



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Vietnam Center and Archive

FRIENDS OF THE VIETNAM CENTER



Spring 2009 Vol. 16 No.2

20th Anniversary Ball With Keynote Speaker H. Ross Perot, Sr.

The Vietnam Center invites you to join us as we celebrate a great milestone in our history. For twenty years, the Vietnam Center has preserved the history of the American experience in the Vietnam War. Over the years, the Vietnam Center has provided resources and assistance to scholars, students, teachers, filmmakers, veterans and government agencies as they study the Vietnam War and gain a greater understanding of the conflict and the Vietnamese people.

To celebrate our project's 20th year, we will be hosting an Anniversary Ball on **May 28, 2009**, at the **Frazier Alumni Pavilion on the Texas Tech Campus**. The evening will feature a very special guest, Mr. H. Ross Perot, Sr., who will deliver a keynote address during the festivities. In addition, our guests will enjoy dinner, lively music, a silent auction and a tribute to our founder, Dr. James Reckner.

This event is an opportunity to raise funds which will allow us to continue our mission to preserve the history of the Vietnam War, help veterans and their families deal with their war experiences, and assist the US government in their search for the 1,750 men who are still missing from the war.



H. Ross Perot, Sr.

★ Ticket Information ★

Individual Tickets - \$75 each

Table for Eight - \$800

Table includes reserved seating, recognition in program, and a sponsor gift

7:00 - Seating and Silent Auction
7:30 - Dinner Served

RSVP by Monday, May 18th
Call (806) 742-9010 or email
amy.k.hooker@ttu.edu

www.vietnam.ttu.edu/20th

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Letter from the Director



Stephen F. Maxner, Ph.D.

Director
The Vietnam Center and Archive

This is a very special year for the Vietnam Center and Archive as we are celebrating our 20th Anniversary. For the past two decades, we have been committed to preserving the history of the United States experience in Vietnam. Of equal importance, we have remained dynamically involved in promoting the study of that experience through scholarship, conferences, and other activities. All of us who are involved in this remarkable project owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our founder, Dr. James Reckner. I hope you will join me in thanking and congratulating Jim for all we have been able to accomplish! I also want to thank all of you who have worked with us over the years. We would not have been successful without you and your generous contributions. You, too, have our deepest gratitude.

“While we are celebrating our past success, we must also look toward the future and what we hope to accomplish during the next twenty years.”

of these events and experiences from all perspectives and our goal will always be to provide as full a record as possible of these historical events for the benefit of future generations.

While we are celebrating our past success, we must also look toward the future and what we hope to accomplish during the next twenty years. Chief among our goals is the broadening of our collections and studies of the Vietnam War to include groups of participants who are not as well represented in the history of the Vietnam War as others. Our future goals also include expanding our

support for academic programs at Texas Tech University. As a component of the Institute for Modern Conflict, Diplomacy, & Reconciliation, we serve as part of the foundation upon which our programs in Strategic Studies are growing and flourishing. Our work with our sister organization, the Center for War & Diplomacy in the Post-Vietnam War Era is equally important as we provide support for building a new Center and Archive that is preserving the history of US conflicts since 1975. In addition, the Vietnam Center is playing a growing role in the recruitment of international students to our university, contributing to the intellectual and cultural diversity of our campus.

Another important future goal for our project remains the creation of a new facility at Texas Tech that will house the Vietnam Center, Archive, and a new Museum. This is an essential goal for us, not just for our project or our university, but for us as a nation. The Vietnam War was arguably the most divisive and important American event of the latter half of the 20th Century. Yet despite the importance of those events, and perhaps because of the divisiveness they created, our nation remains without a National Vietnam War Museum. We believe strongly that this is something we must address soon while we still have the benefit of Vietnam veterans and other wartime participants and the knowledge of these events they alone can provide.

