



# COUNTERPARTS

## TƯƠNG HỮU ĐÔNG NAM A

# SITREP

Volume XIV

Issue 1

Spring 2012

## Killeen Reunion Highlighted by Trips to Ft. Hood, Texas Veterans Home.

By

*Rich Webster, Counterparts PAO*

About the best description of the 2012 reunion in Killeen put together by Commander J.C. Fischer is that the reunions keep getting better and better. Those of you who didn't make it, missed a wonderful event-filled three days with great support from the Ft. Hood active duty personnel.

The Ft. Hood tour began with a demonstration by the 1st Cavalry Horse Platoon in historic uniforms performing maneuvers and drills reminiscent of the cavalry days of the old West. We watched mounted cavalry troopers attacking mock enemy with drawn sabers and firing their weapons from their galloping horses.

We then had lunch at a modern mess hall and were briefed by Colonel Simmerly, commander of the 4th Infantry Sustainment Brigade, his staff officers and one female Captain who commanded a MITT (military transition team/partnership unit) platoon in Afghanistan with similar responsibilities as we advisors had in Vietnam. The Colonel emphasized the respect they all have for veterans and noted that his dad was a Vietnam veteran. He described how instant battlefield intelligence can now be shared via computers that interface with individual soldiers on the front lines. Despite these advances the army has reinstated map reading and compass skills, a lost art so necessary if the GPS system goes down.

After lunch, the next stop was to the K-9 dog unit where we witnessed attack dogs in action that were trained to sniff out explosive devices. A special unit of the 178th Military Police Detachment, the dogs are trained to run toward the fire of an enemy soldier to protect their handler and sniff out explosives and IEDs.

We then visited the combat obstacle course where we witnessed an air assault and rappelling demonstration. The soldier who demonstrated the difficult exercise was born in Iraq and is now a member of the US Army. Last

stop for Thursday was a visit to the 4th Infantry Division Memorial and the 4th Infantry Museum to honor those who gave their lives for our country.

Friday, Commander JC Fischer led us to the Texas State Veterans home where the group heard resident, Ben Russell, a 90-year old Pearl Harbor survivor described the attack that infamous day. The halls of the home were decorated with thousands of medals and insignia donated by J.C. Fischer. Many of the older veterans assembled in their wheelchairs in the hallways so COUNTERPARTS members could chat with them.

We wound up the day with a visit to the Railroad museum, then the traditional meal at a Vietnamese restaurant.

Saturday's Banquet began with the posting of the colors by active duty soldiers from Ft. Hood. Lieutenant Colonel Matt Melvin, commander of the 553rd CSSB, was the Guest Speaker. Like all our contact with Ft Hood personnel, his theme was one of respect for veterans and military families. "Do not underestimate the value of your experiences as advisors," he said. "Your experiences formed the basis of our new counterinsurgency doctrine compiled by General Petraeus. The Army looked back at your experiences in Vietnam to devise methods that we are now using in Iraq and Afghanistan. We recognize you as heroes and want you know that every veteran has made the world a safer place to live. The negative experience that you Vietnam Veterans faced coming home has now been replaced by cheering crowds."

Commander Fischer awarded LTC Melvin one of our commemorative coins and a Certificate of Appreciation from COUNTERPARTS, and awarded another Certificate to LTC Keith McVeigh, immediate past commander of the 553rd CSSB.

J.C. Fischer then presented Appreciation awards to **Richard Webster** for his outstanding service for helping the Montagnards in Cambodia; **Max Lund** for his locating and recruiting Tm 31 members; **Mike and Marion Little** for their humanitarian work with Vinh Son Orphanage in the Central Highlands; **Bill Laurie** as a Founder of *Counterparts*;

*(Continued on page 3)*



# COUNTERPARTS SITREP

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## Commander's Corner

Our 23rd Reunion in Killeen, TX was well attended by 42 people, including 30 *Counterparts* members and 12 wives, as well as 5 special guests.

