



# Bridges

## THE LESSONS OF VIETNAM



### History's Sacrifices Touch a *LOV* Generation

By Emily Bower

Twenty-seven enthusiastic *LOV/RIR* seniors, along with nine outstanding chaperones, got together for a “last hurrah” on April 15 – 17, 2010. We kicked off our thirteenth annual field trip to Washington, D.C. with a visit to the United States Institute of Peace. Students and chaperones later enjoyed a delicious five-course dinner at a Vietnamese restaurant in Georgetown — a great way for all to experience Vietnamese cuisine and culture.

Friday morning started off by meeting special *LOV* links at The Wall. Col. Bill Mayall, Mr. Dave Rabadan, Mr. Bill McGrady, and Dr. Ric Vandett spoke to us about their interpretation of “The Wall That Heals.” Students then located the names of family members or friends of our veteran links and proceeded to rub these special names. Each student was extremely touched, but in a way that was unique to only the individual.

We then took in the beautiful World War II Memorial, enjoying the gorgeous weather and talking with WWII and Vietnam Veterans, as we proceeded to the Holocaust Museum. However, once in the Holocaust Museum, every student was completely silent while walking through the sobering exhibits.

For the remainder of the afternoon, we walked around our Nation’s Capitol, visiting museums and historical monuments of our choice. That same evening, we all headed to the Lincoln Memorial for our Candlelight Ceremony. Due to the slightly inclement weather, students and chaperones hiked up the impressive stairs of the Lincoln Memorial and sought refuge under the east side. Our ceremony started with the following remarks from Veteran Ric Vandett relating to ***The High Cost of Freedom***: “...I’ve been asked to talk about why we are here. Obviously, we’re here to honor those who paid the cost of freedom and whose names are on The Wall. But I want you to think of a bigger picture of what this entire area symbolizes — this area framed by the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. These two memorials honor two Presidents who understood the cost of freedom... Washington’s successes brought freedom from tyranny. Lincoln’s successes brought freedom for the slaves. Washington began a country. Lincoln united a country. These memorials remind us of the cost of freedom, but there is so much more between these two monuments. There is the World War II Memorial and the Korean War Memorial. There is the statue... honoring the women

who served in Vietnam. There is the statue... honoring the men who fought in Vietnam. And, of course, there is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This entire area framed by the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial symbolizes the cost of freedom for Americans.

After reading the names of Raleigh area men who lost their lives in Vietnam, students—one by one—stepped into the circle, freely speaking about what the *LOV* class and our amazing journey had taught them. Natalie Eroh voiced the need for our public to “appreciate our government and our freedom when living in America.” She continued, “Listening to Dr. Vandett’s speech really put into perspective what our soldiers fight for.”

The following morning, our group was given an incredible tour of the Women’s Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery by Veteran link Ms. June Eldridge, after which students trekked up the hill to witness the Changing of the Guard ceremony.

Students and chaperones were extremely grateful for this fantastic experience. Senior Joey Kupsky has found a “new respect for everyone who has served in the defense of this country,” and he feels that “this field trip drove home the idea of what true sacrifice really is.” And, Mark Hoffman came away with a profound realization: “Above all, remember what you have learned. There is no point in knowing and then forgetting, as no growth is made. If we forget the experiences and lessons we have learned, what was the point? But

if we remember, then we have grown as people.”

This is one of the most important lessons we can learn, not only from the Vietnam War, but from all wars. The knowledge that we have gained spans all generations, political affiliations, class, and gender, uniting everyone. With this newfound respect and awareness, our generation will be the one filled with respect for the past, yet determined to do what is right for our country in the present. The confidence that this class and this trip has instilled in us will enable us as adults to be educated citizens and influence our neighborhoods, communities, states, and even our country to truly look deep into the wounds of the past and search for a promising result.

There is no doubt that the scar of Vietnam has produced many things — controversy, conflict, debates — but more importantly it has produced a generation with a will and desire to learn, our generation.

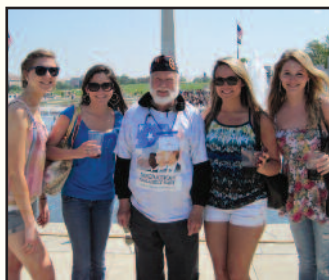


Artwork by Lizz Alfano

### ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Lessons of Vietnam Students in Action ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Wes Odum and his dad visit the Three Servicemen Statue.



*LOV* students pose with Oscar, a World War II Veteran.



Jelani and Trevor meet their link, Mr. Dave Rabadan.



Bao introduces his dad, Mr. Son Pham, to the *LOV* class.





