Class explores Vietnam

Miami students study impact of war on societies

By Dorsey Kindler

It began as the dream of Miami University historian Alan Winkler—a vague desire to take a small group of Miami students 'in country' to examine the effects of war on both U.S. and Vietnamese society.

Together with English professor Richard Erlich, Winkler made this dream a reality.

The Vietnam capstone course they created involved 15 students who not only read about the Vietnam War, but experienced it in myriad other ways, including a visit to Vietnam during the week of spring break.

Highlights of the class include a talk given by former Green Beret Douglass Godshall-father of capstone student Hallie Godshall—who fought in the Vietnam War from 1968 to 1969; a visit to the site of the My Lai Massacre, where student Brandon Keeton—a staff sergeant in the United States Marine Corps-saw firsthand why some orders should not be obeyed; and a peacenik English professor's first visit to the country that so hugely impacted the political landscape of his young adulthood.

All of these experiences were made possible by the Vietnam capstone.

Student enrollment was evenly divided between history and English majors, with the class team-taught by Erlich and Winkler. The class also benefited from the literary analysis of Mary Cayton, also a professor of history. The class met on a weekly basis, and was conducted in seminar style, where students led discussion based on prior reading assignments while the instructors served as moderators.

Students were also expected to attend a seven-part movie series on the Vietnam War. The films ranged from John Wayne's The Green Berets and Stanley Kubrick's Full Metal Jacket to Catherine Deneuve's Indochine.

In Vietnam, the class dove into the culture of the Southeast Asian nation, crawling through the Viet Cong tunnels at Cu Chi, exploring the various rooms of the infamous 'Hanoi Hilton' prison complex, and paying their respects at the site of the My Lai Massacre. It was in Vietnam that the class was able to contextualize the many readings they had done in January and February.

Back in the United States, the last weeks of the semester were spent perfecting the 14 to 16 page original essay written by each student as a means of evaluation. Final drafts were submitted to the class on April 21.
Veteran speaks to capstone

Own daughter a member of the class
By Dorsey Kindler

On July 10, 1969, Green Beret Douglas Godshall boarded a San Francisco-bound plane in Saigon. As he flew over steaming jungle, terraced rice paddies, and finally over open ocean, he thought he was leaving the horrors of the Vietnam War behind him forever.

In the 34 years that have passed, Godshall attended law school, settled in Akron, and started a family.

The peaceful routine of this 55-year-old attorney was shaken-up when his daughter, Miami University senior Hallie Godshall, enrolled in a class that would examine the societal impact of the Vietnam War—a class that included a seven-day trip to the tiny Southeast Asian nation that so greatly impacted his life.

Once he realized that the course would take a fair and balanced look at the war, Godshall became an enthusiastic supporter, and even volunteered to be a guest speaker.

On the afternoon of March 3, the old soldier was given the floor in room 269, Upham Hall. His intrepid personality seemed to fill up the room while his sheer physical presence commanded the attention of students and professors alike.

Godshall began by giving some background information on what it was like growing up in America during the 1950s and early 1960s.

“When I was in high school, every male knew he was going into the service—it was just a given,” he said. He added that the fall of China, the anxiety produced by the McCarthy era, and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy served only to heighten the desire of young men to enlist.

Though he enrolled in college in 1967, Godshall experienced feelings of guilt.

“There was a war going on [Vietnam] and I felt as though I ought to be a part of it,” he said. That year, he left college and enlisted in the Army where he was sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to complete his basic and Special Forces training.

“I always knew I wanted to be in Special Forces,” he said.

Douglas Godshall stands with daughter Hallie in front of his old army uniform.

As a Green Beret, Godshall was taught how to combat guerilla warfare—specifically how to train indigenous peoples friendly to the United States to fight for themselves.

Upon the completion of his training, Godshall was sent immediately to the Vietnam War, where he served from July 10, 1968 to July 10, 1969. He spent most of his time “in-country” patrolling the narrow demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnam, “looking for bad guys.”

