



# COUNTERPARTS

## TƯƠNG HỮU ĐÔNG NAM Á

# SITREP

Volume XXIV

Issue 1

Fall 2025

### **COUNTERPARTS Reunion, April 30-May 2 Westminster, CA**

The 2025 COUNTERPARTS Reunion, held in conjunction with the Vietnamese Black April remembrance ceremony in Westminster, California. 30 April 2025, marked the 50th anniversary of the fall of Saigon and the Republic of Vietnam. Westminster, the home of “Little Saigon” was joined by many surrounding communities in hosting the event. This area has the largest concentration of former South Vietnamese in the US (over 220,000 residents) and is one of the few cities in America that can still officially fly the flag of South Vietnam. Special thanks to Dave Priddy and Tom Vo for organizing a Reunion that was very emotional for those of us who served as advisors to the South Vietnamese in their struggle for freedom. Forty-eight COUNTERPARTS members were in attendance accompanied by family and friends.

The Reunion, the largest ever, was held at the Ayres Hotel Costa Mesa/Newport Beach from 29 April thru 2 May. COUNTERPARTS member check-ins began on Tuesday, 29 April and old friends reconnected and new friendships developed and evolved.

#### **30 April**

At 0900 on 30 April, our buses departed the hotel at 0900 for the day's ceremonies, during which COUNTERPARTS placed a wreath and was honored to be recognized, along with a small contingent of Marine vets who assisted in the evacuation of the US embassy in Saigon. Many local officials spoke in the 2-hour long ceremony which was attended by over a thousand people including hundreds of former South Vietnamese soldiers, many in uniform. Our largest number of COUNTERPARTS members to ever attend a Reunion had a special seating section not far from the speaker's platform. Large bronze statues of an American soldier and South Vietnamese soldier in their combat gear stood in the background, signifying the close bond between the two in their joint fight for the freedom of South Vietnam.

COUNTERPARTS member Dave Priddy, who served 18 months in-country, spoke briefly at the end of the ceremony, recalling his Advisory experience, recognizing our COUNTERPARTS organization and honoring the Vietnamese soldiers and civilians that bravely fought for independence and freedom.

After the remembrance ceremony ended, we traveled to Buena Park and the Komi Buffet for a delicious Asian meal. A buffet of seafood (shrimp, scallops, fish), pork, chicken, vast offerings of a variety of prepared vegetables, sushi and sashimi, fresh fruits and many flavor choices of ice cream. Following lunch, we returned to the hotel and hospitality suite to relax and listen to member Presentations, a new addition to Reunion activities begun in 2023. They are given by individual members and are a unique insight into the fascinating variety of Advisory experiences (and adventures) in Vietnam. The presentations are about 30 minutes long and usually take the form of PowerPoint, videos and slide shows.

.....Continued on page 3

**Commander**  
Steve King  
[cheoreo1@hotmail.com](mailto:cheoreo1@hotmail.com)

**Executive Officer**  
Hank Choy  
[choyh002@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:choyh002@hawaii.rr.com)

**Adjutant/Treasurer**  
Jim O'Malley  
P.O. Box 1331Brawley CA 92227  
[omalley@usa.net](mailto:omalley@usa.net)

**Quartermaster//Logistics  
Officer/Village Market**  
Mike McMunn  
2310 Newberry St Williamsport PA  
17701-4243  
[covan2@verizon.net](mailto:covan2@verizon.net)

**Membership**  
John B. Haseman  
555 W Saddle Dr  
Grand Junction CO 81507  
[jhaseman@earthlink.net](mailto:jhaseman@earthlink.net)

**Public Affairs/Information Officer**  
Rich Webster  
[covanmi@mchsi.com](mailto:covanmi@mchsi.com)

**Historian**  
Carol Lund  
[lundc@chartermi.net](mailto:lundc@chartermi.net)

**Web Site Administrator**  
James F. Alkek  
[jimalkek@yahoo.com](mailto:jimalkek@yahoo.com)

**Facebook Group Administrator**  
Charlie Shaw  
[charlie.shaw@west-point.org](mailto:charlie.shaw@west-point.org)

**Montagnard Liaison Officer**  
Mike Little  
[littlecrazy3@cox.net](mailto:littlecrazy3@cox.net)

**SITREP Editors**  
Ken Jacobsen  
[kjacobson@knology.net](mailto:kjacobsen@knology.net)

Bill Laurie  
[bill.laurie@yahoo.com](mailto:bill.laurie@yahoo.com)

**REUNION Coordinator**  
Len Ganz  
3315 Knoxville Avenue, Long Beach,  
CA 90808  
781.444.7808



# COUNTERPARTS SITREP

The Official publication of COUNTERPARTS/Thương Hữu Đồng Nam Á

## Commander's Corner

As it is for most of us as we age – every year seems to go by faster! And, yet, we seem to get slower. Many of us also continue to endure the effects of Agent Orange. Which is, without a doubt, one of the most insidious and nasty “souvenirs” from our service in Vietnam.

