



# Bridges

## Lessons of Vietnam



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### The Promise of *Tet* Future

By Cindy Nguyen

While the Tet Offensive of 1968 marked the beginning of the end for the Republic of Vietnam, many Vietnamese today recognize this time as the beginning of the Lunar New Year, the most celebrated holiday of the year. *Tet* is a nationally celebrated holiday not only for the Vietnamese, but for other Asian nations as well. The Vietnamese and Chinese use lunar calendars, so the actual dates of the New Year vary from year to year, but they usually occur in late January or early February. This year it fell on January 29th, marking the "Year of the Dog." *Tet* is celebrated sequentially by one of the twelve animals appearing as signs of the zodiac. The Vietnamese are quite superstitious. For example, they believe the balance of a year will be predetermined by the fortunes or misfortunes received within the first day or week of the Vietnamese New Year.

As *Tet* approaches, crowds of shoppers flood the local stores and markets to buy the necessary supplies. Preparation time for the holiday is extremely hectic, as everything from decorations and clothing, to home and building renovations, is supposed to be perfect. On New Year's Eve, families gather to offer their ancestors traditional dishes to signify the beginning of the New Year.

On New Year's morning, the children awaken early to

wish their elders a Happy New Year ("*Chuc Mung Nam Moi*"). My favorite part of the celebration is when our elders give the children *li xi*, a small decorated red envelope containing money!

Wherever the *Tet* holiday is celebrated - at home or at festivals - everyone from the oldest to the youngest celebrates their own family's favorite traditions and customs.

All celebrants have the desire to fix the most beautiful and delicious food presentations as an offering to their ancestors, as well as friends and guests.

While *Tet* of 1968 was a tragic time for many Vietnamese, this holiday remains the most important one of the year. Today, younger generations do not focus on *Tet* past, but rather on the promise of what *Tet* future may hold in store for them.



Millbrook senior Cindy Nguyen and her family prepare for this year's Tet festivities.



### Does Globalization Spell the End for America's Competitive Reign?

By Rachel Zeilinger

A frequent buzzword in the news is "globalization." But, what is it, and how does it affect our economy today?

Globalization refers to changes in societies and the world economy occurring as a result of dramatically increased trade and cultural exchanges. An example of this is the global impact that the development and release of Microsoft's Windows 3.0 in 1990 and Netscape Internet in 1995 has had. People in countries such as India, China and Russia could "plug and play - connect, collaborate, and compete - more easily and cheaply than ever before," contends Thomas L. Friedman, author of the *New York Times* bestseller, *The World is Flat*.

Why does this matter? Globalization has improved life around the world. For example, according to *Upfront Magazine* (September 5, 2005), the U.S. once led the world in the number

of engineering students it graduates, while today, China graduates five times more engineers than the U.S. In the communications

field, one-third of India's college graduates are fluent in more than two languages, giving them an advantage in the telecommunication and operator fields. Globalization is empowering many within the Third World to create a more balanced free market economy.

While we should be pleased that the U.S. has played an important role in achieving this, young Americans can no longer take for granted the competitive edge we have enjoyed. We must now strive for higher educational goals to remain competitive. The world is more connected than it has ever been. As Microsoft CEO Bill Gates acknowledges,

"In the international competition to have the biggest and best supply of knowledge, America is falling behind."



Artwork by Landis Falkner



## In Depth Research Has Multiple Benefits

By Cristina Chenlo

As *LOV/RIR* students began to study the conflicts and issues related to the Vietnam Era more in depth, they played the role of teachers, as they taught their peers about important aspects of the war. Presentations were made through posters, videos, pictures, scrapbooks, live music, and delicious Vietnamese food. Some topics presented included: U.S. Weapons and Strategies, Special Forces, My Lai Massacre, Protest Movement and Protest Music, Operation Baby Lift, Post Traumatic



Phil and Ben present Vietnam War protest music to their LOV classmates.

