

COUNTERPARTS

#35

Tương Hữu Đông Nam Á

SITREP

Volume III

Issue 2

Fall, 2000

Counterparts Reunion 2000: Comradeship, Helping Hands, and a Tribute

By Rich Webster

"You men who didn't go missed a good one," said the XO, Pappy Hicks, about the year 2000 *Counterparts* convention in Orange County, California, 29 Oct-1 September. "The staff worked overtime to keep things in order. Jim Alkek, our Adjutant, who organized our events to the letter. And special thanks to Jack Frost who spent countless hours putting together the whole convention."

"It's good to visit old soldiers" Pappy mused, "especially now that many of us are in the twilight of our years. I reckon you can say the darkest period in the age part is old Ben Myers and myself, both of Korean War Vintage."

Those who attended the evening banquet were treated to an emotional speech by *Counterpart* Lt.Col. Ngo Minh Hong, former 5th ARVN Ranger Group Commander, who spent years in a communist reeducation camp. Hong was at the Battle of An Loc in 1972 where the North Vietnamese Army was ordered to take the city at all costs. Seventy thousand rounds of artillery hit the city and completely destroyed it. Hong limps today from a shrapnel wound received in the battle.

"I am very honored to be here today, talking to you, the fighters for freedom," he said. "You are the best that America ever fielded in battle. Yes, you the proud and the brave sons of America, you came to help us in the fighting to preserve freedom, justice, and democracy for the people of Vietnam."

LTC Hong finished his speech by saluting the Co Vans, then played a tape of *You are the Hero*, a moving song written by Andy Le, a Vietnamese composer. Tapes of the song were also presented to the audience.

Another stirring presentation on Operation Rice Lift, was given by *Counterpart* Mike Little who had served in the Pleiku area. Little returned in 1994 to find a number of Montagnard children, from the Bahnar tribe, in a village near where his MP unit had conducted pacification efforts. Mike and his wife have since been back four times.



One of "Operation Rice Lift"'s Families

Operation Rice Lift has raised over 5,000 dollars to prevent starvation from the drought of 1998. "Fifty dollars can feed a family for one month," said Mike. "Operation Rice Lift is a labor of love for us and we wish every Co Van could stand in the middle of a village, as we have, and feel the emotion coming from these wonderful people. Their lands and culture are vanishing before their eyes and soon their identity will be nothing but a memory. With friends like you, they can live forever."

Also recognized in the audience was Major Le Thoung, former Vietnamese ranger for 13 years, who spent 6 years in a communist re-education camp.

In an emotional impromptu speech, *Counterpart* Lt. Bui Quang Lam praised the former advisors in the audience. Lam, a graduate of the Vietnamese ranger school in 1971, was the son of a Senator in the South Vietnamese government. "Because of my position and who my father was, I could have avoided the draft," he said, "but I felt so strongly about fighting for my country that I volunteered."

COUNTERPARTS officers then expressed their thanks to Lam for his continuing contribution to the organization. A printer by trade, Lam prints SITREP without charge. He also presented attendees with copies of *Memoirs of a Priest Imprisoned in Communist Re-education Camps*.

... Continued on page 4

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Commander's Corner

This is my last column for SITREP as your commanding officer, and I write with a feeling of gratitude to all who have made this a pleasant tour — and, I hope, a profitable one for our organization.

We have picked up membership after a sharp loss, according to Adjutant Jim Alkek. We are solvent, in spite of the fact that we recently committed \$3,000 to Vets With A Mission to assist with their work in Vietnam. We had a good reunion last time around, after a couple of earlier ones that weren't as productive as they could have been. We have established a tight relationship with the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University. We were able to peel off another \$1,000 for Tommy Daniels' efforts on behalf of the Montagnard.