Dave Priddy is to be commended for hosting a great reunion this year in Costa Mesa, CA. He coordinated a host of activities, including our participation in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of Vietnam with the Westminister, CA Vietnamese community, followed by a great lunch at an Asian buffet restaurant. Dave's wife Cynthia hosted an awesome trip to Balboa Island for the spouses! And, once again, the members' presentations were well done and well received.

Our reunion ended with the banquet, highlighted by our speaker, Monty Vogel. Monty was a MAT Team leader, in 1971 in Pleiku Province. Monty shared a number of humorous anecdotes from his time with the Montagnards, which kept us all laughing. Monty authored a book named “*Pawns of Pleiku*,” that is a very good read. Dave and Cynthia, thank you for your service to Counterparts and a job well done.

Planning is well underway for the 2026 reunion, to be held in Lubbock, TX in conjunction with Texas Tech University. Next year's reunion is being hosted by Len Ganz, with Ron Milam and the staff of the Vietnam Archives supporting. As planning continues and the schedule develops, we will publish the schedule and the registration form. There is now a live link on the CP website for discounted hotel reservations. I encourage you to plan ahead and make your hotel reservations ASAP! It is relatively easy to fly into Lubbock. For those who live in Texas or neighboring states, it's an easy drive. We look forward to seeing you in April, 2026!

Obviously, at this stage in the life of our organization, we are in a time of transition. Our focus going forward is to foster a sense of community and mutual support among our members, provide a platform for engagement, support the historical preservation of our unique legacy, and cultivate lifelong connections among our members.

I invite each one of you to join me in becoming a community that strengthens our mutual bonds, celebrates our shared experiences, and supports each other along the rest of life's journey.

If you have a personal need or a suggestion, please don't hesitate to contact me directly at [cheoreo1@hotmail.com](mailto:cheoreo1@hotmail.com) or 307.689.6064.

.....Steve King  
Commander, Counterparts/THDNA

COUNTERPARTS/THDNA is an  
IRS 501 (c)(3) Veterans  
organization Chartered in the State  
of Illinois. Registered Agent is  
Richard Webster, 1019 W Lafayette  
Ave Jacksonville IL 62650-1860

**DUES NOTICE:** Annual Counterparts dues are payable now. Annual dues are \$35.00, or you can upgrade to lifetime membership for \$350.00. Our dues fund the several projects that Counterparts supports for our former Counterparts in Southeast Asia. Please make your check out to "Counterparts" and mail to Membership Officer John Haseman, 555 West Saddle Drive, Grand Junction CO 81507. Lifetime members do NOT pay dues, but those who may like to make a contribution are warmly received! If you are not sure of your status or payment record, feel free to email John at [jhaseman@earthlink.net](mailto:jhaseman@earthlink.net)

## Reunion 2025

...continued from page one

Dr. Ron Milam: "*SEARCHING FOR MIA'S FROM ALL THREE SIDES OF THE VIETNAM WAR*" Ron is a former MAT Senior Advisor and currently serves as a Director of the Institute for Peace & Conflict, Texas Tech and affiliated with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), whose mission is to achieve the fullest possible accounting for U.S. service members who remain unaccounted for from past conflicts, primarily prisoners of war and those missing in action. This involves researching, recovering, identifying, and ultimately returning the remains to their families. DPAA operates both domestically and internationally, collaborating with various partners and utilizing diverse expertise to fulfill its mission. Cost and unexploded ordinance are the biggest problems.

Ed Grant: "*THE CONVOY OF TEARS*", selections from his novel about service with Team 31. The novel tells the story of Advisors with the Montagnards in the Central Highlands during the last 2 months of the War. Reference was also made to Ed Sprague and his efforts to save the Montagnards.

### **May 1**

On 1 May, COUNTERPARTS members and their families had the opportunity to take an optional tour of a local museum, the *Lyon Air Museum* located at John Wayne Airport. The museum displays authentic aircraft, rare vehicles and related memorabilia, with emphasis on the defining event of the 20th century – World War II. Through captivating and thought provoking exhibits based on historical scholarship, visitors gain a better understanding of the important role the United States plays in shaping world history.

Member presentations continued with the following:

John Haseman: "*SURVIVING MARLBORO COUNTRY*". John described a command detonated mine incident that wounded 5 of his RF soldiers in Mo Cay district.

Tony Hoehner: "*BIG MEDICINE*". Tony provided a brief history of his family's Lakota heritage. His grandfather was in the Battle of The Little Bighorn. Tony was given a Lakota name and feather in a ceremony honoring his bravery in Vietnam by a Lakota medicine man after he returned from the war.

