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From: Sean Reckner

Subject: Parade '98, Interim Report

Cc: xmich@ttu.edu

Dear Admiral:

This is a brief summary report on Parade '98. I will follow up with a more complete report (with news clippings) upon my return to Lubbock.

Phil and Victoria Price and Middy and I participated in the principal events related to Parade '98. The first such event was a Mayoral Reception hosted by the Mayor of Wellington on Friday evening. Among those present was the leader of an opposition political party and Member of Parliament, the Hon. Richard Prebble, and Major General Sandy Pearson, AO, DSO, OBE, MC, of the Australian Army.

Thanks to Phil and Victoria's thoughtfulness, we had small presents to give to Mayor Blumsky and Colonel Brian Monks, the Parade '98 organizer. During the reception we took the opportunity to discuss the Vietnam project at Texas Tech, particularly with Mr. Prebble and General Pearson, but also with George C. Duggins, the National President of Vietnam Veterans of America. Mr. Duggins has expressed a desire to publish a feature story about the Vietnam project in the VVA magazine. We will do our best to help him realize that desire.

During the reception remarks by Colonel Monk, he expressed his great pleasure with the letter you sent to all Kiwi Vietnam vets, and also mentioned the level of support he had received from the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University.

The events of Saturday began with a ceremonial Maori welcoming of the Vietnam vets, conducted by flax-cloaked Maoris and bare-footed Maori women, conducted on Taranaki Wharf in downtown Wellington. At the time (0800) it was bone-chillingly cold, with a wind so strong that unoccupied metal folding chairs were immediately blown over. The Maori welcome was a very stirring affair, attended by several thousand.

Following this, the veterans and their wives assembled in assigned areas prior to the parade, which kicked off at 10:00. The US contingent was assigned the final place in the parade, with individual New Zealand Army units in the lead, following by the Australian Army contingent. Immediately preceding the US element was a very sharp looking red-tuniced New Zealand Army band.

When, in due course, the US element, led by a VVA drill squad carrying the US flag and flags of each of the US Armed Forces finally began the march, we were met with what turned out to be a continuous wave of applause from the appreciative New Zealand folks who lined the

route of march. Applause and sincere expressions of thanks marked the entire route of our march, and was perhaps the most gratifying experience I have ever had.

The entire parade marched from the wharf area, along Lambton Quay, the principal thoroughfare of Wellington, to the Cenotaph in front of the Parliament buildings, where the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Deputy Prime Minister of Australia took the salute.

Concerns about protestors proved unfounded. A small, and rather pathetic, group assembled at one point along the march and were carefully watched by the New Zealand police. A mime on stilts carrying a sign, "Sorry, Vietnam," had his sign taken from him and ripped up by a civilian on the sidewalk. When he sought to confront the individual, he was surrounded by very angry Australian veterans and needed police escort to extract himself. A plane scheduled to fly over the parade carrying the banner "NZ Government: Apologize to Vietnam," was denied clearance to fly until after the RNZAF flyover, and thus did not reach the area of the parade until after it was over.

In the end, the protestors turned out to be far smaller in number than their publicity suggested, and did not detract from the Parade. The Kiwi veterans were ecstatic with their long overdue reception by their own people, and many expressed the point that they felt it was exceedingly important that an American contingent was there to march with them.

On Saturday afternoon, Phil and I had lunch with the Dominion President of the NZ Returned Services Association, the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia (himself a Vietnam vet) and about a dozen of the senior officials involved with the parade. Again, we both took the opportunity to publicize the Vietnam project at Texas Tech, and also we presented small gifts to the NZ and Australian co-patrons of the Parade. [Once again, thanks to the thoughtfulness of Phil and Victoria Price.]

That evening there was a musical and drinking [mostly the latter] function on the Queen's Wharf in downtown Wellington, which all four of us attended. Perhaps reflecting our age, all four of us left so early that we awoke on Sunday without hangovers!

In summary, The Vietnam Center and you have provided important support contributing to the final success of Parade '98, and in the process have generated considerable interest here and in Australia for the Vietnam project at Texas Tech. When I return to Lubbock I will pursue such contacts as I have made here, and expect this will help to further our relationships, particularly with veterans organizations in the antipodes. I suspect, too, that our personal interaction with George Duggins of VVA will assist us in our publicity efforts.

I now have two days left with the grandchildren before returning home. I will take them horseback riding today, weather permitting, and then cram as much grandfatherly activity as possible into the rest of the remaining time.

News clippings and a written report will follow after I get home, along with a suggestion that a letter of congratulations to Colonel Monk for his Herculean effort would be well received.

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I learn from the home front that our new newsletter is now being circulated, as is the latest edition of Indochina Chronology. Further, Vietnam Center Occasional Paper #1, with the presentations by Ambassador Lyne, Peter Braestrup, and Marc Gilbert, will be in our hands by 8 June, and thus will be available for circulation at the June conference.

I look forward to visiting with you and Mouza and Vice Admiral & Mrs. Tidd in the very near future.

Very respectfully, Jim Reckner