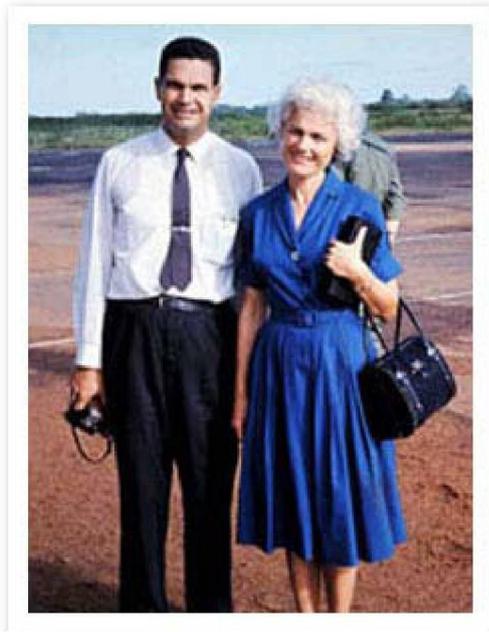


IN THE LINE OF FIRE

You Can Call Me AL

By Josh & Jenn Whiteman



Bob and Marie Ziemer

In October 2008, Josh and Jenn Whiteman from the Video Office and Archives at the U.S. C&MA National Office traveled to Nyack (N.Y.) College to speak with the families of several missionaries martyred in Vietnam. The following is a compilation of interviews with Tim Ziemer, son of Bob Ziemer; Bob Griswold, brother of missionary Carolyn Griswold and son of volunteer Leon Griswold; and Tom Stebbins, whose sister Ruth Thompson and her husband, Ed, were killed.

hadn't met him?

good man. As children, we school, so I recall my father in recall the times when we were together before going to school or during our vacations, but also much of the way I got to know and appreciate my father was through the mail. He would write a weekly letter, often illustrated with cartoons or pictures or [he would] send pictures. It would be an exchange of his thoughts to encourage and update me.



AL: How would you describe your father to somebody who

Tim Ziemer: My father was a were sent away to boarding different ways. Not only do I

My father was of German ethnicity. He was very stern and yet there was a substance of care and loving that came through in every aspect of his life. He was very passionate; he had a great sense of humor. Sometimes the humor was delayed; he would listen to a joke, and it would take him a few seconds for it to either click in or for him to understand the punch line. But then when he would often laugh with a full-body laugh that would just trigger everyone else. But [he was also] very serious, very committed. You know there were times when we felt that we could let our hair down,

and other times when we knew we had to play it pretty straight because life was very real, and life was quite serious.

AL: Were you taken to the mission field as a child or were you born there?

Ziemer: My mom and dad went to the mission field in 1947, when I was six months old. They went on a converted World War II troop ship. My dad lived below deck . . . with a number of other men. Because I was a child, my mom was put in a cabin on the upper decks, so her conditions were nicer. We sailed together to French Indochina, which became Vietnam after 1954 when the French left. I spent my entire life through high school growing up as a missionary kid in Vietnam.

AL: Do you know how [your family member] received the calling to the mission field?

Ziemer: My father used to talk about that frequently, particularly when he preached. After he finished seminary and his training at Nyack, he was offered a number of pastorates here in the United States, but he would often refer to his call as this compelling urge that he felt to go to overseas ministry. He differentiated between U.S. and overseas ministry, and a couple times I recall him saying his call to international ministries was as clear and compelling as the call that he felt to ministry itself. At one point he said that he felt that call was as strong as his call to faith when he realized what God's grace had done in his life and was called to Christ.



Bob Griswold: We were raised in White Plains, New York, very close to New York City. When missionaries that were either classmates of my dad's at Nyack or from church would come to the States, we always welcomed them in our house, and they would stay for a period of time. Missionaries from Vietnam were particularly exciting or interesting to Carolyn, and she seemed to just latch onto those people. . . . She was not more than eight or nine when she really made a lifelong commitment to become a missionary with a focus of French Indochina—a direct result of the missionaries who got to know her very well.



