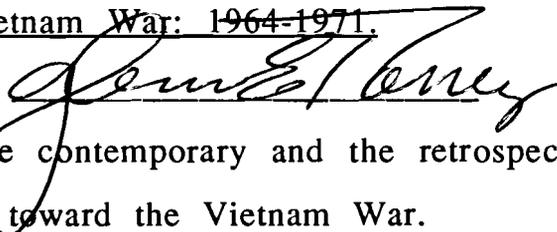


AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF
WILLARD FRANKLIN WHITE for the MASTER OF ARTS
in SOCIAL SCIENCES presented on 13 MAY 1989
Title: PERSPECTIVES: The Views of Seven Veterans
From the Vietnam War: 1964-1971.

Abstract approved:



This thesis examines the contemporary and the retrospective opinions of Vietnam veterans toward the Vietnam War.

The research has been done using three methods. The first method used was to read material on the Vietnam War, books written by combat veterans or articles written about combat veterans. Second was the examination of unpublished letters and diaries that were written by combat veterans. The third method was to conduct oral interviews of combat veterans from the Vietnam War.

This study draws four basic conclusions. The first is that most veterans did not believe then nor do they believe now they were fighting for their government. The second conclusion is that veterans believe that leadership in Vietnam War from the President on down to the company level, was poor. The third conclusion is that Vietnam veterans believe that it didn't matter to the South Vietnamese what kind of government they had, that they were politically confused. The fourth and final conclusion is that Vietnam veterans fall into three groups: pro-Vietnam War, and anti-Vietnam War and whose views are incorrect. This last named group have not returned home psychologically.

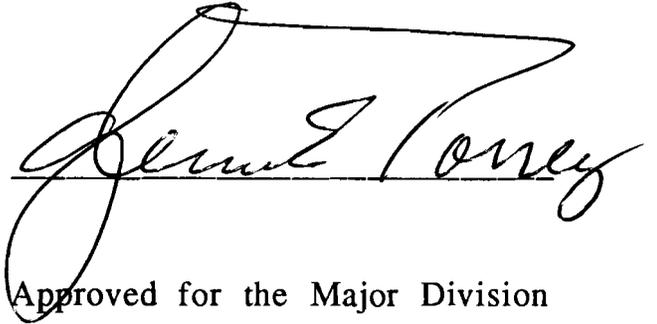
PERSPECTIVES:
THE VIEWS OF SIX
VETERANS FROM THE
VIETNAM WAR
1964-1971

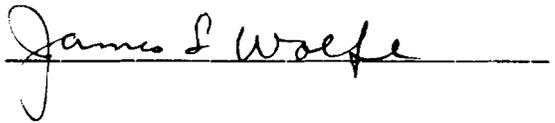
A Thesis
Presented to
The Division of Social Sciences
EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
MASTER of ARTS

by
Willard Franklin White
May 13, 1989

H
1


Approved for the Major Division


Approved for the Graduate School

467120

DP. SEP 01 '89

"War is a game, and we kill each other
because we like it."

Anonymous

Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest thanks to the following people who have made this thesis possible. First I wish to thank Professors Glenn Torrey, Loren Pennington and Samuel Dicks. Their help in the writing of this thesis will always be greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank Bob Knecht, Assistant Curator, and the staff of the Kansas State Historical Society; the staff of the William Allen White Library, Emporia State University; The Vietnam Veterans of America National Headquarters staff; the Vet Center of Wichita, Kansas; and Kevin Reed, who helped reach some of the research materials. I also want to thank those veterans who granted me access to their diaries, papers and letters and who granted me interviews.

My biggest thanks goes to Dolores Dianne Park, my reader, critic, and hardest task master. For without her encouragement and pushing me this project would still be on the computer. This work is dedicated entirely to you.

I would like to thank the following Vietnam Veterans for their assistance:

<u>Robert O. Babcock</u>	<u>6 August</u>	<u>1966-</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>1967</u>
<u>MSG. Allen Crawford</u>	<u>4 June</u>	<u>1968-</u>	<u>12 Feb.</u>	<u>1969</u>
<u>Dave Eldridge</u>	<u>Sept.</u>	<u>1965-</u>	<u>Nov.</u>	<u>1965</u>
<u>Dr. Robert E. Feighny</u>	<u>Apr.</u>	<u>1964-</u>	<u>Mar.</u>	<u>1965</u>
<u>Les Greenhaw</u>	<u>Nov.</u>	<u>1967-</u>	<u>Feb.</u>	<u>1968</u>
<u>Chris Gompert</u>	<u>Dec.</u>	<u>1966-</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>1967</u>
<u>William J. Moore</u>		<u>1968-</u>		<u>1968</u>

<u>Ron Rodgers</u>		<u>1968-</u>	<u>1969</u>
<u>Dr. John C. Williams</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>Feb. 1970-</u>	<u>Feb. 1971</u>
<u>LTC. Donald Park</u>		<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>

I wish to thank Colonel Donald Park of Leavenworth, Kansas for his ability to show me the strength to finish this thesis. Without his silent behind-the-scenes encouragement this project would never have been completed. Colonel Park is retired, formerly of the Command and General Staff College in Leavenworth, Kansas and is presently a teacher in the Leavenworth area.

Quotes from the manuscripts and oral interviews are as given, and no changes have been made in grammar or spelling.

I thank all of you.

Willard Franklin White
May 1989
Emporia, Kansas.

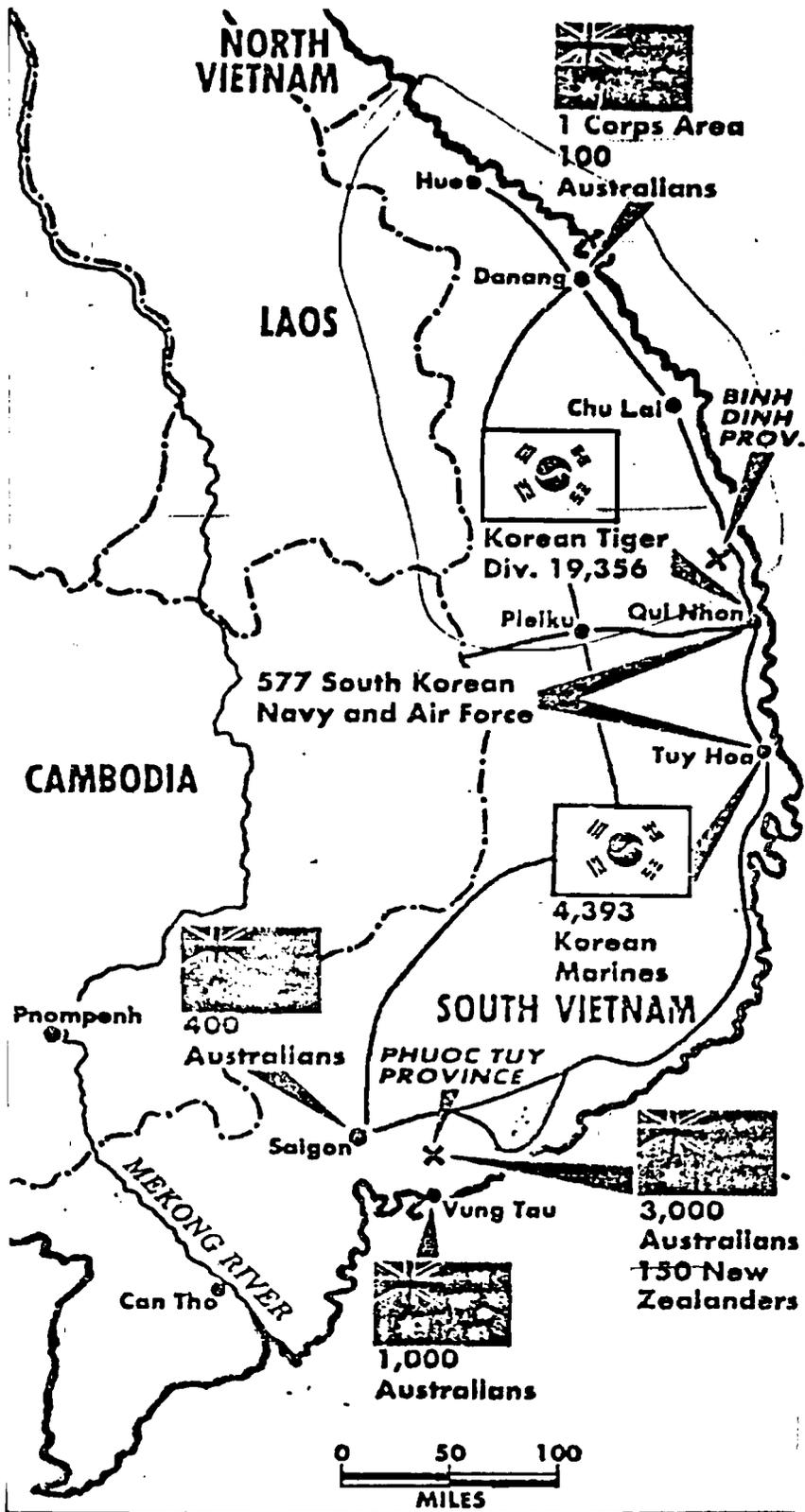
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: iv

CHAPTER

1. Summary of the Vietnam War.....	1
2. Dr. Robert E. Feighny.....	9
3. Chris Gompert	32
4. Robert O. Babcock	48
5. Oral Interviews With Other Combat Veterans	70
6. Conclusion	82

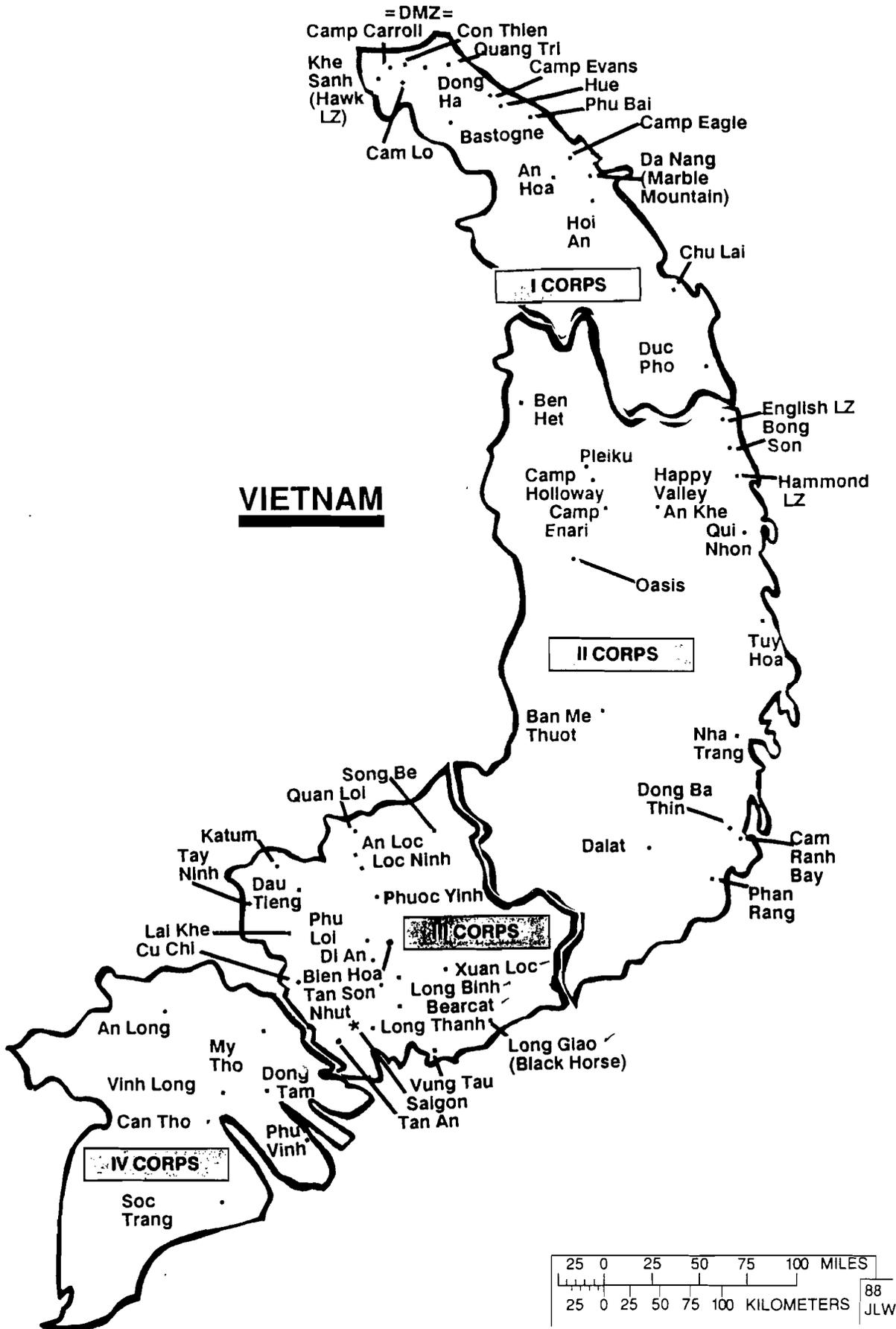
BIBLIOGRAPHY



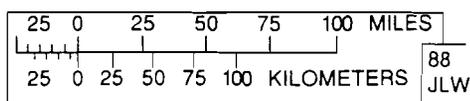
Map shows where Australian, New Zealand and South Korean troops are based in South Vietnam.

