

Why Go Back?

A Pilgrimage to Vietnam

by John W. Fisher, DC



Celebrating after clinic with teachers at the DaLat disabled orphanage and school.

“Oh, you fight in war against me,” one man said as he lifted his shirt to reveal a scarred abdomen. “I Viet Cong.” I gasped in shock. “Oh no, no problem. That was long time ago. We friends now.”



Veterans Bob Resling, Dr. John Fisher, our new friend Cham and Bill Nichols in the Central Highlands.

You’re going back to Vietnam? Why? This is the question often asked of me, mostly by veterans of the war. I’m a veteran of the war, too, so I can understand their skepticism. Maybe I was looking for healing the first time I went back. In fact, it took 34 years of wondering to finally get up the courage to go find out; and, in February of 2003, when I did, it changed my life forever. Shortly after disembarking from the safety of the aircraft, old memories came flooding back, and I assumed that I’d still be a target. The kind of target I became was the biggest surprise of all.

I stood out from the crowd in Vietnam; one tall Caucasian walking a head taller than the sea of Asians around me. They were very interested in me, though. Where was I from? What is my name? Had I been here before? When I acknowledged having been to Vietnam before, they asked “before 1975?” (the date the war was officially over). The first time that happened, I rolled my eyes and looked away before nodding solemnly. I’d only been back in the ‘Nam for a few hours and still expected the worst. “Oh, you fight in war against me,” one man said as he lifted his shirt to reveal a scarred abdomen. “I Viet Cong.” I gasped in shock. “Oh no, no problem. That was long time ago. We friends now.”

Did he say, “we friends now?” He did, and after many similar experiences with former enemies and citizens alike, I realized how characteristic this is of the Vietnamese people. Vietnam is an ancient culture based on Confucianism, as are many Eastern societies. These are people who forgive, who work hard for community prosperity, and who love one another – even us. They completely understand that I fought against their country because my government was at war with theirs and that now that the war is over, we must be friends. This story may seem hard to believe, but only because our Western world has advanced itself right out of fundamental primordial values as it has left behind primitive third-world conditions.

I am now a member of the Soldier’s Heart initiative, based on the writings of Dr. Ed Tick and his book *War and the Soul*. Tick has studied a number of ancient cultures, including the Vietnamese, in order to understand what American veterans need to heal from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Traveling in Vietnam showed Ed that there is very little animosity or stress among our former adversaries. Together, Tick and I lead groups of American veterans back to Vietnam, veterans who have signed up for the same reason I did in the beginning: to renounce the war and become acquainted with the country. Veterans are purified and honored by this journey, something I never imagined feasible. It seems strange that we have to go back to the theater of our nightmares in order to find restitution, but that is exactly what happens. I recently returned from my fourth journey to Vietnam, this time co-leading the group with my wife, Lindsley Field. This was her second trip to the land where her husband was once a soldier.



Veteran Daniel Martin (Rolfer) with his wife Pam (PT), Lindsley Field and Tanya Mayes (massage therapist).

In addition to a reconciliation for veterans, our trip offered healing clinics for the Vietnamese people. Both Lindsley and I are alternative healthcare providers, myself a chiropractor and my wife a Trager® practitioner, body worker, Reiki Master, aromatherapist and Shamanic counselor. We invited other practitioners to join us and had a complete team, working on nearly 1,500 patients during our visit and offering an opportunity to teach our methodologies to Vietnamese therapists. Clinics were held mostly in disabled orphanages, schools and elderly homes. In the latter, we encountered an interesting phenomenon. Some of the elderly patients had been in the war, had fought on the Communist side of the front lines. Missing an arm or leg, they climbed onto our tables with complete trust and acceptance, receiving our services with gratitude and often shaking or even kissing our hands. It is impossible to explain the emotions of working on a former enemy. When all of the treatments had been provided, it was hard to decide who had received the greatest healing: the patient or the doctor. Being allowed to do humanitarian work in this country is a gift, and not just because I'm a veteran. Other team members expressed similar feelings.

By submerging ourselves into Vietnamese communities, we feel love and acceptance from the people we once fought against during a time of war, and only because they are willing to forgive and forget.

Vietnam is a Communist country with capitalist free-enterprise economics, a combination that is hard to imagine. Wasn't this conflict central to creating a need for war? I believe that what binds it all together is the way today's culture maintains its roots in ancient teachings. We enjoy the benefits of "progress" in our Western society but have such difficulty realizing peace. By submerging ourselves into Vietnamese communities, we feel love and acceptance from the people we once fought against during a time of war, and only because they are willing to forgive and forget.



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So, we go back for many reasons. Healing from our past and offering help where help is needed are two important aspects. Learning, feeling and living in this country, if only for a few weeks at a time, is life changing. I was in Vietnam for an entire year in the sixties, but only knew it for the carnage. When I stepped onto the "freedom-bird" at the end of that tour, I was elated to have survived. By going back, I have been able to see a very beautiful country, one filled with enlightened citizens, and this time I hate to leave. Instead of the land of death, Vietnam has become the land of sanctified life.

The next journey is scheduled for the spring of 2010. Veterans and their families, as well as natural healthcare providers and others interested in the experience, are welcome to apply. Everyone is expected to participate as part of the team during the clinics provided along the way. This trip is also a vacation for tourism, relaxation and unbelievable shopping, as well as an opportunity to fall in love with a culture that is not necessarily religious but extraordinarily spiritual. Those interested may visit: www.johnwesleyfisher.com.

Dr. John Fisher served in the US Army with the 4th Infantry Division, 1968. He received a doctorate of chiropractic from Palmer College and founded the Foothills Chiropractic Health Center in Golden, CO, where he practiced for 30 years. Processing post-war distress was always difficult for him until meeting Dr. Tick, but now he speaks nationally to notify the public of methodologies long lost to the modern world. Fisher is now living and practicing with his wife, Lindsley Field, in Murrells Inlet. For more info about Dr. Tick, visit SoldiersHeart.net. See ad page 20.