Max Lund: *CAMBODIA CORPS UPDATE*. Max and Carol Lund, who direct CAMBODIA CORPS along with Rich Webster and Lewis Grissaffi, provided an update and showed pictures of the Montagnard students they support and assist to further their education in Cambodia. CCI has now produced over 70 college graduates, who have become a key resource in providing support to their Montagnard Community.

Joe Napier: "*LIFE AS A DISTRICT SENIOR ADVISOR*". Tony spoke of Team 56 and Phung Hiep district and detailing the many combat operations he led from May 1971 to May 1972.

Steve Leighton: "*TIME TRAVELER SEARCHING FOR MY COUNTERPARTS*." Steve related his experience in locating his former ranger COUNTERPARTS after 40 years who ended up being in his hometown of Minneapolis. Clips from local television coverage of the event that received national attention were shown.

### **May 2**

On 2 May, COUNTERPARTS held its annual Business Meeting. The report is on page five.

While the members met, a group of wives and a few COUNTERPARTS members hosted by Cynthia Priddy, Karen Gray and Stacey Layton, all locals, visited Newport Beach. First stop was at *Roger's Gardens*. For 50 years, *Roger's Gardens* has been a cherished family-owned haven in Orange County. Over the decades, their passion for nurturing plants has transformed the property into an inspirational destination where art meets nature.

Next stop was Balboa Island. Balboa Island's Marine Avenue is home to local small businesses including restaurants, local museum, bakeries, fishing & tackle, and local crafts.

Member presentations continued after the business meeting:

Dr. "Carie" Nguyen: "*WOMEN SERVING IN THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE FORCES*" Carie gave a short history of Vietnamese women's service as soldiers. For hundreds of years women have fought, most recently in the RD Cadre/National Police/PSDF. She highlighted the service of the "Tiger Lady" of the Mekong Delta with 44<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion.

Hank Choy: "*SEABEES ANSWER THE CALL*". Hank provided the background and history of the Seabees and spoke about his assignment with team 10 in Vietnam and also his service in the First Iraq War.

Richard Smiley: Richard shared four unique experiences with TM 65 Sa Dec Province and the capture of a cache of ammo and weapons.

John Haseman: "*HAPPINESS IS FIXING A BOY'S FACE*" John shared his involvement in getting surgery in Saigon for the son of a father who was a senior VC officer. The boy's hare lip was successfully repaired. John noted that this incident illustrated the importance of trust. No advisor can succeed without trust.

### ***Banquet, May 2***

The Banquet was held on Friday evening, 2 May. Reunion Co-host Dave Priddy welcomed everyone to the Banquet, made some administrative announcements, recognized the "Missing Man Table" and provided the invocation. Co-host Tom Vo sang the National Anthem.

Commander Steve King welcomed those attending the banquet dinner thanking Dave Priddy and Tom Vo for their effort and work in organizing the Reunion. He welcomed 5 new COUNTERPARTS members.

Our guest speaker was Monty Vogel, author of the "*Pawns of Pleiku*", a fictional account of his exploits with the Montagnards as the leader of a five-man Mobile Advisory Team. Monty was an Infantry Lieutenant and graduate of the Special Forces Advisory and Vietnamese Language school before his tour in Vietnam, 1970-1971. His presentation depicted many graphic scenes of his life with the Montagnards and experiences in combat.



*After the presentation, members lined up for the traditional group photo and team photos. Henry Newinn entertained everyone with his great singing voice.*

*Many agreed that this was the best Reunion ever; don't miss the next one at Texas Tech.*



## 2025 COUNTERPARTS BUSINESS MEETING

COMMANDER: Steve King: called the meeting to order for the first time as the new Commander. He welcomed all members, including five new members, to the largest reunion ever (48 co vans in attendance). Dave Priddy was recognized for his extraordinary efforts as Reunion Coordinator as this Reunion had more events scheduled than any previous reunions.

SITREP : In absence of Ken Jacobsen, SITREP Editor, Steve said that the SITREP has been through one year of publication in a paperless format and the transition has been successful. It is now possible to use more sophisticated formatting like color photos, and articles are not restricted in length. John Haseman's continuing series on Medal of Honor winners is an excellent example of how new formatting opportunities can enhance already excellent work. Our SITREP is one of the few places where the Advisory Experience continues to be preserved. YOUR STORY IS IMPORTANT. Send it to Ken at the email address listed in the SITREP, kjacobsen@knology.net

MEMBERSHIP : John Haseman: John reported that there are 172 active life time members, 18 of whom are charter members, and 77 annual dues paying members. There are 410 inactive, and 168 known to be deceased. There are 12 organizations that are non- dues paying members. There are a total of 858 members on the roster.

