



# COUNTERPARTS

## TƯƠNG HỮU ĐÔNG NAM Á

# SITREP

Volume XX

Issue 2

Summer, 2020

## ***San Diego 2020; The Reunion that never was.***

By  
Ken Jacobsen

In early March of this year many of us were making our final arrangements for the 2020 *Counterparts* Reunion set for April 16 in San Diego. By the end of that month most of us were hunkered down in our home bunkers all over the US, under attack by a deadly and unexpected enemy; the COVID 19 Virus. Airline reservations and hotel rooms were cancelled, long anticipated reunions with old comrades were put on hold, and on March 6 *Counterparts* Commander Grant McClure formally announced via email, that due to the Pandemic, Reunion 2020 was Cancelled.

At the same time, Grant found himself in the middle of a new form of combat as he assumed responsibilities as Vice President of a large hospital in Maryland with a major COVID 19 treatment role. By March 30 Grant reported that:

*“It's getting tougher by the day. Growing # of positive patients each week.*

- 1. Today we have 13 Covid + patients and one passed this morning.*
- 2. There are another 26 PUI's today that we're awaiting lab test results.*
- 3. The surge is on. We have four large military-style tents set up outside that we're getting ready to activate for handling the emergency room surge.*
- 4. Ran out of critical care beds, so we're converting two med/surge to ICU.*
- 5. The circumstances consumes our time each day.*
- 6. I would say my average 12-hour day is spent 80% on Covid-19 situational management. I've been working 7-days per week for several months.*

*My take on it: not enough seriousness by so many of our citizens on what they can do to help reduce the spread. They have to be told what to do, and then expect them to comply.”*

Nevertheless, despite the cancellation of the 2020 San Diego event, work on the next COUNTERPARTS Reunion has not stopped. Although some members first suggested that the Reunion be scheduled for a Fall 2020 date, the short time frame for planning, and the uncertainties related to the Pandemic made that alternative unachievable. However, *Counterparts* members quickly reaffirmed that we would begin planning for a 2021 Reunion, perhaps in San Diego or possibly in another venue. The continuing COVID 19 struggle has so far prevented any more detailed planning, but COUNTERPARTS members have already begun thinking of alternatives for the “Reunion 2020-21” event.

In this issue's *Commander's Corner* Commander Grant McClure has recommended that we should now begin anew in the Reunion planning process and pray for the best. Grant has also directed *Counterparts* officers prepare reports on this year's status, which will take the place of the cancelled Reunion's Minutes of the Annual Business meeting. These reports begin on page three of this issue.



# COUNTERPARTS SITREP

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## Commander's Corner

As reunions go, it's the first time since the inception of the association in 1989 that a pandemic flu crisis comes along in mid-March, at a most inauspicious time, to turn our wonderfully laid-out 2020 San Diego reunion plans upside down. Most regrettable indeed as Lou Grissaffi had masterfully attended to all the details, and many members had already secured travel plans and accommodations. I know I speak for all members at how we pray such rare circumstances will never disrupt our plans again.

Several months later we're still dealing with future uncertainty and will have to pay heed as to how conditions continue to evolve in the months ahead. In my view, I believe we should engage afresh in 2021 reunion planning and pray for the best.

At the zenith of a very long career in healthcare that began in 1968, the Covid-19 crisis stands-out for me as a singularly unique phenomenon. Two counties in the suburbs of metropolitan Washington DC were particularly hard hit by the virus, and my hospital was in the *eye of the storm* since mid-March to present. There's been favorable signs of positive cases beginning to wane in the first week of June, and it appears the initial surge hit its peak in mid-May and we're now seeing a gradual decline in patients presenting with symptoms and testing positive for the virus. If this continues to develop into what is hoped to be a 'new normal,' then we might very well be able set our sights on realistically organizing an association event as restrictions on travel dissipate, and social distancing eases across the US.

Beyond the wonderful camaraderie we all enjoy at the annual reunion, it serves to keep the association anchored to a shared sense of purpose and in support of programs that are dear to us. With review of an updated annual treasurer's report from the Adjutant, and to the extent feasible and possible, I've asked fellow officers to consider the merit of releasing donations to the various organizations that we traditionally contribute to each year based on member consent at the reunion. Based on consensus among association HQ we'll move forward at this time with the following contributions: Cambodia Corps, Inc \$3500.00, Vietnam Healing Foundation \$2500.00 and, Vets With A Mission \$1000.00.

This issue of SITREP includes annual updates from your HQ detachment head shed that would have normally formed the meeting minutes at the 2020 reunion. Please direct any comments or questions to me via mail, [grant.mcclure@medstar.net](mailto:grant.mcclure@medstar.net).

Thanks! Stay well and be safe!  
.... Dr. Grant McClure, CO

## Annual Reports by Officers

*Since COUNTERPARTS Officers were not able to give required reports at the Annual business meeting, they are provided below.*

### **XO Report**

Aloha fellow Counterparts members. I hope my short report finds you and your family safe and healthy during the COVID19 crisis. Since joining this fantastic group 4 years ago. I feel I am among some of the finest members of the military who served in Vietnam. Although my part was a bit different from many of you, (Psyops with the Naval Advisory Group) we all served with pride and did the best that we could.

As the XO I have somewhat taken on an extra duty in trying to give our Village Market an uplift. First it was to redesign our coin. It took a bit of work and when it was presented at the Pensacola reunion it was an overwhelming success. I ordered a second batch and we have enough to accommodate any new members who wish to purchase the coin. Some were lucky enough to acquire their team number on the coin. Second was to have our Co Van tab reduced to a smaller size, 75%. The vendor goofed and made it 100%, no cost to us. When I received the corrected size tab. I decided to place it on top of a cap (6) with the full size MACV patch below. They were gobbled up very quickly.

