



## **I Keep It In My Heart And Wait For You Preface: Who Did You Want Me To Tell?**

**By  
Timothy A. Duffie  
USMC, Viet Nam, 1966-67**

I understand the anger that has become such an integral part of the Vietnam Veteran's memories of the war. Stories abound of children strapping dynamite to their bodies, then detonating the charge and killing American service personnel. Part of our training was to "...be aware of the 'little old lady' working in her garden..." The inference was that as we passed by, she would take out a machine gun and kill us all.

The logical conclusion to those incidents was to assume that the people of Vietnam hated us. That is one of the many reasons anti-war groups used, and still use, to justify their opinions of the war.

It wasn't quite so cut and dried.

The Vietnamese villagers had a 2,000 year history of hard labor in the rice paddies, a horribly hand-to-mouth existence, to say the least. They had seen little from us, or the North Vietnamese, that would convince them that such a life would ever change. The Americans and South Vietnamese forces were destroying their hamlets, and with it, their heritage; the Viet Cong were terrorizing their villages, assassinating their Village officials, and kidnapping their young men.

From the perspective of the Vietnamese villagers, the "good guys" didn't necessarily wear white hats.

- That villager may have been sixteen year old Co Hue, sexually abused by some South Vietnamese Ranger officers.
- It may have been Co Thien, a 12 year old young lady forced to watch as the Viet Cong buried her grandfather alive, then shot her three uncles. That same Co Thien was later clubbed unconscious from behind with a rifle butt by a passing American GI on the streets of her hometown.
- That villager may have watched as GIs from a passing American convoy laughed as they shot and killed his water-buffalo just for the fun of it, effectively destroying his ability to make a living in the rice paddies.
- Or, that villager may have been one of the children of the Village Chief assassinated by the Viet Cong before we arrived in their hamlet.

Is that confusing? Imagine what it was like for them to decide who their friends were. For many of the Vietnamese villagers, there is no doubt that they didn't perceive all the Americans as having ridden into town on white horses.

Consider the possibility that they simply wished we would **all** go home...to North Vietnam and to America.

That confusion can best be summarized in the following story. While I did not receive this first-hand, and perhaps some of the details were lost when I heard it, I have two reasons for accepting it:

- My "source" is irrefutable. It was "first-hand" for her.
- Based on what I experienced in the hamlet, it has the "ring" of truth to it.

In confronting the issue of missing American service-personnel still in Vietnam, I suspect this story could be repeated dozens of times.

*A member of the American Body Recovery Team was speaking to a group of veterans. A General now, he was a junior officer during the war. He told of visiting a village to retrieve the remains of a downed American pilot. The village chief took the team to the site. There, beside the remains of the plane, the village chief showed them a neat, well tended grave. The villagers at the time had given the pilot the best burial they could. They then went back to their village and said nothing. The team recovered the pertinent information to identify the remains. They then headed back the several miles to the village. As they walked, the speaker stated that he turned to the village chief and asked, "Why didn't you tell someone about this when it happened during the war?" After a thoughtful pause, the village chief responded,*

*"Who did you want me to tell?"*

*"If I had told the Viet Cong, you would have thought that we were Viet Cong sympathizers. You would have come to my village and punished me and my people."*

*"If I had told you, the Viet Cong would have decided that the people of my village supported the Americans. They would have come and punished me and my people."*

*So....who did you want me to tell?"*

In all the years I have listened to people spew their anger, as much as I understand it, none have ever adequately answered that question.

When I lived in the hamlet of Phuoc My, many of those I considered friends may well have been Viet Cong, either willingly or unwillingly. That very well could have included some of those who befriended me when I returned in 1996.

However, these people were confronted with much more than the simple peer pressure to take drugs, or to rebel against society, that youth in America confront today. These were life and death decisions. They had to decide which of these two warring factions would be around to take care of them...or to punish them...when the war ended. I hate to use a worn out cliché, but I never "walked a mile in their shoes".

In retrospect, I ask....***Who did you want them to tell?***

***"I Keep It In My Heart And Wait For You"*** is the story of my few months with a ***Combined Action Platoon (CAP)*** unit, a Marine Corps program that addressed that issue and answered that question. In 114 villages across the I-Corps area of South Vietnam, a squad of Marines and one Navy Corpsman moved into Vietnamese villages and lived there. The Marines said to the villagers,

*You can tell us. And later tonight, if the Viet Cong come into town to punish you.....we will be here. We will fight beside you, and, if necessary, we will die with you.*

None were ever guaranteed safety. All we really did was guarantee them that we would share the danger. Considering their belief in the inevitability of the war, and since most didn't care who won or who lost, for many of the villagers our commitment to their security made a world of difference.

Far too often CAP Marines and Navy Corpsmen would die for that commitment to the villagers of Vietnam.

I was fortunate to be one of the survivors, and this is my story.



## I Keep It In My Heart And Wait For You Part I: The War In Viet Nam, 1967

By  
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USMC, Viet Nam, 1966-67

### Part I Section 1: Introductions

In a letter to me recently, my friend Co Hue said, "**I keep it in my heart and wait for you.**" She was referring to my promise to return to Viet Nam to visit with her next year. To the Vietnamese people, friendship is of the heart. In thinking about my visit, she has tucked her anticipation into a corner of her heart. She can retrieve it occasionally and savor the thought.



The Vietnamese people consider friendship a lifetime commitment. Co Hue had no way of knowing if I felt the same way. When I left her village in mid-summer, 1967, she could only wonder if that was the end of our friendship. She could not know if I kept the picture she had given me when I left. Twenty-eight years passed, and she heard nothing.

**Left: Co Van Thi Hue, 1973. She Sent This To Me After We Located Her In 1994**

Even as Co Hue was wondering if we were still friends, I was wondering if she was still alive. Childhood had been a struggle for her, confronted as she was at every turn by the war. The People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and local Viet Cong, as well as the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and their American allies, all walked the paths of her village. They sat in her parents' cafe drinking beer.

Co Hue was constantly reminded that children her age were dying every day in Vietnam. A few died because they chose sides in the conflict. Others were caught up in battles throughout Vietnam. They could not escape the indiscriminate killing zones of high tech warfare.

For that reason, our friendship was heavily influenced by the war. To understand, you need to know what life was like in Phuoc My in 1967.

That was the year that I, as a 23 year old Marine, experienced Vietnamese life as it had evolved over thousands of years.

From 1965 through 1972, a few thousand Marines were able to be a small part of everyday Vietnamese life in dozens of villages. We went beyond simply seeing this lifestyle from the distance of an American military base. While living in villages across the countryside from Da Nang to the Demilitarized Zone (**DMZ**), we came as close as possible to actually becoming a part of that village. We Marines were members of a US Marine **Combined Action Platoon** (CAP). We did not see the Vietnam of Da Nang or Saigon, culturally diluted as those metropolitan areas were by western influences in the 1960's. We stepped back in time hundreds of years and viewed grass roots Vietnam from the inside. It was a world of thatch roofed huts, rice paddies, water buffalo, and beautiful children.

In a world dominated by deadly enemies, the children of Vietnam learned quickly that their lives depended on their ability to walk two paths. They could anger neither the Viet Cong, nor the Americans. At an age when American teenagers had not yet decided between political candidates in a voting booth, Vietnamese children were expected to choose sides in a life and death struggle. As they neared the age of accountability, their lives became a tightrope spanning two heavily armed and extremely deadly enemies.

Adding to the influences that daily engulfed these children, there were those adults in each village who simply wished to walk both paths. Centuries of warfare had taught them that little ever changed in their daily lives. This was just one more

conflict accompanied by idle promises. They just wanted to be left alone to work their rice fields, earn their daily wage, and tend to their families.

Co Hue, a 16 year old from Lai Phuoc Hamlet, Trieu Ai Village, Viet Nam, was one of those children. She gave us a rare view of historic Vietnam in its purest form. In 1967 we saw this tightrope existence in eyes set in a beautiful porcelain-like face that seldom smiled. When two other Marines and I were able to be at her side during a very distressing experience, we made a very special friend for life.

An understanding of Co Hue's childhood provides us with a microcosm of what life was like for all the children of the hamlets in Vietnam during the war. Our understanding is like a puzzle. We can see the whole only by assembling bits and pieces of what we experienced while living in her village. Years later, as I reminisced about this shy child, I could better comprehend how she had reacted to us when we arrived in her village. As I began to see how well she had adapted to her circumstances, I came to understand why she had never permitted us to know her well. My appreciation for Co Hue grew with each passing revelation. This understanding grew naturally to encompass all the villagers of Vietnam.

She was born in 1951, three years before the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu. When she was four, the United States began training South Vietnamese soldiers to resist the Vietnamese Communists (**Viet Minh**). Her hamlet is just south of Dong Ha, in Quang Tri Province. The French encountered tremendous resistance from the Viet Minh in Hue and throughout all of Quang Tri Province. Long before the mammoth American involvement of the late 1960s, the hostility so evident was her constant companion. By the mid-1960s, other parents in the province were sending their children to live with family in the relative safety of Da Nang or Saigon. They saw war in the near future. Co Hue was not so fortunate. She had no choice but to stay and endure long years of hardship.

When I knew her in 1967, Co Hue's childhood playmates were killing each other. Some of her childhood friends were Viet Cong; others were our allies, local Popular Forces (**Militia**).

Victor Krulak (**Lt. Gen., USMC, Ret.**) alluded to these divided loyalties. In his forward to **Our War Was Different** [Footnote1](#) he wrote, "***The Vietnamese knew who the guerrillas were and where they hid; the Americans knew how to kill them.***"

Right: me at CAC Papa 2, Phuoc My Hamlet, Trieu Ai Village, Quang Tri Province, Vietnam, 1967

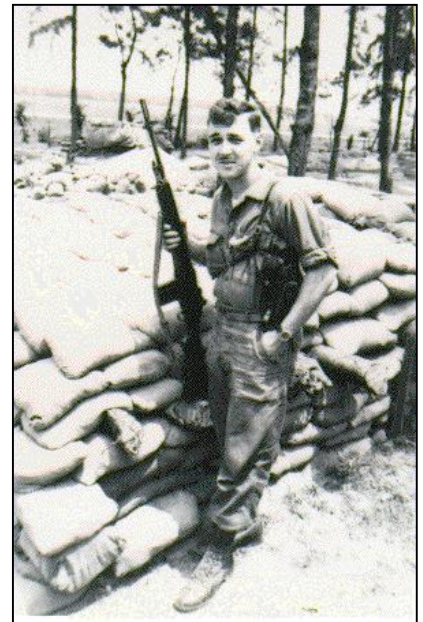
The War in Vietnam was actually two wars. One was taking place against the battalions of the Peoples Army of Vietnam. The other was in the villages. It was being fought against hard core and local guerrillas. The lines were clearly drawn, but only the people of the villages could define those lines. They were the key to our efforts in Vietnam.

In her hamlet of Lai Phuoc, Co Hue's neighbors would tend to their family responsibilities during the day, then go their separate ideological ways at night. Villagers who had visited over the back fence in the afternoon would lie in ambush for each other at night. They had to segregate their military duties from their personal responsibilities if they were to ensure the safety of their families. If they met on the battlefield, all bets were off. Killing your neighbor in the heat of battle was permissible in the convoluted society of Vietnam in 1967. Reporting them to the Americans was not. This practical honor system was intended to ensure the survival of next of kin.

In an ideal world, political concepts of human dignity and civil rights are learned by observing respective ideologies as they are applied to everyday circumstances. In that same ideal world, Co Hue would have been able to watch the people of both armed camps. She could then have made her decision based on how each group treated her day in and day out. The highway running through her village, and the paths that wandered her hamlet, would have been the ultimate testing ground.

Unfortunately, wars are not won with words and ideologies. Wars are won with weapons wielded by people. Ideologies suffer when subjected to the often racist whims of human nature. So Co Hue learned that she could trust very few people outside her village. If an American unit passed through Lai Phuoc, there was always the risk that someone in the group would toss a tear gas grenade into the marketplace. If word spread through the village that the Viet Cong were planning a visit, there was always the possibility that they were recruiting 16 year old girls.

Before the arrival of the small Marine unit in Lai Phuoc, responsibility for protecting Co Hue from marauding bands of Viet



Cong was in the hands of the local Popular Forces (PFs/Militia). Poorly equipped and trained, this local militia was just a minor irritation to the VC.

