



# Watchfires



NEWSLETTER OF THE VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA CHAPTER 333 ROCKLAND COUNTY, NEW YORK

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Vietnam Veterans from across the United States traveled from October 30 to November 18 2007 on a Journey back to Vietnam. Our group came from:

New York > Long Island, Westchester, Rockland & Orange County.  
Pennsylvania > Flourtown & Media  
California > San Diego & Arcadia  
Montana > Big Fork  
Kansas > McCune

We were Grunts, Sailors, Helicopter Pilots, Medics, Nurses, FO's, Special Forces, Clerks, brothers and sisters. In three weeks time, we traveled from Hanoi to the Mekong Delta. At three locations we held Memorial Services for our Brothers and Sisters lost during our War

## THIS IS OUR JOURNEY

Ed Frank President VVA333  
Howard Goldin Editor  
(1 of 2 series)



**RETURN TO VIETNAM—SPECIAL EDITION 1 OF 2 SERIES**

Our group consisted of 15 Veterans and 16 civilians. As part of this group we had two teenage girls going back with DAD (Fred Blanchard AKA Charlie Horse 23) one of three helicopter pilots and the only one of the three to make it out without a visible scratch. The mix also had school teachers, doctors, physician attendant, dentist, psychologists, firemen, police chief, police detective, transportation administrator, airline attendant, surveyor, occupational therapist, laboratory administrator, social worker, V.A. case worker, news reporter, former CIA employee, and a business owner. Our group went under the banner of VVA and Rotary - S.T.E.P. (Schools To End Poverty) and we had 5 Rotarians. We hand carried 2,300 pounds of items that we donated to 1,000 kids at orphanages, hospitals (\$80,000 in donated medical supplies, 500 beanie babies, 1300 toothbrushes, toothpaste, 2500 pencils, 2000 pens, sanitary items, shampoos, soap, VHS tapes, soccer balls, 50,000 vitamin tablets, 1,000 bags of Vitamin C). We built a school for the indigenous Montagnards. We put in a water purification system into a school for the handicap. We met with children involved in human trafficking and visited families living on top of a garbage dump. At every orphanage we left dental and sanitary supplies.

- We had dinner prepared for us at the Hoa Sua Culinary & Hospitality Training School for disadvantage children (orphans & street kids) in Hanoi.
- We bought 65 back packs in Hanoi and took over our hotel lobby to fill them with tee shirts, toothbrushes & paste, soap, shampoo, etc. and then went to the Hoa Phoung Orphanage in Hai Phong
- We held a memorial service on the Perfume River in Hue and remembered those who could not be with us.
- We delivered 20 wheelchairs at the Hue Medical School for 20 severely handicap children 6-12 yrs.
- We had dinner on China Beach and sang songs with “our kids” from Marble Mountain and as we sang God Bless America, they too held their hands on their hearts, a simple gesture.
- We held another wheelchair ceremony in Hoi An and gave 20 more wheelchairs to needy children.
- We traveled to Kontum and walked through a Montagnard Village to see life in the raw.
- We held our second Memorial Service in Pleiku/Kontum for our departed brothers.
- Our weary group moved on to be welcomed at Vinh Son 1 Orphanage in Kontum where 221 children of the different tribes are taken care of. We already pre-arranged to have a playground swing set installed.
- We moved on to Lam Dong Province to meet with 400 plus Montagnards who got up at 4 a.m. to walk miles to meet and greet us at the ROSE school with the Dominican Sisters.
- We held our final Memorial Service in Cu Chi.
- We traveled to Tra Vinh to meet with VVA333 life member Bernie Duff (who now resides in Saigon) with Bao Anh Bui and brought us to the “garbage dump” and left items with the children.

## **RETURN TO VIETNAM**

- Next stop was Long Xuyen where we were met with a roaring reception to give 36 young ladies the gift of a bike and hope for the future.
- On our last day we visited the Go Vap Hospital and gave the gift of life, 58 brain shunts, and 58 young ones will be saved.

