



OPERATION BABYLIFT

In March I was contacted by an American man, who asked if we could provide him with any details from 1975, about Operation Babylift. He was searching for answers, as he was a baby of eight months old when he was taken to America from Hoa Binh Orphanage, in Saigon, as part of that operation. I knew nothing of Operation Babylift, and sadly was unable to help him at the time, but I was fascinated to research more about the subject.

Operation Babylift was the name given to the mass evacuation of some 3,000 war-orphaned babies and young children from Saigon to America, Australia, Canada and Europe, during the collapse of South Vietnam in 1975. It took place during the final days of the Vietnam War, as Saigon was faced with a massive North Vietnamese offensive, and rocked by artillery and endless attacks on the city. As chaos ensued, President Gerald Ford commissioned U.S. planes to fly orphans from war-torn Saigon to be adopted by new families in the western world.

However, although Operation Babylift was set up to help orphans, many of the children airlifted still had parents who were still alive. As the North Vietnamese forces advanced rapidly, rumours were spreading quickly that the advancing soldiers would brutally murder any mixed-race infants. Some mothers acted to protect their children and saw the evacuation to America as the best option for them. They handed their children over to be transported, hoping to be reunited with



Photo: VVA.org

them when the war was over.

It was a massive operation, and was aided by many volunteers and relief agencies. The babies and children were carried into aeroplanes and laid in cardboard boxes both on and underneath the seats. Blankets were strewn on the floor and some babies secured with cargo netting, others crawled in the aisles. Nappies, milk and other provisions were loaded onto the plane, as the volunteers attempted to feed and comfort the hundreds of crying babies.

Tragically, soon after the first plane left, one of its cargo doors malfunctioned and blew out, causing the plane to crash land in a nearby rice

paddy. Half of its passengers were killed, including volunteers, crew members, air force personnel, and 78 babies and children.

Despite its tragic beginnings, in the following weeks Operation Babylift flew approximately 3,000 children to safety worldwide. Upon arriving in the United States, the planes were met by medical teams that treated some of the children for a variety of illnesses. The sickest were taken to hospitals, before being found new adoptive parents, of which there was no shortage. Many potential adopters stood waiting for the planes to arrive.

However, although many

westerners saw Operation Babylift as a humanitarian necessity, many Vietnamese and some westerners considered it kidnapping, particularly as some of the children were not, in fact, orphans. A great number of the children grew up contented, and live happy and fulfilled lives with their new families, but the legacy of Operation Babylift is a deeply complicated one.

The evacuations were controversial, as many questioned whether the children were really without any family, and many lawsuits were filed on behalf of the children that sought to reunite with their biological families. Others are still searching for answers.

Mary Lidgard



Operation Babylift

Photo: Americaoncoffee.wordpress.com

DAUGHTERS OF CAMBODIA

We have recently had news that one of our partner organisations, Daughters of Cambodia, is moving with the times and has come up with a great new initiative.

Whilst MSAVLC provides an



annual grant to Daughters to support their Health and Wellness Project, they are still in great need of funds to help Cambodian girls and boys escape from the sex trade.

Daughters has for some years sold the clothes, jewellery, bags and fashion items made in their workshops at their Visitors' Centre in Phnom Penh. However this year they are

hoping to reach a much wider clientele by marketing their products online. The new Christmas Catalogue is now available, and items ordered now will arrive from Cambodia in plenty of time for Christmas.

To see their beautiful selection of jewellery, home accessories, bags, purses, laptop cases and Christmas accessories, visit their website: www.daughtersstore.com

Daughters of Cambodia has helped 750 girls walk free from the sex industry. Their model is successful because they focus on sustainability and empowerment, rather than institutionalisation. Most sex workers want to leave the trade but need to earn an income to support their families. They are considered the outcast sector of society, despised in their local community and they struggle to find meaningful work because of the lack of education. Through the jobs, skills, training and development programs offered at Daughters, they are equipped to make changes to their own lives, discover their own value, and raise their quality of life. All proceeds

from sales are reinvested in the Daughters' social enterprise, enabling more victims to walk free, gain employment outside of the sex trade and experience value, dignity and a new life.

To help augment their social enterprise income, Daughters also offer a sponsorship programme. To sponsor a girl to leave the sex trade, see www.daughtersofcambodia.org

THE BULLETIN - DATA PROTECTION

MSAVLC is committed to making sure that our communications with you are secure, considered and welcomed.

We promise to respect any personal

data that you share with us, we will keep it safe, and we will not share it with third parties.

If you no longer want to receive the Bulletin and want to be removed from our mailing list, please contact:

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HEROES

In this Bulletin we begin a series of biographical articles inspired by a book written by our Vice-President, John Pilger, entitled "Heroes". The book's cover notes "The heroes of John Pilger's narrative are the many ordinary people he has witnessed coping with their lives in difficult and often brutal conditions"

MSAVLC's heroes are also ordinary people coping with difficult conditions, and these articles give us an opportunity to identify and thank them for what they are doing for their fellow citizens, for the charity, and for humanity.

Our first Hero is Vietnam's Highland Education Development Organisation's Director:-

PROFESSOR TRINH NGOC TRINH

Trinh Ngoc Trinh was born in Ninh Binh Province, in northern Vietnam in 1934. His early life must have been quite torrid. At that time Vietnam was governed by the French, then during World War II it was overrun by the Japanese, and following their defeat, Vietnam was again subjected to cruel colonial rule by France.

