



*Adjunct Professor of International Affairs*

**Issued February 26, 2010, at the National Press Club, Washington DC**

**MEMORANDUM FOR: Colonel Michael Meese  
Professor and Head Dept of Social Sciences**

**CC: Colonel Cindy Jebb  
Professor and Deputy Head Dept of Social Sciences**

**SUBJECT: After Action Report—General Barry R McCaffrey USA (Ret)  
VISIT TO VIETNAM – 9-17 January 2010**

**1. PURPOSE:** This memo provides a strategic assessment of the current situation in Vietnam. I was honored to chair the US Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) 30 person delegation to Vietnam with co-chairs Jan Scruggs, Founder and President, VVMF -- and Peter Holt, CEO Holt Companies and San Antonio Spurs (chairman, fundraising, VVMF Education Center Exhibit).

**2. SOURCES:**

**A. VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS:**

- 1.) **Mr. Pham Binh Minh**, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Vietnam.
- 2.) **Ambassador Nguyen Tam Chien**, Vice Chairman, Vietnam-US Society; Director, The Center for International Studies (CIS).
- 3.) **Mr. Nguyen Duc Chinh**, Standing Vice Chairman, Quang Tri Province People's Committee (PPC); Chairman, Project RENEW Steering Board (PSB).
- 4.) **Lieutenant General Nguyen Dinh Uoc**, Veterans Association of Vietnam; Former Director, Institute of Military Historical Studies, Vietnam National University of Hanoi.
- 5.) **Major General Nguyen Ngoc Giao**, Deputy Director, Ministry of National Defense, Institute for Military Strategy.
- 6.) **Mr. Bui Van Nghi**, Deputy Secretary General (NGOs & Veterans Affairs Desk), The Vietnam – USA Society; Deputy Director, The Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations – The Americas Department.
- 7.) **Mr. Hoang Tan Trung**, Standing Vice Chairman, Union Friendship Organizations of Quang Tri Province.
- 8.) **Mr. Hoang Dang Mai**, M.Sc of International Cooperation, Director of Foreign Affairs Department, Vice President of Friendship Organizations, Quang Tri Province, Vietnam.
- 9.) **Mr. Vu Xuan Hong**, Member, National Assembly of the S.R. Vietnam; Member, NA Committee for Foreign Affairs; President, Vietnam-US Parliamentary Caucus.
- 10.) **Mr. Hoang Nam**, Project Coordinator, Project RENEW.
- 11.) **Mr. Ngo Xuan Hien**, PR Officer, Project RENEW Coordination Office.

- 12.) **Mr. Nguyen Van Vinh**, Producer/Cameraman, Thomson Reuters.
- 13.) **Dr. Khoat Van Tran**, President, Keystone Development Management, Inc.
- 14.) **Mr. Tran Dinh Song**, Guide, Global Spectrum. Delegation Tour Guide.
- 15.) **Mr. Bui Anh Duc**, Guide – Tour Operator, Indochina Travel, Division of Concorde International Travel. Private Saigon Tour Guide.

#### **B. AMERICAN OFFICIALS AND DELEGATION:**

- 1.) **Ambassador Michael Michalak**, United States Ambassador to Vietnam.
- 2.) **Mr. Jan Scruggs**, Founder and President, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund.
- 3.) **Mr. Chuck Searcy**, Country Representative, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Hanoi Vietnam.
- 4.) **Mr. Peter Holt**, CEO Holt Companies and San Antonio Spurs; Chairman of the VVMF Campaign to Build The Education Center at The Wall.
- 5.) **Mr. Adam Sitkoff**, Executive Director, American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham), Vietnam.
- 6.) **LTC Todd G. Emoto**, Commander, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command.
- 7.) **Ms. Holly Rotondi**, Vice President, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund.
- 8.) **Mr. Robert H. Frank**, Managing Partner, Frank & Company, PC. (Auditor Project Renew).
- 9.) **Mr. Richard LeVan**, Consultant, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund.
- 10.) **Mr. Ben Stocking**, Chief of Bureau, Associated Press, Vietnam.
- 11.) **Mr. Gordon Matlock**, Professional Staff Member, US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.
- 12.) **Mr. James Lockett**, Special Counsel, Baker & McKenzie, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi. (AmCham)
- 13.) **Mr. Mark Renton**, Managing Director, Global Co-Head of Public Sector Group, Global Banking, Citibank, Hong Kong. (AmCham)
- 14.) **Ms. Marcia Selva**, President, Global Community Service Foundation.

