



Bridges

THE LESSONS OF VIETNAM



Understanding My Father—Part II

By Chelsea Tucker

As I walked slowly behind my father at The Wall, I realized my year-long dream had finally come true. The man who is the biggest part of my life was now taking a giant step, and there I was right next to him. I did not have to ask what was going through his mind; I could just read the tears flowing down his cheeks. We began to connect in a way that made this experience surreal, and I will never forget it as long as I live.

The most touching moment for me was when a man came up to him and asked if he was a Vietnam Veteran. My father said, "Yes." They then hugged like they had known each other for a lifetime, and the man said, "God bless you, and welcome home."

After our candlelight service Friday evening, my father, some of my classmates, and I went back to The Wall just to experience it



Artwork by Julia Nilsen

at night. I finally gained enough courage to ask my dad, "Do you recognize any of the names?" He responded, "No," but I knew that all he could think about was his own past experiences—positive and negative.

The *Lessons of Vietnam* class, our field trip to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and my teacher have helped to create a comfortable new found relationship between my father and myself. My dad is a different person now. After 30 years, he has finally removed the barrier that had bottled up emotions within him for so long. Charles Tucker is now free—free to express those emotions and thoughts, and answer

any questions that I might ask about his wartime experiences. I am proud of him. I can now say with undeniable pride, "Yes, my father is a Vietnam Veteran, and we talk about it all the time."



Unexpected Emotions

By Sarah Edwards and Mollie Jones

What started as a wet and dreary Friday morning in our Nation's capitol, soon became a wonderful educational and emotional experience for *LOV* students visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on April 22nd. Our featured guest speaker was Veteran/Link Mr. David Rabadan, who served with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade in Vietnam. He briefed us on the controversy surrounding the Memorial's construction, and shared his own personal feelings about the War and The Wall. Mr. Rabadan feels that "this black iceberg—with its heroes identified above the surface and its stories living beneath it—is transcendent in its ability to connect generations." He also reminded us that each name represents a family that was forever changed. Students were then able to spend some personal time with Mr. Rabadan, Mr. Bill McGrady, Mr. Phil Beane, Dr. Ric Vandett, Mr. Larry Weatherall, and Mr. Charles Tucker—all special veterans associated with our *LOV* Program.

After we paid our respects to the fallen soldiers and had completed rubbings of names that were singularly meaningful to



LOV Class Veteran Links at The Wall

our links and our families, we gathered together once again. We wish to share with you Dr. Ric Vandett's eloquent closing remarks—

First of all, I want to thank you for the honor and respect you have shown all Vietnam Veterans — the ones who returned home and those who paid the ultimate sacrifice and whose names are on The Wall. You honor all of us by being here today.

Many of us who returned have always felt that we did not get the honor and respect we deserved for serving our country because the war divided this country, and the Vietnam Vets were seen as symbols of that division. Those whose names are on The Wall deserve better. And your presence today honors them.

I remember my first visit to The Wall. It was a tremendous emotional experience for me. I cried harder than I have ever cried in my life. The tears and emotions just poured out of me. And that Wall, the beautiful, black structure, took those emotions and absorbed them into her allowing me to be able to look at her without tears. And that's what she does. She takes the emotions, the pain, and the tears from each veteran who visits her for the first time, and takes those feelings into that beautiful black granite. She takes our pains and allows us to lead normal lives.

Because you are here today, you honor her and you honor all of us — those who returned home and those on The Wall, and I thank you for that. ~Ric Vandett



Learning About Peacemaking

By Kathryn Stell



On Thursday, April 21, 2005, Ms. Poling's *LOV/RIR* class began our Washington, D.C.

Field Trip with an eye-opening visit to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). We learned about the beginnings of the USIP, an independent government agency established by Congress nearly twenty years ago. We also learned how this Institute operates by working on occasion to help mediate and resolve conflicts at the request of foreign nations. Then, our speakers related the Vietnam War to current issues and answered our questions intently.