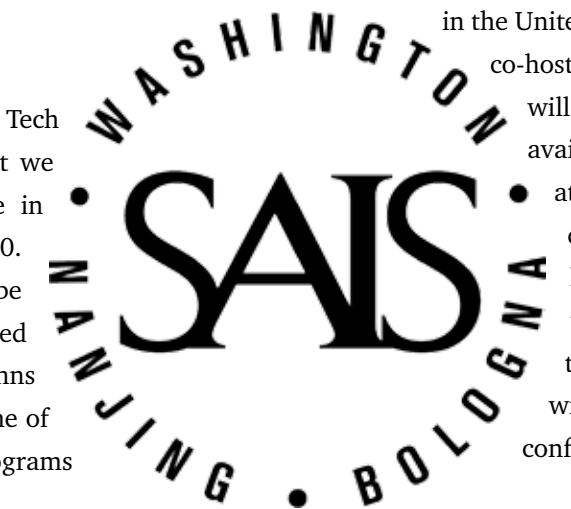
With your continuing support and with that we receive at the local, state, and national levels, the future of the Vietnam Center and Archive remains very bright. Thank you for all of your contributions to our project. We hope you will be able to join us as we celebrate our 20th Anniversary this year and we look forward to the years and decades ahead! *

Upcoming Conference

2010 Vietnam Center Conference in Washington, D.C.

**March 4 & 5, 2010
Washington, D.C.**

The Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University is pleased to announce that we will be hosting our 2010 Conference in Washington, DC, on March 4-5, 2010. Our co-host for this conference will be the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of the Johns Hopkins University. SAIS is home to one of the premier Southeast Asia Studies programs



in the United States. We are in discussions with our co-hosts with regard to conference planning and will announce more information as it becomes available. To build on the unique strengths of each of our institutions, the topic for the conference will be balanced between the historical events of the Vietnam War and their links to contemporary issues between the US and Vietnam. We hope you will be able to join us for this extraordinary conference. *

Thank You For Your Support!



I would like to extend a few words of gratitude to our Friends of the Vietnam Center. Your membership allows us to continue printing this quarterly newsletter which is a very important item for us. Not only does it give us the opportunity to keep our members up to date with the many activities and accomplishments of the Center and Archive, but it also serves as a promotional tool allowing us to inform the public about the tremendous work we are doing to preserve the history of America's involvement in Southeast Asia.

Do you know someone who might be interested in becoming a “Friend?” Please have him or her fill out the membership form on the back of this issue. The membership form is also available on our website at the following link:

www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/pages/newsletters.php
Electronic versions of all back issues of our newsletter are also available at that link.

If you have any comments or suggestions, I would love to hear from you. Please email me at victoria.lovelady@ttu.edu. Thanks again so much for your support!

-Victoria Lovelady
Public Relations Coordinator



ANNUAL CONFERENCE SHEDS LIGHT ON THE VIETNAM WAR AS A REGIONAL CONFLICT

Highlights of the Vietnam Center's conference on Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand and the Vietnam War

By Ron Milam, Ph.D.

Interim Director, The Center for War and Diplomacy in the Post-Vietnam War Era and Associate Professor, Department of History at Texas Tech

Students and scholars of the Vietnam War have always recognized that the war impacted the adjacent countries of Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. The extent to which this occurred was the subject of the recent conference held March 13 and 14 in Lubbock. Former CIA agents, graduate students, professors and independent scholars came together to discuss diverse topics such as the Pathet Lao, the Parrot's Beak Incursion, Air America, the role of Thai soldiers, and the impact of the Vietnam War on Lao Hmong.

