs, and PSDFs. An honest appraisal of the Vietnam War would show that the armed PFs and PSDFs curtailed the effectiveness of the VC and allowed for the success of the GVN/CORDS counterinsurgency program.”

Dick signed off on his first correspondence to me, “Whenever you commit men to war without the willingness to use the necessary brutality to win it, you are worse than the enemy.”



(The interview will continue in the next issue of SITREP, when Dick will share his experience in working with John Paul Vann.)

Rich Webster

PAO, *Counterparts/THDNA*



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