



MEDICAL SERVICE CORPS
United States Army

Silver Caduceus Association, Inc.
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SCA E-News March 2016

The MSC Community has a lot to celebrate: The following Medical Service Corps officers have been nominated for General Officer promotion and are in the confirmation process. Perhaps you recognize some of the names.

2016-02-22 PN1162 Army

The following named officers for appointment in the United States Army Medical Service Corps to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., sections 624 and 3064:

Col. Dennis P. LeMaster, to Brigadier General
Col. Michael J. Talley, to Brigadier General

2016-02-22 PN1160 Army

The following named officers for appointment in the United States Army Medical Service Corps to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., sections 624 and 3064:

Brig. Gen. Patrick D. Sargent, to Major General
Brig. Gen. Robert D. Tenhet, to Major General

With these officers and BG Scott Dingle there will be an unprecedented five MSC General Officers serving on Active Duty.

MSC Birthday Celebration: National Capital Region MSC Officers are planning a MSC birthday celebration on June 30, 2016 at the Ft. Belvoir Community Hospital. A birthday cake cutting and all Active and Retired MSCs in the area are invited.

Major Kirk Reed at Fort Polk reports that BG Scott Dingle has accepted our invitation to be our Guest Speaker for the MSC Birthday Celebration on 30 June. Retired and former MSC officers in the local area will be invited to attend.

NOTES FROM PRES: Membership – I know you have heard my pitch before but need to re-emphasize. We were pleased with the addition of 51 new members in 2015. This was however somewhat diminished when on 1 Jan 2016 we removed 44 member names of those with 2014 expiration dates. We are now concerned that we have as of this date 78 members with 2015 expiration dates. Getting new memberships are great but more important is retaining our current membership. If you are one of our members with a 2015 expiration date PLEASE consider staying with us. Remember this is a Reunion year.

Since 1 January 2016 we have recruited 8 new members.

We Welcome:

Norbert Pincha COL ®	Johnny Walker COL ®
Thomas Shank LTC ®	Douglas Lawson COL ®
William Robertson CW4 ®	Patrick Grady COL (AD)
Michael Collyer LTC ®	Sophia Dalce CPT (AD)

Speaking of the reunion - SAVE THE DATE. The 2016 SCA Reunion will be held 28 Sept through 1 Oct. 2016 in San Antonio. While final program details have not been finalized; Jim Whitmire and his committee hope to put out the program very soon.

Jim Van Straten's Book - *A Different Face of War:*

Memories of a Medical Service Corps Officer in Vietnam: SCA members should know that soon all the hardbacks will be gone and the book will only be available in paperback. Books are available from the Texas A&M warehouse and may be still available at the AMEDD Museum at Fort Sam Houston.

Jim Van Straten was one of the founding members of the Silver Caduceus Association. He was well known as a mover and shaker in the Army Medical Department and especially in the Medical Service Corps. He was most recently interviewed by Mr John Thurman on radio station KLUP on a program entitled "San Antonio Movers and Shakers" on 12 March 2016. Jim's involvement included serving on the Board of Directors for St Peter's and St Joseph's Children's Home; Chairman of the SA Housing Authority's Family Self Sufficiency program; Board of Directors SA American Red Cross; serving on the Policy Board for the Institute of Cancer Research; and on the Board at St Anthony's Catholic High School. He was heavily involved in education after retirement from the Army while serving as Executive Assistant to the President and Dean of Professional Studies at the University of The Incarnate Word and as the Dean of School of Allied Sciences at UT Health Science Center. He truly is a MOVER AND SHAKER.

