



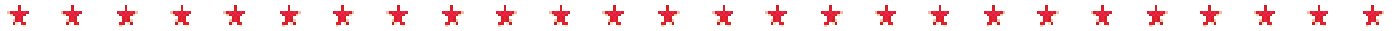
# Bridges

## Lessons of Vietnam



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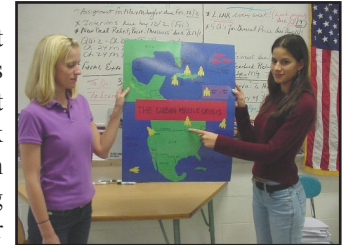
### Revisiting the Cold War

*By Caitlin Radford and Cristina Chenlo*

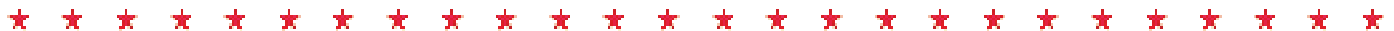
In order to better understand the events leading up to the Vietnam War, *LOV/RIR* students chose to research and present a project relating to the Cold War Era. Topics included The Korean War, The Cuban Missile Crisis, The Marshall Plan, The Berlin Airlift, McCarthyism, Sputnik, and The U-2 Incident.

These topics were presented in several ways and included posters, handmade models, and power point presentations. At the end of each presentation, the class was asked to respond to a set of “quiz questions” developed by each group. The Cold War projects

helped *LOV/RIR* students not only understand the major events relating to the Vietnam War, but they also encouraged teamwork and improved communication skills. We are eagerly looking forward to continuing our learning experience through future projects and presentations.



*LOV students present  
“The Cuban Missile Crisis.”*



### The Internal Struggle in Vietnam

*By Sheelah Iyengar and Marielena Diaz*

“What is Democracy?” is the title of an article written by Pham Hong Son, a Vietnamese doctor and businessman. He wrote in a letter to the head of the Vietnamese Communist Party that Vietnam was ready for democracy. But apparently, not so, for Pham Hong Son was charged with espionage and sentenced to 13 years in prison following a half-day trial in Hanoi in June 2003. No one was allowed to attend his trial and his sentence was eventually reduced.

The Vietnamese Communist Party firmly controls speech within the country. It heavily monitors domestic newspapers, television, and radio stations. It maintains strict control over Internet access. Several dissidents and democracy activists have been arrested and tried on criminal charges for criticizing the government or pushing for party reforms. The government exercises control over religion, from ordination of Catholic clergy to prohibition of flood relief efforts by the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. Christians are frequently arrested and pressured to renounce their faith.

Police officers arrest and confine suspects without warrants; authorities hold suspects in detention for over a year before they are charged or tried. Human Rights Watch has received reports about detainees in “cramped, dark, unsanitary cells; lack of medical care; and police brutalities, including the use of electric shock batons.” Trials are closed to the press and the public,

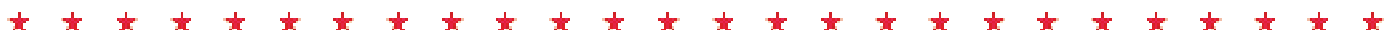
including families. Over 100 death sentences were issued in 2004 for small crimes, such as armed robbery or drug trafficking.

In June 2005, Human Rights Watch gained the opportunity to testify about the human rights situation in Vietnam. That same week, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai visited the U.S.—a momentous event, as it was the first such visit since the end of the war. The Bush Administration pressed Vietnam to improve its human rights record. Vietnam still has a long way to go, having recently moved up to 108<sup>th</sup> in the 177-nation ranking of the Human Development Index (HDI) table. The UN Human Development Report says, “Vietnam has established a strong balance between its economic growth and human development. [It] is an example of a country that has converted high growth into rapid development.”