The Guest Speaker at our traditional Saturday night Banquet was LTC Matt Melvin, US Army, who reminded us of the Vietnam Veterans contribution to today's Army. LTC McVeigh, who introduced LTC Melvin, told us about his father who was a Vietnam Vet and how much it meant for him to address our group. The dinner went well but your commander forgot to follow the program.

The new T-shirts are in and they are very colorful and well done. Contact Mike McMunn for them. Also, if Mike does not have it in stock, he can order items when he has enough requests. So keep Mike informed of what you need.

All the members attended the membership meeting in the hospitality room. Also present at our Membership Meeting was Kelly Krager, Phd. who is head of the TTU Vietnam Center's Oral history program. Dr. Krager urged all present to participate in the program to preserve our experience for posterity.

Rich Webster gave a good update on our *Counterparts* Scholar and on the status of Tommy Daniels' Cambodia Corps, which badly needs an infusion of new help. We voted to make donations to the Cambodia Corps (CCI), the Vinh Son Orphanage, and Vietnam Vets With a Mission.

Our next reunion will be hosted by Louis Rothenstein in Las Vegas, Nev. Make sure you contact him way in advance so he will know how many members and wives to expect.

This and future SITREP's will contain some of the Questions & answers from the Trivia Quiz we had. The winner was Chuck Briggs. We split the pot 50/50 He got \$35.00 and the organization got \$35.00.

Kudo's to Gail & David Marion for running the Village Market. They took in \$708.00.

Kodo's to Louis Rothenstein for running the Hospitality room. We had to restock it every morning.

See Y'all in Vegas next year.

JC Fischer  
Commander, *Counterparts*/THDNA

## Killeen Reunion

(Continued from page 1)

**Bui Lam** for publishing the SITREP free of charge since its inception; **Tommy Daniels** for his founding of the CCI NGO to help the Montagnards in Cambodia and **Michael McMunn** for keeping *Counterparts* Members in Memoriam current. He also thanked **Barbara West**, head catering manager for our fine dinner; and **Donna Fishbach**, Shilo Inn General Manager, for the excellent support she provided for our Reunion.

Once again Team 31, had the largest contingent attending to include: Barry Trost, Charles "Chuck" Briggs, Max Lund, Lewis Grissaffi, Jim O'Malley, Gary Rice, John Hackett, Jerry Weldon, David E. Beck; other members present: Team 86, 49-Rich Webster; Team 52-Donald Bocik Thomas L. Brown, Team 33-Guy E. Daines; Team 88-David P. Marion; RAG 31-Ken Jacobsen; Team 66, MAT 25-Dave Priddy; Team 56/96/22-James Ellis; 9th VN Cav-Neal Henke; Team 28-Bob Barron; Team 93,96-Lou Rothenstein; Team 50,43-Michael A. McDonnell; Team 52,72-Claiborne (Clay) Cowgill; team 60,3/16/9th; Team 143-John Holland; Team 60, 2/15/9th-Bob Turner; Team 25-Grant McClure; C-119, Det 1-Owen Kelly; Team 88-John Haseman.

There were Twelve COUNTERPARTS wives attending. Also attending for the 2nd year as guest was Doug Wilson, a crew chief with the Robin Hoods out of Vinh Long in IV CORPS. Doug's is compiling information on operations, units and advisory teams, POW camps, etc. in the Delta. He may be contacted at [Junglecruiser335@gmail.com](mailto:Junglecruiser335@gmail.com) if you have information for these areas.

Thanks J.C. for the countless hours you worked to put together this unforgettable reunion. And last of all were the hours spent in the hospitality room sharing precious memories and pictures of years ago when we all were "ONCE A WARRIOR KING" fighting for the freedom of our allies, the South Vietnamese and the Montagnards.

It was an honor to walk among heroes at the 2012 COUNTERPARTS Reunion at Ft Hood/Killeen Texas.