The following book review appeared in the Army Nurse Corps Association Newsletter written by Claudia Bartz, a retired Army Nurse Corps Officer who lives in Wisconsin. North Texas Military Biography and Memoir Series; University of North Texas Press, Denton TX, 2015: The author wrote letters to his wife almost every day during his year-long tour in Vietnam (1966-1967) as a Medical Service Corps officer, which, together with memories still fresh in his mind today, made up the substance of the book. This is a very good, very well-written and very well-edited book. Army Nurses who were in Vietnam would appreciate and relate to then-Major Van Straten's experiences and observations. All other ANs will find much to relate to as well. COL-R Van Straten was especially attentive to the horrors of war experienced by active military (US and ARVN) and also by civilians in the war zone (which was, of course, everywhere in Vietnam). As the senior

military advisor to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam in I Corps, based in Da Nang, he experienced a great deal. He was quite thoughtful about things too, noting often that he did not know the explanations for things that puzzled him. He was very sensitive to cultural differences and was offended when other Americans were not. His heart went out to the many impoverished children. His faith and family were strong sources of support for him; rare three-minute phone calls were his only personal contact with his family. No Skype or email back then. Already in 1966, there were differences of opinion at senior officer levels about how and why the war was being fought. Amazingly, the US dragged on in this war, and troops kept dying, for another eight years after Major Van Straten left Vietnam. The book adds to the ever-growing literature about war-fighting, especially its futility when the means are inadequate and the ends are vague and soft. All present and future leaders should read this book and learn from it.

"A Lenton Reflection: Resiliency of the Human Spirit"

by Jim Van Straten

Those of you, who have read my recently published book, *A Different Face of War*, are aware that I served as an advisor to the South Vietnamese Army.

My Vietnamese counterpart, the person I was primarily charged to advise, was a physician by the name of Dr. Pham Viet Tu.

He was of the Buddhist faith, a very moral and decent man, and a highly respected physician.

His family paralleled mine exactly: A wife and four older daughters and two younger sons.

The last time I saw him was in late June 1967, almost a half century ago.

As a direct result of the publication of my book, we have been reconnected. A friend of mine who lives in Pennsylvania, Doug Braendel, read the book, noted that I was searching for Dr. Tu, contacted a Vietnamese American pharmacist who lives in Washington, D.C. and sure enough Pharmacist Nguyen Trinh knew that Dr. Pham Viet Tu was living in Brisbane, Australia.

To make a long story short, we have been reconnected and correspond frequently by email.

I should also tell you that upon arriving in Australia, after fleeing Communist Vietnam, Dr. Tu was not allowed to practice medicine because of credentialing difficulties. He redirected his life, earned both masters and Ph.D. degrees in the field of public health and became respected in that field in his adopted country of Australia.

Human resiliency at its best.

In an email, I recently asked Dr. Tu to tell me how he was able to get out of Communist Vietnam. I knew that he would have been a target for the Communists vindictiveness by virtue of his relatively high status within the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

Below is his response to my inquiry.

It's worth reading carefully, and reflecting upon, as it represents the human spirit at its very best.

Below are three messages. In the very bottom message you'll note that I sought from him and was given permission to share his story.

From: Tu Pham

To: Jim Van Straten

Sent: Sunday, February 14, 2016 7:38 PM

Subject: Letter from Pham Viet Tu

Dear Dr. Van Straten,

I have received your latest email, and while drafting the reply to your questions, I could not help but keep on thinking about **the darkest days of my life.**

After the fall of Saigon, I was incarcerated in "reeducation" camps for three years. Following my release, the communist government appointed me to work at a hospital in central Saigon as a medical doctor. The patients of this hospital were mostly very poor and seriously ill. Being able to work at this hospital gave me the opportunity to treat and help them with all my medical knowledge and ability.

Whilst I was employed at the hospital, the local government kept on harassing, threatening and discriminating against my family. They did not allow my children to have tertiary education, and used all possible means to force my family out of Saigon and to move to the so-called "new economic zones". In these new economic zones, there were no basic infrastructures such as roads, water, etc., and there was no attempt to build them either. It was obvious that the communists were determined to punish not only myself, but also my whole family, just because I was an officer of the former government. We were living in constant fear of not knowing what they would do to us!

Fearing that the danger to my family was imminent and that they could put me back in reeducation camps any time, my wife and I decided to seek ways for the whole family to escape. We tried to get out of Vietnam twice by fishing boats, but unfortunately we failed both times.

