

### Hope's Ambassador

By Courtney Moore

This year, I have had the esteemed pleasure of “linking” with Ambassador Phong Nguyen, the author of *Hope and Vanquished Reality*. It has been quite a learning experience—both educational and meaningful. Ambassador Phong worked closely with the South Vietnamese government in the peace talks after the Vietnam War. He received his education in Paris, London and Oxford University. While in Saigon, he was involved with cabinet level functions from 1965 to 1975. When South Vietnam collapsed in April of 1975, he was Minister of State in Charge of Negotiations at the Paris Peace Talks. Currently, he is the Senior Associate at Texas Tech University’s Vietnam Center in Lubbock, Texas.



Ambassador Phong

Through exchanging emails with Ambassador Phong, I learned many valuable lessons. I learned about the gravity of war and the consequences that can affect many individuals, both directly and indirectly. I have learned that war cannot be justified, but it is better for it to be used as a last resort if and only if it improves the lives of the individuals in the society that it affects. I have also learned that it does not always take force to achieve peace, but rather an understanding of both parties involved working to achieve that goal. Ambassador Phong often mentioned that in spite of everything he has experienced, including being imprisoned for five years, he kept his hope alive. Hope was the spark that ignited within him; that hope continues to emanate from him today. It is clearly evident that he is a man of great courage and strength.

I would like to share with our readers some of the Ambassador’s admirable words:  
*“Hope is an inborn capability of each person and an inherent aspect of our common human condition in the act of ‘being and becoming.’ Hope is, therefore, ever present in each of us even in its latent and passive stages and reaches our awareness or consciousness whenever we are confronted with an adverse situation...”*

I do not think that anyone ever stops learning. Learning is a continuous journey that is made possible by caring mentors along the way. They may be parents, teachers, community leaders, or other extraordinary people like Ambassador Phong. This man helped me realize that *hope* is not only a state of mind, but it is also an uplifting thought that gives us the strength to persevere when great odds are against us.

### The Quiet Enemy

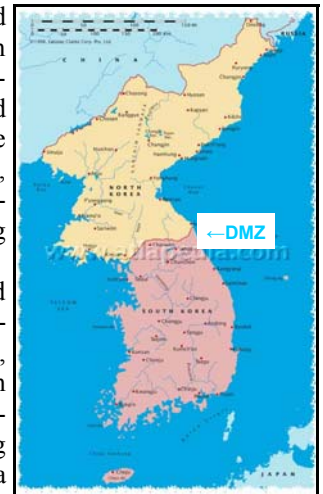
By Rebecca Schley

While our nation seems to be focusing on enemies such as Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, we are overlooking another serious threat; a country that we went to war with once before, a war also “forgotten” by many Americans. North Korea, a communist country just across the Pacific Ocean from America, is developing nuclear weapons that could be used against us in a future attack.

My *LOV* class link, Lt. Col. Jim Zumwalt, has traveled several times to North Korea and other parts of Asia since April of 1994. He has participated in meetings to improve relations between the United States and North Korea and possibly open up the “hermit kingdom” to western businessmen. According to Lt. Col. Zumwalt, life in North Korea is brutal with a lack of transportation and oppressive government control. The government restricts citizens in numerous ways, limiting where they can travel and controlling the propaganda broadcasted on the radio and TV. The government, led by Kim Jong Il, is also corrupt with no concern for its own people, as famines have left two million dead, and resources are selfishly prioritized to the military and government over its starving countrymen.

On January 10, 2003, North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and on February 5th, she reactivated her nuclear power facilities. There are reports that North Korea currently has the capability of striking the west coast of the U.S. with its missiles, and in the years ahead, will be focusing on increasing range and accuracy. Additionally, in the event of war, its million-man army will immediately target U.S. soldiers guarding the DMZ, which separates North and South Korea. According to Lt. Col. Zumwalt, for several years now the North Koreans have been digging large tunnels under the DMZ in order to come up behind our forces with a surprise attack. Although a few of these tunnels have been discovered, there is no way to decipher how many exist.

Because North Korea’s leadership appears to be devoid of any logic, there is no telling if or when the attacks will occur or how they will hit us. While many problems claim the attention of the United States, North Korea, the quiet enemy, will eventually come out of the shadows. Let’s hope we are prepared for the consequences.



