



FRIENDS OF THE VIETNAM CENTER

Spring 2006 Vol. 13 No.2

2006 Vietnam Conference: Reflections on the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam

On March 17th and 18th, 2006, approximately 120 scholars, veterans, students, and supporters attended the 2006 Vietnam Center Conference on “ARVN: Reflections and Reassessments after 30 Years.” The purpose of this conference was to help refocus historical attention on the essential role of the South Vietnamese in fighting their own war – where the US and other nations served as allies to the RVN – and where all too often they are lost in the more substantial focus of research on American operations and activities in Southeast Asia. It is our hope that by hosting this conference, an appropriate shift may occur in research that will be more inclusive of the Vietnamese, who also fought for freedom and democracy in South Vietnam, to ensure a more balanced history is preserved and understood.

The conference proceedings started with a thought-provoking historical retrospective provided in a special keynote address by Dr. Lewis Sorley entitled, *The Army of the Republic of Vietnam: A Retrospective Evaluation*. Dr. Sorley’s detailed and enlightening presentation provided a superlative foundation for



Photo by Steve Maxner

James Reckner, Ph.D. shows an artifact to ARVN conference members during a tour of the Vietnam

Center as it encouraged us to consider the broad history and accomplishments of the ARVN over its two decade history.

The luncheon keynote addresses were provided by Dr. Nguyen Ngoc Bich and The Honorable Geoffrey Connor. On Friday, Dr. Bich examined the Vietnam War within the larger context of the Cold War and communism, reminding us of the larger international issues that faced ARVN and the US forces in Vietnam. On Saturday, Mr. Connor discussed his recent service as the Texas Secretary of State and his role in organizing and escorting a trade mission to Vietnam that also involved Vietnam Center staff and support. He reminded us that we must remain engaged internationally if we hope to have a positive impact on the lives of the Vietnamese people today.

For the Friday evening banquet, we were honored to have as our guest speaker Lieutenant General Lu Lan, the senior ranking Vietnamese officer in 1975. LTG Lu Lan discussed what he considered to be the key phases of the war to include

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Our New Look

You may have noticed our new logo. We have changed our image to comply with Texas Tech’s new identity guidelines which require us to incorporate the Texas Tech signature bar and approved fonts and colors on all our print collateral. Our new image reflects these changes and blends a new, modern style with our previous design.

What’s Inside...



Finding MIA’s: Archive receives praise from Dept. of Defense



A Mother’s Closure 35 years in the making: The Tram diary story



Conference Call for Papers

Letter From The Director

By James Reckner, Ph.D.

In the wake of our highly successful conference, "ARVN: Reflections and Re-assessments after 30 Years," the Vietnam Center and Vietnam Archive staff press on with a number of ongoing projects. Perhaps most pressing of these is planning for our October 20-21 conference, "Intelligence in the Vietnam War," co-hosted by the Vietnam Center and the Center for the Study of Intelligence. We are anticipating a range of very interesting papers on intelligence-related topics presented by academics as well as former intelligence officers. And, as always, we hope to achieve a balance through inviting individuals representing foreign intelligence efforts. A call for papers for this conference is contained elsewhere in this newsletter.

Other conferences and symposia currently in planning: The topic for the 2007 annual conference scheduled for 16-17 March 2007, is, "The Impact of Culture, Race, Religion and Ethnicity in the Vietnam War." We anticipate that this conference will attract a range of papers

on topics dealing not only with race relations within the US forces in Vietnam, but also dealing with issues of cultural clashes between Americans and Vietnamese, ethnic Vietnamese and racial minorities in Vietnam such as the FULRO uprising, the politicization of Buddhism during the Diem years and later, the role of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religions, and much more.

The 6th Triennial Vietnam Symposium is scheduled for 20-22 March 2008.

“Without each of you, this effort would not have succeeded as it has.”

