



# COUNTERPARTS

## TƯƠNG HỮU ĐÔNG NAM A

# SITREP

Volume XIII

Issue 3

Winter 2011-2012

## Update on 2012 Reunion, April 19-22 Killeen/Ft Hood, Texas

By  
**J.C. Fischer**

The good news is that our host Brigade at Ft. Hood made it home early from Iraq... for Christmas! This will give us more time for planning our Reunion. Sorry to say, though, that as of mid-December we have only one confirmed reservation for the reunion at this time. Remember, the reunion is only three months away. It's difficult to do any reasonable planning at this time without more information on attendance. We cannot plan for transportation, the tours or the dinner without the numbers to plan for.

We have provided all the information we could. Now it is up to the members to do their part. Please do not wait till the last moment to decide if you are coming.

Our Hotel is the **Shilo Inn**, our Contact person *Donna Fischbach*. Reservations: 800-222-2244, email [donnafischbach@shiloinns.com](mailto:donnafischbach@shiloinns.com). The hotel will provide pickup service at the Killeen/Ft Hood (GRK) airport. Room rates are \$90.00 a night, good 2 days before and 2 days after the Reunion. Mention the *Counterparts* Reunion for these rates. For more detailed info about the hotel, try: <http://www.roomstays.com/hotel/79186>

We will have a Hospitality room at the hotel. Staff from Texas Tech is going to be there to do Oral History interviews with COUNTERPARTS members. We will be hosted on Ft. Hood by a Brigade just returning from a tour in Iraq.

**If you are interested in buying a souvenir golf/polo white shirt with the Counterparts logo and Reunion dates please let me know ASAP of the size so I can order them. You can also order one for your wife or girlfriend. They are going to be between \$15.00 to \$20.00 each with size 2XX \$5.00 more. They will have to be paid for in advance.**

Flying into Killeen is easy but you may have to change planes at Dallas or Houston. Austin is next nearest, about 60 miles; then San Antonio and Dallas

(about 158 miles) The hotel offers pickup at the Killeen Air Port.

**Here's the projected schedule, day by day.**

### Thursday, 19 April:

Trip to Ft Hood. Exact time is still in the planning stages but it will be on. You can expect it to include tours and lunch at a dining facility It is shaping up to be an event filled day.

### Friday, 20 April:

We will be at the Texas Veterans home in Temple to meet with WWII & Korean Vets. The staff at the Veterans Home is planning a "big" day for us. Pictures will be taken with WWII, Korean, Vietnam, current Vets from Iraq and 1 future soldier in his BDU's. Lunch at the Veterans Home.

Later we will visit the 1910 Santa Fe Railroad Station and museum and the Temple Train club to view the Model Train layouts.

Friday's Dinner will be at the **Saigon Cafe** in Temple. More info at: <http://saigoncafetemple.com>

**Saturday, 21 April:** Morning: Annual Business meeting. Another activity is being planned for the afternoon. There's also the possibility that during the Business meeting the wives could take a shopping and lunch trip to Historic Salado. *Adelea's Bistro* is a great place to eat. We need a count of the number of wives who wish to make this trip to order a bus.

Our Annual Dinner will be on Saturday evening. Menu will include salad and a choice of meat, fish, or vegetable plate. There will be a cash bar. We may be joined by soldiers from the 553rd Combat Bde, just returned from Iraq. They will also provide our Color Guard for the Banquet and their CG will be our guest speaker.

### Sunday, 22 April:

Breakfast at Hotel, Farewells

**Reunion Coordinator, J. C. Fischer**

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**Killeen Ft. Hood Airport:** <http://www.flykilleen.net>

**Ft. Hood information:** <http://www.hood.army.mil>



# COUNTERPARTS SITREP

The Official Publication of Counterparts/Tướng Hữu Đông Nam Á

Volume XIII

Issue 3

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## Commander's Corner

We have a *Counterparts* member who lives in France. He is seeking someone who can help him with his book on the ARVN Soldiers, in particular Airborne, TQLC & BDQ. He needs to know how many battalions in each corps and their strength.

He was born in VN in 1944, lived in Saigon from 1954-1966 & 1971-1973. I have his letter. If someone can assist him, I'll send them his letter with his address in France. He is also looking for a Marine Corps patch. Mike has already sent him a *Counterparts* & MACV patch. If you think you can help, contact me or Mike McMunn by phone or email.