Dr. Jeffrey Helsing

Dr. Jeffrey Helsing's topic of discussion compared the Vietnam War to Operation Iraqi Freedom. He emphasized the contexts in which we went to war, the domestic policies developing during the wars, and the insurgency movements. In these ways, Vietnam and Iraq can be compared. However, Dr. Helsing concluded, "That while the parallels are not equitable, it is important to understand the desires of Presidents Johnson and Bush to insure



Dr. Imad Harb

credibility in the larger war at stake, the Cold War, and the War on Terrorism."

Dr. Imad Harb, who had just returned from time in Lebanon and Iraq, addressed *LOV/RIR* students next. He described the slow progression toward democracy in the Middle East and explained why the totalitarian regimes are not benefiting those countries. Egypt's president is allowing other candidates to be listed on the ballot, Bahrain just became a parliamentary democracy (although it still operates as a kingdom), and Kuwait's parliament decided in favor of women's suffrage. Dr. Harb said that democracy needs to be "attainable...sustainable" and that the "Middle East is ripe for change... generational change."

Having an interactive discussion with foreign policy experts at the United States Institute of Peace was a wonderful start to our 2005 Washington, D.C. Field Trip. It was an excellent opportunity to apply the knowledge gained from our *LOV/RIR* class to better comprehend prospects for peace in the real world.



Women Not Forgotten

By Emily Reass

There is only one memorial in the entire Nation that honors all military woman—the Women in Military Service for America Memorial in Washington, D.C. This memorial promotes education, displays fantastic exhibits, and directs a broad archive and research collection relating to the women who served.

My classmates and I were privileged to have a guided tour led by retired Army Nurse and former Deputy Director of the Memorial—and *LOV* class Link, Ms. June Eldridge. She showed us clothing, photographs, and documents that described all the collective stories of the 2 to 3 million women who proudly served their country from the Revolutionary War to the present day in Iraq. To showcase the amazing efforts of women in Vietnam, there were various artifacts on display such as service medals, military payment certificates, and uniforms representing the American Red Cross, Army Special Services, Air Force, and Navy Nurse Corps.

The most extraordinary exhibit to catch every student's attention was *Faces of the Fallen*. It honors American service members killed in Afghanistan and Iraq, and includes over 1,300 signature portraits. Viewing notes left by family members, wedding bands, photos, and seeing visiting soldiers evoked emotional feelings within all of us that cannot be forgotten.



Photo by Carol Highsmith—
Courtesy of WIMSA Memorial

From our tour of the Women's Memorial, we not only gained more respect for the courageous women who have made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom, but to all who have committed themselves to serving America.



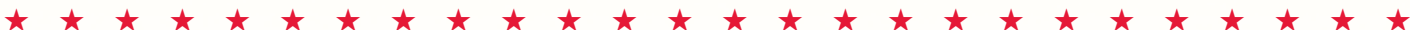
A Letter from a Soldier in Iraq

By Claudia Ortiz

Editor's Note: This past year, several students from Ms. Poling's *LOV/RIR* and *U.S. History* classes have been writing letters to soldiers who are currently serving in Iraq. These students want the soldiers to know how much their service and sacrifice are appreciated. Corporal Kellen J. Scott 3/4 I. CO. United States Marine Corps, the cousin of Nikki Higgins, a Millbrook High School junior, recently corresponded with us. We would like to share a portion of his letter with our readers:

Dear Ms. Poling's U.S. History and Lessons of Vietnam Students, ...I am greatly impressed with all of your support and prayers. I have observed (over my three deployments to Iraq) that although the public may disagree with the 'war' itself, they still support all of the service members. This paradigm is in sharp contrast to the popular opinion during the Vietnam Era. My role here in Iraq is in the spotlight right now because of politics and government, but the quiet behind the scenes work of all of you is just as, if not more, important. Many cultures, countries, and civilizations do not have the opportunity to attend a formal school to pursue an education, let alone feel safe enough to attend such an institution. At home you must concentrate on what had been bitterly defended against all adversaries of freedom, which is freedom itself. While my brothers, sisters, and I fight to secure the Iraqi people with the same opportunities we have, you must take full advantage of the opportunities you have, and that we have given to you.

Many of you mentioned WWII Veterans and Vietnam Veterans. Think about them as you study and graduate into the next part of your lives. I would like to say thank you for all of your support and encouragement to those of us serving our country. Thanks again for your kind letters and meaningful gratitude to us all here.