XO: Hank Choy: The Village Market is now online. The flags that were shipped to every reunion have now been replaced by one American flag with 6 small flags of our allies imprinted on one American flag. Hank continues to work on our COUNTERPARTS vest. We have a lot of the new COUNTERPARTS black and tan CO VAN MY hats that have been well received.

TREASURER's REPORT : Jim O'Malley reported that there was approximately \$30,000 in the treasury and that he has added Lewis Grissafi and Steve King as additional endorsers for our bank account. *Note: After deducting contributions voted at the Reunion and the total cost of the Reunion our balance is \$15,859.*

PIO : Rich Webster: COUNTERPARTS has given \$2500 for ten years to THE VIETNAM HEALING FOUNDATION to help and assist our wounded and disabled comrades back in Vietnam who receive nothing from the present government. Every effort is made by the communist GVN to deny them benefits. This money is distributed under the radar by Vietnam Vet RJ Delveccio and many Vietnamese going back to visit. Last year they assisted 40 families. See [www.thevhf.org](http://www.thevhf.org). for more information about this small non-profit.

CAMBODIA CORPS: Max Lund: The CCI in depth report was given in an earlier power point presentation by Max and Carol showing their work in Cambodia this year with the Montagnard students that COUNTERPARTS has generously supported. CCI has now produced 70 Montagnard college graduates with more in the pipeline. See [www.cambodiakorps.org](http://www.cambodiakorps.org)

CAROL LUND: Historian. Carol Lund was formally recognized as Historian by JC Fischer in 2008 as a recognition of her role in preserving COUNTERPARTS history by creating pictorial record books of the Reunions. She said the real historians are Rich Webster, Jim Alkek, Ken Jacobsen and the SITREP contributors who have written the articles and documented the historical data on our website. She will be going to Texas Tech in December to get a personal tour to see what other historical objects and writings could be donated there.

JIM ALKEK -Web Site Administrator. He is constantly adding names. There are 18 Advisory teams with less than ten teammates listed. Check out your teams and if you see errors, log on and correct them. Currently working on the 54-64 time period has added 600 non-CAP marine Advisors. He also has a list of PRU Advisors. He requests you log on and add the names of your Advisor comrades if they aren't there.

FACEBOOK ADMINISTRATOR: Charlie Shaw: was not in attendance but responded by email stating that the face book page is still active and encourages members to log on and contribute.

**ANNUAL GIVING** This year members voted to send \$5000 to Cambodia Corps and \$2500 to The Vietnam Healing Foundation.

Tom Vo, former VNAF pilot addressed the group and apologized that the organizers of the April 30 commemoration that we attended mistakenly left us out of the groups to be recognized. Those in attendance voted to officially accept Tom as a COUNTERPARTS member.

**NEXT YEAR'S REUNION** Len Ganz volunteered to host the next year's reunion at Texas Tech University at Lubbock, Texas. COUNTERPARTS member, Dr. Ron Milam, Director of the *Institute for Peace and Conflict* at Texas Tech, stated that he would be willing to coordinate with Len and assist in any way.

### ***NEW MEMBERS***

**Richard P. "Rick" Cassidy.** Rick served on Advisory Team 41 as the last Deputy District Senior Advisor and District Senior Advisor in Dak To District, Kontum Province, from January through July 1972, during the 1972 NVA Easter Offensive. In addition to Vietnam, Rick also served in the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Thailand as a Foreign Area Officer. He retired as a Colonel in July 1995. He was referred to Counterparts by long time friend John Haseman.

**Robert R. Gonzales.** Robert served on Advisory Team 5 at Phu Bai, March 1972 - February 1973.

**Benjamin Hamilton "Ham" McDonald.** Ham joined at our Columbus reunion. He served on Advisory Team 1 in Danang from February 1967 to February 1968 as a battalion senior advisor and later as G-3 Air Senior Advisor.

**Charles J. McGillicuddy.** Charles joined at our Columbus reunion. He served as a corpsman and operating room technician, initially at the 3rd Surgical Hospital at Dong Tam and the 36th Evacuation Hospital at Vung Tau, From , and then from June 1968 to July 1969 as a medical advisor on the 336th MilPHAP (Military Provincial Health Assistance Program) Team in Moc Hoa, Kien Tuong Province.

**Robert Landin.** Robert joined at our Columbus reunion. He served on Advisory Team 87 as battalion senior advisor, 4/48th Battalion, 10th ARVN Division (later renumbered as 18th ARVN Division) from November 1965 to December 1966.

**Robert R. Sarratt.** Robert served three tours in the Republic of Vietnam. His first tour was as a logistics advisor on Advisory Team 31, Phu Bon Province (and adding strength to Counterparts' largest Team cohort) from January 1968 to January 1969. His second assignment was as a logistics advisor on the Republic of Vietnam Quartermaster Advisory Team, January-December 1972. His third assignment was as a logistics advisor in the U.S. Defense Attaché Office, Saigon.