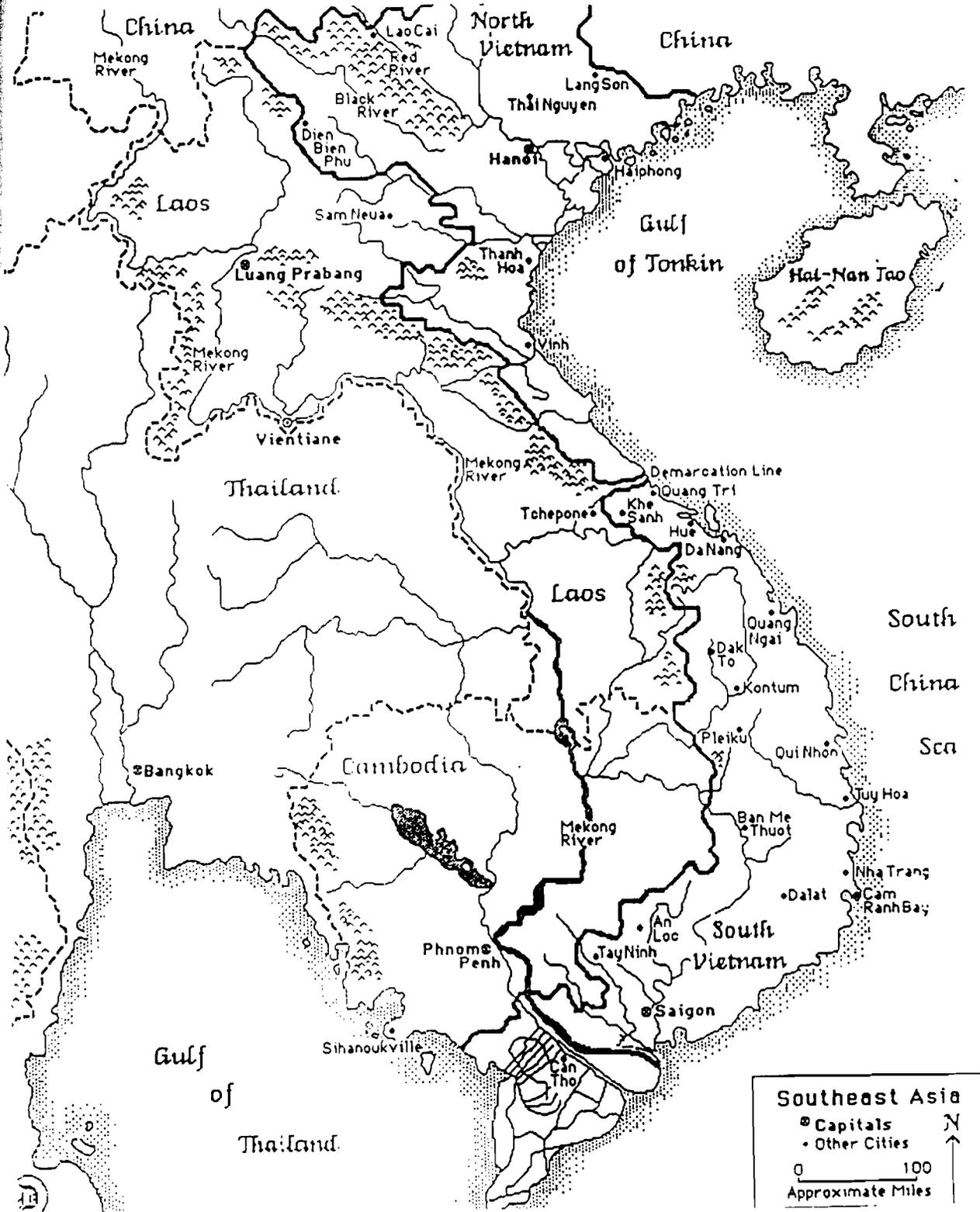
Note: This map is correct through 1966.

Map of South Vietnam



VIETNAM





Southeast Asia

- ⊙ Capitals
- Other Cities

0 100
Approximate Miles

N ↑

CHAPTER I
Summary Of
The Vietnam War
1945 to 1975

During the year 1950 there were changes in Indochina that would eventually be felt around the world some twenty-nine years later. The Vietminh, under the leadership of Senior General Vo Nauen Giap,¹ agreed to a temporary restoration of French colonial rule. This was a political action done to prevent the Peoples Republic of China from occupying North Vietnam permanently. Later in the year the French-Vietminh agreement dissolved and the Vietminh returned to the rural areas around Hanoi. At that time guerrilla warfare against the French colonial government began in earnest.²

The year 1950 was a year to remember. The Peoples Republic of China finally became communist, and North Korea began aggression upon South Korea. The Chinese communist government in Peking recognized the Vietminh as the government of Vietnam. In May of that year, President Truman authorized U.S. military aid to the French fighting in Indochina. By the end of 1952, 400 U.S. advisors and supply personnel were serving in South Vietnam.³

In 1954, the Vietminh laid siege to French troops at Dien Bien Phu, and France asked for the U.S. to assist militarily. President Eisenhower, on the advice of the Army chief of staff, General Mathew Ridgeway, declined. April brought about the Geneva Conference to end the Indochina war. The following month (May) the Viet Minh defeated the French Troops at Dien Bien Phu and ended the war

against the French. The Geneva Agreement separated Vietnam at the 17th parallel on the condition that nationwide elections be held within two years. Ho Chi Minh took control of North Vietnam and Ngo Diem became Prime Minister of South Vietnam. During the summer and autumn of that year, the U.S. Navy and French Air Force began moving the massive numbers of mainly Catholic refugees from the north into the south.⁴

Using the excuse that no free elections would be held in the north, the Diem government declined to prepare for elections. In December of that year (1955) Diem deposed French puppet Emperor Bao Dai and declared South Vietnam a republic.⁵ In April of 1956, the last French troops left Vietnam. The U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) continued to grow in strength. By the end of the Eisenhower years, over a thousand U.S. military personnel were in South Vietnam.⁶

There was an increase in guerrilla incidents in South Vietnam during the spring and summer of 1958.

Intelligence agencies became aware that North Vietnam was infiltrating Viet Cong cadres through Laos. In Laos, U.S. advisors requested Colonel Vang Pao, A Meo tribesman, to organize guerrilla units to harass the North Vietnamese on the border areas east of Plaine Des Jarres. In December the Laotian town of Tchepone and other small villages were openly seized by North Vietnam. This was done to guard the infiltration route (Ho Chi Minh Trail) around the western edge of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).⁷

In the spring of 1959, the U.S. secretly opened a military mission in Laos commanded by General John Heintges and known as

the USAID Program Evaluation Program. The program was twofold, to strengthen the Laotian Army in its fight against the Hanoi backed Pathet Lao, and to assist the Laotian Army harassing the guerrilla infiltration routes.⁸

During January 1960, a state of emergency emerged in South Vietnam after Army Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) troops and a battalion of Viet Cong had their first major engagement. Diem asked for increased U.S. aid, and the USAID Program Evaluation office in Laos was replaced by the U.S. Army Special Forces White Star Mobile Training Teams. The war between the Pathet Lao and the Laotian Army was stepped up as was the harassment of North Vietnamese infiltration routes.⁹

In January of 1961 President Kennedy ordered MAAG personnel to be increased in Saigon. President Kennedy told the world that U.S. advisors would return fire if fired upon. He also announced in March that he had sent U.S. Marines to Thailand, and they would be used in Laos if needed. In September, Walt Rostow and General Maxwell Taylor recommended more U.S. aid and the possible dispatch of U.S. troops to South Vietnam. In October, U.S. helicopters and war planes along with pilots and ground crews arrived in South Vietnam. This made 15,000 military personnel in South Vietnam.¹⁰

In February of 1962 the MAAG office in Saigon was converted to Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). In July, Laos was considered neutral and the U.S. Special Forces White Star Teams¹¹ were withdrawn. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) used U.S.

Special Forces to recruit Montagnard tribesmen to try to control infiltration of Viet Cong cadres from Laos.¹²

In 1963, ARVN troops suffered numerous defeats, and American armed helicopters started playing a major part in the war in South Vietnam. In May, Buddhist revolts occurred with a monk in Saigon burning himself to death. U.S. Ambassador Frederick Nolting, who strongly supported Diem, was replaced by Henry Cabot Lodge. In October, the U.S. agreed with South Vietnamese generals that Diem must go. He was ousted and murdered along with his family in November. Three weeks later in Dallas, Texas, President Kennedy was assassinated.¹³

From 1964 to 1966, South Vietnam was in a period of political instability with many coups and counter coups occurring. In May, the U.S. admitted to bombing Laos in support of Laotian troops. Maxwell Taylor became U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam as Henry Cabot Lodge resigned to run for the Republican presidential nomination. General William C. Westmoreland was appointed MACV commander. In August, the Tonkin Gulf incident occurred, prompting President Johnson to order North Vietnam to be bombed. The mortar attack upon Bien Hoa airbase by the Viet Cong in November was the first assault on an American unit. In Saigon, a terrorist bomb blew up the Brinks Bachelor Officer Quarters just before Christmas and caused severe casualties.¹⁴

In February 1965, the airfield at Pleiku was attacked by mortars causing numerous casualties and the loss of a large number of aircraft. A second bombing of North Vietnam occurred. A bomb blew up the main hotel in Qui Nhon causing numerous casualties.

This was the beginning of the "Rolling Thunder" bombing of North Vietnam. A battalion of U.S. Marines landed at Da Nang to provide security for the airbase. In May, the 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived in South Vietnam and President Johnson approved 175,000 U.S. combat troops in South Vietnam. By the end of the year 184,300 American troops were in country.¹⁵

A new U.S. military build up in South Vietnam began in 1966. South Korea, Thailand, Australia, and the Philippines had sent combat troops. The U.S. Air Force started bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. U.S. Forces also started firing into Cambodia against suspected Viet Cong sanctuaries. American planes bombed Hanoi and surrounding areas.¹⁶

In Spring of 1967, after a year of intense and heavy fighting along the DMZ, U.S. Marines were sent to Khe Sanh to stop infiltration of Viet Cong cadres.¹⁷

The Tet Offensive, in January 1968, with open combat in Saigon and 40 cities around the country, lasted a week. It took 28 days to recapture Hue.¹⁸

In March of 1969, the secret bombing of Cambodia began. U.S. troops totaled 543,000 in South Vietnam. In July the Green Berets were accused of murdering suspected double agents, and President Nixon announced that the United States had started withdrawing troops. The My Lai Massacre became public knowledge.¹⁹

In 1970, four Kent State University students involved in an anti-war demonstration died in a confrontation with the Ohio National Guard. U.S. troop strength was 400,000 by the end of the year.²⁰ In 1971, the American troop strength was down to 140,000

personnel.²¹ In 1972, President Nixon went to Peking to reestablish ties with mainland China. He also ordered the mining of Haiphong harbor. The Paris Peace Accords were signed in January 1973, and the last U.S. troops left South Vietnam. The U.S. ended the draft and in April 1975, the governments of Cambodia and Laos fell. Saigon fell and the war in Vietnam was over.²²

ENDNOTES

1. Davidson, Philip B, Lt. Gen., U.S. Army (Ret.)
Vietnam at War: The History 2946-1975. Novato, Ca:
Presidio Press, 1988, Chapter 1.
2. Willeson, Kim (with the correspondents of Newsweek), The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War. New York: Random House, 1984, p. 14.
3. Ibid., p. 14.
4. Ibid., p. 5.
5. Ibid., p. 15.
6. Ibid., p. 15.
7. Ibid., p. 16
8. Ibid., p. 16.
9. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
10. Ibid., p. 17.
11. White Star Teams are the U.S. Special Forces White Star Training Teams used for counterinsurgency and military operations that call for small elite unit action in specialized military methods and procedures. Ibid, p. 16.
12. Ibid., pp. 17-18.
13. Ibid., p. 18.
14. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
15. Ibid., p. 19.

16. Ibid., p. 20.
17. Ibid., pp. 20-23.
18. Ibid., pp. 21-22.
19. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
20. Ibid., p. 23.
21. Ibid., pp. 23-24.
22. Ibid., pp. 24-253.

CHAPTER II

Robert E. Feighny M.D.

8th Field Hospital

Nha Trang, South Vietnam

April 1964 to April 1965

Dr. Robert E. Feighny was forty-four years old when he was assigned to Vietnam in 1964. He had been married to Helen Feighny for over twenty years with whom he had seven children. At the time of his assignment, the youngest of his children was in diapers and the eldest was ready for college. The rest were in different grades of elementary school.

Dr. Feighny was a "Mustang" in the Navy; that is, he worked his way up the ranks from enlisted status to officer with the rank of Ensign. He had enlisted in the Naval Reserve in 1939 and served on active duty on destroyers during World War II. He served in Alaska, the Aleutians, and the Central Pacific and then returned to the States in September 1945 and was separated from active duty.

Dr. Feighny, graduate of the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas in 1947, went to medical school and joined the Army ROTC Program while a medical student doing his internship at Brooks Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. After his internship he asked for and received residency in orthopedic surgery. He completed one year of residency at The Army/Navy Hospital in Hot Springs, Arkansas and was then assigned to four years of orthopedic residency at Letterman Army Hospital in San Francisco, California.

His last year of orthopedic residency was spent at Lexington's Crippled Children's Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky.

From that point on he was stationed like any other Army doctor. He served in numerous hospitals such as Munich, Germany; Fort Eustus, Virginia; William Beuamont General Hospital at Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas; Eighth Field Hospital in Nha Trang, South Vietnam (April 1964 to April 1965); and Fort Riley, Kansas. He retired from the Army in 1967 as a Lieutenant Colonel and entered private practice in Salina, Kansas, as an orthopedic surgeon. He retired in 1980. (Interview Salina, Kansas November 04, 1988)

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS BY
Robert E. Feighny
to
Helen E. Feighny
8th FIELD HOSPITAL
NAH TRANG,¹ SOUTH VIETNAM

Letter #5 Nha Trang 23 April 1964

"He worked with the local natives that lived in the mountains under very primitive conditions. These people wear no clothes except loin cloths.² These people have (provincial) gunshot wounds which were sent to the provincial hospital. The Vietnamese doctors are very appreciative of medical help. The Vietnamese army has injured people.

Living conditions are certainly difficult with poverty, and life is of little value to these people. Americans are so well off and have such a great form of life and luxuries."

Letter # 13 03 May 1964

"I don't see how we could remain over here very long. Some feel we are only biding our time. We can't win and there is little desire to win on the part of the Vietnamese."

Letter # 29 21 May 1964

"There is rumors to a little news about Laos and Cambodia,³ but I do not know what it all means as yet. It may mean that the communists are going to increase their activities.

I get discouraged about the situation over here as it is so difficult to figure out, but we are committed to try to help these people. If we lose out in South Vietnam, then we feel we may be fighting in Thailand.⁴ This would be the only area that is pro-American."

Letter # 39 05 June 1964

"We have rumors of another revolt⁵ or overthrow of the present government—if this happens, many of us feel that we will leave the country. I get mixed feelings as I feel we are trying to help these people. But the problems are so great and many that I do not believe any one country could solve them."