Stress Disorder, Black Soldiers in Vietnam, the media, Amerasians, Weapons and Strategies of the Enemy, and Vietnam Today.

The preparation, teamwork, and excellent research showed how much there is to learn about the different aspects of the Vietnam Era, and how interesting each one of those topics is. We look forward to future presentations and learning experiences with excitement, because it is not every day that we have the opportunity to develop our own "expertise" in a particular subject area!

## Book Review: *Whitewash/Blackwash*

By James Mackintosh

*Whitewash/Blackwash: Myths of the Viet Nam War* by Vietnam veterans R.J. Del Vecchio and Bill Laurie, may not be the longest book on the Vietnam War, but it certainly is a significant one. It discusses the main misconceptions and stereotypes about the war—such as the U.S. Government's intentions, the effectiveness of the war itself, and its effect on soldiers. These are stereotypes many Americans seem to take for granted. While it may not effectively refute every angle of every question, in a literary arena in which there are many commonly accepted views that are explicitly or implicitly anti-war, it does provide an informative counterpoint. It discusses

a variety of themes, from the background information to the aftermath. In particular, the sections titled, "The Viet Cong were an opportunistic group, just like the American Minutemen" and "The Tet Offensive was a devastating military blow to the U.S. war effort," make particularly important points. Many people do not realize that the Tet Offensive of 1968 was, in reality, a crushing military blow to the NVA and Viet Cong.

*Whitewash/Blackwash* is an important book amongst the plethora of works on the Vietnam War. It is an admirably written piece, made the more so because it challenges many of the negative stereotypes surrounding the Vietnam War.

## I'm Their Wall

By Candy Chasteen

*I'm their wall.*

*I don't remember  
Vietnam,  
But they do...  
They remember.*

*I'm their wall,  
Their rock.  
Too many times I've  
seen  
The tattered  
remnants of war;  
Echoes in their eyes.*



Artwork by Eric Weber

*Callous hands upon my glassy,  
granite face,  
Upon the tear-traced  
names.  
They remember  
Fallen friends  
Who will forever live  
In their hearts.  
I'm their wall.  
I don't remember  
Vietnam,  
But they do...  
They remember.*



# "Merry Christmas, Lieutenant! You're Going to Iraq!"

By Matney Murad

Waking up Christmas morning to learn you have orders to go to Iraq is not the ideal gift to receive. But 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Sean Patrick Keenan had been "biting at the bit" since March of 2002 to serve his country there. On December 26, 2005, this 1992 Millbrook High School graduate parted from his wife and young daughter to become a Huey helicopter pilot halfway across the world. When asked during a recent *LOV* visit how he felt about being a soldier *and* a father, he commented that if he "did not fight the battle today, he knew that his daughter and possibly even his grandchildren would have to fight it later."

Lieutenant Keenan joined the U.S. Marines following his graduation from Millbrook H.S. and later attended Campbell University, where he earned a degree in government with a concentration in foreign policy. He then was commissioned as a Marine officer, undergoing extensive training to prepare for the ultimate test of a Marine's metal: combat. With the aid of special night vision goggles,

he learned how to fly in total darkness. He learned how to land a helicopter in a CALZ (Concentrated Area Landing Zone), and in desert-like environments where sand, stirred up by the aircraft's blades, greatly inhibits visibility.

Currently, Lt. Keenan is whole-heartedly committed to fighting the *War on Terror*. Although he is unable to provide us with specific details regarding his locations and his missions, he is able to send the *Lessons of Vietnam* classes journal entries

describing his experiences. His entries are candid, emotional, informative, and most of all, *real*. They have allowed those of us in the states to understand the importance and complexity of his job, as well as the military's mission in Iraq.

Lt. Sean Keenan has been a vital part of our *LOV/RIR* Program for several years, serving as a link, classroom speaker, and as a Washington, DC field trip chaperone. We honor and appreciate the service and sacrifice he continues to make to Millbrook High School students, as well as to our country.



Lt. Sean Keenan speaks to LOV/RIR students.