I have also received a letter from the Board Members of the Vinh Son Orphanages Thanking *Counterparts* for our donations and support.

From their letter:

*"Moved by the children's love for each other and humbled by their willingness to share simple joys, FVSO and its supporters are grateful for the opportunity to make their difficult lives a little bit better. None of this could be accomplished without your help."*

They included a limited Edition print, titled "*Chocolate*" by Michael Maring. I'll have it matted & framed for display at the April Reunion in Killeen.

I have posted a letter to the Vietnamese Saigon newspaper in Houston asking them to inform their readers of *Counterparts*, who we are & our mission to find our friends from Vietnam. I'll try to keep you posted on any responses I receive. If any member would do the same in his home area, we may be able to find more of our *Counterparts* who moved here from Vietnam. Please keep me informed of any contacts that you receive.

Don't forget to make plans for our reunion in April at Killeen/Ft Hood!

We will be hosted by a Brigade recently returned from Iraq, and on the 18th of April the *Ride to Recovery* riders ( disabled veterans from Iraq/ Afghanistan) will also be at the Shilo Inn. We will also be having permanent name tags made for the Reunion, so if you are attending, please send me your name, spouse's name, and your Advisory Unit or team, as soon as possible.

Check out your home areas to see if you can find more Advisors.

Hope to see all of you in April.

J.C.Fischer

Commander, *Counterparts*/THDNA

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*P.S. Our new Life Membership Certificates are at the printer and should be completed soon.*

## **Montagnard Scholarship student 2011 update.**

By

Rich Webster

For the sixth time, I made the long trek to Cambodia to visit with COUNTERPARTS scholar, Romas Phanna and to assist Cambodia Corps in their mission of providing a college education for Montagnard students from Eastern Cambodia.

Romas Phanna is a delightful young man from the Jarai tribe in Ratanakiri Province. His course of study is Information technology and he will earn a BS degree in 2013. Here are the courses he is enrolled in now- Networking 1, Management Information System, System Analysis and Design 1, Interactive Multimedia II, and Advanced Java Programming.

During my 3-week visit, I assisted the Khmer Director of the CCI student center, Uth Siramaren, in finding a new home for the indigenous student center. The new 4-story house with 4 bathrooms is more modern, smaller, and cheaper to rent-the cost being 500 dollars a month to give the reader an idea of real estate costs in Phnom Penh.

Phanna wanted me to express his thanks to COUNTERPARTS for providing him with the opportunity to attend college. Without an education, his future would be very limited in Eastern Cambodia where the traditional village life of the Montagnards is rapidly disappearing. Ratanakiri Province touches the border with Vietnam and many of the Jarai fled into the province after 1975 to avoid communist repression.

Phanna has a younger sister and recent high school graduate who wants to become a nurse. He asked if someone could sponsor her to a 3-year nursing school in Stung Treng Province. Without a sponsor, her life would be limited to gathering forest products and selling them at the village market. So I offered to sponsor her to nursing school in Stung Treang Province. When you're up close to such a request from a person in need, it's hard to say no.

I traveled out to Sen Monorum in Mondulkiri Province to specifically visit our former student, Broy Makara, who left his job as the promising young Veterinarian working for the Elephant Valley Project; an NGO/tourist organization. Makara was CCI's 3<sup>rd</sup> graduate to leave this organization. Both Tommy Daniels and I have learned that the director of the EVP was very difficult to work with, causing three CCI Montagnard students to leave his employment. By networking with other NGO's in the Province capital, I was able to locate him a position with CIAI, an Italian Association for Aid to handicapped children. So Makara is now working to help the less fortunate children in Mondulkiri Province.

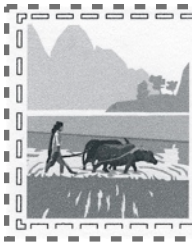
Makara, a member of the Phnong tribe, has recently informed me that he is saving his money to build a chicken house on the little plot of land that his deceased father left to him. He is also making payments on a motorbike that gets him back and forth to work.

Max and Carol Lund also sponsor a Jarai student, Sev Pak, who recently graduated with a two-year degree in Animal health production and is seeking employment. Max and Carol intend to sponsor another Montagnard student when they visit CCI and Cambodia this year.