Carolyn Griswold

AL: How did you see that call affect her and her path from that point on?

Griswold: Her focus was singular—it was directly on becoming a missionary to French Indochina. She talked about it all the time, . . . and the passion she had for the mission field was shared by everybody in the youth group. It's interesting that there were other people who became missionaries to Vietnam out of . . . that church . . . and fortunately were not a part of the martyr group. . . .

Musically, she wrote scores for hymns. The lyrics were written by our uncle, and a hymn that she would sing was "How Will They Know of Jesus' Love, His Death upon a Tree." . . . I have never known anybody with the kind of laser-type focus that she had on missions.



Two American soldiers pay their respects at the grave of Ruth and Ed Thompson and Ruth Wilting. The Ziemer's bombed out house is in the background.

AL: What do you know about their ministry in Vietnam?

Ziemer: Like many of the missionaries in the 1940s and 1950s, [my parents] went to plant the church. . . . After they got to the mission field, it became clear that training was necessary, so from their ministry a Bible school was started. My father realized that there was no Scripture in the language of the Radaay people. I recall walking through the dining room when I was a kid (in the evenings he'd have the pressurant lantern on) and seeing him working through and translating Scripture from the French, the Vietnamese and the English Bibles into the local dialect. He had a national pastor there to assist and make sure the idioms were as close to what they could possibly translate into the local language. This was before the Wycliffe folks showed up. [My

parents] got into translation of the Scriptures from just sheer commitment; medical missions were not on their horizon.

They were preachers and teachers, but they spent a lot of time in what we now call medical development, helping many of the folks who had leprosy and other tropical diseases through the mission hospital. So as you step back and look at their ministry outreach, it involved all of the normal stuff, but it also included much of the compassion ministry component. . . .

Griswold: Carolyn always had a passion and great interest in young people. . . . I think her ministry was largely working with young tribal

people, primarily with the Raday kids. She was passionate about what she did. She would allow that excitement to bubble over, and it's a compelling thing when you are involved with someone like that in a teaching ministry, whether it's one-on-one or one on 20. . . . I think youth work was her primary focus.

AL: Do you remember anything she communicated to you about her ministry and what she was feeling?

Griswold: She was a wonderful communicator. . . . When she came home on furloughs, she would speak with people and have an audience—whether it was 20 or 200 or 500 people—with rapt attention, just totally focused on what she was saying and how she described her experiences with the tribal people and her ministry—a really contagious passion.

AL: Can you share the details about what happened at Banmethuot?

Ziemer: My mother [Marie] was the only survivor, so much of the factual details come from her. . . . [When] I left high school in 1964, there were only 10,000 U.S. military troops in Vietnam. I went back [to the United States] to college. President Kennedy had been assassinated, and President Johnson now had taken over; he was responsible for basically committing up to 500,000 troops in Vietnam. . . . The war was a very dramatic political reality in our country, in the media and also on the college campuses.



The remains of the Griswold's house.

During that time I got word from my folks that they had to stop traveling at night. My father wrote a letter to me and said, "You know, I am responsible for the safety of the missionaries on the field. It's really tough to know where we need to draw the line of safety in terms of traveling and exposing other missionaries." . . . I received letters [telling me] that they heard shelling and had made evacuation plans in the event that they had to leave. They depended on the local officials to give the signals. But in

1968 the North Vietnamese committed themselves to a conventional attack. This was unprecedented, and Banmethuot was one of the provincial capitals that was attacked. They brought in vehicles, tanks and equipment—something they had never done before.

Folks weren't prepared . . . , and as a result the mission compound was caught in crossfire between the Communist and the South Vietnamese forces. The mission compound had a clinic on it, and a lot of the nationals

came because they were injured and needed treatment. It was a place of neutrality; the notion that it might be a safe place to go attracted people. During that three-day period, it was very confusing.