Vietnam should not take any comfort in an HDI ranking that leaves them within the bottom 45<sup>th</sup> percentile. The country’s healthcare sector is insufficient due to lack of sickbeds, medical facilities, medical workers, expensive drug prices, and poor management. The country’s GDP index, the most important factor for healthcare and education, continues to be low, indicating the country still has to focus on efforts to boost economic growth. Hopefully, the government will come to realize that a bustling economy will steadily flourish only in an environment in which the individual rights of its people are *fully* recognized.



*Artwork by Samantha Wilkerson*





## Spreading the Word

By Cristina Chenlo



On the weekend of November 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, our *LOV/RIR* teacher and *Bridges* advisor, Ms. Lindy Poling, traveled to the 2005 National Council for the Social Studies Annual Conference in Kansas City, Missouri. There she made a presentation to over sixty educators titled, "Teaching Vietnam through Personal Stories and Experiences." Her presentation highlighted the unique methods she has developed over the years to teach *Lessons of Vietnam*. She encouraged teachers "to incorporate original sources and oral histories whenever possible to better understand the conflicts and moral dilemmas that our military and political leaders faced during the Vietnam Era." The audience observed pictures and testimonies of many students, speakers, and links who have contributed to our program. Through these observations, educators were able to better comprehend the value of exposing students to multiple viewpoints from a variety of sources. One teacher commented, "Since I am the only one in my area to teach this unit

it was awesome to see someone else's ideas, perspectives, and lessons. It only enhanced my enthusiasm about my own unit."

Ms. Poling also shared our *Bridges* newsletter publication in her second presentation, "Starting a National History Club in Your School," with Mr. Bob Nasson, Director of the National History Club, and Ms. Karen Green, NHC Advisor at Aspen (CO) High School. Attendees were amazed at the wide range of topics in our newsletter, as well as the writing and artistic talents of our *Bridges* Staff.

There is no doubt that Ms. Poling's participation in the 2005 NCSS Conference was worthwhile! Educators from all over the country learned about Millbrook High School's *Lessons of Vietnam/Community in the Classroom* programs.

Many said that they hope to incorporate an effective oral history program in their own classes to help their students better understand an important subject in American history that is too often disregarded: The Vietnam War.



## Speaker Spotlight: Mr. Dan Sheehan

By Matney Murad

As I walked into room 246 on September 26<sup>th</sup>, I was extremely nervous. Although our class had been spending time learning about the Vietnam War and preparing for our first speaker, I had not yet heard a personal experience and story. As he began talking, I was immediately put at ease by his humor and willingness to be so open with a group of high school students. The man I am describing is Mr. Dan Sheehan, a former United States Navy Lt. Commander and pilot.

Mr. Sheehan, a three-time returning "guest teacher," made time to visit us on his way from Pennsylvania to Florida. His reason for traveling to Florida was to pin "Wings" on his youngest son. These Wings could perhaps be described as a family heirloom. They were pinned on his father in 1943, himself in 1968, and his oldest son in 1998. Now, in 2005, Mr. Sheehan's youngest son would receive them.

Among many other assignments, Mr. Sheehan served a one-year tour of duty in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. He described his experience vividly. He told us that his main mission as a Black Pony pilot was to support the PBR's below. He also shared that they flew in pairs and would navigate by watching and memorizing the locations of canals, due to lack of

technology. Also, the rockets on his plane were unguided. He had to learn simply to point the plane accurately at the target.

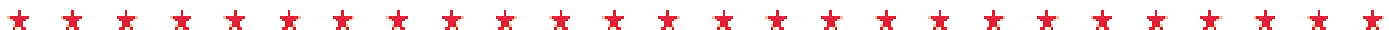
During his visit with us, Mr. Sheehan mentioned something that will forever stay with me. He stated that "things are not as simple as they seem." He related this to his feelings about the war in Iraq today; and he went on to tell us that, in retrospect, the Vietnam War was much more complicated and complex than it had seemed during his time there. I began to question how I could apply this theory to my life today, and I came up with the conclusion that we need to critically examine important situations before we make judgments.