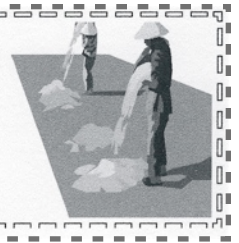
Cambodia Corps is downsizing now for two reasons; a slowdown in funding and the deteriorating health of the President, Tommy Daniels, who is a COUNTERPARTS member and a regular attendee at our reunions. One of the difficulties with funding resources is that there are no grants available for secondary education in Cambodia.

COUNTERPARTS as an organization and also individual members have been very supportive contributing a total of 8080 dollars in 2011 to CCI. Our COUNTERPARTS organization contributed 3,200 dollars from membership dues and individual members contributed 4,780 dollars. Cambodia Corps has now provided 25 Montagnard students with a college education and all have gone back to their home provinces in Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri to become the future advocates and leaders of their people to include the following tribes; the Phnong, Jarai, Steing, Krung, and Tampoun. Anyone out there in Advisor land who would like to step forward to assist the organization in any manner, please contact me or Tommy Daniels.

..... *Rich Webster*



# BULLETIN BOARD



## *A request from Counterparts Member Terry Turner*

“Guys, I'm contacting the list of former MAT members and a few others I was in contact with regarding the magazine article I did over a year ago for ON POINT, the journal of Army history. You might recall that article was about MATs and advising in that counterinsurgency environment. Writing that article and some of the communications I received from some of you at that time made me think more heavily about counterinsurgency and the way it has been done--or not been done--over the last decade. It is clear that much of what many of us learned 40 years ago and what the military had in its memory vaults has been forgotten and relearned many times over. In an attempt to cut through the haze, at least from my perspective, I have written a book covering a number of 'lessons-learned' using personal experience to put a human face on what would otherwise be a rather academic listing of dry information. It is currently being considered by a publisher, but they want an expansion.

I would like to solicit your help, if any of you are willing. I have made a list of what I think some important lessons-learned are and for a number of them have written a personal vignette or example of my own experience to show how an advisor's actions can lead to success or sometimes to failure. I would like to have a chapter or chapters based on the experiences of others. If any of you are up to it, I would like for you to drag up what you think of based on your long-ago experiences as important lessons-learned about counterinsurgency or counterinsurgency advising. If you were not involved in counterinsurgency, per se, what are some lessons learned or pieces of advice you would give on military advising of indigenous forces, in general? I'd like to hear from you if you are willing to pick one or more lessons learned (or pieces of advice) where a personal experience of yours illustrates how that lesson was rightly or wrongly applied. The point would be for present day readers to learn from what you did, be it a done-right or a done-wrong.

The format to use would be to head the page with a short statement of the lesson learned then follow that with a 1-4 page description of an experience you had that illustrates the point. I'd also need your name, if you're willing to get the attribution, your unit or team designation, your year(s) in Vietnam, and, as applicable, your district, province, and Corps region or other important designation. I don't know what to expect from this request with regard to numbers of submissions, but, if successful, my plan is to edit all the experiences submitted, perhaps selecting those that best illustrate the point being made. If multiple people send in the same lesson learned but with different experiences, I may have to make choices as to what stories to leave in and what to leave out.

If you have questions or need further explanations, please let me know. Also, if you know of others who might like to participate, those on MATs, district teams, SF teams, CAP Marines, etc., don't hesitate to send this request on to them. Thanks for any help. Terry T. Turner [ttt@virginia.edu](mailto:ttt@virginia.edu)

## *The Douglas Pike Collection at the Vietnam Center and Archives*

The late Douglas Pike was a veteran, journalist, diplomat teacher, scholar, writer and renowned expert on Vietnam and Indochina. He joined the Vietnam Center in 1996 and brought with him his extensive archives and library on Indochina. The Douglas Pike Collection: Indochina Archive is now a part of Texas Tech's Vietnam Archive and is open to researchers.

