

Newsletter for Friends of TOP (Tours Of Peace) Vietnam Veterans



TOP Voices

Winter 2008-2009

From the desk of TOP (Tours Of Peace) Vietnam Veteran's President, Jess DeVaney:

TOP is a nonprofit humanitarian organization providing veteran & family support, primarily through Tours of Peace. These trips offer opportunity for travel in Vietnam--see it as it is today, revisit areas of personal meaning, and meet war survivors, as well as those who grew up in post-war years. The experience includes humanitarian projects which provide food, medicine, clothing, school supplies, tools, and livestock to villages, orphanages, elderly homes, schools, and health facilities. Trips offer a safe environment for veteran & family healing and closure from war-related matters close to the heart.

The highest number of TOP trip applicants are daughters of Vietnam veterans. The love and support from the daughters is an amazing phenomenon. They return with TOP looking to understand their fathers and grow closer to their special relationship. These courageous ladies often travel with us solo, their fathers with them in spirit.



“As the daughter of a Vietnam Veteran, who has struggled my entire life to understand my father’s troubling experiences as a Vietnam Veteran in the mid 1960’s, I realized a dream I never thought would happen, unfold before my very eyes when I became a part of Tours of Peace Vietnam Veterans.” Shelley Fleming-Wigglesworth

Shelley’s father served in the Navy’s Seabees in Vietnam. She visited his area of service in Vietnam with TOP recently. Upon return, she hit the ground running—speaking out to the press, public and publishing articles about Vietnam veteran and family issues. Shelley puts a face to our Vietnam veteran daughters and symbolizes what a TOP trip does.

“Because of TOP, I re-traced my father’s footsteps, and experienced many of the same Vietnam sights, sounds, smells, and tastes he experienced: The unbearable heat and humidity, taste of fish sauce and the singing sound of the Vietnamese spoken language. I was able to stand, safely and quietly, on grounds where he once stood in fear and amidst gunshots. I had no doubt I would return home. My father probably doubted whether he would make it back home every day he was in Vietnam. What changes and contrasts four decades can bring!”



Daughters sometimes put a period to their father’s service; many dads served with the intention of helping Vietnamese: *“A very important trip aspect was the Humanitarian portion. Because of this, I was better able to understand similarities that bond us as people together, regardless of country, race, ethnicity, social class, or even the devastating effects and aftermath of war. I was able to hold sick children and soothe them. I distributed supplies to the needy, interacted with the*

lonely, held hands of the elderly. Perhaps the most often overlooked but ever powerful thing I was able to do and share, was to exchange many smiles, which cross over all language barriers.”

“One of TOP’s mottos is ‘By helping others we help ourselves’. I was fortunate to fully experience this first hand, in simple yet powerful ways; under the safe guidance and leadership of Jess DeVaney, who carefully and painstakingly plans with compassion each Tours of Peace mission.”



The trip can be life-changing for daughters and often trickles down into the family. It offers promise and a beginning for a new future: *“My TOP experience has significantly changed my life for the better, has given me a renewed sense of hope for the future, as well as the opportunity for some long awaited healing and closure for both myself, and my father.”*

Shelley and daughters like her inspired this newsletter’s theme of “healing and closure.” In this edition, we take you to that special place where healing and closure occurs. Shelley’s words offer proof that it is possible and attainable. However, it does not come without hard work. Soldiers salute those who deserve their respect. We salute Shelley and daughters of Vietnam veterans whom she puts a face to. One of our Family Program travelers said it best, *“We fought a war too. It was just on a different battlefield.”* TOP and Vietnam veteran fathers salute you.

We invite you to read and enjoy our newsletter. Please witness the healing and closure TOP offers, and is the result of those who worked hard to find that special place. – Jess DeVaney

Make a dream come true: Without means, some daughter and Family Program applicants may not realize their dreams. TOP’s available financial trip aid is directly related to our supporters’ contributions. Gifts we receive for trip sponsorships translate to financial aid we make available. Without contributions to TOP, or help from daughters’ communities, trips are out of reach for some. Please help make a Vietnam veteran daughter’s dream come true and send your gift to “TOP Vietnam Veterans.” Mention, “I want to make a dream come true.” We will apply your life-changing donation toward our Family Program’s trip aid.