**Paul A. Thomas.** Paul served as Team Leader for MAT Team II-12 in Tuy An District, Phu Yen Province Advisory Team 28 from May 1970 through April 1971. He lives in Tucson.

**Russell Wood.** Russell served on Navy Construction Battalion (Seabee) Team 1019 in Rach Gi

## **UPDATE ON REUNION 2026!**

### **DATES**

21-24 April 2026 (departing on the 25<sup>th</sup>) in Lubbock, Texas, home of Texas Tech University and the Vietnam Center & Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

The Buddy Holly Museum (perfect for us "older" folks).

The Silent Wings Museum (WWII gliders that flew behind the lines on D-Day).

A visit to the Sam Johnson Archives at Texas Tech. Meet with staff and

Our presentations will be videoed by the TT folks and added to the archives.

**Please submit a presentation topic for approval soon. We have limited time slots. TTU will video and save at the Sam Johnson Archives.**

Supper at the Saigon Café, nước chấm available.

Friday morning spouse outing to a cafe for breakfast, ride in a trolley and head to the botanical gardens.

### **FOR MORE INFO:**

Contact Len Ganz 781.444.7808 PST

## ***New Article by COUNTERPARTS member Dr. Jane Hamilton***

The following note was sent by Grant McClure in response to an article sent to him by Dr. Jane Hamilton, COUNTERPARTS member and renowned Indochina War journalist. Dr. Hamilton's article follows Grant's comments:

*Hi Dr. Jane,*

*I greatly appreciate your sharing with me the wonderful article you authored on the momentous occasion of important 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reflections on the pivotal role of our Hmong allies in the Laos theater of operations during the Vietnam War. I have copied Counterparts leadership, our website administrator, our FACEBOOK administrator as well as the newsletter editor(s) to include the article in the next edition of the SITREP and/or in online formats that will reach the entire membership.*

*As you are held in high esteem as a Distinguished Member of Counterparts (designated in 1994 at the annual Counterparts reunion in Killeen, Texas), the article is both timely and important for fellow Advisors to turn to in tribute to all that we strived to achieve in our effort to support our allies during the Vietnam War. Counterparts will forever be honored to have organized and sponsored the 1997 Lao/Hmong Living Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery, and it is heartening to realize after 28 years how the purpose and intent of the memorial has served such an enduring meaningful role of recognition of Hmong veteran service and sacrifices within their expatriate communities across the US.*

*Warm regards,*

*Grant*

The Article Follows:



# REDDING SENTINEL

MAY 15, 2025

REDDING, CONNECTICUT

Volume 4 / Issue 4

\$3

## 50 years later Vietnam War memories | By Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt



Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt in Vietnam as a war correspondent and photographer.



Hmong Pa'ndau: Hmong stitched escape stories with their needles. This "story cloth" depicts crossing the Mekong River using bamboo - note the person in yellow is drowning.

Could it be 50 years ago that on April 30, 1975, Saigon, South Vietnam fell to the communist forces of North Vietnam, ending in defeat for the U.S. and changing the political dynamics of Southeast Asia and ethnic populations in the U.S.?

It seems like yesterday that Saigon fell; then, neighboring Cambodia fell to Pol Pot and his murderous Khmer Rouge, which in less than five years exterminated at least one – maybe three – million people, particularly anyone with an education, through starvation, hard labor, torture, and execution.

The last of the neighboring countries involved in this conflict to fall to communist rule was Laos: The Kingdom of a Million Elephants and a White Parasol. In this case, tanks didn't roll in to seize control, but a well-planned takeover of Laos was initiated by disarming soldiers and tricking government officials into concentration camps, called "seminar camps." On December 2, 1975, the Lao King was forced to abdicate his throne and the Lao People's Democratic Republic was established. The Royal Family died in one of these "seminar camps."

I went to the Vietnam War with my generation – not wielding a weapon, but with a typewriter (yes, an Olivetti portable typewriter) and a Nikon camera. I covered the troops and the fighting in South Vietnam, winning awards for my front-line combat coverage and photography. But my destiny would

lie with the fate and tragedy of a remote mountain minority in Laos – the Hmong.

While covering the fighting in South Vietnam, I discovered that Laos was a critical but "secret" theater of the Vietnam War. The communist North Vietnamese Army needed control of northern Laos, Hmong homelands, so it could move men and materiel through Laos to South Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail supply route to fight U.S. and South Vietnamese forces.

To me, reporting on the "secret war" in Laos was important – and a challenge. Covering northern Laos was forbidden (or "embargoed") for journalists. I pieced together what was going on by learning to "read between the lines," listening to Americans working in Laos, and even watching as American fighter jets returned to Thai airbases without attached ordnance much too quickly to have made it to North Vietnamese airspace. I did manage to publish some articles on the fighting in northern Laos and got in serious trouble with U.S. Defense authorities.

