



# COUNTERPARTS

## Thương Hữu Đông Nam Á

# SITREP

Volume XIX

Issue 1

Spring 2018

## Reunion 2018 in Pensacola Capped a Productive, Active Year for Counterparts

Since our Louisville Reunion in April 2017, *Counterparts* members and representatives have been at the forefront of a variety of activities ranging from providing an independent voice to challenge the “Ken Burns version” of the Vietnam experience, to active involvement in commemorative projects like the proposed Tri An memorial In Louisville, KY. Along the way we have welcomed new members and friends and sadly, said farewell to some beloved comrades.

We spent a pleasant few days in mild, tropical Pensacola, and even though the untimely death of Reunion Coordinator Steve Moczary had made planning more challenging than usual, enjoyed the warm ambience of Pensacola’s Grand Hotel. Our Hospitality suite was, as always, a focus for renewing friendships, recounting old and new “war stories”, and planning the upcoming year. Ray Robison, who has become the unofficial host of the Hospitality suite, kept the pace going from morning to late at night while Reunion czar Lewis Grissaffi kept everyone moving and organized.

After a day of informal touring an fellowship we went by bus the the Navy’s Aviation Museum, one of the largest and most complete aircraft and aviation memorabilia collections in the world. Members were impressed by the size and scale of the place, and by the end of the day, ready for a bit of rest,

The traditional Vietnamese meal was served at the *TuDo* restaurant In Pensacola. The lively atmosphere and bustling *Co’s* and *Ba’s* were reminiscent of the places we remembered from so long ago. Familiar too, were the puzzled, slightly apprehensive “Did I order that?” expressions of the diners. The food was fresh, hot, and the drinks cold.

Saturday’s business meeting covered a wide swath of subjects, old and new. We discussed the need to continue and refine or mission to counter the “fake history” of the war and to honor our fallen comrade and former allies and Counterparts in the struggle. While our voices are often not heard and more often not listened to, the need to stay in the fight is more important than ever. Other agenda items included a discussion of our plans for donations in the upcoming year. XO Hank Choy presented the proposed new challenge coin which was an immediate hit with the membership

A detailed account of the Business meeting by PAO Rich Webster can be found on page 3. Since the Business Meeting gives us the guideposts for the coming year, it’s important that all *Counterparts* members read and ponder them.

The final item of the meeting was the selection of a 2019 Reunion site. This decision proved much easier than is has often been in the past. New member Henry Newin offered to host the Reunion in Houston, Texas, sometime next April. Ray Robison volunteered to assist Henry, and we can expect that Lewis Grissaffi will also be on the job again as a consultant and corporate memory.

Planners have already roughed out a schedule of events and has provided registration information in this issue of SITREP (page 5).

Banquet Speaker Jay Haney gave us some fascinating insights into his experiences as one of the last *Covans* to leave Vietnam. The final grace note of the Reunion was remarks by Rich Botkin, creator of the film *Ride the Thunde,r* one of the rare true stories of Advisors and their Vietnamese Counterparts.



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## Commander's Corner

There's much that we give tribute to in the memory of Steve Moczary for volunteering to host a fantastic reunion in Pensacola, and also express prodigious gratitude to Lewis Grissaffi, Tom Sutterfield, and Randy Kelly for the phenomenal effort of stepping-in to shore-up Steve's plans by coordinating excursion logistics and association events. It was an altogether terrific get-together.

We're headed to Houston in 2019 with Roy Robison at the helm in collaboration with new member and reunion host Henry Newin. At the time this SITREP goes out, most of the plans have been well defined and will be shared in this issue and posted on the association website.

This brings back great memories of the first reunion I attended in Houston in 1990, after becoming a member in 1989. There was no slate of officers in Houston, and much of our time was spent formulating association structure, by-laws, constitution and the like. It was at the reunion that I volunteered to record the meeting minutes and in doing so was "drafted" on the spot to serve as *XO pro tem* until the next meeting where nominations would be accepted for the officer positions. We were still in the early forming and storming phase of the association's evolution. Also of note at that reunion business meeting were deliberations over the association name which at that time was an early iteration of, "Co Van My." Assistance was requested of member Col. Quach Huyhn Ha to provide insight and perspective on how to best define the type of inclusiveness that the association sought to achieve with respect to our host-country *Counterparts*. This then led a year later to the adoption of *Thuong Huu Dong Nam A*, i.e., denoting a brotherhood of friends of Southeast Asia, that accompanied the brand name, *Counterparts*.

As expressed during the business meeting in Pensacola, I encourage members to share any veteran-related activities with me that you're involved in so I can add to the *Counterparts* chronology. Please feel free to send via email.

Also, I have a special request that we lend our full support to Richard Botkin, author of "*Ride the Thunder*." The feature length film portrayal of his book can be seen on *Amazon Prime*. Members can access the film by and through a free three-month trial of *Amazon Prime*. The request is to view the film and then offer your review/comments at the end to help ensure there is fair balance in the perspective of veterans [especially those who served as advisors] to contrast against some left of center absurdities in comments by others. Rich's book and his film touch the heart of the advisor-counterpart relationship, and there's much that we can do to bolster the meaningfulness of his important true-to-life story with our support.

....Dr. Grant McClure

## *Minutes of the COUNTERPARTS Business Meeting April 14, 2018*

Commander Grant McClure called the meeting to order and the 38 members present introduced themselves, identifying their advisor team/units and years served in Vietnam. There were 7 new members present for the 29<sup>th</sup> annual reunion.

Steve Moczary, who passed away several months ago was recognized and honored for his efforts on hosting the reunion in Pensacola. There are two past articles in the SITREP detailing his military career with two tours of duty in Vietnam and his early experiences as a Hungarian freedom fighter.