This three-day meeting has no specific focus. Rather, Vietnam Center staff will accommodate papers on any topic relating to Vietnam, or the war in its most broad interpretation. With the triennial symposia, we generally run several panels simultaneously, in order to accommodate as many papers as possible. And, of course, we encourage presentations representing all points of view.

Also in the planning stages is a three week student research trip to Vietnam and Cambodia for Texas Tech students. The seven lucky student participants in this trip have already been selected. Each will receive a Lee Roy Herron Scholarship of approximately \$2,500 from the Vietnam Center to help defray their travel and living expenses. Their itinerary includes visits to the Hanoi area, Hue, DaNang, Hoi An, Ho Chi Minh City, Tay Ninh, My Tho, Ap Bac battle-site, Can Tho, Long Xuyen and Chau Doc in Vietnam. From Chau Doc the delegation, headed by Vietnam Center Deputy Director Steve Maxner, will go by boat to Phnom Penh, where they will visit the killing field sites at Cheong Ek and Tuol Sleng, distribute scholarships at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, and then travel on to Siem Reap by hydrofoil for some time touring the remarkable temple complex of Angkor Wat before returning to the United States.

Some important numbers: 878: the number of Vietnam veterans whose claims have been resolved by the VA using the Virtual Vietnam Archive. 41: The number of actionable pieces of information relating to unresolved MIA cases in Southeast Asia obtained by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) from our Virtual Vietnam Archive.

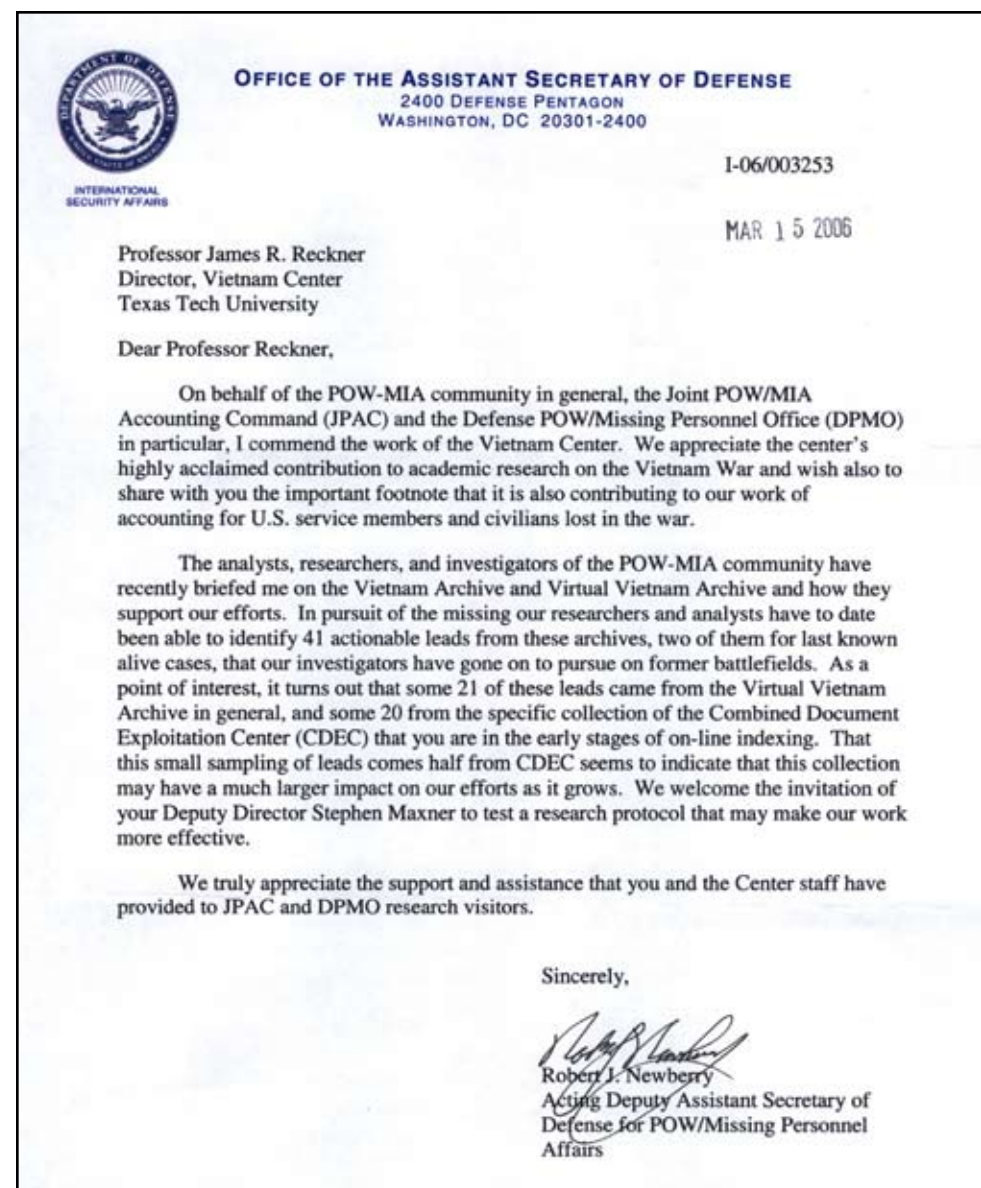
While our original intent for the Virtual Vietnam Archive had been to provide research support for students and historians of the war, we are profoundly gratified to learn that the work of our Virtual Vietnam Archive staff has also found important, "real world" applications. I extend my sincere thanks to all of the Virtual Vietnam Archive staff for their tireless efforts in this respect.

