The Bridges staff would like to dedicate this issue to Mr. Loc Duong. He is a special member of our Millbrook family. "Mr. Loc" came to the United States in 1992. We appreciate his willingness to share his life story with the Lessons of Vietnam class each semester. For the LOV class students, he is a unique link to the Vietnam Era.

(See article —– )

From the Bottom of Our Hearts
Compiled by Kourtney Elliott

The Lessons of Vietnam students are privileged to write reflective thank you letters to our guest speakers who generously share their stories and experiences with us. This is a compilation of quotes written throughout the semester.

Dear Veterans,
"We are truly privileged to hear your views of the Vietnam War."
"You taught me not only about the Lessons of Vietnam, but a wonderful lesson on courage, that I am not soon to forget."
"It is because of veterans like you that my classmates and I better understand the Lessons of Vietnam."
"The stories veterans share are so helpful in teaching today's generation that there is no glory in warfare."
"Only those who were there can explain what it was like and what happened."
"Every single person who comes into our class is special."
"You taught me that you can get what you want if you are willing to work for it."
"I hope you understand the impact you make on people when you talk to them. What you do and have done is extremely admirable."
"You are a hero because you are using your experiences to teach us how not to make the same mistakes."
"I can honestly say that hearing veterans speak is what makes this class so wonderful."
"I hope you know how much my classmates and I appreciate your stories, thoughts, and insights."
"I have so much respect for you."
"You are a living example of courage."
"Thank you so much for the time and effort you have put into our Lessons of Vietnam class, because it has certainly made a difference to me."

Sincerely,
The Lessons of Vietnam Class

A True Hero: Mr. Loc Duong
By Stephen Miura

Many people have seen him around campus. He is one of the people who works as a dedicated custodian behind the scenes to keep Millbrook running smoothly; his name is Mr. Loc Duong. What most people cannot see, however, is his deep past. "Mr. Loc," a native South Vietnamese, fought side by side with American forces in the Vietnam War. Mr. Loc served in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). His role was to supply units with food, ammunition, and other supplies. By 1970, he worked his way up to Sergeant First Class.

In 1973 the war started to take a downward spiral in South Vietnam. America dramatically reduced her troop strength. In 1975, Saigon fell to the communist government. Mr. Loc was put in a "re-education" camp for more than 5 years. The conditions of this camp were somewhat similar to the concentration camps of World War II. Fortunately, Mr. Loc was one of the lucky people to survive.

In January of 1981, Mr. Loc got out of the camp. However, his life was not the same as it was prior to the war. Due to the fact that he fought against the communists, he was unable to get a job. Not only that, his daughter could not get accepted into any colleges.

In search of a fresh start, Mr. Loc left Vietnam by boat with his young son. The boat was rescued, and he was placed in a refugee camp in Indonesia. In 1992, Mr. Loc moved to America. Throughout the past eight years, he has gradually brought over all of his family members.

Initially, when America pulled out her troops, Mr. Loc disagreed with the decision. However, as the years have passed, Mr. Loc has realized that America did the right thing. Mr. Loc is grateful and happy to live in a wonderful country called "America." He is a unique role model, as he teaches us to love life. One student commented, "The most inspirational speaker for me is Mr. Loc. He was an ARVN soldier who spent many years in the re-education camps until making it to freedom. His stories about the fall of Saigon and how he could have escaped by helicopter with his friends and flown to freedom, but he didn't because he had a family to take care of, greatly inspired me." Mr. Loc's outlook on America and his personal struggle for freedom have encouraged many people to respect the everyday "things" that we take for granted all too often. He is a true hero!
**A Healing Process for Two Nations**

*By Kim Le*

After years and years of bitterness and resentment, the U.S. has finally restored near-normal relations with some communist nations; yet, what is even more positive is President Clinton’s recent visit to Vietnam, which many call a “healing process” between our two countries. In early November, President Clinton met with Vietnamese President Tran Duc Long in New York at the U.N. Millennium Summit, where he expressed his intention to visit Vietnam, the site of the war that helped define his generation.

He was in Vietnam on November 12, 2000 after attending the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Conference. The two countries finally reached an agreement on the Bilateral Trade Agreement, which has led to significantly more open markets and made Vietnam a more stable member of the global economic community. Vietnam also agreed to certain commitments on tariffs and non-tariff barriers for industrial and agricultural goods. During the U.S. Presidential Election campaign, President-elect George Bush commented, “I believe expanded trade with Vietnam will help the forces of economic and political reform take root and grow.” Former Vice President Al Gore also believes that the U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement “provides important benefits to American businesses and workers.” Although he only stayed in Vietnam for 72 hours, President Clinton did manage to take some time to observe and tour Saigon. He even tasted the famous soup called “pho.” He indeed saw today’s Vietnam.

President Clinton was the first U.S. President to visit Vietnam since the war ended 25 years ago. How does this affect different groups of individuals in the United States and Vietnam? President Tran commented, “I was very excited when I first heard he was going. It’s about time. It really opens up things for Vietnam.” He hopes that Vietnam will be viewed as a Vietnamese-American student, I wish for this reconciliation process to continue until it fully heals all the wounds so that our two nations can unite as real friends again. Yet the ultimate questions are: Do we all want this goal accomplished? How will we accomplish it?