.....Rich Webster

### VIETNAM TRIVIA CORNER

*Here are some of the questions from the Trivia Quiz presented at the Killeen Reunion. Answers are on Page Five*

1. How many cigarettes were in each special sized C rations pack?
2. A standard tour of duty in Vietnam was one year except for one service. Which service was it and how long was their tour?
3. A US SECDEF established an imaginary line and dared the communists to cross it. What was its name?
4. On which two days of the year was every serviceman "guaranteed" a hot meal?
5. Advisors to the Vietnamese military were referred to by what Vietnamese phrase?
6. What US Company offered a highly popular booklet of recipes for the dreaded C-Rations?
7. Later in the war, GI's would almost kill to obtain these instead of C Rations. What were they called?
8. How much did it cost to mail a letter home from Vietnam?
9. What were the two official sites for in-country R&R?
10. What did you burn to heat water for coffee or hot chocolate?
11. During combat it could rise to a level of 9.8 or higher on the scale of 10. What was it?
12. Who were the first troops to reoccupy Saigon after WW II?

## Minutes of the *Counterparts* Business Meeting, Killeen, Texas, April 21,2011

There were 29 former Co Vans/Advisors present for the business meeting. *Counterparts* Commander/Treasurer, J.C. Fischer, reported that before the reunion there was \$9,300 in the treasury account and that we took in \$6803 this year in dues. Commander Fisher handed out advisor business cards with our web site address, encouraging every member to recruit other Vietnam Vets who were advisors in the War. Commander Fischer reported that member Bill Cross, Tm 47, is the president of the CIB association and that he encourages *Counterparts* members to join the association. Dues are ten dollars.

Membership Chairman John Haseman reported that there were about 650 active members on the membership roster including several hundred kept on the roles for historic purposes. Since taking over as Membership Chairman, John has improved the collection of membership dues with gentle reminders via email of the \$25 annual dues in January of each year. New members must pay an additional \$10 activation fee. There is also a membership application for associate membership.

Rich Webster gave a short update on our *Counterparts* Scholar, Romas Phanna, now attending college in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Phanna is studying Information Technology and is a member of the Jarai tribe in Ratanikiri Province. Webster described his visit last August with Phanna who is in the Cambodia Corps program that was established by one of our members, Tommy Daniels. Tommy expressed his regrets at not being able to attend for health reasons. Many *Counterparts* members have supported CCI quite generously in the past and present. Member Max Lund presently sponsors another Jarai student, Sev Pak. Most of the adult Montagnard population is illiterate and there are only 28 Montagnard College graduates in all of Cambodia. CCI has produced 25 of these *Counterparts* has sponsored two of them, and including total contributions from all members over the years, our organization has provided enough support to pay for five Montagnard students' education. *Counterparts* still has a mission in Southeast Asia to help the people our government abandoned. The impact of our efforts will go on long after we are gone.

The membership voted to sponsor the following organizations:

- CCI Scholarship program student-Romas Phanna : \$4000.00
- Vinh Son Orphanage in the Central Highlands: \$700.00
- Vets with a Mission: \$500.00

JC reported that *Counterparts* gave \$500 dollars last year to an organization for former Vietnamese soldiers in failing health in honor of Bui Lam who has printed our newsletter at his printshop at no cost to us from its inception.

Team member 31, J.S. Hackett, donated \$2000 to the CCI student scholarship program.

A signup sheet from The Vietnam Center at Texas Tech was circulated and members were urged to participate in Oral History interviews. Kelly Crager, PhD, head of the Oral History project was in attendance. He reemphasized the importance of preserving the memories and experiences of the soldiers who fought the war.

John Haseman described the Library of Vietnam/Laos project where Viet Vets, including Medal of Honor winner Roger Donlan and *Counterparts* member Dennis Deeny are establishing libraries in the Provinces of the two countries.

John also described to members the procedure for accessing our web site and the membership roster. There are two lists. One is a static read-only data base. The other is our *Counterparts* data base, accessible by clicking on the Vietnam Campaign Ribbon on our website. Each member has a personal password. Members who don't know their password were reminded to contact Membership Chairman John Haseman.