May marks the 17th anniversary of our Vietnam project. Please permit me to thank all of you who have been so generous in your support and your donations to the Vietnam Archive. Without each of you, this effort would not have succeeded as it has. ★

About Our Philosophy

At this stage of our development, the majority of the individuals directly involved in this project actually served in the war. Nevertheless, it is our sincere desire that the Vietnam Center provide a forum for all points of view and for all topics relating to Indochina, particularly - but not limited to - the American involvement there. We encourage papers and presentations by individuals who opposed the war as well as those who supported it. We also encourage participation by individuals representing the views of the government in Hanoi just as we encourage our former allies from South Vietnam. Similarly, we place equal importance upon preserving records relating to all aspects of the Vietnam War. It is as important to us to preserve the records of the antiwar movement as it is to preserve the records of those who served in Vietnam. To do so otherwise would be a disservice to history.

Documents Prove Useful in Finding Those Lost



Since its creation in 2001, the Virtual Vietnam Archive has been impacting research related to the Vietnam War in ways we never envisioned. We certainly expected students, scholars, educators, researchers, veterans, and the interested public would collectively make excellent use of our online resources. We never anticipated, however, the very important role it is now playing in other areas of research to include Vietnam War POW/MIA accountability, Veterans Administration claims processing, and research into appropriate lessons that can be applied to contemporary missions and operations in the global war on terror and in specific areas of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For the past 18 months, the Virtual Archive processing staff has steadily added materials from the Combined Document Exploitation Center (CDEC) Collection - a captured enemy document collection of 2.3 million pages on 954 previously uncataloged reels of microfilm. To date, we have added four percent of the total holdings of this collection to the Virtual Vietnam Archive. Yet, as the letter (opposite) from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense attests, that small number of CDEC documents has already provided 20 actionable leads that are assisting JPAC and DPMO researchers in their important work to account for America's missing. We feel deeply privileged to be assisting researchers from all walks of life and from around the globe as they continue to study and better understand one of the most tumultuous experiences in U.S. history - and we are especially honored to know that our work is also playing a small role in helping to find Americans still listed as missing from the Vietnam War. ★

2006 ARVN Conference

continued from page one

the early advisory role played by the US and the late but important shift to train and equip the ARVN forces to fight protracted guerilla warfare in the early 1960s. In his estimate of the situation, this served as an essential and nearly successful shift that was subsequently made irrelevant with the introduction of conventional US forces as, "Americans in late 1965, abruptly took over the war, shoved

aside the Vietnamese counterparts, and executed the war unilaterally."