[Footnote1](#)

Al Hemingway, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland



# I Keep It In My Heart And Wait For You

## Part I: The War In Viet Nam, 1967

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### Part I

#### Section 2: Setting Up CAP In Phuoc My

We moved into the village because the Popular Forces were powerless to stop the Viet Cong from rocketing the American air base at nearby Dong Ha. As had happened in Phu Bai, Da Nang, and other air strips in South Vietnam, the Viet Cong were using the outlying villages as a base for attacks on US military bases. The VC would set up their rockets in the marketplace, practically on Hue's doorstep, fire off a few rounds, then disappear into the surrounding hamlets. With each attack the villagers knew with dreaded certainty that the Americans would soon follow. These follow-up visits through the villages had almost always proven fruitless.

The villagers knew that the Americans would kill a few of the VC and add the bodies to their daily body count. Then they would return to Dong Ha to sleep surrounded by miles of barbed wire, machine guns, and heavy artillery. The cooperative villager, however, had to curl up at night with little more protection than his wife and children. Even as the Americans were back-slapping each other on another successful **Search & Destroy** operation, retribution from the Viet Cong would be certain and severe. So the villagers simply said nothing. Throughout the war they paid a dear price for their silence.

In an effort to resolve the security problem, the USMC established the **Combined Action Platoon** program (**CAC/CAP**) in 1965. A squad of 13 Marines with one Navy Corpsman was assigned to select villages. These Marines and Navy Corpsman took up residence in the village and attempted to rid the village of Viet Cong influence. During the early years CAP duty was voluntary. For those volunteers the criteria were quite simple: each volunteer had to have some combat experience, and he must show no signs of xenophobia. Long before the term "Politically Correct" evolved, xenophobia was a politically correct substitute for racism. While not fool-proof, the process managed to staff the CAP units with many who were open to an understanding of the plight of the villagers.

On March 10, 1967, twenty-six dien cai dau (**crazy in the head**) Hoa-ky (**American**) Marines, and two Navy bac-si (**corpsmen**) suddenly appeared in Phuoc My Hamlet, the first hamlet south of Lai Phuoc. (Because the area was heavily infested with Viet Cong, Papa 2 started as a double CAP [Papa 2/4]). With the zeal of terrified missionaries we built a permanent compound on an island just off Highway 1.

Our new home was surrounded on three sides by rice paddies, each no less than 70 yards deep. Not really an island, the fourth side merged with Highway 1 to the east. Railroad tracks sat unused and rusting less than 100 yards west. West of the railroad tracks, the other seven hamlets that made up the village of Trieu Ai followed the river to the southwest. The nine hamlets of Trieu Ai village surrounded us like a necklace. That first afternoon it looked more like a noose.

Khe Sanh was thirty miles northwest of Lai Phuoc, in the far corner of Quang Tri Province. It sat awaiting its destiny as the site of the spiritual death of the American forces in South Vietnam. Within rifle shot of Khe Sanh were Hills 861 and 881 North & South, sites of the "Hill Battles" of April and May, 1967. Highway 9 traveled west to east, parallel to the Demilitarized Zone, from Khe Sanh to Dong Ha. It passed the Rockpile, Razorback, Con Thien, and Cam Lo.

As we surveyed our surroundings that first afternoon, few of us really believed we would survive the night. The village of Trieu Ai consisted of more than 15,000 potentially hostile Vietnamese villagers. As we hurriedly dug our foxholes, we had visions of hordes of Viet Cong screaming out of the hamlets under the cover of darkness. Sleep was impossible. If abject terror was not enough to keep us awake, illumination did. As radioman, I spent hundreds of tax dollars that night as we kept Papa 2 and the surrounding hamlets lit up like Times Square on New Year's Eve. But nothing happened. Not a single shot was fired in our direction. No mortars, rockets, or hand-grenades broke the serenity of our first night on the island.

At the outset we brought little more than one more complication into Co Hue's life. In the past, when Americans had passed through Lai Phuoc, she could always hide in her parent's little cafe on the edge of the marketplace. Now the Americans were sitting in her hideout planning their activities with the local PF Sergeant and Village Chief. There was

danger in appearing too supportive of these Americans. The villagers learned very quickly that the Viet Cong had placed a bounty on our heads. It didn't pay to be too close to us, should someone decide to try and collect that bounty.

Co Hue had a problem. In spite of the potential danger, she found she rather enjoyed being around the gregarious American Marines. In a short time the marketplace in Lai Phuoc began to take on the appearance of a stage full of puppeteers as we communicated in a mixture of unintelligible Vietnamese, French, and English. Our verbal efforts were punctuated by an invent-it-as-needed form of sign language. Listening to us she must have noticed that "Toi Hoa-ky" (***I am American***) sounded more like "Toy Wakee." Her friends in the PF platoon taught us to say, "Anh beaucoup dien cai dau." (***You are very crazy in the head.***) That usually came out, "You beaucoup dinky-dow." Through repeated usage we were pretty good at "Toi khong biet," (***I do not understand***). That was my particular favorite.

Eventually we learned that the villagers could not understand English any better simply because we shouted it at them. Nor did it help to speak slowly. English was a foreign language, and all our verbal gymnastics did not change that one iota.

Being around all these American Marines, Hue could easily become an innocent victim. There were already any number of ways that she could become a statistic. So she reacted to this new group of Wakees as she had to all the others: she stayed aloof and distant. She sat in her parents' little restaurant when the CAP Marines and PFs sat drinking beer, talking, and gesturing at each other.

I should say, she was aloof...until I arrived in the cafe one day with something totally amazing...something she just couldn't resist. It was a unique little machine that you could talk into, and it talked back to you! In your own voice and words! Wow! Those rich Americans have the neatest little things!

Forgetting her shyness and fear for one afternoon, Hue, and several other girls ranging in age from 6 to 16, each took the microphone to my tape recorder in hand and recorded songs on one of my taped letters home. On that tape, I describe to my family and friends the image of Co Hue standing with the microphone in hand, disheveled hair in her eyes, and a few strands in the corner of her mouth.

I had a false tooth while in Vietnam, but I seldom wore it. I would show up in the village, smiling my toothless smile. As I walked the village, smiling and waving at the villagers, my most memorable feature became my gap faced smile. Hue noticed, and she put that in her heart with other important thoughts. She would remember that silly fact for the next twenty-eight years.

Militarily we had many early successes. We had skirmishes with local Viet Cong during 57 of our first 63 days in Trieu Ai Village. Some of them were of major significance to the village. We located a cache of 1,200 lbs. of rice that had been taken from the village to feed the VC camped in the surrounding countryside.

That was military, and that was our prime responsibility. However, the other aspect of the CAP program involved the civic action role of CAP Marines. As armed diplomats, we stood the gap between the people of the village and all adversaries, be they our allies or enemies. We were not concerned with rank, status, or political preferences. We could not permit any actions within our TAOR (***Tactical Area of Responsibility***) that would endanger our efforts.

One of the spoils of victory is the forced implementation of political ideologies. We had to demonstrate to Hue, and her fellow villagers, that we respected their rights to human dignity. One tear gas grenade tossed into the marketplace by a passing American serviceman could set us back months in our efforts. Much as the Viet Cong demands could sway the villagers in our favor, tear gas grenades in the village could be equally devastating to our purposes. There were enough despicable acts perpetrated by both the Viet Cong and the Allies alike to keep the villagers in a constant state of confusion.

One day a 2nd. Lieutenant brought a platoon of cooks out from Dong Ha for some trigger time. We could virtually guarantee at least one fire-fight with the local Viet Cong, perhaps more. Our platoon sergeant, Phil Prince, was not in the compound at the time. I had the responsibility of dealing with the lieutenant. When he asked me who would be guiding his platoon that day, I called for our best PF, Ha Si Phu. The lieutenant looked at Ha Si Phu and said, "No damned gook is going on patrol with my men."

Ha Si Phu, affectionately referred to as the "One Eyed Wonder," had lost an eye as a child. As a result, he could not join the South Vietnamese Army. So he chose the Popular Forces. Day after day Ha Si Phu saved my life, and that of almost every Marine in the compound. He did so by identifying dangers long before we did. We seldom worried about stepping into punji pits, those razor sharp bamboo stakes dipped in buffalo dung and buried below ground level. He would spot Viet



Cong ambushes long before we approached the killing zones.

Dozens of Marines from the 1st. Bn., 9th. Marines owe their lives to Ha Si Phu. He spotted a Viet Cong ambush set up along Highway 1 in the sand dunes south of Ai Tu. The ambush was waiting for a convoy of the 1/9 traveling from Phu Bai to Dong Ha. Their rear guard had not spotted us, so we had the element of surprise. With some help from the Marines of 1/9, we routed them, and the VC had no recourse but to flee the area.

The lieutenant had insulted one of our most beloved PFs. Indirectly he had insulted all of our villagers. So an armed diplomat, in the uniform of a 23 year old Marine Corporal, had to give orders to a 2nd. Lieutenant. It took a few radio calls to my company commander, and I endured a few threats from the lieutenant, but eventually Ha Si Phu and I led a better informed lieutenant and his platoon out on patrol.



Ha Si Phu performed up to his usual standards. At the end of the day the lieutenant reached into his pocket and took out a Hertz **"We're #1"** button. In a fitting gesture of apology, he pinned it on Ha Si Phu's shirt pocket. Ha Si Phu did not know what it was, but you would have thought he had just been awarded the Medal of Honor.

In early May something happened to Co Hue that sealed our friendship for life. A company of South Vietnamese Rangers had set up camp on the outskirts of the hamlet. While they were near the village, I went into Lai Phuoc with Brian Newton, from Rochester, N.Y., and one other Marine.

As we approached the cafe we saw Hue crying softly in front of the little mud hut she called home. Co Hue didn't do anything loudly. She even cried softly. I asked her what had happened. She ran her hands across her breasts and body and pointed inside the cafe. Somebody inside had been molesting her. Hue, and all the other children of Lai Phuoc, had become our family. For weeks we had shared many pleasant moments with them. Through it all, Co Hue had wanted nothing more than to be left alone.

She was humiliated. I asked what she wanted us to do, and she said that she wanted them out of the cafe. We stepped inside and were confronted by a group of six officers from the South Vietnamese Ranger unit. Hue's parents were huddled fearfully in the front of the room. I asked what they wanted us to do. They told us they wanted the men out of their home. I asked the officers to leave. There was some talking and laughing, but they did not move. I asked again.

One of the officers jumped out of his seat and lunged at me. He had to pass Brian Newton; Brian decked him. There was confusion, then the sound of breaking glass. Another officer broke a beer bottle and was attacking Brian from behind. My unidentified Marine friend dealt with him in much the same manner. The other officers picked up their friends and left.

I was feeling very fortunate that I had come to Lai Phuoc with two of the larger Marines in Papa 2. I had it made. I did all the talking, and my large friends did all the fighting!

We returned to the compound fully believing that the issue was over. It was not. Within a few hours police from Dong Ha, along with some American MPs, came to the compound to arrest the three of us. Sgt. Prince, a former Parris Island Drill Instructor and a career Marine, was not one to be trifled with. As he was to remind me years later, nobody was taking **his** Marines from **his** compound. We heard a commotion and looked up as the village chief came running down Highway 1 and into Papa 2. He was highly agitated. Co Hue and her parents had told him about the incident. To the village chief this was a personal affront to him and to the people of Trieu Ai. We had learned that village chief was a position of high respect. The chief had a few choice words with the police, and they left the compound. We were put on something resembling house arrest and were not permitted to visit the village again until the Vietnamese Rangers left the area.





# I Keep It In My Heart And Wait For You

## Part I: The War In Viet Nam, 1967

By  
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### Part I

#### Section 3: The Attack And Leaving Phuoc My

On May 12, 1967, at 0410 hours, Papa 2 came under attack by a reinforced company of the 442nd. NVA Corps of Engineers.

The assault started with a suicide squad. Each member had a target: the Platoon Sgt., Squad Leaders, and Radioman. They had some good inside information, and they knew exactly where each of us slept. For whatever reasons, probably bad timing, they failed in every respect.



My life was spared only because one of our corpsmen, my replacement on radio watch, overslept by 20 minutes. I should have been in my bed, but I was still in the bunker when the first explosion made toothpicks out of my cot. (*The night before the attack I had told all those who assisted on radio watch that, if any overslept again, they would "dig a latrine". A threat obviously not carried out.*) By the time the other charges went off in the other squad bays, the squad leaders were already out of their beds and heading for the bunkers.

Left: my corner of our squad bay the morning after the attack.

There was a platoon of hard-core guerrillas in the rice paddies. Their objective, after the suicide squad had killed all the leaders, was to tear down the barbed wire perimeter. Hard-core guerrillas were generally imported Viet Cong. They were usually better trained and equipped than the local variety. This platoon was doomed to failure because the suicide squad failed.

