



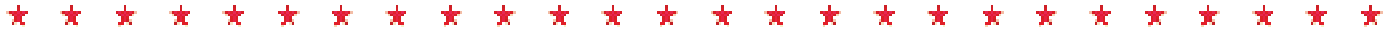
# Bridges

## Lessons of Vietnam



Volume IX, Issue II

Spring 2008



### A Letter to My Link

By Eric Book

**Editor's note:** Each of Ms. Poling's *LOV* students is privileged to "link" with a Vietnam veteran or someone who has close ties to the Vietnam Era. I had the honor of linking with Lt. Colonel Jim Zumwalt during the first semester. I would like to share with our readers excerpts from my reflective thank you letter. Dear Lt. Col. Zumwalt,

*Linking with you this semester has been a wonderful experience for me. Having the opportunity to meet you and your sister made me feel closer to your family... I could sense the family bond that you all have...Your family's commitment to serving this country is extremely admirable...*

*"Think outside the box." Linking with you has made me think outside the box. By your analogies and stories you showed the importance of thinking outside the box. Your father, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. certainly thought outside the box. Your father could have left the Navy all white/all male and probably would have been seen as a successful leader at that time. He probably had more enemies because he did what was right. He thought outside the box. He did what was needed, not what was wanted.*

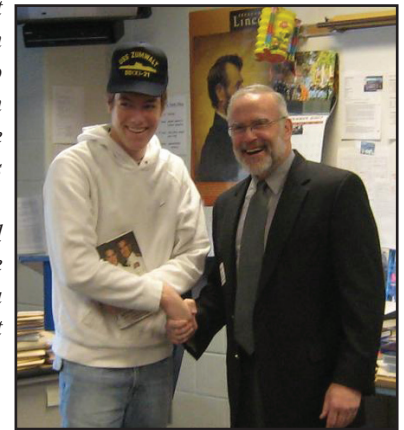
*I want to leave you with a piece from the letter I am*

*writing to your sister, Mouzetta: "Your family is an inspiration. Your family is an inspiration to have a strong family bond. Your family is an inspiration to lead. Your family is an inspiration to serve. Your family is an inspiration to help people. Your family is an inspiration to do what is right. Your family is an inspiration to families to support one another through thick and thin...To me, the definition of "Zumwalt" is "inspiration."*

*I am so thankful that Ms. Poling gave me the honor to be your link. You have made a positive impact on my life.*

Sincerely,

Eric Book



Eric poses with his link, Lt. Col. Zumwalt.



### The Vietnam Under My Roof

By Lisa Huynh

I would without a doubt call myself a true American. Although English was my second language rather than my first, although I eat an assortment of home-cooked meals, none of which are anything in the same realm as a hamburger, and although I grew up on stories of my mother's escape from Vietnam during the War, I still am an American through and through. However, I never understood just how much I "bleed red, white and blue" until my cousin moved into the bedroom next to mine. Her name is Van Khanh. She is twenty and is as different from me as is genetically possible for two people who are kin. The story of her coming is a simple, yet hopeful, one. Khanh's mother, and my aunt, wanted her daughter to live a life clean of the impoverished and demanding world of Ho Chi Minh City, where they live. So come last December, my aunt and cousin were at my doorstep--my aunt to stay for two weeks, and my cousin for good. The goodbyes at the airport were the worst. Khanh had tears flowing down her face, her head buried in her mother's shoulder, left with the burden of expected achievement in a country unknown to her-- not to mention a forced new life in a

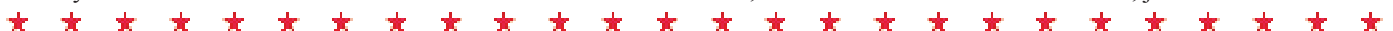
house with people she had only met twice, and with the knowledge that she will not be able to see her mother's face in another two years. "Be strong," my aunt said to her, "be strong."



Khanh and Lisa show off Khanh's brand new Honda Civic.