## New Club Focuses on Darfur

By Kevie Malek

Ever since I attended the Darfur conference at the Exploris Museum last May with some of my classmates, I have been determined to find a way to help the people of Darfur. My history teacher, Ms. Lindy Poling, presented the idea of starting a new club at Millbrook High to raise awareness about the genocide that is occurring in Sudan. With the help of other students and our advisor, Dr. Barclay Poling, we peaked the interest of classmates and friends and founded the *Darfur-Awareness Club*.

*Darfur-Awareness Club* members are very dedicated and want to *make a difference*. We have scheduled an "Awareness Week" in the middle of March that will highlight the need for urgent U.S. action on the Darfur crisis. There will be scheduled activities each day to boost the interest of other students. Our program will include a photo exhibit, a guest speaker, posters, announcements, club T-shirts, and awareness ribbons. In the future, we plan to raise funds for education programs for refugee children now living in Chad. Although it will be challenging to raise a significant amount of money to send to these refugee camps, the main focus of the *Darfur-Awareness Club* is to share information and encourage action at our school in hopes of putting an end to this terrible humanitarian crisis.

Stephanee Kopple, our club Vice President, commented, "I think it's wonderful to be part of a club that could actually make a difference in today's society." We are going to need all the help and support we can get, because the crisis in Darfur gets worse everyday. Although we are only high school students, we believe that anybody can make a difference in the world!

## Risking Their Lives

By Melissa DiBenedetto

Every day, numerous North Koreans risk their lives crossing the 879-mile long border into China. Even if they succeed in escaping, they run the risk of starving to death or being caught. If arrested, they are sent back to North Korea as prisoners.

North Koreans are driven from their country due to impoverished conditions, such as famine, which have been caused by a ruthless totalitarian dictator, Kim Jong Il. North Koreans follow a strict regimen in which no political freedoms exist. Even their basic human entitlement to food is used against them as a political weapon to ensure obedience, leaving nearly sixty percent of the population to suffer from malnutrition. The Chinese government considers North Koreans who flee there as economic migrants, not political refugees. Those refugees who are caught and returned to North Korea are then looked down upon as traitors to their country and dictator. Children of traitors are killed while a traitor who is pregnant is forced to undergo an abortion.

The arduous method used to cross the Chinese border is a modern day underground railroad, manned by conductors who are human rights activists. The final stop is Mongolia. Yet, under intense Chinese pressure, Mongolia is starting to close its borders to these refugees, as well.

The *North Korean Humanitarian Rights Act* of 2004, signed by President George W. Bush, promotes the improvement of human rights and concludes that North Koreans who flee to China are in fact *refugees*. Despite this act and its good intentions, and the estimated 250,000 refugees who continue to flee to China, many are still being sent back to face a most horrible fate.

## A Struggle To End Torture

By Sheelah Iyengar

Torture has been used for many centuries, but studies show that torture is very ineffective. A prisoner subjected to torture will say anything to stop the pain. However, less violent techniques called "torture lite" are sometimes effective, such as making a prisoner stand or squat unclothed, covered with a smelly hood in a cold, dark room, or depriving one of sleep for several days.

Since 9/11, Americans have used torture lite in the war on terror. "There's an enemy that lurks and plots and plans and wants to hurt America again; and so, you bet, we'll aggressively pursue them, but we will do so under the law," President Bush said. Such aggressive interrogation techniques by the CIA, White House aides say, has provided us with a better understanding of how Al Qaeda works. During questioning using these interrogation techniques, an Al Qaeda-associated Libyan, Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, told his interrogators that Iraq had provided chemical and biological weapons training in Al Qaeda. President Bush stated, "Iraq could decide on *any given day* to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group or individual terrorists." A senior Bush aide asserted that torture lite is an essential tool in the *War on Terror*.

