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Editor
The People's Army News
Hanoi
Vietnam

Dear Editor:

It was with regret that I read your article in the September 22 issue of *The People's Army News* criticizing as contradictory some statements I had made both during and after my visit to your country. All too often in cross-cultural communications, there are misunderstandings as a statement made by one party is misinterpreted or not fully understood by the other. Unfortunately, I believe that is what happened in this instance.

There are two certainties in life: one is that we cannot change the past--the other is that we can change the future.

The comments I made for which I was criticized were given in response to questions about the past--America's defeat in the Indochina War and its ensuing impact on the Vietnamese people. during that conflict, I firmly believe, the United States sought to achieve certain goals which it felt were in the best interests of the Vietnamese people. Similarly, your government sought to achieve certain goals during the war, in direct conflict with those of my country, as it believed it was doing what was in the best interest of the Vietnamese people as well. One of our governments was right and one of them was wrong. As an American, I will always believe my country was right in doing what it tried to do and I will respect your right to always believe that what your country did was right. What we both believe about the past will always be--there is nothing we can do to change it.

In visiting your country I was never asked the same question by your officials that I was later asked by members of the western press, so my responses to the questions never became an issue until it was raised by outside media. During my visit to Vietnam and discussions with your officials, I chose then not to focus on the past but to focus on what we still have the power to change--the future relationship between our two countries. It was in this context that I suggested the time had come to heal the wounds of

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the war and forge closer ties. Such a course of action obviously is not only in the best interest of your country, but of mine as well. This is the first time since we both fought as allies in World War II that our best interests have been so aligned. It was in this spirit then, with the lifting of the trade embargo by my country which I supported, that I stressed the present is the best time to start healing the wounds that have left such a deep gulf between our two peoples.

As I have endeavored to explain above, I do not believe I made any contradictory statements either during or after my Vietnam visit. You also suggested in your editorial that I was ungrateful for the gracious reception extended to me by your government. That simply is not true. I was and still am very grateful for the warm reception provided me. My feelings for the people of Vietnam should not be in doubt by anyone. For, as you know, I have worked hard to help them by establishing facilities in your country to manufacture prosthetic devices for those brave fighting men--from both north and south--who had lost legs and/or arms in the war. This is an effort that has resulted in over 12,000 veterans receiving new limbs. I undertook this effort as a means of demonstrating my commitment to the people of Vietnam to do what I could to help start the process of healing the wounds. A primary purpose of my visit was to ensure that the officials of both countries desired to work together on joint research of Agent Orange. This was achieved. Additionally, immediately upon my return to the United States, I communicated to my government my personal belief that all efforts were being made by Vietnam to deal fully with the POW/MIA issue and that diplomatic relations with Vietnam should, therefore, be established as soon as possible.

Again, I want to thank the government and the people of Vietnam for the very warm and gracious reception they extended me. It is my hope that the misunderstanding generated by my comments can now be put in the past so we can get on with the future task we have at hand--the pursuit of our mutual desire to heal the wounds of war and lay the foundation for a closer relationship between our two countries.

Sincerely,



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