We had three fairly nice homes on the mission compound. The Griswold home was blown up, and Carolyn Griswold and her father were trapped in the debris. Because of the intense shelling, my father and Ed Thompson were unable to go to the house when it exploded at three o'clock in the morning. At daybreak, he and Ed Thompson went to the house and started digging through the rubble with their hands. Leon Griswold had been killed. They found Carolyn still alive but in shock. [My father and Ed] were able to pull her out and give her some medical attention, but it was clear that she needed additional help.

The Thompson house was blown up, and the missionaries decided it was very important to at least have some place they could hide, so they dug a makeshift bunker in an old garbage pit. During that confusion, they went to the bunker for security. Carolyn Griswold needed attention, and Ruth Wilting and Betty Olsen, desperate in their attempts to try to get some blood plasma to her, made a trip to the clinic. Nobody knows exactly what happened, but their vehicle was shot at. Ruth Wilting ran to the bunker. My mother remembers her exclaiming as shots rang out that she just wanted to stay alive so that she could help others. My father, realizing that somebody needed to do something, left the bunker to try to negotiate some sort of consideration for the release of people and to take Carolyn to the provincial hospital. We don't really know what happened, but one of the North Vietnamese soldiers shot him with an AK-47 rifle and left him to die in the dust. Then they threw a couple of hand grenades into the bunker and killed Ed and Ruth Thompson. . . .



Leon Griswold

My mother was the only survivor. She had 18 hand-grenade wounds, and her ear drums were punctured from the explosion. The Communists ordered her out of the bunker. She tried to play dead, but they saw her breathing and told her to march off the compound. She saw my dad lying there, still breathing, and she tried to go to him, but they didn't give her permission. It still haunts her that she was unable to go and spend time with him.

She was taken off the compound and held prisoner with Betty Olsen, Hank Blood (a Wycliffe missionary) and his family and a number of nationals. After a couple days the South Vietnamese and the U.S. Army

counterattacked, and the Communists left. They dumped my mom by the side of the road because they thought she was going to die. A young [national] Christian noticed her and took her to the provincial hospital.

AL: Do you remember how you found out about what happened?

Griswold: When I arrived home in Detroit on Monday night [January 29], I had a letter from my dad [Leon Griswold was a volunteer on a two-year assignment following the death of his wife in New York]. I read that he and my sister and other missionaries were going to be flown out on that Friday. I received that letter on Thursday, so I was really happy they were going to get out of there because the news was full of terrible fights and killings. On Friday, I arrived at my office in downtown Detroit about quarter of nine, and the phone rang, which was unusual for that hour. It turned out to be Paul Prentice (a fellow from the Nyack quartet). I thought this was a social call, but he was calling to tell me about the martyrdom disaster. I learned that he was with the U.S. State Department on the South Pacific desk and had just received information that my father had been killed. He wasn't sure about my sister; they knew she was wounded but didn't know if it was mortal. He called me back in a few minutes and confirmed her death, too.

I was alone in the office; there was no one else there at that time. I didn't know what to do. My mother had just passed. I had lost my whole family. *Now who do I talk to? What do I do?* My dad had a home in Florida. I called my boss and got on a plane to Florida to try and sort things out. But God had prepared me with this letter [saying] that they were leaving, and the day that they were due to leave was the day I got the news that they were dead. They were leaving but not leaving the way I thought they were. They were passing on.

I said goodbye to my father in May of 1967 [as] he was on his way to Vietnam. I walked out on the tarmac with him as he was about to get on the plane, and we hugged. He said, "I love you; I'll never see you again." And I said, "Dad, don't say that." We had arranged to meet in Israel, to spend some time where we had never been before, on April 19, 1968. And he just shook his head, got on the plane and that was the last time I saw him. He had a premonition of some sort that he was not coming back, and that was perfectly OK with him. It wasn't OK with me, but that wasn't the important thing—it was OK with him. . . . When I got the news, I just wasn't prepared for the way in which he was leaving and the finality of it. It was something that I think about a lot still.



Carolyn Griswold

When I was in high school—busy playing football and doing all the things that high school kids do—my sister left and went to Nyack. When I graduated from high school, . . . I enlisted in the army. So I never saw her during that period. When she graduated from Nyack, I came out of the army and went to Nyack, so there's a period of about 10 years there that as adults we never spent any time together except Thanksgiving Day and two or three days around Christmas. And the thing I am sad about is that I never got to know my sister as an adult.