So, it was little wonder, that in 1945 at the age of only 11, Trinh joined the Viet Minh, Ho Chi Minh's army fighting for Vietnam's independence. He was a volunteer, and his job was to run with messages during the fighting. His commanders hoped that being young and quick, he would escape the enemy fire, but on a mission in 1947 he was ambushed and shot in the arm. Nevertheless, he kept running and delivered the message before fainting because of the pain. In order to save his life, the field doctors had to cut off the injured arm.

Inspired by the lad's courage, the surgeon who removed his arm, Dr Nguyen Trinh Co, wrote a short story about him entitled "Brother Ngoc". The story has become well known in Vietnam. It was included in the Grade 5 schools' reading list and has been translated into English, French, Russian and Chinese.

Trinh went to China for a while to recover, and then returned to Vietnam where he studied and became a teacher, working mostly in the mountainous North-West Highlands.

During the resistance war against the US, Trinh Ngoc Trinh worked as a teacher and subsequently taught at Hanoi University. In his capacity as Secretary of the Union of Hanoi National University of Education, he was instrumental in the launch



of the "Three Prepared" movement in Hanoi. It rapidly spread throughout Vietnam to become a national movement. Its goals were;

to be prepared to defeat the American empire;

to be prepared to fight to protect the North and liberate the South, unifying the country;

to be prepared to go anywhere, and do whatever the Party, people and the country demanded.

In 1965, Trinh was promoted at Hanoi University of Education to be the Head of Political Affairs. He proposed and set up the "Policy Education" department, acting as the head of the department and also teaching students about policies and guidelines of the Party and the State.

In March 1990, now Professor Trinh Ngoc Trinh was appointed Director of the Highland Education Development Organisation (HEDO), part of the Ministry of Education.

HEDO called on both international and domestic organisations to help improve the material and spiritual life of ethnic minority people. To date they have supported more than 200 programs and projects serving ethnic minorities in 43 provinces, most of them educational projects. Under Trinh's direction, HEDO regularly organizes conferences and seminars on mountainous education development and supports ethnic minorities in poverty reduction and sustainable socio-economic development.

A vital part of their work has been in running training courses for traditional midwives, and a University Medical Training Course designed specifically for students from ethnic minorities. MSAVLC has been partnering HEDO and funding these activities since 2003.

As a result of his practical contributions to the community, Professor Trinh Ngoc Trinh was awarded the second-class Labor Medal by Vietnam's President.

He is known in the Northern Highlands of Vietnam as 'Brother Ngoc', but he still likes to be called a teacher, because he says his life is a constant journey to bring the word to remote areas where students still have difficulties.

He joked "People ask why I have been in the same job for twenty-nine years with no promotion, but I don't mind. I have friends in Hanoi, friends throughout Vietnam, and friends all over the world"

In 2018 Professor Trinh Ngoc Trinh was recognised as one of the ten Most Outstanding Citizens of Hanoi, an honour richly deserved.

PROFESSOR TRINH VISITS COVENTRY

In June, Professor Trinh Ngoc Trinh, director of Vietnam's Highland Education Development Organisation (HEDO), visited Coventry. There he met with Peter Lacy, former Chairman of MSAVLC, and his wife Sheila, a former Trustee. They were joined by Trustees Peter and Mary Lidgard, and after a delicious lunch, they visited the graves of Dr. Madeleine Sharp, former Secretary, and Margaret Methley, former Chairman of MSAVLC.

Prof. Trinh had worked alongside Madeleine and Margaret for many years, organising traditional midwives' training in the northern highlands of Vietnam. He had formed a life-long friendship with them both.

It was a moving experience; flowers were placed at both of the gravesides and prayers said. We all remembered with love and gratitude



the work that both Madeleine and Margaret had done over a span of nearly thirty years, to help the people of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. They were an inspiration to us all.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2018 Annual General Meeting was held at St Mark's Methodist Church Hall in Cheltenham, on Saturday on 11th May, 2019.

Chairman of the Trustees, Peter Lidgard welcomed Trustees and supporters to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance.

Honorary Secretary, Mary Lidgard, told the meeting that 2018 had again been a good year for the charity, despite the fact that we had lost a considerable number of supporters because of the GDPR regulations. The charity had supported seven main projects during the year, and Mary said that she was in regular contact with all our project managers.

Honorary Treasurer, John Firth was pleased to report that our income

was 15% higher than the previous

year, and that project spending totalled just over £100,000. Non-project expenditure, including production of the Bulletin, and all expenses, amounted to only 2.3% of our spending.

The following Trustees were re-elected:

Peter Lidgard (Chairman),
Mary Lidgard (Honorary Secretary),
John Firth (Honorary Treasurer),
Lynn Firth (Bulletin Distribution),
Susmita Ghosh (Facebook Manager).

Author and journalist John Pilger was confirmed as the charity's third Vice-President.

Nic Hewlett was again appointed as Independent Examiner of accounts.

Peter Lidgard thanked everyone who gave their time to keep the charity running smoothly. In particular he mentioned Nic Hewlett, Jon and Deborah Dainton, our website

CURRY AND QUIZ

The annual Curry and Quiz Night took place at the Organic Farm Shop in Cirencester on Friday 18th October. For the sixth year running a proportion of the profits were donated to MSAVLC.

Once again the Trustees would like to thank our supporter, David Smethurst and his team for an enjoyable evening, and for their generous donation.

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK

Keep up with the latest news about the charity by visiting www.facebook.com/msavlc.

Please 'like' and 'share' our page with your Facebook friends.

LORRY DEATHS

As the Bulletin goes to press, details are emerging of the tragic deaths of 39 migrants found in a refrigerated lorry in Essex.

The Trustees and supporters of MSAVLC send our sincere sympathy to everyone in Vietnam who has been affected by this tragedy.