# The Return of the Draft??

By Matthew Turrentine

During the Vietnam War, the Draft shattered dreams, and tore many families apart, making some Americans distrustful toward their government. Many hated even the prospect of going to war, much less being drafted. To avoid this terrible fate, some young men from ages 18-24 fled to Canada. Some hopped from state-to-state dodging the federal government—only to be caught later. Thousands of young men, who under normal circumstances would not have enrolled into college, did just that after high school to get a student deferment. Others with money may have paid off those in high places to avoid the Draft.

After the Vietnam War ended, Americans thought they had seen the last of the Draft. Almost everybody believed that they would never have to deal with a divided family again. Of course the government thought it necessary to have the Draft as a back up plan in case something very threatening happened in the future, like another war. Right now, the government requires that all of its male citizens register for the Draft upon turning eighteen years of age. For thirty years—since the end of the Vietnam War—no one has been afraid of being drafted, until now.

With the prospect of war in Iraq, many 18-year-old high school seniors have become quite nervous regarding whether or not the Draft will be reinstated. In Ms. Poling's *Recent International Relations* class, this is a subject of great importance. "I just turned 18 and registered," reported Millbrook High School Senior Dennis Velez. "With President Bush wanting to go to war, I'm thinking, 'What's the worst that could happen?'" For others, like me, who have not yet reached the draft-registration age, the thought of being drafted is not as close—yet it is very real. Questions now come to mind that I have not considered before. For example, if the U.S. does go to war with Iraq, will I be drafted? What could happen to me if I were to be drafted? What would my family want me to do?

Mr. James L. Nesmith, International Faculty Counselor in the Office of International Affairs at Texas Tech University, and my Vietnam Veteran link, stated that he did not believe the Draft is something to be too concerned about. "...Unless the international situation we are facing turns really bad, the Draft should not be something to worry about for a very long time. For thirty years, the military of the United States has been completely voluntary, and it is respected as the world's best fighting force. Introducing draftees into the military would require big changes in the way the military operates. Additionally, the political cost of instituting the Draft would be so high that few politicians would approve it unless the nation's very survival was at stake."

Even if the United States goes to war with Iraq, the possibility of a draft is slim to none, but the idea of the Draft should not be discarded completely. Prepare yourself for the worst and hope for the best. What happens will happen. Just never let your patriotism die!



*Editor's Note: The Bridges Staff would like to share with our readers a reflection by Mr. Robert L. Gray, a LOV class supporter and outstanding link.*

## Contemplating The Wall

By Robert L. Gray, RivDiv 572/594

Early on the morning of November 9, 2002, several friends and myself descended on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall to place a wreath in remembrance of those who died fighting for our freedom. I have made this journey many times, but this time it was in celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wall. This visit was meaningful, because as I stood there mesmerized by the beauty of the Wall, I heard in the background the reading of names, the names of every individual inscribed on the Wall. I personally knew only two of the men etched in the polished black granite. We had all learned the art of driving, fighting and living on a 31-foot-long river patrol boat (PBR) in early 1968. They were two of the most wonderful men I ever had the chance to meet during my Naval career.



As in the past, I stood there not looking so much at the names, but rather into the smiling faces of those etched in stone. Smiling, yes, because they sensed that myself and many other Americans remembered them and love them for their sacrifice. As many of us have said of the many years, "*BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD GO I.*"

The Wall is like a window into the past. I seldom shed tears anymore. For now I try to remember the men and women for their goodness, and not for what they became, victims of a violent war far away from home. While looking at the smiling faces reflecting from every name, I cannot help but wonder where they would be today and what they would be doing had they not have been killed defending South Vietnam and America. I imagine if my name were listed on this memorial, they would be standing in my place remembering me.

I often hear or see on radio and television or read in the newspaper comments about whether "*our*" war was justified. Did our men and women die in vain? Most people today believe the War was *unjustified* and should never have been fought. To me it is not a question of justification. Instead it is about remembering those who fought and died. They did what their country asked them to do, and I dare say, they would do it again. We did it at

a time in our lives when we were most vulnerable, our learning years, and for many their teenage years; years when we should have been making our mark on the world. But we did it also because our government *asked* us.

Perhaps next year I will once again make my trek to Washington, D.C. to be surrounded by those Americans who gave their all, so that I and others might return home to our loved ones. In the meantime, I still have wonderful memories of friends gone by.