“Godshall’s Special Forces unit of 300 troops suffered more casualties than any Army unit since the American Civil War. “We suffered 50 percent fatalities, and the rest of us suffered, on average, two wounds apiece,” he said. “We just got creamed.”

Godshall said that it was his job as a Green Beret to train the Montagnard people. He explained that the Montagnards are short, dark people who live in the mountains of Vietnam. Unlike the Vietnamese, who are ethnically Chinese, the Montagnards are more closely related to the Polynesians.

“They don’t like the Vietnamese—North, South, Communist or anything—because they’ve been whacking the Montagnards for centuries,” he said. “They naturally gravitated toward us—terrible little soldiers.”

Godshall and his Montagnard troops would go into parts of Southeast Asia where Americans weren’t supposed to be—Cambodia and Laos—and search out the enemy.

“We were always heavily outnumbered,” he said. “If we stumbled onto the bad guys and they saw us, we were in big trouble.”

“We were always heavily outnumbered.”

Godshall recounted a mission in Laos where his ten-man reconnaissance team was attacked by platoon of 50 Viet Cong. Though they suffered several casualties, his men were eventually evacuated by helicopter.

One of Godshall’s Montagnard soldiers had a large bullet hole in his shoulder, so they took him to a field hospital. The doctors wouldn’t treat him, however, because he was not American.

“So a couple of us went into the operating room, loaded, and convinced them it would be a good idea for them to take care of this guy,” Godshall said.

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Godshall recounted another incident that he considered emblematic of America’s involvement in Vietnam.

A two-star general wanted to send his unit on a mission just north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) to do reconnaissance on a main artery of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The area was heavily defended by North Vietnamese troops, and had already swallowed up two units of South Vietnamese troops.

“My Montagnards were not going to go out with this guy,” Godshall said, because they knew they would be killed. “So he got pushed out of a helicopter.”

Though the helicopter was only a few feet off the ground, the General broke his leg, and was sent out of the field.

“We got the desired advantage,” Godshall said, explaining that once the General was gone they no longer had to go on his mission.

When asked what it was like to come home after the war, Godshall said that he was spat upon by an angry man in San Francisco International Airport.

“He called me a fascist or something like that,” Godshall said. “What he wanted me to do was hit him, and I wasn’t going to do it.”

Once he got home, however, everyone in his neighborhood came out to greet him.

“We went from house to house grabbing bottles,” Godshall said. “I didn’t get out of my driveway until 5 a.m. the next morning.”

Giving his thoughts on the war in general, Godshall said that trying to stem the tide of communism was a noble goal. He said that the downfall of U.S. involvement was that we never had a military plan for victory.

“But the Vietnamese are wonderful people,” Godshall said. “They’re nationalist, entrepreneurial, and when the current leadership of Vietnamese communists dies off, they’re going to mutter into capitalism just like the Chinese have.”

Godshall was then asked by a student if, in retrospect, he would do it all again.

“Absolutely,” he said. “I regret that I couldn’t stay there another year to help some more guys, but I did my time and I felt that was enough.”

Said daughter Hallie: “And your mom would have gone over there and dragged you back.”

Film series on Vietnam: War and society


23 January: Go Tell The Spartans (114 minutes). When Vietnam was still a conflict a small group of US advisers, South Vietnamese militia, and a squad of mercenaries fortify and defend against the Viet Cong the village of Muc Wa. Praised by Michael Lee Lanning (Vietnam at the Movies) both for its artistic value and accuracy in its dialogue and its presentation of the situation in Vietnam in the early 1960s. Stars Burt Lancaster. 1978.


20 February: The Deer Hunter (183 minutes). Directed by Michael Cimino, starring Robert De Niro, Meryl Streep, Christopher Walken, John Cazale, John Savage, and winner of five Oscars, the film is well critiqued by Lanning as great not because of its (highly inaccurate) Vietnam content but in spite of it, and for its excellent portrayal of the war’s effect on three Russian-Americans from a steel town in Pennsylvania. 1978.