About TOP: TOP (Tours Of Peace) Vietnam Veterans is an independent nonprofit 501(c)3 organization founded in 1998, to help Vietnam veterans and families heal and find closure through Tours Of Peace. The Foundation is comprised of five programs: Veterans, Family, Humanitarian, Personal Effects, and Education. Tours Of Peace revisit sites of personal meaning, and conduct humanitarian projects nearby--meeting needs of orphans, villagers, and elderly. TOP and participants retrieve personal effects, left behind during the war. We research and attempt to return effects to families and veterans. TOP educates the public about Vietnam veteran & family issues, the War, and Vietnam as it is today. Our approach integrates group support and humanitarian components, based on the principal, “by helping others we help ourselves.”

Important : TOP’s Zip Code Changed to 85756-9275. Please update your address books. (The rest of our address remains the same).

Begin your Tour Of Peace (download the trip application; go here for healing & closure):

<http://www.topvietnamveterans.org/genapp.pdf>

TOP breaks the cycle of trauma and despair, providing veterans and families with programs for healing and closure.

Live Event Moment

It is difficult for some to imagine the existence of healing & closure, after being stuck in a life of misery.



Question to TOP at a veteran's event:

"I believe in healing, but is there ever really closure?"

TOP: "Yes. However, the public has been imprinted with a Vietnam stereotype of a broken war that produced broken veterans. The concept of closure is difficult to recognize and accept . . . even sometimes by those who have seen and experienced it. themselves."



The end of the rainbow; the light at the end of the tunnel. When reaching the place of healing & closure, what does it look and feel like? Would you recognize it if you were on a Tour Of Peace?

(Above) Healing and closure is found by both orphans, with challenging lives lying ahead, and Vietnam veterans who leave a life of challenge behind.

Lives are rebuilt upon a lasting foundation for a better future.

TOP Appreciates Our Dependable Tithers

Tithing good for you and TOP: We thank our regular contributors, such as John McGrath from Puyallup, WA. John sends monthly gifts to TOP. Each gift is always appreciated and never taken for granted. We look forward to applying consistent giving toward ongoing programs. Smaller monthly gifts accumulate into large contributions. Some Vietnam veterans and family find it healing to regularly give to our cause. Others offer regular thoughtful gifts as a way of saying "Welcome home," to Vietnam veterans. Tithing helps us plan, prepare and adds up to big rewards for those who benefit from our programs. Please join our band of tithers and send your gift to "TOP Vietnam Veterans."

News Flash – TOP Blog debuts at <http://topvets.blogspot.com>. Introducing an Internet alternative and access for dedicated TOP followers. Visit the blog for thought sharing, issues, and answers to often-asked questions. Get "real time" updates, sometimes before newsletters. Discover creative ways to interact with TOP. Blog readers will be privy to information not found in other TOP venues; for example, "Meet a member of the Trip Support Team" and learn more about retired Lt. Col. Bruce Logan's role on our next Tour Of Peace. Please bookmark it.



Native American Veteran & Family Efforts Recognized

The award bears the star that is a prominent part of our TOP logo.

Jess DeVaney gratefully shared with George Bearpaw, Indian Services Director, "I will treasure the trophy plaque." He continued, "I always wanted to be a part of the Native American family, and this award had additional special meaning for me."

Place of tragedy; Place for healing

Geography, history and hearts merge toward a special moment that this My Lai Massacre survivor and TOP veteran share together.



News Flash – New Zealand – The above-My Lai picture was selected as part of an overseas children's reader entitled, "Patching Up the Past."

