

Newsletter for Friends of TOP (Tours Of Peace) Vietnam Veterans



TOP Voices

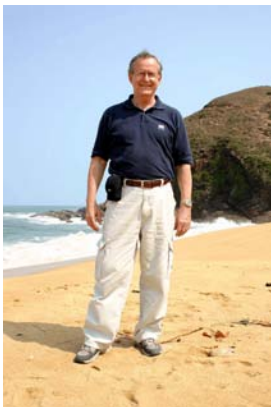
Fall 2005

"TOP is TOPS"

From the desk of TOP (Tours Of Peace) Vietnam Veteran's President, Jess DeVaney:

Dear Friends of TOP,

Please allow me to introduce a loyal TOP friend, retired Lt. Col. Jim Buckner, pictured below, standing on a Bong Son beach, which harbors many personal memories for him. Staunch supporters, like Jim, inspire, energize and motivate us to stay the course, and do what is best for TOP, Vietnam veterans and families, and Vietnamese needing humanitarian aid. September 2005, Jim writes me:



"What you do for old VN vets is needed, fantastic, honorable, thoughtful, charitable and filled with love for your fellow vets. Hoorah!!"

What you and TOP do for VN vets is magnificent. I have arranged ski trips and other outings, but cannot imagine the details with which you must deal in arranging a trip to VN, for three weeks, all over the country, meals, lodging, coordination with humanitarian organizations, donations to these groups, etc. It is abundantly clear to me that you put your heart into each TOP trip. Plus, you "vet" each potential participant very carefully which makes us all feel comfortable. Your on-ground coordination is nothing short of spectacular. I was continually amazed at how you did it, supplies arriving at the exact time day in and day out. TOP is TOPS! I will be an outspoken ambassador for TOP and Jess DeVaney for as long as I live!

You and TOP provide world-class service to VN veterans by enabling them to return to the old war sod. You also provide terrific opportunities for humanitarian service to persons who need help the most. This is something I was unable to do when I was an infantry soldier in VN. I really regretted not being allowed this type opportunity, but when you wear the crossed rifles, your job simply does not allow time for this type work. God bless you! Jim Buckner"

Thanks to loyal supporters, "TOP is tops!" With your support, our cause goes on, exactly as it has since 1998, and will continue for years to come. Please remember our work is a long-term, sustained effort, and TOP continues to rely on your help. We are grateful for continued support of our commitment to Vietnam Veterans and families, and Vietnamese who need our humanitarian aid.

I am honored to be TOP's founder and caretaker. It is an awesome responsibility to lead a great humanitarian organization that proudly subscribes to high standards of compassionate professionalism. On behalf of our supporters and those we serve, I pledge to continue to manage TOP with integrity, and always from my heart.

Please enjoy our Fall 2005 newsletter.

With deep appreciation of your loyal support,
Jess DeVaney

TOP Organization Grows

Refines quality of programs

As TOP grows, gains recognition, and public awareness increases, our mission remains the same: "TOP (Tours of Peace) Vietnam Veterans is a nonprofit humanitarian organization providing programs to help veterans and their families recover from the trauma of the Vietnam War." We continue a long-term commitment to accomplish our mission in the same spirit and fashion, since our 1998 beginnings.

We stay committed to helping Vietnam veterans, families and Vietnamese who need it. Thanks to our excellent programs and your help, we reach out to those who are ignored, forgotten, and pushed away.

TOP strives to keep groups and projects small, personal, and intimate

We will not sacrifice quality and integrity for larger numbers. We measure success one person at a time . . . one returned personal effect at a time . . . one humanitarian project at a time. No one person is too insignificant; no project is too small. The impact TOP makes on the life of one person affects us all. Since our 1990's inception, we have made huge strides by taking small-steps, with our personal, professional, high quality, one-step-at-a-time philosophy and approach.

We are nonpolitical, nonreligious, and nonprofit

We personally oversee contributions. Our staff, resources and budget are lean. In fact, many of our services are provided by volunteers. TOP organizes and manages humanitarian projects, on-site. Your contribution buys what it is supposed to buy, and is used for what it is supposed to be used.

Spring 2006 "101" Tour Of Peace Vietnam trip full

Accepting applications for future trips

Primarily, TOP achieves its mission and goals through traveling to Vietnam. Trips begin with pre-trip preparation, continue with travel and stay in Vietnam, and end after post-trip follow-up.