Fortunately, Mr. Sheehan was just as impressed with us as we were with him! In an e-mail to Ms. Poling regarding letters he received from every MHS *LOV* student, he complimented our ability to "analyze the things most important [to individual students] in the class."

I am truly convinced that we will continue to hear fascinating stories, see captivating pictures, and learn valuable life lessons from all of the courageous veterans who visit our classroom; and I can only hope that *LOV/RIR* students will continue to make lasting impressions on them as well.



Mr. and Mrs. Dan Sheehan and their son, Dave





## Mr. Ray Whitsell: Not Just a Link, but a Mentor

By Arie Lofton

As I anxiously hurried to my *Lessons of Vietnam* class to finally meet my link, Mr. Ray Whitsell, I couldn't help thinking how fortunate I am to be linked to such a great person. Mr. Whitsell served in the military for twenty years, spending the last 17 years as a member of the Green Berets. He retired from the Army in 1977 as an Army Major. My link was a member of Team A-726, led by Colonel Roger Donlon, with whom he fought in the famous battle of Nam Dong in 1964. He received the Bronze Star with "V" Device, Purple Heart and Combat Infantryman Badge.

Mr. Whitsell grew up in poverty in a coal-mining town in Kentucky. He lived in the segregated South and lost both of his parents at a young age. He enlisted in the Army with hopes of receiving an education. (He eventually earned his Masters Degree in Education). His father was a coal miner who had great dreams for his son, and he would have been proud to know that his son exceeded his dreams. Mr. Whitsell commented, "It was always a dream for me to achieve goals like my father did."

In addition to serving as my link in Ms. Poling's *LOV* class, Mr. Whitsell has become a

mentor to me. Senior year is a very stressful year for most of us, so when I told him about the SAT's, senior fees, college applications, and my need for someone to *push me*, he said that he would do just that! He wrote in an early letter to me, "The first thing I would like for you to do is send me a small list of the important things that you have to get done in the very near future." He has also advised me *not to follow the crowd*, giving the advice, "You will rise or fall to the level of the company that you keep."

My link has also encouraged me to follow my dreams! He said to me, "You can do in life whatever you set out to do...I also have learned that...many people from different social walks of life will show up to help you. As long as you stay focused on what you really want to do, work hard and have confidence in yourself, you can make it."

Mr. Ray Whitsell is an amazing example of someone who overcame tremendous obstacles through perseverance, self discipline, and integrity. He has become such an inspiration to me, and he has encouraged me to press on no matter what...because I know...I CAN!



Major Ray Whitsell describes his military ribbons to MHS LOV students.

## Honoring All Who Served

By Caitlin Radford

Have you ever wondered why we do not have school on November 11<sup>th</sup>? Honestly, I had not. Every year on November 11<sup>th</sup>, I simply looked forward to blowing out my birthday candles and opening presents. As a young child, I had always thought we did not have school because it was my birthday! It was only later I came to realize my birthday falls on Veterans Day – a day to honor veterans of all wars. Although my mother told me that my grandfather was a veteran of the Korean War, I never really understood what that meant until I was older. He never talked about it. Now, I'd like to think I helped him celebrate his service through my birthdays; he just did not realize it!

To be honest, I never really understood the importance of this day until I took my *Lessons of Vietnam* class. From our classroom speakers, I have learned about the pride and importance this day gives to them. Many are Vietnam veterans; many have said, "We went to war, we didn't ask why. Our country called – and we answered." Upon their arrival home,

Vietnam War veterans returned without the parades or the pats on the back our World War II veterans received for risking their lives for our country. Most of these Vietnam veterans did not want to talk about the war because nobody wanted to listen. Imagine coming home after serving your country – perhaps even being wounded or watching your "brother" die; a brother who may not be related in blood but has protected you along the way. Imagine going home after that, and no one thanks you.