It is the hope of the Vietnam Center that this conference will contribute to a fair and accurate reassessment of the role of the ARVN in the Vietnam War. To watch the video recordings of the conference presentations, to include the keynote addresses, please visit our website at www.vietnam.ttu.edu. ★

About Us

The *Friends of The Vietnam Center* newsletter is a quarterly publication produced by the Vietnam Center and Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. Articles are written by staff or reprinted from other publications with permission. Newsletter layout and design produced by Victoria Lovelady and Humberto Martinez. You may contact us by email at victoria.lovelady@ttu.edu.



a Daughter's Healing Words

By Mike Castellon,
Contributing Writer

Magnificent Journeys

Doan Ngoc Tram left her home in Hanoi with her three surviving daughters and boarded a 31-hour flight to Lubbock. Her pilgrimage to West Texas was almost 35 years in the making.

Eighty-one year old Doan Ngoc Tram must have felt the way many people do as they look out an airplane's window while on final approach to Lubbock Preston Smith International Airport.

Those who live here know that early October has a unique light about it that lasts throughout autumn's daytime hours, beautifully painting this rugged and barren countryside. Her trip to the Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech would be the farthest she had traveled from her home in Hanoi.

Her eldest daughter, Dang Thuy Tram, a North Vietnamese surgeon, was killed during a battle in northern South Vietnam in 1970. She was 27 years old. Now her prolific legacy has been rebirthed through her own words and is becoming the voice of many young people throughout Southeast Asia as they wrestle with national identity. The story of Tram's diaries, and how they ended up at Texas Tech, is quite an adventure.

Beginnings

A skilled doctor and a prolific writer, Dang Thuy Tram's words and much of what we know of her are found in her journal entries. She wrote intensely of her loyalty to her fellow countrymen while sometimes critical of the Communist party. Her neat, delicate handwriting tells a story of a young woman trapped in a world of heartache, bureaucracy and loneliness. The diaries measure about 5 inches by 6 inches. They were

meticulously constructed by Tram using pieces of cardboard from medical supply containers.

In an entry dated 1968, she writes:

"My dear parents, the daughter that you have loved since she was small has not stopped living, but has a very practical life with many aspects: love, hatred, faith, and sadness. It's a life filled with blood, tears, sweat, and also victory despite the thousands and thousands of hardships. Do you believe that I can get through this?"

Her diaries were found not far from her body.

"Please come to me and hold my hand when I am so lonely, love me and give me strength to travel all the hard sections of the road ahead," she writes in her last entry, dated days before her death.

She would never have imagined the role the discovery of her field diaries would have on two nations and former enemies. Dang Thuy Tram's diaries have captured the hearts of an international audience and became a bestselling book in Vietnam. Almost 350,000 copies have been sold since being published.

By most accounts her diaries would never have been found or preserved unless the most perfect factors lined up and clicked together. Personal belongings typically have a short life span in a war-ravaged and humid jungle. But while fate and destiny was a recurring theme in Tram's writing, so would they be in the story

of how they would be discovered and cared for.

Discovery

The story of how her diaries found their way to the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech began on a battlefield in 1970.

The journals were first discovered by Fred Whitehurst, an American G.I. and intelligence officer whose job it was to comb battlefields in search of documents that might be of value to military intelligence. Papers deemed relevant would be preserved, while personal materials would be destroyed.

His Vietnamese translator advised Whitehurst that Tram's memoirs were very special, and that they should not be destroyed alongside piles of other documents that had been deemed worthless by military intelligence. Protocol at the time would require such documents to be destroyed, usually in a flaming barrel.