Letter # 41 07 June 1964

"Marriage takes two not one. This is what makes this assignment for 15,000 Americans over here so rough.⁶ Some are not married, a few have their families, but most of the families are separated. These several thousand are the only Americans that are really making a real sacrifice. Americans are quite stupid to continue to impose hardships when the results are so fruitless. I fear we feel the solution to all our problems is to give more money and

more money. In America, to improve living standards we increase the pay which buys more, people are happier and standards are increased. This doesn't apply over here. These people are struggling to even exist and have no interest in what kind of government they have. We talk about kinds of government and most of these people have very little if any education. We treat diarrhea, tuberculosis, venereal disease, but there is no attempt to prevent spread of disease by using toilets or isolation of T. B. We would do more good to get to the man on the street than to worry about how to spend another \$ 125 million when all the millions have been to no avail. The government official and his rank in the military gain the greatest from our money. Little, if any, gets to the low class people. The article I enclosed is interesting, especially the part about the provincial leaders as there are mayors, governmental officials, that the people should, support at the low level, but are frequently kidnapped, cut up and killed by either their own people or Viet Cong.⁷ People are willing to accept communism as they feel it promises more. Not that it will, but these people are not convinced. I didn't mean to talk so much about this, and I won't again for a long time. However, it is because of this situation that I don't see if we will remain. It is difficult for so many to understand why America persists on continuing over here. The recent article in Newsweek about Southeast Asia is very good. The Viet Cong controls so many areas that the only way to go in is by airplane. One wouldn't dare to drive to another city, as the area is not controlled by the South

Vietnamese forces.⁸ I'm afraid I am saying too much and you might worry, as there is no need of that. In a way, I am trying to tell you that this is no place for you or the children. There are no approved schools—homes for Americans are \$300-\$400 including utilities and if the situation becomes acute, you will have trouble getting out of this place."

Letter # 42 08 June 1964

"Last night when I was ready to write, some of the fellows dropped by and we had a bull session about South Vietnam. We all came to the conclusion that there are many complex problems with very little or any solution to them. The Vietnamese do not seem to care whether they fight or win the war.⁹ They have been fighting since 1941,¹⁰ first the Japanese, then the French after 1945 to 1954,¹¹ and then the communists from China and then the Americans in 1954,¹² (I think). I don't see how we can continue and hope for unity. The main problem is that to hate to admit we can't solve the problems. Frankly I believe these people believe they have no problems, their life will remain the same whether it be French, Communist or American. Enough of this, but I sure hope some conference can settle this mess and let us go home to our families."

Letter # 71 16 July 1964

"I love you so very much—it is terrible to be over here and to be unable to take care of his family. I wish so much Americans would stop trying to solve the problems of the world. These people have had these problems before America was here, and will have when we leave here—if we do."

Letter # 90 06 August 1964

"Sometimes I am hopeful the recent incident may help to clear up this mess quicker than the way it has been for the past few years. On the other hand I certainly hope America will not be pulled into a fighting war.

There certainly is a lot of speculations and wondering what may happen."¹³

Letter # 110 26 August 1964

"They have been having demonstrations downtown. The demonstrations have been between the Catholics and Buddhists. One day the Catholics demonstrate and the next day those of the Buddhist religion demonstrate. A few houses have been bombed and I have heard a few people have been killed. Those people don't know what they want except to argue and fight among themselves. I understand other demonstrations have been occurring in other cities of Vietnam."¹⁴

Khanh,¹⁵ who has been elected president by those in power I understand, has stepped down and given the reins of government over to civilians. This seems strange as the military junta was quite firm and as stable as seems possible over here. Minh,¹⁶ who did take

over before Khanh and after Madane Nhu ¹⁷ and Diem, is supposed to be definitely out of the picture. He was called the Chief Premier of the country. He was backed mainly by their young people, especially the students. He was quite popular, in actuality opposed Khanh. The story is that Minh has a brother in the Vietnamese Army¹⁸ and when this was discovered, he stepped out of the picture. With Khanh stepping out, it seems the government may be, and most likely will be unstable. It is real discouraging to try to help these people who are fighting among themselves and doing very little fighting against the Viet Cong. They certainly do not seem interested in fighting the Viet Cong or stabilizing an unstable government.

I feel that Johnson and MacNamara really bet on a losing horse over here and they are going to have a hard time saving face in this situation. Goldwater is very critical of the foreign policy of the Democratic party. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Goldwater wins.¹⁹ It would not be because he is extremely well liked, it is that people, I believe, are sick and tired of running all around the world helping people who can't or won't help themselves. I wrote too much about this, but I feel that something is going to come from the uneasy situation over here."

Letter # 111 27 August 1964

"From rumors in news there seems to be a good deal happening tonight in Saigon and a few other cities. I guess most of the Vietnamese are fighting among themselves.²⁰ A new government is being formed. Khanh is out, Catholics fighting Buddhists, and the Buddhists fighting back. The students are having a holiday.

Americans should realize that there is little if anything that can be done in an ununited country with people of strong disagreements. I don't know how it will come out, but when these events happen, it seems like a good chance we will get disgusted and pull out."

Letter # 115 31 August 1964

"I still believe that we have not seen the end of internal affairs of this government, and the situation is not going to improve. There is talk over here of wanting to get Americans out of here, however this is covered up as much as possible. There are many people in high government positions as well as the military who are helped by many American dollars.²¹ Also, the Viet Cong may increase their activity in the next month or two and if so with the situation of the government there is little likelihood that the present Army of South Vietnam can stop or would have the resistance to try. I feel this war may come to an end sooner than we think, the only way to resolve the situation is if American troops in large numbers were sent in and I am sure America is not going to do this.²² I believe if Goldwater gets in he will stop this now and work for neutralization, the same as Eisenhower did in Korea."

Letter # 119 04 September 1964

"I was up until four o'clock in the morning helping take care of the two Marines who were injured with grenade fragments, so this doesn't help my disposition any. One received fragments into his belly with a few lacerations on his back.

As to Qui Nhon,²³ they were having demonstrations up there between the Catholics and Buddhists and a few people were killed. We were restricted to the Army post which is usual whenever there are activities among the civilians. I was the only doctor for this post which has many helicopters."

Letter # 127 14 September 1964

"My Darling Wife,

Today has been very quiet, sleepy, rainy weather. I hope we will get a break from the hot day of summer. It seems Khanh is back in and it was only an attempt yesterday to throw over the government in Saigon.²⁴ This is getting ridiculous and disgusting, no one is doing anything except fighting among themselves. It is only a matter of time before everthing will be lost over here. We will continue to lose. The people need a strong Vietnamese government and a weak government only continues their direction and course of progress. American people must be getting sick and tired of this situation."

Letter # 129 16 September 1964

"I'm O.D. tonight and a patient will be sent in with a gunshot wound to the thigh in a couple of hours. It may be accidental, we have not had a gunshot wound for approximately two months at least. There's been very little activity as far as the Viet Cong or the war effort is concerned. The government continues to have trouble trying to please the people and give into their demand. It remains a hopeless situation."

Letter # 137 25 September 1964

"Today seemed to be a quicker day than usual at least it seemed to go faster and this I like. I went to the provincial or the civilian hospital — they have always some difficult cases.²⁵ Another dislocated elbow in an eight year old boy. This makes the second one in a month. The dislocation was not bad except for the fact that they are two months old and makes surgery very difficult.²⁶ Our work load at the hospital continues to be very light. It is better this way and I knew fewer people are getting hurt."

Letter # 151 08 October 1964

"Today I saw an interesting case and very unusual, a little boy with a fracture of the leg at a 90 degree angle. The fracture wasn't a day or two old, but three months old, no treatment. I can't understand how these Vietnamese can neglect such a serious condition. The boy could never walk and there was no union of the bones.²⁷

Your mother asked about the situation over here— it is a terrible waste of time, money, and energy. It seems to remain a hopeless situation as there is such a great degree of diversity and fighting among the many fractions in Vietnam. They (Khanh) will try to get a new type of civilian government by October 27, which seems unlikely. The Buddhists are very strong and in greater number or approximately 69% of the people. Their culture and religion is very Oriental and by nature, anti-Western and thus anti-American.²⁸ The ones who receive the greatest share of the U.S. dollars are those in

the present government and high rank in the military.

Unfortunately the present government, mainly military, is quite unpopular, yet this is necessary if you hope to have any degree of stability.²⁹ Frankly, I have always felt these people don't know and don't care what form of government they have. They have to spend most of their time getting enough to eat."

Letter # 168 25 October 1964

"We got back from the retreat at 3:00 p.m.³⁰ and I was met by the O.D. to tell me three patients were coming in. They were in a jeep and hit a landmine, two had very minor injuries, but the third was seriously injured, a head injury and a severe leg injury which necessitated an amputation. I hope he makes it, he is still unconscious. The other fellow who sustained a severe injury and an amputation passed away Friday. The first patient I have lost over here but he had a severe head injury as well as the leg injury."

Letter # 170 27 October 1964

"The article that Nixon stated is nice to think of! There continues to be quite a bit of talk of trying to settle the situation. It is not going to get better and I certainly hope that America is not foolish enough to try to fight a war for these people. This they would like nothing better. These people could care less what kind of government they have. Our help and our money is not going to the poor people who really need some help. It is a miserable situation and one that the U.S., is not able to help or can't help.³¹ We have hired a few Vietnamese nurses aids but they do not want to work at

night as they would miss their sleep and be too tired. These people have no drive, no initiative, no sense of responsibility — it is no darn wonder it is such a poor country. Enough of this."

Letter # 202B 29 November and 30 November 1964

"This afternoon I went to the military hospital of the Vietnamese Army to do surgery.³² I didn't mention it to you as it is unimportant but bragging to Julie³³ after I mentioned it to Marianna³⁴ — I guess I should tell you. I am orthopedic consultant to the Vietnamese Army Hospital, the Provincial Hospital and the Medical Missionary Hospital as well as I have a Vietnamese Medical License. The license allows me to practice medicine in Vietnam, "free of charge," and frankly it not very difficult to obtain a license.³⁵ As to the other hospital they are glad to have me help them as I am the only orthopedic surgeon in these parts."

Letter # 238 08 February 1965

"It has been a long time since I have been so physically tired as I was yesterday. Saturday evening I was M.O.D.,³⁶ and everything was quiet until 2:00 a.m. when a patient came in with a head injury and in quite serious condition — very little anyone could do. Within a half an hour we were notified of the attack on Pleiku,³⁷ which is about 90-100 miles from us. By 4:30 a.m., we started to receive the wounded men and officers and within a couple of hours we had nearly 80 injured patients. It was very pitiful. The extensive wounds of the head, chest, abdomen, and extremities. Scott³⁸ did an excellent job as well as the entire staff of the hospital. I was in

surgery for 24 hours performing surgery on extremities, there were cases that absolutely had to be done to save lives. Two patients with severe head injuries died, however, those with a chest and abdominal wounds are still alive. It is overwhelming to try to describe how so many people can be wounded so quickly and so extensively. It is difficult to always pick one, that have to have life saving surgery and decide on those you can wait a few hours. Of course I have never seen a similar situation and hope I never do again."

Letter # 249 19 February 1965

"We have heard there is some kind of a coup in Saigon but we do not know who is carrying it out but we understand it is against Khanh and Ky.³⁹ These are the two strongest people over here. These things are so discouraging — they want the Americans to do the fighting for them but they have to continue to fight among themselves. They want a government but no government can exist when the people are trying to overthrow it. It is rather interesting and I am sure people in the States were never told this, but the attack at Pleiku⁴⁰ and at Qui Nhon,⁴¹ were on the same 52nd Aviation Battalion. This battalion is stationed at the two different areas. They have inflicted more casualties on the Viet Cong in this area. In other words the Americans in this aviation battalion were fighting more than the Vietnamese and the Viet Cong attacked the battalion who was causing them the most trouble. So it makes sense why the Viet Cong attacked. Of course the incident a Brink's Hotel⁴²

in Saigon was a different story in that the Viet Cong were out to kill or injure American officers."

Robert E. Feighny
Extracts of Interview
04 November 1988
Salina, Kansas

"I also felt at the time we got involved in increasing our commitment and military strength over there — which was in 1964 with the Tonkin Gulf incident — was a very poor excuse for getting involved, if that's the word to use. I was in the Navy and realized that some small patrol craft boats would not take it upon themselves to attack a destroyer on the high seas. It just didn't seem like it would be possible and that it was a sign of stupidity on the part of the North Vietnamese people. I thought it was also pretty stupid on our side to think we should have got involved in such a war on such a flimsy basis." (see also Letter number 90, 06 August 1964, and endnote number 13.)

"I think I had much compassion toward the Vietnamese people. A good friend of mine was a medical missionary, Carl Yoder, and he would see these people at his hospital and saw a large number with eye diseases, which he would help them take care of. Tuberculosis was one of our greatest diseases over there. Once a week, he'd bring in maybe 10 or 12 people with severe orthopedic problems for me to try to help or help him solve. And I did see very many unusual, rare conditions among the Vietnamese people, and some I could help.

There was a great deal of hesitation on the part of the Vietnamese people toward accepting surgery on the part of any American doctors, so one treated them with processes like casts. I thought I did do quite a bit of help for them."⁴³

"We had MEDCAP that could go in to the villages to treat the Vietnamese people. When I asked one Catholic nun what they did, she said they'd look and take those children who looked the sickest and most severely ill and they would hospitalize all of them, and they could not treat all of them. They didn't feel like God did not mean for them to try to treat all of them, just to do what they could for them."⁴⁴

"I did work with two Vietnamese doctors. I thought they were very fine doctors, and I admired them. My goodness, they were two doctors that had to run a 150-bed hospital, and it was just impossible for them to take care of all their casualties. I felt, if I worked there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, I would not be able to really help out their problems, but I would try to instruct and teach them when I could."⁴⁵

ENDNOTES

1. Nha Trang—This was the location of that the United States Army 8th Field Hospital. The city itself was located on the cliffs above the beaches of the South China Sea. This area was as secure as any place in Vietnam could be.
2. Local natives that lived in mountains were known as the Montagnard Tribespeople. These people were very primitive in respect both to their customs and society.
3. Laos and Cambodia were areas that the U.S. was getting deeply involved with in 1964 and 1965. There were a lot of rumors about this involvement, but nothing had been said publicly about the U.S. being involved there. At this time the U.S. Special Forces White Star Teams were being used to train the troops of Cambodia and Laos to fight communist aggressors.
4. Thailand was the only very pro-American country in Southeast Asia that could be trusted to not be against the United States being in the country. The people in Thailand were happy to have the U.S. military in their county.
5. From the removal of Ngo Dinh Diem 1 November 1963, until February 1965 when the South Vietnam government was finally stabilized under the leadership of General Nguyen Cao Ky, the governments in South Vietnam were unstable and coups and counter coups were carried out by one faction of the people or another. These revolts produced unstable and very

unreliable governments. These governments are mentioned numerous times in letters by Dr. Feighny to his family. (Phillip B. Davidson, Vietnam at War: The History 1946-1975. Navoto, CA: Presido Press 1988 pp. XI, 838.)

