



# Bridges

## Lessons of Vietnam



### What Is Freedom?

By Crystal Smith

What is *freedom*? According to Mr. Loc Duong, one of our Vietnamese ARVN refugee guest teachers, "America" is his definition of freedom. After spending many years in re-education and refugee camps, he came to America and now works as a custodian at our school. Mr. Loc noted many of the liberties that we take for granted, such as going to school and driving our cars wherever we want, as key examples of why "America" is his definition of freedom. He is very thankful for these rights, because he knows what it is like when they are denied. He truly believed in the South Vietnamese cause and fought for his country, as well as his freedom, during the Vietnam War.

Mr. Son Pham is another ARVN refugee who spoke to our class. His vivid escape story really captured our attention. He fled Vietnam on the day Saigon fell via a damaged plane that was left behind. He had to dodge bomb craters on the runway as he

escaped. He is now a successful IBM consultant and has a son attending Millbrook High School. Mr. Pham, like Mr. Loc, was fighting for freedom during the War in Vietnam. When asked why he came to America, he replied that he wanted to be free, and he knew that he would not find the freedom that he desired under the control of the Communists. One of his most inspiring messages was his belief that *true accomplishment is when you can help people*.

We learned that these men feel that they are now living the American dream. Unquestionably, the most important things we gained from hearing from Mr. Loc and Mr. Pham are a new appreciation for our country and respect for those who risked their lives to have what we all take for granted.



Mr. Loc Duong



Mr. Son Pham



### Appreciating the Little Things

By Michele Wahula

In May of 1972, the North Vietnamese shot down Colonel Bill Talley while flying his 181st mission to Hanoi. Twenty-four hours later he was captured, and eventually taken to the infamous Hanoi Hilton where he became a prisoner of war. Col. Talley came to our *Lessons of Vietnam* class to share his experiences as a POW. When I found out a POW was going to speak with us, I pictured someone who would be bitter about the War and hateful towards the Vietnamese. I was amazed to find that Col. Talley was light-hearted, humorous, and compassionate. Col. Talley truly captured our attention with numerous inspirational stories, which reinforced the importance of spirituality, patriotism, and comradeship.

One of the stories he told was about a man named Robbic Reisner. This man was a POW who started leading worship services for the POW's. The North Vietnamese would not allow this and threatened to put him in solitary confinement if he did not suspend services. However, he continued the services and the enemy put him in solitary confinement. As he was being led away, the POW's began to sing "God Bless America." This emotional gesture made him "feel nine feet tall," and that is why a nine-foot tall statue of Mr. Reisner stands today at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Col. Talley also used amazing live demonstrations. He not only explained the torture techniques, but he actually let students "experience" a few of them. He also passed around the tiny bowl in which the POW's were given soup, and the pants and rubber sandals they wore. Seeing these items and witnessing the torture techniques left each of us with a far greater understanding of the POW experience than any book could ever give us.

Col. Talley taught us to appreciate our freedom and *the little things* in life. He told us that one of the things he missed the most while he was in Vietnam was being able to go to the refrigerator and get a cold glass of water. He even felt sorry for the North Vietnamese, because he knew that he would someday return to America and have our luxuries again while they would not. The fact that he can show empathy for his enemy is an incredibly admirable quality. Col. Talley quoted Dr. Viktor Frankl, who said, "A man can take everything from you except the freedom to choose your own attitude in any given set of circumstances." I had heard this quote before, but until now, I did not fully appreciate it. *LOV* student, Joey Massey and many of my classmates feel that the best lesson Col. Talley taught us is: "If you have faith in God, your country, your family, and each other, you can endure anything."



Col. Bill Talley, NAM-POW





## Vital Lessons in Character Education

By Rebecca Schley

Ms. Lindy Poling, our *Lessons of Vietnam* teacher, recently participated in the National Council of the Social Studies Annual Conference. The four-day event held in Phoenix, Arizona allowed educators from across the U.S. and the world a chance to share their expertise in teaching character. Character Education is starting to catch the attention of public schools, especially in states like North Carolina, and the value of including it in everyday lessons is significant and highly desired.

In her VVMF team presentation, Ms. Poling explained how the *Lessons of Vietnam* class provides opportunities to teach character development: "We are finding good evidence that students are very interested in having Vietnam veterans, their spouses, former ARVN soldiers, war correspondents, peace activists, Vietnamese refugees, and others come into our classroom to talk about difficult personal challenges and moral dilemmas they faced. Traits like courage, respect, responsibility and caring can be very effectively taught by each one of us



Community-in-the-Classroom

with the help of well-informed 'guest teachers'."

As a *LOV* student, I can attest that we all become engrossed in the lessons we learn from *living history*. The experiences and personal stories guest speakers share with us are very effective in humanizing important character traits such as courage, perseverance, good judgment, caring, and responsibility.