Her first test of this "new life" came in the form of the DMV. In Vietnam, Khanh only knew how to drive motorcycles, not cars. Furthermore, the rules of the road there were just not to crash into anyone. I drove her to the DMV three separate times until she finally earned her permit. Now, she is taking weekly driving lessons where I sit in the backseat as the interpreter. I have introduced her to the Philly cheese steak, helped her memorize every store in the mall by name, and taken her to see Hollywood's stars on screen. The

more time I spend with her, the more I begin to understand the life in which she lived, and how much it differed from mine. For instance, she talks whenever there is a pause in conversation like all Vietnamese, whereas I only talk when I have something to say. "You are an American," Khanh said to me one day. Yes, I am; and to her I no doubt represent America, just as she is Vietnam to me. Thus, here we are: America and Vietnam, joined under one roof.



# How Do You Know the Enemy?

By Molly Emmett

Heat, rain, floods, booby traps, and jungles were only a few aspects of the unfamiliar environment young soldiers encountered in Vietnam. But none of these were as difficult to face as the “friend or foe” dilemma. Not only was this one of the most challenging aspects of the war, it is also one of the most difficult for students to understand. In the eyes of many Americans, it is difficult to grasp the idea that two warring sides could be indistinguishable; but they forget the lessons of Vietnam – a country once united, then divided, and now united again.



Artwork by Sally Lulciuc

would help fight for the motherland and drive the foreigners out.

One of the toughest situations facing American soldiers was interfacing with children. During the Vietnam war, children were employed by the enemy to set booby traps – for the very reason Americans tended to view children as innocents. For example, children would be instructed to pull a wire to activate a landmine as Americans neared a position. Children were also often used as couriers for messages and supplies, transiting from their local village into the middle of the jungle

To the American soldiers, North and South Vietnamese civilians and soldiers often looked identical. Throughout the war there was little to differentiate one side from the other. Factor in also that there were those who switched from one side to the other, causing allegiances often to be questioned. It is no wonder some uncertainty existed in knowing who was friend and who was foe. Many South Vietnamese officials had fought with the Viet Minh forces against the French, and later moved south once they understood Ho Chi Minh’s “mission.” The Viet Cong were effective in convincing many civilians that Ho Chi Minh would provide them with everything needed to live if they

where the Viet Cong operated. For the American soldiers, the idea of killing a child was inhumane. But, in that war, the Viet Cong could be anyone. Our soldiers always had to suspect danger.

The “friend or foe” issue was one of the most puzzling aspects of the war and remains of great interest today to many scholars. In a correspondence addressing the issue, my link, Ambassador Nguyen Xuan Phong, observed, “This problem of ‘friend or foe’ among the Vietnamese brother-enemies during the war was actually a complex issue which actually conditioned many other aspects of the conflict.”

# A Communist Connection

By Catherine Leake

For several decades, Cuba and Vietnam have often been a major focus of U.S. attention. The United States came close to nuclear war with Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, and we fought our longest war in Vietnam in the 1960’s and 70’s. Two years before the Vietnam War ended, Cuban President Fidel Castro visited Vietnam as a staunch ally of the communists. Since that visit, Castro has managed to come up with ways to maintain a connection with the Southeast Asian country.



Longtime Cuban President Fidel Castro meets with Vietnamese officials.

Now, we find that both countries have come together to boost their economic ties. Many Cuban and Vietnamese business people have met in either Havana or Hanoi in order to seek trade, business, and investment opportunities. The two countries have discussed further

work in energy, agriculture, communication, tourism, technology, and construction. On June 1, 2007, Cuba and Vietnam signed an agreement in oil exploration, under which two of the largest oil companies will drill oil on shore and in the Gulf of Mexico. The agreement was made between *Cuba Petroleos* and *Petrovietnam* and represents a partnership for exploration. Following China, Vietnam is Cuba’s second largest Asian trading partner. At the *Vietnam-Cuba Inter-Governmental Committee for Economic, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation Conference* in Hanoi, Vietnamese Minister of Construction Nguyen Hong Quan pledged to support the Cuban companies in establishing a trade business with Vietnam.

Vietnam hopes to further sponsor business with Cuba in order to promote trade with countries in the Caribbean and Latin America. The *Vietnam-Cuba Inter-Governmental Committee* pledged that Cuba will continue to forge cooperation with Vietnam. Vietnam’s Construction Minister feels Vietnam will do all it can to promote this relationship by building a world of equality, peace, stability, and development. But with hundreds of Vietnamese and Cubans escaping their country each year, it will be a while before Hanoi and Havana can convince their citizens greener pastures lie at home.