6. From December 1961 to July 1965 the total U.S. military strength in South Vietnam was 15,000 troops. In July of 1965 President Johnson ordered that the U.S. troop strength be increased to over 175,000 personnel. (Kim Willenson [with the correspondents of Newsweek], Newsweek, The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War, New York: Randon House, 1984, pp. XVIII, 311.)
7. The Viet Cong were the Peoples Army of South Vietnam. This army had during World War II been known as the Vietminh, headed by Ho Chi Minh. He was, after 1954, the leader of North Vietnam. The Viet Cong were mainly terroristic in nature and were the main group that the United States and France fought against. (Davidson, Vietnam at War, pp. 3-31.)
8. Vietnam as a country was controlled in an unusual fashion. The country itself was divided at the 17th parallel into two countries: North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The Country-side was controlled by the military armies of South Vietnam or the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong controlled the highlands and the Mekong Delta while the Army of South Vietnam controlled the coast line. Some of the cities were controlled by the Viet Cong. To get from one place to another in Vietnam you flew because the roads were controlled by the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong had its own government newspapers, hospitals, courts,

and government. They were in essence a government within a country that was fighting to become the legal government of all of Vietnam. This was a civil war and these people were fighting to overthrow the government of South Vietnam.

(Davidson, Vietnam at War, pp. 666-724; Willenson, The Bad War, pp. 121-184, 212-374.)

9. The people of Vietnam, especially South Vietnam, had been involved in wars for over two thousand years and they were very tired of fighting over their country. (Davidson, Vietnam at War, Willenson, The Bad War, pp.3 to 31.)
10. From the invasion of the Japanese troops in 1940, the occupation by the French from the turn of the century (1900's), to the involvement of the Americans in 1951, the Vietnamese have been fighting a foreign country for their land. (Willenson, The Bad War, p. 14.)
11. Vietnam returned to the control of the French in 1945 at the end of the World War II. They fought the Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. (Davidson, Vietnam at War, pp. 161-280.)
12. In 1951, the United States became involved in the problems in Vietnam after the French had asked for military help. The United States entered the war in Vietnam using military forces in 1964. (Davidson, Vietnam at War, p. 311-332; Willenson, The Bad War, p. 18).
13. The Tonkin Gulf incident in August 1964, was given some mention at this point in Dr. Feighny's letters. The North Vietnamese Navy had sent three small torpedo boats to attack the U.S.S. Maddox in internal waters. In Dr. Feighny's inter-

the U.S.S. Maddox in internal waters. In Dr. Feighny's interview, he discusses this incident in some detail. It was the cause of the United States beginning the buildup of military forces in South Vietnam and for the U.S. Navy to bomb North Vietnam. (See interview papers and Davidson, Vietnam at War, pp. 317—322, 628, 806; Willenson, The Bad War, pp. 5, 27, to 38, 85, 205, 213.)

14. Demonstrations occurred in Vietnam for numerous reasons. The biggest number of demonstrations were backed by the Buddhists, who would demonstrate whenever they were against anything and would set themselves on fire in the support of the demonstrations. These people would demand that the government do as they wanted or they would demonstrate. This would always end up in riots.
15. Nguyen Khanh took power in Vietnam on January 20, 1964 after overthrowing the government of "Big Minh," who took power after the overthrow of Diem. Numerous attempts by persons and groups attempted to overthrow the Khanh regime. (Davidson, Vietnam at War, pp. 313—334.)
16. General Duong Van ("Big Minh") Minh in 1964 led the coup that overthrew the government fo Diem. "Bib Minh" had communist connections in North Vietnam. He was under suspicion by all the leaders of Vietnam after he was deposed in 1964. He was not trusted by the political leaders of South Vietnam. Davidson, Vietnam at War pp. 313, 790; Willenson, The Bad War, p. 26.)
17. Madame Nhu was the wife of Ngo Dinh Nhu the head of the

(Willenson, The Bad War, pp. 169, 174, 176.)

18. The brother of General Duong Van Minh was reportedly a member of the North Vietnamese Army. This revelation caused "Big Minh to leave the South Vietnamese government in 1964. (Davidson, Vietnam at War, pp. 313, 790).
19. Senator Barry Goldwater ran unsuccessfully on the Republican presidential ticket in 1964. He was a man who was very critical of the war in Vietnam, saying "Win it or get out." (Davidson, Vietnam at War, pp. 391, 334; Willenson, The Bad War, pp. 1, 27, 29, 408.)
20. See endnote # 14, also see reference note. (Davidson, Vietnam at War, pp. 318-329.)
21. The United States gave the government of South Vietnam millions of dollars in foreign aid and economic aid. This money never reached the people it was intended to reach and was kept by the government officials that received the money. (Willenson, The Bad War, pp. 7, 191, 310, 321.)
22. In 1966, the U.S. forces in South Vietnam were being built up to the total number of over one-half million troops. (Willenson, The Bad War, p. 20.)
23. Qui Nhon was a port city on the South China Sea which was used to help bring supplies and U.S. troops into the country. The city is known for a terrorist bombing, when V.C. bombed The U.S. Air Force barracks there.
24. See endnote number 20.
25. Dr. Feighny and other doctors helped the local people with medical care. This was known at the MEDCAP Program.

25. Dr. Feighny and other doctors helped the local people with medical care. This was known at the MEDCAP Program. MEDCAP stands for Medical Assistance Program.
26. Dr. Feighny found a curious attitude towards medical problems. The people were uneducated and therefore were not aware that they should deal with these problems. Their attitude was that if a person lived after having some kind of a problem then he lived. (Feighny, Robert E., Interview 04 November 1988; Salina, Kansas.)
27. See endnote number 26.
28. In Southeast Asia, most of the people are Buddhist. In Vietnam alone, these people comprised over 60% of the population. (Davidson, Vietnam at War, pp. 302-303, 305-306, 323, 439, 751; Willenson, The Bad War, pp. 84, 105 to 106, 135, 144, 174, 215, 218.)
29. The government of Vietnam was under the rule of General Nguyen Khanh who, because of corruption under his rule, was very unpopular with the people in South Vietnam.
30. Retreat is where the doctors went to a church organized meeting to become closer to their religious beliefs.
31. The local Vietnamese army hospital had no real orthopedic surgeon. Dr. Feighny was the surgeon they used.
32. Julie Feighny is Dr. Feighny's oldest daughter and at the present is a physical therapist in Tucson, Arizona.
33. Marianna Feighny is Dr. Feighny's third oldest daughter.
34. Medical licenses in Vietnam for American doctors were mainly used for political and propaganda purposes. Dr. Feighny was

36. Pleiku was the city where the Viet Cong attacked the U.S. airbase. This attack was designed to cause the unit stationed there damage, and to prevent them from attacking Viet Cong. (Davidson, Vietnam at War pp. 148, 167, 180, 205-212, 333-342, 399, 403, 545, 678, 690, 767-778; Willenson, The Bad War, p. 19.)
37. Dr. Scott was a surgeon who was with Dr. Feighny at the 8th Field Hospital. (Feighny, to Helen Feighny; 08 February 1965.)
38. Ky was General Nguyen Cao Ky. He was the Premier of South Vietnam until the fall of Saigon in 1973. At the present he lives in Louisiana and is a shrimp fisherman.
39. Pleiku; see endnote number 36.
40. Qui Nhon; see endnote number 26.
41. The Brinks Hotel was a hotel in Saigon that housed American officers. It was bombed in December of 1964. (Willenson, The Bad War, p. 19.)
42. Dr Carl Yoder is a Mennonite Physician who went to Vietnam with the Mennonite Church Medical Mission. He was well known to Dr. Feighny.
43. MEDCAP is Medical Assistance Program. The program is described in endnote number 28.
44. Medical doctors from South Vietnam were not the best trained and lacked the modern equipment and training that other nations had. They were very happy to be taught new techniques.

CHAPTER III

CHRIS GOMPERT

1st MARINE DIVISION

CHU LAI, SOUTH VIETNAM

1967

Chris Gompert was born in 1944 in Carmel, California, and lived in Los Angeles, California until his family moved to Sacramento, California when he was 10 years old. Mr. Gompert attended San Jose College in San Jose, California and was graduated in 1966 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management. Mr. Gompert, 22 years old and married with no children, was due to be drafted in June of 1966 when he enlisted in the Marine Corps. He spent one month in Okinawa¹ while he was assigned to duty in Vietnam. He served in Vietnam from January 1967 to May 1967 with the First Marine Division and was wounded in Operation Union

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS
TO HIS WIFE
TAMMIE AND HIS PARENTS
1967

Chu Lai, South Vietnam

16 February 1967 (Taped Letter)

"We're still within the same area here. Right now we're still living in the same area, getting first in the chow line. Today is the sixteenth, which means eight more nights of bunker watch³ before I find out if I really have leave here or not. It is really getting on my nerves counting the days like that. I can really imagine what it's going to be like when I'm due to go back.

Just want you to know that letter I wrote you about the operation and everything was the only time I had done any shooting. It was just for one day but oh what a long day.

It's turning into a big thing down there now, at a place called Dak Phu in Quang Nhe Province on Operation Desoto. They're on Operation Desoto II now.⁴ I'm sure we won't be on that. Our company was on standby which means they could call on us any time they needed a company, K company is on standby; chances are less. Besides in eight days what can happen?"

13 April 1967

"Happy April 13th,

It really has no significance other than the fact that in two more days another month will be half over.

I'm still in the same area at Chu Lai⁵ we haven't pulled off the big move as yet. But there was excitement —

The night before last, our platoon had to go out beside a road not far from our area, the reason supposedly being the engineers⁶ were receiving sniper fire. In typical Marine Corps fashion, we wandered around in vehicles, lost and disorganized until we finally went in for the night.

No evidence of anything in the area at all. About 1:00 AM we heard a few rounds burst a little ways away. At 1:30 AM we heard one Marine had shot another—mistaken identity while the latter was crawling along a rice paddy dike. The guy had been in Vietnam 2 weeks and had learned that you crawl and move quietly as possible at night in the States. The rule over here is make a lot of noise if your comrades don't know if it's you or who. Anyhow, the guy was sprayed across the head, the ankle, and the calf. Evidently he's going back to the States. Just an example of how the Marine Corps can make an abortion out of the simplest maneuver.

Outside, of that, the most exciting thing that's happened is the cold beer we had tonight. Sorry if I wrecked this letter with that incident, but the whole affair made me very angry."

15 April 1967

". . . Perhaps it's the calm before the storm—we are now moving out of here between Friday and Monday for sure. Now we are

supposed to be going on a 60-day operation — location unknown. This means 2 months of being on the field with no permanent base camp, no sack to come home to every day or night.⁷ This will mean of course that food (we'll be getting c-rats) from home will be welcomed."

28 April 1967

"The squad leader came down with malaria last night so he got medevac(-)ed this morning. A couple of other guys got it too, according to the rumors. Sometimes I wonder—maybe I shouldn't take my pills. Is malaria any worse than this? I'm going to speak what's on my mind even though you may think it's cold. I love Doug⁸ as much as I love any of you—he's my brother. Soon he'll be finished with his training and it may be and it's possible he may get orders for Vietnam, even as a cook. He will have a choice of staying in the U.S. because of my presence here or coming over anyway. His coming over would mean I could leave. Cruel? I think so sometimes, but this living gets the better of me sometimes. Let's face it; a cook in the Army has it a hell of a lot better than a ground-pounder (infantryman) in the Marine Corps because our counterparts in the Army have it three times as good as we do."

30 April 1967

"I hope Tammie's⁹ been able to call and tell you what's been happening to me, as I haven't had any time to write of late. To fill in my missing letters: I've (or we've) been out in the field on Operation Union City¹⁰ for the last 7 days (I think). It's all taking place about

half way between Chu Lai and Da Nang. Sounds like this is part of the big plan to clean the area between the two airstrips, as I read recently in Newsweek.

Right now we are situated on top of one economy-sized mountain getting the first decent rest we've had and rightly so, as it was some hump getting up here yesterday. It's surprising how much little things mean in life, a sip of cold water, a good breeze across your face, dry socks etc."

April 1967

"We're living in bunkers instead of tents. It's kind of crowded.

They were on Operation Desoto¹¹ as security. Nothing happened so, uh nothing exciting has happened to speak of.

I miss chocolate milk. They had that in Okinawa. I had about six glasses a meal. I miss that.

The latest rumor around here is we might be moving. There are a number of places. I can't say where they are, and you can't count on whether we're moving or not."

4 May 1967

"I can't believe it — — —

We're actually relaxing. Since last evening we've been encamped next to a river, which of all things has a helicopter sitting in the middle of it. Until they lift it out, we will probably stand security around it and it's stuck in there real well. This comes as quite a relief after 13 or 14 days of hiking. I took a little swim this morning, washed my cloth(e)s, shaved and brushed my teeth. What a

difference the little things make. I only hope it stays cloudy, because there is no shade near Quang Tri¹²—fortunately we're not. We're supposed to be about 5 miles from the Cambodian border, west of Tam Kay—which is between Da Nang and Chu Lai. It's still much the same thing since I wrote last, a lot of walking and much drudgery, so worry not—things are quiet.

We might get relieved out here soon—put the emphasis on might. I guess that's as much of a dream as going home right now."

10 May 1967

"Yeah! It's the first day of May and I thought it would never come. This something like our tenth day in the field. Have you ever had a continual thirst for 10 days—it's crazy—all I can think about is water (or beer dreams) during the day. When I go to sleep I start dreaming about the darn stuff. It's going to drive me crazy before long.

We are over one mountain range and into a little valley now about another set of peaks looms ahead. We passed a large (for V.N.) river yesterday and of course I started thinking about the Amerillion River and Heartwangs.¹³

There's a few more snipers down here, but that's all. More of a nuisance than anything—it's going to take many years of this type of drudgery to clear out this, or any other area. Sometimes I think about Libby Jay (our pres.)¹⁴ and my dislike for the war grows more and more each day. I feel he is responsible for my being in this giant cesspool."

11 May 1967

"First news from the front — — —

I guess the biggest item lately is that I am now a radioman. One of our platoon radiomen had a pinched nerve in the elbow and had to be medevac(-)ed—this happened about four days ago.

I really like the job as it is more interesting than being a ground-pounder day in and day out. I get a better chance at getting rations and supplies. The only bad point is the fact that the radio is heavy, but the mind being what it is, it doesn't seem too heavy at all. Besides, I got rid of my rifle and got a light compact little .45 pistol in exchange. At least for now the drudgery I was going through before is gone.

No, I don't mind you're being frank and straight forward at all — in fact the more the better. You asked me not to hide the facts too, so I'll oblige.

It's true that we haven't seen much action in the 21 or so days we've been out, but yesterday was an exception. Our platoon was beginning to sweep through a village when we got ambushed. The fire was really heavy and we were fortunate to have taken only a few wounded. It was almost as hairy as Operation Desoto¹⁵ for the few minutes we were pinned down. But things are peaceful once again — our platoon killed a lone V.C. (spotted from the air) today but nothing else. It's a waiting game out here for the most part.