"My interpreter looked at me and said, 'Fred, you can't burn this, it already has a fire in it,'" Whitehurst said.

He asked his translator to write out a very rough English translation of the diary. After reading it, he defied State

Department orders to ignore the issue and dedicated several decades to finding Tram's family.

Now an attorney in North Carolina, Whitehurst spent 35 years trying to locate members of Tram's family. Last March, Whitehurst turned Tram's writings over to the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech hoping scholars there might be able to solve the dilemma. Researchers located Tram's family within a few months, and extended to them an invitation to see the diaries in person after sending them a digital scan of the documents on CD.

Doan Ngoc Tram said it was a habit of every member of her family to keep personal diaries. She recognized her daughter's penmanship right away.

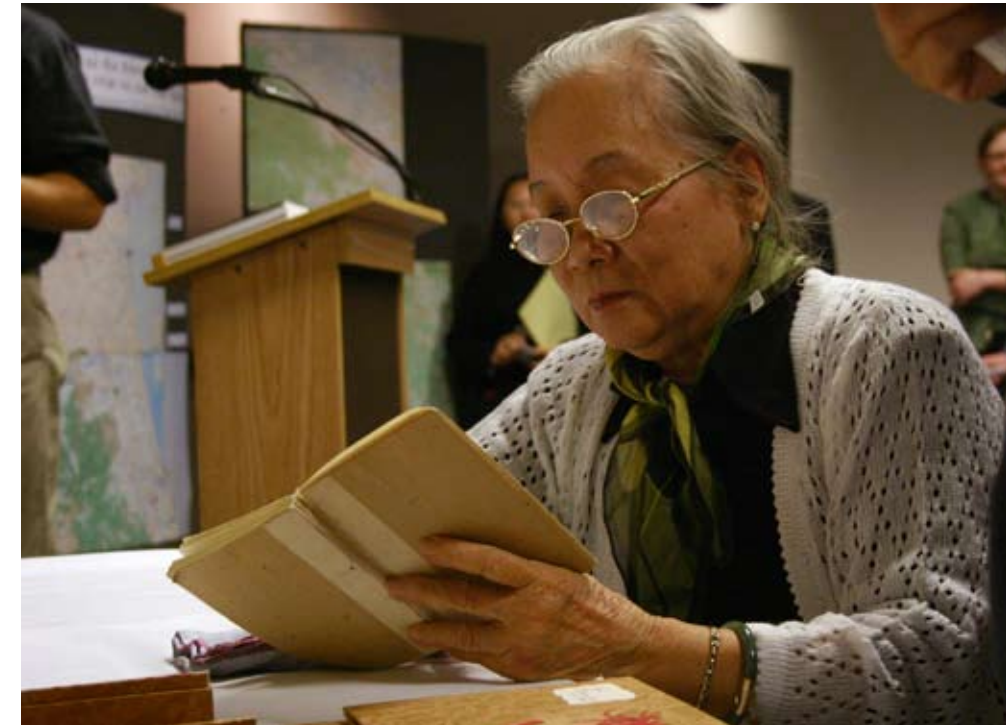
"When we [saw the CD] we recognized Dr. Tram's handwriting right away," she said. "We knew the diaries existed, but we didn't know where. We couldn't have imagined we would have seen them after all this time. We thought they were gone forever."

James Reckner, director of the Vietnam Center, upon Tram's family's confirmation of the authenticity of the diaries, extended an invitation for the family to visit the archive to view and hold the diaries.

"Inviting the family to Texas Tech to hold and view the diaries was a symbol of goodwill between the United States and Vietnam," Reckner said. "It also serves to heal some of the wounds suffered by those after the war. We hoped this occasion would bring us closer together."