## The Ghost of Vietnam Past

By Aby Stoner

On April 15, 2010, students participating in the *LOV/RIR* field trip to our nation's capitol had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Marvin Kalb, former Chief Diplomatic Correspondent for both *CBS* and *NBC News* and moderator of *Meet the Press*. Regarding his new position as the first



Journalist Marvin Kalb

“Writer-in-Residence” at the United States Institute of Peace, Mr. Kalb remarked, “I have been mightily impressed by the good people that work at the Institute of Peace. They advise on policy, but do not advocate for a particular partisan method; the goal is simply to promote peace.” This distinguished journalist is currently working on a new book about the Vietnam War’s effect on American policy and politics. Mr. Kalb shared with us that even in the

Obama Administration, “The ghost of Vietnam sits in on every meeting.” As our current president makes increasingly important decisions regarding the War on Terror, the lessons of Vietnam continue to have an impact on our foreign policy.

However, Mr. Kalb does not believe the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are the same as our conflict in Vietnam. We are not there for the same reasons, and we are not staying for the same reasons. Most importantly, he explained, these conflicts will not have the same result. While some believe that America must unleash her full power to destroy the terrorists, others feel we should get out in order to avoid

another situation like Vietnam. Mr. Kalb emphasized that an important lesson of Vietnam that relates to today is as follows: “Once you’re in, if you don’t win, you have lost. Inversely, the insurgents do not have to win—they simply have to not lose.”

As students, what we learned from Mr. Kalb was invaluable, simply because it is so difficult to comprehend how one event in America’s history has had such a ripple effect. No other conflict in our country’s history has had such a haunting impact on the ability of our political leaders to exercise decisive leadership in conflicts that have followed. Perhaps it is the stigma of having been the first war America lost, but clearly our foreign policy decisions for many years to come will continue to be visited by the *Ghost of Vietnam Past*.

**Editors’ Note:** Ms. Poling was delighted to receive this recent correspondence from Mr. Marvin Kalb:

Dear Lindy:

*It was my pleasure to meet you and your students, who are very lucky to have you as their mentor. I was very impressed by your whole operation and wish you and them lots of good luck. I had a feeling, while talking to you and them last week, that I have discovered the deep down reason why I have been involved in this project for the past five years—it has been to write a book for your students, for young people who want to know why we got in, how we got out, and how the entire experience has now become part of presidential DNA when facing new challenges involving the use of American military power.*

Best wishes,  
Marvin Kalb



## Point of View: Options in Afghanistan

By Morgan Carstens

On December 1, 2009, President Barack Obama gave what could possibly be the most important speech of his Presidency. At West Point Academy, he announced that 30,000 more U.S. troops would be deployed to Afghanistan and would likely return by mid-2011. There are many key components to President Obama’s plan, and if the plan works out, we will see the Afghan government provide security for its people without U.S. troop involvement in just a couple of years. There have also been talks regarding a peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban. If a peace agreement works out, we could see conditions improve in the near future.

President Obama’s main goal is to have the U.S. military train the Afghan military so that U.S. involvement is no longer needed. One of the most anticipated parts of his speech was his exit strategy, and he comforted many Americans by providing one. Looking back at Vietnam, we realize there really were no benchmarks for departure; so when the time came, we did not know how to end the war or what the end would look like. President Obama explained in his West Point speech, “If I did not think that the security of the United States and the safety of the American people were at stake in Afghanistan, I would gladly order every single one of our troops home tomorrow.” If the President loses public support for the war, some feel we might leave too early for Afghanistan to be ready to defend itself. In a talk given at the United States Institute of Peace on April 15, Ambassador William Taylor made it clear that part of our role in Afghanistan is to help the Afghan government stay secure as the “elected people try to form a [stable] government.” One of the most controversial parts of President Obama’s strategy is his withdrawal date. He stated that he would definitely withdraw troops from Afghanistan starting in July 2011,



Artwork by Kiet Tran

but the pace at which our troops would come home could change. Some critics think that declaring a timeline is a bad idea because the Taliban will know we are giving power back to Afghanistan’s national security force; however, many people feel that having open-ended involvement will lead to slower progress.

Recently Afghanistan’s President Hamid Karzai has spoken about conducting peace talks with the Taliban. At the London conference in January, General Stanley McChrystal commented, “As a soldier, my personal feeling is that there’s been enough fighting. I believe that a political solution to all conflicts is the inevitable outcome. And it’s the right outcome.” A peace plan presented at the conference offered Taliban fighters a job, land, and a pension if they lay down their arms. Some experts say that offering the Taliban money to lay down their arms will help achieve peace, but some Taliban vow they will

continue fighting to the death. A problem with offering money and security is that once the money is gone, the Taliban may return to fighting. While many experts suggest peace talks will not work, this is an option appearing to gain popularity with the Afghan government and NATO.