## *Vietnam Center Guest Lecture Series*

The Vietnam Center also continues its series of Distinguished Guest Lecturers. The schedule for 2012 includes BG Thomas B. Draude, USMC, who served 3 tours in Vietnam (March, 1, 2012), Dr. Raymond Scurfield, an expert on PTSD who served on a psychiatric team in Vietnam 1968-1969 (April 19), and for the Fall Series, Dick Rutan, Hall of Fame Aviator, who flew 325 missions in Vietnam, and Rocky Bleir, Pro Football star who served in the 196th Light Inf. Brigade, and was wounded seriously in an ambush. After two years of rehab he returned to play for the Pittsburgh Steelers in 4 Super Bowls.

For more information contact The Vietnam Institute at [www.vietnam.ttu.edu/GLS](http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/GLS)

## *Don't Forget your 2012 Dues!*

Dues are payable as of January 1, 2012. Dues are \$25.00 annually or \$250.00 for life membership. Pay to Membership Chairman John Haseman [jhaseman@earthlink.net](mailto:jhaseman@earthlink.net)



## COUNTERPARTS PERSONAL STORIES

*Every member of COUNTERPARTS has a unique and personal story to tell. This section will appear in each issue of SITREP and will contain COUNTERPARTS member's stories, told in their own words. We encourage all members to submit their stories, between 1,000 and 3000 words. We may edit to fit limited space or for clarity, but the story will be yours. It does not have to be a literary masterpiece. Send your material to: Ken Jacobsen, 607 Wampler Drive, Charleston, SC 29412, email [kjacobson@knology.net](mailto:kjacobsen@knology.net)*

### ***“As if it Were Yesterday”***

*( This is the final part of Ken Delfino's Story)*

We proceed on...one more block to the “Y” and the villa. Wies was on point and Keeffe was covering the intersection ahead. We reached the walls of the villa compound and I immediately went for the bomb shelter only to find it full of Vietnamese civilians! Had the team gotten out? The door was closed so maybe they were still inside.

I decided to tap on the front window rather than take a chance that rounds would be fired through the door if I knocked on the front door. I tapped and yelled out “Myrna! Myrna!” trying to get a response from LT. Myrna Milan. Three shots rang out and I ducked and turned only to see Wies aiming at upstairs windows across the street...”Just keeping ‘em honest and their heads down!” he yelled. “I got you covered”...I knocked at the window again and yelled Myrna’s name much louder and saw the curtain move and her face appear in the window.

“Let’s go! We’re getting you guys out of here now!” She disappeared and in less than a minute the front door opened and she, CAPT Leonora Gumayagay and a sergeant appeared. We escorted them around the corner and we all loaded up into the truck and took off for the hospital.

When we arrived at the hospital, they were aghast to find that a sergeant was missing! Apparently he had gone back upstairs to destroy the radio so it couldn’t be used had there been a second attack! We had to go back to get him! Garza, Keeffe, Wies and I looked at each other...nothing was said and we all piled back into the truck and headed back. Again, the ARVN officer would not move a tank, but this time he did have a fire team cover us to the next intersection...but not all the way to the “Y”. It was on this trip that I took a closer look at some of the VC bodies and noticed a couple in particular that were much larger stature and did not have the harsher VC features...I deduced they may have been Chinese. They were all wearing black and had blue armbands.

My memory’s a bit fuzzy here, but I think it was SGT Salvador who was the commo man and he was very relieved and grateful for our coming back to get him. We got him out and back to the hospital and were happy that not one of the team members was lost.

After grabbing some chow and water, we decided we needed to obtain another vehicle so we could patrol the inner perimeter in two vehicles. We found a blue jeep with USAID markings that was sitting unattended. It was hot-wired and we got it back to the base where a coat of OD green was applied and a mount for an M-60 was added. Navy markings were added and we were set.

Around 1400 we were in the vicinity of the soccer field, which was across the street from the previously mentioned school. Adjacent to the field were two Army jeeps with one US WIA. They were waiting for a DUST-OFF to come pick him up. There was a helo pad on the west side of town, but units of the 9th Infantry Division had not cleaned out the VC that had taken over that area. We decided to take a break and wait to see the Medevac. As the helo was flaring out to land, the window in the announcer’s booth across the field flung open. Not knowing if a VC was in there with a B-40 rocket, we immediately took the booth under fire...the Army sergeant waved off the chopper and they took off.