Our SITREPS improved in quality, thanks to the efforts of co-editors Ken Jacobsen and Bill Laurie. We put down a couple of brush fires from people who wanted to use our membership list to espouse their political views. Our web site continues to be first-rate, thanks again to Jim Alkek, and is one of the principal ways of attracting new members. Most of all, we have had two years of relative peace and quiet within the organization (with a minor exception or two) in which we have tried to make it clear that the officers have no hidden agendas and that the aims of COUNTERPARTS continue to be fraternity, humanitarian aid and the correcting of scurrilous articles and columns by media often not qualified to be making assessments about Vietnam.

At this writing we have not elected a new commanding officer, but by the time this is in print we probably have done so. While I cannot address him by name, I can still direct a couple of friendly suggestions in his direction.

First, during my tenure I often questioned the very structure of this group, seeking a simpler set-up and claiming we could run General Motors with the organization as it is now. But I found no support for this idea, so I suggest you simply step out lively with the current structure and staff positions.

Secondly, I have questioned whether an annual reunion is too much of a good thing, and perhaps a reunion every two years would make more sense. I still feel this is a valid argument, and suggest you perhaps take a survey of the membership on this issue. I ran out of time before we could launch such a survey.

Despite my efforts, during my tenure we were not able to set up a workable public affairs program, which I consider a necessity. We must be able to get our message across to the public in a non-political fashion (our tax-exempt status prohibits political expression). We tried two or three public affairs officers but the experience and drive simply wasn't there. I suggest you keep searching until you find someone capable of making national or local news releases in support of new appointments, humanitarian aid projects and such other events or situations as warranted.

START THOSE CARDS AND LETTERS COMING...

We need more material from COUNTERPARTS members. Letters to the Editor, oral history, photos, Bulletin Board Items, are all welcome.

Commander's Corner (continued)

Finally, and most important, I hope you will call on the other staff officers with whom you will overlap in terms of tenure. Executive Officer Pappy Hicks is a gold mine of good sense and friendly support when you need it. Adjutant Jim Alkek has done much of the grunt work during this administration, simply because he was the most qualified person to do it. We lost our long-time supporter Paul Brubaker recently, as he launched a new enterprise in another direction, but he will remain a member and perhaps someday come back into active participation. Paul was the glue that held COUNTERPARTS together for years, and will be missed.

My thanks go to all our members for allowing me to serve the past two years. As Charter Life Member 001, I will, of course, continue my interest in COUNTERPARTS, and hope for the continuing success of this fine group.

Scott Stone



I Pledge Allegiance...

From a speech by Senator John S. McCain, CAPT USN (Ret)

As you may know, I spent five and one half years as a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War. In the early years of our imprisonment, the NV kept us in solitary confinement or two or three to a cell. In 1971 the NVA moved us from these conditions of isolation into large rooms with as many as 30-40 men to a room. This was, as you can imagine, a wonderful change and was a direct result of the efforts of millions of Americans on behalf of a few hundred POW's 10,000 miles from home. One of the men that moved into my room was a young man named Mike Christian.

Mike came from a small town near Selma, Alabama. He didn't wear a pair of shoes 'til he was 13 years old. At 17, he enlisted in the US Navy. He later earned a commission by going to Officer Training School. Then he became a Naval Flight Officer and was shot down and captured in 1967. Mike had a keen and deep appreciation of the opportunities this country—and our military—provide for people who want to work and want to succeed.

As part of the change in treatment the Vietnamese allowed some prisoners to receive packages from home. In some of these packages were handkerchiefs, scarves and other items of clothing. Mike got himself a bamboo needle. Over a period of a couple months, he sewed the American Flag on the inside of his shirt. Every afternoon, before we had a bowl of soup, we would hang Mike's shirt on the wall of the cell and say the Pledge of Allegiance. I know the Pledge of Allegiance may not seem the most important part of our day now. But I can assure you that in that stark cell it was, indeed, the most important and meaningful event.

One day the Vietnamese searched our cell, as they did periodically, and discovered Mike's shirt with the flag sewn inside and removed it. That evening they returned, opened the door of the cell, and for the benefit of all of us, beat Mike Christian severely for the next couple of hours. Then they opened the door of the cell and threw him in. We cleaned him up as well as we could. The cell in which we lived had a concrete slab in the middle on which we slept as well as we could. Four naked light bulbs hung in each corner of the room. As I said, we tried to clean up Mike as well as we could.