Advanced Trips

TOP offers Vietnam trips for experienced TOP past-participant travelers. Some of our participants have become frequent visitors to Vietnam. Their sorrow and pain are replaced by the joy of humanitarian service. We refer to the first TOP trip with us as "101" or Vietnam 101—like college level courses, i.e., English 101. Those who travel with us again on exclusive trips for past-participants go on our 202 trips, 303 for a third trip, etc. As with college courses, each trip changes, in some ways becomes a little rougher, other ways easier, and includes different experiences.

"The Wall" Trip

The Wall trip is offered to veterans and family as alternative or additional trip. TOP is accepting applications for a 3-day trip to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C..

All trips include the same application process. Should you wish to join TOP on a future trip, please either contact us or download an application from our Web site: www.topvietnamveterans.org

TOP WEB SITE FACTOID: "WWW.TOPVIETNAMVETERANS.COM" AND "WWW.TOPVIETNAMVETERANS.ORG" ARE ONE OF THE SAME. WHEN ANYONE TYPES "WWW.TOPVIETNAMVETERANS.COM" THEY WILL END UP AT THE SAME TOPVIETNAMVETERANS.ORG SITE, AND VICE VERSE.

Jessy's Latest Baby Pictures

Jessy, son of TOP's guide, Anh



See the resemblance? We appreciate Anh's loyal service over the years, and thank his new family for sharing him with us on our long trips.



Education Program Flourishes

An important part of our mission is to provide public awareness of veteran and family issues, the Vietnam War, and Vietnam today. TOP accomplishes this in various ways: Providing information on our web site; making presentations at community organizations and events; and providing media interviews.

Education Program participants join veterans and families on trips

TOP occasionally allows Educational Program participants to accompany our trips. These participants are usually journalists, reporters, or scholarship-sponsored from outside sources. Our policy of not allowing observers still remains. Educational participation is identical to Veteran and Family Program participants. They go through the same application process, and work the trip program with the rest of the group. Their involvement is unintrusive, and sensitive to everyone's privacy and trip experience. We look for heartfelt professionalism when considering Educational applications.

TOP receives International recognition

European journalist, Ilka Schmitt (pictured right), received a paid scholarship from the foundation Mit der Heinz-Kuhn-Stiftung Eine Welt erleben, to go with TOP. She wrote about her experience, and published stories in European and International media about TOP, Vietnam veterans issues and PTSD. Ilka was recently published an extensive 27-page account of her TOP experience.



News flash: Ilka Schmitt and Tobi Hahn presented TOP with a generous contribution. A substantial portion of the donation was contributed by the German people. Funds are to be applied to humanitarian projects, including leprosy villages, children with physical challenges, and our work with children in Hue. TOP is grateful for their gift and kind gesture.

Award-winning TOP Television Specials



Southeastern Arizona CBS television affiliate, KOLD-TV, devoted considerable programming to TOP's cause. The result was numerous news pieces, culminating into two superb 30-minute specials--"Behind the Bamboo Curtain," and sequel, "Back Behind the Bamboo Curtain." The specials powerfully revealed lives affected by TOP, and the gut-wrenching stark reality of Vietnam veterans and families returning to Vietnam. Coverage was factual, yet from the heart. Public response was overwhelming. "Behind the Bamboo Curtain," received a first place at the Associated Press awards. The sequel, "Back Behind the Bamboo Curtain," received the ultimate recognition--a prestigious Rocky Mountain Emmy award for the Documentary category. The message was heard--the programs captured the hearts of all who watched.

KOLD dedicated the Emmy to all Vietnam veterans, and told TOP's President, Jess DeVaney, "Thank you. This wouldn't be possible without all the help and support you provided."

TOP also deeply appreciates the TOP participants who courageously allowed viewers into this very personal part of their lives.

This coverage, and the Educational Program, ultimately serves veterans, families, and surviving families; as well as Vietnamese visually impaired children, leprosy victims, nursing home residents, street children, and physically challenged orphans. It enables our country to further heal, find closure, and put a period at the end of the last sentence of the Vietnam War chapter of American history.