Member Grant McClure will represent *Counterparts* in Washington, DC, at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the Vietnam War on May 28 this year.

SITREP editor Ken Jacobsen encouraged *Counterparts* members to write up their stories and send them to him for publication in our newsletter. If not in finished form, he will be glad to edit them. Photos, maps and other documents are also welcome.

Documentary film producer/Director Paul Callahan explained his desire to make a film about advisors helping the people in Vietnam to present a positive image of the Vietnam Veteran Advisor providing humanitarian assistance to the villagers. He conducted a number of interviews with *Counterparts* members.

Next year's Reunion will be in Las Vegas. New member, CSM Louis H. Rothenstein volunteered to host the Reunion. Reunion dates will be forth coming and posted on the bulletin board.

*Submitted,  
Rich Webster.*

## Another *Counterparts* member finds a former Comrade

*(Recently one of our members, Darryl Goss, began a search for his former Counterpart. Once again, Bill Laurie, reached out nationally to the Vietnamese community for help, and as so often in the past, Bill's unique abilities and his far flung network came through for him. Attached is the story telling of Darrell's recent reconnection with his old friend and Vietnamese interpreter, Sgt. Thach Ngoc Nguyen)*

During 1970-71 I was a U.S. Army Infantry First Lieutenant with MAT III-26. We were garrisoned with Popular Forces Platoon #132 at Can Duoc in Long An Province, South Vietnam. It was our good fortune to have as part of our team a Vietnamese interpreter, Sgt. Thach Ngoc Nguyen. He assisted in all our communications as we traveled to nearby hamlets, villages and outposts.

After I left South Vietnam at the end of my tour of duty in 1971, the situation in the country worsened. We left the South Vietnamese to stand alone against the invading North. Over the years I feared for the fate of my good friend Thach Ngoc Nguyen. We had formed a close bond. Our MAT team had been invited to his wedding. He was on my mind. I always wondered what had become of him and his family. In fact, at one point a few years later I was on the verge of starting inquiries, but was advised that to do so could be potentially dangerous to Thach.

Civilian life and work and my family kept me busy, but there came a time when I could wait no more to find out about my friend. Four decades after I last saw him, I set into motion inquiries that I hoped would yield me an answer. I didn't know what to expect. Bill Laurie, a long-time admirer and supporter of the Vietnamese and himself a Vietnam War veteran, ably spread the word about my quest and enlisted help from the wide Vietnamese community. They did the heavy lifting and grunt work to make this happen. In a remarkably short time, word came to me of the whereabouts of my friend Thach and his wife. Imagine my relief on knowing they were now safe and living in the U.S.

I immediately called Thach, and had a wonderful, long conversation with him and his wife, talking over old times. It had taken them many years, but finally they made it here nine years ago. They are now U.S. citizens. Their four grown children remained in Vietnam. Thach's youngest sister, Tuyet Hong, had left Vietnam in 1980 with her brother, his wife and their baby boy during those turbulent times with other "boat people" who risked everything, even their lives, to escape the Communist takeover.

Luck was with her and she eventually reached the southern part of Thailand; however, her brother was not so lucky and he was killed by the pirates. Tuyet Hong, her sister-in-law and her nephew arrived in Songkhla refugee camp, where she met Paul Muzhuthett who was then working in the refugee camp. Paul had worked in the Songkhla Camp with Rev. Fr. Joe Devlin, S. J., known as "the boat people's priest" and champion of the thousands of Vietnamese boat people who fled to Thailand. Tuyet Hong came to the U.S. in 1982 and settled in Virginia. In 1985 Paul arrived here for studies for his Master's in International Administration. Tuyet Hong and Paul married in 1986. They were able to sponsor Thach and another brother in their relocation to the U.S. Thach and his wife Anh Nguyet now live and work in a town in Massachusetts. They are intent on the possibility of their children joining them here and have put this process into motion.