Grant has suggested that explore making both the Co Van and MACV patch even smaller that would look better on a black baseball type cap. When you search online you can find all the major unit caps etc. What you cannot find is our Co Van type cap. Upon approval from our Counterparts Command section. We will produce a number of these for sale via our Village Market. This would provide another way to show our Counterparts pride. We hope to keep the cost down and make a reasonable return on the caps

In closing I would ask any of our Counterparts members who have an idea for an item we can sell on our Village Market submit a suggestion. Or an Idea on a current item we have on a possible change/upgrade of this item. Please be well and ask that you continued support and hope to see you all at our next reunion. Date and time to be announced based on the COVID19 sitrep.

*...Hank Choy*

### **Treasurers Report**

As of today we have \$22,785 in the bank, I see no reason that we could not continue to fund the charities we have been funding. Our total donations have been \$7,000 as follows, \$3,500 to CCI, \$2,500 to the Vietnam Healing Foundation, and \$1,000 to Vets With A Mission.

It is hard to give an accurate report for the finances since the Reunion falls mid- year but since we didn't have one this year I can report that our income was as follows, \$3,115 from dues, \$2,460, from life memberships and \$1,210 from member donations. I didn't include \$271 from village market since that will probably have to be replenished eventually. So we had around \$6,785 of income against \$7,000 of donations so I would say we are doing well. There are some miscellaneous expenses but they don't amount to much around \$500.

It might be a good idea to put in the SITREP that all donations are appreciated, not talking about much. An extra \$10 or \$20 with the dues goes a long way to keeping us stable.

On another subject, I would like to continue to ask if someone has an in with a bank that would open us an account somewhere. There are no banks around where I live that would touch it. From what Jim Alkek says they need a lot of documentation. I'm sure if we ever had it is lost. Every year my daughter files our form 990 E with the IRS and Rich Webster keeps our State of Illinois corporation filing up to date.

Thanks to all

*...Jim O'Malley, Treasurer*

## Membership Report

All members are reminded that annual dues for 2020 were payable as of 1 January 2020. Dues remain \$35.00. You can also upgrade to lifetime membership for \$350.00. Please make your checks out to "Counterparts" and mail to Membership Officer John Haseman, 1555 West Saddle Drive, Grand Junction CO 81507. Lifetime members do not pay dues, but if you care to make a contribution to the Counterparts assistance programs it would be very gladly received. If in doubt on your dues status, check with Membership Chairman John Haseman at [jhaseman@earthlink.net](mailto:jhaseman@earthlink.net)

Here is the current membership profile:

Active Lifetime members: 153

Active annual-paying members: 119

Active distinguished members: 4

Known deceased: 131

Inactive members in all categories: 406. (Many of these will be deceased but nobody told us).

Total on our roster, all categories: 813

Although everyone is sorry the 2020 Reunion had to be cancelled because of the coronavirus Counterparts is "alive and well" and new members continue to sign up. Here are several newcomers.

**McKendree Long** served two tours of duty as a tactical unit advisor. He was Senior Advisor, 51st Artillery Battalion, 5th ARVN Division, 1966-1967 (Advisory Team 70); and Senior Advisor, 3/42nd Infantry, 22nd ARVN Division, 1970-71 (Advisory Team 24). McKendree lives in Blythewood, South Carolina.

**Joseph Napier** served at MACV Headquarters, 1967-1968; and Advisory Team 56 (Phong Dinh Province, Phung Hiep District) 1971-1972. Joseph lives in Grande Prairie, Texas.

**David Parker** was chief of MAT Team 88, Advisory Team 37, a detached assignment from the 1/50th Infantry Battalion, in Binh Thuan Province. An 11B infantry soldier, he served in Vietnam for most of 1970. David lives in Reno, Nevada.

**Gerald Pierce** served on Advisory Team 64, Chau Doc Province, from August 1968 until May 1969. He had a second Vietnam tour as S-3, 3/187th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, April 1971-February 1972. Gerald lives in Marietta, Georgia.

**Brian Valiton** served as Province Engineer Advisor, Advisory Team 88 (Kien Hoa Province) from September 1971 until February 1973, when, along with Counterparts member John Haseman, he was one of the very last American advisors to leave the field in Vietnam.

**Richard D. ("Tex") Wandke** served on Advisory Team 60 (43rd Ranger Battalion) 1965-1966; and as an advisor at Ranger High Command in Saigon, 1972-1973. Tex lives in Laughlin, Nevada.

...John Haseman, Membership Chairman

## Quartermaster Report

The Counterparts Village Market is open 24/7 for orders of branded items. At this time we are well supplied with most sizes of black and white polo shirts, hats, *covan mi* tabs, decals, MACV patches, coins, lapel pins, coffee mugs, jackets, etc. We try to fulfill mail orders within a couple of days.

Most of our sales occur during the annual Reunion and since we did not have the Reunion this year sales are down.

We strive to order the highest quality products for our members and offer them at a fair price. We do not have a big markup on items and try to keep them affordable so you can show your pride in belonging to our association.

One reminder: if you send in an order, kindly make your check payable to: "Counterparts Association." If the check is made out to me personally it requires me to deposit the check to my account and then for me to write a check to our Treasurer.

Respectfully submitted,

...Mike McMunn, Counterparts Quartermaster

## **Facebook Page**

We stood up our Counterparts private Facebook Group Page in August 2019, and presently have 62 members and 130 posts. The page is a great way to share stories, pictures and videos of our collective Vietnam experiences, as well current Counterpart and Vietnam related happenings - including pictures of our annual reunions. As a Private Group Page, it is only accessible by registered members, and such membership is limited to current Counterparts members. Non-members cannot see member posts or member names except those of the Group Admins. When the Group was stood up last year, email invitations were sent out via the Facebook Group to all Counterpart members at their email addresses on file.

If any members missed the initial invitation and wish to join the Group, they may do so by:

1. Navigating to our Group page at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Counterparts.THDNA/>
2. Clicking on the blue +Join Group button which takes you to the 'Answer Questions' page
3. If your membership dues are current, select 'Yes' under the 'Are you a dues-paying member of Counterparts?' question.
4. Check 'I agree to the group rules' under 'Group Rules From the Admins'.
5. Click the blue 'Submit' button at the bottom of the page.