Grant distributed a summary of the history of *Counterparts* and the many positive actions we have taken over the years to aid our abandoned allies in Southeast Asia. This last year, along with members Jim Coolican, and LTC Tran Ngoc (Harry) Hue who was in the Burns/Novick Vietnam documentary, Grant attended the special preview of the Vietnam War documentary in Washington. Grant noted that the anti-war protestors in the audience were also asked to stand and be recognized and were given hearty applause by those in attendance. Grant and Harry were also invited to attend the final episode of the documentary, and it appeared they were the only two to remain seated while the audience gave a standing ovation to Burns & Novick for their documentary.

Lewis Grissaffi represented *Counterparts* with a wreath at the *Black April* commemoration organized by our Vietnamese allies in San Diego last year.

Grant distributed a page with military patches worn by advisors/units serving with our Vietnamese allies. Dave Priddy will send the Popular Forces patch which was missing. This page of patches will be mailed out to all members for their input/comments.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE- John Haseman reported that there are 113 active members, 35 who have not paid their dues. There are 154 active lifetime members. There are 270 active members and 321 inactive members. There are 703 members on our roster. For historic purposes no one is ever taken off our roster. Annual dues are \$35 dollars, a recent raise to fund our humanitarian projects. Our four distinguished members are: Tommy Daniels, Jane Hamilton Merritt, Rufus Phillips, and Roger Donlon (MOH). Daniels, Phillips, and Donlon have all been past speakers at our banquets

TREASURER'S REPORT – Jim O'Malley reported that *Counterparts* brought in \$2,600 last year and has roughly \$25,000 in the bank. Last year we gave \$3,500 to *Cambodia Corps*, \$2,500 to the *Vietnam Healing Foundation*, and \$500 to the Vietnamese Ranger fund in honor of Bui Lam who prints our newsletter for free. The check was not cashed and Jim will look into this. This year we donated \$6,500 to the Tri An Foundation and memorial to be built in Louisville, KY, which will enable to have the association's name etched into the granite display there. Lewis Grissaffi chaired this project. Most of the funds had been donated via individual member contributions. After reunion expenses, *Counterparts* will have \$15,000 in the treasury to include the \$3800 made at the Reunion.

ANNUAL CHARITABLE GIVING - This year members voted to continue funding *Cambodia Corps Inc.* with \$3,500. Max Lund, new President of CCI, gave an update on the NGO in Cambodia that provides educational scholarships to poor Montagnard children from the two eastern provinces of Cambodia that border Vietnam. To date, CCI has educated 41 college students with degrees in engineering, teaching, nursing, community, health education and information technology. Our *Counterparts* scholar, Sev Yem, recently graduated, and teaching in Ratanakiri province, helped save the life of a poor hill tribe student by raising funds to take him to Phnom Penh for medical care. Yem is also active in voter registration to help the Montagnards to keep their land from the large multi-national corporations who are destroying their forest habitats.

Members also voted to continue funding with \$2,500, the *Vietnam Healing Foundation* which helps former ARVN soldiers who are living in poverty with little if any health care. The organization is run by Viet Vet RJ Del Vecchio who sends money back to Vietnam Last year the VHF distributed approximately \$14,000 to 100 former ARVN soldiers. Rich Webster showed pictures of several of the ARVN who we assisted by our cash gift. The present government of Vietnam gives nothing to former South Vietnamese soldiers and goes out of its way to harass anyone who tried to assist them. For more info, see [WWW.thevhf.org](http://WWW.thevhf.org).

*Counterparts* will also donate \$1,000 to *Vets with a Mission* which provides medical care to the poor of Vietnam. Member Lou Rothenstein gave a brief overview of their program. He and his wife who volunteered her services as a nurse spent several weeks working with the VWAM mission last year in Vietnam. Discussion was held on extra money above the cost of dues donated to *Counterparts*. It was decided that the extra money will go into the general fund to be used for our charitable project

Carol Lund, our historian, asked if the membership wanted a face book page. Because of the privacy issue, the idea was voted down. Carol provides our annual year books and she will work on digitalizing them.

## ***Business Meeting (Continued)***

Henry Choy, our XO, presented the new *Counterparts* challenge coin, which he has been working on for the last year. It is very similar to our old coin but larger and very professionally done. Cost for the coin will be \$15. Most members purchased the coin after the meeting. Thanks Henry for completing this project.

PIO UPDATE. Rich Webster encouraged members to write up their stories and send them to him or Ken Jacobsen, the SITREP editor. Ken and Rich will assist members in writing their story if requested. Their email addresses are in the SITREP. All SITREPs and the articles in them can now be searched for and found on the internet. They will be a part of the history of the Vietnam War forever. Copies of the SITREP are sent to Texas Tech University Vietnam Center Archives.

New member Henry Newin volunteered to host the 2019 reunion in Houston, Texas, to be assisted by Ray Robison, whose counterpart lives there. Henry Choy will explore hosting the Reunion in Hawaii in 2020.

NEW MEMBERS PRESENT- Jesse Tamayo, MAT 32, Kien Phong Province; Bill Stallings, MAT II-7, tm 42; Jeff Crowe, 23<sup>rd</sup> Wing M Nap; Bill Miller, Tm 21, 23<sup>rd</sup> Ranger Battalion; Ray Cloud, Tm 56, S1 Province Hq; Jay Haney, Tm 60; Jack Colvin, 5<sup>th</sup> ARVN, Ben Cat, 1964, and Henry Newin, ARVN.