From the Media Desk

KOLD-TV's General Manager writes:

"Hi Jess, You have done so much for us. It is refreshing to have such a win-win relationship with such a wonderful group of people who have given so much for each of us living in this great nation. I hope our paths might be crossing again soon. Jim Arnold"

Infinity Broadcasting Senior Vice President writes:

"It is gratifying to know we who served in Viet Nam are not forgotten. And Jess, thank you for your continuing, unselfish efforts to provide closure for so many Viet Nam vets; and, for what you have done for the unfortunate Vietnamese civilian casualties of the war. Charlie Ochs, Senior Vice President, Infinity Broadcasting"

Featured in soon-to-be released resource publication

TOP, and President, Jess DeVaney, will be included in the forthcoming book, "Remembering Vietnam: Memoirs, Memorials, Museums," authored by Julia Bleakney. The text will have a strong presence in Universities and libraries, and will sell for approximately \$60.

New TOP Camera Gift

TOP thanks Wally Woolfenden for his generous donation of a new Canon 6.3MP Digital Camera with Lens, battery, and flash Card. We also appreciate Michael Ladd's contributions for additional camera memory cards and accessories. The camera is one of TOP's necessary and important tools. Our

participants, web viewers, and Educational Program recipients will view things with greater clarity and emotion. A picture is worth a thousand words; their donations are worth a thousand thanks.

Educational Program donation need: TOP would much appreciate any monetary or material donation for new, PC compatible, PowerPoint software and hardware for our presentations.

Family Program

Profound effect on Vietnam Veteran's daughters returning to Vietnam

Over the years, we have observed a strong connection between daughters of Vietnam veterans and their fathers. Many daughters travel with us to Vietnam. In some instances, fathers have died and daughters return without their dads. Some fathers are living and choose not to return with their daughters, and others travel with their fathers. Returning to Vietnam is a poignant gesture.

Father finds forgiveness in a distant land

Read about, daughter of deceased Vietnam veteran, Heather Mocabee's (right) powerful news account, "Father finds forgiveness in a distant land" on our web site, www.topvietnamveterans.org.



Dedicated daughters return with TOP for an unprecedented third time



Several daughters of Vietnam veterans have opted to return with us more than once. This Spring, Katie Somera (left), a daughter of a Vietnam veteran will have her ultimate dream realized--she will return with her mother and father to Vietnam. Her mother lost her first husband in Vietnam, and eventually remarried a Marine who fought at Khe Sanh. Katie is also our volunteer Humanitarian Coordinator and does an excellent job providing direction to participants for distribution of humanitarian goods in Vietnam.

Katie wrote Jess DeVaney, "You are one of my personal heroes! I can't tell you how much TOP has changed and enhanced my life for the better. I love knowing that I always have a place to go to, to help people whether it is hands on in Vietnam or administrative - I know it makes a difference and I love it! Thanks for the opportunities you have given me." Daughters like Katie give our work purpose to keep forging ahead, and proving TOP does work.

Family now talks about what their veteran never spoke of



Lorrie Brooks, Vietnam veteran widow and Navy veteran herself, makes a new friend with a blind student (pictured left) at a TOP humanitarian project. Read the newspaper article, "Tours make veterans, kin feel better," on our web site, www.topvietnamveterans.org. Learn how retracing where her husband once served enabled Lorrie's family to talk about what her husband never spoke of.

Vietnamese Humanitarian Program

TOP offers humanitarian help to those still suffering from the effects of war by providing food, medicine, clothing, school supplies, tools, wheelchairs, and livestock to villages, orphanages, elderly homes, schools, street children homes & schools, and health care facilities. Veterans and families are personally instrumental in improving Vietnamese healthcare, education, and economic conditions.

More wheel chairs needed

Our last contribution of custom-made wheelchairs was such a hit with Hue disabled young people, that we have been asked to produce more. Costs for one wheelchair are about \$110. Please contact TOP to contribute, or “sponsor” a wheelchair.



TOP Scholarship for children in need, proposed



TOP looks for permanent solutions to humanitarian needs and problems. Longstanding problems will not be solved with band-Aids. Providing opportunities to further the education of children in need, is a long-term solution.

TOP will offer scholarship opportunities to impoverished children living in remote areas near Hue. This long-term “TOP Scholarship” project, will continue for years to come. Scholarship candidates are rural students with unfortunate situations, who work and study hard, and deserve a scholastic chance. Yearly scholarships help get instruction and tools needed to pass their college entrance exam. A \$45 contribution sponsors the scholarship of one child for one year. Please send your scholarship donations to TOP. We will visit scholarship recipients on each TOP trip.