\* Of course, you do need to have a personal Facebook account to access the page and register.

... *Charlie Shaw, Facebook Group Admin*

## **PAO**

Here is the current ( June 2020) status of Organizations to which we have contributed.

### **- VIETNAM VETS WITH A MISSION (VWAM):**

Here at Vets With A Mission, we're continuing to operate and making plans for the re-scheduled spring medical teams postponed because of COVID-19. The training and medical team will now be in Vietnam this fall, October 2-17 and October 16-November 2 respectively. There are a limited number of volunteer openings on these teams, both medical and non-health professionals or Vietnam vets, so if you are interested contact VWAM for details.

On May 5 the country celebrated National Giving Tuesday. It's an effort to attract donations to non-profits across the US. You can imagine the economic impact the financial crisis has had not only on employment, but charitable donations as well. While VWAM is not in danger of closing, a few other humanitarian organizations have not been so fortunate. This ministry is being challenged, however, as monthly contributions and general donations have declined February through April. For more information visit our website at <https://www.vetswithamission.org>

... *Chuck Ward, VWAM*

### **- VIETNAM HEALING FOUNDATION-UPDATE 2020**

This is the fourth year that COUNTERPARTS has donated \$2500 to the Vietnam Healing Foundation, an organization that sends back money back to Vietnam to help old wounded, desperately poor former ARVN soldiers who have been forgotten and ignored in their country. The President of the non-profit VHF, RJ Del Vecchio, has just informed me that during the last year they sent back the regular disbursement during TET of \$14,000, plus a special disbursement due to the COVID lockdown of \$7000.

Del Vecchio says many of their clients (old soldiers) eke out a small living selling lottery tickets or offering minor services out on the street, and they could not do so in the lockdown, so they sent an emergency fund over to help get them through. This summer disbursement just finished was \$11,800. Given the ages of many, and poor health from malnutrition at times, and of course very minimal health care, they lose a couple every month now. The VHF has a long list of alternatives and they keep finding more.

The VHF now supports over 100 men and families from Saigon to Hue.

For more information see their web site [www.thevhf.org](http://www.thevhf.org). The VHF reserves of money this year are lower because they couldn't run their yearly fundraising dinner dance because of the COVID virus.

For this reason, members may want to add a little more money to their annual dues so that COUNTERPARTS can continue to fund this worthwhile organization. Del Vecchio has informed me that COUNTERPARTS is the second largest donor of funds to their organization. There are no paid employees at the VHF and all work is done by volunteer Vietnamese both here in the US and in Vietnam. Just as important as the monetary gift for these old Vietnamese veterans is the impact of not being forgotten by their former comrades in the US.

...*Rich Webster PAO*

## Cambodia Corps Update

*By*

*Max and Carol Lund*

Greetings Fellow Counterparts,

We hope everyone is bunkered in and staying safe. Hopefully, things will change for the better as spring progresses. Without a reunion this year we miss being able to see each and every one, to thank you for your support and to bring you up to date on the activities of the CCI students. Especially the students sponsored by Counterparts and by individual members. We, and they, are grateful for your continued support.

As a brief review, Counterparts began sponsoring an individual student, Broy Makara, in 2005. Broy obtained a degree in Veterinary Medicine and works for the NGO Care International throughout his home province of Mondulakiri. In 2009, we sponsored Romas Phanna, who graduated with a degree in Information Technology. He now holds a seat on the Oyadao District Council in his home province of Ratanakiri. In 2013 Counterparts sponsored Sev Yem who enrolled in the government Teachers Training Center and simultaneously earned an AA degree in English. He now teaches middle school at Som Thom Commune and teaches English and Computer Science on weekends. He also does Voter Registration in his District. In 2015, we sponsored Sall Panha for a degree in Community Development. She is now the Finance Officer for the Khmer Youth Association, which is a Local NGO. She has traveled to Vietnam and Thailand as part of the Women For Peace organization. In 2017, we sponsored Thoeurn Phem in a Computer Secretary program. She is now working for an NGO as a Pre-school teacher in Keo Seima District. In 2019 with the Counterparts donation, we are currently supporting two students, Klan Peung in Community Development and Som El Sopheap in Primary School Teachers Training.

Counterparts has been able to help educate young Montagnard students who have then lived up to their promise to return to their home province and work on behalf of their people. There have also been individual Counterparts members who have sponsored students in programs such as Business Management, Animal Health, Nursing, Mid Wife, Law, Economics and Accounting. To borrow a Special Forces phrase, we are developing "Force Multipliers", young, dedicated individuals who will have a disproportionate effect on the future of their people. A future that is very much changing every day. Outside interests threaten the existence of the Montagnard people. Poaching, logging and land grabbing threaten. Government officials who grant land concessions to mining and development companies threaten. Without education, without the ability to help themselves, the Montagnard land, culture, and people will be lost.

Why do we continue to care about the Montagnard? In the words of fellow member Mike Bengé, "The Montagnard tribes in the Central Highlands were among our most loyal allies in the fight against the communists during the Vietnam War. They fought alongside the U.S. Special Forces in epic battles and rescued countless Americans, including pilots, crews, and aircraft passengers. More than half of the Montagnards' adult male population was lost fighting for Americans. Without their sacrifice, there would be many more names on that somber black granite wall – the Vietnam Memorial." We care, in order to give back to the ones who were most loyal to us. By giving back, we enable the Montagnard to help themselves. By giving bright capable youth an education, we help them have a role in determining the future for their people. Counterpart's members can be proud of what we have done as an organization and as individuals.

Even though the gov't of Vietnam shut down all in-school classes, most schools and instructors have resumed instruction through the internet. All of our students have returned to Phnom Penh to the Student Center and are working on their programs through our wifi connection. Thanks to Lewis Grissaffi and John Hackett recently donating laptops to CCI, all twelve college kids are able to continue their school year via the internet.