## Back in My Day... Lessons Learned

By Michele Wahula and Kim Dragos

As *Lessons of Vietnam* students questioned their family members and teachers regarding their memories of the Vietnam Era, they discovered many different lessons and values taken from this tragic period of history. Each interviewee shed light on the ways in which these lessons may be applied to each of our lives. With our country yet again at war, it is vital for American citizens, as well as our government, to draw from the knowledge we have gained from the Vietnam War experience. The following quotes express some of these valuable lessons:

- "The world is extremely diverse and what works for us may not particularly work for other nations. We must accept our differences." ~MHS Uncle
- "Respect the veterans because they gave up their lives for our country." ~MHS Father
- "We must remember that young people can successfully challenge the government and change policies." ~MHS Father
- "Look at all sides of a question before we come to a decision, and question authority, not just blindly accept it." ~MHS Mother
- "Democracy is worth fighting for, but we must be careful how and why we commit our children's lives." ~MHS Father
- "The greatest warrior is one who is either able to prevent war or who works to alleviate the suffering caused by war." ~MHS Uncle



## My Most Memorable Adventure

By LaToya Carlton

While applying for a college scholarship I was asked to write about my most exciting high school memory. Since I have traveled to places such as Germany, Czech Republic, Italy, London, as well as many places across the United States, not to mention that I have attended four different high schools, I thought this scholarship application would be a breeze. I thought the home run I scored in softball that helped my team win the game would be a wonderful story. Then I thought about my award-winning role in the school play.

Now, I truly see what deserves to be written. You see, I moved to North Carolina not knowing much about the state. I came to Millbrook High not knowing much about the school. I took *Lessons of Vietnam* not knowing much about the class; and I put my trust into my teacher, Ms. Poling, not knowing much about her either. All I honestly knew was that I could take a wonderful trip to Washington, DC. As I completed my first week of school, I thought there was no way I could pass the *LOV* class. I felt my previous knowledge of Vietnam was less than that of my classmates. Even when Ms. Poling assured me I would do fine, I was still skeptical.

But now, I understand that *LOV* is not a class, and you cannot fail. *LOV* is an adventure and you will always learn; as long as you are learning, you cannot fail. The *LOV* adventure has taught me history, philosophy, and something that I've never learned in any other class, **understanding**. This adventure has taught me about Vietnam, the country and the culture; why the men and women who served in the War are so affected and now so honored; and how bright and intelligent my peers are. On top of that I have learned the value of words. When guest speakers like Ms. Lee Wilson respond to the reflective letters each student writes, my heart is touched in a way I have never felt before.

I personally feel the only way to truly learn is through experience. Our guest speakers and our links help us obtain a true understanding of the War. Of all the twenty-seven classes I have taken, this is the only one that has taught me in a way I will never forget. I am very thankful to Ms. Poling for keeping the adventure as interesting as she has, and to all of the guest speakers who have given me a reason to **learn** and **understand**. For without all those who support the *LOV* class, there would be no adventure to speak of, or a great story for my scholarship!



## A Veteran's Reflection on Veterans Day

Editor's Note:

The *Bridges* staff would like to share this letter from one of our veteran links reflecting his thoughts on Veterans Day.

Dear Linh,

Thank you for your kind thoughts about Veterans Day. Over the years, I had sort of forgotten what the holiday was all about. But, this year it was a bit more meaningful, because of you, Mrs. Poling and the class. For that I am truly grateful. I don't feel that I should be one of those honored on that day, but to be remembered as one who served is greatly appreciated.

A couple of years ago, my wife, Judie, and I visited my brother in Maryland. While we were there, we all went to see the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. That was the first and only time that I had ever been there. I had always felt that I was in complete control of my emotions. However, as I was finding friends of mine, one in particular, on The Wall, I found myself crying. My family went on ahead of me and gave me some private time to remember those who were part of my life, and had given such a sacrifice. It was truly a moving experience for me.

I have not seen the movie, *To Heal A Nation*. Maybe someday I will. But, I can tell you what the memorial means to me. When I came back from the war, I spent about three months at Walter Reed Army Hospital. While I was recuperating, we were advised **not** to wear the uniform when we left to go on leave. The anti-war sentiment was very strong in some areas, as you already know. For young men to sacrifice everything and then be confronted like this was quite disturbing. Then a few years later, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was built. This unique structure not only gave tribute to all who served during that period, but more importantly, honored those individually who gave their lives for their country. For parents who lost a child, for brother and sister who lost part of their family, and for the young children who lost their father, this is a fitting remembrance, not only for today, but also for years to come. They will not be forgotten. The differences that we experienced among ourselves back then have been resolved in this memorial. It healed many wounds.



Thank you,  
Tom Dingbaum



### A Tribute to the Memorial that Heals

By Elizabeth Lodge

From November 6-11<sup>th</sup>, 2002, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) held the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of The Wall. To open the ceremonies, the VVMF organized a musical tribute to Vietnam veterans on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Artists like Paul Revere and the Raiders, Bill Danoff, and Country Joe McDonald filled the air with '60's music from the steps of the Reflecting Pool. Following this event was the 'Reading of the Names.' Crowds filled various events, such as a Veterans Day Dinner, a tour of Washington, DC with American University Professor Ed Smith, and other special ceremonies at The Wall. As many as 20,000 individuals attended the various ceremonies and events.