**Taking A Step Back, Remembering The Past**

*By Sara Ostrow*

As new generations come into the world, the older generations are beginning to leave. It is a known fact that most veterans from World War I are no longer living, and many from World War II have passed on. It is important for future generations to be aware of the experiences people had during the wars of the past century.

In the LOV class, many students were able to hear a first hand perspective on how the Vietnam War affected people. Students either interviewed close family relatives, family friends, or teachers around the school. Here are some of the answers to questions that students received when interviewing:

1. **What was your attitude during the war?**
   “I know a lot of people who were against the war but I was proud of everyone there. I think Kennedy brought back a lot of patriotic feelings. I respected our country a lot and was very proud.” —MHS Grandmother

2. **In what ways did the war affect your life?**
   “I did not stay at home all the time. I thought of it as a job. It was considered as something to do.” -Vietnamese Soldier
   “My relationship with my parents became worse because I was against the war and they were for the war.” —MHS Mom

3. **What was your most vivid memory of the war?**
   “The mental memory was the emotional and mental destruction of the ones who came back from the war. It was the closest thing I felt to the war, but in my opinion it was close enough.” —MHS Teacher
   “The March on the Pentagon. My husband was working there at the time; he was very frightened by the masses.” —MHS Grandmother

4. **What should we teach our kids?**
   “Protesting is important for expressing your ideas. Working towards world peace is essential, as well as respecting and considering what protesters are saying.” —MHS Dad
   “Be better informed and more prepared to involve ourselves in foreign affairs.” —MHS Dad
   “The importance of looking at alternatives to international disagreements. Also that everyone isn’t like us and we can’t force them to be.” —MHS Teacher

**The Vietnam War from a Woman’s Point of View**

*By Lindsay MacPherson*

The LOV class was privileged recently to have my link, Ms. Nancy Mahnke, speak to us. Ms. Mahnke was a Red Cross worker in the Vietnam War. She was stationed in Chu Lai and Saigon from 1969 to 1970.

Ms. Mahnke’s responsibilities as a Red Cross worker were varied. She wrote letters for wounded soldiers; she read to them; and she listened to them when they wanted to talk. She and other Red Cross workers made “goodie bags” for the soldiers. In these bags soldiers could find: soap, razors, a deck of playing cards, and envelopes. These “goodie bags” were a treat for our servicemen.

Ms. Mahnke said that American females were treated respectfully and fairly in Vietnam.

When this special “guest teacher” returned to the United States after her stint in Vietnam, she spent time working with Vietnamese refugees. She then enrolled in graduate school. Since then she has worked in the North Carolina prison system in the psychiatric field.

Ms. Mahnke’s experience in Vietnam was different from those of the male speakers we have had. Although she was not on the “front line,” she was a valuable asset to our American soldiers. She also has been an outstanding “link,” and we all appreciate her dedication to our LOV program.
A Veteran In Wildcat Country
By Carter Garrett

Everyday I walk through the doors of the 200 building and I see the same teacher outside of his classroom monitoring the halls. For the longest time I had no idea who he was and what he did at Millbrook High School. My first encounter with Mr. Jim Nelson was not a good one. The first time I interacted with this man was when he caught me with my pager in school. After explaining the rules of having a pager on school grounds, he confiscated it.

Needless to say, when I found out that Mr. Nelson was a Vietnam veteran and he was coming into our Lessons of Vietnam class to talk to us, I was a bit apprehensive. For each speaker who comes into our class, every student prepares up to five questions. Afterwards, we write a reflective thank you letter to send to our guest. I was thinking to myself, why would I write a letter to Mr. Nelson when all I could think about was our first encounter?

Mr. Nelson turned out to be an interesting man. He was up front and honest with all of us. He began by telling the class how he became involved in the war, and when his military experiences began. He said, “I enlisted to go to Vietnam.” He spent eight weeks in boot camp and eight weeks in infantry camp. When he finally got to Vietnam, he landed in Danang. The first thing he noticed when he got there was the smell. It was very different from back home. His first realization of what he had gotten himself into was when he saw how scared his commander was. In his first combat situation, he froze because the first guy he saw killed was his commander. Mr. Nelson ended up having to be carried over a person’s shoulder out of danger. That man saved his life and he would never forget it. He said, “Vietnam was a real experience and he wouldn’t trade days in Vietnam with anything else.” He got to know his fellow Marines better than his own wife. He entered the war in 1969 when the casualties were at the highest. Once he got there, he became a radio operator which also automatically made him a target because of his knowledge of the situations at hand. Since he was a radio operator, he was able to call anyone, so most everyone liked him. Mr. Nelson served in the Marines for 20 years.

This teacher has many positive views on the war and society today. He said, “We should be the police of the world to protect democracy.” He believes the war was actually with the Soviet Union because everything led back to that nation. Mr. Nelson feels that the outcome of the war is clear: the US won militarily and economically in the long run. The communist Vietnamese lost because most of what they thought they had won has fallen apart. He does not believe that there is any advantage for the Vietnamese to continue to hold American POWs. His views relating to PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) are quite controversial.