27 February: Full Metal Jacket (117 minutes). Directed by Stanley Kubrick from a script by Gustav Hasford (from his novel The Short Timers), and Michael Herr (author of Dispatches). A worthy addition to Kubrick’s study of the mechanization and violence of men, and one of the great war films. 1987.
Social Proprieties

By Dorsey Kindler

Though American students are received warmly by most Vietnamese, it is important to note that this is a culture vastly different from your own. Visitors should make an effort to learn a few simple rules about Vietnamese traditions so as to avoid projecting the Ugly American image while in-country. Consider the following suggestions from the Asia Transpacific Journeys guidebook:

Never leave a pair of chopsticks sticking vertically in a bowl of rice. As it resembles the incense sticks that are burned for the dead, it is symbolic of death and in very poor taste.

Never touch anyone, especially children, on the head, as the head is considered to be the dwelling place of the soul. Likewise, do not point at anyone or anything with your foot. The feet are considered by Vietnamese to be the lowliest part of the body.

Keep a pleasant, smiling attitude and never display anger. To the Vietnamese, criticism of others is in very bad taste. If you have a complaint, be extra calm and polite. To show anger or raise your voice will only decrease the chances of your problem being resolved.

The Vietnamese are proud of their political achievements and their right to self-rule. After years of bending to foreign political influence, they are committed to retaining their national sovereignty. It is never a good idea to make fun of, laugh at, or in any way ridicule anything associated with the government, government officials, or what may seem to be relics of an antiquated Communist culture. Be considerate of the Vietnamese national pride before you criticize anything that seems inefficient to you.
Illness hits students returning from Vietnam

By Dorsey Kindler and Holly Wissing

Members of Miami University’s Vietnam Capstone class have been unsettled by the recent outbreak in Southeast Asia of what is being called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Concerns have been compounded by the fact that that class has twice traveled through Hong Kong International Airport in recent weeks, the apparent epicenter of the outbreak.

Of the 15 students who traveled to Vietnam, 10 have reported illnesses of varying severity, five have sought medical attention, and none has required hospitalization.

Dr. Greg Garnett, medical director of Miami’s Student Health Services, reports that the four students seen at the health service have come down with the typical types of illnesses that often follow overseas trips. None has exhibited the combination of symptoms that would indicate SARS.

Senior Craig Divis became concerned upon his return from Vietnam because he had a few of the symptoms typical of SARS, including a sore throat.

“My parents were really worried and they called to ask me how I was feeling before they asked how my trip was,” Divis said. His parents wanted him to drive home to be checked by their family doctor, but Divis told them that he would go to the Student Health Center instead.

Though he was found asymptomatic of SARS, Divis was placed on the antibiotic Zithromax. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the antibiotic to any traveler suspected of being exposed to the illness.

The outbreak apparently began in November in China’s Guandong Province. From there it leapt to Hong Kong.

The CDC recommends that all non-essential travel to Hanoi, Hong Kong and China’s Guandong Province be postponed until further notice.

People who may have been exposed to SARS should contact a physician if they exhibit all of the following symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or higher
- Symptoms of bronchitis or pneumonia (coughing, hacking, wheezing, shortness of breath)
- Have been in Southeast Asia or have had close personal contact (kissing, sharing a glass, or being sneezed on) with someone who has been

Vietnam on his mind

By Dorsey Kindler

The tiny Southeast Asian nation of Vietnam has been important to Allan Winkler since young adulthood—largely because he was subject to the draft upon returning from the Peace Corps in 1969—but for other reasons as well.

“I was intrigued by Vietnam, as most people of my generation were,” he said. “It was behind the turbulence, political upheaval, and counter-cultural changes that took place during the 1960s that changed the way the nation looked and was.”

After the war ended in 1975, Allan said Vietnam fell off the political radar screen for most Americans. Though it was not possible for Americans to travel there at the time, he continued to study Vietnamese people and culture through popular books and films.

When Vietnam became open to American travelers in the mid-1990s, Allan knew it was only a matter of time before he would go. The long awaited trip took place during the summer of 2002, and was organized through the travel agency Asia Transpacific Journeys.

Allan was thoroughly impressed with guides Davies Stamm and Vo Le Truc, and it was during a long bus ride “in-country” that Allan and Davies got to talking about the possibility of bringing over a group of Miami students.