We have recently revamped our website "Cambodiacorps.org" to make it more informative. Please take a look at it and let us know your thoughts. We are also looking to add more photos depicting American and Montagnard interactions. If you have a pic, you would like us to include, please email us at [cambodiacorpsinc@gmail.com](mailto:cambodiacorpsinc@gmail.com)

On behalf of Rich Webster, Lewis Grissaffi, myself, and the students, thank you for all your support.

*While Carol and I were in Cambodia, our friend who was collecting our mail suddenly passed away which resulted in some of our mail being returned and some lost. If you mailed a donation to CCI during January, please check your records to make sure we received it. If not, we would appreciate you reissuing your donation*

### ***Some Additional information from the Commander.***

With some great feedback received in a series of recent emails, I propose we “stick to the schedule” and make-up for this year’s reunion cancellation by replicating the very same venue so diligently arranged by Lewis for gathering together in San Diego in 2021. The caveat of course for planning annual events moving forward would always have to be weighed against the level of prevailing pandemic uncertainty and conditions...for the health and well-being of our members is our highest priority. It was through this lens that the best laid plans for a reunion may be impacted and lead us again to make difficult decisions. Our decision this year was compelled by notable developments regarding the coronavirus including, but not limited to:

1. California’s declared State of Emergency
2. Greater uncertainties surrounding the incubation time and transmission of coronavirus
3. Restricted or prohibited travel for many of our members.
4. Constraints placed on lodging services
5. Limits imposed on public gatherings.

The decision to cancel this year was made out of deep concern for the safety of all members and their wives who accompany them.

At this time, we have a great recommendation for the next reunion which would be in 2022 by interest expressed by members Terry Turner and Rex Latham. See details below:

1. Terry and Rex attended an October 2019 reunion of former MACV advisors who served in IV Corp.
2. The event was sponsored by Teams 60 and 65, who served in Sa Dec, but all delta MACV advisors were invited.
3. Terry and Rex, along with other Counterparts members, advocated for future collaboration between the two associations for a combined event.
4. The concept was advanced to coordinate the next reunion in Ft. Benning, Georgia, home of the Military Advisor Training Academy (MATA).
5. All details will be further developed and communicated by Rex and Terry and a reunion coordinator local to the Columbus, Georgia area will need to be identified.

Dr. Grant McClure  
CO

## The Importance of Trust

By John B. Haseman, Colonel, U.S. Army, Retired

I arrived in Kien Hoa Province in the Mekong Delta in July 1971 for my second tour of duty. As I settled into a small U.S. district advisory team, a lot of what I experienced was new. I had no problems with the spartan living conditions as I had done that before. The food was familiar, and that first assignment had familiarized me with the Mekong Delta climate and environment. But now I was working every day with Vietnamese military personnel, and at the district level I was at the end of the U.S. advisory chain. All of the officers and soldiers had more experience in combat than I did. How was I to advise them? Could I trust them with my life? Would they accept and trust me?

I extended my assignment in Vietnam for an additional six months, and since the Ham Long district team was being closed down because of improved security, the PSA assigned me to Mo Cay, a very insecure district, for the rest of my tour of duty.

My first experience with the newly assigned district chief (he a major, me a captain) while my boss was on leave did not get off to a good start. Early one afternoon came word that a group of visiting province-level officers had been ambushed in a dangerous place on the road through the district. The district chief gathered a small force of soldiers and sped to the scene to provide security and render first aid. He did not tell me he was going. I found out from one of the radio operators in the tactical operations center (TOC).

This was not a good start to a counterpart relationship! I quickly rounded up my interpreter and our jeep and the two of us raced to the scene of the ambush and found the district chief. His reaction when I arrived surprised me: "I didn't tell you I was going out here because I assumed you would not go out to a dangerous area."

Uh oh! He had clearly had a less-than-satisfactory relationship with American advisors at his previous assignment.

"Sir," I told him, "I am your advisor and I will always go with you no matter where. You have far more experience in fighting this enemy than I do, but there are many ways I can help you. From now on, please don't leave me out of your operations."

He nodded, and we got along very well in the ensuing months.

Perhaps the most important event that cemented our relationship occurred just a short time later, on a large operation in the dangerous western part of the district. It was the first time I had gone on to the field with this district



*The district chief is directly in front of me. Within minutes of taking this picture, a soldier on our right flank hit a booby trap and was carried to this road*

chief. The command group walked on a rough muddy and rocky road while most of the troop strength moved on our right and left flanks through rice paddies and unkempt coconut jungle.

We were well into the operation when a soldier to our right flank hit a booby trap that blew off his foot and inflicted severe head wounds. His buddies carried him to the road and attended to his wounds while the district chief radioed the Vietnamese side of the province TOC to request a medevac helicopter. By that time in the war it was firm policy that U.S. medevac helicopters would respond only for U.S. casualties. All Vietnamese casualties had to be evacuated by Vietnamese Air Force helicopters. But the Vietnamese TOC told him that there were no helicopters available.

So, he turned to me: "Can you help?"

In addition to a medical emergency, this was also a test.

Could his advisor help when help was really needed? I knew it was a test, but there was no way the American personnel at the province TOC in Ben Tre could understand that.

I radioed the U.S. side of the province TOC and requested a U.S. medevac mission. The duty officer knew I was calling on behalf of a Vietnamese casualty, so my request was denied.

I got angry. As it happened, I knew there was an IG team from Saigon visiting the province and had its own helicopter for transportation; it was on the ground in our adjacent district. I told the TOC duty officer that a life was in the balance and we needed that medevac. When denied again, this time by the senior American TOC officer -- who out-ranked me -- I got really angry and demanded that they call the pilots for the IG team to ask if they would come in to pick up the wounded soldier.

Fortunately, the adjacent district advisory team was monitoring the radio net, and the DSA broke into our contentious radio exchange and said he would ask the pilots if they would fly the mission. Within a few minutes a pilot had me on the radio. I described the landing zone on the muddy road where we had stopped and put out security. A soldier tossed a smoke grenade to show the wind direction, the helicopter landed, took the wounded soldier and two escorts on board and flew them to the Ben Tre hospital. Then they continued their mission with the IG team. I later found out that the wounded soldier survived his serious wound.