A misconception—I'm not in the Fifth Division (I wish I were—they're at Pendleton). 5th Marines means Regiment. They just decided to change the address around—supposedly for fast, efficient mail (Ha!)."

16 May 1967

I guess you already know by now I got hit and I know how you must be a little worried. Don't be, because I'm having the best sleep and relaxation that I can remember.

I got shot with a round in the left hip. It made a slight fracture of the bone but the doctor said that there should be no permanent damage. He also said in 8 to 10 weeks I should be completely healed which isn't exactly heartening news considering the time I have left in my tour.

Our quiet little operation certainly changed complexion quickly. We finally made contact with the V.C. The ones we're supposed to have been chasing, only it turned out to be a regiment (estimated) of North Vietnamese Army (we had a battalion there).

Our company was pretty well decimated, but it was mostly wounded. Ironically, I got hit trying to take a wounded man back to the area along with two other guys. A bullet also brushed my elbow (it couldn't have been closer without leaving some kind of mark) so I feel pretty lucky.

When I got medevac(-)ed, they first took us to Tam Ky, then about two hours later we took a big chopper to Da Nang. At the first place there (I guess it was an emergency receiving ward) they just looked me over and then put me on yet another chopper to a second Da Nang hospital where they removed the bullet in four pieces from my hip.

I stayed at the second hospital for a day and then took a plane to Clark AFB,¹⁶ Philippines. We arrived yesterday morning."

23 May 1967

"Quang Tam Province or locality is approximately 30 miles southeast of Da Nang, very near the Laotian border. In fact we were traveling down the "Ho Chi Minh Trail,"¹⁷ for a couple of days which explains how we met up with N.V.A.'s rather than regular V.C."¹⁸

26 May 1967

"Also now someone finally got smart and sent troops into the DMZ.¹⁹ Comes as no surprise to read about what they found there. Now if they'd do something about Laos (Ho Chi Minh Trail, etc.) things might suddenly change for the better. I have no doubt the guy who shot me made a migration through Laos as well as his supplies.²⁰

Assuming I go back, I wonder if I will be in the same outfit. Rumor here has it that there were only 50 people left in "K" Company, and that the whole battalion 3/5 was similarly undermanned after our little battle. It's possible I might be incapacitated enough to get some other duty than infantry when, and if I go back to complete my tour. That however, is my conjecture only."

28 May 1967

"The case of the "jamming" M-16, has been a misery to me, too, because the Army never had any complaints about it. But when I got into the field, I found my M-16 had some little problems of the

bolt sticking in the changer, no matter how earnestly I cleaned it. Other guys have had a good deal of trouble with it, too, especially during the encounter where I got hit.

My own theory, since Colt manufactures all M-16's (to my limited knowledge) the Marines just haven't been given enough, or proper instruction of the rifle.

The only instruction I had on the M-16 was a 3 class on dismantling, cleaning, and functioning and I fired 5 rounds with it the same day. This was before I left Okinawa—quite a bit before—so when we got the rifles, it had been at least 1 1/2 month since that single day of instruction. I had forgotten most of what was taught that day. I wasn't sure (I'm still not) how to clean the chamber, barrel and where and how much to oil it.

Compared to the extensive training we received on the M-14, and the M-16 instruction was nothing. We learned every nook and cranny of the M-14—how to assemble and disassemble it blind folded — when to oil it and how much. And of course we were taught to "love" it. You felt "safe" with the M-14. I'm sure this is the case with many other guys besides me. I could be wrong (not being too mechanically inclined), but, like you say, the Army never mentioned the problems. Maybe (they probably did) get more, and better, instruction than we did. Let's just say the Marine corps is having problems with the M-16 and leave it to the experts."²¹

INTERVIEW EVALUATION

Mr. Gompert was not a ease about enlisting for Vietnam, but he felt that understanding what was going on over there would benefit him, even at the risk of his life. Mr. Gompert states, "therefore I rationalize that the only way to judge what was going on there was to actually go." He was aware that Vietnam was a so called democratic nation under seige by invasion. He, like thousands of other militry and civilian people knew nothing or very little about Vietnam, its problems, culture or society.²²

The major complaints of the Marines in Vietnam centered around their not being resupplied in the field or at the company area, the lack of proper sleep due to guard duty and other assignments requiring the troops to be watchful, and the companies going out on maneuvers until they were ambushed or drawn into combat. Another complaint was the "lousy beer rations, (we got two warm cans once a week)."

In reflecting upon the ARVN troops, his opinion of the ARVN troops was that they were bad troops and he did not care for them. They (the Marines) did not work with the ARVN's directly. They had heard stories about their follies. He says they felt resentment towards the ARVN's because Americans were fighting for the South Vietnamese by proxy or default.²³ Mr. Gompert notes the only real contact with the South Vienamese was with the "camp followers." These people lived near the base camps and sold services (mess and kitchen workers, prostitutes, barbers, and laundresses). When the Marines were in the field, the only people that they came in contact with were the children, women and elderly. These people, he says, "were afraid of us and who we viewed with suspicion." Mr. Gompert

believed that the Vietnamese with whom he had contact with regarded the Americans with disdain and as the destroyers of their lives in one form or another. The modus operandi in combat operations by the Americans caused the South Vietnamese population to become resentful of Americans.

Mr. Gompert feels that the United States had erroneously involved themselves in Vietnam in 1951 and 1952. He believes that the United States, by siding with the French in Vietnam and not recognizing that the nationalist movement of Ho Chi Minh's government would eventually win over the French was a big mistake. The Vietminh had fought the Japanese, a common enemy of both France and America, during World War II.

Mr. Gompert was not aware at the time of the real reasons for the United States to be involved in Vietnam.

"While I was in the field my admiration for the tactics and commitment of the V.C. and N.V.A. grew and convinced me that we would have to spend years and lives to gain control of their countryside. The only alternative was to destroy it to save it."²⁴

Mr. Gompert feels that at the time the U.S. was attempting to "jam our brand of democracy down their throats." He feels that we were not aware of the culture and thought little of the South Vietnamese people. This just magnified the problems that the U.S. had in dealing with the South Vietnamese.

Mr. Gompert was wounded in May 1967, and for the next six months was under medical care due to an infection of his wounds. He

was not returned to Vietnam for duty, and was later discharged from the Marine Corps.

He is currently residing in Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts. Although he has been a police officer, he is no longer in that profession.

ENDNOTES

1. Okinawa was a major military base for the U.S. Marines in the Pacific. And the transfer point for aircraft going to and from the United States and Southeast Asia.
2. Operation Desoto was a search and destroy mission that was designed to clear out the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army from around Da Nang.
3. Bunker watch was basically guard duty of the perimeter of a base camp or company area.
4. Operation Desota II was an extension of Operation Desoto.
5. Chu Lai was a city about 70 miles south of Da Nang on the coast of South Vietnam.
6. Engineers assigned to the Marines were basically the U.S. Navy Seabees Construction Battalions. These were combat trained engineers who built base camps for the Marines and Navy units in South Vietnam.
7. Long term field maneuvers meant excessive hardships on the combat troops. These people were in the field for long periods of time with the comforts of a base camp.
8. Doug is Mr. Gompert's younger brother who enlisted in the Army while Mr. Gompert was in the Marine Corps.
9. Tammie was Mr. Gompert's wife at the time.
10. Operation Union City was a Marine combat operation that was supposed to clear out enemy troops around Da Nang and Chu Lai.

11. This kind of operation was known as "Search and Destroy." That meant to search the country side and destroy and burn what would help the enemy troops, such as food and housing.
12. Quang Tri was a city north of Da Nang about 90 miles. It was a base camp for American Troops near the DMZ.
13. Amerillion and Heartwargs are rivers in Central California.
14. Libby Jay was a slang term used at the time for reference to President Johnson.
15. See endnote number 2.
16. Clark AFB, is the U.S. Air Force base in the Philippines.
17. Ho Chi Minh Trail was the infiltration route used by the North Vietnamese troops to evade detection by the South Vietnamese troops to supply the Viet Cong with troops and supplies. The route went west of the DMZ through Laos.
18. N.V.A. and regular V.C. are two distinct groups of military troops. The V.C. (Viet Cong) were not professional soldiers. They were basically terrorists. The N.V.A. were well trained and well supplied troops of the North Vietnamese Army.
19. DMZ is also known as the Demilitarized Zone, at the 17th parallel which divided North and South Vietnam.
20. Migration of the soldier and supplies refers to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. See also endnote number 17.
21. The military had problems with the first production models of the M-16. The weapons would jam and could not be cleared. Changes were made by Colt Armaments Company and the weapons worked reasonably well. However, the troops did not like the weapon at all. Because of its plastic parts and the style

of the weapon the troops called it "The Mattel Toy." This was hinting that the weapon was really manufactured by the Mattel Toy Company.

22. Most Americans were not familiar with the society and culture of Indochina. They were ignorant as to customs, speech, religion and politics. This caused a lot of problems for all concerned.
23. The U.S. troops felt that they were fighting someone else's war. They resented it and would complain to no avail about it. The South Vietnamese let their allies fight and die for them. They really weren't concerned about the war.
24. Quoted from his interview asked about the Vietnamese people. (Interview by telephone and letter 25 January 1989).

CHAPTER FOUR
ROBERT O. BABCOCK
4TH INFANTRY DIVISION
AUGUST 1966-JULY 1967

Robert O. Babcock was in Vietnam as an executive officer and rifle platoon leader with B Company, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. He served with that unit from its arrival in Vietnam on 6 August 1966 until he left the unit to return to U.S. in July of 1967.

Mr. Babcock was born in Heavener, Oklahoma. He attended college at Kansas State College in Pittsburg, Kansas. He went through ROTC¹ training and graduated as a distinguished graduate. He chose the infantry and went on active duty in June of 1965. His first assignment was to go to Fort Benning, Georgia, and attend Infantry Officers Course and Airborne school. Then he was assigned to the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, Washington. From August 1966 to July 1967 Mr. Babcock served in Vietnam.

Mr. Babcock believed that what we were doing in Vietnam was absolutely correct. He didn't question what we were doing in Vietnam and was certain he was fighting communism there and that would mean that he would not have to fight it in California. "Everything they told us I believed in. So I had no problem at all."

Mr. Babcock felt that nobody knew what we were doing. At the time he was there, no major complaints were voiced as to why we were involved in Vietnam. He is a patriot now and was one then

as well. He feels now that we didn't have good leadership² in the Vietnam problem. He is absolutely certain the U.S. should have won the war in Vietnam. "We should have done it right in 1966 and not play around," said Mr. Babcock in his interview. Mr Babcock still feels that the year he spent in South Vietnam was the most significant year of his life. He has no regrets at serving in South Vietnam. (Interview Lawrence, Kansas February 14, 1989.)

EXTRACTS OF LETTERS
TO HIS WIFE AND
HIS PARENTS
FROM AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT
"What Are You Going To Do Now Lieutenant?"
by Robert O. Babcock

21 July 1966

". . . When we got to the boat, we unloaded to the music of the Sixth Army Band. It was as I had envisioned it would be when you go off to war. The band was playing march music, the troops were lined up on the dock shuffling along waiting their turn to board the ship, and the wives, parents, children, and sweethearts were lined along the fence trying to get another glimpse of a special soldier before he left. Two or three of our NCO's even had time to go to the fence to talk to their wives before we boarded. Cameron, my boy who has turned conscientious objector,³ kept saying he wouldn't get on the boat so I put an armed guard on him to make sure he didn't give us any static when it came his turn to board. I stayed off the ship until he was completely up the gangplank so I could stop him if he had tried anything."

5 August 1966

". . . On 6 June 1944 at 0630 hours, the lead elements of the 4th Infantry Division hit Utah Beach in Normandy on D-Day. Tomorrow, 6 August 1966, lead elements of the 4th Infantry Division will once

again land on a hostile shore, exactly 22 years and 2 months since the last invasion.

The ship has been bustling with activity all day long as the troops prepare to land. All our American money had to be turned in in exchange for military pay currency (MPC). Most of the people have had to repack their rucksack⁴ and duffel bag⁵ after living out of them for two weeks."

"First Week in Country": August 1966

". . .The heat was stifling as we half dragged, half carried our duffel bags off the LST⁶ onto the sandy beach at Qui Nhon harbor. By the time you add a duffel bag to the packed rucksack we had on our back and the combat equipment we were wearing, each man was carrying close to one hundred pounds of equipment.

I never knew if it was right or not but someone told us the temperature was 130⁰ on the beach when we landed—you couldn't get me to argue with that.

We moved from the beach to busses waiting to take us to the airfield where we would fly on to Pleiku. The first thing that made an impression on me, after the heat, was the wire mesh that covered all the windows on the bus. We knew it was there to keep the Viet Cong from throwing grenades in.

We were very uneasy as we drove through the town of Qui Nhon, past the Vietnamese people on the streets, to the airfield. They still hadn't issued us any ammunition.

It was 6:15 PM as we pulled into the rustic base camp that was to be the home of the 4th Infantry Division for the next many months. The area was a rolling plain surrounded by two tall mountains to the west, officially known as Dragon Mountain (but referred to by the troops as "Titty Mountain" because of its obvious resemblance to what we had left behind at home).

Major High⁷ assembled the officers and showed us the portion of the perimeter that we were responsible for defending. He also told us that the First Cavalry Division (Airmobile) had spotted a battalion of North Vietnamese troops only two days before beyond a hill approximately 5000 meters to the southeast of our position.

By the time we had our briefing and picked up our troops, their equipment, extra ammunition, and C-rations, it was beginning to get dusky dark. The fading daylight barely illuminated the defensive position as my platoon moved uneasily for the night.

Our fields of fire consisted of a path the width of a bulldozed path was dense jungle. We dug hasty prone shelters, loaded our weapons, fixed bayonets, and got ready for anything to happen. Well, it did!!

It rained, and it rained, and it rained, and it rained some more. I learned my first lesson in Vietnam—never try to sleep in a foxhole when it is raining. A foxhole collects water and you will get very wet. All I had to keep me dry was my poncho and it didn't do too good a job.

Every time I moved, a stream of water rushed under the poncho and soaked me even more. I ended up trying to lay on my gas mask and equipment to keep me out of the water. My poncho

kept some of the rain off me but I was wet and miserable all night long. You don't know what wet is until you have spent a night in a monsoon.

I was very proud of my troops because they controlled their jitters and no one fired a shot all night. (This was not the case from other positions around the perimeter. Shots were being fired and flares were shot up in the air all night long as troops shot at shadows). It is really a funny feeling to lay there in the rain and try to figure out where every sound is coming from.