Perception Versus Reality— Debunking the Myth of the Vietnam Veteran

By Monique Oliveira



When I first began writing for *Bridges*, I found myself at a complete loss as to where I should begin. I had not yet taken the *Lessons of Vietnam (LOV)* course and had learned very little about the Vietnam Era in my U.S. History class. So I sat down with Ms. Poling to jumpstart an idea. After realizing that I was a blank canvas, she started asking me basic questions about the Vietnam War — and what I thought about Vietnam Veterans. I

told her the stereotypical answer: disheveled men who were left “broken” from the war, drug abusers who neglected their families, lonely souls who were still angry at the world. After taking this course and meeting several veterans who served in all branches of the Armed Forces, I now know my perceptions were way off base!

The fact is that most veterans picked up with their lives after the war; others even had successful military careers. However, public perception is deceiving, and without this class, I might not have known the truth. Hollywood has played a big part in perpetuating the myth, more often than not, casting Vietnam Veterans in a negative light.

The speakers in our *LOV* class have really helped me see the true face of a Vietnam Veteran. I have met a Vice Admiral who is one of the smartest men alive. I have met a Red Cross “Donut

Dolly” who was able to touch my heart with her stories of heroism and personal anguish. I have met a Marine who also served as a Green Beret. He had a sense of humor even when talking about an attack that could have ended his life. These are just a few of the people who have shared their stories with our class; but there are countless others who have their own memories from the war who are not *haunted* by them.

My link is Mr. Dan Sheehan, a Harvard graduate who served in the Navy for twenty years. When I asked him what he would like high school students to know about Vietnam Veterans, he replied, “We Vietnam veterans are your neighbors and fellow Americans... We’re just people who had a difficult job. Some of us did it well, some did not — but, for the most part, we did what was needed.”

Vietnam Veterans have not always been supported, but now is our time to thank them for doing their duty. Political ideologies aside, those who serve in the Armed Forces should be held in our highest esteem. What they do for our country is far more important than most of us will ever know or understand. Before giving labels to Vietnam Veterans based on what you have seen in the media, talk to one and find out for yourself. I have found that these men and women who served and sacrificed in the jungles of Southeast Asia are the most amazing people on earth—and no media report or movie has ever been able to capture the magnanimity of their role in our history.



Music—A Window into Cultural Change

By Mark Stephenson

As happens in times of war, the Vietnam Era was a catalyst for cultural change. This change manifested itself in many ways: clothing styles, pop culture, and especially, music. As the War escalated in the mid 1960’s, the music of that time experienced change. While acoustic music, along with rock, were the most common styles, guitars in heavy overdrive, screaming solos, and soaring lyrics associated with rock were still in their early stages.

Protest music had its roots in the folk music of the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. Artists like Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, The Kingston Trio, Joan Baez and Peter, Paul and Mary broke ground here. Joni Mitchell and Judy Collins came along in the mid ’60s. And, of course, Bob Dylan was the driving creative force behind them all, turning from acoustic folk to electric folk-rock in 1965.

Most young people today believe the most popular music during the war focused on protest. While protest music had its place, it was never really mainstream pop. The British Invasion of the early ’60s, led by The Beatles in 1963 and groups like The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, Marianne Faithful and others, dominated American pop music with love songs and adolescent angst, but was not generally anti-war. Not until the Tet Offensive in 1968 did protest music—and rock in general—develop a little harder edge. Protest music was not only about the War, but also about protesting racial prejudice, the “estab-

lishment,” and even “hippies.” Artists like Jefferson Airplane, Barry McGuire, The Who, Buffalo Springfield, and The Byrds made their mark in this area.

The early 1970’s began the age of what is now called “classic rock.” Music freely mixed acoustic and harder rock, having less concern with labels like “folk-rock” and paving the way for the more mainstream music of the 1980’s and ’90s. Bands like the Doobie Brothers, Boston, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Steppenwolf emerged with a harder image. Major players of the ’60s (most notably The Beatles in ’71) went away, while some (The Rolling Stones and The Who) stayed, still setting the pace in tone, attitude and lyric. Today’s musicians would list many such artists as their main inspiration as, in my opinion, they shook the music world like

no others. Even though this newer style of rock was popular among young people, there remained light rock bands and many fans of popular 1960’s folk music.