For myself, I am thankful that they are safe and I am grateful for the opportunity to see him again. Two old friends coming together again. A happy ending to conclude over 40 years of wondering, waiting, worrying. This would NOT have happened without Bill Laurie and *Counterparts* and the immense assistance provided by the Vietnamese community who spread the word far and wide.

.....H. Darrell Goss

### Answers to Vietnam Questions

1. Five
2. USMC members served 13 Months or 395 days.
3. The McNamara line
4. Thanksgiving and Christmas
5. The McIlhenney Co., who made Tobasco Sauce
6. Co van
7. Long Range Recon Patrol (LRRP) Rations. Freeze dried and lighter than C rations
8. Letter mail to the US was free
9. China Beach and Vung Tau
10. C-4 Plastic Explosive
11. The "Pucker Factor"
12. The British. (Indian Troops)

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VILLAGE MARKET**



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# Reunion 2012, Killeen, Texas



Team 31 and their Personal Film Maker



Pearl Harbor Survivor Ben Russell



Pappy Hicks, Ty Hicks and JC Fischer



The Annual Banquet



The Ladies at the Banquet



The Color Guard; Our Nations Finest

## ***The Lighter Side of War.***

*These anecdotes and photos were sent to us by Counterparts member Joe Frankoski. Most of us will find something familiar in at least one of these stories. It makes us wonder sometimes, how we survived it all.*

*.....Editor*

*The following incidents occurred in 1963 in Tan Uyen District, Phuoc Thanh Province about 25 miles north of Saigon in the Southwest corner of War Zone D where I was Battalion Advisor, to the ARVN 2/48 Inf. Regt. Although these incidents were not always funny when they took place, they appear more humorous half a century after the fact.*

*.....Joe Frankoski*

### **Bayonet and Bra**

Report received from U.S. helicopter: VC unit entering wooded area north of Bau Ca Tre strategic hamlet (no longer exists). Plan: one company to attack the wooded area and another company which I accompanied would circle behind the woods and hit the VC as they tried to flee. A brief firefight occurred between the attacking company and the VC. We circled the woods but too late; the grass was still springing up from the VC escape route. A pursuit failed to intercept them. Learned that a VC female had been firing a BAR at the attacking company. A 105 mm artillery was captured. On the return to Bau Ca Tre I saw a soldier had a bayonet fixed on his M1 rifle with a white bra fluttering from it. Friendly losses: none. VC losses: one artillery round, one white bra!

### **Dog Food**

My first counterpart at Bau Ca Tre was Capt. Quyen (KIA battle of Dong Xoai, 1965). He had a police dog, Me Dinh which he characterized as a "war dog." (On one operation a soldier had to carry Me Dinh because it was tired; some war dog!). It was suppertime and I was super hungry. I told Pvt. Dacca, assistant cook, that I wanted more rice. He walked to the iron rice pot and I noticed Me Dinh was eating out of same. Dacca kicked the dog away from the pot, filled my rice bowl, Handed it to me and said, "Rice, captain." After several moments of hesitation my chopsticks were digging into the rice.



**Joe Frankoski outside the room he shared with a cobra**

### **Aromatic Advisors**

Battalion HQ at Binh My strategic hamlet (anti-GVN inhabitants) on Rt. 16. A Huey landed unannounced. SFC Thaggard, my infantry weapons advisor and I hustled to the chopper. A colonel dismounted. We saluted, he returned the salute and suddenly stopped and loudly asked, "When in hell was the last time you two had a shower?" For me it had been at least three months and for Thaggard considerably longer." I replied. He then ordered. "From now on take turns to go to Saigon once a month for a shower!" He reboarded the Huey and departed. He never said why he had come to see us! We then discussed his order and concluded we didn't smell that bad. Perhaps he had a more acute sense of smell.

### **My Roommate is a Cobra**

At the old French fort at Binh My, my quarters was a very dark, damp, windowless room with a dirt floor. One morning as I was arising from my canvas cot I noticed a cobra, about two feet long, eating a frog for breakfast. It was between me and my M3 grease gun. An ARVN NCO passed by, and I shouted, "Rung Loup". In a moment he returned with a machete and cut the cobra in two. My guess is that the cobra and I had been sharing the dark room for weeks. Anyhow, I picked the wrong time and place for breakfast.