After the excitement died down, I looked in the corner of the room and, sitting there beneath that dim light bulb with a piece of red cloth, another shirt, and his bamboo needle was my friend, Mike Christian. He was sitting there with his eyes almost shut from the beating he had received, making another American Flag.

He was not making the flag because it made Mike Christian feel better. He was making that flag because he knew how important it was to us to be able to pledge our allegiance to our flag and country. "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

*The Old Breed News,
October 2000*

Reunion 2000 (Continued from page 1)

Texas Tech University, home of The Vietnam Center, was represented by Steve Maxner, oral historian, who urged COUNTERPARTS members to participate in the oral history project. Contact Steve at :

http://www.lib.ttu.edu/Vietnam/oral_history.htm.

One of the center's major projects is to collect and preserve materials belonging to American soldiers who served in the Vietnam War. For those interested, Steve says that upon request, he can furnish Xeroxed reproduced 1:50 maps of areas where soldiers served.

Jack De Boer was there with The Village Store to sell *Counterparts* memorabilia as was author Dr. Carl A. Nelson, selling his novel, *The Advisor*.

Keynote speaker for the Sunday morning breakfast was Vicki Nenner, RN, MSN, who was an USAF nurse for four years in a 350-bed acute care hospital in Japan.

"I cared for approximately 4,000 wounded soldiers from Vietnam," Ms. Nenner said, "yet I never set foot in country. Every day, 20 to 25 soldiers were air evacuated to Yokota Air Force Base. After a big battle in Vietnam, the work was intense. The hardest duty was triage where 20 cases came in and you have to pick the first for treatment that have a chance to survive. Others wouldn't survive, no matter what you did for them. For those very seriously wounded, we tried to keep them alive until the Red Cross could fly their families to Japan to be with them when they died."

"Why did I volunteer? I went to make a difference. Since I was a trauma nurse, I thought I could do a good job. We were young and naïve and probably unprepared emotionally for the mass casualties. It was hard to believe that the human body could survive after being blown up so badly. Less than two percent died after they reached us."

Ms. Nenner observed that the experience of war affected military nurses no less than it has other veterans. Some suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, although women who were older seemed to fare better than the younger nurses after the war. Among nurses that served in Vietnam, there appears to be a higher incidence of pancreatic cancer, substance abuse, and depression. Just like the men, there seems to be a correlation between those who were closest to battle casualties and those who suffer most from PTSD.

Ms. Nenner remembers the wounded who passed through her hospital with fondness and compassion.

"...they were happy to be there, they were grateful to be alive, and they were very appreciative of everything we did. This was a bonus for the nurses, unlike many other nursing situations. Many of the wounded would

say, 'Come closer, you smell so good.' "

"We also learned to never touch a patient at night while they were sleeping. Talk to them first, or they might attack you. One did and wrestled me to the floor when I touched him to awaken him."

Ms. Nenner also shared her memories of some men who left a lasting impression.

"Nick Rowe was a patient after he escaped from a Viet Cong POW camp. We were amazed at his hunger. Doctor's orders were to allow him to eat anything and as much as he wanted."

"One air evacuation patient was clutching his jungle hat on his head where he was wounded. We couldn't get him to remove his hat that was covering his bandages. After threatening that we would have to subdue him, he took it off. It was filled with military payment certificates rolled up like cigarettes. He must not have known they were worthless outside of Vietnam."

"Another patient brought his guitar with him and clutched it closely to him like a baby. He had that vacant stare that so many of the wounded had. Finally after prodding to try and get it away from him, he went berserk and beat it into a thousand pieces making growling guttural sounds. He was taken to the psych ward."

Ms. Nenner also paid tribute to the surgeons and other medical personnel who served.

"Our plastic surgeon did wonders there, putting faces back together to make them look human.... We had fabulous medical technicians without which we could not have done the job."

Nine military women and 59 civilian women from various US agencies were killed in the war. No one kept an accurate figure of the women who served in the Vietnam War. Seventy-five hundred is a figure that is given-some references say over 11,000.