In the first time, as we and other escapees were prepared to board the boat, someone shouted that the police were coming to round us up. Everyone then hurriedly ran away before the police arrived. Some were captured and later imprisoned.

In the second time, we did not seem to have any troubles at the beginning. However, the problem arose when we noticed that although the boat had already travelled for one whole day, but we were still within Vietnam's water territory. We then realized that the skipper was inexperienced and lost direction. The boat was only about 10 - 12 meters long with more than 100 people on board. The sea was so rough and the big waves just kept crashing down into our little boat. Most people on board did not want to venture further and demanded to be returned to Vietnam. Fortunately, there was a fishing boat passing by and they were so kind to guide us back to the seashore of South Vietnam.

Having failed both times and lost a large amount of money, my wife and I were still determined that we had to try again and again until the whole family could get out of Vietnam. With the remaining money, we decided that it was best for our children to have a go first, my wife and I stayed behind and would try to get out later. The six children were divided into two groups and escaped again by boats at different times. Fortunately, the first group was able to reach Songkhla province (Thailand). The second group was also successful in reaching the Bidong Island (Malaysia). After short periods in refugee camps, the children were allowed to resettle in Australia. A few years later, they sponsored my wife and myself under a family reunion scheme, and we finally arrived in Australia in April 1990.

I am now living in Brisbane, the third largest city in Australia with a population of about 2 million. Brisbane is a beautiful and delightful city, and the people are very friendly, welcoming, and down-to-earth. My wife passed away in 2009 at the age of 80. The six children have now matured and have families of their own. They are also quite successful in their studies and professions.

Words may not be able to describe the realities of living with the communists. When my wife and I boarded the plane in Saigon to go to Australia in 1990, I was still not sure that we could finally get out of Vietnam because they could cancel my flight at any time! Nowadays, I still have nightmares about the days in the reeducation camps.

Now, all of this is over for me and my family. But there is hardly a day goes by that I do not think about my former fellow soldiers, especially the wounded ones, who are still living in Vietnam. More than 40 years after the war, they and their families still suffer from brutality and harsh discrimination from the communists.

Kind regards,
Pham Viet Tu

Date: Mon, 15 Feb 2016 12:42:48 +0000
From: **Jim Van Straten**
To: **Tu Pham**
Subject: Re: Letter from Pham Viet Tu

Dear friend,

I was greatly saddened to read in your much appreciated reply to my questions that your wife of many years died in 2009. I am thankful that you had nineteen years together, in Australia, after leaving Vietnam in April 1990. I am also most thankful that your six children all made it safely to Australia.

As you stated in your message, those were "the darkest days" of your life. I can only hope that your describing in words the details of the tragic events that impacted your life may have proven therapeutic for you. Sometimes describing painful events, in writing, is cathartic. I hope this was the case in your instance, my good and trusted friend.

I cannot tell you how much I admired your work in Vietnam. From the day we first met, at Duy Tan General Hospital, when you so patiently gave me a tour of the many wards of the hospital that you were charged to temporarily command, in addition to your primary duties as I Corps Surgeon, I knew that you were a good and decent man and that we would become friends.

May I ask, my friend, do you mind if I share your story with others? I find it to be a very inspirational in that it portrays the human spirit at its very best.

I await your response.

Respectfully yours,
Jim Van Straten

From: Tu Pham

To: Jim Van Straten

Sent: Monday, February 15, 2016 7:18 PM

Subject: RE: Letter from Pham Viet Tu

Dear Friend,

I appreciate your kindness and words of comfort. Yes, reminiscing and writing about those "darkest days" is quite emotional, but very helpful.

Yes, I vividly remember the day we first met at Duy Tan General Hospital nearly 50 years ago. I admire your compassion for the underprivileged, and am really proud of the work we did together in Vietnam.

Please feel free to share my story with others if you think that it is helpful.

Kind regards,
Pham Viet Tu