Along the railroad tracks west of the compound waited a company of NVA. They were to administer the final blow. They failed because Sgt. Prince knew they were there. I learned years later that the villagers had passed the word of that company to some of the PFs who, in turn, came running into the compound after the attack started.

When satchel charges began rocking the compound, Marines came pouring out of the squad bays. In rapid succession there were about 14 explosions. PF Ha Si Nam stood straddling a satchel charge. He grabbed LCpl. Ray Borowski and tossed him into the safety of a bunker, then he fell on the dynamite. Ray, his life spared when Nam tossed him into the bunker, looked over his shoulder in time to see a blinding flash as Ha Si Nam disintegrated.

Though Ray was disoriented by severe head and upper body injuries, he noticed a fellow Marine propped against the far wall of the bunker clutching the stub of his leg, severed at mid-thigh. He said nothing. He simply stared blankly at Ray as his life spilled onto the dirt floor of the bunker. Ray watched helplessly as he died.

Ray regained enough of his senses to look out toward the rice paddies. He saw dozens of Viet Cong wading toward the compound. Before he could fire a shot, he passed out. He was eventually taken by med-evac to a field hospital. Ray would not hear a word from any of us for the next 18 years. He assumed we were all dead.

Separated from his weapon by a satchel charge near his cot, Sgt. Prince ran to the communications bunker. Pleased to see that I was still alive, he borrowed my rifle and headed into the compound. He returned in a few moments with instructions for me, then left again. I called in artillery on the company along the railroad tracks. Rounds spaced at roughly 10 yard intervals decimated most of that threat.

For all intents and purposes, all that was left was the platoon in the rice paddies.

While the battle was far from over, the details are unimportant. Just before daybreak the Viet Cong broke off the attack and began dragging off their dead. The villagers were to tell us later that the VC spent hours dragging their dead into the surrounding countryside from behind the elevated protection of the railroad tracks.

The people of Lai Phuoc and Phuoc My, the closest of the hamlets, had been startled out of their sleep at the first all too familiar sounds of gunfire. They had sat in their huts throughout the battle listening to the sounds small arms fire, artillery, med-evac choppers, and gunships. Those villagers on the perimeter of the rice paddies were able to see a little, aided in their watch by the illumination that began floating down within moments of the first explosion. They saw solid lines of tracers ripping into Papa 2 from the rice paddies.

As the sun came up they saw that the Marines were still in control of the island.

We were busy after sunrise. We had to care for the wounded, rebuild our defenses, and indulge in the adrenaline induced chatter of survivors. We watched as Ha Si Nam's family came and carried away his remains in a poncho. We gave our dear friend an ineffectual, but heartfelt, 21 gun salute as bits and pieces of him were taken off for burial.

The tears we shed for this dear friend were as real as they were for any of the American friends we lost during the war.

As we were preoccupied with our activities, a long procession came down Highway 1 from Lai Phuoc. The villagers of Lai Phuoc knew we were too busy to prepare breakfast, so they were bringing breakfast to, as the village chief said to Sgt. Prince, **"...our Marines"**.



To this day that thought still brings tears to the eyes of each Marine who was there that day.

Then Co Hue began to lose more friends.

Sgt. Phil Prince received his third Purple Heart that morning. A satchel charge had lifted him and deposited him on the outside of the barbed wire. He crawled back whispering, "Don't shoot guys...it's me!" "Riiiiiiight, turkey!! What's the password...?"

**Left: Ha Si (Cpl) Nam & Ray Borowski. Nam saved Ray's life when he pushed him into the bunker, then fell on a satchel charge**

He was sent stateside with his third Purple Heart, a Silver Star and a Battlefield Commission. He was to return to Vietnam for two more tours between 1967-1972. He retired a Major in 1979.

Ray Borowski spent 1 1/2 years in the hospital. I found him 18 years later haunted by his certainty that none of us could have survived the attack. He believed that he had let us down, and, as a result, we were all dead. When I located Ray in 1985 and called him at work, Ray finally learned that we had all survived.

I learned that, after our phone call, Ray went to the men's room and cried for over 4 hours!

*Ray had left high school to join the Corps. As he lay in the hospital recovering from his wounds, his class began their senior year. Some of his classmates had heard about his experience in Vietnam, and they wanted to honor him. Years later Ray saw a copy of their High School Yearbook. Ray's picture is inside the front cover; below the picture is inscribed, "In Memorial, Ray Borowski, Killed in Vietnam"..*

I should have paid more attention to a wound in my ankle. Within weeks my foot had swelled to the point I could not tie my boot. I went to the hospital in Dong Ha and had a piece of shrapnel removed. I could not wear a boot, so I was of no value to a field unit. I was re-assigned to CAP Headquarters in Phu Bai. After two weeks in the hospital in Phu Bai, I returned to Papa 2 briefly to pick up my gear.

While I was there, I went into the hamlet to say good-bye. Co Hue, hearing that I was leaving, handed me a picture of herself and asked that I remember her. She had never permitted us to take pictures, so I was honored. It is the only picture I have of her from 1967.

I worked supply out of Phu Bai my last two months in Vietnam. I continued to hear reports that Papa 2 came under heavy attack each month. An unconfirmed rumor went through headquarters that someone had called artillery during an assault one night, and a round had landed in the heart of Lai Phuoc. I came home in November, 1967, still worried about that reported stray round.



# **I Keep It In My Heart And Wait For You**

## **Part I: The War In Viet Nam, 1967**

**By**  
**Timothy A. Duffie**  
**USMC, Viet Nam, 1966-67**

### **Part I**

#### **Section 4: Three Decades Later**

I continued to think about the children of the village often over the ensuing twenty-eight years. Frequently all I could envision was the marketplace in Lai Phuoc destroyed, and Hue and others the victims of "friendly fire." As I reminisced of those beautiful children sitting on my lap, tugging at my chest hair and giggling, I came to despise the term "friendly fire". What a heartless face we assign to such a horrible event.

Years later, when I read that Quang Tri was the center of intense fighting during the Tet Offensive of 1968, then again in 1972, I worried about all of my "family" in Lai Phuoc and Phuoc My. As the years passed, I would often look at the picture Co Hue had given me. That did little more than fan the fires of concern for all of my friends in the village.

After the Americans left Quang Tri Province, a natural reaction of some of the Vietnamese people was to feel deserted, particularly those who had risked everything for our cause. Many of them were sent off to "re-education camps" where they died by the hundreds-of-thousands.

The thought they had been abandoned would exist in a little hamlet in the northern portion of Quang Tri Province. A beautiful young woman in Lai Phuoc would wonder as she entered her twenties. Viewing the world through her window of rice paddies, it is not likely that she would know anything about embassies, international relationships, and boycotts. All she would know is that, as all those years passed, none of her dinky-dow Wakee friends returned. The funny looking CAP Marine with the missing tooth, the one she had asked to remember her, had disappeared with the rest.

Eventually, Hue married. Over the years she had five children. She moved with her family to Phuoc My and opened a small roadside shop, just like many of the villagers did when Viet Nam opened its doors to free enterprise. Saigon became Ho Chi Minh City. It was rebuilt, along with Da Nang, Hue, and other metropolitan areas. These areas continue to grow, complete with high rise buildings and busy thoroughfares.

For the villagers of Trieu Ai, renamed Trieu Giang in 1975, nothing really changed. Their lives still consist of rice paddies, backbreaking work, and family, just as they did before the war. Hue and her family live in a crude hut built from remnants of American buildings, possibly even items left behind from the CAP compound. If it is left over from the CAP unit, then twenty-eight years of monsoon rains and 110 degree heat have taken a toll. She hopes to build a new house in the summer of 1994.

In 1985 I did a little research on the CAP program. While at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, I met Connie Menefee. She helped me with my research. Those efforts resulted in her taking an active interest in the CAP Unit Veterans Association. Eventually Connie became our unit historian. In early 1993 she announced that she was taking a three week trip to Vietnam with several veterans. She asked if I wanted to go along. I did not. My reluctance was not for reasons we normally expect. I did not fear opening old wounds, nightmares, flashbacks, and so forth. My reasons were less dramatic than that. I did not go because I was afraid to find that my worst nightmares about the children of Lai Phuoc and Phuoc My were true. I did not want to be confronted with the truth while in the village.

That is one of the personality mood swings found in many combat veterans. Much has been written of warriors engaging in the bloodbath of a heated battle, only to be moved to tears at the plight of an innocent victim of the war. That scenario was played out thousands of times in CAP 'Villes in Vietnam during the war. I have called in air strikes on enemy positions..strikes that resulted in bombs or napalm. I've toured the results of those attacks and stood in arrogant triumph over the bodies of the victims, in one instance it was the body of a pregnant teen-aged girl. The fact that she was on the wrong end of a .30cal machine gun waiting for me is of little consolation.

Hours later, back in the village, I've sat and laughed heartily as a 3 year old Vietnamese child sat on my lap, tugging at my chest hair, and giggling because he or she had never seen chest hair before.

While I only vaguely remembered the carnage of the war, and had given no thought to the dead enemy, I'd never forgotten the feeling of those little girls tugging at my chest hair. I'd lost many a night's sleep with visions of them as victims of someone else's napalm.

On April 20, 1994, Connie and Tom Harvey, a former CAP Marine, were passing through Lai Phuoc on their way to Khe Sanh. I had given Connie the picture that Hue had given me in 1967. It was a very bad picture. Even I have difficulty remembering her face by looking at it. The group had a Vietnamese friend from Da Nang, Tuyet (To-Wit), to help during their trip. Tuyet said she knew of the hamlet of Ai Tu, so that was where they started their search. The six other American tourists with Connie and Tom were taking bets. The odds were heavily against ever finding Hue. They had seen the picture!



They were very nearly right. Tuyet took them directly to Ai Tu where she began showing the picture to the villagers. It was a long search, but eventually she found a young lady, Co Dang Thi Que, daughter of PF Ha Si Phu, who recognized Hue. Co Quy gave instructions to another villager, and Connie and her group followed her to a small roadside shop in Phuoc My. While the Americans waited in the van, Tuyet entered the shop and showed the picture to the proprietor.

**The Picture Co Hue Gave Me In 1967 Enlarged And Almost Recognizable**

Tuyet asked, "Do you know this person?"

Hue said excitedly, "That's me."

Tuyet asked what she remembered about the picture. Hue told her that she had given it to a Marine in 1967. Oh, and incidentally, she also said that the Marine had a missing tooth! Tuyet then told her a tourist had brought the picture from America.

What was going through Hue's mind those first few moments? She explains her thoughts in a letter.

*"Do you understand that at the first time Connie met me I felt so stupefied and scared?" she said. "I wondered why American people stop in my house so suddenly. I feared and stayed anxious. Then the interpreter said that Connie, a friend of Tim, was looking for me, so I felt recovered."*

Co Hue was trembling by the time she got to the van. Connie gave her a picture I had sent of Phil Prince and me. Within minutes the van was surrounded by a small group of villagers. They passed the picture around; they pointed at my unsmiling picture, tapped their teeth in memory of my missing one, and they laughed. They remembered me, gap faced smile and all. Throughout the visit Hue held tenaciously to Connie's hand. It was a virtual death grip. Her hands never stopped trembling. The tour then moved on to Khe Sahn, telling Hue that they would stop on the way back.

In their absence Hue went out into the village looking for people who remembered us. She located Nguyen Chong, one of our PFs. She then sat down and wrote me a letter. In her letter she mentions Ha Si Nam and Ha Si Phu saying, *"Your friends they all dead."* She talks about how stunned she was when told that an American tourist was looking for her. She could not believe that I would remember *"...a child from Vietnam."*

Connie had told her that I have a married daughter. In one touching comment Hue said, *"I think you would not to remember me and send me an announcement."* Could this charming lady be hurt that I "forgot" to invite her to the wedding? She asks that I *"...come to Vietnam so my family can visit with your family."* She sent me another picture (right), this one taken in 1973, writing on the back, *"For Your Memories."*

In a letter to me after his return, Tom Harvey said the group was nearly moved to tears by the experience. Dan Sharp, a Lt. Colonel with the 101st. Airborne Division, had commented after an earlier visit to a CAP 'Ville, *"...we never experienced anything like this."*



Since that day, Hue has become somewhat of a celebrity in Trieu Giang Village. Every day the villagers come to her shop and ask about news from her dien cai dau Hoa-ky friend. She begs of me to write more letters. *"It would be a shame,"* she says, *"to not tell me everything in only one letter per month."*



Co Hue also sent this picture (below left) taken in 1970. It has become my favorite, for no other reason than the emotions of this particular pose. By 1970, she had survived five years of major American involvement in the war. She had survived the Tet Offensive of 1968. That offensive devastated much of her home province. There were no young men in her hamlet, all having been killed or off to war. She had no "Senior Prom", no holding hands as she walked the river bank with a childhood sweetheart. Yet the war had no apparent end in sight. What could have been going through her mind as she posed for this picture? Only she could answer that question.