We went on this journey to see military sites (former areas where we served) and we went to see the children. We saw toll roads, casinos, western clothes and western cars. The U.S. Navy now makes Port of Calls in Saigon We hope these pictures show what we saw.



Thanh Xuan Peace Village for handicap kids



Jeff Keahon (Vung Tau) & Ed Frank (Delta)



**Hoa Phuong Orphanage with Ed, Peter, Howard, Doris, Butch Sincok and the kids**



## **VVA 333 CHAPTER MEMBERS RETURN TO VIETNAM**



Charlie Horse 23 explaining how he rescued one of our fellow travelers in I Corps



Hue-wheelchair distribution Dr. Joann Quattrone



Beetle nut is still around



Francisco Muniz singing in Spanish



China Beach - DaNang

**FRED BLANCHARD WRITES THAT DREADFUL LETTER**

*Fred (Charlie Horse 23) read this letter at our first Memorial Service held near the DMZ*

*“Dear Carl, Gay, Carol,*

*I received your package yesterday. Thanks for the thoughtfulness. It finally motivated me to write some things that I have wanted and needed to say for a long time. I considered visiting you feeling that what needs to be expressed should be face to face. Now, I think that, perhaps, a letter would be more appropriate.*

*Carl and I were in a unit in Vietnam that had over a third of its aircrew members killed. Of those killed, Carl was one of three that I loved. I didn't realize how much I cared about any of them until they were gone. Of those three, Carl's loss has affected my life the most. It took ten years and the potential loss of my children before I was willing to deal with what had happened in Vietnam. A lot of reflection has taken place since then.*

*Carl wasn't John Wayne or any of the other media heroes we thought we were suppose to be like. Carl was a little brother to me. We spent quite a bit of time together, drawing some peace from each other's company, even though no words of great meaning were ever exchanged. At the time, Carl wasn't what I thought that I was supposed to be. Nor was he what I thought that he was suppose to be, considering the circumstances. Neither of us seemed at all confident in what we were or what we were doing. What Carl was, and what I felt the terrible loss for, was gentle and kind. He had a good heart. But in those days I was under the misimpression that gentleness was a sign of weakness. Since then I've realized that gentleness is a sign of strength. It struck me as absurd that Carl flew gunships with his personality. On the one hand, I thought he should have been flying medivacs. On the other hand, I occasionally suspected he had some hidden cruel streak. Now I understand that his flying gunships was just a sign that he accepted, without judgment, those things that life presented him; the same way he accepted, without judgment, those people who moved in and out of his life. Carl flew the missions and did his job as well as or better than most, without hesitation or complaint. And yet, while the rest of us were denying our fears and consequently the rest of our emotions both good and bad, he was open to his fears. While the rest of us did our jobs with the aid of being emotionless, he did his with his emotions intact. Carl wasn't full of hatred for, or fear of, our alleged enemies. Neither did he have the need to put out fronts of patriotism, bravado, killer instinct, or hate. Carl did what he did because he cared for his friends and because he was trying to keep his self respect intact.*

*I'm sure Carl knew he was going to die long before it happened. He referred to it often; all but once, in a kidding way. He was the only person I know that made any plans or preparations for it. And, I think he accepted it. (continued next page)*

**VETERANS RETURN TO VIETNAM, LETTERS CONTINUED:**

*I'm also sure he knew that death was not an end. I know that it is not. After the deaths of Carl and the others, I felt for a long time that they had been left behind. Now I feel that it was me and the others who lived that were truly left behind. I don't agree with the traditional Christian view of heaven as an after life of wealth and excess. I do know there is an after life of peace even though I don't know its exact nature. That was one of the lessons of Carl's death was that spirituality is not some abstract concept that we have to believe in, in order to go to heaven. Spirituality is a tangible unseen side of our everyday experience. It is always there for us when we are open to it. And it is there on occasion, to affect our lives, at times when we are not open to it.*