The Hmong alliance with the U.S. began in 1962 when President Kennedy reached a Geneva-negotiated "deal" to keep Laos "neutral" and out of the regional fight for control that was taking place between the Soviet Union and China and the U.S. and its allies. The Geneva Accord of July 23, 1962 declared the neutrality of Laos by stating that the 14 signatories, in-

cluding the Soviet Union, China, North Vietnam, and the U.S., would refrain from direct or indirect interference in internal affairs, and that no foreign troops could be housed or operate there. The U.S. made an attempt to keep its end of the neutrality deal while other countries continued operations there. When the Kennedy administration realized that its adversaries had not withdrawn their forces, Kennedy's CIA covertly recruited, trained, and armed Hmong to be the American "boots on the ground" in Northern Laos.

The Hmong, under Hmong General Vang Pao, would become a guerrilla blocking force against the North Vietnamese Army invaders. And significantly, Hmong would serve as defenders of a hi-tech aviation guidance system atop a mountain called Phu Pha Thi – code-named LS 85 – that strategically and precisely directed U.S. bombers and fighter pilots to their North Vietnamese targets regardless of weather or time of day. Hmong also became spotter pilots for U.S. strike aircraft in Laos, Ho Chi Minh Trail watchers, pilots of T-28 bomber aircraft, and were tasked to rescue American pilots downed in Hmong territory.

All of this was done at great sacrifice by the Hmong. While Americans didn't know about this U.S. "secret war" and its alliance with the Hmong, those whom the Hmong were fighting knew and vowed revenge.

After the Communist take-over in Laos, revenge came quickly and deadly to those allied with the U.S., supporters and officials of the Royal Lao Government, and the Lao Royal Family. The new Communist Lao government even announced on national radio that when they found any former U.S. or Royal Lao Government allies, they would "wipe them out."

As word trickled out about the atrocities taking place in Cambodia and Laos, I decided to return to the area to investigate – focusing on the refugees from Laos, particularly the Hmong – who had sought sanctuary in northern Thailand refugee camps.

As fate would have it, the English language *Bangkok Post Newspaper* agreed to run my articles based on my interviews with Hmong survivors who had escaped. They described in great detail their treacherous and deadly treks to escape Laos.

Then this happened: I witnessed a massacre of Hmong refugees trapped on a sand bar in the middle of the Mekong River. Helpless to do anything except record the details of what I was witnessing, I made the commitment to record my interviews, to document everything with photos, and to preserve what I was witnessing and what I was learning from the survivors.

This was born my book *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, The Americans and the Secret Wars for Laos 1942-1992* which includes interviews with over 1,000 people, including some 500 Hmong involved in this "secret war." Hmong shared stories of their fighting days and their consequent fleeing and surviving at horrific costs to themselves, their comrades, and their families.

As the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War is remembered, I opened *Tragic Mountains* to re-read the heroic stories of children, women, and men who somehow managed to find a way to survive to tell their stories.

Now decades later, Hmong who resettled in the U.S. officially as political refugees have been hugely successful after some years of struggling to adjust to ways totally different from their remote mountain villages.

In those early days of Hmong

resettlement in the U.S., I was keenly aware that for resettlement to be successful, Americans needed to know who the Hmong were and why they were suddenly living in their communities. In the early 1980s, I created a traveling exhibit featuring their intricate and exquisite textiles accompanied by my photos of traditional Hmong life, refugee camp life, and their alliance with the U.S. during the Vietnam War. It was a small gesture, but it was effective, and today there are museums devoted to featuring Hmong textile arts, particularly the story-cloths which depict scenes from Hmong life and history.

While researching *Tragic Mountains*, I was befriended by General Vang Pao, the Hmong leader in the Hmong diaspora communities. I often joined him in travels to various Hmong communities in the U.S. He was a charismatic speaker who always used tribal traditional homilies to make a point, much to the delight of his fellow Hmong. He had several themes he always talked about. Two I remember clearly: get off welfare and get a job; and, you must keep your children in school, because education is the future for the Hmong in America.

Much has happened in the American Hmong community since Hmong refugees first came here in the late 1970s. On May 15, 1997, a memorial at Arlington National Cemetery was dedicated to honor the Hmong soldiers of the "U.S. Secret War in the Kingdom of Laos." May 15 has become a special Hmong day, as Hmong gather each year at Arlington to remember those fallen in defending freedom and to reflect on the fall of the Hmong base at Long Chieng and the horrors that followed. During this time, General Vang Pao, outfoxing enemy forces and capture, made it out of Laos. He was never able to return to his mountain homeland. He, too, became a refugee – and the leader of the Hmong in exile.