She looks for mail every day. She scolded me in one letter because I had failed to...



*"...tell me everything about your life. What work does your wife do? How do you spend your days? Why do you not send me a picture of your home? Are your parents still living? Do you live close to your family? What does your daughter do for a living? What does your son-in-law do for a living? Put an accurate date on your letters; I want to see how long they take to get here."*

In picturesque language, she continues in a subsequent letter...

*"When you left me to your home I handed you one photo and at that time I felt so sad...I do not believe that you still keep those memories until now. Being separated in the war years you are still thinking about me..."*

Later in that same letter...

*"...even if being on one side of the world, I hope you notice that there is a friend, Co Hue, who is always beside you so that I feel enough happy and, in your turn, you do so*

*with regard to me. I think that a bridge once broken would not be rebuilt. Then, when it is rebuilt, it becomes a dream."*

With reference to my return next year, she says, *"...if you want to do it please let me know one month in advance, then I will prepare my spirit for reception."*

Hue was a child of 16 when we were in Lai Phuoc. She has stated that the day I left her hamlet was the saddest day of her life.

In 1967 she had asked me to remember her, then she was stunned to find that I actually did.

Vietnamese friends who read her letters for me laugh and cry their way through each one. Twenty-eight years later this lovely product of the war continues to touch people with her gentleness. In the same letter in which she said, "I keep it in my heart and wait for you," she repeatedly seeks assurances that I will return. She seems, once again, afraid that I will forget her.

However, the diplomatic bridge has, indeed, been rebuilt. Soon I will once again walk the paths of Lai Phuoc and surrounding hamlets. This time I will not be carrying an M-16 rifle and hand-grenades. I will not be in the company of Marines and PFs. I will once again view the beauty of Viet Nam, but I will not be looking through the eyes of a warrior. I will walk with Hue, her family, and many others of the villagers who eagerly await the return of one of "our Marines".

I will not forget.. I have learned the value of friendship from an exceptional Vietnamese teacher. When it comes to remembering this most charming of friends, ***I keep it in my heart.***



# **I Keep It In My Heart And Wait For You**

## **Part II: The Return, 1996**

By  
Timothy A. Duffie  
USMC, Viet Nam, 1966-67

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***"The final battle against intolerance is to be fought--not in the chambers of any legislature--but in the hearts of men."***

Dwight D. Eisenhower  
October 19, 1956

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## **Part II**

### **Section 1: Miscellaneous Thoughts**

I have opted to answer a few questions I've received since my return. The result will be a somewhat random collection of notes and thoughts.

#### **Were You There During The Rainy Season?**

No. I timed the trip for the end of the monsoon, but prior to the stifling heat. We had one day of monsoon rains, and a few heavy showers during the week in Phuoc My. However, it was early enough in the summer that the temperature never got much above the 110° mark.

#### **How Much Had Things Changed Since You Were In Nam?**

If you consider the inevitability of the jungle, and its eagerness to continually renew itself, then everything was exactly as I had remembered. But each familiar scene was in a different location.

Phuoc My hamlet lies just south of the hamlet of Lai Phuoc, which in turn is about 1 mile south of Dong Ha. Lai Phuoc was the marketplace for the village of Trieu Ai when we were there. The old marketplace in Lai Phuoc has now reverted to jungle. A new marketplace has been set up slightly north of the hamlet.

There was but one recognizable landmark in the 135 mile trip from Da Nang to Dong Ha: the island in the rice paddies where we had our CAP compound. If I hadn't seen a sign indicating I was entering Phuoc My, that island would have been my only landmark.

For three months after I was wounded in 1967, I had traveled Highway 1 from Phu Bai to all our CAP units south toward Da Nang. Each day we stopped to re-supply the compounds on the way. I thought I would recognize a few of the hamlets on the trip. I did recognize one abandoned Catholic church just south of Phu Bai. I have a slide of that church taken in 1967. Other than that...I recognized nothing!

So everything was different, but everything was the same. The jungle provides a logical basis for that contradictory statement.

#### **How About The Water?**

I drank nothing but bottled water...and the occasional Coke or beer.

*I've never quite developed a taste for beer. However, much like my first taste in 1967, when the villagers offered something, I could not refuse. During our CAP training we received several warnings about refusing something the villagers offered us. So, while sitting in Co Hue's family cafe in Lai Phuoc in 1967, the Village Chief had offered to buy a beer for Sgt. Phil Prince and myself. I had never tasted beer, so I refused. I asked Co Hue's mother to bring me a Coke.*

*The Chief offered again, and I refused again. Co Hue's mother stood patiently, my potential beer in hand, waiting to serve me. Sgt. Prince quietly, but in a firm USMC Sergeant's whisper, reminded me that I had insulted the chief by rejecting his offer. But I would not be intimidated. I knew he wouldn't shoot me or anything.*



*Then I heard considerable talking among the villagers standing nearby. As I adamantly stood my ground, I heard laughter ripple through the cafe. The villagers were pointing, talking, and laughing...all directed at me.*

*Turning to our interpreter, I asked what was so funny. He responded, "They not understand why Ha Si (Corporal) Tim no drink beer. In Viet Nam only girls no drink beer!"*

*That's worse than being shot!*

*I drank the beer!*

The bottled water is replaced daily in the hotels, and each home I visited had a more than adequate supply. It seems that they, too, are somewhat afraid of the potential for drinking Agent Orange, along with any variety of unidentified organisms in their water supply.

### **How Did You Survive The Long Flight And Change In Time?**

The worst was the 14 hour leg from San Francisco to Hong Kong, which actually turned out to be 15 1/2 hours. Accepting the fact that I could do nothing about it, I took a few music tapes, a walk-man, and a good book. The flight was not all that bad. It was daylight the entire way, but everyone shut down the blinds on the airplane, and we were able to sleep throughout much of the flight.

There was a large group from Thailand on the flight. I sat in the right of four seats directly behind the divider between front and rear sections. A young lady from Thailand sat in the far left seat of that row. Without ever exchanging a word, using nothing but hand signals and facial expressions, we managed to laugh our way through the entire fourteen hour flight. We laughed about our efforts to straddle the two middle seats so we could sleep. If one found what appeared to be a particularly comfortable position across the seats, we would watch amusedly as the other tried to imitate it.

We laughed about the movie we were watching. I think she was particularly pleased when I watched carefully to see how she prepared the meal we were served for dinner late in the flight. It was an Asian meal, and it required "assembly". She noticed me watching, so she smiled brightly as she held up each item, then patiently showed me how to prepare my meal.

I was reminded again, as I had learned in Vietnam in 1967, that under any circumstances you can communicate...if you want to; you can laugh...if you want to, and you can make friends...if you want to.

And you don't have to talk to do it.

I now have a friend in Thailand. I don't know her name, nor she mine. But we are friends. I hope she told everyone in Thailand about the American friend she met on the airplane.

By the time I got to Saigon, I had managed to adjust fairly well. I went to bed the first night at 12:30 A.M. and woke up at 5:30 A.M. ready to see Saigon.

And it was a good thing I woke up when I did!

At 6:20 A. M. I heard an ever so gentle rap on the door. I opened it to see my hostess at the boarding house (**See "What did you do for two weeks?"**) standing with a tray of breakfast. Breakfast was not the traditional Kellogg's Corn Flakes, bacon and eggs, hash browns, toast, and coffee. Well...there was coffee.

I was not really hungry, since my hostess had fed me what can best be described as a nine course meal when I had arrived at 10:30 P.M. Saturday. As I was to soon learn, there is little concern as to whether or not you are hungry. In Viet Nam, you eat three times a day...period! My first morning in Viet Nam I dined on a bowl of noodle soup with bits of meat, chives, a hard boiled bird's egg, and a variety of vegetation for flavoring purposes. A small dish of salt, pepper, and a sliced red pepper was on the side along with a loaf of French bread. Two cups of Vietnamese coffee (**make that Vietnamese COFFEE 'cause it is potent stuff!**) completed the menu for my initial venture into a morning banquet Viet Nam style.

It was unique, filling, and delicious. An excellent start for my first day back in Viet Nam.

### **What Did You Do For Two Weeks?**

Nothing that I had planned on doing! My introduction to Saigon Saturday night was on the back of a Honda motorbike driven by an 18 year old college student. I had anticipated that she would meet me in a taxi. That was the first of many surprises that were to set the tone for the next two weeks.



Nguyen Hoang Phuong Thu, oldest daughter of Nguyen Khac Diep and Hoang Thi Thy Tuyet from Da Nang, met me at the airport. If I had anticipated the shy Vietnamese young lady of the 1960s, as I had remembered many of the young ladies of the hamlet, I was in for a surprise. Phuong Thu greeted me and immediately tried to relieve me of my luggage as she guided me quickly toward the exchange window. Still fighting over control of my bags, I exchanged my American dollars for Vietnamese dong.

**Left: Nguyen Hoang Phuong Thu, Honda Jockey, Guide, and Interpreter**

Then she headed across the parking lot...me chasing along behind wondering why we were moving **away** from the taxi cabs! My unspoken question was answered when she disappeared into a small parking area, then reappeared perched on the driver's seat of a Honda motorbike. **This** was my **taxicab**?! Accepting no protest what-so-ever from me, she grabbed my bag and draped it across the gas tank. She then waited patiently as I gradually got the picture....**it was either the Honda....or walk!** As she blasted away from the airport, I almost fell head over heels off the back of the bike. I hadn't quite allowed for the 75 lb backpack I was wearing.

I soon learned, however, that Phuong Thu has a voice so soft it makes falling rain sound like a standing ovation. I spent the next two days with my ear cocked toward her as she whispered at the top of her lungs. That was the only thing about this gracious young lady that drove me crazy! She was the first member of a very dear family that I was to come to love during my two week visit to Viet Nam.

I rode on the back of my chauffeur driven Honda across town to the boarding house where I was to stay for two nights. She had reserved a room for me with Mrs. Ha Thi Nhan, 513/6 Dien Bien Phu Street, Dist. 3, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.

My first view of my home for the next two nights was a little frightening. The boarding house was halfway down a street that would have to be upgraded to pass for an alley in America. At first glance it was dark and ominous. I did not want her to take me down that street! She did not share my fears, however...so down the street we went!

To be perfectly honest, there was really nothing ominous about the street. I was simply nervous on my first night in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam!

A visit to the Vatican would have made me nervous that night...if it had been in Ho Chi Minh City.



# I Keep It In My Heart And Wait For You

## Part II: The Return, 1996

By  
Timothy A. Duffie  
USMC, Viet Nam, 1966-67

### Part II

#### Section 2: Touring Saigon

##### No Tourist Ever Had A Better Tour Of Saigon!

Sunday I had the best tour of Saigon any American tourist could possibly want, still on the back of that Honda. After we had toured the main streets and side-streets of Saigon, I suggested to Phuong Thu that this may be an opportunity for her to see some sights she had never visited. She took me to the Presidential Palace. Perhaps not my first choice, but...

As we moved with our group through the palace, new guides met us to explain each floor and/or room. They all spoke English exceptionally well, and very quickly I became the center of attention. One of the guides asked if I was an American. The others didn't. They saw the 35mm camera over one shoulder, and the videocam over the other, and they knew I had to be an American. The Vietnamese nationals became a mere footnote to the excitement of having a Hoa-Ky (**American**) on the premises. The guides seemed inordinately attentive to me, leaving the nationals to fend for themselves.

Right: Nguyen Hoang Phuong Thu & her sister, Nguyen Hoang Phuong Quyen (you'll meet her later) on my "Cab" in Saigon

Deep in the dungeon-like heart of the palace, three levels down, we entered a room full of radio equipment. It was antiquated U.S. equipment that had been left by the Americans when they fled Saigon. **Good Morning, Vietnam!** did enter my mind. The guide looked at me, cocked her head in an ever so charming manner, and in the most disarming of voices said, "Do you know how to operate this?"

So Coy!

So Lethal!

I gave her my best nonchalant shrug, shook my head feebly and tried to look like anything but an American Vietnam Veteran who had just come close to wetting his pants!

*Why do you ask me that?! What makes you think I would know? Ask some of these other people!*

I cast furtive glances over my shoulder at the heavy steel doors to make sure they were still unlocked!

While it was a pleasant tour, I drew the line at the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to sit in a captured American helicopter. All for the bargain price of 1000 dong (\$.10).