Veterans Day is a special day. It is a day to honor *all* who have served our country. Many of the veterans I have talked to tell me that this holiday is very meaningful to them. So next Veterans Day, take a few moments to pause, reflect, and thank those who have served and are currently serving our country.

Whatever one's opinions or beliefs, we should *respect* and *honor* those who have answered the call of their nation. That itself might just mean more than any medals that have been bestowed upon them.



Artwork by Billie Jackson

## The Road to Democracy in Iraq

By Kevie Malek

On October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2006, a referendum allowed citizens to vote on a draft of Iraq's new constitution, which protects the unity of Iraq and grants her citizens more rights. An estimated 8 million people voted – more than 60% of those registered.

Only one question was on the ballot: "Do you approve of the draft constitution?" Citizens simply checked YES or NO. The constitution was overwhelmingly approved by the Iraqi people. President George W. Bush is highly supportive of this constitution. He stated, "The Iraqi people themselves made this election a resounding success." And, despite the fact that this election was marred by a series of attacks that killed 36 people, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, said, "The Iraqis who turned out today are courageous. They know they are voting for the future of their country."

The Iraqi people have navigated another leg of the road to democracy. It is the sincere hope of many Americans that democracy can become a reality in Iraq.

## The Bird Flu – A Looming Pandemic?

By Sarah Whitley

"A flu pandemic is the most dangerous threat the United States faces today," said Richard Falkenrath, who recently served in the Bush administration. Many people are starting to worry about what could be a worldwide pandemic that could easily kill millions of people.

The story started when 48-year-old Bang-orn Benpad, from the Thai province of Kanchanaburi, decided to help himself to chickens that were part of a neighbor's flock. After killing, plucking, grilling and eating the birds, he developed a cough and a fever, both of which were not normal. As time passed, his condition only worsened. Two days later, he died.

The "Bird Flu" virus is actually called a "lethal H5N1 variant of avian flu." Over the last year it appeared in various parts of Asia. The virus destroys the cells that coat the upper respiratory tract, the body's primary filter against airborne pathogens.

While the fear of the bird flu spreads over Asia, the U.S. Government is starting to prepare for what could be a worldwide epidemic. There have been at least 36 deaths in Vietnam due to this virus, and Vietnamese officials are worried of a larger outbreak due to increased movement of people and poultry. In fact, *LOV* student Cindy Nguyen's grandmother just returned from visiting relatives in Vietnam. Mrs. Nguyen reported that any passenger "with symptoms of sickness was not allowed to board the plane." Sick passengers were "immediately taken to the nearest clinic to be tested for the bird flu virus."

The virus does not normally infect humans, but when it does, it can become lethal. As of Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>, it had killed 60 of the 116 people who were infected. Dr. Andrew T. Pavia, Chairman of the Pandemic Influenza Task Force of the Infectious Diseases Society of America believes that, "We should be worried but not panicked," because the virus does not usually infect humans.

## Aid Continues in Pakistan

By Wesley Brown

On October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005, a catastrophic 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck several areas of South Asia. More than 74,000 deaths have been declared so far, and those who survived this disaster now face a desperate situation.

As winter approaches, refugees are in critical need of food, medical treatment, supplies, and better living conditions. On October 27<sup>th</sup>, President George W. Bush called for a nationwide effort to encourage donations either to private or corporate organizations. During a speech on November 9<sup>th</sup>, President Bush stated that the United States government gathered \$156 million for relief funds available for the victims in Asia.

The U.S. government has started clearing roads, making shelters available, transporting supplies to outlying areas, and transporting people to locations where they can receive medical attention at military hospitals set up by American troops.

In order for Pakistan to rebuild and regain normalcy, the U.S. government, along with other relief efforts, must continue their support. The United States, led by Andrew Natsios, Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, also participated in the Pakistani government-sponsored Reconstruction Conference in Islamabad. Hopefully, in the future, Pakistan will be able to recuperate from this colossal event and rebuild its nation with the help of international aid.



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*Happy  
Holidays from  
the Bridges  
Staff!*

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