



Watchfires

SPECIAL EDITION PART II, RETURN TO VIETNAM



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
(2 of 2 series)



BLACK VIRGIN MOUNTAIN - TAY NINH 2007



**BLACK VIRGIN MOUNTAIN 1968 - 25TH INFRANTRY
BASE CAMP**

RETURN TO VIETNAM—SPECIAL EDITION 2 OF 2 SERIES

Our journey back to Vietnam had a very mixed set of travelers, Crossroads II The Return, consisted of 15 Veterans and 16 civilians. As told in Series 1, we had with us three helicopter pilots of which two were shot down. Tom Crosser was in the Scout Platoon of Charlie Horse, C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry. “I always loved flying” said Crosser, a helicopter pilot in the war. Crosser made it out of Vietnam, but barely. After a few months as a LOACH pilot he was wounded three times and his chopper shot down. It was Memorial Day 1970 and Crosser lost his left kidney, had his ankle shattered and took a round of bullets behind his spine—where they are still lodged today. Tom wrote a poem dedicated to his fellow Vietnam Veterans and it appears on the Montana Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

*“Together we flew to battle
Hearts and blades pounding
Sharing fear and pain...*

*Parted...Yet together....
We face the unknown
You death, I the future...*

After our recent trip, Tom wrote:

“I went to see old friends and visit a place that changed my life. I met new friends and came away with a peaceful, powerful appreciation of the Vietnam I once feared. As hard as I tried, I could not hear the explosions and gunfire. Bushes no longer took up fighting positions. I truly found peace standing on the runway at Khe Sanh, listening to the silence. Smelling the incense where cordite, sweat, blood and death had permeated the air at Dak To. I marveled at the tranquil, serene beauty of the Ho Bo woods, which I remember as moonscape on my flights to Tay Ninh.

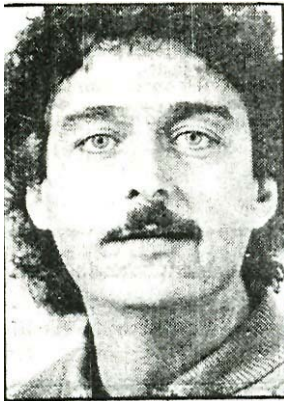
My new Huey (editors note: wooden model hand built in VN), the rocks I collected from all those sacred places so that I will never forget, even if I wanted to. I just got off the phone with a friend I hadn't talked to in a number of years. Ron was a Captain with the 1st Cav in 68. He arrived in country the second day of the Tet Offensive. His first ride in a helicopter was re-routed to another chopper shot down. Ron spent his first day running through fire, pulling the wounded crew to safety and then taking over an artillery battery south of Hue shooting support for the Marines. Several weeks later he and his batter were moved to a small hill (hill 400) slightly NE of Lang Vie. He shot support for Khe Sanh during the siege. His unit was overrun one night and he lost 9 of his kids. He just got back from brain surgery in California and was like a little kid when I told him about our trip. I told him I had a rock from Lang Vie for him, he broke down crying.”

Tom's return to Vietnam was documented with thousands of digital photographs. Tom, while recovering from his wounds wrote a poem about Nui Ba Den, The Black Virgin, which appears on the next page.

A CHOPPER PILOT'S RETURN TO VIETNAM

*Nui Ba Den
The Black Virgin*

1970



Tom Crosser

Tom in the Ho Bo Woods
November 2007



*The Black Virgin hangs high above Tay Ninh
Looking down on a land of intolerable mourn
The mountain's shadow darkens many men's sins
Concealing the people whose country remains torn*

*A mountain which rises above the jungled plain
Situated in the midst of towering violence
Surrounded by villages cursed with human pain
Without the slightest promise of any tolerance*

*For a brief and lingering span of time
I became an actor in the shadow's play
A nightmare script clouding the Asian sunshine
Casting doubt on how long I might stay*

*I was killed and reborn in the darkened shadow
Many friends journeyed by my side without return
Creating sadness so deep and graves so shallow
For men so young with much more to learn*

*Perhaps in time and through another way
Nui Ba Den will represent its real beauty
Forsaking the sorrow and regaining someday
The dignity sacrificed for another country's duty*

*The mountain remains, but the youth is gone
Surrounded still by fragile hope with war
If peace could only rise with the dawn
It would light the darkness and heal the sore*