Healing

On Oct. 6, Doan Ngoc Tram entered a room in the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech and fell to her knees and sobbed at the sight of her daughter's diaries, which sat elegantly at a table beside a picture of a smiling Dang Thuy Tram. She clutched her daughter's diaries to her chest and wept as her daughters held her. It was the closest she had come to hugging her daughter in almost 40 years.



Top - Duoc Ngoc Tram reads her daughter's diary for the first time. Middle left - James Reckner, Ph.D. conducts the press conference for Tram family members' visit. Middle right - Dang Thuy Tram's sisters examine her diary and housing. Bottom - An undated photo of Dang Thuy Tram recovered from her diary. Photos by Humberto Martinez

For at least an hour she sat and held the diaries to her body, running her aged and delicate fingers across its pages and binding. She hugged her daughters and walked around the room viewing pictures of Dang Thuy Tram, whose absence was achingly felt and obvious to the 40 or so spectators present.

"I thought it was her, I wanted to hold

her but I couldn't," she said through an interpreter. "It was like she was there with me when I held the diaries for the very first time."

Her family agreed.

"It is a very holy story," Dang Thuy Tram's sister, Dang Hien Tram, said while holding back tears. "This is my sister's spirit, my sister's soul." ★

- This article first appeared in *Vistas*, the research journal of Texas Tech University.

Conference Calls For Papers

2006 Conference on Intelligence in the Vietnam War

On October 20-21, 2006, the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University and the Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) will co-host a conference on "Intelligence in the Vietnam War," which will be held in Lubbock, Texas, at the Holiday Inn Park Plaza. The purpose of this conference is to examine intelligence activities in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and elsewhere as they impacted the Vietnam War. We welcome papers that discuss intelligence analysis and operations from all sides of the conflict and desire presentations that discuss U.S., RVN, DRV, VC, USSR, PRC, Warsaw Pact, and other

intelligence activities as they related to the Vietnam War.

While the focus will remain on historical events, it is our distinct hope that appropriate historical lessons might be drawn of more immediate application to current wars and conflicts. To that end, we are seeking paper and panel proposals on all subjects related to Intelligence in the Vietnam War to include but not limited to the following topics: Intelligence and counter-intelligence operations to include human, electronic, signals, and imagery intelligence; Terrorism and counter-terrorism; Infiltration operations into North Vietnam, the Viet Cong infrastructure, and elsewhere; Psychological operations; The Phoenix Program, Provincial Reconnaissance Units, and other attempts to neutralize the VCI; Rolling Thunder, enemy order of battle, the will to persist, and other

analytical issues; Inter-agency cooperation and conflict between the CIA, DIA, and other intelligence organizations; The politics of intelligence (e.g. the producer v. the consumer in the development of estimative products); the use of RAND and other private analytical resources as intelligence; etc.

This conference will offer students, scholars, intelligence officials, policy makers, and others an excellent opportunity to examine intelligence activities from America's longest war and the many issues that surrounded these complex activities and events. If you are interested in providing either an individual presentation or a panel discussion, please submit a proposal (single page or less) to Steve Maxner, Deputy Director at the Vietnam Center at steve.maxner@ttu.edu or call (806) 742-9010 for more information. ★

2007 Conference on the Impact of Culture, Ethnicity, Race, and Religion in the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War became all the more challenging as nations with very different cultures interacted with one another in Southeast Asia. Contributing to the complexity of the situation were cultural clashes that also emerged within each participating country and within the respective government, military, and civilian organizations involved. Appreciating the multifaceted interplay of the different cultures involved is essential to understanding the Vietnam

War and its aftermath. It is the hope of the Vietnam Center that our 2007 annual conference will help foster a thorough and provocative examination of this important topic. The 2007 conference will be held at the Holiday Inn Park Plaza in Lubbock (the same hotel as this year's conference), on Friday and Saturday, 23-24 March.