We escorted the soldiers down to the docks and called in a PBR to take him up to the Army hospital at Dong Tam just five miles west of us. The road to Dong Tam was still cut off by VC. *(continues on page 6)*

*(continued from page 5)*

I returned to the TOC and gave CDR Steed and my XO, LT Bob Moir an update on the Filipinos. After hearing the report, CDR Steed told me to invite them to stay at the TOC so they'd at least have some military protection as opposed to the hospital where there was none. Officers doubled up in their quarters and bunked in rooms whose crews were on patrol. The Filipinos were our guests for about two weeks.

It wasn't until around 1600 that I went back to my room and noticed a huge hole in the street in front of the Carter. This was the round that had hit and jarred me out of my stupor. We had a deuce-and-a-half stake truck parked across the street and the entire left side was riddled with shrapnel as was the wall protecting the first floor...MY FLOOR of the billet!

As darkness started to fall, we learned more of what had happened. It was a guess that up to three battalions of Viet Cong had hit the town (later determined to be accurate), but were repulsed by an immediate counterattack by the 7th ARVN on the north and west, 32nd Rangers on the East and our SEAL team was wandering through town doing what they were good at to help stem the attack. The 9th Infantry counterattacked from the West toward the ARVN positions, but that five-mile area was to be contested for a few days. The immediate threat to the heart of the city (7th ARVN HDQ and our TOC) had been stopped, but we all were anticipating a counterattack when darkness fell.

After picking up the Filipinos and getting them settled at the TOC, we decided not to stay in the Carter, but rather picked a building across the street from the TOC that gave us a decent view of approaches to the TOC a block away. We supplied ourselves with water, food and plenty of ammo and grenades and settled in for the night.

Though night had fallen, the battle raged on. Twinkling lights in the sky indicated either helicopters or fixed wing aircraft. Several times green tracers of the enemy would reach for the lights only to receive a return of thousands of rounds from a Spooky gunship. Artillery rounds from Dong Tam were landing only a couple of miles away as they supported operations in progress. Gunfire could be heard in the streets, but beyond the perimeters the Vietnamese had set up.

I started dozing off into that mode known as 'combat sleep'...your body is relaxed, but your mind can separate the distinction between imminent and possible threats. You aren't really asleep, but you are able to recharge.

When morning came, there still were battles raging in close proximity, but the offense had been pushed to beyond mortar range of us.

People have told me I should write a book, but dang, that sure is a lot of work and I don't know if I'd enjoy writing a book...let alone have it sell! I owe a great deal of thanks to President Fidel Ramos, GEN Jose Magno, Jr. and Ms. Stella Marie J. Braganza who helped me locate members of the Dinh Tuong team.

So this small segment of my life is dedicated to my brothers-in-arms with whom I patrolled the Long Tau, Soi Rap, Co Chien and Ham Luong Rivers for 22 months...to my young friends at Millbrook High School in Raleigh, NC (Kim, Sara, Kevin, Chris, Courtney, John, Caitlin, Lauren and Gessica), who have been able to pull forgotten memories out of the recesses of my mind...to Mrs. Lindy Poling who created the Lessons of Vietnam class at Millbrook...to Ralph Christopher who told our My Tho story in his book "Duty...Honor... Sacrifice" ...to Rich, Jose, Dennis and the members of the Dinh Tuong PHILCAG Medical team for a bond that will never be broken...and to my wife Melba who stood by my side and understood the frustration, anger and need for revenge that came out after the September 11, 2001 attacks by those murderers.

### **Epilogue:**

The events of that morning...that day...that week will live with me forever. I've always wondered whatever happened to my Filipino friends as well as my "team"...those guys who did not hesitate to step forward.

*(continued on page 7)*

(continued from page 6)

Since 2002, I have had the opportunity to meet up with Jose and Dennis. I've been in e-mail contact with Rich and just 20 days ago, with a tremendous amount of help from the former PHILCAG Chief of Staff, I received a letter of verification of the mission from COL Myrna Milan Delena, Philippine Army (RET).

Through her, I found out that COL Leonora Gumayagay is in Las Vegas and COL Estela Casuga is in Daly City...where I went to elementary school and lived when I returned from Vietnam and in the late '70s. I spoke with Nora (we called her Mom) and I will attempt to contact Estela.