Almost that time of year--Charitable Contribution Tax Deadline Fast Approaching

End-of-year opportunities to include charitable contributions for taxes is near. Please send contributions to TOP Vietnam Veterans, 8000 S. Kolb Road, Suite 43, Tucson, AZ 85756-9275. Unless noted by you, your gift is used for projects and expenses we determine have the greatest need. TOP is a nonprofit corporation recognized as tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

100 TOP Scholarships Annually Awarded to the Disadvantaged in Rural Vietnam

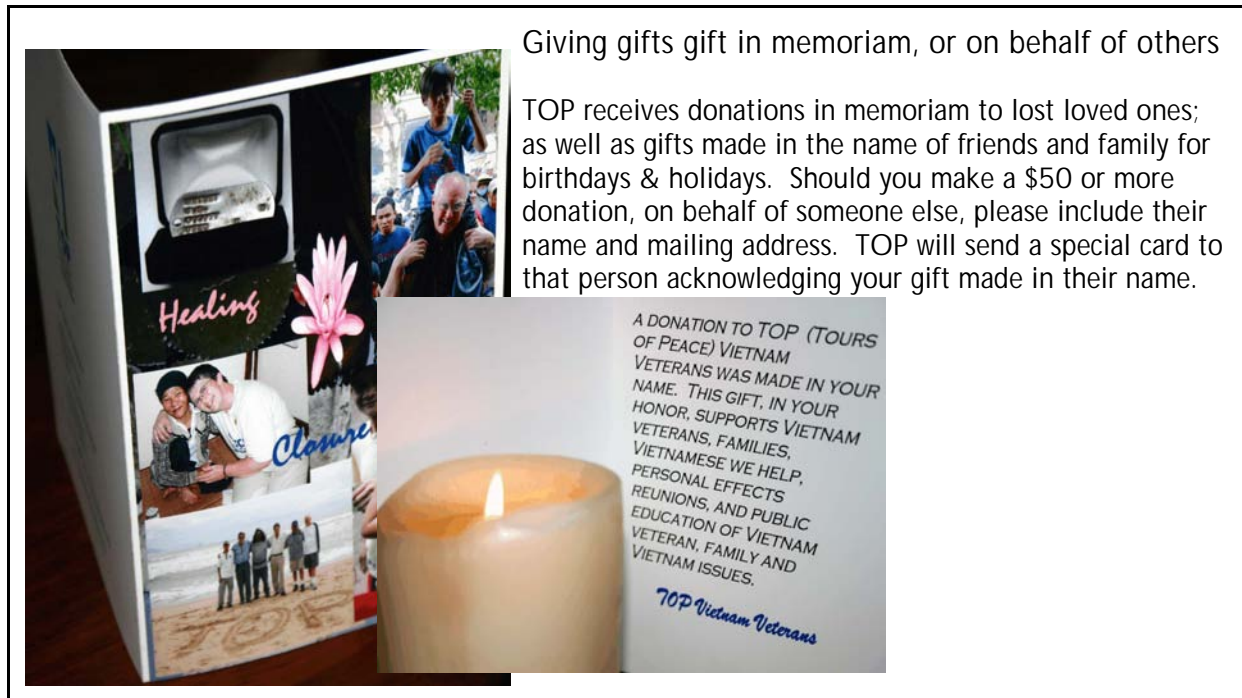
One of TOP's long-term solutions is our TOP Scholarships, annually awarded in Hue to physically and financially challenged children, especially those living in rural villages. Recipients progress through school until college age. Please mention "TOP Scholarship when sending gifts to "TOP Vietnam Veterans. These gifts encourage healing & closure between Vietnamese and Americans.



Finding new friends and family, at the place where family and friends were lost—part of the healing & closure process.

TOP's group support component enables participants to share common bonds and support each other in the place where it all began.





Giving gifts gift in memoriam, or on behalf of others

TOP receives donations in memoriam to lost loved ones; as well as gifts made in the name of friends and family for birthdays & holidays. Should you make a \$50 or more donation, on behalf of someone else, please include their name and mailing address. TOP will send a special card to that person acknowledging your gift made in their name.