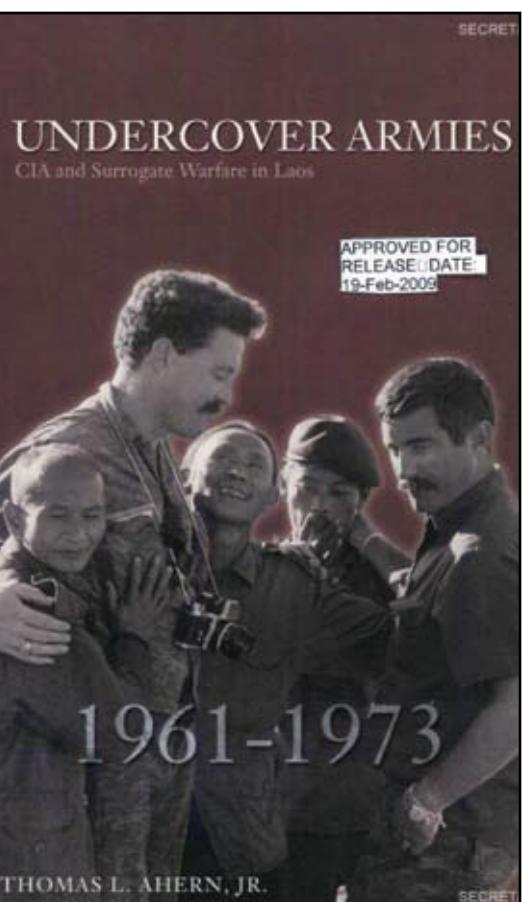
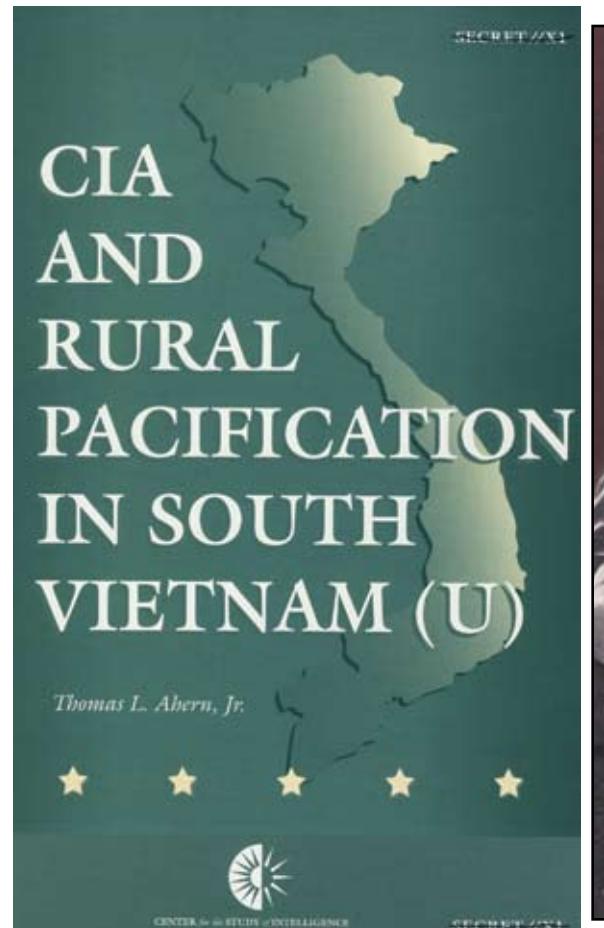
At the centerpiece of the conference was the release of the formerly classified CIA works of Thomas Ahern. With the support of the Center for the Study of

Intelligence, Dr. Clayton Laurie moderated a panel that included Dr. Jeffrey Race, author of *The War Comes to Long An*, and a professor at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in Bangkok, Thailand. His reflection on the Ahern Collection was that it was "raw material that will make for rich studies" by Vietnam War scholars, and that this information will confirm intelligence reports that very early on in the war it was known by the CIA that it would be a challenge to "win someone else's war." These sentiments were confirmed by other scholars such as former intelligence officer and independent scholar Merle Pribbenow who commented on the importance of the Ahern Collection on an understanding of the Fall of Saigon, that CIA warnings of the imminent disaster without U.S. air support were transmitted to Washington, and ignored.

A special panel for the conference was made up of Vietnamese graduate

students who examined the impact of the war on the adjacent countries, from a Vietnamese perspective. Chau Huy Ngoc, a student from Ho Chi Minh City looked at the Pathet Lao as a significant force, even at Dien Bien Phu. Nguyen Thanh Long from Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City reviewed the three countries' respective roles as impacting his country significantly. And Ms. Diu Huong from Ohio University discussed the United States' incursion into Cambodia at "Parrot's Beak" as an important event in the post-Tet period of the war. All three of these students were presenting papers in English before an American audience, for the first time, and we were pleased that they chose our conference for their debuts.

The role of Air America in Laos was discussed by both a veteran of that unit, Allen Cates, and also John Prados of the National Security Archive at George Washington University. Both of them



Left: Covers of previously classified documents released at the conference by The CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI). The released studies were written by Mr. Thomas L. Ahern, Jr., a career CIA officer and contract historian with CSI.

Want to see more?