Marine Corps veteran Richard Botkin, author of *Ride the Thunder*, about a U.S. Marine advisor and a Vietnamese Marine's struggles after the war, was in attendance. Two of the books he donated were auctioned off for \$65, and a number of CDs of the movie were handed out to members. See [www.ridethethundermovieproject.com](http://www.ridethethundermovieproject.com). Members are encouraged to subscribe to *Amazon Prime* to view the film and write a review. It is noted that *Amazon Prime* offers a free three month trial during which some members may elect to view *Ride the Thunder*. It is most important to have member involvement in this to support the film with comments immediately following their viewing. Such comments bolster the purpose of this important film that is all about the relationship of an American advisor and his counterpart and helps to reflect the greater purpose that was served in the allied effort to stem the tide of communist aggression against the Republic of South Vietnam. Support of this film also negates the vapid stereotypes about the Vietnam War that show up in other comments by viewers that have skewed perceptions of the war and our allies.

The Saturday evening banquet was attended by 70 *Counterparts* members/wives plus a number of distinguished guests. Grant recognized faithful member Steve Moczary who passed away before the reunion and was instrumental in planning the reunion in Pensacola. He was assisted by his local veteran friend, Randy Kelly. Members then introduced themselves and wives. Steve's son was also recognized.

Grant commented that we watched in horror in 1975 when our former allies were overrun despite their heroic efforts against the communist invaders. *Counterparts* is dedicated to keeping those memories and friendships alive and what can we say to those we abandoned and left behind.

Banquet speaker was our own member, Jay Haney, West Point grad, who used a presentation of his experiences as one of the last advisors in Vietnam. Jay served with Advisory team 60 with the 1st BN of the 16<sup>th</sup> ARVN infantry during the 1972 Easter Offensive. He pointed out that even though the South Vietnamese won the Easter offensive, the correlation of forces changed after that with the invasion of 14 NVA divisions into the South to include one in the Mekong Delta. And for the first time, the NVA had superior artillery and 200 tanks assigned to each division while the ARVN were left to stand on their own after their abandonment by the US.

Richard Botkin was introduced and remarked, "I consider you the Vietnam generation to be the greatest generation. The anti-war generation doesn't deserve to be your equal. My film, *Ride The Thunder* shows that you and the South Vietnamese are the real heroes of the Vietnam War and you fought bravely for freedom. At the premier showing of the film, wives of former South Vietnamese soldiers were present and despite the brutality depicted in the reeducation camps, they said I was too nice to the communists. Of the wives who were able to visit the camps, the communist guards raped them before they could visit their husbands. "

Botkin suggested that we are not winning the "culture war with regard to the true history of the Vietnam War, referring to the distorted image depicted in academia, Hollywood, and the Radical Left which was reinforced in the recent Burns/Novick film. The Burns film relied heavily on the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, a very small group of Vietnam anti-war Veterans comprised of less than 2,000, compared to the 2.7 million who served there.

Huy Nguyen, architect and son of a South Vietnamese artillery army officer, gave a short presentation about the American/South Vietnamese memorial he has designed in Orlando, Florida. "Nothing is more sacred than the soldier who fights for freedom. This monument will honor the South Vietnamese soldier and their American counterpart in the fight for freedom in Vietnam. Unless we do this, the next generation will not know and the communists will capture the history of the Vietnam War."

**Hotel Information and Reunion Events**

**Hotel Information**

The Reunion will be held April 3rd thru 7th, 2019 at the Crowne Plaza Suites 9090 Southwest Freeway, Houston, Texas 77074 (713-995-0123). If at all possible fly into William Hobby airport, as it is much closer to the hotel. **In order to get the Counterparts rate, inform them your group code is "COU".** The room rate per night is \$118.66 including tax. This rate is available for April 1<sup>st</sup> thru 10th. The room rate of \$118.66 includes Tax and complimentary breakfasts per room. If additional persons are staying in the room, additional breakfasts may be purchased for \$6.00 per person. The hotel offers complimentary parking. These rates will be honored if reservation is made before March 22, 2019.

**Schedule of Reunion Events**

**Wednesday April 3<sup>rd</sup>:** Registration in the hospitality room starting at 12 Noon. The Hospitality room will be open from 8 AM to 12 PM daily except on April 6th when it will be closed at 2 PM to allow resetting for Banquet Dinner.

**Thursday April 4<sup>th</sup>:** Depart with Bus at 9:15 AM/10:45 AM (if 2<sup>nd</sup> trip required) to Johnson Space Center (JSC).. The tour takes about 4 hours. Food and drink items available in the JSC cafeteria. Return to Hotel at 2:00PM/3:40PM. Rest and refresh.

**Friday April 5<sup>th</sup>:** Depart Hotel at 11:00 AM/11:15 to Vietnam Veterans Memorial Houston for a memorial ceremony and placing of a wreath with local Vietnamese Veterans. From there to a local Vietnamese Restaurant (pay as you go), with Vietnamese Veterans. Depart to Hotel at 1:30/1:45PM. *Guests who do not wish to attend the Veteran Memorial Ceremony, will be bused at 11:30 AM to the Galleria Mall and picked up at 2:00 PM*

**Saturday April 6<sup>th</sup>:** Business meeting from 9 AM to Noon in Hospitality room. The Hospitality room closes at 2 PM for set up for Banquet Dinner. There will be a cash bar at Banquet. The guest speaker TBD.

**Sunday April 7<sup>th</sup>:** Goodbye's, checkout and depart for home or continue a personal vacation. 'Til next year.....