Ken Delfino  
Boat Captain, PBR 152  
River Division 533, RIVRON 5  
TF-116



## MEMBERS IN MEMORIAM

**Homer W. Smith:** MGen, US Army. A sometimes overlooked, but extraordinarily heroic figure in DIA history, died March 6 in his home state of Texas. He was 89. Known as "the last soldier out of Saigon," Smith served as the U.S. defense attaché in South Vietnam from 1974-1975 and played a major role in one of the great dramas of the Vietnam era.

**Robert Ryan Holmes:** June 15, 2008. US Army and International Police Advisor, under USAID

**Earl P. Hopper, Sr:** Jul 11, 2008 COL US Army (Ret)

**Ronald L. Kirshman:** July 11, 2011 (Notice from Family). Mr. Kirshman was an Army Advisor with Advisory Team 48 and a Life Member of *Counterparts*.

**Walter L. Chambers:** Deceased 2000. Mr. Chambers was an Army Advisor in Kien Hoa Province. He served with Advisory Teams 90 and 96. He was a Plenary member of *Counterparts*.

**Col. Nguyen Kim Ban:** ARVN

**Col. Le Duc Dat:** KIA April 24, 1972, ARVN 22nd Infantry Division

**Fr. Joseph Dinh Huy Huong:** 9 August 2011. Father Joseph, "Ut" to his many friends, one of the best known priests in Vietnam, devoted 48 years of his life to pastoral care of the poor, lepers, Montagnards, and abandoned children in Vietnam. He was also a Chaplain to US soldiers in Vietnam. After the fall of the GVN he refused to be evacuated, and was arrested and spent ten years at hard labor in the NVA "Reeducation" camps.

## A Different Kind of Reunion

*(Counterparts member Tucker Smallwood was seriously wounded in 1969 near Tan Nhut Nam village while commanding MAT-36. He wrote of his 2004 return to Tan Nhut Nam in the Spring 2005 issue of SITREP. In 2011 he attended a Reunion of the 3rd Field Army Hospital, and after 42 years, again met the people who had saved his life in 1969.)*

Recently I visited Chicago for a unique gathering. The medical personnel from 3rd Field Army Hospital in Saigon decided to hold their very first reunion. This allowed me, a former patient, the chance to thank two very special people in my life; Ellen Lally, the nurse who cared for me 42 years ago and Dr. Cardenas, the surgeon who restored me to life on September 14, 1969.

This year marked my 42nd anniversary of that day. It remains the single most resonant day of my life. I still struggle with Anniversary Syndrome, Survivor Guilt and PTSD...but my life today is ever so much more stable and I am challenged to adequately express my gratitude for being here.

I arrived in the 15th floor hotel lobby and was embraced by Ellen almost before I could put down my bags. That act fulfilled a pledge I made years ago when I began searching for her. As luck would have it, my book was published in 2006, Leo Paradis bought it, recognized her photo and put us in touch. After reading the chapter I'd written about her, Ellen sent me a very moving response.

I recognized Dr. Cardenas from behind at the Meet and Greet. He was somewhat shorter than I'd remembered (but I don't think I'd ever before stood beside him) and he occupied such stature in my estimation, I imagined him to be a strapping physical specimen. I knew that he'd be unlikely to remember me, one of the hundreds of patients he'd treated. Yet after an hour or so, he said to me, "I do remember you now. I believe I have a photograph of your wounds... and a film of your surgery." I'm not sure I'm man enough to watch that but would value having it, in any case.

I'd been obsessively rehabbing three bulging discs in my lower back for the past two months, accepting the pain and the meds, all in the hope that I might be strong enough to make this trip. Both flights were endless pain but I could leave the gathering every now and again to rest for an hour, soon to return to be in the company of these caregivers.

On Saturday, I was allowed to speak to the attendees (30 had been hoped for, almost 90 turned out) and I read several chapters from my book, as well as Ellen's letter to me. Other than my speaking at my father's memorial service, I can't remember ever having felt so challenged to maintain my composure. I shared my memories of awakening in ICU, Ellen's caring interaction after two weeks of IV feeding and encountering my cousin Lillian, who was entertaining my ward with the USO at Camp Zama, Japan.

I was told by several men that there was not a dry eye in the house, theirs included. I was aware that I might not be up to the task. How do you thank someone for giving you back your life? I did my best, knowing I spoke not only for myself but for all of their patients who couldn't be here to thank them. And I'm told that my presence was affirming to all of them, because I represented the legions of soldiers that enjoy quality of life today because of their efforts and expertise.