[Carolyn] was a phenomenal person, not because she was my sister, but because her passion and her focus was so exciting and contagious. . . . She was everything; she was the kind of person who was never sarcastic—always kind, always loving. . . . I talked with Tom Stebbins, and he was saying he met Carolyn early on and thought she was an angel, thought she was a queen—she was a role model to him. It was great to hear someone else whom I respect and have known for 60 years say the same thing about my sister that I had experienced.

Ziemer: I was in my senior year at Wheaton College. I was actually helping to pack out a missionary couple going to South America, and there was a knock at the door. It was the college chaplain, and as soon as I saw him, I knew something pretty serious had happened. Then he broke the news that my father had been killed with some other missionaries, but he didn't have any of the details and didn't know what had happened to my mother. At that time I was a young guy, pretty confident life was going good, but the reality of that news was something that didn't shock me. All along, when you have loved ones in a war zone, you knew that any day something terrible could happen. Missionaries with other denominations had been killed. [In 1962] Archie Mitchell and Ardel Vietti [both C&MA] along with Dan Gerber [Mennonite Central Committee] had been kidnapped, so the risk was known. But still, when you get the word of something like that . . . it's pretty sobering.

AL: Do you think the mission should have asked the people in the field to come home sooner?

Ziemer: Yep. I think we all get calloused to all situations that we are in. The nature of danger, the degree of danger, being able to look at the information and sort it out is always very complex. Having been in the military, [I myself have been] responsible for life and death decisions: When do you commit? When do you not commit? When do you wait?

Those are not easy questions. Having been in World Relief and having people in Darfur, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, in Iraq—any time there is a personal risk, it's always a very, very difficult decision point on when [to] pull out, and it's a faith thing as well as just sheer safety. If you wanted people to be safe, you wouldn't put them in that environment, but that contradicts the nature of what you are trying to do: to help people in desperate situations. . . .



The Banmethuet leprosarium compound. The homes of the Ziemers and Thompsons are in the foreground. The house that Carolyn and Leon Griswold shared was on the right.

I've never second guessed it, because, having been in the military, [I know that] the way you try to discriminate and determine the go/no-go situation usually happens at the field level. I know for a fact my father routinely checked in with the local security folks. I know he was talking to the U.S. military daily. They had phone connections to the headquarters, so [if they had] any intelligence that would have triggered a withdrawal—to grab

their suitcases and run for the secure military base—they would have done that. The fact [was] that the situation kind of crept up. There is a tolerance—you get calloused—and when the situation sprung and the compound was in the middle of this attack, there was nothing that they could do.

The U.S. Army sent a couple of helicopters to see if they could fly in and whisk them away, but the firing was so intense that they couldn't jeopardize the crew. So that's one of those things that I have never second guessed, because I don't think it serves any purpose at this point.

AL: What kind of legacy do you feel was left behind?

Griswold: I think there's one interesting story that I should tell you. Trudy and I have two daughters. When my first daughter, Carolyn, was graduating from college, she was a major in English and creative writing, . . . so as her senior writing project she obtained as many of the letters from my father and sister [as she could]—those that my mother had passed on to me that my sister had written over the years—and created a book about Carolyn. That's an example of the impact that my sister has had upon one of my children.

Ziemer: I think any death in the family is a life-changing event, and frankly, I don't think you ever stop working through it. I think it's traumatic. You can accept it, you can understand it and each passing year, as you get any opportunity to look back, you can understand it and

accept it even better and in different ways. At this stage of my life, I have found [that] a point of it gives me an opportunity to encourage other people who have lost family members.

But when you bring in the church component to personal tragedy or missions, it changes everything. If someone dies in a car accident or someone dies from cancer, those are terrible things, and it's just devastating. But when you tie in the church, where you can ask, "Lord, why would you allow this to happen?" it changes the dynamic a tad bit. Early on I reconciled that while I couldn't quite see the picture, I was able to get to the decision point and the logic point that I could accept it just almost in blind faith. . . .