But now I knew I was in trouble. Senior officers do not take kindly to junior officers demanding anything. Besides, I had challenged a firm policy by calling for an American helicopter to evacuate a Vietnamese casualty.

Days later I accompanied the district chief to Ben Tre for the monthly District Chief/DSA meeting. I was sure I was going to get an ass-chewing from somebody. But my counterpart, knowing that I was probably in trouble, had already told the Province Chief what I had done. At the very start of the meeting the Province Chief thanked me, in front of the assembled U.S. and Vietnamese officers, for what I had done, and praised the high level of the U.S. - Vietnamese counterpart relationship in Mo Cay District.

Saved!

The PSA, a very reasonable man, thanked me in public and told me in private not to do it again.

My counterpart, once he saw that I would go where he went despite the danger posed by a strong enemy threat, trusted me to be there when he needed assistance. He re-paid that trust by ensuring I was not disciplined for a humanitarian act that was, nevertheless, contrary to firmly established policy. Our relationship throughout the ensuing months was rock-solid. At our parting when my assignment ended, we shook hands very firmly, looked each other in the eye, and nodded. No words were needed. Trust between counterparts is essential for success.

I survived two-and-a-half years in the Vietnam War. He probably did not survive the peace that came with vindictive reprisals against the losing side.

### More Advisor's Thoughts By John B. Haseman

From time to time I have passed along a series of "thoughts" from my advisory days, things that popped into my mind then, and now. Here are some more.

. . . The Provincial Phung Hoang Committee inspection team travels to Tan Loi village, the district's largest village. Lunch, and the inevitable contest to see which side can hold down the most beer. Having to do my part, refusing to "chieu hoi." Getting totally smashed in the process, but staying awake. Then sitting down to a lunch of stewed snake soup and keeping it down.

. . . The crump of mortars falling into nearby Quan Meo outpost, frantic calls for help over the radio from the small force of defenders. Then silence, and the looks of helplessness on the faces of the TOC personnel when they realize the relief force will never get there in time.

. . . Tinh, the District Chief's RTO, whose sense of humor made the long days more bearable, who appears in more of my pictures than any other man because he was always in the right place, doing his job well.

. . . Disconcerting news when a reliable source reports of plans for four traitors inside the district compound to blow up the TOC and the advisors' team house under the cover of a sapper attack. Maintaining a 24 hour watch for several days, wondering who the four traitors are and when will they strike. And nothing happens.

. . . Our FAC, Covey-41, flying his OV-10 straight into the swampy ground in the jungles of Binh Khanh to support some little guys he never saw, for the advisors he never had the chance to meet. Giving lie to every snide comment ever made about the RF/PF, as three different platoons plead to make the ground trip through the dangerous, booby-trapped jungle "to help U.S. pilot." Our Kit Carson Scout platoon and its American commander, landing in an un-reconned LZ to recover the remains. The poignant traffic over the net from the Scouts: "This is Kilo 88. We found him. He's dead. Covey, I'm so damned sorry." And the collective agony from district after district checking in, especially we of Huong My and Mo Cay for whom he fought -- "Covey, we're so damned sorry."

## MY TOUR OF DUTY WITH LE MINH DAO

*Recollections of an American Advisor*

By

*Dave Priddy*

*From the Editors*

*Captain David Priddy was a CORDS/MACV advisor on Advisory Team 66 from December 1970 to the end of May 1972 in Dinh Tuong Province, Mekong Delta, where then Colonel Le Minh Dao was the Province Chief. For a 6-month period until May 1971, Priddy commanded Mobile Advisory Team 25, one of 15 MATs in the province and one of three (along with MAT 24 and MAT 133) assigned to Sam Giang District. HQ MACV began drawing down manpower in the Delta reducing Team 66 to two MAT teams (MAT 25 and MAT 80) of three men each and the seven districts to three advisors each.*

*At that time, the role of the MAT advisors changed from being assigned to a Popular Force platoon or RF company where they conducted military training and were involved with uplifting the life of the villagers via MEDCAPS, USAID projects, reinforcing the RD Cadre, and training the PSDF. MAT 25 and MAT 80 were now advising RF battalion sized units and military focused missions. Priddy served on MAT 25 until all the MATs stood down in March 1972 and finished his tour on the Cai Be District Team. Here is his story.*

MAT 25 were advisors to a newly formed group of 5 Regional Force Companies called Lien Doi 15, a special Sector strike force referred to as the Tiger Forces that deployed on short notice to any site in the Province that came under enemy attack. “We reinforced the local territorial forces to reestablish and maintain GVN control in the area,” says Priddy. “Our deployment usually lasted several days but, in some instances, we stayed in the field for weeks. We normally took three or four Regional Force companies, leaving the rest back in reserve at our compound in My Tho. “

“I first met Dai Ta (Colonel) Dao when Lien Doi 15 was being organized. At that time, 3 of the RF companies were assigned to a former US Cavalry compound east of My Tho,” says Priddy. “Colonel Dao explained that our job would be to maintain order, discipline, and government presence in Dinh Tuong Province. In August, Thieu Ta (Major) Tran Van Anh was assigned as the commander and the Lien Doi 15 had 5 RF companies assigned. The compound had reestablished water and power, constructed company headquarters and troop quarters and began military operations.”

“in June of 1971, Colonel Dao assigned the Tiger Forces the mission destroy the Viet Cong’s traditional sanctuaries located in Sam Giang, Cai Lay and Cai Be Districts. They were hard to reach, dangerous to patrol, loaded with booby traps, and just plain nasty. We began using axes, saws, machetes and a lot of explosives (TNT), dynamite, C-4, and Bangalore torpedoes to clear out the vegetation along the small rivers and streams and canals. This was backbreaking work and very dangerous. We lost on average 3-5 RF soldiers KIA and 20-25 WIA a week to booby traps.”