Ending her presentation, Ms. Nenner affirmed that "I would serve again with pride."

After the Presentation *Counterparts* adjutant Jim Alkek presented Ms. Nenner with an honorary membership certificate.

Jack Frost had put together a great convention up to this point but it continued to get better. We made a visit Sunday morning to a ceremony called *Molding Friendships* which included the unveiling and exhibition of the Vietnam War Memorial Monument presented by the Vietnamese Broadcasting Company in Westminster (Little Saigon), California.

The striking 15-foot statue shows an American and a

South Vietnamese soldier in combat gear standing shoulder to shoulder. The artist, renowned sculptor/designer Tuan Nguyen, was present at the unveiling.

The ceremony also included a moving sound and light tribute to Americans who served in Vietnam. As the video was played, two voices were heard—one of a young Vietnamese girl born shortly after the war was over. She told how her father, a Vietnamese veteran of the war, explained to her what the war was about and how she should honor the Americans who came to her country to fight for the freedom of the Vietnamese people.

The second voice was that of a young American soldier writing letters to his loved ones back home explaining why he had volunteered to fight in Vietnam and that it was his duty to be there.

The film was powerful and, as *Counterpart* Ben Meyers said, "So moving that a Vietnamese lady behind me gave me a tissue to wipe my eyes. The whole trip was worth that moment." His was not the only moist eye in the audience.

The purpose of the memorial is to insure that the ultimate sacrifice of these brave military men and women will never be forgotten. These quotations will be on the wall behind the statue:

"We have sometimes been weak and sometimes powerful, but at no time have we suffered from a lack of heroes."

Vietnamese Emperor Le Loi, 1428

"Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives."

John Adams, 1808

Also during the convention Bill Laurie gave an informal presentation on the way the history of the Vietnam War was distorted in the curriculum at the school where he had taught. The curriculum was from the Center for Social Studies Education, a left-wing organization that received funding from the anti-war activist and visitor to Hanoi during the war, Cora Weiss. Her father was a member of the American communist party.

According to Laurie, the curriculum contains significant misinformation, including statements that there were more civilian casualties in the Vietnam War than any war in which America was involved. One-thirteenth of the curriculum concentrates on Lt. Calley and the My Lai massacre but there is very little mention of the North Vietnamese massacre at Que or the thousands of assassinations by the Viet Cong of civilian

officials and teachers in the villages. There is no mention of the boat people after the war, no mention of Pol Pot murdering 3 million people in Cambodia, and conveniently missing is the mention of the Communist re-education camps after the war.

Laurie, a history teacher, said, "Basically, school children are being taught propaganda. There is a small thread of truth about the American effort in the war, but mostly the bad is accentuated on our side, and very little bad is mentioned about the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. So get involved in your local schools and find out what they are teaching about the war in which we served."

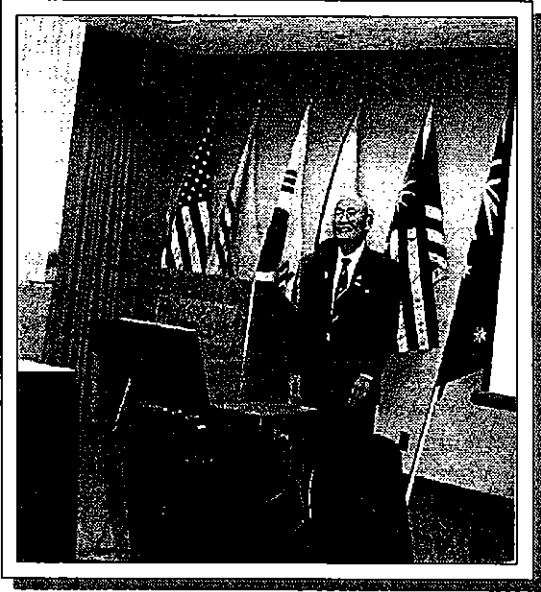
As the chronicler of this convention, I have one final event to report. I was stranded in the Minneapolis airport on the way home and still wearing my *Counterparts* ball cap. A young Vietnamese lady noticed the Vietnamese phrase on my hat. We struck up a conversation. She was born in 1971 and finally escaped from Vietnam in 1991 when her sister came to get her. She had this to say about the wonders of communism. "Our country very bad now. The communists come and take people away in the night and you never see them again. They do anything they want. There is little food, no money, our country go nowhere."