Later that afternoon, after Phuong Thu had gone home for a while, I met the enemy. Two former Viet Cong sat watching as I walked up and down Dien Bien Phu Street. They pointed to a chair and invited me to sit and visit. One spoke English, so I did. I was still a little nervous on the streets of Saigon, so we verbally sparred our way through the introductions.

The conversation started off innocently enough. With a smile on his face, one asked, "This first time you live in Viet Nam?"

*My first day there it had taken me some time to realize that "live" is synonymous with "visit". For the next two weeks that peculiar phrase was to be repeated dozens of times.*



I knew then where this conversation was going to lead. With a sheepish smile, and hoping to impress them with my firm grasp of the Vietnamese language, I said, "No. I lived here in sau-bay ('67)."

Well...one Vietnamese phrase didn't really impress them, but it was a start! Plus, that really isn't "67". It's actually 6 & 7...but it was the best I could do!

Knowing glances; sly looks passed between my new found friends.

Then the spider continued to weave his web. "Where you live when you live in Viet Nam in sau-bay?"

"I lived in Phuoc My Hamlet, Quang Tri Province."

Feeling as though I was being undressed in public, I watched as they compared notes on what they knew about Quang Tri Province in sau-bay. To one well versed in the Vietnam War, time and place tells volumes about the participants. I had every reason to believe that these gentlemen were well versed in the war. I sat mentally whistling past the graveyard, then he went for the kill. He asked,

**"Have you learn yet...perhaps...your government not tell you truth in sau-bay?"**

So well put; rapier sharp. He was kind enough to say "perhaps", but I know he didn't mean it. Thirty years ago I would have argued with them. But that was before I endured twenty-nine years of bodies parading through my mind. I was not sure that this issue was worth arguing over. Hoping to find a more tactful way of settling our differences, I learned that I can be non-committal when I want to be. Smiling diplomatically, I responded,

**"I don't talk about that in America, and I am certainly not going to talk about it sitting here on Dien Bien Phu Street in Saigon."**

*Every time I slipped and referred to Ho Chi Minh City as Saigon, I glanced around in paranoid anticipation of being strong armed for inciting a revolution. After several days I began to notice that even the locals, at least the older ones, continue to use the name Saigon. I began to relax....a little.*

They looked at each other, nodded in agreement that such could only be construed as a confession, and our conversation moved on to other matters.

But I could not dislike them. In addition to their both being quite affable, as I sat on Dien Bien Phu Street I was acutely aware of the fact that I was in their home. Again. I was the visitor. I could not be angry because thirty years ago they had made a choice that differed from mine? A choice that had an impact on their own country. In my mellow old age, I found that rather ludicrous to contemplate.

### **Don't Believe Everything You Read.**

At the airport, and during my first day in Saigon, I was surprised to find that I was traveling alone with Phuong Thu. I had read a few trip reports on the internet, written by experienced travelers, regarding travel in Viet Nam. Some had mentioned the attitude of the Vietnamese toward a single woman in the company of a Western man. The books all indicated that the woman would be considered a prostitute. No questions asked.

I had anticipated that she would bring some friends to the airport. Since it was obvious that she did not seem the least bit concerned, I asked her about it. She explained that her attire was more of a determining factor than the mere fact that we were together. Since she was not wearing a mini-skirt, being in my company did not, categorically, brand her as a prostitute. So much for the **experts**.

### **Did You Enjoy The Food?**

Yes. I ate everything that was put in front of me...no questions asked. I was given a fork and spoon at each meal, but I was determined to learn to use chopsticks. I even learned to bring the rice bowl to my mouth as I pushed the rice into my mouth with those ungainly utensils. I did get a trifle annoyed when my Vietnamese friends insisted on putting a towel on my lap at each meal to catch all the food I dropped! *I am reasonably sure they were just funnin' with me.*

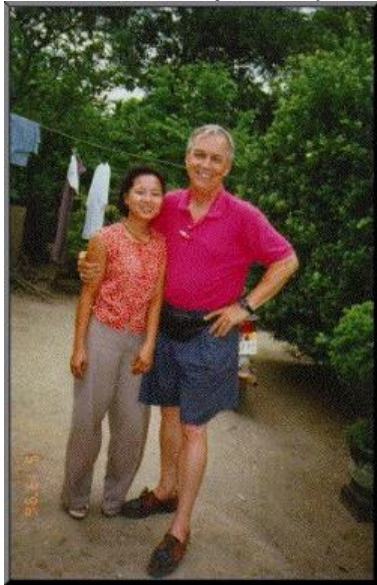
I spent much of my meal time watching them so I could do things properly. What is the sauce in the dish? How do they mix their food? When I was uncertain, I waited until someone else showed me the proper procedure for each item. I had remembered that Viet Nam is a country of polite idiosyncrasies. Shaking hands with both hands; offering something to someone with two hands, bowing politely while making the offer. They are easily offended when we don't pay attention to



their customs. Rightfully so, I might add. While they have become accustomed to our more off-handed approach to such formalities, I was determined to not offend them.

Nothing would offend them more than for me to turn my nose up at the dinner table. So I watched carefully, then I proceeded accordingly. And I ate everything!

*Later, in Phuoc My, I was presented a plate of seven raw squid one morning by Hue's daughter. Not your everyday basic food in America. I had given my hostess, Co Van Thi Hue, 100000 dong [approximately \$10.00] for the market. She bought me the squid as a special treat. Her daughter, Phuong Thao [left], brought it to me. One look and I knew I did not want to eat them. However, with Thao standing there looking so pleased and excited, I simply could not turn my nose up at it. So...gulp...here goes...gulp!*



By the end of the two weeks, I was beginning to dread the next meal. The food was delicious, but I could not eat as much as they thought I could. Perhaps because of the size difference, *me* a svelte 175 lbs., them, a miniscule 90 to 130 lbs, they thought I should have eaten more than they. When I could eat no more, I would push my chair back to let them know that I was done. Co Hue (while I was in Phuoc My), or Phuong Quyen in Da Nang would simply fill my rice bowl again. They would throw in a few pieces of meat and some vegetables, then sit back with the satisfied look of a Boy Scout who just helped a little old lady across the street.

They never did figure out that I could not eat what they thought I could. So late each afternoon I began to worry about the fact that I was going to have to eat again. I did not want to offend my host families, so I always managed to eat. But it was sometimes difficult.

And I lost 12lbs. in the process of gorging myself!

*Since my return, it has been suggested that my mistake may have been in cleaning my plate. To indicate that I was finished, I should have left a small portion on the plate. Unfortunately, while in Vietnam I couldn't forget all those "starving children in China", just a few hundred miles north, my partents had so often warned me about as a child! Talk about a "Catch 22" situation.*

### **In Spite Of My Best Efforts, I Did Offend My Host Family In Da Nang.**

Late in my visit, while at the home of Diep and Tuyet in Da Nang, I was getting restless each evening. After dinner Diep went to fix the lights in the streetside restaurant in front of their home. One evening, I went out and offered to help. He took me by the arm and, murmuring softly "No...no...no...", led me back to the family room. He pleasantly deposited me in a chair.

Their daughters, Phuong Quyen (**age 16**) and Phuong Tam (**age 14**), were helping Tuyet clean up the dishes. Co Hue and her husband were there, so she was helping the women. Co Hue's husband and I sat alone at the table. I did not care all that much for being waited on hand and foot, so I picked up some dishes and headed for the kitchen.

**Right: Nguyen Hoang Phuong Quyen dressed for school.**

Word rampaged through the house like grenade shrapnel. Diep dropped the string of lights and came running in from the shop. Horrified, Tuyet and the girls huddled anxiously nearby. Co Hue was no doubt humiliated. After all, she was the one who had invited this uncultured Neanderthal to Viet Nam in the first place! I stood looking around in confusion.

For the second time in as many minutes, Diep took me by the arm as he removed the dishes from my hands and gave them to Tuyet. Then, in his best **"You Are An Honored Guest"** manner, he once again murmured politely, but this time just a little more firmly, as he led me to a chair.

In Viet Nam, Honored Guests do not help with the dishes...or the electrical wiring in the cafe.



## Confronting My Fear

Back to my first day in Vietnam, that evening, while waiting for Phuong Thu to arrive for our evening out, I experienced the first of three terrifying moments that I was to encounter over the ensuing two weeks. I must add that none were justified. Each was the result of my mental VCR playing back responses to external stimuli.

*Even toward the end of my visit, I never totally got over the feeling of impending danger, a feeling I had not anticipated prior to the trip. It happened once while I was in the train station in Da Nang, mid-afternoon, and I was with Diep, Tuyet and the girls at the time. That was the most inexplicable of them all, but the feeling was real.*

*Perhaps it was because Viet Nam has represented danger in my mind for the past thirty years. It would seem that fear is a thought process that simply cannot be turned off in a few days.*

I was sitting on the curb in front of the boarding house. The street was narrow, leaving room for only a motorbike and possibly one pedestrian to pass at any given place. It was, to say the least, mildly claustrophobic! Parading past was a constant array of local Vietnamese. Sitting directly across from me, on the opposite curb, was a Vietnamese man approximately 30 years of age. I had the feeling, as we had said in 1967, of being "...all alone in Indian country".



In what can only be considered a response to an all too familiar environment, the feeling of impending danger I had experienced years ago crawled through my body like blood poisoning. I knew that I had to sit and confront that fear. Not with rifles and hand grenades, but with reason and logic. I would be traveling between Saigon and Dong Ha for two weeks. The majority of the time I would be in the company of my friends. But I would also be alone for extended periods. Those would become very long weeks if I could not control the replays of old fears.

**Left: Nguyen Hoang Phuong Tam, the youngest of the Nguyen daughters.**

I knew I was being ridiculous. But that did not make the fear any less intense. Feeling virtually defenseless in this sea of Vietnamese faces, I had to fight the urge to run up to my room and lock myself in.

As logic argued with experience in my mind, I heard a motorbike approaching from my right. As it passed, I noticed that the driver was a rather attractive (a gross understatement) Vietnamese woman in her mid-twenties. However, it was her passenger who earned my undivided attention, and my eternal love. The object of 52 years of my dreams was sitting side-saddle behind the driver facing me. She was dressed in a mini-skirt that left little to the imagination.

Conceding to life's most basic of instincts, I almost fell face first onto the pavement as I leaned forward and followed my fantasy down the street until she disappeared onto Dien Bien Phu Street. As I struggled to regain my composure, forcing my head back to front and center, I noticed my imagined nemesis on the far curb doing the same thing. He looked at me, and we both knew we had been caught with our basest instincts bared. He laughed, and my terror disappeared.

Later that night, Phuong Thu and I went out on the town. She took me to ***The Cabaret Of Art, 14 Lam Son St., Binh Thanh, Saigon, Viet Nam.*** This was not a tourist spot. It was a local favorite. I relaxed as a variety of foreign and domestic music was presented by different groups and soloists. As I listened to a woman sing a rather melancholy song, Phuong Thu explained that it was about the war in Viet Nam. A man went off to the war, leaving his family behind. Once she told me it was about the war, I was able to draw conclusions based purely on the tone of the music.

Then the tone changed. It became music of celebration. Without being told, I knew that the man had returned from the war. He had been reunited with his family. It was a happy time, and the faces on the Vietnamese listening reflected that joy.

I tried to think of anything comparable that had been written in America during the Vietnam War. Anything! I thought of many songs of celebration that had been written down through the years. ***"When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again"***, ***"Over There"***, and a few others. But they were all written for other wars. Not ours.

We were treated to protest music and nothing more.

*Fortunately for me, and all those around me, that was my only brief venture into the unwelcome land of self-pity. Early Sunday morning Phuong Thu had called her family to tell them what time I would arrive in Da Nang on Monday. She spoke to her sister, Phuong Quyen, who was to be my interpreter and guide while in Da Nang, and told her that I was "cheerful". Quite frankly, it was something she had not expected. I was determined that Quyen, too, would say I was cheerful when I left.*

### **Some Final Thoughts About My First Two Days In-Country.**

It was impossible to watch the locals as they moved about on Dien Bien Phu Street, or those with whom I had toured the Presidential Palace, and not be aware of the fact that some of them may have killed Americans.

What was my reaction?

Even as I was pondering these things, my body was fighting off jet lag from the trip half-way around the world. Mental and physical fatigue were constant reminders that I had traveled 24 hours to get there. The vast majority of those I was critiquing were, no doubt, South Vietnamese nationals at the time of the war. As citizens of South Vietnam, they had made a choice based on what they believed was best for their country. I was the outsider....then, and now.