The effects of the clearing operations produced results. In the middle of September, two units of NVA and VC launched a night attack in retaliation against the 586th RF Company. A battle raged for several hours supported by gunships. . Results of the action were 18 enemy KIA, 2 WIA/captured, and 6 civilians WIA within the perimeter.

The Province sent a chopper out to pick me up at first light and take me back to My Tho to brief Colonel Dao, PSA and Team 66 headquarters staff on the operation. Dao listened intently to my remarks, regarding the Lien Doi’s security measures and defensive actions. Then he opened up about the policy of clearing the mini bases. He was concerned about our soldiers lost while clearing the mini-bases and wanted to know if the results achieved were worth the losses we were incurring.

I believe he was genuinely concerned for the health and welfare of his soldiers, their families, and their great struggle against the communist forces.

Several weeks later, I was still involved in the mini-base clearing, when I got a call on the radio that a “VIP” was in route to receive a briefing on our operations. Several hours later, a chopper touches down and out steps Colonel Dao and the renowned Sir Robert Thompson, the British counterinsurgency expert and special advisor to President Richard Nixon. I had no clue as to who he was at the time.

I briefed them on the mini-base clearing operations and the use of the Lien Doi 15 in combat support roles with the local populace. Using a tactical map of the operational area, I stressed the intelligence success we had from the Vietnamese people. Numerous times COL Dao would jump in and add comments and information in support and address the impact to the bigger military picture in the province. It was like the Huntly/Brinkley hour on TV at that time where we were both talking and trading comments. Dao was very passionate about the success we were having against the enemy throughout Dien Tuong province.

## GENERAL LE MINH DAO-TRIBUTE FROM A CO VAN

*By*

*Rich Webster*

The heroic former South Vietnamese General Le Minh Dao died March 19, 2020, in America where he fled to after being imprisoned in a communist reeducation camp for sixteen years. General Dao was the ground commander Xuan Loc, the last major battle of the Vietnam War where his 18<sup>th</sup> ARVN division stopped 3 NVA divisions before running out of supplies and ammunition. General Dao's soldiers fought back 6 major attacks for 12 days before being overwhelmed when the communist forces threw their entire PAVN 4<sup>th</sup> CORPS against them.

General Dao was the banquet speaker at our 2005 Reunion that also included Vietnamese Rangers, Vietnamese who survived the communist gulags and graduates of the Dalat military academy and their Vietnamese families. The event also commemorated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of South Vietnam, referred to as Black April by the South Vietnamese refugee community in America.

"This is the first time I have had the opportunity to thank you," he said to the American advisors. "I offer praise to those American soldiers who came to help against the human rights abusers. The American Army was not defeated. The War was lost by unconscionable political decisions. The peace protestors disrupted the political process. Your protestors were blind to the truth of the Vietnam War, siding with the true aggressors."

Dao's remarks to his fellow soldiers/comrades/American Advisors are of historic value, "We who fought the communists knew what they would do when they took over the South. No human rights, no freedom of religion and no free press. Sixty-five thousand were executed shortly after the fall of Saigon and two hundred and fifty thousand perished in the concentration camps. Refugees were scattered all over the world."

"Your leaders tied your hands behind your back, and they did everything not to win the war. But still you were exceptional. You helped with the South Vietnamese pacification programs-building roads, conducting MEDCAPS and improving the life of the villagers. The people in South Vietnam knew what you did."

I felt honored to have stood beside General Dao in Phoenix and record his remarks about his imprisonment for 16 years by the communists, 10 of those years locked in a cage. He remarked in anguish, "I asked many times why me to be locked up like an animal. I fought for my country. Why do my fellow officers and I deserve this? I finally gave myself up to God and survived through His help. My catholic religion and my loyalty to my men and country pulled me through it."

Asked by his captors why he did not give up but continued to fight, he replied. "I could not abandon my soldiers who had fought so hard for me. I was their General and if you are holding any of my soldiers in prison, I wish to be the last from the 18<sup>th</sup> ARVN released." He was finally released in poor health almost blind from malnutrition.

Famous for his last battlefield interview, Dao spoke these words for all the world to hear. "The communists could throw their entire army at Xuan Loc, the 18<sup>th</sup> will stand fast. "Nicknamed the supermen, the 18<sup>th</sup> did stand fast destroying the myth that the ARVN was no match for the North Vietnamese Army.

When Dao took command of the 18<sup>th</sup> ARVN, it was considered the worst in the South Vietnamese Army. Ray Robison, RD Cadre advisor in Dinh Tuong Province, when Dao was the Province Chief there, remembers him, "Dao was unique in that he was always out and about with his soldiers, sitting down to eat with them and to ask about their families. He never sat still. He was filled with energy. He always had a smile on his face, but if things weren't quite right, be ready for criticism."

Ray continues, "He was also a nice guy, friendly, inquisitive. I met him from time to time performing my duties with the RD program. During the TET celebration of 1972 he visited me at my villa in My Tho which raised my status to have him pay his respects as was the Vietnamese custom during that holiday. Years later, I contacted some of his former staff to help me locate my old counterpart."

I also had a connection with General Dao in that the Regional Force company that I served with fought with the 18<sup>th</sup> ARVN in that last epic battle. I was a MAT team leader near Xuan Loc in Long Khanh Province in a little village of Cam Tam, with the 413<sup>th</sup> Reginal Forces company in late 1968/early 1969. Yes, he knew about Cam Tan, the little village that sat in the middle of a French rubber plantation. I befriended the South Vietnamese catholic nuns that ran a clinic/school there. I had great respect for the impoverished South Vietnamese soldiers in the 413<sup>th</sup>. At that time, they were outmatched and outgunned with their WWII and Korean War vintage weapons by the larger VC/NVA forces hiding in the jungle areas nearby.

I used to drive by the Catholic Church on the edge of Xuan Loc on my infrequent trips to the province capital for supplies. Forward observers from the 18 ARVN used the steeple of the church to spot artillery until the church was completely destroyed as was every building/house in the capital city of Xuan Loc by the North Vietnamese artillery.