Healing & Closure Accompanies Returned Personal Effects

TOP recovers Personal Effects left behind by soldiers during the war and returns them to surviving families and veterans. The personal effect, often a dog tag, symbolizes a period placed at the end of a very long chapter in recipient's lives. Poignant reunions & homecomings are sites of healing & closure which sometimes occur in unexpected spots:

Portland, OR – Grave-side is site of healing & closure for surviving family.



Ronald Nepper's dog tag was presented posthumously at his final resting place, with family present. The event reunited the family; including Vietnam veteran relation, flying in from as far as Reno. The emotional homecoming included TOP Tag Team members, Linda & Gary Stocker.

At the ceremony TOP provided information about Ronald's service the family had not previously known: After Ronnie went into the service (July 1967), they had heard little about what transpired during his time in the Marines. They were unaware he was a "Non-Commissioned Officer" who attained the rank of Sergeant. As recipient of a Purple Heart Medal with one oak leaf cluster, he was wounded twice. He returned from Vietnam in 1968 and served his remaining active duty as a Rifle Marksmanship Instructor. He was discharged from active service in 1969, just 11 years before he died.



TOP President's letter was read: *"It is with great respect and gratitude for the service, in Vietnam, of Ronald Reed Nepper, that we return this Personal Effect to the family. We*

hope this is a welcomed discovery and this small object will bring him closer to you, as you hold it in your hand. Perhaps it will promote further healing and closure from your loss. We are privileged to return this tag home to you as a way to honor his memory and service."

The ceremony concluded with held hands and prayer. "Emotions not already risen, were apparent at that point as we all felt a sense of closure, and that appropriate tribute had finally been paid after all these years," Linda Stocker.



Fast Fact: Ronald's family is one of 49 surviving families of deceased veterans who received personal effects from TOP to date (as we regularly find more families, even as we print this newsletter). Personal Effects are returned free of charge, as a public service, and way to honor the service of soldiers, and family sacrifices. Costs & expenses associated with returning these treasurers, are covered by supporter's gifts sent to "TOP Vietnam Veterans."

Stories in the Making:



Russell Fordham

Berlin, Germany -- Killed-In-Action soldier Russell Fordham's dog tag is enroute to surviving German family in Berlin. A highly decorated 2-tour soldier, Russell also received medals from service in Germany and Korea. TOP representative, Ilka Hahn, will present his widow, Christa, with his tag, in Germany. To be continued . . .

Fast Fact: As in Germany, TOP has worldwide support. Pictured are Japan's Mitoyo Junior High School volunteers, who championed a humanitarian shipment for TOP's Vietnam use. Arigatou gozaimasu! (Thank you!)

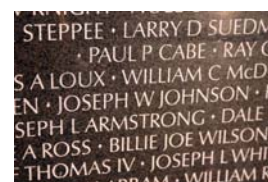


Please update us on changes or news about yourself. To remove your name from our mailing list, please contact us. TOP respects your privacy. We welcome your comments and suggestions.



HCMC, Vietnam --Medal of Honor Winner's Effect Found! Medal of Honor winner, David F. Winder's dog tag has been recovered by TOP on our recent Vietnam Tour Of Peace. David was heroically killed-in-action. At this press time, arrangements are being made to escort the tag to surviving family in Philadelphia. More to follow . . .

Names on The Wall: TOP has returned **33** personal effects to surviving families of soldiers killed-in-action—their names immortalized on the Vietnam War Memorial. Additionally, **25% of TOP's returned tags were received by surviving families** who either lost their family member in the war or afterward.





In Memoriam: Meet Chance; the son of an American soldier killed-in-action lost his father in southern Vietnam, where this orphan girl strumming his guitar lost her parents. They find healing & closure together as they speak the same international language of music. Chance's trip and contributions have been made in loving memory of Mother, Pat, and Father, James Wayne.

