



VETERANS

Phone: 661-259-1234 • Mail: 26330 Diamond Place, Suite 100, Santa Clarita, CA 91350

FRIDAY, JUNE 23, 2017 · WWW.SIGNALSCV.COM · A12

Brotherhood and Healing

June 19 ceremony held near Ap Bac Village in Mekong Delta

By Bill Reynolds

Signal Director of Veteran Affairs

This is a follow up from last Friday's Veterans Page by Jim Holt who reported that The Greatest Generations Foundation and its founder Timothy Davis hosted a Vietnam Program enabling 21 Vietnam combat Veterans to retrace their footsteps in the Mekong Delta.

These 21 Veterans journeyed from across America, including eight from Southern California and three from Santa Clarita Valley - Robert Good of Stevenson Ranch, Stan Cockerell of Newhall and me, Bill Reynolds of Valencia.

Our 21 Veterans represented each company of the 4th/47th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division that fought in a significant battle near Ap Bac Village 50 years ago on June 19th. These men desperately fought for their lives while seeking freedom for the South Vietnamese.

Retracing Footsteps

Once we disembarked mid-morning from the river, just as we did in 1967, Timothy Davis became our platoon leader leading us on a mission retracing our footsteps very much like from 50 years ago.

"This is just so surreal walking here again, something I thought I'd never dream of ever doing again," said Former Platoon Leader Lynn Hunt of Murrells Inlet, South Carolina.

"If not for the tremendous generosity of The Greatest Generations Foundation, this would not be possible," Hunt said.

As we trudged on among the all too familiar tree lines, vivid memories filtered through each of our minds.

And the heat and humidity proved even more daunting than it was 50 years ago. Just shootin' spit balls here, but being aged 70 rather than 20 may have had an effect.

Reflections

"As we trudged through our ole battle site, it brought back deep feelings of remorse that I had not been there when the battle first erupted," said Stan Cockerell of Newhall, Calif.

"I felt bad for my buddies fighting for their lives and when I was finally chopped into the battle I felt a great sense of relief that I was doing my part with my brothers," Cockerell said.

He was also moved by a ceremony which was held in remembrance of the battle.

"I shed 47 tears for our 47 fallen," Cockerell said.

In a flashback-like moment, another Veteran commented on how the trip

brought him back in time.

"As I disembarked our river boat, I immediately was transported back 50 years," said Billy Terrill of Edmond, Oklahoma. "Though many rice paddies were replaced with large fish ponds, the tree lines remained and in my mind's eye I could see the exact canal that we hunkered in as the battle raged."

"Louis Collier, one of my Alpha brothers, was instantly wounded and as I pulled him to safety bullets were flying everywhere," Terrill said. "It was the scariest day of my life."

Words became difficult for others. "I don't have the vocabulary to describe my emotions and feelings being on this battle ground again," Bob Good of Stevenson Ranch, California said.

"It's the same lack of words of what occurred when I returned home and expressed my war experiences; few people seemed to care back then," Good said. "I am extremely appreciative of The Greatest Generations Foundation for such a mind-boggling journey."

Vietnamese Cuisine

Following our battle site patrol, several wonderful Vietnamese ladies treated us to the fine delicacies of Vietnamese cuisine.

Famished from our excursion, we enjoyed sumptuous shrimp, chicken, calamari, vegetables, and delicious bread.

Oh, and there was plenty of Bah-Bah (333 Vietnamese beer).

Riveting Invocation

Our primary mission was visiting a Memorial Museum near Ap Bac Village that honors our 47 U.S. Soldiers and the 255 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Soldiers who perished there on June 19, exactly 50 years ago to the day.

With local villagers crowded around that museum observing our proceedings, which included us ole soldiers and two of our former enemy, a remarkable ceremony rooted in Christianity, Buddhism and Paiute Indian Tribe spirituality transpired.

We began our ceremony with Randy Torres, formerly with Alpha and Echo Companies, leading us in The Pledge of Allegiance.

Gary "Doc" Maibach, formerly with Charlie Company, delivered a riveting invocation along with stirring words of healing and brotherhood.



Photos by John Riedy, TGGF

(Above) Our Native American soldier, Dalton Tom, presents gifts to a former Viet Cong captain who fought against us on June 19th, 1967. (Below) 21 combat veterans and two former Viet Cong at our memorial service honoring all lives lost on June 19, 1967.



As Master of Ceremonies, I invited Sonny Castellano, of Alpha Company, Mike Masello of Bravo Company and Bob Ehlert of Charlie Company to take turns reading our 47 fallen warriors names. It was touching moment.

"Crying of Taps"

Our Native American soldier Dalton Tom, formerly with Bravo Company, performed his ritual "Crying of Taps" to honor our fallen warriors who fell that gruesome day so long ago.

Dalton's powerful delivery was heart-felt bringing tears to his brothers in war and it clearly mesmerized our Vietnamese friends.