#### **3. SCHEDULE OF EVENTS:**

- Lecture to 250+ students and faculty of Hanoi area Universities.
- Private meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister, Pham Binh Minh (PhD Tufts University), and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Senior Officials.
- Roundtable seminar (90 minutes) with Vietnamese academic and governmental officials dealing with national security and foreign affairs, headed by former Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States, Nguyen Tam Chien.
- Presentation to the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organization (VUFO). Subsequent delegation Meeting with VUFO.
- Presentation to the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham Hanoi) Luncheon.

- Private delegation dinner reception and meeting with Ambassador Michael Michalak, senior Embassy staff, and selected Vietnamese officials.
- Hotel Metropole Press Conference with delegation heads (Scruggs and Holt) to announce \$1 million earmark for Project RENEW.
- VVMF Dedication ceremony of Tuong Van Primary School in Trieu An Commune.
- One-on-one meeting with Vietnam-USA Society (VUS) International Research Center.
- Delegation meeting with Veterans Association of Vietnam (VAVN) and Lt. Gen. Nguyen Dinh Uoc.
- Private meeting with Quang Tri Province leadership; Vietnam Veterans Association of Quang Tri Province, and DoFA in the headquarters of Quang Tri Province People's Committee.
- Briefing meeting at Project RENEW Coordination Office.
- Delegation lunch with Quang Tri province leadership, officials, and Project RENEW staff.
- Delegation Tour of Hoa Lo Prison (Hanoi Hilton).
- Delegation briefing by Joint POW/MIZ Accounting Command.
- Tour of West Lake and site of John McCain's crash.
- Tour of Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and Stilt House Residence.
- Tour of Hanoi city.
- Tour of the Citadel of Hue, Vietnam.
- Tour of Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone and Hien Luong Bridge.
- Tour of Da Nang. Visit to Marble Mountain.
- Personal tour of Saigon Economic Region.

#### **4. CONTEXT:**

- The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) under the able and determined leadership of Founder and President Jan Scruggs over the past ten years has developed a remarkable series of in-country engagement programs (Children's Education -- and De-mining/UXO Neutralization) with the Vietnamese people.
- These programs have been funded as a 501C3 Charitable Trust with private donations. The effort is almost wholly operated and managed by Vietnamese -- with Vietnamese workers and educators. VVMF audits the funds (Mr. Bob Frank) and maintains oversight thru our in-country representative Mr. Chuck Searcy. He is a Vietnam combat vet who has devoted his life since 1992 to helping the Vietnamese people.
- The central focus of this tenth VVMF trip which I chaired was to take a delegation of Vietnam War US combat veterans and widows back to Vietnam to engage in a people-to-people program. Our primary objective was to visit and assess the VVMF Project Renew -- Unexploded Munitions (UXO) Neutralization Program -- which has now been funded by \$1 million of congressionally appropriated money.

- This Project Renew UXO Neutralization effort involves 62 Vietnamese employees who are trained by our Norwegian NGO partners -- and equipped and paid by the VVMF to neutralize wartime munitions. A major aim of the program is also to do educational outreach targeted at children to reduce the incidence of death and maiming by accidental handling of munitions. The VVMF program has also helped mitigate the consequences of war by assisting with the rehabilitation of those injured by unexploded military munitions. (Prosthetics for amputees ...and vocational training assistance to the blind)
- More than 1000 Vietnamese a year are killed or injured by unexploded military munitions (UXO). There are estimated to be 350,000+ metric tons of UXO munitions. (40% Vietnamese... 60% US). The VVMF educational program has been enormously successful and has drastically reduced the rate of injury in Quang Tri Province which is the focus of our efforts. Quang Tri is the northernmost province of the former South Vietnam and the scene of ferocious combat particularly in the final two years of the war. Our delegation was briefed by the courageous and dedicated VVMF De-mining team and we participated in the symbolic detonation of three US Cluster Bomb Units (CBU's) in a farming village.
- These US Air Force and US Army artillery delivered Cluster Bomb Unit (CBU) munitions are a continuing disaster for civilian populations as well as a contemporary threat to US friendly forces. The CBU dud rate is enormous. (My 24th Mech Division suffered casualties from these unexploded US Air Force CBU's during our Desert Storm withdrawal from Iraq following our left hook attack.) The CBU's are incredibly sensitive and unstable to handle. The CBU's remain lethal for decades. These small CBU munitions (and also dud M79 40mm grenades) drift with surface water pressure, sand movement, freezing/thaw cycles, etc. They are very difficult to recognize when encased in mud. We should eliminate CBU's as US munitions if their reliability cannot be drastically improved to prevent long-term hazard to civilian populations and friendly military forces.
- VVMF has also focused on assisting Vietnamese children's educational programs in this very impoverished Quang Tri Province. Our major project this year was to open a school built with \$75,000 of private VVMF donations (Marsh Carter, Bill Murdy, Will Soza, Terry O'Donnell, John Weber, and Jimmy Mosconis.). Rarely have I ever seen a happier and or more proud group of children (330+ beautiful grade school children), teachers, parents, and dignitaries than the scene at the ribbon cutting ceremony for this expanded school in a poor rural community of Quang Tri. The school project was designed and built with Vietnamese labor and management. They did a superb job. Small budgets go a long way when done by the Vietnamese themselves.