## A Bridge Between Two Cultures

By Angela Gonzalez and Lauryn Reece

Many years after the Vietnam War, the country, the people and their culture are still an enigma to some Americans. Following an activity in our *LOV* class called “Views of Life,” in which Vietnamese and American cultures were compared, many of us wanted to know a little more about Vietnamese culture and its differences and similarities to American culture. We interviewed several MHS students who have experienced “both worlds.” Following are some of their responses to the questions many of us had:

### How important is family in Vietnamese culture?

- ◆ “Family is a very important part of Vietnamese culture; we are closely knit and united.”
- ◆ “A family in Vietnamese culture is above everything else in society.”

### Do you think you value education more than American teenagers? How so?

- ◆ “Yes, we value education because not everybody can go to school in Vietnam. In a poor family, a teenager will work to help support his family.”
- ◆ “Yes, a good education is what brings honor to my family and I. Furthermore, it is strongly emphasized by my parents to be successful in life.”

### What differences do you see between the lifestyles of your family and your friends’ families?

- ◆ “My family does not run on a consistent schedule. Another difference is that my parents put lots of emphasis on education.”
- ◆ “Vietnamese have a lot more respect towards adults, especially toward parents.”

### What do you see as the greatest difference between opportunities here and in Vietnam?

- ◆ “There is a huge difference in technology. Computers, fast Internet, TV...In a country like Vietnam, citizens do not easily access these tools and the opportunity to some information is limited. Also, it is difficult to receive a good education over in Vietnam. Schools are competitive and expensive. Poor families do not get a chance at all.”

### Last, but not least, our interviewees, Kevin, Hoang, and Phong, were kind enough to give some words of wisdom:

- ◆ “Value your family and friends.”
- ◆ “Use fully the opportunities available to you. Many children in Vietnam and other countries wish they had them.”
- ◆ “Respect all races; treat everyone equally.”

Even though Vietnamese and American cultures are so different, we all have one thing in common—we are all human. We think, feel, hurt, and love. We can all learn a great deal from each other; and if we do, we can improve our world.



Lauryn Reece interviews  
Kevin Nguyen

## America: Love It or Hate It?

By Bev Loudon

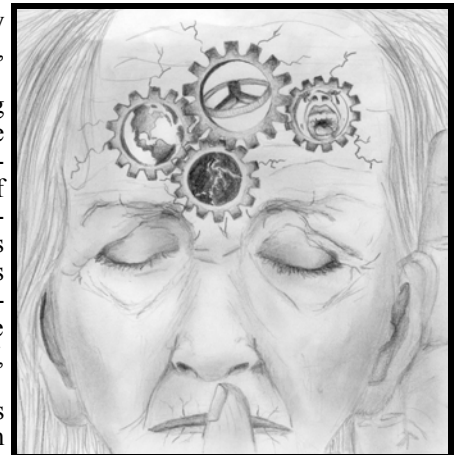
Egypt, Iraq, North and South Korea. As America hopes for a new era of peace and tranquility, many refuse to join in our quest to eradicate terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Why? America is obviously attempting to aid the world by obliterating terrorist advances. However, many view America as too ambitious, imperialistic, and selfish.

Burnings in effigy, torching the American flag, and carrying signs stating, “We don’t want Americans,” are just a few of the acts committed by citizens in some foreign countries, such as Pakistan, to express their anger against the United States. Vietnam Veteran, R.J. Del Vecchio commented, “They don’t hate us for who we are, but [for] what we are.” When some fanatics, who may become martyrs, observe a piece of Western civilization in their communities such as a local McDonald’s, they blame America, not the local entrepreneur. Today, even our allies, such as South Korea, do not seem to want us “invading” their borders.

In a recent e-mail, my link, Dr. Diane Oliver, Deputy Director of the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University, provided some insights on the issue of anti-Americanism. She stated, “You might consider how someone in another country might feel about a wealthy nation with a very large military capability in what is now a mono-polar world. These countries have no reason to trust us, or any other country, for that matter.”

When asked why people in other countries “hate” the United States, considering that it is the provider of so much foreign aid, Dr. Oliver discussed the perception that the United States has strong ulterior motives. For example, in a recent speech Nelson Mandela stated that President Bush wanted to stage war against Iraq, with the objective of “obtaining Iraqi oil.” Dr. Oliver commented, “There is a certain logical appeal to this argument. The purpose of the U.S. military is to protect our national security, and oil is critical to the overall welfare of the country...Another example might be that sometimes when the U.S. gives military aid, we want the receiving country to buy weapons and platforms (ships/aircrafts) from American manufacturers thus helping our economy.” She also stated that although the United States attempts to aid others with our foreign relief, “People often do not really appreciate charity even when they desperately need it.”