I may have differed then, and still do, with their political choice. However, the simple fact remains that it was their country. It was their choice to make. Only Yankee arrogance could continue to be angry with them for making a choice in their own country. Even if that choice led to a war.

As I pondered the decisions of my youth, an expected side effect of my visit to Viet Nam, I considered the fact that one of the premises I had fought for was that of freedom of choice. It seemed rather silly, thirty years later, to remain angry with them because of that choice.

So, as I fought more with jet lag, and less with the locals, my personal war in Viet Nam continued to abate.





# I Keep It In My Heart And Wait For You

## Part II: The Return, 1996

By  
Timothy A. Duffie  
USMC, Viet Nam, 1966-67

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## Part II

### Section 3: Da Nang & Phuoc My

Monday afternoon my chauffeur arrived on her Honda to take me to the airport for my trip to Da Nang. I was pleased to be leaving Saigon. While an interesting diversion, Saigon is no more representative of Viet Nam than New York City is representative of America. Rural Viet Nam was what I had returned to see. I was anxious to get there.

I only had one night in Da Nang on this leg of the trip, so there is little worth discussing, other than the hotel accommodations. I stayed at the ***Xuan Thieu Hotel***, off Highway 1 on the north side of Da Nang. It was close to the home of Diep and Tuyet, within view of the Hai Van Pass, and quite a pleasant location. Stepping out of my room in the early morning hours, a walk of less than 100 yards put me on the shores of the South China Sea. Not a bad way to start the day.

The stay in Da Nang was not totally uneventful, however. I did encounter my second incident of fear as I stood on Highway 1 my first night there. For the first time since arriving in Viet Nam, I stood outside in the dark, in an area where I could see the mountains of the Hai Van Pass in the distance, and palm trees on either side of me. As had happened the first time in Saigon, I had to fight the intense feeling of impending danger. I was virtually quivering, eyes darting to either side searching for the shelter of "friendly faces". And, as in Saigon earlier, the awareness that I was unarmed only added to my terror.

The scenario was not totally as it would have been in 1967. Highway 1 would have been pitch black back then. The villagers would have all been in their homes. The fact of cars and trucks moving up and down the highway, of lighted homes and people walking the highway, made no difference. My mind would not listen to reason. Once again I felt defenseless. In the heart of Vietnam, I had no place to run. I had no recourse but to stand and wait for the terror to go away.

But I remember the feeling. I don't like it, and I have no desire to ever experience it again!

#### The Trip Up Highway 1, Tuesday, May 7th.

Tuyet arranged for a car to take us to Dong Ha on Tuesday. A friend had agreed to take me the 135 miles up Highway 1 for \$40.00 The bus would have been cheaper, but we would not have been able to stop and visit in some of the hamlets as we traveled.

By 8:00 A.M., Tuesday, May 7th., we were climbing the Hai Van Pass at breakneck speeds approaching 25 MPH! That does not sound like much until you consider that in Viet Nam there seem to be no written or verbal Rules-Of-The-Road. They pass around curves...over the top of hills...on the left side or right side as circumstances dictate...the only constant being a continuous bleating of horns. Throughout all of this, the only person who seemed on the verge of a coronary was the Dinky-Dow Wakee tourist in the back seat. My hostess for the ride, Tuyet, and the driver, Nguyen Van Khanh, were treating it like just another day at the office!

With Phuoc My as our prime goal, we buzzed (correction...we TOOTED) our way through Phu Bai, Hue City, and Quang Tri. Those cities would have to await the return trip. My old CAP Village, and those friends who had survived the TET Offensive of 1968, and the destruction that had taken place in Quang Tri Province in 1972, had beckoned for twenty-nine years. I was ready to get there.

#### Phuoc My, Viet Nam

After passing a sign that said Phuoc My and crossing a bridge, Tuyet spoke quickly to Khanh. He skidded to a halt, then he put the car in reverse and backed across the street. Thinking something must have happened, I glanced out the rear window and saw Hue and her husband standing by the roadside watching the car.

Hue looked into the back seat and saw that it was me. In struggling to adequately describe what I saw in the next two seconds, there is but one thing I can think of to say: she went ballistic.

How do you describe someone who appears to be running, but is not moving? She seemed to spin around in circles. She literally started in two or three directions, all in a split second, but stopped. She just did not know what to do. Mostly, I think she wanted to be sure that all her neighbors were watching her moment of glory.

Who could blame her. After twenty-nine years, of the hundreds of thousands of American service personnel who had passed through that hamlet on the way to Khe Sanh and the DMZ, one had returned to visit her and her family. She was the center of attention. It is impossible for me to comprehend the prestige this had given her within the community. In a society still built around dignity and saving face, her's was beaming that day.

I arrived to a "wash the dust of the trip off your face", administered by Co Hue at the community well. I then settled into what turned out to be six days of people coming in from miles around just to visit with one of "our Marines" who had returned.

I decided that I would rather sit and share in the love and friendship of these people than go look at mountains and hills. So I never visited the DMZ, Rockpile, or anywhere else I had planned on visiting. Mountains could not have made me feel the way the people did. How would I have felt if someone had walked several miles to visit while I was standing somewhere taking pictures of mountains and hills? It just did not seem appropriate. I had said all along that I was returning to Viet Nam because I have friends there, not because I had fought a war there.

And my friends did not disappoint me!

I was visited by the brothers of Ha Si Nam, one of our PFs (*local militia*) who had saved my friend Ray Borowski's life, then fell on a satchel charge. The brothers heard that I was there, and that I remembered Ha Si Nam. They came to thank me. I had the chance to tell them that we had loved him, and that he was a great and fearless warrior. I had converted some slides to photos, and I took one of him for his family. They seemed grateful when I gave it to them. All pictures of him had been destroyed during the war.

*That scenario was repeated time and time again. As I met people who said they remembered me, I asked for childhood pictures. I wanted to remember them, but could not take thirty years off their faces. Far too often they simply said that the pictures of their childhood had been destroyed during the war. One of the untold side effects of war. Never having a picture to look at and say, "That was me when I was 12."*

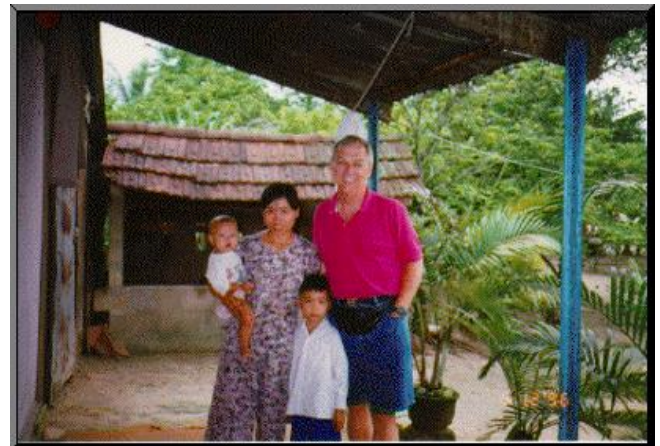
Another of our PFs, Ha Si Phu, had died in his home one afternoon in 1968. It can be said that Ha Si Phu had saved each Marine's life many times. He was adept at spotting booby traps and ambushes long before we entered the killing zone.

**Ha Si Phu's daughter, Co Dang Thi Quy, with her son & daughter.**

In 1967, while on patrol south of Phuoc My one day, Ha Si Phu spotted a Viet Cong ambush along Highway 1. The ambush was waiting for a unit from the 1st. Battalion, 9th. Marines, on its way to Khe Sanh. We spoiled the ambush, and the 1/9 never knew how close they had come.

In 1968, while his wife and 8 month old daughter were in the rice paddies, a satchel charge had destroyed him and his home. So his only daughter, Co Dang Thi Quy, now 30, stopped by to see me. She came with his older brother. They had heard I was there, and that I had asked about

Ha Si Phu. They came to thank me for remembering him. The next day Co Quy returned. This time she brought her five year old son and eight month old daughter. Her son heard her speaking of the American who was talking about his grandfather. He wanted to meet me.



She returned several times throughout the week. Her visits became very difficult for me. She just sat beside me at the table under the trees, quietly watching and listening. Smiling, though I do not totally understand why. She lives in poverty in a grass hut donated by her mother and step-father after her husband left. The 100000 dong (\$10.00) I had given her the first day for groceries was more money than she had ever seen at one time. Small change for the daughter of one whose skills had saved my life, and a few dozen Marines from the 1st./9th.

It seems she just wanted to connect with this American stranger who had fought beside her father. At times I was overwhelmed by memories of him. Sitting with her was a constant reminder of his courage and skills; it was a gentle renewal of my dislike for the macho, back alley courage of lesser men. I often found myself choking back tears. I simply wanted to hold her and tell her that things would get better. But I know they won't.

Those who have never experienced the love and understanding that can exist between people, often for intangible reasons, have missed one of life's most priceless treasures. This was one of those inexplicable connections during which words could have done little to enhance the emotion.

Each time she passed the hut, down the trail beside Co Hue's house, she would look to me and smile. She came for the last time on the day I was to leave Phuoc My. She is one of my many experiences that continue to bring tears with the memory.

### **Regarding Hairy Chests.**

Each evening we entertained ourselves by plugging the videocam into the VCR compatible TV in my hotel room, and we watched the highlights of that day. I was always accompanied by any number of hangers-on from the day's activities. One evening it was Co Hue, her sister Co Hien, and Hien's two daughters.

*While I was there, indicating to me that I wasn't the only Marine they remembered, Co Hien asked if I could find her friend "Rick". Hien was only five when we were in Lai Phuoc, and she doesn't remember his last name. But "Rick" had befriended her, and she remembered him! Unfortunately, I don't. Another of the villagers asked about Ray Borowski. Fortunately I know where to find him. When I called and told him this, he said he had chills. With everything Vietnam Veterans have been told, and called, over the past 30 years, it was nice to be remembered by those we believed we were helping.*

I stepped into the bathroom for a quick waist up sponge bath. I returned to the room, quickly donned a T-shirt, then sat down to enjoy the tapes. The next day, as I sat in the arbor in front of Co Hue's home, I noticed Co Hue bringing her friends and neighbors up to me. She would point to my chest, then they would walk away giggling and talking animatedly as they patted themselves on the chest. What could possibly be so amusing?

### ***Chest Hair!***

Not a lot, mind you, by American standards. But more than they had seen in a long time. Sitting there in my pull-over golf shirt, my anemic little Brillo pad peeking over the top became the novelty of the day. I did a quick flashback to 1967. I remembered sitting in the marketplace in Lai Phuoc. Children would come up and gently pull the hair on my chest to see if it was real. And they would giggle. My visit had rekindled a pleasant memory for Co Hue and her friends. One of the few things from their childhood about which they can laugh.



*Later on Dien Bien Phu Street in Saigon, I was sitting with the street merchants late Saturday night. I watched a little girl stare at me, then turn to her mother and point to me. Her mother looked, and they both laughed. I looked at her mother, then I pointed to my hair. She nodded in agreement. If chest hair were the mark of royalty, in Viet Nam I could be king!*

In that respect, Viet Nam has not changed in the past twenty-nine years.



## **What Did You Do For Six Days In Phuoc My?**

### **Eat! Sometimes I couldn't eat because I was too busy eating!**

We had lunch at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Nguyen Huu Hoang. They had visited with me at Co Hue's house for dinner the night before. While they were there he had added to my notebook several pages of notes of his history of service to the Americans during the war. Row after row of names of his American supervisors. He needs to find someone who can verify his faithfulness to our cause so he can get approval to immigrate to the US. Since he would never think of asking for something without giving in return, he then invited us to their home for lunch the next day. While we were at his home, Mr. Hoa came and added his military biography to my ever growing notebook.

We left that lunch table at about 6:00 P.M. and hurried back to Co Hue's house. Le Thi Phuong Thao had been cooking all afternoon, and dinner was ready!

Nguyen Thi Que, Co Hue's sister-in-law, rode her bicycle six miles from Quang Tri to join us for lunch one day to see if I could help her escape Vietnam. She returned to Quang Tri on my rented motorbike driven by her brother. When she returned, she had copies of documentation of her service during the war.

She arrived once more on Sunday for dinner, my last full day in Phuoc My. She made a formal presentation of some wonderful gifts for my wife. She thanked me in advance for everything I was going to do to help her. One more of those tearful memories.

### **Thoughts On Being A Messiah.**

Each of these former allies touched my heart in many ways. Try as I would, I could not seem to convince them that I had not walked on the water across the Pacific Ocean. I had, in fact, arrived in Viet Nam on an airplane. Like pilgrims to a religious shrine, they each sat looking to me to be their messiah. Some traveled several miles in 100 degree heat just to talk to me. I never became totally comfortable with being a celebrity...or a messiah.