The presentation videos and photos from this conference are available for download here: www.vietnam.ttu.edu/vietnamcenter/events/2009_Conference/

Page 4 photos: Top left: Ambassador Sichon Siv asks a presenter a question. Top middle: Dr. John Prados asks a question during a panel discussion. Top right: Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt listens to a question from the audience. Bottom left: Dr. Timothy Castle gives a presentation during lunch. Bottom middle: Audience members listen closely to a presentation. Bottom right: Ms. Diu Huong listens to a question from an audience member.

agreed that the role of Air America has been misunderstood and misinterpreted, and their scholarship should shed new light on the role that the controversial pilots and equipment played in the Vietnam War. In keeping with the frank and open dialogue that our conferences allow, the issue of the role that Air America played in drug trafficking was discussed, with no resolution.

Other papers that shed new light on controversial topics were those presented by filmmaker Marcus Rhinelander who also displayed photos of efforts to remove unexploded ordnance, particularly in the form of cluster bombs or "bombies" from Laos. And Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt discussed the very current genocidal treatment of Lao Hmong in the border refugee camps in Thailand. Both of these papers were a reminder that although the American involvement in Southeast Asia ended in 1975, the impact of the war lingers for those in the

jungles and plains of their war-torn nations.

Dr. Marc Gilbert presented a paper on the role of the very important – but seldom studied – International Voluntary Service. Marc talked about their role in both Vietnam and Laos, and he reflected on their having been removed from the war zone during the Nixon administration. This may account for why many American veterans are not aware of their presence in the battle to win the "hearts and minds" of the people.

Dr. Richard Ruth and Sudina Paungpetch presented papers on the U.S./Thailand relationship during the war. Ruth's paper raised the question of why only Thailand's soldiers were considered "mercenaries" when virtually all soldiers in the war were being paid to fight. And Ms. Paungpetch explored the impact of American Rest and Relaxation (R&R) and B-52 bases on the Thailand economy. *

Our banquet speaker, Ambassador Sichon Siv presented a very personal story of his survival in the jungles of Cambodia as the Khmer Rouge came to power. Through photos and rhetoric, he chronicled his good fortune to not only have survived the "Killing Fields," but also to have enjoyed a career as a United States diplomat and White House fellow in the Bush administrations. We thank him for his very special presentation.

All of the papers presented at the conference are available as video files and I urge everyone to view them. The conference was a huge success because the subject matter was unique, diverse, and controversial, which always invigorates the audience and participants alike. Thanks to all of the presenters, moderators and registrants who made up the audience. *

Accomplishments and Presentations of Our Faculty

Tenure and Promotion for Vietnam Center and Archive Faculty

Two years ago, Texas Tech University developed new guidelines to recognize the important scholarly contributions of Archivists and Librarians to our university and granted them status as Faculty, making them eligible for promotion and tenure. The Vietnam Center and Archive are proud to announce that on March 6, 2009, Dr. Stephen Maxner (Director, Vietnam Center) and Mrs. Mary Saffell (Associate Director, Vietnam Archive) were each awarded Tenure as faculty at Texas Tech University. Additionally, Dr. Maxner was promoted to the rank of Archivist (equivalent to full professor) and Mrs. Saffell was promoted to Associate Archivist (equivalent to associate professor). Please join us in congratulating Steve and Mary and we look forward to sharing future announcements recognizing our faculty and staff for their accomplishments. *

Presentations

- Kelly Crager, Ph.D., Head of the Oral History Project, spoke at the Texas Heritage Museum's 29th Annual Symposium, "Texas and Texans in World War II," in Hillsboro, Texas on April 4, 2009. The title of his presentation was "Lone Star under the Rising Sun: Texan POWs on the 'Death Railway'."

- Ty Lovelady (Associate Archivist), Katrina Jackson (Assistant Archivist of the Post-Vietnam War Era Archive), and Jason Stewart (Oral Historian) gave presentations on the same panel at the Oral History of the Mid-Atlantic Region Conference entitled "Exploring War and Conflict Through Oral History." The conference was held on April 30-May 1, 2009 at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The following are abstracts of all three presentations:

Vietnam War Draftees: Perceptions of Soldiers "Who Did Not Want to Fight" By Katrina Jackson

A common perception of the typical Vietnam War draftee is that they did not want to be involved in any aspect of the war. Because of this, another common perception is that the draftee also was largely an unskilled and unwilling soldier. Through a careful examination of oral histories with Vietnam Veterans who served with, or were themselves draftees, this perception becomes much less apparent. Although there was much joking in regard to volunteers and draftees amongst fellow soldiers, many volunteers felt that draftees were some of the finest soldiers with whom they had served. This is due to the fact that, although draftees were largely not interested in joining the war effort, once they were enlisted, they were proud of their service and willingly and skillfully did what was necessary to make it through their tours of duty. These soldiers were draftees, but they were not unwilling soldiers.