The Vietnam Center invites papers as well as complete panel proposals that examine the interplay between US, Vietnamese, and other

participant nations' cultures for the entire period of US diplomatic and military activity in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. This can include some of the earliest interactions between the US and Indochina. We also encourage paper submissions that discuss more nuanced topics to include internal ethnic, religious, and racial conflicts within Vietnam, the U.S., and Southeast Asia, as well as race and cultural relationships within military forces, government agencies and in-

stitutions, and civilian organizations. Given the breadth and potential depth of this topic, it is our sincere desire that willing participants will help shape the agenda by providing insightful and creative proposals.

Both individual and panel proposals are welcome. If you are interested in participating, please submit a one page proposal that describes the topic you would like to discuss along with your resume or CV to Steve Maxner, Deputy Director for the Vietnam Center. You can send your proposals to him at steve.maxner@ttu.edu. If you have any questions, please call 806-742-9010. ★

Additions To The Archive

Ann Ackerman ★ Air America Association ★ Army Otter Caribou Association ★ James L. Aubuchon ★ William Bruce Bartow ★ Robert M. Bayless ★ Larry Berman ★ Allen Binckley ★ Kenneth R. Bowra ★ Eric Bray ★ William T. Brown ★ Frances Shea Buckley ★ John C. Burnham ★ Chester Carlock ★ Allen Cates ★ Dominick Cirincione ★ James Coan ★ Tom Cossaboom ★ Edward C. Costello ★ George Dalley ★ Hoi Bach Dang ★ John "Dutch" DeGroot ★ R. J. Del Vecchio ★ Richard DiBenedetto ★ Nguyen Viet Duc ★ John J. Ellis ★ Ralph C. Erchinger ★ Gregory Fearon ★ Ruth Coder Fitzgerald ★ William Foulke ★ Gamewardens of Vietnam Association ★ John Lance Geoghegan ★ Albert J. Geraci ★ Nguyen Van Giang ★ George E. Gray ★ Carroll R. and Joan C. Griffin ★ Oren B. Harnage ★ John Haseman ★ Paul H. Herbert ★ John Hester ★ George A. Hill ★ William Hughes ★ Herman E. Jackson ★ Ray Janes ★ John S. Janks ★ Gary Jestes ★ Rod Keith ★ Charles R. Kelly ★ Don Kilgore ★ William Kirkland ★ Yung Krall ★ Richard Kyle ★ Jimmy T. LaBaume ★ Tran Si Lam ★ Marc Leepson ★ William E. LeGro ★ Ron Leonard ★ Bob Lothringer ★ Terry Maroste ★ Jerry L. Mason ★ Jerry Mason ★ Michael J. Mattie ★ Mike McDermott ★ Jimmy Dale Miller ★ Angela Moore ★ Dick Moser ★ Phong Xuan Nguyen ★ Lana Noone ★ Mary Pennington ★ Ivan N. Pierce ★ Jay C. Pierson ★ Pleiku-Ia Drang Veterans ★ Lindy Poling ★ Dennis Proulx ★ Nguyen Quang ★ Lloyd B. Ramsey ★ James Reckner ★ Ralph Reinhart ★ Bernard Roberson ★ Leon Robinson ★ Fred Salazar ★ Robert Santo ★ Dick Scott-Welch ★ Raymond M. Scurfield ★ Don Searle ★ Jeff Seeber ★ I. Thomas Sheppard ★ Allen W. Sims ★ Ed Sinclair ★ Robert Singer ★ Carey Spearman ★ Jim Stanitz ★ Bill Stratton ★ Ralph Eugene Thompson ★ Cung Tran Thuy-Tien ★ Emmett H. Tidd ★ Sedgwick Tourison ★ Hai Trieu ★ Van Quang Truong ★ Neal Ulevich ★ USS Richard B. Anderson (DD-786) Association ★ Jay Veith ★ Richard Burks Verrone ★ Ha Mai Viet ★ Hieu D. Vu ★ Bill Watson ★ Michael Wells ★ Joseph Welsh ★ Gary Wever ★ Darrel D. Whitcomb ★ George Wickes ★ Joy Wilkerson ★ Graham Winterflood ★ Barry Zorthian ★ Ann Zumwalt Coppola ★ Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt ★ Mouzetta Zumwalt-Weathers ★

