



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

PO Box 355, Champaign, IL 61824-0355 (773) 569-3520

www.vvaw.org
vvaw@vvaw.org

March 2019

***"You may remember—as I do—thinking, when I was in Vietnam the first time, what a beautiful country Vietnam was, and how nice it might be to come back someday when there was no war. For me that day had now come—I hope you get the chance and take it."
—VVAW member Pete Zastrow, Fall 1987 issue of The Veteran.***

Dear Friends,

Fifty years ago, a good chunk of us were still in Vietnam. Wherever we were at in country and whatever we were doing, it was not for the benefit of the Vietnamese people. When we came back, whether it was right away or after some time, joining VVAW was how we coped with what we did in Vietnam and how we fought to stop the war and the impact it was having on our Vietnamese brothers and sisters.

Even when the US war on Vietnam was still raging, we were making efforts to reconcile with the Vietnamese people. In 1972, VVAW member Barry Romo was on a peace mission to North Vietnam with Joan Baez and Telford Taylor, delivering packages to the US POWs. Nixon greeted them with the Christmas bombing.

Over the years, VVAW fought for the US government to officially recognize Vietnam. On July 11, 1995, the US and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam announced the establishment of formal diplomatic relations. This is something that VVAW had called for since the end of the shooting war in 1975.

Over the years many of our members went back to Vietnam, to engage the people, do work, and reconcile with the people and the country we ravaged. The first post-war VVAW delegation to Vietnam spent 10 days in country. In the Fall 1987 issue of *The Veteran*, Pete Zastrow said, "It is much better to visit Vietnam as guests of the government of Vietnam than as invaders sent by the US government."

One of the projects VVAW supported over the years, especially the Milwaukee Chapter, was the building of children's libraries in Vietnam. Founded in 1999 by Vietnam vet Chuck Thuesch, the Library of Vietnam Project (now called the Children's Library International) set out together with the Vietnamese people to build libraries throughout Vietnam, creating a vibrant system of book exchanges, computer hardware and software, and educational programs. In the early 2000s, VVAW helped to support the Library of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Project. In 2004, VVAW co-sponsored a library at Kean Village in Laos' Savannakhet Province.

Last year, VVAW sponsored a computer lab in the library in My Lai. The children loved it. We loved it. Our members and supporters loved it. What a way to recognize that Vietnam is not a war, but a people. What a great way to move beyond the carnage we created (and whose after-effects still ravages the people and the land).

Now, we have an opportunity to leave a permanent marker to VVAW's role in reconciliation. We plan to build an entire library in Vietnam. Not just sponsor, or put a lab in, but to build a dedicated library for the children of Vietnam. Plans are to build it in the Bến Tre Province.

The costs of this project, while not overwhelming, are not insignificant. Thanks to a generous bequest from a long-time VVAW supporter, we have a significant start on our fundraising goal. But we still need your help. We hope to break ground in 2019 and raise enough money throughout the rest of the year to complete the project by 2020. We hope you are as excited as we are about this project and donate what you can.



Pete Zastrow and Barry Romo from VVAW delegation to Vietnam meeting with Vietnamese, 1987.

While we look forward to making a lasting impact where we caused the most harm, we still have to acknowledge the constant attacks on us and our country by the current administration. If it wasn't crystal clear before, there can be no doubt that those who share VVAW's goals of fighting for peace, justice and veteran's rights have not had a more daunting challenge in a long time. Make sure to read the Spring 2019 issue of *The Veteran* to keep up with the attacks and what you can do.

We are deeply thankful when our members and supporters make tax-deductible donations to VVAW's work, at whatever level. Your contributions to VVAW help us keep distributing our newspaper, *The Veteran*, to our members, friends, and supporters. Please pass out copies to your family and friends, your local library, or your local VA. Your donations also keep our website going, where we have every issue of VVAW's newspaper online as well as archives of many other articles, photos, and videos. Your donations allow us to make VVAW's legacy not only accessible to all through our website but also to archive them for generations to come. Your donation will also help us to build the library in Vietnam. We thank all of you for your continued support.

In solidarity,

William Branson

Bill Branson
VVAW Board member

I am sending Vietnam Veterans Against the War \$35 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 Other to support its work for peace, justice, and for decent benefits for all veterans. Donations to VVAW are tax deductible. You can also donate online at www.vvaw.org.

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