And that was how the convention ended for me.

....Rich Webster, tm 86, tm 49



Reunion 2000 Photo Album



LTC Ngo Minh Hong, (5th ARVN Rangers) Addresses Reunion



Former RVNAF Officers at Memorial Dedication



Jim Alkek presents COUNTERPARTS Plaque to Guest Speaker Vicki Nenner



Pappy Hicks and Former ARVN Officer at Vietnam Memorial Dedication



Ted Jagosz, Bob Thomas, Bill Laurie, Bui Quang Lam



(L to R) Rich Webster, Bill Laurie, Bui Quang Lam

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"...Vietnam will never mature as a nation if its leaders continue to steep themselves in victimology. A quarter century on, the Vietnamese government continues to blame its lack of economic progress on obstreperous outsiders and the destruction of the war. This conveniently ignores the reality that Germany, Japan and South Korea all suffered far worse destruction in wars and yet moved forward quite nicely in the years following war's end. The Vietnamese government may argue that its recovery was slowed by the U.S. trade embargo, but its greatest problem is clearly from within. After the embargo was lifted six years ago, numerous international businesses flocked to Vietnam. Most soon left, chilled by evidence of corruption, bureaucratic stagnation and unenforceable contract laws."

"In the coming years the "overseas Vietnamese" who were forced to flee their country will also play a much larger role, both here and in their direct involvement inside Vietnam. The Vietnamese community in this country, now one million strong, is steadily shifting from the struggle of making it in their new homeland to more aggressive political involvement. Since 1975 they have put the strength of their culture at work, transforming the landscape of places like Orange County, Calif., and sending droves of talented young scholars to top schools across the country. Many are prepared to do business in Vietnam. In an odd twist of history, they have already been a major factor in keeping Vietnam afloat, sending a steady stream of money to family members who remain behind that now amounts to tens of billions of dollars. They are examining more closely how the war was lost, including the debate inside this country, and they stand to have a greater impact on how the U.S. will manage its evolving relationship with their former homeland."

"Vietnamese and Americans alike should realize that there is nothing to be gained by refighting the war, or by seeking a new struggle. The mutual interests of both countries are self-evident, in both economic and strategic terms. But strong relationships require mutual respect. And the bedrock of mutual respect is an honest rendering of the facts, rather than the simplistic propaganda in both countries that has thus far passed as history."

..... James Webb, a combat Marine in Vietnam and former Secretary of the Navy

SITREP Editorial Policy and Procedures

Copy:

- Articles, letters and other news items are welcomed from all members and other subscribers. Copy should be typed double spaced using standard manuscript fonts like Courier, Cobb, or other "plain vanilla" fonts that can be easily OCR scanned.
- Electronic submissions via email or on disc are also welcome. Microsoft Word or Word Perfect is preferred.
- Submissions should not exceed "column length" pieces, i.e.: no longer than 600 -1000 words. Members shouldn't hesitate to send short (50-100) word contributions. Remember, brevity is the soul of wit.
- Photos or pictures can be submitted by mail or on the internet. For Internet material use one of the standard graphic formats like JPEG, TIFF, MIX, or GIF.