President Obama and President Karzai are under great pressure to end the war. Their options include building a stronger Afghan security force or brokering a peace plan with the Taliban. Should neither of these bring resolution, a third option—cutting our losses and withdrawing—may prove successful by process of elimination as continued public support for the war wanes. As time goes on, our choices will diminish. Our best option—a stronger Afghan security force—could bring success; our worst option—cutting and running—could lead to a victory for the Taliban.





## Iran Will Flex Its Nuclear Muscle!

By Reid Baumann

The situation in the Middle East has never been more tense than it is today. The United States is currently involved in military actions in both Iraq and Afghanistan; however, a dark cloud looms over the horizon. It has become evident that the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to become a nuclear power in the Middle East. There has been continued pressure on Iran to stop the enrichment of uranium, but this pressure from other countries as well as the United Nations has failed to deter Iran.

If Iran gains the means to construct a nuclear bomb, it will check U.S. diplomatic power in the Middle East. As such, a nuclear-armed Iran will further embolden terrorist organizations to take on the United States and its allies in the region, escalating tensions even further. The willingness of the United States to assist its friends in the region when challenged by Iran's nuclear capability will raise concerns among America's allies.



Artwork by Lizz Alfano

The intimidation a nuclear-armed Iran hopes to wield remains to be determined. Undoubtedly, it will empower the Shiite dominant country to confront its Sunni neighbors and non-Muslim states whenever it so desires. Tehran may attempt to intimidate other oil-producing states to reduce production to help destroy Western states' economies. Only time will determine how far such intimidation will go as Iran flexes its nuclear muscle.

There are concerns, too, that Iran will look to disrupt stability by attacking Israel or providing a terrorist proxy group with a nuclear device to target other enemies—such as the U.S. While Iran would stand to lose a great deal by such aggression, its leadership continues to threaten to take such action.

There should be no doubt that a nuclear-armed Iran poses a serious threat to peace in the Middle East and world stability.



## Follow Your Dreams

By Stephanie Wakeford

December 18, 2009 proved a monumental day for Mrs. Poling's *LOV/RIR* classes. Thanks to Veteran link and frequent guest speaker, Mr. Larry Stogner, all experienced an amazing opportunity. It was the day Mr. Byron Pitts, Chief National Correspondent for the *CBS Evening News* and the seventh correspondent on the ever popular 60 Minutes television news program, made a guest appearance. Mr. Pitts has an accomplished 27 years in journalism and has traveled to 37 countries.

Throughout the course of the visit, *LOV/RIR* students were unable to stop writing, filling journals with endless quotes and words of wisdom. With the topic, *Follow Your Dreams*, guiding his presentation, Mr. Pitts made it clear he was fulfilling his lifelong dream—and having the time of his life doing so! Exhibiting grateful emotion, Mr. Pitts explained his connection to *WTVD* journalist/anchorman Larry Stogner. Attributing much of his knowledge and success to his mentor, Mr. Pitts told us, “I wouldn’t be on *60 Minutes* if it wasn’t for Larry Stogner.” When asked about his life-long goals, Byron Pitts responded, “To be a grandfather, do great work on *60 Minutes*, and to do for someone what Larry Stogner did for me!”

To prepare for his assignments, this dedicated journalist reads 12 newspapers a day, all the major news magazines, and one book a week. He told us he gets to see “the very best or the very worst.” As a result of his recent experiences as an embedded reporter in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mr. Pitts shared with us that he has become a great admirer of the men and women who serve in our military. He gets to “see bravery.” He feels that his role in this war is to be a witness—a storyteller—and make a difference.

*Bridges* Staff members in the audience were especially inspired by Mr. Pitts’ advice to aspiring journalists: “Dream big, have a detailed plan, get into it for the right reasons, care about other people, care about the truth, and care about information.” He truly believes a journalist’s job is to “afflict the comfortable and confront the afflicted,” and he reminded us that “a free press is vital to our democracy.”

In his recently published book, *Step Out on Nothing*, he painfully describes what it was like to be functionally illiterate until the age of 12 and a stutterer until age 20. The author declared, “Nothing about where I come from suggests what I do today, but every dream has an address. Figure out what it is, and figure out how to get there.” *LOV/RIR* student Mark Hoffman subsequently wrote in his reflective letter to our special guest, “To learn from a man who has transcended the low expectations predicated upon him is inspirational. And even better is that the humble attitude and conscientiousness of who and what helped get you there was not lost during your rise to success.”

Senior Allie Haywood viewed Mr. Pitts’ presentation as “a wake-up call...a wake-up call to grow up, decide what I want in life, and go out and make it happen!”