Whatever the reason, a number of countries continue to detest the United States and its policies. At this point in time, there appears to be little chance that we will obtain peace throughout the world unilaterally. However, I do agree with Dr. Oliver’s concluding statement: “The real difference with regard to building world peace is made when people from different cultures and countries strive to understand each other.”



By Laura Bonin

## Who is Protecting Us?

By Crystal Smith

A typical high school senior does not usually spend his or her lunch period talking about international politics. However, a guest speaker in our Recent International Relations class, Mr. Chris Keon, changed that. My classmates and I could not stop talking about this young Navy Petty Officer and some of the ideas that he presented.

Chris Keon is now serving as a Chemical Warfare Specialist. He touched us for several different reasons. He is very close to our age, as he graduated only five years ago from Millbrook HS, and he has already visited 28 countries. Mr. Keon helped us understand the reality of war, because he is someone whom we can all relate to. His pictures taken in the Middle East of American sailors checking Iraqi ships for smuggled oil also presented a shocking reality. Tragically, two of his buddies were killed during one of these dangerous operations.

Angela Gonzalez commented, "It's amazing that someone who is only five years older than me has been able to experience so many things by serving his country." Because of Mr. Keon's experiences and accomplishments, we started to think about what our lives will be like as young adults.

The most profound outcome of this young sailor's visit is the

renewed sense of patriotism many of us feel for our country. In a letter to Mr. Keon, Udoka Nwaeze commented, "Meeting you has personalized the whole thing, and I realize that this country is truly blessed to have men like yourself who are dedicated, wise, and willing to stand up for our country."

Petty Officer Chris Keon is in our thoughts and prayers as a possible war with Iraq approaches. We are very grateful that skilled and dedicated sailors like him are willing to protect people like us.



Navy Petty Officer  
Chris Keon

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## Good Wars and Bad Wars

By Heather Burton

Is war good or bad? As explained by Mr. R.J. Del Vecchio, one of our Vietnam Veteran guest speakers who served as a Marine Combat Photographer, war can be either *good* or *bad*. He believes "good wars" have outcomes that make the world a better place to live. Our Civil War helped to end slavery. World War II brought an end to the Holocaust. This veteran feels that very little was gained in the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

So what is good or bad about the impending war in Iraq? Mr. Del Vecchio quoted British statesman Edmund Burke who said, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph, is for good men to do nothing." It is widely believed that Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction, and he is prepared to use them. As my classmate Mike Miller commented, "I cannot imagine anyone who would kill little children in front of their family members. If Saddam is using these types of tactics on his own people, then I know that he would use them without regard to others." "Sometimes you just have to fight," concluded Mr. Del Vecchio.

If we do not try to stop Saddam Hussein, who will? If we sit back and do nothing, will there be another horrible terrorist attack on America?

## Changing the Channel

By Susan Woodson

When I tune into the television at night, I usually watch shows for entertainment and laughs. But recently, I turned the TV on to watch the State of the Union Address. At the beginning of each new year, the President delivers a speech to Congress in which he presents his agenda. This year he presented goals that focused on domestic issues, such as our economy and our environment, as well as foreign policy issues. He reassured Congress and the American public that our economy will improve soon and that our military will be successful in defeating terrorism and Saddam Hussein.

As our country meets these challenges, it is comforting to hear President Bush's confidence in our State of the Union. To help fight the War on Terrorism and protect us at home, President Bush proposed that the leaders of the FBI, CIA, Homeland Security, and the Department of Defense form together a Terrorist Threat Integration Center. He provided Congress with supportive information that will help members make decisions that will offer benefits such as tax cuts and security for the American people.

Hopefully, President Bush and Congress will move forward toward accomplishing these goals. When I turned off the television, I realized that it is important for everyone to take time away from entertainment shows and learn about the President's agenda. After watching President Bush's State of the Union Address, I now feel more informed about his plans. Since I intend to vote in the next election, I will be more prepared to make a wise decision in choosing the best candidate. By changing the channel one night to watch the State of the Union Address, I have become more educated about the problems concerning my country, as well as President Bush's proposals to solve them.