Veterans Heal With Their Returns

Healing & closure can occur with the return of Personal Effects retrieved on Tours Of Peace. **247 of TOP's returned tags have been reunited with veterans themselves.** Many veterans we return dog tags to wear them daily afterward:



"Dear Jess, I can't begin to tell you what it meant . . . Certainly more "closure" was attained. I have the dog tag around my neck. When I feel it occasionally, it will prompt me to remember how lucky I am to be alive and here living close to a normal life. Think well of yourselves, you deserve it. Jim S."

As well, we are grateful for our supporters whose monetary gifts cover the many costs associated with getting personal effects back home.

Dog Tags Flock to TOP From Around the World

Many Vietnamese and global travelers, learning of TOP's Personal Effects cause, have "volunteered to help" in a unique way. We thank those who entrust and donate additional dog tags found in Vietnam to TOP. TOP receives tags from Vietnamese residents, as well as tourists, via mail. Some of our volunteer contributors are Vietnam veterans. We are grateful to those who have recently sent dog tags to TOP, including: Dennis Capilouto, Bruce Clark (Australia), Mikella Hurley (Switzerland), Richard Ostrowski, Adam Rosen and Terry Young.

Special thanks

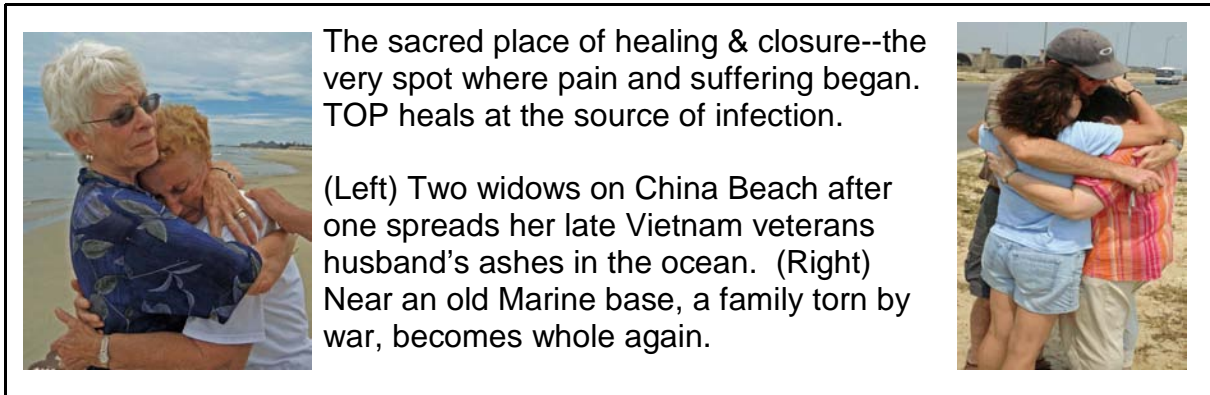
TOP is grateful to MyFamily.com for granting us free access to their databases on Ancestry.com and "People Finder." These resources are making a measurable difference in the return of personal effects to Vietnam veterans and surviving families.



Personal Effects Wish List

TOP began our Personal Effects Program in the 90's with one item belonging to a soldier killed-in-action. Little did we know that by 2009 we would have collected **1,946** personal effects, most of which is our priceless dog tag collection. Like the "Old

Woman Who Lived in a Shoe," we now have so many personal effects we need a new "shoe." On TOP of our "Personal Effects Wish List," is a tall, wide-body vault, able to withstand theft, fire and protect these national treasures from further corrosion. Please help protect priceless treasures, once worn by heroes, by sending your monetary gift to "TOP Vietnam Veterans" and mention, **"Protect the national treasurers."**



The sacred place of healing & closure--the very spot where pain and suffering began. TOP heals at the source of infection.

(Left) Two widows on China Beach after one spreads her late Vietnam veterans husband's ashes in the ocean. (Right) Near an old Marine base, a family torn by war, becomes whole again.