Perhaps, she summed it up best for all of us: “Knowing that someone who frequently appears on national news cares enough about the future of America to visit a high school elective class speaks volumes of his character to me. I was truly inspired by his courage, motivated by his hardships, and challenged to be a better person—and to be the change I want to see in the world.”



Journalist Larry Stogner, Ms. Lindy Poling & Journalist Byron Pitts





# The Healing Wall

By Alysa Citero

On Friday morning, April 16th, Ms. Poling's *Lessons of Vietnam* students stepped off the bus to cross a busy Washington, D.C. street near the Mall. No, not the mall where you shop. This Mall is something special, something every American should experience. It contains many of



LOV class Veteran Links—  
Washington, DC—2010

America's most beautiful memorials--and more. And, of course, we had been waiting all semester to *see and touch* the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Once we arrived, we were greeted by the familiar faces of Veterans links, Mr. David Rabadan, Mr. Bill McGrady, Dr. Ric Vandett, and Colonel Bill Mayall. I have always wondered: "What does the Vietnam Veterans Memorial mean to veterans?" That morning, I found the answer to the question I was curious to know.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial means everything to these proud warriors who sacrificed so much for this country. Reminiscing about their experiences in Vietnam brought some of them nearly to tears. Dr. Vandett described "this beautiful black granite Wall [as] a woman, a black woman, who takes the pain and agony of each Vietnam vet and absorbs that pain into her so that we do not have to continue to suffer." To all of these veterans, The Wall is a symbol of peace and mourning, a place to grieve and a place to remember.

Over 58,000 names etched in a granite wall denote the American lives lost in Vietnam. As *LOV* students, we all felt a sense of appreciation for the service of these veterans. These people were sons and daughters and brothers and sisters, everyday people like you and *me*. After such a controversial conflict in American history, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial brings all Americans together, young and old. To the families and friends of these fallen heroes, The Wall is a place to leave flowers or letters and to make a rubbing of a loved one's name. It is a beautiful place to just pause, take a deep breath, and reflect on this dramatic time period in American history. *It is, for many, a place to heal.*

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## A Letter to My Link

Dear Mr. Nesmith,\*

*This entire semester has been one of the most enlightening, enriching, and memorable semesters of my life, and a large majority of it is due to this linking project – to you. When I first heard about the linking project, I was excited and looking forward to learning more about Vietnam and those who experienced it. I never dreamed of having so much in common with my link, nor did my highest expectations ever lead me to think I could learn as much as I did from you.*

*I took the LOV class with the intention of learning more about my grandfather and his life in Vietnam. Not only do I feel that I better understand my grandfather, but I appreciate him in a way I have never been able to previously--because I didn't understand. Furthermore, I am walking away from this class with not just an idea of what my Grandfather lived through, but what others have experienced as well. I learned so much from people like Mr. Stogner (a Veteran/ journalist), Mr. Waldorf (a war protestor), and Mr. Pham (a member of the South Vietnamese Air Force). Last, but certainly not least, is you, Mr. Nesmith. I have been truly blessed to have a link who has so much in common and shares many of the same interests as me, a link who is knowledgeable in so many different subject areas. You gave a wonderful answer to everything I asked, from the simple questions like where you served and what you did, to the more complex questions about that crucial year of 1968 and the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.*

*The time and effort you put into your responses was awe-inspiring. You made me think, and every time I got a response from you, I knew that you thought about every single word of my correspondence.*

*As I move on to the next chapter in my life, I know that I will carry this experience close to my heart. I love being able to share my newfound knowledge with my friends and family and being up-to-date and informed regarding the happenings all around me. More importantly, I truly feel that through the course of this semester and this unique project, I have learned many of the lessons of Vietnam. Thank you for such a wonderful, incredible, and inspiring learning experience!*

Sincerely,  
Amanda Dalton

**\*Editors' Note:** Mr. James Nesmith served in the Army Security Agency in Vietnam, 1969-1970. He speaks five different languages and has been involved in Immigration in various forms since 1982. He worked with refugees in Southeast Asia who came to the United States with only the clothes on their backs and world class scientists from the former Soviet Union who had very little to show for a lifetime of achievement and the downtrodden from all over. Mr. Nesmith commented, "Though their backgrounds couldn't have been more different, they all came to the United States with a dream and a determination to succeed. They have built beautiful lives and made significant, in many cases major, contributions to the richness of the fabric of our society."



MHS LOV Class Field Trip—Washington, DC—2010

## Websites:

<http://mhs.wcpss.net/academics/poling/index.htm>  
[http://www.community\\_in\\_the\\_classroom/](http://www.community_in_the_classroom/)  
<http://www.nationalhistoryclub.org/>