Editorial Policy:

- We will edit for grammar, spelling and clarity. If we feel the need to edit for length or content we'll contact the author whenever possible. We will NOT edit for political or philosophical content unless it's obscene, illegal, or libelous.
- **SITREP will be published quarterly, in January, April, July, and October. Deadlines for manuscripts and photos are the first of the month before each publication date, but we can be flexible if there's late breaking news.**
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COUNTERPARTS
Village Market

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[note: the **Village Market** is closed from 1 October to 1 December]

In the Rear View Mirror

Some current comment on the Vietnam Experience

"There is another question about this war that is seldom asked, perhaps because we can't face up to the answer: Did the anti-war movement so weaken our nation's resolve in fighting distant communism that the death of these two million Asians may in some way be our own fault? The 1960s saw the rise of a movement that challenged our involvement in Vietnam, and in some sense the efforts to contain communism globally. Centered in our prestigious universities and colleges, a new breed of dissident arose, different from the civil rights protester of the 1960s: the 'movement radical'.

Like many of my friends and fellow students at the time, I embraced the hard-core radicalism of the anti-war 'movement'. There were millions of us from Ann Arbor to Austin to Berkeley, mostly middle-class kids full of 'rage' over an imperialist America that supported an evil economic system designed to subjugate the Vietnamese. For us, Hanoi had it right; Washington had it wrong. We disrupted classes, marched in the streets and closed down our universities. We burned our draft cards and screamed at the police who protected the public property we attempted to deface. In short, we trashed the principles and traditions of America life and law.

In the meantime, American soldiers were fighting and dying in the rice paddies of Asia for no other reason than they had felt compelled to serve. Volunteers in this war accounted for 77 percent of combat deaths. Yet upon their return, we treated them — with taunts and glares as the perpetrators of this despicable war.

The last two Americans killed in Vietnam were Marines Charles McMahon Jr., 21, and Darwin Judge, 19. Both died 25 years ago in the last few hours of this war as they helped the remaining Americans off the embassy rooftop. They had been in Vietnam for less than a week.

We live in an age when our national religious leaders feel duty-bound to apologize for deeds committed years and even centuries prior. For those of us who blindly mistook the intentions of Communists and gaze at the terrible consequences of a Stalinist Indochina, should we not have some remorse also? Is an apology not in order for the destructive deeds directed at our veterans and the parody we made of American values? Will we ever find the courage to say we were wrong?"

... Kenneth Smith, *Washington Times*, April 27, 2000

"I looked for some conclusion, a summation of this trip to my teammates house. I wanted to come to the single right thing, a true thing that I may not like but that I could live with. After hearing Al Kroboth's story of his walk across Vietnam and his brutal imprisonment in the North, I found myself passing harrowing, remorseless judgement on myself. I had not turned out to be the man I had once envisioned myself to be. I thought I could be the kind of man that America could point to and say, 'There. That's the guy. That's the one who got it right. The whole package. The one I can depend on.' It had never once occurred to me that I would find myself in the position I did on that night in Al Kroboth's house in Roselle, New Jersey: an American coward spending the night with an American hero."

... Pat Conroy — Citadel graduate, author of *The Great Santini*, *Prince of Tides*, and other books, and former anti-Vietnam War Activist.

"Silenced Vietnam. The communist victory in Vietnam 25 years ago brought the usual communist political brutality. Thousands of political "enemies" were killed; many more "boat people" died trying to flee by sea. Tens of thousands were herded into re-education camps... Vietnam remains a one party state whose leaders seem hesitant about how far they want economic reform to go; rampant corruption retards foreign investment. Apparently the Communist Party fears more openness toward the outside could bring in more political heterodoxy for which the Party has shown zero tolerance."

...*The Washington Post*, May 2, 2000

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.

Memoirs of A Priest Imprisoned in the Communist Re-education Camp (1975-1988).

Rev. Peter Dinh Ngoc Que, CSsR, ProTech Printing (714) 751 6424.

When the Republic of Vietnam fell in 1975 the author of this book was Chaplain to the Special Military Zone of the Capital. On April 28, 1975 he was aboard a Vietnamese Navy ship preparing to evacuate civilians from Saigon. Rev Que however, could not bring himself to desert his parishioners, and chose to remain in Vietnam even though arrest was virtually certain.

Within a few months Rev. Que was in a Communist "Re-Education Camp". He was not released until January, 1988 and even then was not permitted to preach, celebrate mass or the sacraments, or to contact his former parishioners. He finally escaped to the United States in 1993.