A wish fulfilled after so many years. I returned home exhausted but grateful and somehow complete. On tomorrow's anniversary, I'll think of them all...as I will each day for the rest of my life.



*Tucker Smallwood and Nurse Ellen Lally*

.....*Tucker Smallwood*  
*13 September 2011*



*Attached is the final chapter to the Senyint Chin quest for freedom I asked Bob Melka, a former NILO and a friend of mine to put this together, so BRAVO ZULU to Bob. Note the name David MacVean. David's uncle, LT. Steve MacVean was KIA on an Op with me at coastal Group 36 on the lower Bassac in October 1969. David attended the last Counterparts Reunion in San Diego.*

*...Tom Green*

## **The Final Chapter**

By Bob Melka

I became involved in Senyint Chim's quest when Swiftboat Skipper Virg Erwin, author of *Cat Lo: a memoir of invincible youth*, brought his case to the attention of a San Diego friend of mine, David MacVean. Dave recollected that I had served in a NILO capacity about the time of Chim's escape, reasoning that I might be able to help connect the necessary dots to reunite him with the US Navy Intelligence Officers who were instrumental in saving him from the VC hit squad bent on his assassination.

As background, the role of a Naval Intelligence Liaison Officer, or NILO, was unique and varied. At any given time, there were perhaps three dozen of us spread across Vietnam's coastal and Delta regions. Each had his own geographic territory, with a mandate to develop sources and operational response teams as he saw fit. Utilizing the support and cooperation of allied air, ground, or waterborne resources, the NILO collected, assessed, and disseminated timely intelligence to operational forces for targeted combat missions. (The NILO's role is elegantly recounted in the novel *NILO Ha Tien*, by Larry Serra)

When our year was up, each of us returned to the world, whether to our next assignment or release from active duty, generally severing whatever connection we might have had with fellow NILOs during our tour.

Fortunately, as we would later learn, a small number of these intelligence specialists continued their Naval Intelligence careers. The Naval Intelligence community, being comparatively insular, enabled several of these ex-NILOs to remain in contact. At the center of this little network was VADM Earl "Rex" Rectanus. Rex had served as Admiral Zumwalt's intelligence chief at NAVFORV Headquarters, and it was during his tenure in Saigon that Naval Intelligence suffered the loss of LCDR Jack Graf, leader of the Third Coastal Zone's six-NILO team. Graf's OV-1 Mohawk was shot down on a visual reconnaissance mission over Long Toan, a VC controlled region on the coast of Vinh Binh Province, resulting in his and the pilot's capture and his death at the hands of his captors several months later. Graf remains the only such case in the history of Naval Intelligence.

VADM Rectanus, having ultimately served as Director of Naval Intelligence and now in retirement, undertook the creation of a memorial to honor Commander Graf on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his loss. His diligence in this effort resulted in an incredibly convoluted networking project to collect and reassemble the whereabouts and contact info on the long-separated NILO community. Rex's death last year passed the torch of spiritual leadership to Pete Decker, NILO Duc Hoa, who stepped up to maintain the roster and fill a pivotal role as communications director and chronicler of the NILO legacy.

So much for the background; now back to Senyint Chin's unending quest.

On 25 May of this year, I received Virg Erwin's narrative of Chin's saga, attached to an email request for some possible help in identifying and locating the NILOs in the story. I forwarded it immediately to Pete Decker for promulgation across the NILO network.

*May 25, 2011*

*Hey Pete,*

*Virg Erwin and Dave MacVean are trying to put this guy in touch with some of our guys who he worked with over there. Read his story. (BTW, did you read Erwin's book, Cat Lo? An excellent read about the PCF experience in '68--'69). Can you help?*

Pete put it out the following day on “NILO Central.”