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**REGISTRATION FORM**

Registration Fee: \$166.00 Per Person. Includes Banquet, Transportation, and Drinks/Snacks in Hospitality room.  
Number of reservations \_\_\_ X \$166.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_. (If bringing a guest for the banquet only, cost is \$35.00 per guest)

Please provide the names and addresses of Member, Spouse and Guests

Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Guest: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest: \_\_\_\_\_

**MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO 'COUNTERPARTS'  
SEND CHECK AND REGISTRATION FORMS TO:**

Mr. Lewis Grissaffi  
1221 Vegas Street  
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619-922-8682

Email for Additional Information or Questions: [Luisaffi@yahoo.com](mailto:Luisaffi@yahoo.com) or [rayjobison@gmail.com](mailto:rayjobison@gmail.com)

## Ngay Quoc Han

*The young dead soldiers do not speak.  
Nevertheless, they are heard in the still houses:  
who has not heard them?  
They have a silence that speaks for them at night  
and when the clock counts.  
They say: We were young. We have died.  
Remember us.*

*- "The Young Dead Soldiers Do Not Speak"  
....Archibald MacLeish*

"Ngay Quoc Han" can be translated as "National Indignation Day." It refers to the 30th of April, 1975, when Hanoi's *Wehrmacht* conquered the Republic of Viet Nam. It is a day that is generally unrecognized by the public at large and only honored and memorialized by those who supported an independent Republic of Viet Nam, not to exclude Laos and Cambodia from list of communist victims.

It is more than an abstraction, much more than a simple day. There was a before and after to "Ngay Quoc Hanh." Returning to Viet Nam in '73 as a DoD civilian, following a one-year tour with MACV, the dire situation was immediately visible. The aid cutback did not, as some assume, take effect in '75 but by mid-'73. "Scholars" and news people may disagree but RVN forces were well aware of the gradually growing restrictions and decline in combat capabilities. These "experts" could have discovered this had they spent any time with RVN soldiers and people. They did not. It was obscene and became increasingly so as time moved on. Some expressed surprise that Republic of Viet Nam Armed Forces (RVNAF) apparently collapsed overnight in '75; but they were oblivious to a greater question: how did RVNAF keep fighting from mid-'74, bled dry by American aid cutbacks, amplified by sharp rise in petroleum prices. 25% unemployment and 50% inflation made matters worse. Troops and their families were going hungry. Meanwhile, Hanoi's allies proved more reliable and gave Hanoi's communists more weaponry, munitions, supplies, POL than ever before. Consider: an estimated 84,000 VC/NVA attacked in the first wave of the '68 offensive, upwards of 150,000 NVA were committed in '72, while Hanoi sent as many as 350,000 VC/NVA in '75. Never in the war had U.S. forces been confronted by such a massive force with devastating artillery and armor.

When the end came I was engulfed by a toxic emotional blend of heartbreak and volcanic rage. Had my parents not been living I might not have returned to the U.S.

After 30 April Viet Nam plunged into an abyss of misery, of police state oppression, poverty, of malnutrition, prison camp brutality, and "New Economic Zone" labor camps for non-military. Nothing Hanoi promised came about. No press freedom. No freedom of speech. No freedom of religion. Many who had supported communist forces realized it had all been a lie. Hundreds of thousands took to the sea to escape Hanoi's barbarity. 250,000 are estimated to have perished at sea. Scores of female boat people were abducted and raped by Thai pirates. After Hanoi's communist conquest, maternal and infant mortality rates doubled.

The bad guys won, providing ample reason for incendiary indignation.

Who were MacLeish's "...young dead soldiers" fighting against this repugnant brutality? One is Tran Van Bay, an RVN soldier who pushed his US Marine counterpart away from a booby trap blast, absorbing the explosion, dying in the process. One would be John J. Kedenburg, who gave up his spot on the last lift chopper from a hot LZ to a Montagnard comrade. Kedenburg was subsequently killed by NVA surrounding his position. Perhaps Hilliard Wilbanks would like to speak.

He was killed providing "close air support," firing his M-16 from the window of his O-1 bird dog to draw fire from an NVA element and alert an RVN Ranger unit walking into an ambush. We might ask a Major Phiep if his voice is heard in the "still houses." Major Phiep died trying to drag his U.S. counterpart out of an ambush kill zone. Why limit ourselves only to military people? Vuu My Linh's voice should be heard in the "still houses." She was a 14 year-old boat person, abducted by Thai pirates and never seen again.

In view of all this, other names can be applied to this tragic day. Perhaps "Day of Revulsion," attesting to U.S. abandonment of Viet Nam, after having poisoned the well with a criminally negligent excuse for a "strategy." Perhaps "Day of Crushing Heartbreak," reflecting the many hard, tough men...and women...who cried rivers of tears when RVN fell. Perhaps "Day of Barbarity," signifying the "night of long knives" when Hanoi's communist thug policies caused the death of tens of thousands of prison camp and New Economic Zone inmates. Maybe "Day of Nausea" reflecting American ignorance and bland, amoral indifference in accepting this putrid outcome with equanimity.

Whatever the day is called it evokes the deepest of emotions among those trying to stop Hanoi's wretched, vile war, a war bringing death of millions, not only in Viet Nam but also in Laos and Cambodia.

"Ngay Quoc Han" occurs a month before Memorial Day, a day in which the United States honors those who died defending America. There is no better way to honor these people than to comprehend and honor their objectives, and no more contemptible practice than to ignore the realities, to ignore those who did not burn villages, who were motivated by a sincere desire for an end to Hanoi's repugnant war.

Too many assume the war ended in '75. But this reflects a profound ignorance. In fact the war never ended for many. As Baruch Spinoza, observed, "Peace is not an absence of war it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, and justice."

These conditions emphatically did not apply in Viet Nam, lending more tragic meaning to "Ngay Quoc Han." MacLeish's admonition remains in effect:

*They say: Our deaths are not ours: they are yours,  
they will mean what you make them.  
They say: Whether our lives and our deaths were for  
peace and a new hope or for nothing we cannot say,  
it is you who must say this.*

*We leave you our deaths. Give them their meaning.  
We were young, they say. We have died; remember us.*

On 30 April, or the last Sunday before this date, small groups of Vietnamese and American veterans will gather at Vietnam memorials across the county. Few others will pay attention to the event. After all these years it is readily apparent to many of these veterans that they will go to their grave with unresolved indignation, a simmering core of anger, of crushing disappointment. "Ngay Quoc Han" will forever course through our blood, day in, day out. We now know that few will "give meaning" to "the young dead soldiers."