In the 1960s and 1970s, each had placed a bet on their favorite horse. That horse was awesome coming out of the gate, and their hopes had soared. They could not have known that their choice had no staying power. This horse did not have the fortitude required to complete the race. He faltered in the final turn, then he lost it all in the home stretch. Their soaring hopes had soured. After the race was over, and an exhausted race horse had limped home for a much needed rest, the racetrack was locked to the outside world. Out of fear of retribution, these people had burned all evidence of their initial wager. Now they need that documentation, and it is gone. They felt trapped there forever.

And then their messiah walked across the Pacific Ocean to Viet Nam.

I wish I could do what they think I can do!

### **I Must Be Rich! I Have Five More At Home That I Can't Find.**

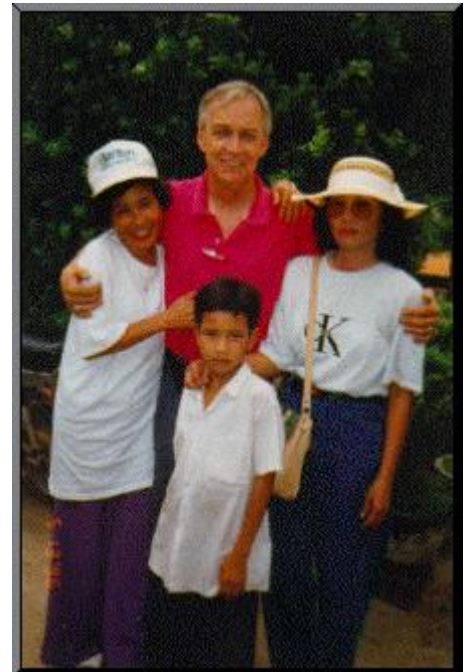
I stepped into the small side room in Co Hue's shop one day, and I found my interpreter, Tran Bich, sitting with a young lady I had watched for several days around the shop. She had a small kit on her lap. She was giving Bich a manicure. I watched as she took a well worn pair of scissors and carefully trimmed his nails.

**Co Hien (Hue's Sister), me, Co Hue, Hue's ten year old son**

The next day she sat watching as I took my fingernail clippers and attacked my nails. When I was done, I started to put the clippers in my pocket. I noticed her look as those priceless clippers started to disappear. I respectfully took the clippers in both hands and bowed politely as I offered them to her.

Her face lit up. She ran to her little corner of the commercial world and returned with her kit. She carefully placed her new prize into the kit with her other tools.

I was reminded of the five or six fingernail clippers that I have at home, none of which I can find at any given moment. How many other manicurists could I have upgraded to state-of-the-art, 20<sup>th</sup>. Century, equipment had I thought to bring them with me?



And, even worse, in our throw-away society, how many of those five or six had I bought simply because I could not find the others?

When faced with such poverty, I even came to have a better appreciation for my fingernail clippers!

### **Regarding Gifts.**

In offering gifts, I had remembered to always offer with both hands, bowing respectfully as I made the offer. It had been my understanding that a one-handed, casual offering, could be perceived as an insult. I did not, however, anticipate a "Thank You". According to Vietnamese culture, in giving a gift the giver earns points toward heaven. The individual who received the gift was enabling the giver to earn those points. So a "Thank You" was deemed inappropriate.

However, in deference to our need to see gratitude for our generosity, my friends had all mastered the rather difficult English "Thank You". It actually comes out "T'an' 'ou".

*Later, viewing videos of my home while back in Da Nang, Phuong Quyen complimented me on my "..beautiful green garden".*

*"Garden? I have no garden," I said.*

*Then, after giving it some thought, I said, "Oh! You mean my YARD!"*

*"Yes," she said. "You have a beautiful green YAR..." Hard as she tried, she just could not quite get the "d" in yard.*

### **It Is Okay To Clench Your Teeth; Just Use Both Hands And Bow Slightly As You Do It.**

If you go to Viet Nam, be prepared to buy cartons of cigarettes. Even if you are a non-smoker. The adult men in Viet Nam all smoke....well....almost all of them. As the parade of locals continued throughout the week, it became mandatory that I offer each of the men a cigarette when they arrived...two handed offerings to each of my long procession of visitors.

Not only that, but there is the *Sacred Male Bonding Ritual* of the after meal cigarette. I found myself buying a carton of cigarettes almost daily. In the process, I learned that it is possible to extend a pack of cigarettes with two hands, bowing slightly while clenching my teeth as I watched money disappear at the end of my two fistfuls of generosity!

### **Does Anybody Remember What You Wore When You Were Sixteen?**

I was talking with Co Hue one afternoon about some of the things we remembered from the hamlet in 1967.

She said that she wore black pants and a purple blouse then.

That was 29 years ago!

If I were to see a picture of myself at 16 years old, I might!...maybe!...if I tried real hard!... remember the shirt and pants! But don't bet on it!

I guess in Viet Nam in 1967, there was not much else to remember.

Except death.

### **On My Next Visit, I Will Just Walk Around Naked.**

After several days my T-shirts and golf shirts were beginning to plead with me for soap and water. I offered Hue's 14 year old daughter, Le Thi Phuong Nhung, some money to do my laundry. As my T-shirts hung on the line drying, one in particular caught the eye of Hue's 17 year old daughter, Le Thi Phuong Thao.

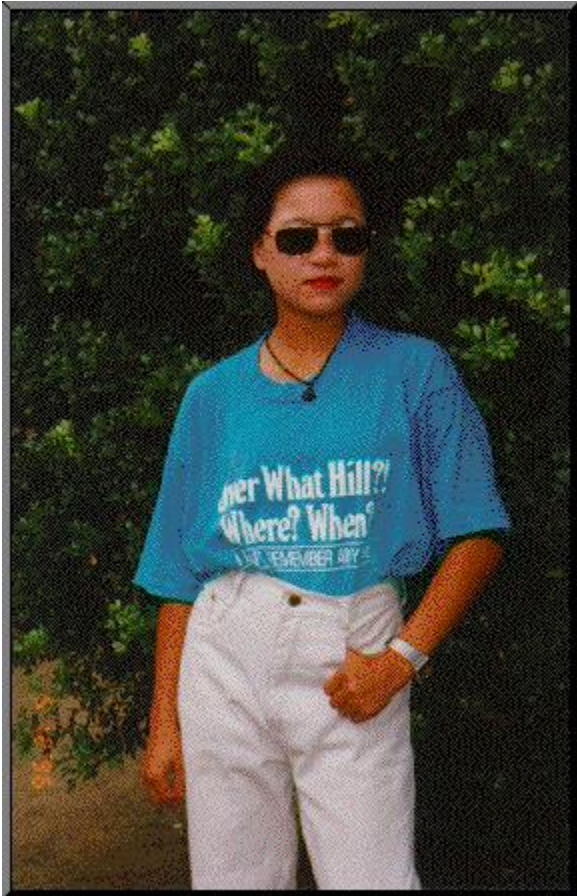
*Why is this entire narrative "her daughter this; her daughter that....."? Why were most of the visitors in Phuoc My women in 1996?*

*Where were all the boys/men in 1996...and 1967?*

*In 1996 they were there, but in Viet Nam it is the women who do most, if not all, of the domestic chores. Taking care of my every need fell into the category of a domestic task [notice that I can't bring myself to refer to it as a "chore"]. Phuong Nhung did my laundry; Phuong Thao did most of the cooking.*

Co Hue's nineteen year old son was always hanging around with his contemporaries near the shop. Her ten year old son was close most of the time I was in Phuoc My. However, the young girls were considerably more forward and friendly. They were the ones who stared balefully at my shirts until I gave in and gave them to them. It was the girls who took my pony tail hat off my head and went strutting off across the courtyard.

As to why the visitors were mostly women, we knew mostly girls in the hamlet in 1967. The males were either off fighting the war, or their parents had hidden them to keep them from being "conscripted" by one side or the other. The war continued for eight years after I left in 1967. So even the little boys I knew in the village are either dead from fighting the war in later years, or I had never met them. So the little girls grew up, and that is who came to visit me in 1996.



Anyhow, back to my laundry. Glancing up late that afternoon, I saw Phuong Thao walk out of the house wearing my 50th. year birthday present. It was a T-shirt that said, "**Over What Hill... Where...When...I Don't Remember Any Hill!**" She giggled and glanced slyly at me to make absolutely certain I had noticed her. Then she walked quickly past me toward the shop. I grabbed my camera, chased her down, and she posed for the obligatory pictures (**which is what she wanted in the first place!**). Then she went back into the house, removed the T-shirt and put it back on the line with the rest of my laundry.

**Left: Phuong Thao With One Of My Favorite Shirts. I Came Home With Only The Shirt On My Back**

She didn't want to **KEEP** it...she only wanted to **BORROW** it.

**RIIIIGHT!**

I sure do miss that shirt! It was one of my favorites. But, then again, so was my Fossil T-shirt ....and my Cincinnati Bengals T-Shirt....and my Cincinnati Reds 1990 World Championship T-shirt ....and my Guardian Angel lapel pin.

Guardian Angel lapel pin?

**I Think She Needs A Guardian Angel More Than I Do.**

As I was leaving for Viet Nam, my friend Tina Hubbard, from Rochester, NY, had met me at the airport. She gave me a Guardian Angel pin. She knew that I was nervous about the trip, and this was her thoughtful gift to me. I was pleased with her thoughtfulness, so I

wore the pin whenever I had an appropriately collared shirt.

My last night in the hotel in Dong Ha, I sat on the floor with Le Thi Phuong Nhung, Co Hue's 14 year old daughter, snuggled tightly into my side as we watched the tapes from that day. Her eyes caught the pin. She stared at it intently. She reached and gently touched it, looking up to me often as though afraid I would get angry. She looked to her mother for help, back to the pin, then up to me. Hope and desire churned inside this beautiful child. Phuong Nhung was in love with that pin!

I didn't think Tina would object. I was close to the end of the trip, and the angel had served its purpose. I unfastened the pin, then I reached over and fastened it onto Phuong Nhung's collar.

**She bounced! Literally!** I had never seen anyone simply levitate off the ground. I still haven't figured out how she did it.

In an explosion of excitement, she bounced up and down, then she glanced anxiously around the room to see if all had witnessed her moment of glory. She said something to her mother. Then she settled just a little tighter into my side. When she nestled her head contentedly onto my shoulder, I decided that an angel pin had been a small price to pay for the special love that I had found for this very real angel over the past several days.

At the house the next day I noticed that she was not wearing the pin. I asked Bich about it, and he said that she had carefully placed the pin in a box, and it was safely tucked away out of sight of prying eyes and potentially sticky fingers. Everything given to a Vietnamese individual is given to the family. Everything...that is...except this guardian angel pin!



### **About My Nieces And Nephews In Phuoc My.**

My third or fourth day in Phuoc My, Bich told me that Co Hue's children were beginning to dread the day I would leave the hamlet. They had anticipated my arrival with a degree of fear. No doubt they had heard stories about the war. They had heard of the Marines who had lived there thirty years ago. They knew that while we were there we had killed people. So they were afraid.

By the end of my visit, however, Phuong Nhung had become my shadow. Bich informed me that the children had begun to refer to me as "Uncle Tim". Family is sacred in Viet Nam. So when the little ones began referring to me as Uncle Tim, I understood that this was not something they simply tossed out just for appearances. In the few short days I was in Phuoc My, I had become part of the family.

**Right: my New Niece, Le Thi Phuong Nhung She Now Has A Guardian Angel Of Her Own....and my ponytail hat!**

Phuong Nhung had even expressed concern to her mother that she may cry when it came time for me to leave.

Well, my newfound "Little Niece", that will make at least two of us.

### **Some Things I Envy About Viet Nam.**

Earlier I indicated that giving something to one is giving something to the family. The same could be said about giving something to the community. Several times during the week I dropped off one or two rolls of film in Dong Ha in the morning before venturing out into the hamlet. I was surprised when I arrived to find a Kodak Express shop in Dong Ha, right down from my hotel. We never had to wait long for the pictures. Same day service! By early that afternoon, the pictures were ready.



That afternoon, all whose pictures were on those rolls would meet in the courtyard of Co Hue's house, and the pictures were divided among the families. I always made two sets: one for the Co Hue and her family, and one for me. Everybody who had participated in the photo-orgy the previous day received copies of their pictures. Everybody! Nobody had to ask; it was simply done. If the picture was of someone else's family, Co Hue sat and patiently made sure that they got copies. Each has a memory of that special week. Of the more than 175 pictures I took in and around Phuoc My, Hue kept 50 or 60. The neighbors and relatives have all the rest.