"I want to clear out TOP's stockroom" – TOP receives hand-sewn leprosy bandages from volunteers, more than our suitcases can hold. Bandages



await monetary contributions to pay for shipment. Once shipped, TOP can personally deliver them to remote Vietnam villages. Recently, this box of bandages was shipped at a \$37 cost to our destination nearly 10,000 miles away. Inside the box



were precious hand-sewn leprosy bandages, specifically made for re-use with wounds associated with leprosy. Shipping cost is a bargain, considering that those suffering from leprosy value each bandage as priceless. When you send your monetary gift for safe shipment to "TOP Vietnam Veterans," please mention, *"I want to clear out TOP's stockroom,"* and we will apply your gift to leprosy bandage shipment.



Until next time . . .



The healing and closure in this newsletter was brought to you by TOP participants, volunteers and supporters. We hope you enjoyed seeing what it looks like—please tell others that it exists and is possible: We leave you with a special place where a combat pilot's wife teaches orphans the "Bunny Hop." It is a place of miracles, where an orphan without hands (because of Agent Orange exposure), plays a harmonica



TOP gave him. Pain & suffering magically transforms to music and laughter. New stories replace old ones. A source of tears and tragedy is now a resource for joy. For daughter's, like Shelley Wigglesworth, the world is turned upside down, in a very good way.



During these challenging economic times, please remember us with your financial support. We have many friends who love & believe in what we do, but sadly do not "put their money where their mouths are." Pats on the back do not fund our programs. We commend the courage it takes during these difficult times to make TOP a budgetary priority. Making TOP a "necessity" gives others life-changing necessities.

TOP cannot exist without financial support. The good news is a little goes a long way, especially in Vietnam. As well, our overhead is so low that most of what you give goes directly to projects and programs. Your gift counts—you are not lost in the crowd among millions of charity minded givers.

No matter the gift size--\$20, \$50, \$100, or \$10,000--TOP appreciates every donation; we feel a closeness to all of our gift-giving partners. Your donation makes a difference in people's lives. Your prompt action transforms despair into triumph for those who wait, hoping help will come. Your donation has tremendous impact. We invite you to play a part in providing the healing & closure you have read about in this newsletter. Until next time . . . with your support, our next newsletter will reveal even more miracles, opportunities, healing and closure.

✂ -----Cut here and place near your computer-----

Reminder Sticky Note: To begin the Tour Of Peace process and return with TOP to Vietnam for healing & closure . . . go to:

✓ <http://www.topvietnamveterans.org/genapp.pdf>

✂ ----- Cut here and include next page with your gift to TOP-----

Reminder Sticky Note: Send gift to:

✓ TOP Vietnam Veterans
8000 S. Kolb Road
Suite 43
Tucson, AZ 85756-9275

Yes! I want to help provide opportunity and support TOP Vietnam Veteran's projects & programs. Enclosed is my tax deductible* contribution to be used as specified:

\$____ **Veterans:** Help sponsor a veteran's Vietnam Tour Of Peace.

\$____ **Families: (*I want to make a dream come true.*)** Help sponsor a veteran's family member's Vietnam Tour Of Peace.

\$____ **Humanitarian:** Aids needy Vietnamese with support (such as tools, water purification systems) and short-term needs (food, clothing, medical, and school supplies). TOP oversees all projects and ensures goods & services are delivered & administered to those who need them and whom they are intended for.

\$____ ***I want to clear out TOP's stockroom:*** Help defray humanitarian shipping costs.

\$____ **TOP Scholarships:** "*Throw out the band-aid solutions.*" Long-term educational solution offering scholastic help for challenged Vietnamese children.

\$____ **Personal Effects:** Reunite surviving family members, or veterans, with personal belongings left long ago in Vietnam.

\$____ ***"Protect the national treasurers:"*** Help TOP provide a new Personal Effects vault.

\$____ **TOP's Discretionary Fund:** Funds projects of greatest need.

\$____ **Endowment:** Builds for TOP's future.

\$____ **In Memoriam:** Gift made in remembrance of (name): _____

\$____ **Birthday or Holiday Gift:** (\$50+ gifts include name & address to send card to):

First name: _____

Last name: _____

Street: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

*Your contribution may be tax deductible; please consult your tax advisor.

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(Newsletter Business Card)