“We both thought it was a great idea,” Continued on following page
Continued from Winkler story
Allan said, though he imagined it would be at least two years before such a class could be organized.

Upon returning to Miami for the fall semester, Allan remembered that he was teaching a senior seminar in the spring of 2003—the topic was to be related to the 1960s.

“All of the sudden it clicked that it would be the perfect time to do the Vietnam capstone class,” Allan said.

Allan first contacted Asia Transpacific Journeys, telling them that the trip needed to be done inexpensively, and within the dates of Miami’s spring break.

“Well that was one issue,” Allan said, “the other was raising the money to make the trip as affordable as possible for students.”

Allan estimated that he needed to raise $2,500 per person, including air fare. He looked to a variety of Miami sources, including the College of Arts and Sciences, the Office of Liberal Education, and the Dolores Fund sponsored by the Richard T. Farmer School of Business.

In order to tap the English Department Capstone Endowment Fund, Allan decided to team-teach the Vietnam capstone with a member of the English Department. He was quickly paired with professor Richard Erlich, half of the class enrollment opened up to English majors.

“I raised that money in two to three days,” Allan said.

After that, the Vietnam Capstone became official, and the first class took place on January 6. The capstone then traveled to Vietnam during the week of spring break.

Personally I’ve been delighted,” Allan said. “I think the class went well before we went to Vietnam—our discussions were good—but I thought we gelled beautifully on the trip.”

Allan said that the trip went off “like clockwork” because people looked out for each other, and nobody made things difficult.

Though the classroom discussions were highly informative, Allan said the trip to Vietnam threw in a wholly different perspective to the things they had been reading about.

“Being there firsthand and seeing My Lai, the Cu Chi Tunnels, and Ho Chi Minh in his Mausoleum really gives you a different perspective and understanding of what the war was all about,” Allan said. “Things came together better than I ever could have imagined.”

An Impression of Vietnam; A highly personal column by Rich Erlich

I was very much moved by the massacre site at My Lai and highly interested in the Cu Chi Tunnel Network, but my most lasting impression of Vietnam—one burned into my memory—is an armless child begging me for money in Ho Chi Minh City.

During what we Americans call The Vietnam War, I protested against US policy, but I did not resist it. I did not go to Canada; I paid my taxes; I did not go to jail. I did not want exile, and I greatly feared rape in prison. I protested but did not resist; hence, as an American alive at the time, I share part of My Lai guilt.

I may burn it to protest the war in Iraq (not that anyone would care!), but I still carry my draft card from Vietnam, and my 1-A classification card, the one declaring me immediately available for service.

My protest against the war went this far: in early 1970 I refused to cooperate with conscription, and my draft board automatically classified me 1-A, but declined to draft me. Still, the draft was a possibility in 1970 and earlier, and I’ve been told by two friends who became Army Classifiers that they’d have looked at my file as an English major and sent me straight to the infantry and to Vietnam. They may have been teasing me, but combat in Vietnam was a possibility I thought about. And part of that possibility was the knowledge that an enlisted man my size stood a good chance to wind up a tunnel rat.

And if I submitted to the draft, tunnel rat would be a good job for me. Not that I’d be a rat—a rather admirable family of mammals in terms of evolution, and not that playing Search and Destroy in tunnels is a good job—but that tunnel rat would be about the least bad job I could have: killing or being killed by undoubted enemies, face to face in a kind of primordial warfare. Pulling a lanyard on an artillery piece, killing God-knows-who at a distance that would be, for me, for where I was coming from, despicable.

So My Lai was emotionally wrenching, and the tunnels something I had to see, and feel, but they pale before an armless child calling after me “Sir, sir!” and begging money.

The boy’s birth defect may have been caused by all sorts of things, but my gut says Dioxin, or any one or more of the cocktail of chemicals we used during the war.

How do you refuse a request from a kid you feel you helped to maim in the womb? How do you—how do I—as a matter of “micrologistics” give money to someone with no arms? How do you get it to him fast enough to get on a departing bus?