### **Late Night Latrine Visit**

Again Binh My fort. Late night and nature called. The Latrine was outside the fort. Approaching it I pulled down my trousers and squatted over the slit trench. Something made me turn my head and perhaps a yard away I saw a water buffalo and could feel its breath on my bare butt. (I'm sure many readers recall that water buffalo disliked adults and HATED Americans.) Armed only with a .45 pistol I determined that running for the nearby fort was better than having a wounded buffalo chase me. As I ran two thoughts flashed: what a way of being killed in a war by a water buffalo and, how fast I could move with my fatigue trousers around my ankles! That was my last late night visit to the latrine.



**The Beer Drinking Monkey of Binh MY**

### **VC Monkey's Revenge**

Again, Binh My. 2/48 had captured a monkey at a VC camp in the Delta before coming to III Corps area. It was moody, aggressive and noisy so it often was kept chained. We sometimes gave it beer to quiet it down. Very early one morning I heard heavy small arms fire very close by. Dressed only in shorts I grabbed my weapons and exited the building). As I exited that VC monkey sprang from the roof onto my bare back almost causing a heart attack. I reached up, grabbed it, and threw it violently to the ground. It ran into the protective minefield. Unfortunately it was not blown up. As the firing ceased I thought that a nice breakfast would be monkey stew.

### **Beer Call**

Binh Co strategic hamlet on Rt. 16. About once a week a three-wheeled Lambretta would deliver ice from Saigon - a big day for us. The battalion CO, XO and I were at a "restaurant"; two tables, a bench and a dirt floor, sipping warm *Bier La Rue*. The Lambretta arrived, stopped and discharged a couple of passengers. The lady serving us took a machete and walked to the rear cargo deck of the vehicle. There was a block of ice but with a pig resting on it! She pulled the pig off, slid the block onto the ground and hacked off a slab. Next, she chopped the slab into smaller pieces, wiped them off on her black pajama trousers, placed the ice into our glasses, and proudly announced that we now could have cold beer.

### ***Why your story is important***

By

Ken Jacobsen

A few days ago, while doing some informal research on the internet, I ran across what promised to be an interesting article on the history of Riverine operations in Vietnam. As I dug into the piece though, I began to notice an irritating number of errors. None seemed important at first; an incorrect acronym here and there, some dates a bit off, and a few odd omissions. The errors added up though and some of them were significant. Worse yet, the author's analysis of this error riddled information led him inevitably to conclusions that were clearly false and misleading.

If the article had been written by an antiwar reporter or published in an academic journal, this experience would have been annoying, but not surprising. What was disturbing was that it was published in 2002 by the US Marine Corps Air/Ground Training and Education Center in Quantico, and written by a USMC Major, apparently as a research paper of some kind. Unintentionally, the Marine Corps was participating in spreading misinformation about tactics, lessons learned, and basic historical fact. *Rolling Stone* could not have done a better job of undermining the truth.

The experience reminded me again of the importance of getting out the facts and the story of the Vietnam war as we, the Advisors, saw it. Now more than ever, as the war recedes into the past, and the intensity of our recall fades, we must jealously guard historical truth. No one else is going to do it for us, no one is going to speak out on our behalf. If we do not preserve our history no one will. Every one of us has seen examples of errors, obvious to us, but not apparent to the unaware, become accepted truth, simply because no one stood up to correct the author.

I'm writing a letter to the USMC Center, and hope that I'll be able to replace at least one troubling piece of misinformation with the humble but enduring truth.

*"Human History becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe"*

*....H.G Welles*

## 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.

**Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-75.** *George J. Veith. Encounter Books, May 2012. Hard Cover \$19.20, 624 pages \$19.20: Available through Amazon.com*

*Note: The following review was excerpted from Amazon.com's reader review comments. Author of the review is unknown*

The defeat of South Vietnam was arguably America's worst foreign policy disaster of the 20th Century. Yet a complete understanding of the endgame—from the 27 January 1973 signing of the Paris Peace Accords to South Vietnam's surrender on 30 April 1975—has eluded us.