A recent Vietnam magazine article describes Dao's action during the battle, "Dao spent most of his time moving among his front-line soldiers, rather than issuing orders from the rear. He insisted that all his officers maintain close contact with subordinates at least "two levels down" which was an unorthodox method in an army that maintained rigid class stratification between officer and enlisted personnel."

The Regional Force/Popular Forces of Long Khanh commanded by the Province Chief, Col Nguyen Van Phuc, were nearly wiped out during the battle at Xuan Loc. The 413<sup>th</sup> was there and their families would have been close by. I grieve for them because there would be nothing for them or their families in the new Vietnam controlled by communist forces, not even cemeteries to mourn their dead.

I have been back to Vietnam three times to visit the Xuan Loc area and my old village, Cam Tan, which the communists renamed Xuan Cue. Dao's remarks about the communists poisoning the peasant's minds, I reflected upon many times over the years.

I have tried to visit the giant communist cemetery on the edge of Xuan Loc that contains the graves of the five-thousand North Vietnamese peasant soldiers who died there in that battle, some barely more than 16 years old. The front gates to the cemetery have always been locked but staring at me through the chained entrance was the symbol and cause they died for. A giant Soviet style hammer and cycle monument casts a shadow over the graves signifying that they died for communism, not Vietnamese nationalism.

I was reminded of General Dao's remarks in 2005, "The communists poisoned the peasants' minds with simple slogans that were beyond their abilities to understand. They promised them freedom and land but when the South was conquered, they discovered the communist party owned the land."

Why would Vietnamese in the South want to visit this cemetery? It contains the graves of strangers, invaders and conquerors from the North who destroyed the city of Xuan Loc with their artillery. created a hell on earth for the Southerners, even bulldozing the cemetery's and graves of South Vietnamese soldiers.

Who were the heroes and leaders of the world that the North Vietnamese leaders venerated in their war against the South? Their pictures line the walls of the General Tran Van Tra museum near Loc Ninh on the Cambodian border now closed to the public. Marx, Lenin, Castro, adorn the walls, along with Ho Chi Minh, the founder of the Indo China communist party and the Khmer Rouge. Joseph Stalin was also there along with Mao Tse Tung. There are no pictures of former Vietnamese patriots there. Over one million young peasant soldiers from the North Vietnam gave their lives for the ideology of these mass murderers as described in "The Black Book of Communism."

Vietnam scholar historian Mark Moyar echoed similar remarks recently in a Vietnam War seminar that I attended in Atlanta in the fall of 2019. "The real Vietnamese patriots were in the South, like President Diem and those southern leaders and soldiers who fought against the communists from the North. Ho Chi Minh and his communist party built their career on killing the legitimate Vietnamese nationalists in the North along with assassinating the Vietnamese nationalists in the South."

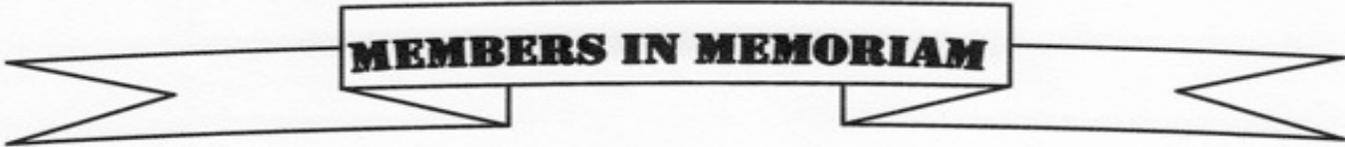
The mobile advisory teams and the CORDS program partnering with the Regional Forces/Popular Forces won the counterinsurgency battle but the media at the time was uninterested in it. We won the hearts and minds battle in Vietnam but lost the same battle back home in America where the communists in today's vernacular, established their meme in the American media. There was no alternative media at the time in America to deliver the message for the South Vietnamese.

My old company, the 413<sup>th</sup> was part of the 400,000-man regional force/popular force army that was not only the forgotten army, it was an unknown, unreported about Army back in the US. The US media chose not to recognize these heroic soldiers, for not one story/article ever appeared in any major media source in America about them.

The Vietnamese people today know nothing about the Vietnam War except the communist version. The Southern heroes who fought for their freedom and sacrificed everything have been written out of their history. Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote that the first step of a tyrant towards enslaving a people is to steal their history.

Dao's remarks 30 years ago should be a part of Vietnamese history, "The communists poisoned the minds of the peasants against the central government. The American Army was not defeated but the war was lost by unconscionable political decisions. After 1972, we fought the communist bloc alone until we were defeated. I offer praise to the American soldiers who came to help against the human rights abusers. "

Lieutenant General Scholes, senior ranger advisor in I Corps, ended the evening with these remarks, "No war is over until the last combatant dies. We who fought there will never forget the sovereign republic of South Vietnam and the incredible sacrifices the South Vietnamese made for their freedom. It is a soldier's duty to fight the war which we did. We grieve for our comrades who died by our side, for the boat people, and those caught in the killing fields after the war. A soldier's grief lasts forever. That's why we can't forget."



## MEMBERS IN MEMORIAM

### **SENIOR CHIEF PETTY OFFICER EDMUND B. CANBY,**

May 31, 2020. He was a combat veteran of WWII and Korea. Senior Chief Canby's Vietnam service began in 1964 when he was assigned as an advisor to coastal groups in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Coastal Zone. He served a total of five tours in Vietnam mostly as an advisor. He served as a gunnery advisor with Coastal Group 37, and later served with Coastal Group 36, River Patrol Division 511 at Can Tho and in 1967 began two consecutive tours with River Assault Groups 23 and 31. In a 1971 article in the Navy's "All Hands" magazine, Chief Canby spoke highly of his Vietnamese counterparts of those days. "They had a hard job to do with older boats, he said, but they never complained, not even during Tet when the going was really tough. They never gave up," he emphasized, "they just kept going." Chief Canby was a COUNTERPARTS member.