I put money aside for my dash to the bus to the airport, but I lost sight of the kid and ended up giving the money to a woman with a child, a woman selling postcards. Then the kid showed up, literally in my face, jumping up and down with “Sir, sir!” And I was on the bus and on the way home. Back to small-town America with no visible beggars I’d have to take seriously, no kids walking down the street without arms.

I’m ignorant on military matters, but I’m not stupid; I understand the logic behind using Agent Orange. And I hold sentimentality and squeamishness to be obstacles to ethical action. During what we call The Vietnam War, I chided people upset over the unintentional killing of women and children and old people but who accepted the deaths of US fighting men and took satisfaction in high body counts among our semi-official enemies.

Still . . .

Long-term, possible collateral damage, that kid; but for a long time I’ll carry his image.
Warm night, warm hearts

(Editors Note: This column is a contribution from Nguyen Phuong Thao, one of the Vietnamese students who participated in the Hanoi mixer party given by Jean Vander Woude.)

“The Americans think we hate them,” the student said.

“Oh really, why?” the other asked.

“I was studying in Australia, and there were American students there. I sat next to one with whom I’d never talked. He said, ‘I thought you would hate me,’ I burst into laughter and asked him why. He said, ‘Because the Vietnamese hate Americans because of the war.’ I explained to him how the Vietnamese actually feel: we talked, and became friends from then on.”

This is part of a conversation I overheard I overheard at the Vietnamese Institute for International Relations, the school that I attend in Hanoi.

What the two students were talking about is also how many Vietnamese feel. I am a 22-year-old girl, and you might think that I’m saying this as part of a younger generation who didn’t experience the loss of the war.

But while growing up in Vietnam, I have never seen any expressions of hatred from my grandparents, my parents, my uncles, or anyone else in the older generation. This even though my grandfather was wounded twice during the war and one of my uncles died.

At school, they don’t teach us that Americans are the enemy and that we should hate them. They teach us how brave the Vietnamese heroes and heroines were. We were also taught to be patriotic, courageous, and to be friendly with everyone.

The other day we met with the students from Miami University. The night was so warm, and we talked openly and played games with each other. There was no thinking of the finished war-only laughing, singing, chatting and making friends.

That night the hostess served us “westernized Vietnamese food.” I felt it a symbol of not only intertwined cultures, but the intertwined hearts of Vietnamese and Americans.

“Americans think we hate them…”

The night was so wonderful that we were reluctant to say goodbye. We thanked the hostess and the American professor who had given us the chance to meet and talk with the American students, to get to know and understand each other, and to show that the war is something of the past.

Some weeks have passed by since that night, and our American friends have gone back home. But we are still in touch, and in Vietnam, there is something new in our daily conversations. We don’t only talk about studying for exams, now we also talk about the emails we receive from our new friends.

I think the actor Michael Caine-who recently came to Vietnam to shoot The Quiet American—put it best when he said: “Before coming here I thought we would not be welcome...but I was wrong. The Vietnamese people are very friendly and there are no leftover feelings of anger.”

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By Mary Cayton

Want to know something about Vietnam today? Read Ho Anh Thai. The premier writer of post-war Vietnam, Ho Anh Thai shows us the world of a post-revolutionary generation trying to find its way in a world not quite as heroic as it once was. In fact, we wonder with the author as we read the stories in this collection whether the revolutionary generation was ever as heroic as their children had been raised to believe. And even as they question the heroism of their parents, the children wonder whether they can ever live up to it.

Ho Anh Thai is the author of fifteen novels and collections of short stories, the first published when he was only 17 years old. Born in Hanoi in 1960, he fled to the countryside to escape American bombing from 1966 to 1973. Graduating from the College of Diplomacy in 1983, Ho Anh Thai served a three-year stint in the army before entering the Foreign Ministry. Several of the stories in Behind the Red Mist are set in India, where the author served. He earned a Ph.D. in oriental culture in 1991.

