



# Bridges

THE LESSONS OF VIETNAM



The *Bridges* staff would like to dedicate this **special international issue** to our country's principles of FREEDOM and JUSTICE.



## Third Time's A Charm

*By Norma Kwée*

The 2001-2002 Lessons of Vietnam class is proud to present the third volume of our newsletter, *Bridges*. Over the years we have brought you information about our feelings concerning the Vietnam War and how it affects us today. This year we plan to incorporate new ideas into our newsletter, including interviews with veterans, book reviews, student surveys, poems, political cartoons and current foreign policy issues. As always, readers will be able to enjoy articles written and edited by students in the LOV class. We hope to provide new and interesting insights for our readers. We anticipate that these new minds and faces will come together to create the best *Bridges* ever!

## The Impact Never Fades

**Editor's Note** -- Meredith College Junior, Ferne Taylor, sent this letter to Ms. Poling six days after the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. The *Bridges* staff would like to share it with our readers.

*As a twenty-year-old American, I have never witnessed anything like the tragedies that struck our country this past Tuesday, but I felt like I understood it more than a lot of my peers. I appreciate so much now the lessons that I learned in LOV because the stories that the soldiers of that time taught me really opened my eyes to what can happen in this world. I don't feel like I am as naïve as so many people my age because of your class. When I found out that New York and Washington had been attacked, I felt like I had already experienced things like this before secondhand. It was easier for me to cope and to see it in some sort of perspective and compare it to something I knew a lot about. While the attacks on America are no less tragic to me, I feel like my eyes weren't closed to the brave actions of soldiers who fought so dearly to protect our freedom in the past, and it makes me appreciate my patriotism even more. I just want to say thank you for pushing so hard to make your LOV class succeed, because the lessons taught in there are important lessons to learn.*



## What Lessons Have We Learned?

*By Erin Smither and Erin Collins*

The Lessons of Vietnam class is known for its link interviews. However, before students can ask a "stranger" about Vietnam, they must "warm up" by asking parents or other familiar adults who lived through the Vietnam Era some questions. The answers are very moving, and for some students, unexpected.

**What was your attitude during the war?** *"To make it back alive."* – MHS Parent

**What was your attitude during the war and did it change as the war progressed?**

*"I supported the war in the sixties, but disagreed with college protesters. It changed later in life; now I feel our motives for entering were questionable."* – MHS Teacher

**In what ways did the war affect your life?** *"It brought the war into everybody's living room. It was the first one [war] that could be broadcast."* – MHS Parent

**What is your most vivid memory of the war?** *"My memories of the funerals for the fallen soldiers."* – MHS Relative

**How did you feel when the U.S. withdrew its forces from Vietnam in 1973?** *"The U.S. didn't keep their promise to help and protect, which created disappointment and hopelessness."* – MHS Vietnamese Parent

**What are your feelings about the war today?** *"The U.S. sacrificed many men, and I have sympathy for the soldiers who returned with no heroes' welcome."* – MHS Parent

**What lesson has the Vietnam War taught us?** *"That we should not think that we can bully other people or cultures into our way of thinking and our life."* – MHS Parent



*Brad Bowman interviews his mom.*

We can only hope that today's government will apply the lessons of Vietnam as it faces America's New War.



## Standing Up To The Call Of Duty

**Editor's Note --** 2001 MHS graduate, Willie Johnson, recently sent this letter to Ms. Poling and the LOV class. The *Bridges* staff would like to share it with our readers.

*Dear Ms. Poling,*

*I am in my sixth week of basic training here in Fort Benning, GA. It has been a real experience for me...How have you gone about talking to the class about the tragedy of 11 September 01? I could fathom the severity of the attack and the implications that followed, because I always thought that war could break out at any time, but that was in the back of my mind and I never took it to heart. The thought of going to war hit hard as I remembered all the Vietnam veterans who came in to talk to us about their time. Now our training has taken a more serious approach because some of us will be using these skills sooner than expected. Already two of us in the platoon have had their units activated. I looked at the date today and I realized that it has been one year since I signed the contract and was sworn in. Although I joined for college reasons, now with the impending campaign, I did not join for the money. Just like the oath said, I will defend the country from all enemies foreign and domestic... As I learn more everyday about what's going on, I can still draw from the Lessons of Vietnam class and the experiences of the veterans who answered the call before me. I may not have agreed with some of the reasons but I know that it was their duty, as it is mine, to protect those who cannot protect themselves...*

## Former LOV Student is an Inspiration!

*By April Mallett*

Many high school graduates forget their teachers and class experiences, but Richie Maccini, like so many LOV students, has not forgotten the lessons he has learned. School was not always uplifting for this 2000 MHS graduate. Richie spent more time "celebrating life" than concentrating on his studies. It was not until his senior year that he found a class that truly inspired him.