*I was with Carl and John Hunter, as a member of flight of four aircraft, when they were killed. I clearly remember the last time I sat watching Carl fiddle with his maps as if it were yesterday. And I remember watching his aircraft impact the ground seventy five minutes later. Both John and Carl died very quickly. There couldn't have been any pain. They crashed on a green grassy hillside, on a cool sunny day, about four kilometers east of Loas, in a valley northwest of Khe Sahn. It was my job to rescue them. There wasn't anything I could do. There wasn't anything to be done. But the guilt was overwhelming. So for the next nine years I told myself that I really didn't care that much about Carl. And so, I kept some distance from you.*

*I hope you understand why I've needed to write this. As it turns out, Carl was then the kind of person, that most of us only realize later in life, we should be. Part of my comfort is that he's alive with peace. But I still miss him.*

*Fred*

*P.S. Carl talked a lot about home and fond memories. He spoke most often and with the greatest fondness of Carol. I hope that none of you have to live in Carl's shadow. He wouldn't want that. He would want you to go on just as he has. It took years for me to let go of my grief. Finally, I understood that I wasn't mourning Carl's loss. I was mourning my loss, of him".*

Carl & John were Killed In Action February 20, 1971. They are listed on "The Wall" 5W, line 24





## **VETERAN'S ARE NOT FORGOTTEN**

**Crossroads II Journey, VVA - Rotary S.T.E.P. hold three Memorial Services along our travel route. The first service is in Hue, the second in Pleiku/Kontum and the third is in Cu Chi/Tay Ninh Vietnam. The services held in Vietnam were held near the spot where 9 of our Brothers were killed:**

**Seaman Frank Jacaruso USN (21 yrs.), Perfume River KIA> 03/12/70**

**Captain Michael Donald McGovern, USAF (29 yrs., Pleiku KIA>2/11/71**

**LTC Harold David Krashes USA (41 yrs), Pleiku > 1/20/72**

**Captain Harold James Kaufman USA (26 yrs) Kontum MIA/KIA 11/20/67**

**SP 4 Robert Michael Bates USA (19 yrs.), Kontum MIA/KIA 11/9/67**

**SGT Joseph Edward Hartz USA (19 yrs.), Gia Dinh Province (Cu Chi) KIA 3/6/68**

**SP4 John Terrence Kile USA (21 yrs.), Tay Ninh KIA 12/13/70**

**PVT Andre Maurice Brooks USA (20 yrs.), Tay Ninh KIA 5/8/68**

**SGT William Richard Turner Jr. USA (21 yrs.), Tay Ninh KIA 9/19/68. Also remembered were brothers & sisters of our other Vietnam Veterans with us, who had lost someone special along the way. YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN.**



**Hue Memorial Service Flowers floating down the Perfume River.**



**Pleiku/Kontum Memorial Service**



**Cu Chi—Tay Ninh Memorial Service**



**A peasant women fixing our flowers & incense in the Rubber Plantation near Cu Chi**

## **THE MONTAGNARDS**

We visited the Montagnards in the back country in Pleiku, Kontum, Dalat. We went to their Villages giving out the “things we carried” and making new friends. We visited the Orphanage at Vinh Son 1. In Lam Dong Province we dedicated the “Rose School” that we help build for the 5 tribes, Tho, Nung, Thai, Thuong, Tau and Kinh.





## **THE MONTAGNARDS (CONTINUED)**



Group  
discussion :

Do we really  
want to walk  
this bridge?

I told you it was  
back country!



**Vinh Son 1 Orphanage**



**Vinh Son 1 kids learning to grow crops**



**Setting up donated items for the Rose School**



**The "Rose School" 3/4s finished and kids waiting**



**They walked 5 hours to greet us**

## **RETURN TO THE NAM**

Did you know a Westchester N.Y. Gannett News Reporter met our group in Saigon and traveled with us for a week with her Dad, Colonel Andonios Neroulis USA (Ret.) 25th Infantry class of 67-68 Cu Chi?

Check out the blog by going to <http://vietnam.lohudblogs.com/> You can listen to the Memorial Service held in Cu Chi, or the Dominican Sisters signing to us. You can read comments left by readers about our trip and about their own experiences in The Nam.

Speaking for those of us who were in Combat, it is not easy to face your demons. For those of us who have lost someone, it is even harder. We do things for many reasons, some of us are humanitarians, some of us want to put the past behind us, some of us want to see the world as it is now. It is all about choices.