The nine stories and one novella in this collection cover a range of topics...In “The Goat Meat Special,” a party official who becomes entranced by pornography on television turns into a goat. In “The Indian” and in “The Barter,” Westerners long for and eroticize what they find in the East, while the Asians who are the objects of their romantic fantasies covet Michael Jackson tapes.

In the latter story, a German disenchanted with his life, Heinrich, journeys to India, drops his old name, and becomes reborn as Amar Singh, a devout Hindu. It is an effort fraught with irony. Ho Anh Thai makes it clear that though Westerners such as Heinrich may try, they...
"Is it possible for Khoa to return to himself?"

cannot understand the East because they approach it as though it were a consumer good. Heinrich/Amar Singh marries an Indian wife - buys her in fact - only to have his wife convert completely to the values of Western culture. By the end of the story, she is ready to abandon her husband and leave India. The East that Westerners seek wants to become the West that the Westerners flee.

One of the funniest and most poignant stories in the collection concerns a Vietnamese man who wakes up one morning to find himself turned into an American. “The Man Who Believed in Fairy Tales” is at first terrified by his transformation. But gradually he discovers that in Vietnam, an American who speaks Vietnamese fluently has status and respect. People seek out his opinion: if a Westerner likes it, it must be good. By the end of the story, Khoa (the narrator) no longer has a name but is universally referred to as “Mr. Western Tenant.”

One might think that the fairy tale of the title is the initial transformation itself. But at the end of the story, Ho Anh Thai makes clear what the true fairy tale would be. He meets a girl who recognizes him as himself behind his unwanted disguise. "Anxiously, hopefully," the narrator asks her "if she thought there was a way I could get back to myself." Yes, she replies. "Perhaps there was. Perhaps one day a fairy would appear who honestly loved me, not because I was a Westerner or for hundreds of other reasons. Only when I met that sincere love would the curse be lifted to me, and I would return to being who I was before" (102).

Is it possible for Khoa (and perhaps by implication, a Vietnam in the process of Westernization) to return to himself? Ho Anh Thai leaves the question open at the end of the story. If you believe in fairy tales, he seems to say, yes. But if you don’t, fat chance.

“Behind the Red Mist,” the novella that furnishes the title for the collection, is the longest piece in the book and displays Ho Anh Thai’s talents at their best. As one reviewer has remarked, it’s a kind of Vietnamese Back to the Future. The protagonist, Tan, becomes injured in the collapse of his badly built apartment during an earthquake in 1987. When he wakes up, he finds himself transported back twenty years. He meets his parents, who are courting each other secretly. And in the process, he is allowed a fascinating glimpse into what life was like during the war and before reunification.

Tan’s journey into the past gets him beyond patriotic mythmaking and into the experiences of people who will be important to him later on in his life.

As he discovers the complexity of making a life in the midst of hard and changing times, he develops a new admiration for the revolutionary generation different from the formulaic one he had before.

Behind the Red Mist is characterized by a kind of whimsy, a surreal and fantastic quality that can be alternatively confusing and charming.

That in itself may tell us something about how the Vietnamese experience themselves and their culture these days.

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No Late Papers!
Vietnam Itinerary

Thursday, March 6, 2003
Fly Cincinnati to Los Angeles on DL #1401 (16:40-18:28)
Coach Class
Fly Los Angeles to Hong Kong on CX #881 (23:30-07:25+2)
Coach Class

Friday, March 7
En route

Saturday, March 8
Arrive Hong Kong this morning at 6:55 am, and connect to Hanoi.
Fly Hong Kong to Hanoi on CX #793 (09:05-10:05)
Coach Class
Late this afternoon we’ll take cyclos (bicycle rickshaws) through the bustling Old Quarter to Hoan Kiem Lake, where we’ll take a leisurely stroll and have a welcome dinner at a local restaurant. We’ll then return to the hotel for a well earned night’s sleep. Overnight at the Galaxy Hotel, Hanoi.