But it really wasn't until my mother was released, and I saw her back here in the United States that she affirmed what I had done and that was to



Ruth Wilting plays a recording for villagers.

embrace the truth of Scripture. Regardless of the circumstances, if we just claim the truth of what the Bible tells us, we can see things a bit more clearly. She worshipped in her own shy, quiet way through this entire situation. She never once complained. I've never heard her second guess. . . .

AL: The last thing I want to ask you is about what's been happening in Vietnam—how the church has really started to flourish there. How does

that make you feel . . . ?

Ziemer: It's encouraging to see how God works through man's hatred and the conflict of man's unwise decisions. In spite of the war, in spite of the viciousness, in spite of the terrorism, God had a plan, and it's encouraging to see how He used seven missionaries to go and build up this mission station: to set up a Bible school, translate the Scripture, build the church and give it the roots it needed to endure virtually 20 to 30 years of severe persecution. We've seen it happen in China and other countries, so the fact that God has replicated that type of response and that conflict situation really doesn't surprise me. . . .

The Christians—the pastors and the lay folks—endured the persecution throughout those years using the tools that were left behind, and today we have the church as it is. . . . God has moved people and given them the courage, the passion, the conviction to stand up and follow Him and serve the rest of the community. That outreach through their own national

tribes and through the Vietnamese people has basically caused the church to multiply in some places up to 500 percent.

I wouldn't say the end justifies the means at all. I'd love to have had my father [there] to watch me graduate, to celebrate the birth of my three kids, to cheer for me as I joined the Navy and flew off, to counsel with me, to mentor me and so I could call him up and bounce ideas against him. I've never had that. So I can't say I look back with joy, but I can look back with peace and contentment that God is at work, using individuals like you and me to accomplish His purposes.

Griswold: I knew most or at least [some] of the martyrs. . . . [T]hose people have had a phenomenal impact. Their character and the way in which they ministered was pretty much a copy, one of the other—giving, focused, a passion for Christ, a focus on the practicality and believability of the Word of God. . . . Just imagine being with six to eight people like that in Banmethuot as they did prayers together, as they shared their spiritual journey with one another, as they told about experiences that they had had with individual tribal people. Imagine the explosive nature of that. . . . I use the word "contagious" a lot when I talk about Carolyn, and the same is true with Bob Ziemer and the others I don't know the missionary group that worked in Saigon, Da Lat or other areas in Vietnam, but I do know the character of people who were missionaries on leave when I was a child. They were all the same. Carolyn was typical of the people that we met. . . . I see my sister as this great, wonderful giving person, but you know what, Josh? She's no different than the other missionaries. They are talented, brilliant, capable people with similar passion.

Tom Stebbins was Ruth Thompson's brother and Ed's brother-in-law. While serving as a C&MA missionary in Vietnam, Tom witnessed the fall of Saigon and was among the last to be evacuated from the U. S. Embassy compound.



AL: How do you feel that the death of Ruth and Ed Thompson left a legacy for your family?

Tom Stebbins: Ruth and Ed's death in Vietnam was the climax of their wonderful missionary career, and I've said many times they impacted many more people in death than they did in life. . . . Every young person who heard him preach wanted to give their lives to missions. And Ruth was equally eloquent. . . . But I firmly believe that through their deaths they impacted first of all their son David, who up until that time didn't know what he wanted to do with his life. . . . When he heard of their deaths, he committed his life to become a missionary doctor and now heads up the Bongolo Hospital in Gabon [where] thousands of Africans come to know Christ And now [Ed and Ruth's] granddaughter is serving in Kratie, the town where they served.