In addition, after years of lobbying by Hmong veterans and their friends, in 2018 Congress approved legislation that allows Hmong and Lao veterans who served in support

*Continued on page 8*

50 years later Vietnam war memories | continued from page 6

of the U.S. during the Vietnam War Era to be buried in U.S. national cemeteries. This was considered by Hmong veterans as, at last, recognition of their years of service as the American "boots on the ground" in the "secret war" in Laos.

Hmong General Vang Pao is no longer with us, but his vision for Hmong success in America is recognized by the descendants of those who managed to escape at-

tempts to "wipe them out." Hmong are now lawyers, judges, school superintendents, educators, military officers, farmers, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, historians, poets, mayors, members of Congress, an Olympic gymnast, and a winning female golfer.

During 2025, Hmong American communities will host commemorative events to recognize Hmong unique history, resilience

to tragedy, and their eventual blooming in American society. ■

*Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt is a Redding resident and journalist, photographer, war-correspondent, historian, human rights advocate, and expert on Southeast Asia. She was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1998 and again in 2000 for her work on behalf of the Hmong people of Laos*

# ***Cambodia Corps Update 2025***

By  
Max Lund

Greetings one and all. It was great seeing everyone again at our reunion. We enjoyed making our presentation and explaining more of our origins and activities. Thank you for attending and allowing us to talk about a subject near and dear to us. Counterparts and individual members have been our core support. The students, Rich, Lewis, Carol and I thank you.

Cambodia Corps continues in its mission to help the Montagnard help themselves through education. Our new relationship with Wildlife Conservation Society and their efforts to thwart the illegal activities in the huge Keo Seima sanctuary through education of the Montagnards who live within the sanctuary is proving to be a learning process for both of us. We have created a high school program tailor made for their goals, in which we highlight different career fields that can be utilized within the sanctuary such as forestry management, ecology, eco-tourism and other environmental related fields. The hope is to educate the youth in the preservation of their rain forest to slow down and perhaps end the illegal activities by Vietnamese companies crossing into the Cambodian sanctuary. WCS has also entered into an agreement with CCI to fund five scholarships for college level training in related environmental fields. We'll be closely monitoring our graduates to gauge how effective their training will be. We have already attracted the attention of the government Ministry of Environment who is also interested in the program we have developed together with WCS. This is our first foray into actively working to save the rainforest. This is part of our mission to help the Montagnard in the preservation of their lands and culture, so we are excited to be entering into these partnerships with WCS

## **Members in Memoriam**

***Gary Rice***, a Team 31 member, passed away 12 Oct 24 after a seven-year battle with Agent Orange-related cancer. Gary was an active member of COUNTERPARTS. He and his wife Debra enjoyed attending reunions, especially if there was a casino nearby. He served two tours as a Phoenix Program adviser in Thuy Muan & Phu Thien Districts of Phu Bon Province. Thanks to the efforts of Ray Robison and Henry Newin, after fifty years, Gary was reunited with his counterpart, Theip at the Houston Reunion 2019. A great storyteller, especially if it involved hunting or fishing, he entertained many of us with great tales of northern Vermont.

## **Two COUNTERPARTS Members to be Honored by Army FAO Association**

This October, John Haseman, COUNTERPARTS Membership Director, and Rick Cassidy, COUNTERPARTS Member, will be inducted into the Army's Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Hall of Fame. The Army began its FAO program in 1972, combining the Military Advisory Officer program and the intel-centric Foreign Area Specialist program.

John applied for the MAO after his Advisory assignment in RVN and moved to FAO when the advisory program was not available. In 1974 the Army accessed John into the Army FAO Program with no further training since he already had Thai language, a Master's degree, and was in-country in Thailand. (DoD later required all services to have their own service FAO program). He also became a linguist in both the Burmese and Indonesian languages. John has also been deeply involved with the all-services FAO Assn for 25 years. He was also inducted into the DIA Attaché Service Hall of Fame in 2011 and into the University of Missouri ROTC Hall of Fame in 2014.

Rick joined the FAO Program in 1975, having completed a dangerous assignment as an advisor at Dak To and Kontum, RVN. He acquired a Master's degree and language training in both Japanese and Thai. He held FAO billets on the Army Staff, as an attaché in Japan, as a Director of army security cooperation programs in Thailand.

John's citation notes that he distinguished himself by courageous and professional leadership as Defense Attaché in Burma (1987-1990), and through unequalled performance and leadership in security cooperation and attaché assignments in Indonesia (1978-81, 1982-85, and 1990-94). During 30 years of retirement he has continued his support of the FAO program through mentoring junior officers, speaking and writing, and editing the FAO Assn Journal of International Affairs.

Rick's citation notes that he distinguished himself by highly professional leadership in FAO assignments in Washington, DC, Tokyo, and Bangkok that achieved particularly noteworthy successes with the U.S. Army's operations in Panama and the Middle East, and host nation army cooperative programs in the Far East and Southeast Asia.