## **5. VIETNAM 2010:**

- Vietnam is a huge and very poor country with a land area the size of Ohio, Tennessee, and Kentucky combined. 72% of the population is rural. It has an enormous population of 86 million people. (85% ethnic Vietnamese with 54 minority groups.)
- Vietnam has modernized dramatically in the past ten years. The United States is the largest source of foreign investment. Bicycles have been replaced by millions of motor scooters and many cars. The North and the South have been united by a modern high speed highway and a standard gage railroad. Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) the former Saigon is now a megalopolis of eight million people with huge skyscrapers and modern hotels. Cruise ships with thousands of European tourists dock in the Saigon Port. Da Nang is a beach resort city with two miles of sparkling sand and resorts to include a major Casino. Hanoi is a major city of four million people with a skyline. The enormous international energy of Hanoi is signaled by the many businesses in the city with both English and Vietnamese neon signs.
- Private use and traditional family operation of farm land (the communist state retains legal ownership) has re-vitalized agriculture and turned Vietnam into the second largest exporter of rice in the world. (After Thailand). Agriculture is intensive, clever, and yet still relatively primitive. In central and south Vietnam they can produce two or three crops a year.
- The Vietnamese people are extremely hardworking and disciplined. They worship education and technical training. Vietnam has the 9th largest number of students in the world studying in the US -- and they actually then return to Vietnam.

- There is almost no violent or street crime in Vietnam. Internal controls by security forces are strict to include nearly total elimination of private possession of firearms -- as well as registration and close internal surveillance of the population by neighborhood and city block. However, drug addiction to heroin and methamphetamines is a very serious problem. There are 87 treatment centers for the 173,000 registered addicts. (Actual rate probably multiple times larger.) There is very little actual cultivation of opium in Vietnam...less than 1% of the SE Asia total. Drug smuggling is dealt with severely. Possession of more than 600 grams of heroin is a mandatory death penalty.
- The economy has increased dramatically following the approval by the Vietnamese Communist Party of entrepreneurial activity and external investment. The state retains direct control of 36% of the national GDP. Per capita income today is \$1000 -- per capita income in 1994 was \$220. The two million Vietnamese-Americans have been a major source of capital for their families in the south which has had major positive impact on their economic livelihood. 12% of the Vietnamese-Americans have returned to visit the unified country.