Rev. Que's story is told in the first person, without literary pretension or any attempt as drama. Yet his experience is as moving as any account of battle. Tortured, beaten, starved and humiliated, he nevertheless kept his faith. He continued to serve his flock inside the Camps. During the long years of imprisonment he, together with Protestant Clergy and Buddhist priests, worked together to provide hope and spiritual assistance to their fellow prisoners.

Rev. Que does not claim to be a hero. Yet his courage, dedication, and service to his people show qualities that place him with the best among us.

... Ken Jacobsen

"I'm not ashamed of myself and I don't think anyone who was over there should be ashamed of himself... it was the single most momentous event in our lifetime."

...Gen. Norman Schwartzkopf
on his Vietnam experience

The Bridges of Vietnam: From the Journals of a U.S. Marine Intelligence Officer, Fred J.

Edwards Jr., University of Texas Press, 2000. 273 pp. \$39.95

The author was a USMC Intelligence Officer who was given the unusual assignment to "visit every major ground unit in the country... special Forces camps,.. ground reconnaissance units... waterborne reconnaissance units...Search everywhere for intelligence sources".

Edwards kept a journal of his experiences and observations, which records his own education as a soldier. He observes, among other things, that "once committed to war and combat, most men become heroes."

From reviews in other publications, the book appears well worth examination.

... Ken Jacobsen

NOTICE

The New Jersey Poetry Society is seeking Korean War related Poetry and permission to use it. Author retains copyright. Submit as many as you wish. All will be published by the NJPS Project Member, when sufficient verse from Korean War Vets or kin is received. ALL anthology profits will be used to decorate the NJ Korean War Memorial in Atlantic City. If desired, a line caption of unit served with, area of Korea, and personal photos may accompany your verse. Thanks

Victor Rizzo

New Jersey Poetry Society, Inc.
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Lawrenceville, NJ, 08648

LAOS: SUDDEN TURMOIL

The specter of violence haunts the normally placid capital of Laos. A series of indiscriminate bomb attacks has unsettled the populace, deterred tourists, and concerned neighbors. The incidents in Vientiane combined with an escalating rebel insurgency in central provinces has pushed the worried, secretive government closer to China and, in particular, Vietnam.

Ever since the end of the Vietnam War, low-key resistance, largely by Hmong, has gone on in mountainous areas, but nothing the regime's security forces couldn't handle. What were periodic skirmishes have become, since the beginning of 2000, hit-and-run raids, ambushes, killing of government officials, and growing casualties among the Laotian military. More troops have been dispatched to Xiang Khouang Province (which includes the Plain of Jars), various other areas and border districts. News reports gleaned from foreign diplomatic sources in Laos and hotly denied by both Hanoi and Vientiane — say Vietnamese troops are operating with Laotian forces to contain the rebellion. This, of course, worries the Thais because of threats to regional stability, Thai-Lao trade, and Thailand's 1,800-mile border with Laos.

In early June, sources reported Vietnamese troops had recently been seen moving through the streets of Vientiane, and that a helicopter carrying artillery had been shot down. One Western diplomat said the insurgency could no longer be hidden from the population and intensification of the attacks was creating a siege mentality.

Vietnam's FM said reports that Vietnam had sent troops to Laos were "totally fabricated with ill intention" (*Nhan Dan* June 6), and the Laos FM called the reports "a blatant fabrication...aimed at sabotaging the ... special solidarity between the peoples of Vietnam and Laos" (VNA, June 8).

On July 3 a group of 60, described as armed robbers by Laos and rebels by Thailand, attacked and briefly held (with hostages) a Laotian checkpoint on the Thai-Lao border. The raiders took down the Lao flag and raised a resistance banner.

Five or six were killed when the Laotian military attacked and 27 fled back over the border and were captured. Varying reports, all from Thai sources, say (1) a letter seized by authorities bore the letterhead of the United Lao Nation Resistance for Democracy in Laos and came from the movement's office in Fresno, CA; (2) the raiders were from the Neutral Justice and Democracy Party, which seeks to overthrow the Lao government; and (3) the raiders represented nine anti-Vientiane insurgent groups. There is not believed to be a connection between the border attack and the Hmong resistance.

