

2025 COUNTERPARTS REUNION AFTER ACTION REPORT

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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.

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. 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 44th 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.