Additions to the Oral History Project

January 2006 Barbara Ann Weathers Geoghegan Johns, Civilian/Family Member ★ Gerald M. Sampont, U.S. Coast Guard ★ Sedgwick Tourison, U.S.A. **February 2006** Richard E. Moser, USAF ★ Rene Defourneaux, U.S.A. ★ William Culotta, USN ★ Cornelius Carmody, USN **March 2006** Emmett Tidd, USN ★ Robert L. Ordoñez,

USN ★ Lloyd B. Ramsey, U.S.A. **April 2006** Angela Moore, Civilian ★ Phillip F. Thomas, US Foreign Service ★ Gerald La Tour, Army ★ Robert Shippen, U.S. Army ★ Harold Bowen, USA ★ Tomas Silva, USA ★ Johnnie Hitt, USA ★ David O'Quinn, USA ★ Frank Anton, POW, USA ★ Will Drewry, USA ★ Roger Hobbs, USA

New Website User Survey

Beginning on May 20, the Vietnam Archive is asking site visitors to complete a user experience survey when they visit the Virtual Vietnam Archive and Vietnam Project Website. Participation in the brief, anonymous survey will allow us to better understand how and why our online resources are being used, and will provide important information that we can use to more effectively manage our resources. To complete the survey, please visit: www.vietnam.ttu.edu/vietnamproject/survey.htm.

A Parting Gift of Honor

By Thomas Reynolds
Archival Specialist

In mid-April, the Vietnam Archive received a large addition to the Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. Collection from the estate of Mrs. Mouza Zumwalt. Included in this donation was the Admiral's Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award, which was awarded to him by President Bill Clinton on January 15, 1998.

Originally established by President Harry S. Truman in 1945 to recognize notable service in the war, the Presidential Medal of Freedom was reintroduced by President John F. Kennedy in 1963 with an expanded purpose. Since then, the medal has been awarded for meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, promoting world peace, or cultural or other significant public or private endeavors.

According to the citation, Admiral Zumwalt "exemplified the ideal of service to our nation" in both wartime and peacetime. He not only helped create a higher quality of life for sailors during his service in the Navy, but also fought tirelessly for veterans afflicted with medical conditions resulting from service to their country. President Clinton called Admiral Zumwalt "one of the greatest models of integrity and leadership and genuine humanity our nation has ever produced."

In receiving this award, Admiral Zumwalt joined the ranks of a very distinguished group of people, including John Steinbeck, Neil Armstrong, Bob Hope, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Cesar Chavez, and Pope John Paul II. ★



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Important Message Regarding This Newsletter

As you know, the *Friends of the Vietnam Center* newsletter is a publication that provides updates and information about the Vietnam Center and Archive. **Due to budget constraints that will take affect September 1, 2006, we will no longer be able to provide free print issues of the newsletter.** If you wish to continue receiving printed and mailed copies of the *Friends* newsletter, we ask that you fill out the membership form at left and submit the modest fee. The new membership rate is \$10 per year. This includes only printed issues of the *Friends* newsletter. To receive additional publications from the Vietnam Center and Archive, to include a new annual report of our archival collections, the membership rate is \$25 per year. Friends who are Life members, Benefactors, and Sustaining Life members are not affected by this change in our publication policy. In addition, the *Friends* newsletter will also be available free on our website in PDF format. If you would like to receive email notifications when we publish the Newsletter online, please send us a request to be added to our email distribution at vietnam.center@ttu.edu. **Again, these changes will become effective September 1, 2006.** Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns about this change in our policy by calling 806-742-3742 or writing to us at vietnam.center@ttu.edu.



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