Sunday, March 9
This morning we’ll depart the hotel on a half day tour of Hanoi, stopping to learn more of Vietnam’s greatest hero, Ho Chi Minh, visiting his mausoleum (if open), museum and simple stilted house. We’ll then visit the Confucian Temple of Literature, site of the first university in Vietnam. It is a serene and beautiful place in the midst of this bustling city. Also stops will be included to view a local market, the Beaux Arts style Opera House, the One Pillar Pagoda and lovely Quan Thanh Temple. After lunch, we’ll return to the hotel. The afternoon and evening will be free to independently explore the Old Quarter with its indigenous architecture and fascinating shops. Overnight at the Galaxy Hotel, Hanoi.

Monday, March 10
This morning we’ll transfer to the airport for our flight to Danang.
Fly Hanoi to Danang on VN #311 (08:00-09:10)
On arrival in Danang, we’ll have a short city tour including a visit to the open air Cham Museum. This small museum displays an array of artifacts from the little known Hindu kingdom of Champa which began in the second century in central Vietnam. There will also be a short stop at China Beach (a former R&R site for US soldiers). Then continue a little way south to Hoi An, a once flourishing port that now has the feeling of a place set back in time. On arrival, enjoy lunch at a wonderful local restaurant and then take a walking tour of the historic town. The Japanese covered bridge, Tang Ky House, and the Phuoc Kien Pagoda are all fine examples of the stylistic syncretism of this vibrant community. Late in the afternoon we’ll check into our hotel located in the heart of the Old French Quarter; the evening will be free to wander or relax. Overnight at the Hoi An Hotel, Hoi An.

Tuesday, March 11
Depart Hoi An on the full day excursion south to the town of Quang Ngai and the site of the My Lai massacre. Overnight at the Hoi An Hotel - Hoi An.

Wednesday, March 12
This morning we’ll depart Hoi An for what will surely be one of your most memorable days in Vietnam. We’ll drive to Hue through the sea of clouds and over the 2,500 foot Hai Van Pass with spectacular views of the mountains and sea. There will be a stop at the fishing village Loc Co for a chance to stretch our legs and have a cup of tea. Continue to Hue, arriving in time for lunch and a tour of the famous and ancient Citadel. Hue was the capital of Vietnam until the early 20th century, and generations of royalty lived in the Forbidden Purple City, inside the walled exterior of the Citadel. This was also the site of some of the most brutal fighting during the infamous Tet Offensive. Time permitting we’ll visit the hectic Dong Ba Market before settling into the hotel for the evening. Overnight at the Le Loi Hotel - Hue.

Thursday, March 13
This morning we’ll transfer to the airport for our flight to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon).
Fly Hue to Saigon on VN #251 (08:30-09:45)
Coach Class
Upon arrival we’ll be met and transferred to our hotel located in the heart of District One. After checking in, set off for a full day tour of Saigon including the Reunification Hall (formerly the Presidential Palace), Petit Hotel Deville, Notre Dame Cathedral and the General Post Office (designed by A.G. Eiffel). After lunch we’ll walk amongst the frenzied merchants and buyers of Cholon Market and visit Thien Hau Pagoda one of the most celebrated temples in Saigon. This evening is free at your leisure. You may opt to end the day with a drink at the rooftop bar of the Rex Hotel, where journalists would congregate during the war for the five o’clock follies (official government briefings). Overnight at the Bong Sen Hotel, Saigon.

Friday, March 14
This morning we’ll take an excursion into the countryside to visit Cu Chi, where the famous Viet Cong tunnels are located. Starting in the forties, these offered refuge for the underground resistance movement against the French and then later against the Americans. At one time, this massive tunnel system stretched from Saigon to the Cambodian frontier. Those who wish can descend into the tunnels to gain a firsthand view of the terrible conditions faced by the Viet Cong who lived here. We’ll return to Saigon to enjoy a bit of down time before our farewell dinner at one of Saigon’s best local restaurants. Overnight at the Bong Sen 1 Hotel, Saigon.

Saturday, March 15
Fly Saigon to Hong Kong on CX #766 (11:40-15:20)
Fly Hong Kong to Los Angeles on CX #882 (16:20-12:45)
Coach Class
Fly Los Angeles to Cincinnati on DL #548 (23:15-06:18+1)

Sunday, March 16
Arrive Cincinnati this morning at 6:18 am.