Black April addresses that deficit. A culmination of exhaustive research in three distinct areas: primary source documents from American archives, North Vietnamese publications containing primary and secondary source material, and dozens of articles and numerous interviews with key South Vietnamese participants, this book represents one of the largest Vietnamese translation projects ever accomplished, including almost one hundred rarely or never seen before North Vietnamese unit histories, battle studies, and memoirs. Most important, to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of South Vietnam's conquest, the leaders in Hanoi released several compendiums of formerly highly classified cables and memorandum between the Politburo and its military commanders in the south. This treasure trove of primary source materials provides the most complete insight into North Vietnamese decision-making ever compiled. While South Vietnamese deliberations remain less clear, enough material exists to provide a decent overview.

Ultimately, whatever errors occurred on the American and South Vietnamese side, the simple fact remains that the country was conquered by a North Vietnamese military invasion despite written pledges by Hanoi's leadership against such action. Hanoi's momentous choice to destroy the Paris Peace Accords and militarily end the war sent a generation of South Vietnamese into exile, and exacerbated a societal trauma in America over our long Vietnam involvement that reverberates.

Black April is a book about the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. The book has 18 chapters, each titled by a quote, and an introduction. The book tells the story of South Vietnam in the last two years (1973-1975) of the Vietnam War, starting with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords and ending with the final collapse of South Vietnam on April 30, 1975.

The story is told from a military viewpoint. Those with other interests (e.g., political, social) may be easily turned off with detailed military maneuvers, troop movements, strategies, etc. However, the author skillfully intertwines war scenes with anecdotes of the human spirit, poignant and touching.

For those who are interested in military history, or just history in general, this book is a must-read. The chapters are full of detailed and vivid descriptions with maps and accounts of what happened during the last few months of the war. The author presents the material from a fairly objective position, using sources from all sides, including communist sources, in printed materials, memoirs, articles, etc. In addition to superb narrative, the author also provides valuable insights and analysis on what, how, and why things happened the way they did.

The collapse of South Vietnam started with the Paris Peace Accords in 1973 when Nixon pressed South Vietnam President Thieu into signing the agreement by promising harsh reaction to violations of the Peace Accords by the Communists (Chapter 1). Nixon's promise to Thieu was kept secret from Congress. However, it is doubtful that things would have been different had Congress known about it.

As expected, the Communists didn't sign the Peace Accords in good faith. It was merely a trick to allow the Americans to complete the face-saving withdrawal from Vietnam. Le Duan, the North Vietnam leader at the time and a die-hard Marxist, wanted to conquer South Vietnam. He persuaded the Politburo to push forward "revolutionary violence" in a military conquest of the South (Chapter 2).

Vietnam desperately needed military aid from the U.S. to prepare for the defense. But Congress voted to reduce the aid amount. While South Vietnam prepared for the renewed war, North Vietnam poured supplies down the Ho Chi Minh trail and sent fresh troops to the South (Chapter 3). "[O]ne hundred thousand fresh troops advanced southward in 1973, and another eighty thousand were headed to the battlefields during the first half of 1974." (p. 69)

The war resumed in South Vietnam when Gerald Ford became U.S. President (Chapter 4). "Ford faced a recalcitrant Congress and a stagnant economy," (p. 81) and couldn't do much.

The beginning of the end started with the collapse of Phuoc Long in January 1975 (Chapter 5). "Heavy rains swept Saigon, unusual for January." Colonel Le Gro's Vietnamese driver, eyeing the pouring rain, said to him, "Even the gods weep for Phuoc Long." (p. 110)

Chapters 6 through 16 chronicles the collapse of Corp I and Corp II, from Ban Me Thuot (Chapters 6-7), Thieu's error in his order of withdrawal (Chapter 8), the retreat from the highlands (Chapter 9), to the chaos and disintegration (Chapter 10), Hue and Corp I collapse (Chapters 11-12), the battle for the coastal cities (Chapter 13), the Communist advance toward Saigon (Chapter 14), the battle for Phan Rang and its capture by the Communists (Chapter 15-16).