My daughter found Jesus Christ as her Savior when she heard of the death of her uncle and aunt, and most importantly, the tribal people in Vietnam were impressed. When I left . . . the day Vietnam fell, there were at most 60,000 [evangelical] Christians in Vietnam, including the tribal [groups]



The Thompson family

and the Vietnamese. Today there are 1 million. . . . A Vietnamese [pastor] . . . said, "When they saw that the messengers of the gospel were willing to lay their lives down for Jesus Christ, they said this must be the truth." And when tribal people come to Christ, they don't come to Christ as individuals; they come as whole villages. . . . I would estimate that probably 80 percent of that growth was among the tribal people of Vietnam. And it even spread up into the North where missionaries were not able to go for 30 or 40 years. So the impact [is] not just Ruth and Ed but also of Bob Ziemer,

. . . the Griswolds and the Mitchells and Archie, who was taken captive in 1962, and Ruth Wilting and Betty Olsen—it was a result of their sacrifice that these people were moved with the love of Christ. . . .

AL: How did you end up going back to Vietnam?

Stebbins: My wife and I served for 20 years in Vietnam. We studied Vietnamese in Da Nang, we served three and a half years in Tuy Hoa, six months in Da Lat, and we spent time in Da Nang and in Hue. It was during [our] second furlough that our missionaries were killed.

We were committed to Vietnam just like the ones who laid down their lives, and I knew that I was a target for the North Vietnamese and the Communists. In fact, four different times mines were put under the platform where I was preaching, and they didn't explode. We know that happened because the two Vietcong guys that did it came to Christ, and [one] said, "Where is missionary Stebbins now? What's happened to him? I tried to kill him. No way could I kill him."

We saw death on every hand. In the city where we lived we'd get up in the morning and find the head of a village chief in the middle of the park. So it's not like we didn't know that there was a war taking place or many people laying their lives down.

In 1972 I was in Zamboanga, Philippines, speaking to a group of pastors [when] I [received word] that the North Vietnamese had just crossed the DMZ and were invading South Vietnam. I hurried back and gathered our mission committee and the church committee together. We fired off a

cable to Dr. Nathan Bailey [then president of the U.S. C&MA] and asked him to have a day of prayer. On May 1, 1972, The Alliance worldwide had a day of prayer [asking] that God would turn back the enemies and give us an extended time. Praise God, He gave us three more years, and they were the most fruitful years of all of our time in Vietnam. . . . So our trust was totally in God, and our lives were in His hands. In any minute we knew that He could take us home. . . . Serving Christ in Vietnam was the highest honor, the greatest privilege, any young man could want.

AL: Why would The Alliance stay in Vietnam so long in spite of all that was going on there?

Stebbins: The number one reason missionaries stayed until April 30, 1975, is that we trusted in God. But we also trusted that God would grant wisdom to the leaders of The Christian and Missionary Alliance, and they would call us out of Vietnam when we should move. . . . We also would get security reports from the U.S. military [about] where it was safe to travel and where it wasn't. We would not go anywhere that the U.S. military would say [was] a questionable area. In the closing years, most of our work was in the cities, and the Christians would go off into the countryside and witness. So it's not like we were being careless. We were trusting God, we were obeying those over us and these were the most fruitful years of our whole ministry. To pack up our bags and leave Vietnam when we were seeing the most fruit would [have been] a serious mistake. . . .

AL: What did you see happening during that time?

Stebbins: When I went back to Vietnam for my fourth term I was appointed first of all to be pastor of the International Church in Saigon, and then . . . I was . . . the field-wide evangelist. I was invited up to Da Nang to preach at a district conference. On March 10, 1975, we got word that Banmethout had been taken by the Communists. Betty Mitchell had been taken captive and was on her way up to Hanoi somewhere through the jungles. The Communists were gradually taking city after city, so I hurried back to Saigon, and for the next month or so I preached in the Vietnamese churches and evangelistic services and saw people coming to Christ like we'd never seen before—droves of people coming to Christ.

On April 8 my wife was scheduled to leave Vietnam on the last commercial flight. On [that day] the North Vietnamese dropped bombs on the presidential palace. Saigon went into havoc; people were fleeing . . . to the suburbs. . . . My wife was helped back to our house, which was just a few blocks from the presidential palace. I got back there, and then [field director] Jack Gravelle said, "Tom, you better get out with Donna." So I left on the last Pan Am flight out of Vietnam to Manila. . . . We expected that things would turn around like they had so many times, but finally, on April 28, Gravelle left Vietnam—the last American to leave.