It is a small world and you never know who you will bump into. In doing the research for finding a tour company that will fulfill our needs of seeing places we were stationed at and doing humanitarian work, look no further than MilSpec Tours, run by Morgan "Butch" Sincok. Turns out he took over as my CO of the 4/23rd B Company 25 Infantry 1968. During this tour of duty, we slept in 4 Star Hotels WITH air conditioning. We ate safe food and traveled with a guide who is extremely knowledgeable about the places we wanted to go and places we needed to see. We went with a very mixed group, the youngest was 14, the oldest in her mid 70's and we traveled down paved highways in a luxury bus. Everyone came home safe and sound with 20,000 plus photographs of this journey.

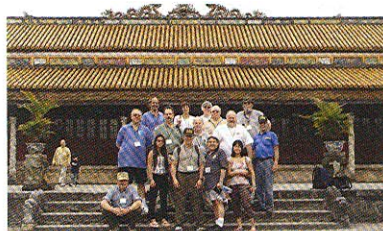
Coming up in part II of this series will be Saigon, Cu Chi, Tay Ninh Mekong Delta and Tra Vinh. So we leave you with this photograph below. It was taken in the Delta





## **TOUR INFORMATION**

*Please note this is for information only. We derive at no financial benefit. This is a safe tour company with a proven track record. The owner, Captain Butch Sincock has traveled back with us on two separate occasions and has made the trips memorable. The photograph in the flyer is of our group taken in 2005, when we took back to adopted Vietnamese girls to see family they left behind 10 years earlier.*



### ***Tour Vietnam***

*Get on board for 2008. Don't wait too long. Flights and hotels fill up months in advance. Over the past several years we have had to turn away last-minute requests to sign-up.*

#### **Panorama of Vietnam Tour**

April 10-25, 2008

Hanoi, Hue, DMZ, DaNang, Quy Nhon, Pleiku, Kontum, Dak To, Saigon, Cu Chi, Tay Ninh, My Tho, and more!

#### **Bobcat Tour**

March 12-21, 2008

Saigon, Cu Chi, Dau Tieng, Tay Ninh, Katum, COSVN, Duc Hoa, Trang Bang, Go Da Ha, Vung Tau, and more!

#### **III Corps Tour**

October 2008

Saigon, Vung Tau, Bien Hoa, Hoc Mon, Cu Chi, Ho Bo & Boi Loi Woods, Trang Bang, Dau Tieng, Nui Ba Den, Tay Ninh, Katum, COSVN HQ, Go Da Ha & more!

#### **Central Highlands Tour**

October 2008

Saigon, Pleiku, Dragon Mountain, Kontum, Dak To, Ben Het SF Camp, Mang Yang Pass, An Khe, Quy Nhon, Tuy Hoa, Nha Trang & more!

*Also available: customized private tours. Call or write for details!*



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## HOT LZ PRINTS

On January 12, 1969 Bernie Duff arrived in Vietnam as a Medic on his 19<sup>th</sup> Birthday and left exactly one year later on his 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday. As a Medic, he saved many men wounded in firefights and lost many others. Painting allows him to cope with the memories he long has kept buried. While Duff administered aid to wounded soldiers, others would gather around him, shielding him with their bodies. Some took bullets intended for him. "A little piece of me died each time they took a hit for me." Bernie states, "It is my hope, that in viewing these images, they may provide some measure of closure. In painting them, I have been given some control of a situation that I have had no control over for better than thirty years". Spec. 5th Bernard J. Duff, Medic, served with the 51<sup>st</sup> Medical Company, Phu Tai, and Qui Nhon, Vietnam.\* **The entire bottom of the original painting has a sand mixture in the paint. The sand was brought back from Vietnam's China Beach.** You can see more of Bernie's combat art by visiting his website at [www.geocities.com/bernie.doc/vietnam.html](http://www.geocities.com/bernie.doc/vietnam.html) or [michvet3@yahoo.com](mailto:michvet3@yahoo.com).