The battle of Xuan Loc is the most heroic battle of the war (Chapter 17). Against all odds and clearly outnumbered, under the magnificent command of Brigadier General Le Minh Dao, the men of the 18th Infantry Division, the 82nd ranger battalion, the 1st Airborne Brigade, the Air Force, the 3rd Armored, and the popular and regional forces fought with remarkable courage and skill.

Only when President Duong Van Minh broadcast the surrender order on April 30, 1975, the South Vietnamese soldiers laid down their weapons (Chapter 18). They followed the order of their supreme commander against their own wish to continue fighting. Even when surrendering, they maintained their honor and discipline. In the most moving scene on the final day, the 81st Airborne Rangers surrendered to their enemy with class. "Shouldering their weapons, lining up four abreast in a column stretching almost half a mile long, the two thousand men of ARVN's most elite unit began marching along the highway toward Saigon. As promised, Colonel Huan was in the first row. . . Soon a Communist officer and troops met Huan on the highway. Huan told the officer his men were prepared to turn over their weapons, but they would not undress. If ordered to do so, they would refuse, and a firefight would break out. The Communist officer relented, and the soldiers of the 81st stacked their arms and dispersed. It was the final unit in Saigon to lay down its weapons." (p. 494-495). Several South Vietnamese Generals committed suicide. "[M]ost mid- and upper-level commanders stayed with their men. For example, not one Ranger-group or battalion commander deserted his men. Of the senior officers who escaped at the end, Lieutenant Generals Truong and Thi, for example, were no longer commanding units." (p. 495)

Black April is an accurate account on the heroic efforts of the men of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces who stood up for a last fight against the aggressive North Vietnamese despite lack of ammunition, supplies, equipment, and replacements. They fought till the end. The very end.

A Vietnamese saying says, "Heroes die, but their heroic spirit never dies." (Anh hung tu, khi hung bat tu.) The country of South Vietnam died, but the spirit of the Vietnamese people never dies.

Black April is about the military defeat of South Vietnam. But the stories in Black April are not just about the fight against communist invasion. They are about the human spirit. They are about the spirit of the Vietnamese people, the peace loving people, who were not given the chance they deserved to fight for freedom.

**Vietnam River Warfare, 1945-1975.** LTC Victor Croizat, USMC. *Blanford Press, 1984. Soft Cover 160 pages, illustrations and photographs.*

Riverine or "Brown Water" warfare was one of the facets of the Indochina experience that made the war quite different from other recent conflicts. With over 5,000 miles of waterways and poor land lines of communications, the Mekong delta was a natural environment for water-based military activity. Although extensive operations were carried out in the northern areas of Indochina and later in the northern sections of South Vietnam, the Mekong Delta and the approaches to Saigon saw the most activity, from the French reoccupation of Indochina in 1946 to the final fall of the Republic of South Vietnam in 1975.

The most useful part of Croizat's book is the first half, covering the background and history of French riverine operations. The text is leavened with a healthy sprinkling of photos, maps, and diagrams of River Assault formations and battles. Unfortunately, the discussion of the Republic of Vietnam Navy (VNN) is far too cursory. Croizat includes sidebars on two engagements involving VNN River Assault Groups (RAG) but provides little insight into the overall employment and the tactical use of the RAG's beyond a rather broad-brushed summary which seems to end at about 1965-66. In common with so many US military historians of the Vietnam war, he appears almost eager to move quickly past the Vietnamese Armed Forces' role and into a detailed narrative of US forces, their tactics and their operations. Amazingly, the book does not even mention the role of Riverine forces in the 1970 Cambodian Incursion, which was the largest River operation of the war, involving over 140 VNN and U.S. craft.

.... Reviewed by Ken Jacobsen



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