How Marines Perceived the Corps Before and After Their Service: As Seen Through Oral Histories at the Vietnam Archive By Ty Lovelady

Since its establishment during the early days of the American Revolution, the United States Marine Corps has always attracted those in search of adventure and service to their country. Marines have always seen themselves as an elite force that is second to none in fighting ability as they have primarily been an all volunteer force. By and large, this means that individuals have become Marines because they want to be Marines and not because they were drafted. However, joining the Corps does not mean that it will meet the individual's expectations. For better or worse, the person's experiences in the Marine Corps will change during their service, particularly as a result of wartime experiences. *

I will make the argument through ex-

amining oral histories conducted at the Vietnam Archive that individual Marines were more likely to feel positive about their service because they volunteered to join the Corps knowing they would be sent to Vietnam. Though an individual's perception of the Marine Corps may have changed after joining and his feeling toward the Vietnam War may even have been negative, he is likely to feel proud of his time as a Marine.

Proximity and Perception: Reassessing the ARVN through Oral History By Jason Stewart

A cursory glance at the historiography of the Vietnam War tends to lend credence to the popularly held belief that the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was a hopelessly incompetent, corrupt, and inefficient organization that was doomed to failure from its inception. This perception is not without good reason. Throughout much of the war, the ARVN performed abysmally in the face of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong aggression, the most famous case being that of the battle of Ap Bac. On several other occasions the ARVN performed quite well; however, the ARVN's performance throughout the war varied from stellar to atrocious. Among US veterans, the reputation of the ARVN tends to be quite negative, but by using oral histories one can clearly see that American troops who worked closely with the ARVN tended to respect them a great deal more than those who had little to no contact with them. Utilizing over one hundred oral histories from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, my study will compare the opinions of American advisors to South Vietnamese units with American soldiers who did not work directly with the ARVN. In doing so I will make the argument that the amount of interaction with South Vietnamese units greatly influenced the American soldier's perception of the ARVN. *

By Victoria Lovelady

Public Relations Coordinator

On May 13th, DaNita Buckley, Budget Analyst for the Center and Archive, was presented with our annual Staff Achievement Award. "It felt really good to know that my co-workers thought enough of me to honor and recognize the work that I've done. It is great to be recognized for your hard work and dedication" DaNita said.

DaNita has been with the Center and Archive since December 1, 2004. Her main responsibility is the management of the budget, but she also handles human resources and administrative duties, manages travel arrangements for the staff, and assists with many other details that help our department run smoothly. Her detailed knowledge of the Texas Tech information and accounting system for purchasing, payroll, and other functions of the university is vital to our organization. Many of our readers probably know DaNita well due to her extensive involvement with the planning and coordinating of our many confer-



DaNita Buckley poses with Ambassador Sichon Siv after receiving the Staff Achievement Award.

ences and symposia. DaNita enjoys being able to "make things happen" which makes her well suited for her position.

Even though her job is quite demanding, DaNita says, "I love the people I work with. They have become my extended family. From day one, Dr. James Reckner (former director of the Vietnam Center) has been most instrumental. He

encouraged me to pursue my dreams of completing my education no matter how long it took."

DaNita received her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and a minor in Accounting from Wayland Baptist University in May 2006 and will soon complete her MBA in International Finance from the same institution. *

Student Spotlight on Natalie Swindle



My name is Natalie Swindle and I am an editor/interviewer for the Oral History Project here at the Vietnam Archive. Also, I am in my fifth semester as a Master of Education student studying Counselor Education. Currently, I am working on a project in which I seek out and interview Lubbock area veterans. My work on this project has been very rewarding. I find myself extremely fortunate to be able to assist Vietnam Veterans in recording their personal histories. It is encouraging to know that their experiences will transcend time to educate people about such an important aspect of American

History. Personally, I find that interviewing and working with veterans has helped in my study of mental health. As an intern for the Lubbock VA Outpatient Clinic, I find I am able to draw on my experiences here at the Vietnam Archive to help servicemen and women obtain optimal mental health. Sadly, I will be leaving the Vietnam Archive this May 2009, but I will take what I have learned as a student assistant at the Archive and use it to contribute to my success in the future. *

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