*Pvt. Maccini answers a question.*

Although "Private" Maccini tried attending college and working for a year, he soon realized the military was where he belonged. Richie's Lessons of Vietnam class opened his eyes to the possibility of a military career. By listening to various Vietnam veterans share their personal experiences, he came to respect and honor those defending our nation.

As a result of being exposed to positive role models and gaining knowledge in LOV, he turned his life around. Richie has now finished basic training and is on his way to Germany. He admits his life was headed nowhere, but now this very proud American has the world in front of him to explore. "You should feel very proud of your accomplishments," wrote Michelle Sarnie, after Richie's visit to our LOV class. We are **all** very proud of you, Private Maccini!

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## Surrounded by Light, Still Shrouded in Darkness

*By Jennifer Dickson*

In America today we have 24-hour access to information. Through the internet and television, it is possible to obtain the most recent news coverage any time of the day or night. On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, Americans were glued to their televisions. News reports on the tragedies played for days on end and the gruesome images were burned into our memories. Now we almost feel like we are experts on the happenings of "Black Tuesday." However, when it comes to the intensely important details, we know nothing. Sure, people can spout out the flight numbers of the hijacked planes, the origins and destinations of the flights, and other such trivial details. But mostly, we know nothing about what really happened or what is truly happening right now. We do not know exactly how certain terrorists were involved; we do not know what retaliation will be implemented, or the best way to retaliate. These unknowns are vital to the story of the "Attack on America," but not wholly important to all people.

To the families with loved ones in the military, these unknowns produce a large cloud of uncertainty. My brother is a paratrooper in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne at Fort Bragg. He is trained to parachute out of a plane with full battle gear and maneuver the Hummer once on the ground. Since his training makes him an ideal candidate for an invasion, my family is anxiously awaiting news. Soldiers are unable to contact family when the deployment call comes in, so the only way to know when they are gone is, quite simply, by watching CNN.

Unfortunately, the media is not always the most reliable source for news. Reporters want to cover the story that will attract the biggest audience, so some of the details are sensationalized to increase viewers. If random people were asked what the United States is planning to do in retaliation, one would receive a wide range of answers. Some people believe that no retaliation will be implemented, while others believe that full-scale war has already begun. The best way to know what is really going on is fairly simple. First, gather news from more than one source. Do not simply concentrate on one station, like CNN or NBC. By varying the sources, the types of stories and details are more diverse, thus increasing the probability of accuracy. Second, obtain background information on the issue. This can be done by researching the subject or talking with experts. In this case, talk to someone in the military or someone with political experience. Both of these methods can produce an educated and informed opinion. We feel very educated; but truthfully, without gathering the proper information, we are ignorant as to the true situation at hand.

# United We Stand; Divided We Fall

By Summer Al-Abdalli

“911” – the date says it all. Thousands of people have died in the wake of the most violent act of terrorism the world has ever seen. We are still not certain what we will find once all of the dust has settled. I walked into my Lessons of Vietnam class, and glanced at the flaming buildings on the TV screen, quickly dismissing the scene for an educational war movie. It wasn't until I saw the ghostly faces and wide eyes of my teacher and classmates that I realized something was terribly wrong. The scenes were not that of some horrific war, but of the World Trade Center that less than an hour earlier had been hit Kamikaze-style by two hijacked, commercial airplanes. I stared at the TV in horror and disbelief. “This cannot be happening!” And then came the voice, “Not to alarm anyone, but the ground just shook and the windows rattled over here. I think we've been bombed!” The news showed another building billowing smoke. The Pentagon had been bombed! Yet *another* plane had been hijacked and steered into a wing of the Pentagon. “Where's our national security?” I wondered angrily.

Just when we were certain that nothing else could possibly happen, we gasped, screamed, and were nearly brought to tears as the Twin Towers – one-by-one – collapsed in an impenetrable cloud of dust, smoke, and debris. There are no words to express what I felt while watching that scene. I just remember thinking, “All of those lives lost, FOR WHAT?”

But I feel that the worst is occurring now, as the bodies are being found in the gaping wounds of what used to be an invincible America, and the anger that is being directed toward the Arabic community within the United States. I am one-half Arabic, and I am appalled at the tragedy that has taken place and the strengthened hatred that is forming towards my people. I feel like I am a walking target as I walk down the hallways of my school and my neighborhood. I am finding enemies in my friends, and I know of the threats and violence that have been directed toward some Arabs. I am admittedly afraid, but I refuse to allow *anyone* to bring me down because of his or her ignorance and insecurities. Our country is suffering enough. The people of this country need desperately to realize that the terrorists want to shut us down; they want to divide us; therefore, we should unify and not alienate certain people because of the actions of a fringe group of people.