*May 26, 2011*

*Guys, Bob Melka sent me the attached writeup( at the end). It is a good read and at the end is a picture of a couple of NILOs from our list. I am forwarding it because I thought you would enjoy it and because some of you might be able to help.*

*Slainte,*

*Pete*

Bill Steshko, NILO Vinh Long, responded that same day with the following:

*May 26, 2011*

*I just read the story on Sinjin...*

*Jack Herriott called me one afternoon and asked me if I could put some one up at my quarters for a while. I had just moved into a new cinder block house that was part of the expansion of the RAG base in Vinh Long, so I said sure. Jack sent me Sinjin - I can't remember who brought him up from Can Tho, maybe it was Larry Miller ( I don't think I went down to get him). Jack's instructions were to put him on ice for 30 days in Vinh Long, keep him hidden in my quarters.*

*I later saw Sinjin in No. Virginia after the fall of VN when he was living with the Herriotts. Didn't keep track of him tho, regrettably. Glad to know he has led a decent life and glad to know he became an American citizen.*

*Bill Steshko*

*NILO Vinh Long 1970-71*

The following day, I was able to respond to Messrs. Erwin and MacVean with the final piece of the puzzle.

*May 27, 2011*

*Hey guys--mystery solved. Larry Miller and Bill Steshko are two of the NILOs that kept Sinjin alive during his time on the lam. The address mob below represent the email addresses of all NILOs we have been able to locate and attach to our network. We have their names and other contact info on a spreadsheet somewhere if you're interested.*

*Bob*

Some might wonder that the solution materialized in fewer than 48 hours. The credit goes to the drive and determination of VADM Rex Rectanus and diligent follow-up by Pete Decker. Their efforts at tracking down and reassembling this scattered, aging collection of former Navy “spooks” made what could have been an incredibly difficult task a simple matter of a few short emails and a couple of clicks.

I’m told that Larry and Bill soon made the trip to San Diego for a long-awaited reunion with their old Cambodian friend.

*(Thanks to Counterparts member Tom Green for sending along this fascinating story, of yet another old comrade found again*

## 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.

**KONTUM: The Battle To Save South Vietnam.** *Thomas P. McKenna, Lt. Col., USA (Ret.) Kentucky Press (\$37, or \$29 from author and signed copy). Amazon \$23.*

At last, a definitive work that addresses the largest battle of the Vietnam War. Thomas McKenna, senior Advisor, Team 33, offers an exceptional work and comprehensive account, undergirded by years of research and personal interviews with those directly involved in the siege of KonTum in the 1972 Spring (Easter) Offensive. The book is a powerful testament to the indispensable role played by advisory teams, which has often been obscured in conventional combat histories of the Vietnam War. The work is unique, given McKenna's role as a major player in the defense, survivor of the siege who was wounded twice during the battle. He provides a rich context of research to make the policy dynamics and actions surrounding the buildup of the battle more understandable and palpable. Significant attention is also given to the strategy and tactics of NVA units and their armaments. It is sobering to realize the extensive tank force and the amount of powerful artillery available to the enemy.

The work illuminates and credits the critical role of the ARVN 23rd Division, as the telling difference in the ground action at the height of the siege. US air support emerges, especially B52 *Arc Light*, *Spectre* and *Spooky* strikes) as the most crucial element in the defense and victory of KonTum City. The later arrival and use of TOW antitank missiles were invaluable in blunting the NVA tank assaults.

Tom McKenna's first-person narration, in a "Hemingwayesque" style of self-transparency, naturally draws the reader as a mutual companion into the intensifying arena of combat. For those of us who served there, it becomes a powerful revivification of personal experience.

The wealth of personal quotes add to authenticity and the life-energy of the book. Special focus is given to the personality and decision-making dynamics of John Paul Vann, Senior II Corps Commander, with whom the author had frequent interaction.

The book stands as a resounding accolade to the contribution of advisors; to the integrity, professionalism, and courage exemplified under often perilous conditions and circumstances. It is a must for any veteran or scholar who wants an in-depth understanding as to how the Vietnam War was fought, and why its conclusion came to be.

.....*Jim Barker*

*Counterparts member Jim Barker served as an Advisor/Linguist with the 23rd DARRS Team at the Siege of Kontum. Jim is also sponsoring the creation of a Vietnam Library at his alma mater, Graceland University. The collection will include more than 400 volumes, some of them rare, plus memorabilia and historic items related to the war. He's also one of the few Americans to have run in the Hanoi Marathon, which he completed in 1993. Anyone interested in books, documents or other items to Jim's "Vietnam Archive Book Project" is encouraged to contact him at his email address, [erodemango@yahoo.com](mailto:erodemango@yahoo.com).*



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