Veterans Program

TOP provides emotional support for Vietnam veterans through Tours of Peace that allow Vietnam Veterans and their families to travel to Vietnam and see the country as it is today, meet people who survived the war, as well as those who grew up in the post war years. Tours Of Peace gives veterans the opportunity to bring closure to their Vietnam War experience.

Tour Of Peace trips help make peace

Read an ex-Marine’s article (available on our Web site), “Sierra Vista man's trips help make peace.” Learn how his Tour Of Peace changed his life forever—especially his family life.

Since 2001, Ken’s story “keeps on coming”

Retired Lt. Col. Ken Rehusch (right) started searching for his Vietnamese friends on a 2001 TOP trip. Quoting Ken, “It just keeps on coming.” Ken recently found a friend (right), but lost another. Read the bittersweet update to his story, “Search and Find,” at www.topvietnamveterans.org.



We need substantial financial resources to meet our program needs, sustain administrative and professional help, and grow and expand. Please join others who sponsor TOP veterans, family members, and humanitarian projects. Brighten your life by helping veterans, families, and Vietnamese turn their lives around.

Personal Effects Program

TOP recovers personal effects left in Vietnam after the war, such as dog tags and clothing, and returns them to veterans and surviving family members. Returning personal belongings remembers and honors a soldier's service.

Dog Tags Returned



We have many powerful stories of those who have received their tags, as well as surviving families who provided the stories of those who did not return.

We recovered Ken Griesman's dog tag in Hoi An, March 17, 2004. Hoi An was in the old I Corps, north of Quang Ngai and the Duc Pho area. The tag was posted on our web site shortly afterward. Here's what Ken said after recently receiving his tag:

"Thanks for your efforts in obtaining my original Dog Tag. This brings up many emotions and feelings, I don't know how to place into words my heart felt memories. Quite frankly, I was afraid to open the box you sent, even though I really wanted to. I was very nervous knowing that almost 36 years ago I was critically wounded while still wearing them. I was wounded on September 16, 1969 in the I CORP of South Vietnam, when our area of operation was extended from Duc Pho, up and into the mountain range and around the HO Chi Minh Trail. We were a Company size, light infantry unit that was ambushed by a heavy Battalion of North Vietnamese Regulars in triple canopy jungle. Of course I will never forget this day, nor the hardships of war, being just twenty years old and having seen, smelled, and felt the scars both emotionally as well as physically.

I was hit by an AK-47, 30-Caliber bullet to the right side of my face, just before a Russian/German style hand grenade went off next to me, but I was already on the ground and was later pulled down and tied to a rope to be pulled up to an evacuation helicopter/gunship, meanwhile still conscious, with all the bullets and debris from our own firepower and support surrounding me. I have had over 18 separate operations through the years and I was retired from the Army as a SGT. E-5, back in 1970. The VA had taken over all future hospital care and through the years I've gone through quite a bit of turbulence. However, my first marriage and two children are fine and make me very proud of themselves and their respective families, and of course, I'm a proud grandfather and another on the way from my son, Joseph and his wife, Grace.

I'm still recovering from the Trauma-I attend counseling weekly, I know I'm lucky to be here. Years ago the oral surgeon who wired my jaws shut in the hospital in Chu Lai, and was drafted from my area here on Long Island--a Captain--and another Medical Surgeon who operated on me, (also, from here--Shelter Island . . . a Colonel--also drafted) told me I should have been dead three times. I met the Captain a year or so later for lunch. He told me I lost so much brain fluid that by all rights I shouldn't have made it. I never saw or heard from them again, but they, and many others, and helicopters, saved my life. In closing, I feel pretty good today. I know it's God & my Grandchildren helping me along to see and feel a

little differently. There's much more in between I left out: College, business success . . . and maybe I can write this another day. Sincerely, and again, thank you, Ken, G.

PS-I was drafted too! May 27, 1968!!!"