I really surprised myself because I wasn't scared. I was very alert, but not scared. A loaded rifle with a bayonet on the end of it makes a pretty good sleeping companion under these circumstances. (This was the last time we fixed bayonets at night for the remainder of the tour, but it seemed like a real good idea that first night).

A Vietnamese madame drove up to the perimeter in a three wheeled Lambretta⁸ Sunday afternoon and tried to convince me to let my men partake of the prostitutes that she had brought with her.

She didn't know English and I don't know Vietnamese but I have learned one phrase, "dee-dee", which is supposed to mean, "Get out of here!" When I used it on her it turned her smile into a frown, but she still didn't leave. Some of my men weren't helping the problem any.

When I finally pointed my rifle at her, she got the hint and moved on to another part of the perimeter to see if she had any luck with someone else's troops who didn't have such a "bad assed" platoon leader."

02 September 1966

". . . Our first battalion size operation is in its fourth day. We moved south of Tuy Hoa on Tuesday, 30 August and are now set up along Highway 31. My platoon has about an 1800 meter area of responsibility. I have it broken down into four outposts scattered along the road at strategic points. My main responsibility is a bridge which has been partially destroyed but is still passable. I have a squad at the bridge and my command post is in sight of it.

Yesterday my platoon went out on another patrol. We were checking out a valley which comes into our area from the base of a hill where an old Buddhist shrine and an abandoned village were located. There were reports that a VC company had been sighted up there last week, but we didn't find them. We walked from 8:00 until after noon in water from knee to waist deep with elephant grass over our heads. There wasn't a dry place to sit down and rest all morning."

04 September 1966

". . . Today has been a pretty good day. . . After chow, I went to church. It is funny, or I should say ironic, to go to church with a loaded M-16 in your hand. . .

The battalion had their first contact and casualties yesterday. A platoon from Charlie company was hit and had one killed and two slightly wounded. There are a lot of caves in the area where they were ambushed. They called in air strikes to finally get them out of their jam.

Yesterday I took a patrol out into the mountains but didn't find anything. We waded water, climbed over rocks, thrashed through jungle, and sweated but that was about all. Won't go out again until Tuesday or Wednesday. . .

As we surveyed the situation, we found something of a surprise. Laying on the ground around our three man outpost⁹ was the Vietnamese platoon, sound asleep. They felt more secure with our three men guarding them than they did with their own thirty men. It didn't do anything to raise our opinion of the South Vietnamese militia.¹⁰

We woke the Vietnamese platoon leader and got a better picture of what was happening. They hadn't seen any VC in the village but they expected them to come in at any time. We asked them where they normally came from and he pointed toward a tree line on the other side of the village."

27 September 1966

". . . I spent the day doing nothing and listening on the radio to a firefight that Charlie Company was having north of here. They had a fight yesterday afternoon and had to break contact when it got dark. They went back to the same place again this morning and made contact with an undetermined number of gooks.¹¹ They were pinned down most of the day. They had three men killed and eleven wounded and never did get close enough to the gooks to see if they had killed any of them. They called in air strikes and armed choppers so maybe they killed some of the little slant-eyed bastards."

29 October 1966

". . .I would give anything in the world if we were together tonight. I need to have you to talk to. We had our first accident today . Specialist 4 Thomas, my man from the West Indies, caught a piece of shrapnel from an M-79 grenade in his left eye.

They were out on patrol and were firing into a suspected bunker when the fragment hit him. They brought him back to our position and we called in medivac to take him to the hospital. We're afraid that he might lose his eye. It really made me sick. It was just a freak accident and couldn't be helped but it's terrible.

He is without a doubt one of the best men in the battalion. I'm certain he won't be back, so we'll just have to do without him."

02 November 1966

". . .On this operation there will be about 5,000 American troops in the area with another 10,000 on call from the First Cavalry Division (airmobile). There is no way in hell that the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) can have enough power to give us much trouble.

You wouldn't believe how much artillery and air power we have supporting us. We'll probably get shot at but we're smart enough and good enough to handle whatever they throw at us without getting hurt. Captain Fiasco is the best company commander in the business. I'm pretty damn good at what I do, and my platoon is great. When you hear about contact with the enemy, don't think that it is always me involved. . . ."

Operation Paul Revere IV-II/3/66 to 12/31/6604 November 1966

". . . I'll bet you didn't expect to hear from me again this soon. We have moved to a forward landing zone and are waiting to move out on foot tomorrow morning on Operation Paul Revere IV.¹² They have been saturating the area we will be moving through with artillery barrages and B-52 bomber strikes. As it looks now, we will be moving north about ten miles during the operation trying to find anything in the area. It should take about two weeks, more or less."

Trust The Dog

". . . My platoon has been given the dubious "honor" of being the point platoon.¹³ We saddled up and started moving into the jungle, the dog and his handler leading the way, followed closely by our point squad.

I wonder what made a man volunteer to be a dog handler.¹⁴ I knew that we would be rotation between point and further to the rear of the column each day. He and his dog would be in the lead day after day.

We had moved without incident through the morning and into the early afternoon. The tough terrain and heavy load we were carrying had us sweating profusely, forcing frequent rest stops.

As the month progressed, we would be in better shape for the rugged terrain and load. But, this day, we were just plain tired as we moved cautiously through the untracked jungle. About midafternoon, the dog stopped and perked up its ears. His handler

immediately dropped to the ground and pulled the dog down with him. He motioned for the point squad to come forward to see what the dog had sensed.

Two days later, the dog and handler were working together with Alpha Company. Lieutenant Dick Collins, the West Point officer who had beaten my platoon in the platoon tests at Fort Lewis, was dealing with a similar situation where the dog kept alerting frequently.

As he, his point squad leader, and the dog handler were standing up talking about what to do, they were all three killed by an NVA ambush. The dog was not hurt."

14 November 1966

". . . We're still at it. We keep hunting the little slant-eyed bastards but just can't seem to find them. Everyone around us has made contact, but we just keep looking for them.

For the last three days and nights we have been listening to artillery fire, air strikes, and B-52 bombing raids between us and the Cambodian border. The 1st of the 12th Infantry is over there and are really tearing up the NVA. I heard today that they estimated they have killed or wounded at least 1500. They are just about two or three miles from the Cambodian border.

We moved yesterday from our old position and set up in another place closer to the river. Today I took my platoon on patrol along the riverbank and found some places where the NVA had been crossing the river. We destroyed three rafts and found two graves."

19 November 1966

". . . We're still running out here in the jungle with no relief in sight. Yesterday was a little more interesting than some of our other days have been. We found a major NVA crossing site and destroyed 15 rafts, a canoe, a foot bridge, and other miscellaneous stuff. We also found an NVA rifle that someone had left. He ran away just as we were approaching. We shot at him but missed.

Last night a three man listening post from my platoon ran into an NVA soldier on a trail outside our defensive perimeter."

21 November 1966

". . . The only officers left now are Captain Fiacco and me. Lew is still sick with fever and is in the hospital, I think. Don't write Sandra about Walt getting hit. I don't know whether he will tell her about it or not.

Today we are staying in position and not moving. We really need it, too. We've been constantly on the go since the end of October and everyone is getting physically pooped. That accident¹⁵ yesterday took a lot out of the men emotionally.

It's bad to be here four months without serious injury and then lose eleven men because a friendly unit made a stupid mistake. It makes you wonder if it's all worth it. Fortunately, none of the men in my platoon were hurt.

I guess you can tell that I'm depressed today. I'll get over it and be okay tomorrow. I'll sure be glad when they get us out of this damn jungle for a few days. If they'd just give us two days off so we

could relax, we'd be ready to go another twenty days. Well, maybe they will before too much longer.

. . . Your letters mean an awful lot to me. The letter I got from you today helped perk up my spirits.

I'll close and fix a C-ration meal. Don't worry. I'm just trying to talk to you in this letter since we can't talk in person...."

24 November 1966

". . . From the sound of things, we seem to be cleaning up on the NVA. The unit operating about 800 meters to our east killed 40 in the last two days and captured a bunch of weapons, including some machine guns.

When they start leaving machine guns behind, you know they are really getting hurt and are running. I just heard on the radio that an NVA surrendered by waving his shirt to a helicopter flying over. They dropped a rope, pulled him out, and are taking him back to the rear area. He will probably give them some valuable information.

I have gotten used to all the shooting around me, or as used to it as I can. When the artillery round and air strikes whistle over us and land close, I just hug the ground a little closer and try to find a bigger tree to get behind. I sure am glad that we have the artillery and air power on our side and they don't have it. The stuff keeps the NVA on the run. When we run into him, we have all the support we can use on call at a moment's notice."

26 November 1966

". . . We started calling in artillery fire and air strike. One guy came out of the woods and surrendered. I felt sorry for him. He was scared to death. We questioned him through our interpreter and then sent him on a chopper back to battalion.

This morning they brought him back and he led the first platoon to a possible rice cache.¹⁶ They just came back and didn't find anything. He seemed to be starved so I fed him my C-rations.

See, I'm not such a hard hearted guy after all. I even have compassion for the people who are responsible for me being here. This poor guy is just like us, he doesn't want to be here. All he wants to do is go home, grow rice, and make babies, not necessarily in that order."

12 December 1966

". . . I'm sitting here on top of a mountain in the middle of a jungle listening to jets blow the hell out of the next mountain to the north. It sure is music to my ears to hear those planes screaming overhead and then feel the ground shake as the bombs hit the ground on a suspected NVA battalion base camp.

We're still on an operation and don't know when we'll head back toward the fire base.¹⁷ We're still working with Alpha Company. It's really nice to have two companies together instead of one by ourselves. We've had pretty good success so far. Our company had killed two NVA and captured one and Alpha Company has matched our results.

I now know what it means when someone gets his brains blown out. One of the NVA we killed caught an M-16 round in the head and his brain was lying on the ground beside him. It was an interesting, although somewhat gory sight. These people we are picking up seem to be stragglers. They are pretty sickly."

14 December 1966

". . . I had quite a scare yesterday afternoon. We were walking through a bunch of NVA bunkers with everyone on full alert, ready to shoot at anything that moved. The machine gunner I keep with me at all times tripped and fired a burst of machine gun rounds into the ground not six inches from my heel. It did get my attention.

Our company's luck is still holding out. On this operation we killed five NVA, captured five NVA, four AK-47¹⁸ automatic rifles, three SKS bolt action rifles, one light machinegun, one rocket launcher, one field telephone, commo wire, a lot of ammo, and about six tons of rice.

We still haven't been hurt by the gooks. It's amazing, isn't it? I personally have killed one ten foot boa constrictor snake. Our only bad luck has been when the mortar round fell about on us on 10 November."

15 February 1967

". . . The lull in the war seems to be over in this area. There had been quite a bit happen around here in the last 24 hours. About 10:15 last night the VC gave us a Valentine's present—they hit us with a mortar attack! I had just gone to bed when I heard a couple

of mortar rounds explode on the chopper pad about 75 meters from my tent.

Like a big, brave soldier, I tumbled out of bed and hit the floor. I crawled out of the tent and heard shrapnel flying through the air so I decided I'd best vacate the area and go get in our bunker. I went back into the tent and picked up my pants, my steel pot, and my rifle and ran like hell—barefooted—the fifteen yards to our bunker.

Charlie¹⁹ walked two more volleys toward us and the last three or four rounds were too damn close—one round hit on top of Alpha Company's bunker, one round hit about five yards from our bunker, one round hit one of Charlie's Company's tents. Our mortars and artillery reacted like lightning, and were throwing "outgoing" rounds back at them so we didn't get any more "incoming."

We were lucky, out of the approximately thirty rounds they hit us with only eight of us were wounded, none seriously. The only man in our company to get hit was a guy who had a piece of shrapnel graze his back and give him a little burn. It surprised me, but during the entire attack, I wasn't frightened. Of course after it was all over and I finally got back to bed, I didn't sleep too well. Every time one of our mortars fired, I jumped.

The battalion flew to the Cambodian border today to join Bravo Company and begin operations there. Just as the lead helicopters were ready to land, Bravo Company received small arms fire from around the LZ.²⁰ They killed several of the NVA without suffering any casualties. They followed a blood trail for several hundred meters but found nothing to indicate a prolonged pursuit.

The battalion landed without opposition after that. However, the 1st of the 12th Infantry has been making contact all day. The last I heard they were still at it. They've had two or three men killed and about fifteen wounded. It looks like the picnic is over.

I feel sort of helpless and useless sitting back here in the rear away from the action. In a way, I wish I was back out there with the troops but on the other hand I'm glad I'm not. The most important thing to me is to finish my time and come home to you. . . .

This place is getting to be more and more of a dust bowl every day. It hasn't rained since the last of December. The ground has turned to red powdery dust. I'm ready for the monsoon to start again. I think it would drive anyone crazy trying to decide whether the monsoon or the dust was worse."

3 March 1967

". . . This has been one hell of a day to say the least. It started as uneventful as usual but about midmorning things started to happen. We were monitoring the battalion radio net,²¹ as we always do, when we heard a report that a helicopter was coming from "Oscar" (Bravo Company) to "3 Tango Dustoff Pad." That meant someone had been hurt so I went to the aid station.

Just as I got here, the chopper came in with Lieutenant Roy Dean. He was the officer who took over my old platoon. He had been hit in the side with shrapnel from a mortar round. They worked on him here then sent him on back to 18th Surgical Hospital for surgery. He is in bad shape but should pull through okay.

"Oscar" called in another dustoff while I was at the aid station. The chopper aborted the mission because of enemy ground fire. About an hour later, they called it out again. This time it made a pickup with no sweat.

In the meantime, Alpha Company had run into contact and had three wounded and one killed. Lieutenant Katin, who was in a helicopter serving as a radio relay station, was wounded by ground fire that came through the floor of the chopper.

So, when the next "dustoff" came in, it had Lieutenant Katin, Sergeant Cheatham from my old platoon, and Alpha Company's wounded men. Lieutenant Katin was hit in the shoulder and neck. Luckily, neither wound was serious, just flesh wounds, so he'll be okay in a couple of weeks. Sergeant Cheatham took quite a bit of shrapnel in the leg and groin but he'll be okay too. The men from Alpha Company weren't wounded very seriously either.

All this activity was over by 1:00 so the rest of the afternoon was rather uneventful. I took a shower about 4:00, ate supper, then it started again. A call came in from fire base that "Raider 6" had been shot. That's Colonel Braim, the battalion commander.

He came in on a chopper and now has been evacuated to 18th Surgical. The doctor says he is in bad shape but will survive. It seems that he was in his tent and a guy in headquarters company was cleaning his rifle, it went off, and hit the colonel in the back."