## 6. INSIGHTS:

- The war was over 35 years ago -- it remains only as elusive and fading memories. 65% of the Vietnamese population is under 35 years of age. Our group of Marine and Army veterans was hard-pressed to find signs of our past campaigns. Shopping centers and new hotels have replaced old urban street battles and Fire Bases. Relics of the US military and iconic signs of the South Vietnamese Government and the Army of Vietnam (ARVN) have been ruthlessly eradicated. The old US Embassy in Saigon has been torn down and replaced by a modern US Consulate. The old CIA HQS in Saigon has been retained as an historical artifact. This was the actual scene of the disastrous US helicopter evacuations during the final days of Saigon. The Brinks Hotel has disappeared to be replaced by a giant modern hotel. The slightly seedy Rex Hotel remains as a memory of the 60's/70's...it plays period US music in the rooftop terrace restaurant. The giant Long Binh Logistics Complex is a shopping mall and parking area. Former US military airfields are used to dry rice. Many former US fixed infrastructure are now Vietnamese Military installations and strictly off-limits to the public as well as foreigners. The US presence in the war is in many cases no longer visibly resident on these long ago battlefields. The memories remain, however, in the families of the 58,000 US killed whose names are engraved on the Vietnam Memorial -- and the physical trauma of the 300,000 US wounded.
- With the possible exception of the Ft Benning-Columbus, Georgia area -- I have never seen a more supportive welcome to an older group of US military combat veterans. The Vietnamese people both North and South are incredibly welcoming to Americans. Vietnam suffered grievously from this eight year "American war." They lost three million killed and four million wounded. The official Vietnamese Military Museums focus in stark and distorted manner to portray US brutality and alleged war crimes. The Hanoi Hilton museum strongly denies that they maltreated our POW's for years to the point of death from torture. However, the northern soldiers and Viet Cong in the south who battled against us say they do not hate the US soldiers who fought them. They rightfully view the war as a tragedy in which they were caught up in the successful US global confrontation with aggressive communism.
- However, the spirit of reconciliation in Vietnam is genuine. It is palpable. The Vietnamese admire our culture and values. They strongly welcome port visits by the US Navy. They actively seek US investment. They strongly want US tourism. In particular they want the Vietnamese-Americans to return with full dual citizen rights. These Vietnamese people are honorable, a delight to be around, and trying to catch up to history. They have strongly supported our search for the still unaccounted or missing 1731 American servicemen in Southeast Asia. (Since 1973 -- 915 American servicemen have been successfully accounted for.)
- Vietnam is still an authoritarian, one party, totalitarian state which is in uncertain transition to an open, pluralistic, free market economy. The security forces are paranoid from their decades of violent struggle to create the unified nation.
- The police are corrupt and all intrusive. The Army is disciplined and highly respected. The current generation of communist party leaders emerged from a culture which had been at war with the French, the Americans, the Cambodians, the Hill Tribes, the South Vietnamese, and the Chinese for 75 years. There is no free press. There are only one-party nominal elections. There is neither free speech nor the right to assembly. Free practice of religion is closely restricted. There is only a state controlled union. Dissent is immediately and ruthlessly suppressed. The former South Vietnam government civil and military authorities to the lowest level are barred from public life -- as are their children and their grandchildren. The Vietnamese Communist Party is now at a crossroads. In ten years will they be a

modernized version of South Korea or Taiwan -- or will they be unable to escape the poverty and lack of liberal opportunity which is a legacy of their history of wartime struggle?

- The Vietnamese government set up a 90 minute seminar for me with foreign policy intellectuals in Hanoi. I noted at the end of the seminar that the group of military and civilian officials had asked two brief questions about US foreign policy -- and spent the remainder of the time discussing the threat from China. They are extremely focused on not becoming a target of Chinese foreign policy hostility or Chinese military aggression. The Chinese conducted a brutal 30 day military invasion of Vietnam in 1979 that was bloody and meant to be a retaliation and warning for the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The Chinese have now asserted “indisputable sovereignty” over the entire South China Sea. In 1988 more than 70 Vietnamese sailors were killed-in-action in combat with Chinese naval forces. Currently China is enforcing a strict unilateral fishing ban and detains Vietnamese fishermen. The conflict is the struggle over the prize of undersea oil and gas exploration in the Spratly and Paracel Islands.
- The US completely normalized trade and political relations with Vietnam in December 2006. In December 2008 -- the US and Vietnam inaugurated annual political-military talks to consult on regional security and strategic issues. Vietnam now is a member of the WTO. Vietnam now serves as the Chair of ASEAN. (Member for 15 years.) The US and Vietnam are now on the verge of opening direct airline flights between the United States and Vietnam with both US and Vietnamese airlines.

## **7. THE BOTTOM LINE:**

- Our VVMF representative in Hanoi told me that one of the great US Marine combat heroes of the war (a triple amputee) wanted to return to visit the country where he had suffered such devastating injuries. He was warned that as a wheel chair disabled vet he should understand that Vietnam is a poor country which has almost no mandated infrastructure that allowed access for the disabled. However, he was also assured -- “if you come you will find the Vietnamese people immediately help the disabled whenever they even appear to need assistance.” The badly disabled US veteran returned to Vietnam and spent a week traveling without assistants throughout the country. Wherever he went -- the kindness and support of the Vietnamese people was immediate and unstinting.
- Vietnam is a country worth admiring and visiting. The US should continue to engage at a governmental level as well as with people-to-people programs. It is haunting to imagine the world that might have existed if the US had immediately recognized the new government on 2 September 1945 when Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of Vietnam on the very spot in Hanoi where his mausoleum now lies. Ho’s speech incorporated language from the US Declaration of Independence. Instead the US did not recognize the revolutionary government, the French were allowed to return to attempt to reinstate their brutal colonial regime -- and the rest is history.
- The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund will continue to support return of our US combat veterans and their children and grandchildren to Vietnam. Our outreach educational -- and wartime unexploded military munitions neutralization programs -- will hopefully gain increased US Congressional support.

Barry R. McCaffrey  
General USA Ret  
Adjunct Professor of International relations  
Department of Social Sciences  
USMA  
West Point, New York