A good way to study cultural history is through the music of the time and the motivations behind it. Vietnam was a revolutionary period, with a young generation beginning to ask questions and express themselves, much like the older generation before them had done during the Jazz Age. While we may never see another era like Vietnam, studying the music of that time can provide us with a “window” through which we can examine the motivation for society’s cultural changes.



What Linking Means To Me

By Chelsea Hutcherson



Veteran Tom Dingbaum & Chelsea Hutcherson

Many of the students associated with the *LOV/RIR* Program feel that “linking” is one of the most educational—and exciting—aspects of this class. Through the Link Program, students are able to interact with living history. If you are lucky, like myself, you might be paired with a local link, and be given the opportunity to introduce that person to your classmates!

For a whole semester, my link, Mr. Tom Dingbaum, who is a former Infantry Company Commander, Korean Linguist and Green Beret, and I kept in touch through weekly e-mail exchanges. He answered my questions thoughtfully, and he continually offered intriguing insights relating to important foreign policy issues. The most satisfying part of sharing these exchanges is the knowledge we all acquire. Linking helps us gain experience from *their personal experiences*. Linking encourages critical thinking and independent study. I thank Ms. Poling, Mr. Dingbaum, and all of our amazing speakers and links for enriching our journey through *LOV/RIR* in this very special way.



I’m not the only one who has had a wonderful linking experience! Here’s what some of my classmates have to say:

- *Linking connects us to the past in a fun way that makes us want to learn more.* ~Cham Nguyen
- *“Linking gives us a platform to express our views and opinions about politics and war.”* ~Matt Kemerait
- *“This linking experience has been life-changing for me. I have learned so many life lessons, and my critical thinking skills have really improved.”* ~Chelsea Tucker
- *“Linking with a veteran goes past the value of knowledge and learning about the Vietnam Era; it extends a hand of friendship and understanding.”* ~Mark Stephenson



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Letters of Hope

By Joy Strickland

Reflecting back on the *LOV/RIR* class, I can only marvel at the unique experience. One of the most rewarding aspects of the class is its Link Program, which allows students to correspond directly with people who played important roles during the Vietnam Era. My link was Nguyen Xuan Phong, former South Vietnamese Minister of State during the Paris Peace Talks (1968 to 1973).



Ambassador Phong

To help me understand Ambassador Phong’s background, Ms. Poling encouraged me to read his book, *Hope and Vanquished Reality*. It details his life during the Vietnam Era and shares his philosophies concerning the war and its aftermath. “Purposes of hope are very personal and individual,” Ambassador Phong wrote, “but hopes with meaningful and rational purposes are also communicative...they may prevail, acquire, and give meaning to hope’s purposes.” Without hope, he could never have withstood his five-year imprisonment in a North Vietnamese “reeducation” camp. To this day, Ambassador Phong continues to fight an ongoing battle on behalf of his people. During a symposium at Texas Tech University three years ago which was attended by communist officials, he gave an impassioned speech about the suffering of his fellow Vietnamese citizens. He concluded with a demand for the communists “to let my people go,” and he became an icon for people fighting for human rights.

Although I was initially intimidated by Ambassador Phong’s international stature, he quickly put me at ease. His letters read as though he had written to the dearest of friends, and his incredible sense of humor always made me smile. Our political discussions ranged from pacification attempts undertaken during the War to other military options that President Johnson might have chosen. Our conversations were not only limited to war and peace. We also spoke of topics ranging from linguistics to history, from childhood pranks to current events. And, through each of our discussions, his warm message of *hope* rang clear.

The Vietnam Era was a crucial time in our Nation’s history; but for many young people of my generation, the issues are unclear or even irrelevant. Ambassador Phong has opened my eyes, not only to new points of view about the Vietnam War, but also about life. An incredible man, Ambassador Nguyen Xuan Phong is more than an historical hero. He is a philosopher, a mentor, a human rights crusader—and, most amazingly, he is my friend.



MHS LOV Class visits our Nation’s Capitol—2005