The two retired army colonels will be inducted into the Army FAO Association Hall of Fame on 12 October 2025 at the organization's annual dinner, to be held at the National Museum of the U.S. Army, Fort Belvoir.

**MEDAL OF HONOR**  
**SERVICE AS ADVISOR TO VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES**  
**One in a Series**  
**By Colonel John B. Haseman, U.S. Army - Retired**

**Sergeant First Class Gary Lee Littrell, U.S. Army**

Gary Lee Littrell was born on 26 October 1944 in Henderson, Kentucky and joined the U.S. Army in 1961, one day after his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. He deployed to Okinawa from 1962 to 1965 with the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade, during which he met and married his wife Mitsue “Susie.” They were married for 58 years until she passed away in 2022. Together they raised two sons. He also deployed to the Dominican Republic with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in 1966. He then completed Ranger School and remained as an instructor until 1969, when he received orders to Vietnam. By then a Sergeant First Class (SFC), Gary Littrell was assigned to MACV Advisory Team 21, where he was on the advisory team with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Group at Dak Seang, in Kontum Province.

On 4 April 1970 the battalion, at less than 500 men with a four-man advisory team, moved south toward the Cambodian border and set up on Hill 763, a small hilltop. The ARVN force was quickly surrounded by the 28th North Vietnamese Army Regiment, a much larger enemy force estimated as large as 5,000 men. The Rangers came under an intense enemy mortar attack that killed the battalion commander and one advisor and wounded the other two advisors. SFC Littrell, the only advisor still untouched, became the senior advisor.

For the next four days SFC Littrell kept the Ranger battalion intact, directed artillery and tactical air support, and cared for wounded team members and Vietnamese soldiers. He encouraged the battalion soldiers, shouting to them in Vietnamese as he moved around the defensive perimeter distributing ammunition and helping strengthen faltering positions. On their last day stuck on the hill, Littrell's commander radioed to say troops had cleared a small path for the trapped battalion to try to escape. The journey led them through several ambushes that they managed to stave off with the help of helicopter gunships protecting their flanks. Littrell repeatedly kept order amid the chaos and directed airstrikes on the enemy, some of which came within 50 meters of his own position. Five treacherous miles later they made it back to friendly forces. Littrell later learned that, of the 476 men he started the mission with, only 41 came back alive. However, thanks to his courage and leadership, many lives were saved.<sup>i</sup>



Littrell has always maintained he's only a conduit for the medal's true owners.

"I'm wearing this medal for the 400 and some people that died those four days," he said during an interview. "I'm their representative. They won this medal. I was selected to wear it for them."<sup>iii</sup>

Gary Littrell continued his career in the army and reached the rank of Command Sergeant Major. He retired from active duty in October 1983. He moved to Florida in 1987 and for many years he counseled veterans at Department of Veterans Affairs facilities. In 1993 he was inducted into the Army Ranger Hall of Fame. He served two terms as President of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

**Presentation Date & Details: October 15, 1973**  
**The White House, presented by President Richard M. Nixon**

### **Citation**

“For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. SFC Littrell, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Advisory Team 21, distinguished himself while serving as a Light Weapons Infantry adviser with the 23d Battalion, 2d Ranger Group, Republic of Vietnam Army, near Dak Seang. After establishing a defensive perimeter on a hill on 4 April, the battalion was subjected to an intense enemy mortar attack which killed the Vietnamese commander, one adviser, and seriously wounded all the advisers except SFC Littrell. During the ensuing four days, SFC Littrell exhibited near superhuman endurance as he singlehandedly bolstered the besieged battalion. Repeatedly abandoning positions of relative safety, he directed artillery and air support by day and marked the unit's location by night, despite the heavy, concentrated enemy fire. His dauntless will instilled in the men of the 23d Battalion a deep desire to resist. Assault after assault was repulsed as the battalion responded to the extraordinary leadership and personal example exhibited by SFC Littrell as he continuously moved to those points most seriously threatened by the enemy, redistributed ammunition, strengthened faltering defenses, cared for the wounded, and shouted

encouragement to the Vietnamese in their own language. When the beleaguered battalion was finally ordered to withdraw, numerous ambushes were encountered. SFC Littrell repeatedly prevented widespread disorder by directing air strikes to within 50 meters of their position. Through his indomitable courage and complete disregard for his safety, he averted excessive loss of life and injury to the members of the battalion. The sustained extraordinary courage and selflessness displayed by SFC Littrell over an extended period of time were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on him and the U.S. Army.”

As a recipient of the Medal of Honor and a soldier for life, Littrell continues to serve and does so through speaking engagements.

“I speak to students about the six core values of the medal – courage, commitment, sacrifice, integrity, citizenship, and patriotism,” Littrell said. “I really zero in on integrity.”