## ARVN: Their Story Finally Will Be Told

By Andy Didsbury

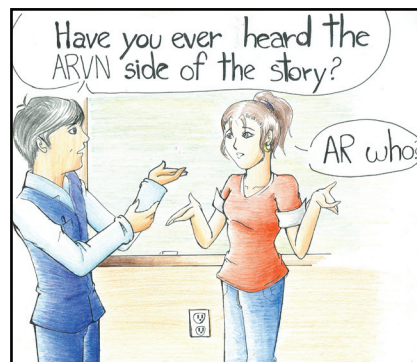
The story of the U.S. soldier in Vietnam has been told and retold since the end of the Vietnam War. The actions of these courageous men who fought and died for their country have been commemorated in films, memorials, ceremonies. But, at least on this side of the Pacific Ocean, we tend to forget who also fought for their country. They were the hard-fighting and hard-living group of soldiers called the “Army of the Republic of Vietnam.”

Respected *LOV* speaker, link, field trip chaperone, and former Army Ranger, Phil Beane, has been working on a project that will finally give the ARVN the recognition they deserve. “I knew I wanted to learn more about these truly ‘forgotten’ soldiers of the Vietnam War,” said Mr. Beane. This Vietnam veteran, who took classes at the Duke Center for Documentary Studies, decided to produce an independent documentary chronicling the experiences of these soldiers that history seems to have forgotten. His inspiration for this project did not come from his experiences fighting alongside these soldiers, but rather from the beginning of a friendship. “Ms. Lindy Poling asked me one year if I would share my class time with a Vietnamese man who had served with the ARVN. I was excited at the opportunity to hear his stories each semester and became a friend of Mr. Loc Duong. His stories had drama, heartbreak, bravery and a strong sense of family.”

While actively researching information about the ARVN, Mr. Beane was able to meet additional former ARVN soldiers through the Vietnam Healing Foundation (VHF). This work spurred on his interest in the project, as he learned about the cruel mistreatment that ARVN veterans still face

to this day. Mr. Beane plans to use a 28-minute film of interviews with ARVN soldiers to complete his *Certificate in Documentary Studies*. “If the project is received well, I hope that it can be made into a longer film that can be shown at special film festivals and to Vietnamese/American groups.”

Mr. Beane concluded, “It is not my intention to make any money from this film or to change anyone’s mind about the war, but to tell the truly untold story of these men.” Even if it is forty years later, these men will finally get the recognition they deserve.



Artwork by Irma Tello



## World War II Comes to Life

By Chantelle Martin

For the 12th year in a row, Mrs. Poling’s *Honors U.S. History* students had the privilege of hearing two wonderful World War II Era speakers. These two amazing senior citizens, Delores and H.T. Conner, connected with the class in an entertaining and educational way. Aspects of war often carry a negative connotation; however, Mr. and Mrs. Conner were able to show the patriotic side of war through their singing, dancing, and fascinating descriptions. Their deep love and admiration for one another touched the students’ hearts and showed us that no matter what you go through, there is always something to look forward to in the future.

Mr. and Mrs. Conner grew up during the years of the Great Depression. Both of their fathers died at a young age. Their mothers could not support their families; thus, they moved to the Masonic Home Orphanage in Richmond, Virginia. It was here that both of them met and became friends. They eventually went their own way over the next several decades. What brought them back together was Mrs. Conner’s response to an article that Mr. Conner wrote for the Masonic Home Newsletter. Now, they’ve been married for twelve years.

The couple’s intriguing presentation began with Mrs. Conner’s vivid recollection of where she was during the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Mr. Conner was drafted into the Air Force and

was stationed in China. He explained that he was helping China eliminate Japan’s territorial gains. Back in the United States, women sang patriotic songs to boost morale. Mrs. Conner’s most important lesson of sacrifice was demonstrated by her description of widespread rationing in this country.



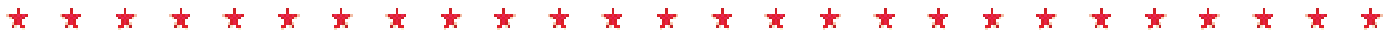
Mr. and Mrs. Conner share their WWII experiences with MHS students.