Sadly, the terrible images of abused prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan have lowered America's standing in the international community. "It's killing us. It's killing us," exclaimed Senator John McCain of Arizona. As a POW in Vietnam, McCain knows plenty about torture. His bill to ban "cruel, inhuman or degrading" interrogation techniques passed in the Senate in October, 2005. Although the Geneva Conventions, which set the standards for international law for humanitarian concerns, state, "No physical or mental torture, nor any other form of coercion, may be inflicted on prisoners of war," President Bush and Vice President Cheney agree with Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, that, "Al Qaeda and Taliban individuals under the control of the Department of Defense are not entitled to prisoner-of-war status..."

The administration vigorously opposed Senator McCain's bill, but President Bush signed it into law in December, 2005. Senator McCain strongly feels that subjecting prisoners to degrading treatment is not about them, but about "us as Americans and who we are and what we stand for in this troubled world."

## A LOV Tradition Continues

By Wesley Brown



For the eighth year, LOV students are gearing up for their annual visit to our nation's capitol. Scheduled events include:

- **Thursday, April 20<sup>th</sup>:** Q & A session with foreign policy experts at the U.S. Institute of Peace; Dinner at a Vietnamese Restaurant
- **Friday, April 21<sup>st</sup>:** Tour of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial led by Mr. Jan Scruggs, Founder and President of the VVMF; Tours of museums and historic sites; Candlelight ceremony led by veterans Mr. Phil Beane and Dr. Ric Vandett
- **Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>:** Visit to Arlington Cemetery and special tour of the Women's Memorial led by Ms. June Eldridge, former Deputy Director and LOV link; Changing of the Guard Ceremony

## Reflections on LOV

By Sara Kiper

**Editor's Note:** As part of Ms. Poling's final exam, students are asked to reflect on the *Lessons of Vietnam* class and how its unique teaching approach has contributed to students' personal learning experiences. This is what Sara Kiper had to say:

*"I think that the Community-in-the-Classroom approach is extremely effective! I have learned so much about United States foreign policy from the different speakers and links who have visited our class. This program allows mature young adults to learn at their own pace and become more in tune with what is going on in our world today.*

*Taking this class affected me tremendously on a personal level. I met so many wonderful people and was able to communicate one-on-one with a pen pal link who answered my questions beyond the classroom. My favorite assignment was the interview project at the beginning of this course, in which I interviewed a friend of my family who shared some amazing stories that I will never forget. This class has especially helped me develop my critical thinking, writing and presentation skills.*

*I will not only take away important lessons of history from LOV, but I will also take away lessons of communication and respect. Before taking this class, when I heard the words "Vietnam veteran," I automatically formed an unfair stereotype. Now I know that veterans come in all forms. After hearing them present their own personal experiences, I respect and understand them much more."*



## Bridges Staff

**Editor:** Cristina Chenlo

**Designer:** James Mackintosh

**Staff:** Ben Al-Abdalli, Sarah Acord, Michelle Adams, Alaina Alevizatos, Sarah Begun, Wesley Brown, Candy Chasteen, Richard Coggins, Amber Davis, Marielena Diaz, Melissa DiBenedetto, Amy Elmayan, Landis Falkner, Jacob Fields, Adrienne Gillis, Alexis Glass, Andrew Ianucci, Sheelah Iyengar, Sara Kiper, Arie Lofton, Kevie Malek, Matney Murad, Cindy Nguyen, Staci Page, Caitlin Radford, Heather Sanders, Courtney Schammel, John Tilman, Eric Weber, Sarah Whitley, Samantha Wilkerson, Rachel Zeilinger

**Advisor:** Ms. Lindy Poling (lgpoling@juno.com)

**Advisory Board:** Vice Admiral & Mrs. Emmett Tidd, Lt. Col. Jim Zumwalt, Mrs. Mouzetta Zumwalt-Weathers, Mr. Bob Gray, General George B. Price, Mr. John Odom, Mr. James Sarayiotis, Mr. Joe Galloway, Mr. Larry Stogner, Mr. Rob Wilson, Mrs. Elizabeth Stevenson

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