I have great respect for all of the veterans who visit our class. These men have been through a lot and many of their memories have been stored away for some time. Now they are sharing these memories with LOV students. To me, that takes a lot of courage and dignity. These men fought and died for our country, and they deserve nothing but the utmost respect from their fellow citizens. My uncle fought in the Vietnam War, and it has been a breathtaking experience to hear his stories and the stories of other veterans. I have gained a new perspective regarding Mr. Nelson—a much better one. He is a humorous guy and a wonderful storyteller. He is also a strict man who goes by the book, and one can only admire him for that. We all appreciate him for taking time to come and speak to us about an emotional, yet serious, subject: this very controversial war.

A Time of Confusion
By Jenn Kowolenko

Recently, Lessons of Vietnam students heard about the Vietnam War from a different perspective. Mr. Waldorf, a Millbrook Dad and parent of a former LOV student, came to our class to enlighten us on a very controversial subject: the War Protest Movement.

Although Mr. Waldorf wrote anti-war articles when he was the editor of UNC-Chapel Hill’s student newspaper in 1968, he did say that he would go to war if drafted. This puzzled many of my classmates and myself. Mr. Waldorf’s draft number was quite low, but he ended up not having to serve. He did, however, show us a copy of his draft card, his draft notice, and many articles from the Sixties. These items included articles he himself had written that protested the war. Mr. Waldorf spoke of the harsh reality of some protesting which he was not involved in, and the less aggressive way in which he protested the war—through writing.

This “guest teacher’s” overriding point throughout his presentation was that the Vietnam Era was an extremely confusing time. Many people questioned the draft and how the whole system worked. While some felt that the draft was unfair, others were willing to serve their country at this time. In some cases it went both ways in that men did not like the draft but would serve if chosen. This was Mr. Waldorf’s stand. So while the Vietnam War left many people in a confused state, he came out with an understanding of what he thought was right and wrong. He feels that his editorials which often addressed the question, “Is this a price worth paying?” made people think.

From him, our class has gained a vision of the war from a journalist/protestor’s perspective. We also wish to thank Mr. Waldorf for his help with our “Bridges” newsletter. Mr. Waldorf and his daughter, Catherine, helped launch the “Bridges” newsletter with Ms. Poling last year, and we are pleased to feature him in this issue. Thank you, Mr. Waldorf, for your support of our LOV class and our special publication!

Editor’s Note

Bridges readers might enjoy visiting these related LOV class web pages:

www.wcpss.net/community_in_the_classroom/
http://schools.wcpss.net/MillbrookHigh/departments/socialstudies/Ms.Poling/Ms.Poling.htm
www.wcpss.net/news/poston/millbrook_poling.htm
The Lessons of Vietnam class has proven to be a wonderful learning experience for all students who have taken the course. Each semester, students are linked with Vietnam veterans from all over the world. At the conclusion of each semester, we all turn in our link project. Students take some of their best question-and-answer sessions and formally write them up. At the conclusion of our write-up is a summary of the lessons we learned over the semester. Following are some of the most exemplary excerpts from these LOV link projects:

"I have traveled a long journey this semester. Lessons of Vietnam is a journey that will leave memories with me for a lifetime. It is hard to describe every emotion that the LOV class has put me through. Happy to hear of our accomplishments, excited to see a new e-mail from my link, sad to hear of others' troubles during the Vietnam war, and the list goes on. It seems that there are no words to describe an experience like this; you can only find what it is like by experiencing it yourself."

"Before I became part of this LOV class, I was very shy about meeting new people, and I had no idea what it took to fight a war such as Vietnam. Now I have more self-confidence and don't even know that I 'inherited' this state of mind. The Where? A small country southeast of China. The When? 1965-1975. The Why? To stop the spread of communism. Everything I have learned this semester has made me grow and blossom into the maturing teen that I am. The only reason that I have the courage to do the things that I have done is because of the support that I have gained from this class. Throughout the semester, my friends asked me why I did so much for Mrs. Poling when it was not even worth a grade. I thought about this answer long and hard and I came to one conclusion. I did not do anything for Mrs. Poling this semester...I did it for me. After taking a course on the Vietnam War, I know that my opinion does count in everything that goes on. Although, I am not a huge fan of politics, I will always vote and make sure that my opinions are heard."

"The gamut of participants in this war was interesting and varied. Since I "inherited" this war and did not actually experience it, all of these new facts have been a wonderful substitute. I have learned that we Americans have everything today and don't even know that we do. The men and women who fought for our country are the heroes. They are the heroes who attempt to teach us of their experiences before we make the same mistakes, and to them we owe a great deal of thanks."

"This class was great and it helped me understand what happened politically during the war. The atmosphere of the class was always positive, and it seemed like everyone in the class wanted to learn about the Vietnam War just as much as I wanted to. I believe that the goal of the LOV class is to make sure that the youth of today never forget the mistakes of yesterday, and it is teachers like Mrs. Poling who make sure that we do remember and never forget."

The Lessons of Vietnam class would like to thank every single Vietnam veteran link and guest speaker who help to make this course as special as it is!