Tom Crosser 1970

RETURN TO VIETNAM - SAIGON



Saigon - November 2007



Go Vap hospital—child **hydrocephalic**



Rotarian gives the gift of 54 Brain Shunts



Dinner cruise Saigon River



East meet West - notice the clothing

RETURN TO VIETNAM SERIES II - THE DELTA



Life on the Delta

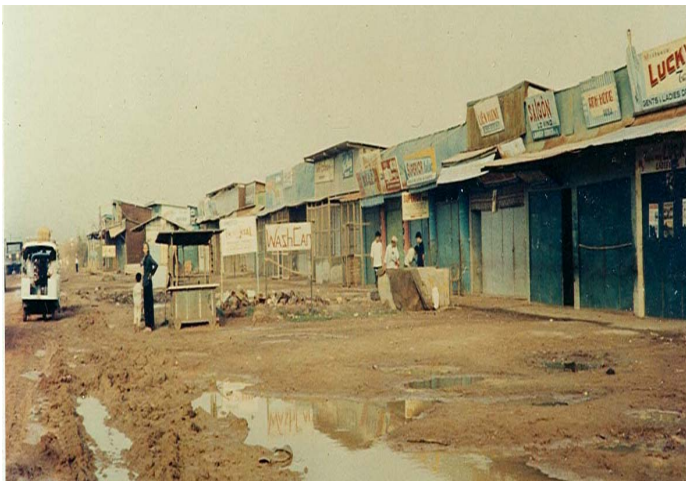


Same day laundry service

RETURN TO VIETNAM - CU CHI



Entrance Cu Chi base camp 2007 - former 25th



Rubber trees in the Ho Bo Woods 2007



Our brothers remembered



Explaining the tunnels of Cu Chi



RETURN TO VIETNAM - TAY NINH



Cao Dai Temple, Tay Ninh



Cao Dai ceremony



Two former enemies making peace



Temple at the top of Nui Ba Den



Ride up to the Black Virgin Mountain



RETURN TO VIETNAM - TRA VINH

Bernie Duff, life member of VVA-333 now resides in Saigon. As one of his many projects Bernie has taken on helping the families who live on top of the Tra Vinh **garbage dump**. This story needs to be told and more information can be found via Bernie's email site, michvet3@yahoo.com.



A family house on top of the dump



**Piermont Police Department
(Rockland County NY) helps out
with T shirts & hats for the kids**



Hiding donated items in the dump



No shoes on this child

LONG XUYEN - NEAR THE CAMBODIAN BORDER

As Veterans and Rotarians during this trip one of our projects was to help children at Risk in the Long Xuyen area, which is located in the southwest portion of Vietnam. To bring back dignity and self confidence for these children, and to give them mobility to get to school, we purchased 36 brand new bicycles for them.



Ali & Morgan raised \$900.00 for these bikes



Voncile Oliver, retired teacher giving a helping hand



Those who made it possible.



Our teachers meeting the principal

RETURN TO THE NAM

VIETNAM VENTURE By Joyce Brown

American Association University Women members Joyce Brown, Sherry Jackson, Rosalind Maxwell and Vencil Oliver accompanied the Spring Valley Rotary and the Vietnam Veterans of Rockland County on a humanitarian trip lasting three weeks. We traveled from Hanoi to Saigon and many places in between. The party of 30 people included Vietnam vets, doctors, dentists, nurses, retired police personnel, educators and two teenagers, 14 and 16 years old. We visited the touristy sites but, more importantly, we traveled in the bush to places where veterans were stationed, shot down or rescued. Memorial services were held for all of the Vietnam War veterans from Rockland County. We visited schools, hospitals, orphanages and survival sites for abandoned people. We left school supplies, medical supplies, toys, swing sets, a water-filtration system, bicycles and a thousand friendships and fond memories. We were welcomed into homes and hearts without reservations. Dr. Joann Quattrone from the Warwick New York Rotary was responsible for \$81,000 worth of donations and medical supplies, including 58 brain shunts which were delivered directly to the hospital for hydrocephalic children and which will be implanted by the next team of Doctors Without Borders.

We visited an ethnic minority tribe, the Montagnards, in the hillsides of central Vietnam and along the Vietnam-Cambodian border. Unique to the south Mekong Delta area were the descendants of Cambodians who ran from the Khmer Rouge many years ago but have no place or opportunity in Vietnam. Some live on the dump that they harvest; others in nearby shanties. They collect a certain type of plastic which is recycled by local factories.

The Dominican sisters, who direct the school that the Rotary is building, surprised us and came to the airport to see us off. That simple act of kindness broke our collective composes.

It was so rewarding to share the joy of the recipients of the wheelchairs and bicycles. We saw how the money was distributed. No offices, no telephones, no mailing lists. It is the same kind of response that one gets after reading Greg Mortensen's *Three Cups of Tea*. Would we go again? In a heartbeat!



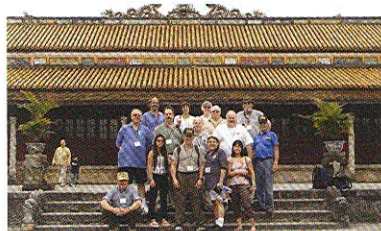
Retired educator Joyce Brown with an at Risk student near the Cambodia border giving her a bike purchased by Rotary



Ed & Deb Frank riding off into the sunset with our friends from Marble Mountain

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 19th Birthday and left exactly one year later on his 20th 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 51st 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 or michvet3@yahoo.com.