I called headquarters, and they said, "Tom, we need you to go back and sponsor 500 people that need to escape." There was no commercial travel, so I went to the military base and told the U.S. chaplain, "Sir, I need to go back to Vietnam." He said, "If you want to get back to Vietnam you have to go over the head of our commanding general." So I called our headquarters . . . and Dr. [Louis] King said, "Tom, you stay right there at the airport. We'll get word over his head."

To make a long story short, they contacted Billy Graham, and Graham contacted President Gerald Ford, who sent a cable to the commanding general: "Send Tom Stebbins back into Vietnam." The chaplain . . . quickly drove me out to one of the C130 aircraft. They had to land in corkscrew fashion in Saigon because the airport was already surrounded by North Vietnamese armies. When I got off the aircraft, I showed them the cable from the White House, and they . . . took me right to the embassy. I said to the vice ambassador, "Sir, I'm back here to take 500 people out of Vietnam. They are Christians that are blacklisted; they'll be wiped out when the Communists take over." He said, "Go get their names, and we'll put them on the next aircraft." [While I was at the church], bombers . . . destroyed the [C130] planes at the airfield.

I rushed to the U.S. embassy and helped Dr. Dustin, the embassy doctor, get over the wall into the [compound]. We had to get into the embassy through the garbage disposal door because everything was locked up. We couldn't find the Marines anywhere but lay on the floor until the firing subsided.

Then the vice ambassador said, "We have to evacuate by helicopter, and we have 2,000 people." I said, "I will help the Marines." . . . I spent maybe 12 hours interpreting while helicopters both on the roof of the embassy and in the parking lot were loaded with evacuees. Finally, at one o'clock in the morning, Dr. Dustin said, "Pastor, this is it. If you don't get on the next helicopter you'll get left." I went up six stories to the roof of the embassy and boarded the third from the last helicopter to leave Vietnam.

[We] flew so low, just missing the treetops, I was sure we were going to get fired at from below, but God helped us to reach the aircraft carrier. I stood on the deck and looked back at the coast of Vietnam—the land where I was born, the land where I had served for 20 years, the land where I had more friends, more churches, than anywhere in this world—and I had a broken heart. I wept for several hours, and then at last, when there were no more [evacuees to interpret for], I went down in the hull of the ship, and the ship took us to the Philippine Islands.

I flew in a C130 to Guam, and my wife and I were instructed to spend the next year helping sponsor the Vietnamese for transportation to America.

We spent exactly one year on Guam ministering to thousands of Vietnamese and preaching the gospel to them. . . . Today there are several pastors that then were just converts on the island of Guam.

AL: How [did] you [find] out what had been happening in Vietnam?

Stebbins: In 1994 someone gave my wife and me two roundtrip tickets to Vietnam for our fortieth anniversary. . . . Our son was teaching English in Hanoi, and we had a chance for the first time to visit the churches in the north. . . . Every church we visited was literally exploding with people. . . . And the truth of it is that through great persecution, these people came to realize that the gospel was the truth.

Last time I was in Vietnam, in April 2007, I preached in the delta, in the south, in the center and in Hanoi. Everywhere I preached people came to Christ, and as long as we were preaching in churches we had freedom. . . . In the church in Saigon, they were singing "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," and in the balcony I saw hundreds of Christians thanking God for His faithfulness. I wept like a baby. . . .

We praise God that through His faithful witnesses and even in the absence of missionaries or missionary dollars, God was at work through His people. We thank God for the leadership of The Christian and Missionary Alliance that taught indigenous principles, so when we served in Vietnam prior to 1975, we were building a self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting church. They didn't need the missionary any longer. . . . And sometimes that's what it takes—the missionary needs to get off the scene and let the nationals that we've been training take over. The work literally exploded—it multiplied beyond our wildest dreams—and that's what we praise God for today. God is faithful; He's building His Church, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.



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