*Ed Canby was my Assistant Advisor at RAG 31 in 1968. Actually, I was more a student, and Canby was the teacher. Ed was loved and admired by the VNN sailors, who would do anything for him. He was also one of the most remarkable men I have ever met. Through COUNTERPARTS we renewed our friendship in the '90s and he attended Reunions in DC and in Las Vegas. He was a living example of all that was brave and noble about US Advisors in Vietnam and a true representative of the Greatest Generation. ...Ken Jacobsen*

### **EVERETT F. BUMGARDNER**

December 18, 2005 at home in Arlington, VA. Mr. Bumgardner was born November 23, 1925. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and subsequently attended George Washington University. After graduation he began work with the U.S. Information Agency as a photographic Specialist and in that capacity worked primarily in Korea and other Asian countries. Following appointment as a foreign service officer, Mr. Bumgardner was assigned to Laos and headed the USIS Field Operations Office until 1961 when he was re-assigned to develop and direct the USIS Field Operations Office in Viet Nam. He continued to serve in a variety of special assignments in Vietnam, such as Special Assistant to Deputy Commander MACV William Colby, during the duration of warfare in that country. Mr. Bumgardner retired from government service in 1976 and until recent illness, was always accessible as a reference resource for writers and media personalities researching aspects of recent history in Southeast Asia.

### **JAMES THOMAS O'MEARA,**

Retired Foreign Service officer for USAID and a Peace Corps volunteer, died December 18, 2019, in Washington, DC, at the age of 76. Mr. O'Meara was born September 25, 1943, in Chicago, Illinois. Mr. O'Meara went to Vietnam with the U.S. Agency for International Development from 1967 to 1969. While there, he set up classes that taught people to drive, sew, grow vegetables, and raise chickens. As part of a military-civilian team in Binh Duong Province, he was often in harm's way, especially during the Tet Offensive of January 1968. The State Department gave him its Award for Heroism that year "for courageous action while under fire in Vietnam."

### **ROBERT LEWIS HOWARD, COLONEL (RETD)**

(July 11, 1939 – December 23, 2009) was a highly decorated United States Army Special Forces officer and Medal of Honor recipient of the Vietnam War. He was wounded 14 times over 54 months of combat, was awarded the Medal of Honor, eight Purple Hearts, a Distinguished Service Cross, a Silver Star, and four Bronze Stars. COL Howard was nominated for the Medal of Honor three separate times over a 13-month period but received lesser medals for the first two nominations, which were for actions performed in Cambodia where the U.S. was fighting covertly. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on December 30, 1968, his third nomination.

He retired from the US Army after 36 years of service as a full colonel, and the most highly decorated service member on active duty. He died as a result of pancreatic cancer and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery on February 22, 2010.

### **THOMAS RAYMOND LAFLAM**

March 20, 2020. He was from Meriden, NH Tom was proud to have served his country as a Navy corpsman for two tours in Vietnam with the Seabees and Marines He was a member of several veterans organizations., including Counterparts Tom wrote many stories about his time as a corpsman, two of which were published in Military Magazine.

## 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.

***Just Another Day in Vietnam.*** Keith M Nightingale COL, USA (Ret.) Casemate, 264 pp.; \$34.95, hardcover; \$11.99, Kindle)

Trickery initiated a little-known battle at Soui Long Creek 75 miles northeast of Saigon during the Vietnam War in 1967. A highly trained Viet Cong pretending he was a *Chieu Hoi* defector led a battalion of ARVN Rangers into a fight with a VC division. In what he calls “my initial introduction into combat in Vietnam,” retired Army Col. Keith M. Nightingale describes the action that ensued in *Just Another Day in Vietnam* (in an unusual manner).

As he puts it, the book “is 95 percent fact and 5 percent speculation.” Relying exclusively on his narrative and a dozen photographs to recreate the event, Nightingale provides no notes or bibliography.

The book is not a memoir, though, but rather the “combined stories of all who served that day” on both sides of the battlefield, he says. An adviser with the ARVN Rangers, Nightingale refers to himself as “the lieutenant.”

He tells a fascinating tale. It begins in 1965, when the general who commanded North Vietnamese military forces in South Vietnam decided to accelerate actions against South Vietnamese and American troops to try to convince the American public that they could not win the war. He clandestinely moved and advantageously arrayed 2,000 men of the 5th Viet Cong Division to a site on Soui Long Creek.

South of there, a VC laborer defected to the Americans supposedly in hope of returning home. Under interrogation, he haltingly revealed information on building a nearby VC camp, which was new intelligence to Americans. He fearfully agreed to lead forces to the location. With approval from an ARVN general, Americans sent a Ranger battalion to destroy the camp and its forces.

Nightingale’s account of the give and take of the ensuing battle provides minute details of uncanny certainty that override his warning about speculation. His recollections of fighting during an afternoon, night, and the following day revolve around heavily reduced and surrounded Rangers; ambushed, as well as battered and stalled U.S. 11th Armored Cavalry troops en route to rescuing the Rangers; and disciplined masses of Viet Cong infantrymen. He summarizes one attack on the 11th as a “short sudden cacophony of death.”

The descriptions of behavior among men of both sides provide captivating reading, particularly concerning a sense of responsibility among leaders. Suffice it to say that the trickery backfired.

Nightingale’s writing style differs significantly from most I have read about the Vietnam War. It often contains touches of poetic writing and passion. For example, he addresses death and destruction in a voice bordering on poetics yet infused with scientific nomenclature. In viewing a corpse, he writes:

“The eyes, no longer in existence, become tunnels into the tributaries of the cranium” and “The cambium layer lay exposed with a dark blotchy stain around its circumference composed of bone matter and blood.” One of his descriptions of the Vietnamese landscape resembles a view of a beautiful woman’s body.

In many respects, the book provides an education in infantry tactics. Along with the action, Nightingale explains how weapon systems operate and the coordination of manpower necessary to attain maximum results from them. Nightingale served two tours in the Vietnam War. The first with the 82nd Airborne Division working with the 52nd Vietnamese Ranger Battalion and the second with the 101st Airborne Division. He retired as a colonel in 1993.



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