A mass of speculation about who exactly is doing what in Laos has been dutifully reported by news services and the Thai press, but the connections among the explosions in Vientiane, the Hmong insurgency, and the various anti-government Lao resistance groups is uncertain if not completely unknown. There seems to be general agreement that the impetus for rebellion comes from outside the country, at least in terms of material support, whether from Hmong émigrés in the United States, royalist groups, or others.

The government does acknowledge increased fighting with the Hmong, blaming it all on the support and encouragement of the émigrés. But it insists the explosions in Vientiane — five since the end of March, including a bus explosion that killed two and a bomb in the central market that injured 15 — and the border raid are merely the work of criminals seeking to rob and create mayhem.

The Hmong complain of corrupt officials and resettlement policies that have forced some of them to move to lowland areas. Critics say the government is providing highland forest land to Vietnamese logging firms. In the capital, discontent centers on economic hardship, widespread corruption, an obvious disparity in income, and last year's repressive moves against Christian groups and a student demonstration. It is hard for the government to deny a rising discontent in Laotian society and, suddenly, the urge to express it.

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New Counterparts Members

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MEMBERS IN MEMORIAM

William R. Corson, 74, a retired Lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps and expert on counterinsurgency warfare who was almost court-martialed for publishing a book that was highly critical of U.S. Policy in Vietnam, died July 17. Corson was born in Chicago on Sept. 25, 1925. He attended the University of Chicago, but left in 1943 to enlist in the Marine Corps during World War II.

For much of his career, Col. Corson was an intelligence officer on special assignment with the CIA and the Marine Corps. He spoke Chinese and specialized in Asian affairs. In 1962 he was assigned to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. This put him in touch with decision-making at the highest level as U.S. involvement in South-east Asia deepened.

In 1966, he was ordered to Vietnam as commanding officer of a Marine tank battalion, and in early 1967 was named director of the Combined Action Program, in which small detachments of Marines served with South Vietnamese militia in villages throughout the country. The purpose of the program was to provide security from the communists and win the loyalty of the people to the Saigon government. The program was highly successful. Col. Corson was praised by his superiors for his ability to relate to Vietnamese villagers and win their confidence.

Corson became convinced that the U.S. strategy in Vietnam was failing. His book, *The Betrayal*, argued that the Saigon government was corrupt, incompetent, and perceived by ordinary Vietnamese as being as much a threat to their well-being as the communists. Unless the United States devised policies to take this into account, the book said, the war would be lost and American servicemen would have died in vain.

Publication of *The Betrayal* was set for July 1, 1968, a month after Col. Corson was scheduled to retire from the service. The Marine Corps attempted to prevent Corson from publishing the book by holding up his retirement and beginning Court Martial preparations. These plans were dropped on the grounds that they only serve to draw attention to the book. Col. Corson's retirement went through a month later than originally scheduled.

Col. Corson later taught history at Howard University wrote several books on national security issues, including *Promise or Peril*, *Consequences of Failure*, *The Armies of Ignorance*, and *The New KGB* with Robert T. Crowley. He also wrote a column on veterans affairs for *Penthouse* magazine and was the publication's Washington editor.



Counterparts Knife Raffle

Drawing will be held Tet 2001 (February). 1st Prize is another knife from G.L. Kreff #00005. It has a stainless steel blade with Counterparts Tuong Huu Dong Nam A on the blade face, and G.L. Kreff, 00005, the Counterparts logo and the year 2000 on the reverse. The hilt and guard are brass and the handle is ivory colored.

2nd prize is a white sweatshirt with the MACV logo patch in red and yellow and "Military Assistance Command Vietnam" over the left breast. Size is XL.

Tickets will be \$5 each or 5 for \$20. Send checks payable to "Counterparts/THDNA" to Jim Alkek, Adjutant, 4107 Solway Lane, Houston, TX 77025-2913.



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