So, I will leave you all with this: To the loved ones in mourning and the victims of these heinous acts, my heart goes out to all of you. May you find comfort and closure in time. To the vast Arabic and Islamic populations, for you I will say this: In the weeks that follow, we may be threatened and some of us may bleed, but we will remain beautiful and carry ourselves with the same pride for which we are so well-known; because we know that it is not us, but the ugliness in the hearts of **others** that has caused this tragedy and its ripple effect unto us. And to my beloved Americans: We will rise above this senseless tragedy and become a more resilient and united nation.



## Smoke and Fire

*A special contribution by MHS Junior, Michael Moore*

I saw two men of strength and might,  
Who stood very tall and proud,  
They now lie in the streets tonight,  
Crying their sorrows out loud.

Oh dear flag who covers me,  
Why did they burn your bright stars,  
Why did they leave me here in the streets,  
With me and my nation so scarred.

There was a house where power lived,  
Where quintet walls protected,  
But a bird flew down and then burned it,  
Now only four stand erected.

The world felt the nation's pain,  
A broken wall and two men,  
But the rest of the nation held banners high,  
America was united again.

Smoke and fire over the city tonight,  
The Lady cries for the day,  
But still she stands for freedom and right,  
God bless the U.S.A.



By Stefanie Speer



## Understanding the Profits of Peace

By Julius West and Jessica Buie

Ms. Poling stresses to her students that education must be an ongoing process. She often reminds us of the value of gaining new knowledge and experience even after formal education has been completed. During the summer, our LOV teacher was privileged to attend the U.S. Institute of Peace Summer Program in Washington, DC. For eight days

Ms. Poling and 26 other secondary social studies teachers from all over the country examined the dynamics of international conflict management in the post-Cold War era with leading foreign policy officials and scholars. The seminar included discussions on the changing role of the military, human rights, teaching about



peacemaking in the Middle East and a curriculum development session on landmines. While attending the seminar, Ms. Poling and three other teachers served as a panel on a "Voice of America" program answering callers' questions from around the world.

We are excited that as a result of her USIP experience, Ms. Poling has introduced new curricula to our LOV Program, as well as a new LOV class link, Mr. David Rabadan. (See article, *A Safer World to Walk On.*) As a State Department official and a Vietnam veteran, he is very impressed by our *Bridges* publication. Ms. Poling continues to demonstrate the value of building and maintaining relationships, and the amazing benefits of lifelong learning!



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## A Safer World to Walk On

By Victor José

Today, it is possible for anyone in the world to be killed or maimed from wars and battles fought long in the past. It is all due to a simple device: the antipersonnel landmine (APL). Annually, there are 26,000 casualties from the estimated number of 60-70 million APL placed in about one-third of the world's nations. An APL can cost as little as \$3.00 in some areas to be made, and it takes only a minimum number of mines to create a minefield. Long after conflicts, hidden landmines pose a constant threat to lives. Along with that, landmines hinder post-conflict reconstruction and recovery by preventing people from returning to their homes, making lands unusable, depriving access to resources, disrupting circulation of people and goods, and preventing deployment of peacekeeping forces.

Landmines are indiscriminate weapons, since there is no distinguishing between a soldier's footstep and a child's footstep. They appear in various shapes and sizes, and some can even take on the appearance of hand-sized toys. Many APL are buried and made of various substances, usually plastic, making it virtually undetectable by metal detectors. The most vulnerable victims are those who make a living in agriculture. Other victims can include those who collect debris, or even a young child who wants to play; and then there is the undeniable sound of an explosion. For families living in the impoverished nations that are infested with mines, a casualty in the family is a destructive economic blow. As a result, these innocent victims need time and money for medicine, prosthetic devices, physical therapy, and other medical costs. It also means one less indispensable worker. Not only are humans affected, but many animals are killed, too.

Despite the horrors that landmines cause, there have been actions taken to fight back. In 1997, the Office of the Special Representative for Global Humanitarian Demining (GHD) was established. This resulted from the announcement from former President Bill Clinton's Demining 2010 Initiative, which aims to create a mine-safe world by the end of this decade. My link, Mr. David Rabadan, is the Director of Multilateral Programs in this office.



If you want to help, there are two available adoption programs. The Adopt-A-Mine Detection Dog program, can be reached by logging on to their site: [www.marshall-legacy.org](http://www.marshall-legacy.org). The Adopt-A-Minefield program has a site at [www.landmines.org](http://www.landmines.org). The Canadian Landmines Foundation is currently in conjunction with Adopt-A-Minefield in holding a "Night of a Thousand Dinners" on November 30, 2001 to raise awareness and funds for humanitarian demining. Dinners can be sponsored by anyone for any amount. One can log on to [www.1000dinners.com](http://www.1000dinners.com) for more information. The Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA) assists landmine survivors and helps to increase mine awareness. Log on to [www.vvaf.org](http://www.vvaf.org) to discover more. There is no doubt that together we can make this a safer world to walk on.