4 March 1967

". . . Colonel Roselle, the brigade executive officer, is our new battalion commander. I met him today and he seems like a much calmer, easier to get along with guy than Colonel Braim was. Colonel Braim's temper was something else. Luckily, I never did anything to make him mad at me. I hate to see anyone get hurt but I'm sure glad to see that idiot out of the battalion."

12 March 1967

". . . Sit down because you're not going to believe this. In fact, I can hardly believe it myself, but, unfortunately, it is true. I got a letter from Ron Marksity today and Cathie wants a divorce. Needless to say, I'm shocked and can't believe it. . . ."22

16 March 1967

". . . We got word that we would move out the next day back to the Pleiku area. We spent the rest of the day packing everything that hadn't been destroyed. We stayed close to our bunkers but didn't receive any more mortar rounds. That night we slept as best we could in and around the bunker. We didn't get hit any more and moved out early the morning of the the 15th by convoy (in borrowed trucks)²³ for Pleiku.

The trip was uneventful and we're now set up just north of Pleiku. We can sleep a lot better here than out at "3 Tango." Also, we have grass and very little dust. We'll be here about a month before we make another move.

Alpha Company met their Waterloo²⁴ again on the 14th. They stumbled into another ambush out by the border and lost eighteen killed and twenty-nine wounded. Captain Keuler was wounded very seriously in the head. Once again, that company made a mistake and paid for it.

They have now lost about 50 killed and 150 wounded since we came over here. Charlie Company has some contact yesterday and lost two killed and five wounded. Bravo Company is still maintaining its luck and hasn't made any more contact. They're supposed to move the battalion fire base and companies back to this area tomorrow. It should be much calmer for the troops that have been in the field."

12 June 1967

". . . I still don't know anything about when I'll be leaving here. I checked today and my orders are supposed to be cut tomorrow. That will at least be a step in the right direction. Port calls ²⁵ can't come down until after you get your orders. So stay loose between the 1st and 20th of July. As I said before, you can bet that I'll be doing my best to get out of here as soon as possible after 1 July."

At present Mr. Babcock is employed in Kansas City, Missouri by IBM in the Marketing Division. He currently lives in Lawrence, Kansas with his wife and children.

ENDNOTES

1. Reserve Officer Training Corps. A college program to teach college students how to be officers.
2. Lack of Leadership from President Johnson down to the platoon leaders was a common complaint.
3. A person who objects against fighting in a war because of moral/religious reasons.
4. A small personal equipment bag with shoulder straps. 30 to 50 pounds is the approximate weight carried in the bag.
5. A personal equipment bag about 3 feet in length. It can carry up to 150 pounds in weight.
6. Landing Ship, Troop. Naval vessel used to transport troops in large numbers.
7. This was the battalion executive officer.
8. Three-wheeled motorized vehicle the size of a golf cart.
9. A listening post manned by three people. Basically to guard against enemy movement and warn against enemy attack.
- 10 Irregular military units — local defense forces South Vietnam.
11. Slang term used in reference to oriental people.
12. This operation was designed to clear out any Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Troops on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, five miles from the Cambodian border.

13. The leading platoon of a company or battalion during a combat operation.
14. Scout dogs were used to flush out the enemy soldiers. The teams worked well, however the losses were great. If the handler was killed, the dog was destroyed as no one else could work with the dog. The dog and handler were so close that some handlers had real trouble when they lost the dog they worked with.
15. During a combat operation, one of the other sister platoons was hit by American artillery.
16. A large hidden supply of rice to be used at a later date.
17. A base composed of artillery units.
18. Assault Kalassnakoive-47, Soviet made rifle.
19. An American slang term referring to Viet Cong. This term comes from the phrase Victor Charlie (military term)
20. Helicopter Landing Zone.
21. Radio channels used for communication by military units.
22. Mr. Babcock is upset because friends of his are getting a divorce.
23. The battalion trucks had been destroyed in a mortar attack and the company had to borrow trucks from the battalion.
24. This is Alpha company's defeat, similar to Napoleon's final defeat in 1815.
25. This term refers to dates of departure from overseas or to overseas for military personnel (not to be confused with the Navy term used when ships dock in different ports).

CHAPTER FIVE
ORAL INTERVIEWS
WITH
COMBAT OFFICERS

DAVE ELDRIDGE
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
MARINE INFANTRY COMPANY
Sept.—Nov. 1964

Let us now examine two veterans from the war in South Vietnam who served there at different times with different views of the war. The first is Dave Eldridge of Emporia, Kansas.

Dave Eldridge is from Cooperstown, New York. In 1958, he came to Kansas to attend the Kansas State Teachers College, majoring in business and minoring in psychology. While he was attending school, the Marine Corps recruited him and a friend for the Platoon Leaders Class (PLC) Program. For the next two summers he and his friend from school went to Quantico, Virginia for Marine Corps training.

His first assignment was to the First Marine Division. He was sent to Okinawa for a 13 month tour of duty. "About May of 1964, while over there, I was executive officer of the infantry company I was with."¹ The summer of 1964, brought changes into his life. In August, the company commander was assigned as an advisor to the Vietnamese Army. Mr. Eldridge was now the company commander.

Shortly after that the company was assigned to Vietnam to provide security at the airbase in Da Nang, South Korea.

Mr. Eldridge notes his Marine company was the first Marine Infantry Company to be sent into South Vietnam. He says originally the Marines sent in a platoon, then they sent in two platoons of infantry. As infiltration of Viet Cong personnel increased, it was decided that the company was needed. They were assigned to Da Nang for two months, "roughly from September 1964 to November 1964 to provide security for the airbase at Da Nang."²

Mr. Eldridge acknowledges that his company was relatively safe from direct combat situations. However, two of his men were wounded by sniper fire. At the same time he was there, he and his men did experience fire fights on the perimeter of the base. They were not, however, involved in them as combatants. These fire fights were not directed at Mr. Eldridge's company. The sniper fire was the only direct contact with the Viet Cong. His company was fortunate enough not to have any direct combat experiences like other Marines in South Vietnam. The area was relatively safe for Mr. Eldridge and his men, as they were allowed to take liberty in Da Nang. However, at the time it was rumored that Da Nang was 30% Viet Cong.

Mr. Eldridge was proud to serve in Vietnam, and feels that his service there was for a good cause. However, at the time and even now, he considers it to be the most frustrating of his experiences. He does not believe that the Americans were aware as to why they were involved in Vietnam. The Americans, in his opinion, were not informed as to why they were fighting in South Vietnam. He feels

that they were not fully informed as to what their mission was, as well as to what they were supposed to do.

An example of his frustration with his tour in South Vietnam was evident during the interview pertaining to his assignment to provide airbase security in Da Nang.

"... We had security of the airbase, but my men could not interrogate Vietnamese indigenous personnel working at the base. As I said earlier, 30% of the folks in Da Nang we thought to be Viet Cong. Well, there's a lot of top secret stuff going on there and some of our highest powered airplanes were flying out of there to do recon, and other things. At a base like that in this country, people would have security clearances, we would probably occasionally frisk them to make sure nothing was coming on the base or going of the base. The word we got was don't do this because you'll offend them. To me, offending them wasn't the problem at all, though. It's gaining respect. And sometimes you do some tough things, you do interrogate and you do ask some questions. But in the long run you do gain respect. And I found it very frustrating."³

Mr. Eldridge feels that we should have won the war in South Vietnam, and we should have secured South Vietnam and got North Vietnam to pull back to the DMZ, like in South Korea. He is not suggesting we should have won over the North Vietnamese, just secure South Vietnam like Korea is today.

Mr. Eldridge is today with the Emporia State University Alumni Association. He lives in Emporia, Kansas and works at Emporia State University.

DR. JOHN C. WILLIAMS
QUANG TRI, SOUTH VIETNAM
U. S. ARMY CHAPLAIN
FEBRUARY 1970 to FEBRUARY 1971

This leads to our next veteran, Dr. John C. Williams who was a chaplain stationed at Quang Tri with the 63rd Maintenance Battalion. Dr. Williams served in South Vietnam from February 1970 to February 1971. Dr. Williams grew up during World War II in California. He served in the U. S. Coast Guard as a personnel specialist, assisting in discharging misfits from the service. It was here that he saw a need to work with young people. He pursued his Bachelor of Arts in Education while attending Bob Jones University. He went on to Talbot Technological Seminary to become a minister. He had joined the Army reserves in 1967. Upon his graduation and ordination as a minister he attended chaplain's basic at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, until he went on active duty in June of 1969.

Dr. Williams was married and had a child when he received his orders to go to Vietnam. At the time of his orders he was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. He was a battalion chaplain with the mechanized infantry division. He did field training with the infantry. He noticed at this time conflict between the enlisted men who had returned from Vietnam, and the "green butter bars" from Officer Candidate School (OCS) about tactics. The combat veterans said, "fight this way," and the OCS graduates would say, "No, this is the way you fight, according to the books."⁵

He also covered a unit that was preparing people for Vietnam. The realities of using live ammo, live grenades and not dummy grenades got his attention as well as the troops. Then on Halloween of 1969, he received orders for Vietnam. So on February 27, 1970, Dr. Williams flew to Vietnam and arrived there the next day.⁶

Dr. Williams was informed that he was going to be America's northern most chaplain in South Vietnam. He was to be assigned to Quang Tri on the DMZ, with the 63rd Maintenance Battalion. He left Long Binh and the 90th Replacement Battalion on the first of March 1970. After boarding a C-130 in Binh Hoa, he and his fellow soldiers were informed "guys, where we are going, they are taking fire." Dr. Williams landed in Da Nang scared like the rest of the new troops and hoping to survive and go home in a year.⁷

After spending a day in Da Nan and attending the support command's chaplain conference, Dr. Williams was issued a flack jacket, and helmet, and drove 125 miles north from Da Nang to Quang Tri. "We're going to be going through enemy territory, so we'll be driving fast; keep your flack jacket and helmet on at all times." That is the first thing his driver told him about the journey. He spent the night in Phu Bai and then went on to Quang Tri. This drive in a jeep from Da Nang to Quang Tri is something Dr. Williams will remember all his life. He says it is his most vivid memory of his first week in South Vietnam.

Dr. Williams was totally surprised by the environment and living conditions. The housing that he was exposed to was totally alien to him. Dr. Williams, being a city boy, was totally shocked by his quarters. The quarters were naturally "air conditioned" year

round. The floors had cracks about an inch wide. The roof was full of holes.

Sanitary conditions were different, to say the least. Outdoor plumbing was a fifty-five gallon drum cut in half. To use it, you had to fight the flies. To show the comical side of this, one officer would go down to the toilet, count the flies and then he would send in the "Official Fly Report." This official report was so regular that when the officer left the country, division headquarters requested their "Official Fly Report."⁸

Dr. Williams fixed up his living quarters to make it liveable. He used plywood to fix the walls and floor, Plexiglass for windows, and PSP metal for the roof and walls to serve as protection. Sandbags were put around the walls to serve as protection. Bunkers were also common and were used for protection from mortar and rocket attacks.⁹

Dr. Williams talks about the artillery battery that was about a mile away. This battery would fire off rounds every night from sundown to sunup. The hooch that Dr. Williams shared with four other people vibrated from this nightly firing of the guns. The firing of the eight-inch guns was a lullaby for the troops. When the firing stopped the troops woke up. As Dr. Williams said in his interview, "You learned the difference between incoming and outgoing. We knew as long as there was outgoing there would not be incoming. In a matter of seconds they could shift the outgoing and hit something."¹⁰

He talks about how one night while he and his fellow officers were playing dominoes they heard a sound that didn't sound right.

They left their hooch in a matter of seconds before a mortar hit. It was an experience he will not forget easily. He mentioned one night when he was in the officers club watching a movie, a round landed about ten feet away and peppered sandbags and building. There was a door which was swollen shut so that it would not open. He said that in matter of seconds the club emptied and from that time on the door not only swung freely but worked well. Another incident was when Dr. Williams and one of his fellow hooch mates had an experience together:

"... But also I shared the hooch with a medic. He had been and ambulance driver up in San Francisco. One night we heard some stuff on the perimeter. He took his bag and went to the perimeter."

Another incident that he talks about is when he was three weeks away from returning home and driving back from Da Nang, he and his driver experienced a fire fight:

"... But we were on Q09 and up ahead of us we could hear a fire fight, a lot of fire power going on. And I said, "Danny, put it in the middle of the road, put your foot in the carburetor, give me the M-16. And I locked and loaded the M-16 and we scooted down in the seats and took off. There's a fire fight up to the left about a 100 yards. I said if they are Americans, we will stop. If they aren't we will keep going."

As a chaplain he was considered to be a good luck charm. He would go to Phu Bai, Da Nang, and Dong Ha to give religious services to the troops. When he would go to Dong Ha he could get up on a hill and see into North Vietnam.¹¹ After one of Dr. Williams' trips he was told by his men, "Chaplain you can't leave us. You'e got to stay here."

The men felt safe when he was around, as they considered him a good luck charm. When he was there no incoming rounds were received. Wherever he went, men wanted to be near him. They'd say "Can I be near you?" He noticed the usual religious experiences these men had. Also the men would wear a Protestant cross, a Catholic cross, a Jewish star and a rabbit's foot. They'd say "Chaplain, how 'bout a New Testament for over my heart? What else do you have? I want to go home—alive."¹²

Dr. Williams was aware of the fact that the war in South Vietnam was a political and religious war (civil war). The U. S. troops in the field couldn't fire on the enemy without permission. Some of these men were taken POW's. This situation upset him. The troops couldn't fire back without permission even when fired upon. This upsets him now, just as it did then.¹³

When demonstrations were occurring in Quang Tri, the troops were restricted to the base. He said it was more dangerous when the Vietnamese were demonstrating than when the troops were up against the enemy in the field. He feels that the officials in Washington, Saigon, the Pentagon, and Congress knew little to nothing about what was happening in South Vietnam; the war was a formal issue. He believes this to be true now and then as well.

Dr. Williams points out that four major complaints of the troops were justified. First of all the news media was a major headache to everyone. They lied, destroyed, and fabricated the news stories all for the sake of news. What was a "no big deal" incident would be blown out of proportion and made into front page news. For example, seven rockets were fired into Quang Tri which ended up

being sixty rounds by the news media people. One sapper with a hand grenade ended up being a massive invasion.

The other complaint was the lack of support. Do your job, but do it on your own, we can't help you. This was the common attitude all over South Vietnam. The idiotic paper work was another complaint. To go anywhere and do anything you needed orders to do it. To go to the field and fight you had to have printed orders. Busy work created a totally pathetic situation.