World War II servicemen discovered that news about fellow comrades was often limited. “One of the hardest things I had deal with,” said Mr. Conner, “was to go back to the barracks and see a vacant bed where someone you knew used to sleep. It gave you an eerie feeling.”

American spirits, however, remained high throughout the war. Then in August, 1945, the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. At the time Mr. Conner was ecstatic because it meant that he would not have to continue to fight against the Japanese. But, in retrospect, he feels that this was one of the worst moves our country ever made.

At the end of their presentation, this amazing couple sang and danced to a WWII Era song one more time before thanking us for having them. Our class resoundingly thanked them, too, for we all felt we had experienced a wonderful historical journey back in time. By the end of the period, everyone had smiles on their faces, knowing that the opportunity to hear the Conners was a gift that could not be surpassed by anything else.





## Korea: Freedom vs. Tyranny

By Megan Knox

There may be no clearer example that highlights the blessings of a free, democratic society than the situation we have in North and South Korea. Before the Korean conflict of the 1950's, Korea was a single nation, populated with a people of a singular background. After the war, the country was split into the two nations appearing on world maps today. North Korea, supported by the communist Chinese, became a totalitarian state, with its people living under a repressive dictatorship. Meanwhile, South Korea, supported by the U.S. and other Western nations, became a democratic society. In the decades since the Korean conflict's truce was signed, one can see a world of difference in the lives of this once unified population.



Artwork by Zach Smithson

South Korea has become an economic world power as its people have flourished. The freedoms afforded South Koreans have enabled them to build a society that the North Koreans can only dream about. In contrast, North Korean domestic life is considered to be one of the worst in the world. The people of this isolated country are not allowed contact with the outside world by way of mail, internet, telephone, or radio. Many North Korean people are severely affected by malnutrition. It is estimated close to sixty percent of all North Korean children (the highest percentage of any nation in the world) suffer from

a lack of nourishment. When international aid is given to the North, it quickly turns it into a propaganda effort. In one instance, for example, the U.S. sent 500,000 tons of food. This gift was explained by the North Korean government to its people as tribute paid to their powerful nation. Meanwhile, as the North Korean people suffer, their leader, Kim Jong-il, lives like a king. Thirty percent of the North's domestic income goes straight to its military, with whom the nation's leaders maintain a close relationship, enabling them to hold onto their privileged positions. As darkness falls at night over the Korean peninsula, if one could fly like a bird over the two countries, the contrast would be obvious with the brightly lit cities of the South,

as opposed to the darkness engulfing the cities of the North, a testimonial to the human spirit in a free society.

As we observe the U.S. Presidential election season of 2008, we may at times get aggravated, disgusted, and perturbed by the process and candidates with whom we particularly disagree. But through it all, we should be so thankful that our forefathers chose a path of freedom, and established a nation that has thus prospered as has no other. If one questions this thought, they need only look at the example of the two Koreas!



## The Best Revenge

By Hillary Stewart

To many Americans, Afghanistan and Iraq represent our major concerns. Recent news articles tell us we now need to take a closer look at Pakistan and its President, Pervez Musharraf. The United States and Pakistan were said to be on good terms until Musharraf's self-appointed presidential term began running out. His opponent was to be Mrs. Benazir Bhutto, daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto—the nation's first democratic prime minister—politician in the Pakistan People's Party, and former two-time Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Mrs. Bhutto was the first female prime minister of a Muslim country, a notable accomplishment. She was a woman who was greatly respected and who believed democracy to be the best revenge. As prime minister, she initially did not see the Taliban as a threat, but when she returned to run against Musharraf this time, she did not hesitate to be very vocal about her anti-Taliban concerns. She did not fear making such statements openly in the public eye, as her failing to do so meant that the terrorists had won. She felt she needed to be in the streets with her people.

Raised by democratic parents, Mrs. Bhutto refused to give up on the dream of her father. She distinctly remembered his last words, "You can walk away. You're young. You can go to live in London or Paris or Geneva." She told him, "No!" because she had

to keep the "mission" of democracy alive. Mrs. Benazir Bhutto felt that terrorists had no business being involved with politics. During her first two terms as prime minister, she tried to rid the government of the ISI



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(Pakistan's infamous intelligence service) which held a contrary viewpoint, but she was overthrown for doing so.