Ms. Holly Rotondi, VVMF Special Ceremonies Coordinator, and Ms. Tricia Edwards, VVMF Program Director, were key figures in making the celebration a success. Ms. Edwards believes the 'Reading of the Names' was the most significant ceremony of the week. 2,000 Volunteers read the 58,229 names of every soldier, sailor, or airman who fought and died for our country in Vietnam. They were honored and remembered, as they should be, as heroes. Ms. Edwards made an interesting point, saying: "There is something very powerful about hearing the names read for 65 hours. It really drives home... all the lives that were lost in Vietnam."

Other celebrations also have served to impact our nation and the families of soldiers. In preparation for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the VVMF released a compilation of essays titled *The War and the Wall*. In addition, various speakers such as Senator John Kerry; General Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi were invited to share their insights regarding The Wall. Another unique celebration occurred with the unveiling of Jamie Wyeth's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary painting, "Night Vision." During the final ceremony on Veterans Day, VVMF President Jan Scruggs made the following remarks: "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund is honored to celebrate The Wall's 20 years of honoring our nation's veterans, healing the wounds of the Vietnam War and educating our country's school children about one of the most divisive times in American history. It is a testament to the Memorial's

healing power that two decades after its dedication, it remains one of the most revered memorials in the world." True to his statement, The Wall has been healing individuals for twenty years, and it will continue to do so far into the future.





## Book Review: *Moon Dash Warrior*

By Nic Pilley

*Moon Dash Warrior* is a true-life story of one man's life-altering experiences that took place during the Vietnam War. This autobiographical sketch of Delano Cummings' three tours of Vietnam illustrates the growth of a young innocent boy to a hardened man. Delano Cummings is a Lumbee Indian from eastern North Carolina who joined the Marines less than two years out of high school. He was able to deal with so many horrific ordeals because of his Lumbee pride and the fact that he is a Marine.

I enjoyed reading and learning about Mr. Cummings' thirty-seven month experience in Vietnam. This story goes into specific details of what the fighting was like in a foreign country. Before reading *Moon Dash Warrior*, I had no idea that so much of the firefighting occurred at nighttime. I really enjoyed how this novel portrayed the author's thoughts during the War. As a reader, I am able to learn more effectively about a person who went to fight in Vietnam by reading his own thoughts.

*Moon Dash Warrior* is not a story for the light-hearted. This story goes into descriptive battles, ambushes, and the utter inhumanity of war. The story is not all blood and guts; it has a lighter side with the everyday humor. This story also has an element of sadness when it tells of the deaths of Delano Cummings' friends and just how cruel war can be to the unlucky. *Moon Dash Warrior* illustrates just how lucky some men are in war, such as Delano Cummings, who had several near death experiences.

Overall, I found *Moon Dash Warrior* to be one of the best books that I have ever read. I would recommend this true-life adventure of a tough Marine to anyone interested in the Vietnam War or anyone who is interested in learning about the character of a soldier in Vietnam.



## Seasons Greetings



*from the Bridges Staff!*



### From Link to Link

Editors Note:

The *Bridges* staff would like to share a special link letter with our readers.

Dear Ms. Oliver,

Thank you for being my partner in my efforts to find the questions and answers to the lessons of the Vietnam War. As a result of this interesting and informative program, I have grown and matured greatly.

You are an intelligent and remarkable individual. When I ponder your amazing life and what you have experienced, from horrifying coups in the Philippines to witnessing the return of POW's, some of the lost heroes in many wars, I can only hope that I will be able to contribute to world affairs by informing individuals on distinct aspects throughout our history, like you. I admire and appreciate everything you have done for me over the last few months.

You are a great role model and you have inspired me to attack and accomplish my goals, and to become a strong and intelligent woman with the intent to benefit society. Thank you for your endless care and empathy towards our program and towards me, because you saw a student who had and still has a great interest in the War. I express great gratitude to you for thoughtfully and truthfully answering my questions during my assignment.

I appreciate all the time and effort you exerted to aid me not only on my project, but also in life. This assignment taught me many things: One being that there are many unanswered questions about the War, and that we can always continue to search for them.

Thank you. Hopefully we will continue to e-mail, and I would truly enjoy meeting you someday.

Sincerely,  
Bevonnie Loudon



## Bridges Staff

**Editor:** Rebecca Schley

**Production Designer:** Laura Browning

**Staff:** Will Allen, Kim Dragos, Angela Gonzalez, Taylor Henry, Frida Krebs, Elizabeth Lodge, Bev Loudon, Courtney Moore, Nic Pilley, Lauryn Reece, Crystal Smith, Matthew Turrentine, Chris Wagoner, Michele Wahula, Susan Woodson

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

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and <http://mhs.wcpss.net>

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