Dr. Williams has very little use or respect for the South Vietnamese Army:

"... We found since we were so far north, that this was where the South Vietnamese government would send all of their screw-up soldiers, or the guys who were not politically inclined or financially inclined. So we got a lot of action trash. I had an officer killed from MACV, because he was out training some ARVN's out on a training mission, how to set up an ambush. He had these ARVN's set up this ambush and when the ambush went down they all didi mawed,¹⁴ as we said and he was killed. How do you write to a bride of a year that her husband has been killed? What can you tell her? He was out there training them to set up an ambush, and they just booked,¹⁵ when the time came to enact the ambush.¹⁶

He feels that their philosophy was "Don't sweat the war. I'll come back in my next life." He felt we should have won the war. However, that was a little difficult then, "The average Vietnamese cared about his rice paddy and his water buffalo and that was it. Let the world go on, we will survive." In his opinion the Vietnamese were willing to let the Americans fight their war. They didn't have

to fight it. This was a common attitude throughout all of South Vietnam.

Dr. Williams resides in Emporia, Kansas. He is with Emporia Counseling Service as a psychologist.

ENDNOTES

1. Executive officer, second in command, usually a 1st Lieutenant in a military unit.
2. Da Nang contained major U. S., Australian, Korean, and South Vietnamese Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force bases.
3. Dave Eldridge Interview, 14 November, 1988, Emporia, Kansas. Tape recording.
4. Ibid.
5. Conflict in training the troops going to Vietnam was due to the fact that the methods used in the training of the troops were outdated. The manuals used for training were designed for conventional warfare and not guerilla warfare.
6. Time and dates were always a day ahead as in Vietnam it was the next day. The international date line caused dates to move forward.
7. Tours in Vietnam were normally twelve months for the Army, Navy and Air Force personnel. The Marine Corps had 18 month tours.
8. Toilet facilities ranged from open toilets to houses that used 55 gallon drums cut in half to collect human waste products.

9. All buildings had sandbags around them for protection as were the abundant use of the bunkers to protect the troops from mortar and rockets attack.
10. With time and continual exposure to artillery rounds being fired, one could tell the difference from those rounds fired from outside the camp and those fired from within the camp.
11. Units served at the DMZ could see North Vietnam as the DMZ was only five to ten miles wide.
12. Religious experiences, actions, beliefs and ideas were always a wide range of experiences. The old adage of "There is no atheist in a foxhole," is true.
13. Free fire areas were politically controlled areas that the U. S. Congress set up to prevent troops from using their weapons in. These areas were politically motivated. The enemy troops did not follow these rules of engagement in the free fire areas.
14. "Didi Maw" means to go quickly.
15. "Booked" means to leave or run away quickly in fear.
16. Dr. John C. Williams, Interview, 28 November 1988, Emporia, Kansas. Tape Recording.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

When we look back at our past activities, we see some of our actions with hazy vision. The further back we look into our past, the more blurred our recollections become as the years take a toll on our memories. This especially holds true for veterans, resulting in the events of the war being distorted, and the recollections of facts being confused.

During the war in Vietnam, 3.78 million of the 9 million (42%) American soldiers who served in Vietnam served directly in combat units. Of that 9 million, 58 thousand died, which is one of the legacies of Vietnam. Now, in 1989, some Vietnam veterans support the U. S. involvement in Vietnam and see the Vietnam war as a great patriotic experience.¹ These people with movies like Rambo, Full Metal Jacket, Platoon, and Hamburger Hill glorify war. History has glorified the warriors from the first myths of the dragon slayers to World War II's most decorated combat hero, Audie Murphy. Even today our children are being exposed to the glorification of war through cartoons such as "G. I. Joe."

However, not all veterans of the Vietnam War who saw combat see the war as being glorious and some prefer not to recall their experiences.² Another reason that some Vietnam veterans prefer not to talk about the war is that they feel alienated by other war veterans as well as a large part of the American society. Alienation felt by Vietnam veterans is common. Some Korean War and World War II veterans did not view Vietnam as a war, hence they did not

consider the returning soldiers from Vietnam to be true veterans. Some of the American public looked down upon the soldiers as well, and some say this had a negative effect on their psychological dispositions. "Alienations can exist in veterans of all wars, but with Vietnam veterans it seems heightened. Not one of the—hawk, dove, or haunted—was entirely free of doubt about the nature of the war and the American role in it," wrote Murry Polne after interviewing more than 200 veterans while the war was in progress. "Never before have so many questioned as much as these veterans have the essential rightness of what they were forced to do." Much of the same feelings are still present today.³

My first conclusion is: That most of the veterans interviewed did not believe they were fighting for their country. It is certainly not hard to understand why all of the veterans I interviewed have agreed with the statement that "we were not fighting for our country, but were fighting for our government. Our government sent us to Vietnam, not our country."

The government of the United States was "exporting democracy," to a country that could not comprehend what a democracy was."⁴

The Vietnam veteran has, to some extent even to this day, some distrust of America's political leaders. Five of the six veterans interviewed in this thesis agreed that they were in reality not fighting for their country, but for their government.

MSG. Allen Crawford said in his interview:

"Seriously, I have regrets for a lot of things, we blew it, we blew it big time. And that is when we committed

ourselves, whenever you commit yourself militarily you have to do one of two things: you got to go over there like you mean it. And you got to use firepower and resources. You see what I mean? We were the puppets of a Congress that said: 'Let's go over there but here's free fire zones you can't shoot here. Now be careful here. Now you shoot who we tell you to shoot.' And that's what happened—we were restricted. Very badly restricted...."⁵

"Our government was sending troops to fight in a war the government didn't really understand," said MSG. Crawford.⁶ The troops could not make sense of the war, so how could a government halfway around the world understand a war being fought in a land they didn't understand? The American government sent troops wholly unprepared for South Vietnam. The troops were not able to speak the language. The social customs were not even explained to the troops nor were the religious customs. The troops were not educated as to what to do and what not to do.

Mr. Babcock at the end of his interview during the discussion about his unpublished manuscript (see Chapter IV) said: "... come to think of it, I was fighting for my government and not my country. I never looked at it in that direction." Mr. Dave Eldridge said in his interview:

"I'm a flag waver. I'm pretty patriotic. I wanted to serve my country. I feel generally those in the places of authority and power and whatever in our country for the past and whatever in our country for the most part know what they are about and have the necessary data to make what I would hope to be pretty sound decisions in the nation's interest...."⁷

Dr. John C. Williams feels that there was some questions as to whether or not we should have been there. He said in his interview:

"Well, I'm not sure of all the ramifications of why we got involved way back then (1951-1952). I think if we had a clear purpose and followed through with it we could have not escalated without a purpose. I think really it became a political, religious purpose.

... And I really believed then and now, that we were fighting a war that the folks in the Pentagon, knew nothing about, to them it was perfectly formal."⁸

Chris Gompert said in his interview:

"In retrospect, I feel that this country erred in siding with and supplying our allies, the French when they were in Vietnam, especially since they were re-establishing their colonial reign after being ousted by the Japanese. We made the mistake of discounting the nationalism of Ho Chi Minh and his resistance to the Japanese, a common enemy."⁹

On the whole most veterans interviewed believed that the U. S. had made a mistake by getting involved in Southeast Asia. Of the seven men interviewed only two were sure that America was totally correct in getting involved in Vietnam. Most, however, do feel that maybe at the time we originally became involved in South Vietnam (1951-1952), the reasons were justified. However, as time went on, those in the government should have questioned our involvement there. Did our high and lofty intentions fall by the wayside? As we are aware now, the war in Vietnam was a political war and a political game. "War is a game, and we kill each other because we like it."¹⁰ This comment about war is a good explanation about what was occurring in Vietnam. Getting involved in Vietnam helped to keep

that attitude alive. The veterans knew that most people in Vietnam certainly didn't want to be there. Only those officers and non-commissioned officers who wanted to further their careers looked forward to serving in Vietnam. And most of the troops in Vietnam were aware that their actions were nothing more than a holding action. South Vietnam would certainly fall to the communists because the South Vietnamese would not fight for their country, thus proving again that American political leaders were not fully aware of what they had gotten America into in South Vietnam. America was attracted to Southeast Asia's web like a bug to a web of a spider. To escape from this web was to lose the war. Vietnam veterans generally are critical of the lack of defined policy in South Vietnam, knowing full well that involvement in Vietnam's war would eventually bring in the Soviets or Chinese. To prevent this from happening America had to extract herself from the Vietnam quagmire.

Vietnam veterans each had different experiences and different perceptions about the war and had different tours of duty. However, these men and women all had one thing in common, and that is that they served in a war that was unpopular, psychologically distressing (more so than previous wars), and uncommonly different in the nature of traditional warfare.

My second conclusion is that Vietnam veterans believe leadership was not as strong as it should have been, starting from the Commander-in-Chief (Presidents of the United States 1960-1973) right on down the line to the platoon leaders. The leadership could

have been better throughout the conflict. Dr. Robert E. Feighny said in his interview:

"Many people in Vietnam as well as in the United States were under the impression that things would change in 1963 after President Johnson came into office."¹¹

This impression was shared by many people, including the Americans serving in Vietnam. They were all surprised at President Johnson's actions about Vietnam.

The third conclusion is that most Vietnam veterans believed that the South Vietnamese people were politically confused and that the United States presence in South Vietnam confused them even more. Since the South Vietnamese were politically unbalanced, these Vietnam veterans feel that the U. S. involvement only added to the already unstable situation. The Vietnamese people were not into the war. They had been involved in wars for over two thousand years. Their hearts were not into the fighting. As MSG. Crawford pointed out, "... what America did by getting involved in the war was to compound the existing complex problems."¹²

My fourth and final conclusion is that Vietnam veterans fall into three groups.¹³ The first is pro-Vietnam War; these men and women supported the war and United States involvement there. They truly believed in what they were doing. The second group is the anti-Vietnam War veterans, who really tried to work within the system. The last group, a shadow group, are the veterans who have gone into hiding and are rarely heard about or from. It is almost impossible to get an interview from these people because they are

still living in Vietnam (in their minds). These men have not come home mentally and are still fighting the war.¹⁴

One last interesting point is that most of the Vietnam veterans interviewed refused to own weapons of any type. Combat veterans do not even want to see one. Even Dr. John Williams feels this way. They also do not like to watch war movies of any kind. All the interviewed veterans were asked, "Do you watch war movies?" The movies just bring back memories they would just as soon forget.

ENDNOTES

1. Macperson, Myra: Long Time passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation; New York: 1984, p. 7 (figures vary on the number of troops that served in the war in South Vietnam).
2. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
3. Ibid., pp. 8-9.
4. See Chapter II, letters number 13, 29, 71, 115, 127, 129, 151.
5. Master Sergeant Allen Crawford interview, Emporia, Kansas, 18 November 1988.
6. Ibid.
7. Dave Eldridge interview, Emporia, Kansas, 14 November 1988.
8. John C. Williams interview, Emporia, Kansas, 28 November 1988.
9. Chris Gompert telephone interview, Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts, 25 January 1989.
10. Quote from an unknown author about war. The quote was published in American newspapers during the Allied push on Rome during World War II.
11. Robert E. Feighny interview, Salina, Kansas, 09 November 1988.
12. See endnote number 5.
13. Moore, William J., National Service Officer for the Paralyzed Veterans of America, Wichita, Kansas.
14. See endnote number 13.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS

Babcock, Robert O., Letters to his wife and parents, Heavener, Oklahoma, 5 August 66 to 1 July 67. Transcript in the hand of Robert Babcock, Lawrence, Kansas.

-----. Unpublished manuscript, "What Are You Going to Do Now Lieutenant?"

Feighny, Robert E., 280 letters to Helen Feighny, El Paso, Texas, April 1964 to March 1965. Transcript in the hand of Manuscript Division, The Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

Gompert, Chris, 14 Letters to his wife and parents, San Jose, California, April 1967 to May 1967. Transcript in the hand of Chris Gompert, Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts.

-----. 1 Letter to Willard F. White, Emporia, Kansas, 21 January 1989. Letter in the hand of Willard F. White, Emporia, Kansas.

ORAL INTERVIEWS

Babcock, Robert O., Interview by author, 14 February 1989,
Lawrence, Kansas. Tape Recording.

Crawford, Allen, Interview by author, 18 November 1988, Emporia,
Kansas. Tape recording.

Eldridge, Dave, Interview by author, 14 November 1988, Emporia,
Kansas. Tape recording.

Feighny, Robert E., Interview by author, 04 November 1988, Salina,
Kansas. Tape recording.

Gompert, Chris, Interview by author by telephone, 25 January 1989,
Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts.

Williams, John C., Interview by author, 28 November 1988, Emporia,
Kansas. Tape recording.

Primary Sources

Caputo, Phillip. A Rumor of War. New York: H. Holt & Company, 1977.

Edelman, Bernard, ed. Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam. New York: W. W. Norton, 1985.

Herr, Michael. Dispatches. New York: Avon 1984.

MacPherson, Myra. Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation. New York: New American Library, 1985.

Marshall, Katherine. In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1978.

Santoli, Al. Everything We Had: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Thirty-Three American Soldiers Who Fought It. New York: Ballantine, 1986.

Van Devanter, Lynda with Christopher Morgan. Home Before Morning, The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam. New York: Beaufort Books, 1983.

Walker, Keith. A Piece of My Heart: The Stories of Twenty-Six American Women Who Served in Vietnam. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985.

Willenson, Kim (with the correspondents of Newsweek) The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War. New York: Random House, 1984.

Secondary Sources

- O'Ballance, Edgar. The Wars in Vietnam, 1954-1980. New York: Hippocreve Books, 1981.
- Crouch, Harold. The Army and Politics in Indonesia. Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- Davidson, Phillip B. Vietnam at War The History 1946-1975. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988.
- Hallin, Daniel. The "Uncensored War." New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Harrison, James. The Endless War, Fifty Years of Struggles in Vietnam. Riverside, N. J. : Mc Graw-Hill, 1983.
- Herring, George. America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975. 2nd. ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985.
- Kahin, George M. and John W. Lewis. The United States in Vietnam. Rev. ed., New York: Dial Press, 1969.
- Karnow, Stanley. Vietnam, A History: The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War. New York: Viking Press, 1983.
- Lipsman, Samuel and Edward Doule, and eds. of the Boston Publishing Company. The Vietnam Experience: Fighting For Time. Boston: Boston Publishing Company, 1983.
- Lomperis, Timothy J. "Reading The Wind": The Literature of the Vietnam War. Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1978.
- Pratt, John Clark, compiler. Vietnam Voices: Perspectives on War Years, 1941-1982. New York: Viking 1984.

SarDasai, D. Vietnam Trials and Tribulations of a Nation. Long Beach,
Ca. : Long Beach Publications, 1988.

SarDasai, D. Southeast Asia, Past and Present. New Delhi: Vikas,
1988.