Nicholas F. Carione's wife, Kathy, found her husband's name on our web site dog tag database. Not long ago, Nick received his tag from TOP and wrote:

"I have just received the dog tag. I cannot tell you the emotions that I felt opening that beautiful box. I am still truly in a state of shock. I cannot believe that after all these years I have my tag back. When my daughters were growing up they always ask where my tags were. Telling them I lost them in the jungle of Vietnam was sad for me. I can't tell you how happy I and my family are. The gratitude we owe you and your organization. I don't know how to thank you. I feel like we have developed a friendship. Please keep in touch. Thank you again so very much. NICK"

Now we can put "[Returned to veteran](#)" next to Ken and Nick's names on our Web site.

Personal Effects sponsors needed

Personal Effects are returned to surviving families and veterans, as a free service. Personal effects are returned without charge, in a respectful, beautiful package presentation, with an official letter of appreciation, as a memorial to the service of the soldier or veteran. The process and expenses related to returning one personal effect averages about \$15 each. For a \$15 donation you can sponsor the return of a personal effect.

Volunteer's Corner

Acknowledging volunteer spirit

There is no bigger inspiration than one who walks the walk. Anyone can say anything, but action is the true spiritual language of communicating what really matters to our fellow man. Actions form foundation of true great character. Volunteers speak the language of action by backing their words up with deeds. TOP volunteers grow and empower their spirit, and affect all whose lives they touch. The world is in short supply of these kinds of people. TOP honors, and expresses deep gratitude for, their presence and support. They do make a difference.

Educational Program Opportunity for Volunteers

TOP regularly receives worldwide requests for information related to our trips, the Vietnam war, Vietnam, and veteran's issues. The public needs answers to unique questions only our veterans and families can provide. Requests range from media interviews, to serving as a resource to school term papers. Past-participants wishing to be included as a resource for students, studies, surveys, presentations, speeches, or interviews, please notify TOP.

Special recognition to our leprosy bandage makers

Thank you for your precious donations of the leprosy bandages that take painstaking hours to sew. It takes many hours to make one bandage, and the numerous skeins of yarn cost money. Leprosy village residents we visit treasure each bandage and make them last a lifetime.



Gifts

Year-end deadline for tax charitable contributions fast approaching

End-of-year opportunities to include charitable contributions for 2005 taxes are fast approaching. Please send contributions to TOP Vietnam Veterans, 8000 S. Kolb Road, Suite 43, Tucson, AZ 85706-9104. Unless noted by you, your contribution will be used by TOP for projects and expenses we determine are in need of funds. TOP is a nonprofit corporation recognized as tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

Material gifts

Material gifts are welcome to the extent of their usefulness, transportability, and availability in Vietnam. It is usually cheaper and easier to purchase needed items in Vietnam, because of cargo costs, weight restrictions, space, and low cost of Vietnamese goods. Therefore, monetary gifts are best. Material gifts that are medical, technical, and unavailable in Vietnam are needed most.

TOP Fact: The demand for our programs, projects, and resources exceeds donations received. Currently, donation dollars are less than dollars spent. Our nest egg shrinks yearly, and will be gone someday. What will happen to TOP then?

Please stay in touch

Please update us on address, e-mail, phone changes, or news about yourself. You received this mail because you requested to receive TOP information. If you received this in error, or wish to remove your name from our mailing list, please contact us. TOP respects your privacy. Please update us on your stories too. We welcome your comments and suggestions regarding our newsletter.

Until our next newsletter . . .

Faces light up upon TOP's arrival at places where nobody else cares. Says TOP President and Trip Leader, Jess DeVaney, "Like lyrics in 'The Impossible Dream,' returning to Vietnam, with our small groups of veterans and families, is an endless quest . . . no matter how small our projects may sometimes be; no matter how far we have to go. This is something we do, and are true to, as long as we have resources, and are physically able. I never forget the people we help, and carry them with me each day, and into my dreams at night. We shoulder responsibilities toward others who desperately need us. We have responsibility to veterans, families, and Vietnamese. It is a heavy load, more than many can bear, or comprehend. This is a calling, and those who join us, and loyally support TOP, are an extraordinary group, with selfless compassion and strength to bear such a load."

Please be a Friend, and support TOP. Together, we give veterans, families, and Vietnamese in need, a chance to believe in themselves.

TOP Vietnam Veterans, 8000 S. Kolb Road, Suite 43, Tucson, Arizona 85706-9104
T: 520-326-0901 F: 520-844-8485 WWW.TOPvietnamveterans.org E: TOP@TOPvietnamveterans.org