Nobody is selfish in Phuoc My, Viet Nam. The neighbor lady came each day and helped Phuong Thao cook our meals. That gave Co Hue time to spend with her family and me. Each shirt and hat I gave away found itself on each of Hue's children at least once. Some found a home with the neighbor's kids.

Since most of the community is Buddhist, I can only assume that their religion, also, has a clause that says, "...it is better to give than to receive". And I can tell you that they do practice that!

### **Well...It Is One Big Happy Family.**

In discussing the tight knit community organization with my interpreter, Tran Bich, he provided a logical reason. Few people ever leave the hamlet. Most grow up and find a mate within the confines of a one or two mile radius. Since this has been going on for centuries, they accept the fact that they are all related. They don't stop to calculate whether or not an individual is a cousin thirty-seven times removed. Family is family. And in a hamlet in Viet Nam, they are all family.





## I Keep It In My Heart And Wait For You Part II: The Return, 1996

By  
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USMC, Viet Nam, 1966-67

### Part II Section 4: Da Nang, Saigon, And Back Home

We returned to Da Nang on Monday, May 13th., with a stopover in Hue to tour the Imperial Palace. We had an entourage. Co Hue and her husband were with us. They stayed with Tuyet and her family until Thursday. During the week we toured Hoi An, Hoi An Beach, Marble Mountain, Da Nang, and China Beach.



*Hoi An is a stunning collection of Buddhist Temples and old homes, most in excess of 450 years old. It was satisfying to watch Co Hue and her husband as they went excitedly from one tourist spot to another. They had never toured the Imperial Palace...the Temples of Hoi An [they are Buddhists], the 450 year old homes in Hoi An, or the scenic areas in and around Da Nang. The 550000 dong it cost me for the car, entry into all the tourists spots, etc., represented four of five months income for them. I considered that the money would have been better spent had I simply given it to them. But then they wouldn't have the memories and pictures of their tour through their cultural and religious heritage.*

Thursday morning Co Hue and her husband boarded a bus for Phuoc My. That afternoon I boarded the train in Da Nang for the 18 hour trip to Saigon. I was not alone. Diep and Tuyet's 16 year old daughter, accompanied me.

Of the many cultural differences between Viet Nam and America, the trust that Tuyet and Diep placed in me ranks high on my list. I was virtually a stranger, having only exchanged a few letters over the past two years. Yet they trusted their beautiful 16 year old daughter to me on the train, in a private compartment, for 18 hours.

When I commented to Tuyet that I was a stranger, she looked horrified that I would say that. I had been a guest in their home, so I was no longer a stranger. Unbelievable! I don't think I would have done the same in their place! But then, I grew up in America. They simply trust people. I hope they don't have to change in the near future.

Before we left, Phuong Quyen asked a favor, one that only a Wealthy American Tourist with several expensive cameras could fill. As I understood it, she needed a portfolio of pictures in order to enter a beauty contest in school. Seein's how I was the only Wealthy American Tourist with several expensive cameras there, how could I refuse? Tuyet visited a neighboring home and returned with a rather striking Vietnamese dress, and we proceeded to take a series of 15 set-up shots, some of which are included here.

Later I learned that Phuong Quyen did enter the "Beauty Contest" in 1997. She won "Miss Da Nang Province"!

During the train ride to Saigon, I was looking forward to beautiful scenery and hours of sparkling conversation with Phuong Quyen. The scenery did not disappoint me. We boarded the train at 3:30 P.M. By 5:00 P.M. Phuong Quyen was sound asleep in her berth! She may have been exhausted from the tortuous (*ten minute!*) session posing for the pictures earlier that day.

Be that as it may, I finally climbed into my berth about 7:00 P.M. and slept restfully



until 4:00 A.M. on the 14th. In the wee hours of the morning I heard the door to our compartment open. Opening my eyes only enough to see what had caused the commotion, I saw one of the policemen from the train peering in. He looked to his left and saw Phuong Quyen comfortably asleep in her berth. He glanced up to me, then turned and left the compartment. That may be standard procedure on the train. However, I'm inclined to believe that word was out that an American was traveling alone with a young Vietnamese woman.

Eighteen hours after it had begun, our odyssey ended in Saigon. Two more days, then home.

### **Before We Leave Da Nang...**

If you visit Vietnam, and plan on spending time in the homes of the people, wear slip on shoes. Whenever we visited one of the nicer homes, both in Phuoc My and later in Da Nang, we always removed our shoes before we entered.

My first day in Phuoc My I wore laced running shoes. Taking them off and on became a nuisance as we moved from house to house. My friends tried to tell me I didn't need to take them off, but, when in Rome...

I replaced them the next day with a pair of deck shoes. After a few days, however, I realized that nobody removed their shoes when they entered Co Hue's home. I asked the interpreter why. He simply pointed to the floor.

Dirt floor.

Everybody else had cement floors.

I guess you need not worry about offending them if the people you are visiting can't afford a cement floor.

### **Back on the streets of Saigon.**

I spent my final two days on Dien Bien Phu Street mixing with my friends the street merchants. They remembered me from two weeks prior, and they welcomed me back like a long lost friend. We laughed together, and I took pictures.

And my friends protected me from the streets. That was evident Saturday night as five street youths walked past me on Dien Bien Phu Street. In a scene that would have caused mild panic in New York City, I noticed that the looks I was getting from these young men were not all pleasant. I was uncomfortable as they approached, thinking I was about to encounter Viet Nam's version of street toughs.

The fact that I was an American and stood out like the proverbial sore thumb only served to enhance my continuing trip into a fantasy induced paranoia-land. I glanced over my shoulder and saw that each of the women I had been visiting with all day were watching this group intently. More than once I had watched a Vietnamese woman take a disobedient young lad by the ear, twist, and lead him to whatever task he had been assigned. I learned that nobody crosses the women of Viet Nam.



**Left: Back In Saigon With Phuong Thu & Phuong Quyen.**

I relaxed. I could not have been better protected had I been sitting at home in my family room. I was one of them; my street friends were watching out for me.

Saturday afternoon Phuong Thu took me to her home for lunch with Quyen and Phuong Thu's college classmate. That night I enjoyed

dinner with Phuong Thu and Phuong Quyen. The restaurant was on a sidestreet just off Dien Bien Phu Street, a few blocks from the boarding house.

We were sitting in the open door restaurant less than ten feet from the street when it happened.

I am not totally sure what caused the noise. It was either a back-fire from a passing motorbike, or someone with a few firecrackers. Either way, two quick "shots" penetrated the silence...and my extremely thin veneer of false bravado. My worst nightmare had come true! "They" had found me...and they were coming to get me. You can use your imagination for the rest.

We all laughed about it when it was over...Phuong Thu, Phuong Quyen, and the other patrons of the restaurant. They knew. There was a time when their laughter would have sent me into fits of anger. But no more. It was the light laughter of

empathy, and I took it as such. I'm reasonably sure quite a few of them have some not-so-pleasant memories of life in Vietnam, also.

The next morning Phuong Thu and Phuong Quyen escorted me to the airport. I boarded a plane for home, burdened down with gifts, my two weeks of renewed love and friendship at an end.

### **Did Any Positives Come Out Of Your Two Weeks In Viet Nam?**

Too many to count.

People will never again convince me that we had no friends in Viet Nam. Nor will they tell me that our former enemies, on a one-on-one basis, are still enemies. Perhaps we will someday again find ourselves at odds with their political system. But that is politics, something over which we, the often impressionable little people of the world, have no control.

However, when given the opportunity to meet my counterparts, all of them, former enemies and allies alike, took me into their homes and into their shops. They offered me their chairs and protection on Dien Bien Phu Street.

### **My Former Enemies**

My former enemies sat with me on the street corners and in side street shops. We had guarded conversations about our war. I came to a better understanding of those with whom I had been angry for so many years.

We'd had an interpreter in our CAP compound in 1967. I was wounded and sent to Phu Bai to recuperate. One day one of my fellow CAP Marines from Phuoc My passed through on his way home. He told me that our interpreter had been a "spy". He was caught and sent to prison. I thought of the times we had sat in meetings with the village chief. I had thought of the interpreter as my friend. So I got angry with him. In 1967, or virtually anytime since, I would have gladly shot him out of anger and hatred. For twenty-nine years I have stayed angry with him. He had betrayed me.

Betrayed me?

Everything in life is a matter of perspective.

Did he travel half way around the world to America to fight a war? Did he come to my homeland where I could have fooled him and disappeared into a sea of Caucasian faces?

Need I answer that?

I went to his country. I went to an ethnic/geographic area that was divided against itself. This would have given even the dumbest of military strategists a variety of opportunities to trick me. My enemy was far from dumb. This was not the British army of our Revolutionary War. The Viet Cong did not wear bright red uniforms. They didn't stand in neat lines as we hid behind trees and killed them. Perhaps I am angry because they didn't permit themselves to die an "honorable" death, whatever consolation that is to the dead.

Since he spoke English, he had participated in the war in a manner for which he was uniquely qualified: he hid in a sea of Vietnamese faces, and he deceived me. And that made me mad! Even as I was fighting a war for his right to the freedom of choice, I despised him for the choice he had made.

Now there's an example of illogical Yankee arrogance for you.

Multiply that scenario several hundreds-of-thousands of times over, and you have the legacy that is the Vietnam War.

But I am no longer angry. After 29 years of soul destroying hatred and anger, I have made the choice to put an end to it.

And it feels good!

### **My Former Allies**

Nor will I ever forget that we had allies in that war. Those who had been my allies took me into back rooms in their homes where they showed me small Buddhist shrines. Behind each shrine of burning incense I saw pictures of their fathers, sons, and brothers. All wore the uniform of the South Vietnamese Army. Each had been killed. After a reflective pause, we bid adieu to their loved ones once again, and we left.

Our former allies say little about the war. Each deals with his/her pain in their own way. There are no psychiatrists, no government sponsored systems designed to help them deal with their PTSD. There is only hard work and a meager existence.

One former ally sat at a table in his home a hundred yards south of our former Papa 2 compound. He proudly lifted a pants-leg to show me the scars on his leg incurred in a battle with the Viet Cong south of Saigon. His wife sat stoically beside him watching me. I wondered if she had slept in that home while I was sitting on a night ambush a few hundred meters away in 1967. I wondered if she had felt safer because we were there.

I wondered about so many things.

During our visit we did not need to remind ourselves that our mutual sacrifices had all come to naught when South Viet Nam fell in 1975. He knew it. I knew it. It was best left unspoken. So we simply sat in silence for several moments. A Vietnamese and an American. Veterans of the Vietnam War. Twenty-nine years after we had shared the combat experience.

That is what my involvement in the Vietnam War boiled down to: this former ally, his wife, Co Van Thi Hue, and me. In retrospect that was the moment I had returned to Viet Nam to experience. Everything that had transpired over the past two years had led inexorably to that meeting in his house, on the edge of Highway 1, Phuoc My Hamlet, Trieu Ai Village, Quang Tri Province, Vietnam.

As I sat with cameras and cash that equal fifteen years of hard work for them, my years of self-pity seemed almost sacrilegious. I have reached an emotional equilibrium: I am no longer angry with my enemies, nor am I apologetic for my allies. This man had been my ally, as had the hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese who had fled the country after the fall of Saigon in 1975. I could not feel guilty for having helped him, or them, fight for his vision of what was best for his country.

Strip away all the political rhetoric. Others may delve deeply into the overall attitude of the Vietnamese people in the 1960s. They can discuss politics; perhaps they will count supporters and enemies and put them on a scale to see which way the true political winds were blowing thirty years ago in Vietnam. They can hash over lies and alleged lies.

Both governments will continue deny fault. Each will mount a soapbox and preach their particular gospel of self-righteousness.

***Just so much political verbal diarrhea.***

I will always remember the look on his face. We had been allies once, and he wanted me to know that. We had shared his dream. We had fought as best we could.

We had lost.

There was nothing left to say.

It was in that home that my thirty year war in Vietnam ended. I thanked them for their hospitality. I silently thanked him for providing me with the peace I had traveled half way around the world to find, and we left his home.

These former allies were the throw-aways of the Vietnam War. They were the people we left behind. Yet there was not one word of complaint. No accusatory "Why did you leave?". These survivors of the war do not want their children to go through what they went through. Their country is at peace for the first time in decades.

They simply thanked me for my friendship the only way they knew how...they fed me more food than I could eat...they continually filled my cup with tea, literally and figuratively...and they smiled.

They are a tough lot, and they have earned my respect. Life had to go on for them.

And it has.

And so has mine.

Timothy A. Duffie  
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