...Bill Laurie

## Into The Mouth Of The Dragon

by Steve King

I do not claim to have done anything singularly heroic during my time in Vietnam. However, I was very fortunate to have served with some who did. I feel honored to have served with these men and will always remember their leadership, bravery, and humility.

Over the past 47 years, like most Vietnam Vets, I've been asked many times, "What was Vietnam like?" To this day, I never know quite how to respond. Do I share about the good times or the hard times, the life/death situations or the crazy things we did just to maintain some semblance of sanity in what was often a very insane environment?

This is less about the 46 months I served in Vietnam and more about my 1<sup>st</sup> trip back to the country that so significantly shaped me as a young adult. When I left Vietnam for the last time in 1971 after serving a total of 46 months in-country, I never imagined returning. The fall of the country to the communists in 1975, removed any idea of ever going back from my mind.

Seattle, During my multiple tours in Vietnam, I served in the security company for the 5<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Bn., on MACV Team 8 as a convoy security advisor with the ARVN 21st Transportation Battalion, as the S-4 NCO on MACV Advisory Team 31, and as an advisor with on MACV Advisory Team 21. All of my time in Vietnam was served on the Central coast or in the Central Highlands in places such as: Qui Nhon, Phu Tai, An Khe, Pleiku, and CheoReo. In almost every way, I did my growing up as a young adult in Vietnam during the war. During my years in Vietnam, I developed a great love for the Vietnamese people and their country.

From my time in the Central Highlands, I grew to know and deeply respect the Montagnard people, particularly the Jarai and Rhade tribes. I found them to be fiercely loyal and wonderfully honest. For their loyalty to the United States and their stand with us against the Viet Cong and the NVA, more than 250,000 Montagnards have been slaughtered by the Vietnamese government since 1975. Unfortunately, this persecution continues to this day. Our abandonment of the Montagnards following the fall of South Vietnam, has to be one of the great tragedies of modern times.

Life went on and Vietnam was mostly relegated to the past. In 1990, almost twenty years after my departure from Vietnam, I embarked on a journey to return to the country that had so shaped my life as a young adult. This time, however, the purpose of my trip was a desire to provide some sort of humanitarian assistance to the huge number of orphaned and abandoned children. As I began to meet and have relationship with some of the Vietnamese-Americans living in the Seattle area, I became aware of the seriousness of the need. There had grown in me a desire to do whatever I could. Like many Vietnam veterans, there was always the underlying theme of reconciling with my past experiences in Vietnam. In my world view, a measure of peace with the war could be found in helping those who could least help themselves –some of the orphaned and abandoned children in Vietnam.

In 1989 I had built a friendship with Nguyen Lan Son, a Vietnamese-American from Seattle, whose family had escaped Vietnam in 1975 and emigrated to the U.S. Son still had family in Vung Tau and he shared my desire to help children. As we became close friends, Son challenged me to consider going back to Vietnam with him and exploring what opportunities to help the children might exist. To even consider returning was, at the same time, both exhilarating and somewhat anxiety producing. In spite of my own internal struggles, we planned our trip, with Son to function as my interpreter.

In 1990, Vietnam was still in the grips of Soviet-style totalitarianism. The United States did not have diplomatic relations with Vietnam yet. So, travel was more or less, "at your own risk." An overnight stay in a third country was required, as the U.S. would not allow direct flights to Vietnam. Since the U.S. and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) had no diplomatic relations, I could not apply for a visa in advance. I petitioned the SRV embassy in Canada and received a letter giving me permission to fly to Saigon and apply for an entry visa upon arrival. So, I must fly to Saigon and request a visa once on the ground. If denied, I would be detained at the airport until I could be put on an outgoing flight.

*Sunday, February 17, 1990* – The day is finally here. After 6 weeks of preparation: obtaining a new passport, getting all the necessary immunizations, procuring the requisite anti-bacterial and anti-diarrheal medications, scraping together \$1,500 for travel expenses, purchasing the airline tickets, and wrestling with the psychological issues of going back – the journey begins today in Seattle.

Due to the travel restrictions in place, the flight itinerary is Seattle to Taipei (9 hours), Taipei to Bangkok (5 hours), overnight layover in Bangkok, and then Bangkok to Saigon (1 ½ hours).

The irony begins shortly after we take off on a Thai Airlines 747. An hour or so after we take off from Vietnamese man in the row in front of me turns to exchange pleasantries with me and inquires as to my destination. Upon hearing that I was going to Vietnam, he asks if I had ever been there before. It was difficult not to laugh. I related a brief version of my prior history in Vietnam during the war.

Spring 2018

*continued from page 8*

My newly-made acquaintance, Tuan Huong Dinh, is a former NVA Captain from Hanoi who is making his first trip back also. As he tells me his “story,” I am amazed. Disillusioned with communism and the severely repressive policies of the Hanoi government after the war, he deserted and fled Vietnam in 1977 – eventually ending up in Ottawa, Canada after 2 years in prison in China.

Dinh is returning to Vietnam because his 83 year old mother is dying of cancer. He has been refused an entry visa twice before because he was a deserter and still has charges pending against him. This time, they have said, “*come to Hanoi and we’ll see!*”

Our conversation makes the hours pass quickly. After nine hours in the air, we land in Taipei. It felt really good to be off the plane for a while and stretch my legs. Even Taipei held memories, as I spent two, 7-day R and R’s here in 1967 and 1968. Here we have a 2 hour layover before boarding another Thai Airlines plane for the 5 hour flight to Bangkok.