Pakistan's future could have been bright, or at least brighter than it looks now. Mrs. Benazir Bhutto was assassinated December 27, 2007 while attending an election rally in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. The assassin has not yet been identified, although there are definite suspects. We will never know the impact on Pakistan Mrs. Bhutto might have had had she not been assassinated. The concerns we have about Pakistan—from al-Qaeda to nuclear weapons—will now continue as we await the impact the upcoming elections, without Mrs. Bhutto, will have on the future of the country.





## Story of a Soldier

By Molly Emmett

Most students know the American soldier only through statistics and their studies in history class; but they never get to know the individual. North Carolina State University's D. H. Hill Library recently housed a photo exhibit titled, *The American Soldier: A Photographic Tribute from the Civil War to Iraq*. The exhibit was sprawled across the lower floor of the library and included plenty of photos from nine wars. Its main focus was on the Army and the Marines, but it also included Air Force and Navy images. Many were Pulitzer Prize winning photographs, including two of the Iraq War by Cheryl Diaz Meyer.

I found this exhibit to be extraordinary! It began with the Civil War and twisted around the walls as each war unfolded and concluded, featuring continuing advancements in photography. The photographs from all the wars were surprisingly clear, even those from the Civil War Era which had been enlarged to at least sixteen by twenty inch photos. Another surprise was the number of women, not just nurses, involved in each conflict. After completing my *Lessons of Vietnam* course, it was surprising to see some new and different photographs from the Vietnam Era. The searing eyes of a weary soldier were not uncommon, as these portraits were often placed around the corners of the exhibit where they would have a lasting impression.

The most astonishing aspect of the exhibit was the feeling I had upon leaving. To me, this exhibit was truly humbling and a wonderful tribute to all soldiers past, present, and future. I believe if the exhibit had a voice, it would have quietly said: "As the camera got closer to the soldier's life, it captured a story—one of hard times, humor, courage, camaraderie, honor, victory—and, the ultimate sacrifice, death."

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## 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/>

## Point of View: Educational Progress?

By Annie Wheeler



Major issues in presidential elections come and go. What will the front runners in the 2008 election plan to do for education now--and later? With foreign policy and economic issues stealing the limelight, education has been shoved to the backburner. However, as young voters, we should focus on subjects that directly affect us, such as our educational future.

Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton is a longtime supporter of a wide range of educational opportunities for everyone. She has already helped to push through the Early Head Start Program in New York State for students from low income backgrounds. Senator Clinton also supports an overhaul of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) program, which she says 'stifles originality and forces teachers to focus on preparing students for tests.' Senator Barack Obama plans to implement a Zero to Five Plan which emphasizes effective early education that will better prepare youngsters for kindergarten. A statement on his official website says that Senator Obama also wants to "improve the assessments used to track student progress to measure readiness for college and the workplace and improve student learning in a timely, individualized manner. Obama will also improve *NCLB*'s accountability system so that we are supporting schools that need improvement, rather than punishing them." Republican Senator John McCain perceives *No Child Left Behind* as an eye-opener for Americans. He feels that this initiative shows how well students perform against standards. He strongly believes that low standards should not be accepted by parents, teachers, or students. Arkansas Governor, Mike Huckabee, has an alternative plan for *NCLB*. A similar program should be implemented, he believes, but he wants each state to have its own standards by which progress can be tested and judged.

*No Child Left Behind* legislation has not demonstrated the positive results our government was hoping for. The main focus seems to be on standardized testing of math and reading skills. Teenagers are curious, inquisitive human beings who can be motivated to acquire knowledge about important issues on our own. Many *LOV* students echo my sentiments regarding high stakes testing, such as senior, Ashley Ray, who commented, "Testing doesn't promote learning, passion, or understanding--merely memorizing long enough to write facts down." When knowledge is forced upon teenagers in an unstimulating way, it generally has no staying power. At *nochildleft.com*, many critics agree that the *NCLB* mandate and the stringent testing that comes along with it are "untested, unproven and laced with political motives that could do great damage to public education."

I believe excessive testing and pressure upon core subject areas has disconnected students from education. It will take a true fighter to change this negative epidemic. Our new president cannot jump on the *NCLB* bandwagon. We need innovative and effective educational policies that challenge today's generation of students to develop the important critical thinking and writing skills they need in order to become well-informed citizens and effective leaders in their communities.