It's noted that numerous people around the world, including our Gold Star families, are following our exploits on social media - including Joey Messina of Philadelphia

See HEALING, A13



Photos by Bill Reynolds (Above and right) These ladies prepared an outstanding luncheon of Vietnamese cuisine, including this poor chicken. Hope you love chicken head!



Photos by John Riedy, TGGF (Above) Bob Ellert of Battle Lake, MN, giving gifts of candy and school supplies to the Vietnamese children at Ap Bac Village.



SCV Veterans Calendar

Are you a Military Veteran looking for work?

Every Wednesday @ 8:00 am - 4:30 pm

Santa Clarita America's Job Center of California, College of the Canyons - University Center, Suite 250, 26455 Rockwell Canyon Road, Santa Clarita

Call now to schedule an appointment with a Career Advisor specializing in assisting job seekers that served in the military!

Hometown Heroes Military Banner Program

The city of Santa Clarita Hometown Heroes Military banner program honors our city's heroes with a banner featuring the military member's photograph, name, rank and branch they serve. The banners are installed around Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Veterans Day.

To order a Hometown Heroes Military Banner to honor your hero, please visit Santa-Clarita.com/Heroes.

Veterans and Military Personnel

The Signal would like to publish information regarding name, branch of service, dates served, deployment orders, promotions and award presentations from veteran and active military families and personnel. Please send your information to Bill Reynolds, director of veterans affairs: billry@ca.rr.com.

SCV VETERANS



Photo by John Riedy, TGGF

HEALING

Continued from A12

who's Uncle Robert Cara, a Charlie Company medic, paid the ultimate sacrifice during this battle.

Joey has been in constant contact with me and several others. For 32 years Joey searched to find someone who knew and served with his uncle.

After watching "Brothers in War" on Netflix several months back, he made contact with us and he is forever grateful.

Incense and Amazing Grace

Next, tour guide Vinnie Van Phan led us in a solemn Buddhist Incense Ritual while our other tour guide Hung Phan Ngoc played Amazing Grace on his harmonica.

Incense burning is an ancient religious ritual common to Egypt, India and East Asia. It's steeped in symbolism and it's a sacred offering, a way to honor the Triple Gem of the Buddha, his Dharma and the Sangha.

The burning of an incense stick, resulting in fragrant smoke, teaches the necessity to burn away negative qualities within

(Above) Timothy Davis became our platoon leader leading us on a mission retracing our footsteps.



Photo by John Riedy, TGGF

(Above left) This is (L to R) Larry Lillie of Gainesville, GA, Steve Hopper of Greenfield, Illinois, Bill Reynolds of Valencia and Gary "Doc" Maibach of Sterling, Ohio. We're checking our 9th Infantry Division Cross we placed there in April 2016. June 19th Battle Site near Ap Bac Village. (Above right) A former Viet Cong captain who fought against us.



Photos by John Riedy, TGGF



Photos by John Riedy, TGGF

(Top) Dalton Tom of Las Vegas, Nevada.

(Above) Ralph Mecka of Sherwood Forrest, CA.

oneself in order to reveal the pure self within.

I would venture a guess that never before had these three spiritual entities assembled for such an occasion.

Unity and Brotherhood

The War Museum's caretaker, whom we fondly referred to as "The One-Arm VC," took center stage stating that he wished us all well and that we should never forget our fallen on both sides of the war, and this June 19th battle.

He urged unity and brotherhood; something we have all embraced.

Amazingly enough, this caretaker had assembled quite a collection of images in his memorial representing the devastating battle there, including images they found on my website, the Ninth Infantry Division at www.9thinfantrydivision.com.

It's noted that this former enemy fought us on June 19th but he lost

his arm in a later battle against 9th Infantry Division troops.

Washington D.C. Program

At our ceremony's end Ralph Mecka and Bob Good stepped forward to issue Timothy Davis a token of our gratitude.

Timothy, a history buff, had been seeking old lost dog tags which are randomly found in Saigon. So, The Boys of '67 chipped in and purchased over 30 dog tags for him.

Then, Timothy stepped forward to make an amazing announcement that his foundation will cover all expenses for "The One-Arm VC," his fellow warrior, tour guides Vinnie Van Phan and Hung Phan Ngoc, and their wives to visit Washington D.C. to see our Vietnam Memorial Wall and our monuments.

They readily agreed. So, I agree that we will have a fine reunion at some point with these fine folks and The Boys of '67. The last bit of business

(Above) During Memorial Ceremony on June 19 at Ap Bac. (Below) Jim Miller of Thousand Oaks at the June 19th Battle Site near Ap Bac Village. (Bottom right) David Rodarte of Anaheim.



had Billy Terrill, Bob Good and Steve Hopper placing three 9th Infantry Division Crosses in the War Museum's flower garden.