As we land in Bangkok, Dinh shares with me that he is planning on staying in the airport until the next morning, due to a shortage of money. Upon deplaning, we discover that the Thai police do not allow “sleepovers” in the terminal, under any circumstances. So, I invite Dinh to share my hotel room and meals!

As I try to fall asleep, I am struck by the irony of this situation – a Vietnam Veteran sharing a hotel room with a former NVA Captain – *hard to believe!* As I lay there, trying to go to sleep, a feeling of anxiety rises, over what lies ahead tomorrow.

*Tuesday, February 19, 1990.* At breakfast, Dinh and I talk about the paradoxical situation we find ourselves in. Years before, we were enemies committed to kill one another. Yet, here we are – both “*pilgrims*” returning to the country that has so heavily shaped and impacted both of our lives.

As the Thai Airlines plane makes the 90 minute flight from Bangkok to Saigon, my mind is filled with questions: “*Was this whole idea stupid? Did I do the right thing? How will I be treated? Will things go OK? Have I lost my mind? What was I thinking – coming back to Vietnam?*” Wrestling with these questions and their somewhat elusive answers makes the flight pass fairly quickly. As we begin our descent into Saigon, we are handed SRV Immigration and Customs forms to complete. There is no escape now!

As we land at Tan Son Nhut Airport, I am struck by several things: there is very little air traffic, the general state of upkeep and repair of the airport is quite poor, there are still twisted heaps of U.S. aircraft left when Saigon fell scattered around the taxi ways, and the empty overgrown concrete revetments that once sheltered U.S. warplanes stand as decaying reminders of the past. Most all of the aircraft visible, as we taxi to the terminal, are Soviet-made military aircraft.

As the plane comes to a stop, an archaic external stairway is wheeled up to the side of the plane and a platoon of SRV armed soldiers deploy to provide a “gauntlet-like” pathway to the terminal. Once again, when the front door of the aircraft was opened, the heat, humidity and smell of Vietnam filled the plane. Memories of my first arrival in 1966 flood back into my mind. As we deplane down the stairway and walk between the two lines of soldiers with their AK-47’s held at their chest, it is amazingly quiet. With this simple act, the government is conveying a powerful message – we are in their country now and, make no mistake, ***they are in control.***

Once in the terminal, the confusion begins for those of us who have not been here before and do not speak Vietnamese with any fluency. There are no signs in English to direct you. So, it becomes a process of “trial and error.” All of the Immigration officers are quite obviously North Vietnamese sent to work here in the South, all looking very official and very stern. They are all dressed in military uniforms with soviet-style hats. As Vietnamese are generally small in stature, this style of hat is far too large for them and makes them look like toy soldiers. Finally, I end up at the correct desk and I am stiffly handed two visa application forms to complete. The letter from the SRV embassy in Canada is dismissed without much interest. I complete the forms and return them to the Immigration Officer.

In about 20 minutes, my name is called and I am escorted down a hall and motioned to be seated in a small room with a desk and 2 chairs. The door is closed behind me. After sitting alone in the room for about 10 minutes, the door opens and an officer wearing a slightly different uniform enters. He introduces himself as Thieu Ta (Major) Tran of the Immigration Police. My suspicion is that he’s not really from the Immigration Police, but rather from the Ministry of the Interior.

He is initially fairly direct in his questioning: “*Was I here during the War? Where was I stationed? How long was I here? What did I do during the War? Do I speak Vietnamese? What is the purpose of my trip? Will I be seeing any SRV citizens while I am here?*”

*Continued from page 9*

I answer his questions as honestly as I can, leaving out anything that might raise his suspicions. (I had been warned in advance to downplay any active combat role during the War.

I took the position that I had been in a support unit my entire time in Vietnam and never saw any combat.)

He felt it necessary to ask these questions multiple times, with a slightly different nuance each time. Obviously he was attempting to find a *"hidden secret"* in my story.

Upon hearing that I was stationed in the Central Highlands, his line of questioning changed to focus on my past interaction with the Montagnards. *"Did I work with any Montagnards during the War? Was I sympathetic to their cause? Did I belong to any organizations that supported FULRO, (the Montagnard resistance organization active at the time.)? Did I plan on visiting the Central Highlands on this trip?"* He must have believed that he was on to something, because he became much more accusatory in his questioning. We "danced" around this line of questioning for almost 2 hours, with me continuing to take my "non-combat" position.

At one point, he said that my stated reason for returning to Vietnam, (helping orphaned children,) was a lie and just a cover for my intention to support the Montagnard resistance movement. It was hard to keep from laughing out loud, as this was really the farthest thing from my mind at the time. But, I guess if you have the mindset that everyone is suspect, then it isn't so far-fetched. He was clear in communicating that not many Americans had returned up to this point and we were all suspect.

After more than three hours of questioning, I guess that we reached an impasse and he agreed to approve my entry visa, with the condition that I would not be allowed to travel up country to the Central Highlands. I was given a travel permit that allowed me to go from Saigon to Vung Tau and return. If I wished to travel anywhere else, I would have to go to the Immigration Police Station in Vung Tau and submit the proper request. Major Tran was very clear in stating that he did not believe my story and that I would be watched very carefully until the day I left Vietnam. *(What a comforting thought!)*

I am escorted back out to the Immigration Police waiting area by a surly uniformed soldier. My name is called in about 10 minutes and I proceeded to the same desk I started at 3 ½ hours before. My passport and all of my papers are scrutinized by a female Immigration Police officer, who works hard at looking as stern and as uncommunicative as possible. She asks me again why I am visiting Vietnam. With the payment of \$25.00 US, my visa is stamped into my passport and signed. My passport is returned, along with the travel permit signed by Major Tran.

I am now allowed to find my way to the baggage area to retrieve my bags. Finding them seemingly unmolested, I head for the Customs Inspection counter. At the Customs counter, I am greeted by a rather friendly female Customs officer, who actually speaks a little English. *(This must have been a mistake!)* My encounter with her is by far the most pleasant and least threatening one yet. She asks me several questions about my trip, my stay in Vietnam, the amount of US dollars I am bringing into the country, and when I am leaving the country. She x-rays my bags, without looking through them, and passes me through, wishing me a good stay in Vietnam. (My "gut feeling" is that my bags had already been searched while I was being questioned. That was confirmed later when I unpacked.) Of course, there has to be the necessary stamps on the customs documents and another \$10.00 US fee.

As I finally step outside the terminal, the heat, humidity, and smells of Vietnam engulf me. *Funny, how quickly that memory returns!* Son, his brother-in-law (Dieu) and nephew are waiting for me. My journey back was now in full swing.

*(to be continued)*

## WARM WELCOME TO NEW COUNTERPARTS MEMBERS

**Thomas J. "Tom" Friedel** served as Chief Radio Operator for Advisory Team 47, Binh Long Province, from September 1969 to July 1971. His first posting was in Loc Ninh. Tom has been aware of *Counterparts* for several years from on-line research on the Vietnam War, and he decided he needed to become a member. Tom resides in Racine, Wisconsin.

**William "Bill" Hanne** served two separate assignments with the 9th ARVN Division in Sa Dec Province on Advisory Team 60, July 1965-June 1966 and June 1971-April 1972 mostly as the G-2 advisor. Bill was referred to *Counterparts* by our member Gordon Bare. Bill has written a book about his experience in Vietnam entitled "A Snake in the Road." It is available through amazon.com or Barnes & Noble.

**William "Bill" Stallings** joined *Counterparts* at the April Pensacola reunion. Bill served on Advisory Team 42, Binh Dinh Province, as team chief/senior advisor, 48th Regional Force Group, on MAT Team II-7 in Hoai An District, May 1969-May 1970. Bill lives in Zebulon, North Carolina.

**Manuel G. Trevino** served on Advisory Team 73 in Vi Thanh, Chuong Thien Province, from December 1970 to December 1971. Manuel was team chief, MAT Team 110. Manuel lives in San Antonio, Texas

**Gary W. Williams** served on Advisory Team 60, Sa Dec Province, where he worked with the 9th ARVN Division 1968-1969. Gary lives in Lexington, Tennessee.

## ***Would you like to Write something for SITREP?***

In ancient societies, the elder storyteller was much respected as the keeper and preserver of the tribe's shared memory, heritage and knowledge, and an important and revered man. Are you a storyteller? Send us your story.

Our memories are fading and we're not getting any younger. When you talk or write about your time as a *Covan My* you are describing events and experiences that are unique, and unless you share it, will, in the future, disappear forever. If we want future generations to have the opportunity to learn and perhaps appreciate what it was like to be an Advisor in Vietnam, we have to pass on the story.

**Send to Ken Jacobsen, email: [kjacobson@knology.net](mailto:kjacobsen@knology.net) or by mail to 607 Wampler Drive, Charleston SC 29412. Please send a printed copy, no handwritten copy please, and no "all caps" copy since we cannot convert handwritten or all CAPS copy.**

## 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.

### **Sa Dec Province: A Memoir of War and Reconstruction in the Mekong Delta.** *Gordon Bare.*

To order: visit: <https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/TeamRiverRunner/BookDonation.html>

The mailing address is: 5007 Stone Road, Rockville, MD 20853

*Counterparts* member Gordon Bare has published his reminiscences as an advisor in Sa Dec Province. He served there 1969-1970 as a young lieutenant, both as an intelligence advisor and as a key officer in economic development assistance. Post-Vietnam, Gordon had a distinguished career in the U.S. State Department that continued for more than 40 years until his 2016 retirement.

In the meticulously researched book he reviews the recent history of the province and merges that with his experiences in all types of wartime advisory assistance. By far the most interesting are his accounts of traveling in civilian clothes to support and manage a variety of economic development projects, from housing to animal husbandry. He also gives credit to colleagues he worked with, which include other *Counterparts* members.

Most notably, all of the proceeds from the book go to a wounded warriors project called *Team River Runner*, which helps veterans find health and healing through white water kayaking.

Find inspiring stories of Team River Runner activities at the website: [teamriverrunner.org](http://teamriverrunner.org)

Reviewer: Colonel John B. Haseman, U.S. Army retired

### **You Ain't' Nothing but a Swamp Rat: Two Years in the Jungles and Paddies of Vietnam**

**Author:** Colonel George P. Bonville, U.S. Army retired. Available through Airborne and Special Operations Museum 100 Bragg Boulevard, Fayetteville, North Carolina 28301 [www.asomf.org](http://www.asomf.org) or 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division Historical Society, Inc. Post Office Box 70119 Fort Bragg, North Carolina 28307-0119 [82ndairbornemuseum.com](http://82ndairbornemuseum.com)

*Counterparts* member George Bonville served as district senior advisor in two districts of Dinh Tuong Province in separate assignments not quite two years apart. In 1966, as a Captain, Cho Gao District, east of the city of My Tho, was an important link in the VC logistics network for moving weapons, supplies, ammo, and personnel from the site of infiltration from the South China Sea onward to base camps in the Plain of Reeds and the 20/7 Secret Zone along the My Tho river. Later, in Long Dinh District, where then-Major Bonville arrived in spring 1968. It lay west of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division base camp of Dong Tam and straddled Highway 4, the only highway between Saigon and the rice-rich and populous Mekong Delta. Most of its villages were VC-controlled

The book covers Bonville's entire military career as a Field Artillery officer, but the majority of space is devoted to the two years he spent as a DSA in two contrasting districts. In Cho Gao, his biggest problems were poor support from his province advisory headquarters and an unmotivated and fairly cowardly district chief. In Long Dinh (later re-named Sam Giang) he was almost in the heart of a major VC-controlled secret zone despite the nearness of Dong Tam. He had a very fine professional district chief to work with, and an exemplary (for the most part) advisory team. Many of his problems came in dealing with the senior leadership of the 9th Infantry Division, although relations with the smaller U.S. Army units co-located in his district were much better.

George devotes much space to praising the work of his team members in both districts, though he had "problems" in both places. His descriptions of the importance of interpersonal relations to success in working with his Vietnamese *Counterparts* as well as his team members will bring back strong memories to many *Counterparts* members. In his own words, this is a "...large book with 628 pages and 50 glossy pictures, it contains what are essentially 94 vignettes detailing the life and struggles of a U.S. Army officer as he encounters the physical, mental and moral trials many soldiers faced in the Vietnam War." General (retired) James Lindsay praised the book as "... a forthrightly honest and amazingly detailed personal account of the war conducted by Allied Forces in the Mekong Delta. . ."

Reviewer: Colonel John B. Haseman, U.S. Army retired

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## MEMBERS IN MEMORIAM

**Michael Healy, Major General, US Army, Retired** – Special Forces icon MG Michael “Iron Mike” Healy passed away on April 14, 2018 at the age of 91 in Jacksonville, FL. His Army career spanned five decades and two wars. He earned three Distinguished Service Medals, two Silver Stars, the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, seven Bronze Stars with Valor, and two Purple Hearts. He was the inspiration for John Wayne’s character in the 1968 film *The Green Berets*. He went to Vietnam in 1963 as a Special Forces colonel and would ultimately serve five tours there over almost eight years.

His nickname “Iron Mike” came while he was serving as a young officer leading Army Rangers on combat patrols deep behind enemy lines in Korea in the early 1950’s. He attended several military schools before being recruited to serve as chief of the Special Warfare Operations and Foreign Intelligence Branch of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence.

MG Healy is survived by Jacklyn, his wife of 67 years, sons Michael Jr., Daniel, Timothy, Sean, Kirk, and Patrick, 10 grandchildren and eight great grand children.

**Robert D. Parrish, LTC, US Army, Retired** – Soldier, author, and *Counterparts* Member LTC Robert D. Parrish died on February 18, 2018 in Tacoma, WA. He was 77 years of age. He graduated from the University of Nevada in 1966. He was a Regular Army officer until he retired in 1985. He served two combat tours in Vietnam: one with Advisory Team 70 with Vietnamese infantry and rangers and one as the commander of an infantry rifle company in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (Airmobile).

Between tours he served as a Ranger instructor in what is now the 6<sup>th</sup> Ranger Training Battalion, Camp Rudder, FL. LTC Parrish was a distinguished author who wrote several books, including *Combat Recon*, which recounted his tour with the ARVN Rangers.

He was wounded twice and was awarded the Combat Infantryman’s Badge, the Silver Star, the Purple Heart, two Bronze Stars, the Air Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, along with other awards including the Ranger Tab, Senior Parachutist Badge, two Meritorious Service Medals and the Legion of Merit.

**George Wallace Gaspard, Jr., LTC, US Army, Retired** – LTC Gaspard passed away on January 30, 2018 at his home in Saint John’s, FL. He was 91 years of age. He served in the US Marine Corps from 1944 to 1946 and entered the US Army in June 1951. In May 1952, he reported to FT Benning as a student in the first all officer class at the Ranger course, followed by attendance at a special course at the Air Ground School at Southern Pines, NC. He then applied for transfer to the 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group (Airborne) that had just been organized at Ft. Bragg, NC. In March 1953, then-Lt. Gaspard was assigned to Korea where he commanded four enlisted men and 80 South Korean agents, who were dispatched behind enemy lines to gather intelligence on the North Koreans. In October 1954, he joined the 77<sup>th</sup> SF Group as a guerrilla warfare instructor with the Psychological Warfare School’s Special Forces Department. He served with the 187<sup>th</sup> ARCT and honorably discharged in September 1957. He served his country in civilian capacities from 1960 – 1962 and was recalled to active duty in April 1962 and assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group at Ft. Bragg commanding Detachment A-13 and in September opened a new SF Camp in Kontum Province at Dak Pek. He was subsequently assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup> SF Group at Ft. Bragg and then to AID in Washington and Saigon where he was assigned as provincial advisor in Quang Duc Province. He continued to serve in Vietnam in several capacities over several years earning the Vietnam Service Medal with 15 campaign stars. His awards and decorations include: the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star with V-device and five Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Medal with V-device and three Oak Leaf Clusters, Purple Heart with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Combat Infantryman’s Badge with one Battle Star, Master Parachutist Badge, and numerous service and campaign medals and ribbons.

## MEMBERS IN MEMORIAM

**Brian Zawacki. Born Feb 17, 1944, died Dec 29, 2017.** –Longtime, active member of *Counterparts*. Brian was not a Vietnam veteran himself, but he served veterans throughout his adult life, and made significant contributions in support of veteran’s organizations in the Chicago area. He edited and wrote articles for the Southeast Vietnam Veteran’s Association Newsletter, and as a volunteer, did all the electrical work for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Southeast Chicago. He often assisted at *Counterparts* Reunions, and was especially helpful in helping Max Lund and Dave Beck when they hosted our Reunion in Greensboro, N.C. Brian was a lively addition to every *Counterparts* event he attended.

Brian was a graduate of Mendel Catholic HS in Chicago and attended Rensselaer College in, Rensselaer IN. He was an avid outdoorsman and hunter, was a prolific reader, Vietnam Historian, and master crossword solver. He was also a member of the National Rifle Association and Local 134 Chicago IBEW, and a retired Journeyman electrician

.... Contributed by Historian Carol Lund



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