

The Behrend Beacon

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# Texas Tech is home to premiere institute for study of Vietnam War

by Chris Vaughn  
Knight Ridder Newspapers

Nguyen Xuan Phong cupped his hand to his mouth and caught his breath, his presentation in the process of being overtaken by raw pain.

"I haven't spoken of this publicly in almost 30 years," he said.

A former minister in the South Vietnamese government who never left the country, Phong continued, almost preaching a rambling but captivating sermon of the causes, the casualties and the consequences of the Vietnam War, on him, on veterans, on the people of his nation.

"In conclusion, I have four words to add," he said, addressing the Vietnamese government that silenced him. "As Moses said in Exodus, 'Let my people go.'"

His remarks, expected to be all but perfunctory, were stunning in their impact on the room, which rose to cheer him for an unflinching, and risky, speech.

It is all the more stunning that Phong, who knew the Vietnam peace talks from the inside, chose to break his silence in Lubbock, a city best known for dust storms and cotton gins, Buddy Holly and Big 12 football.

But every three years, a disparate group of Vietnam experts from around the globe arrives for a conference organized by the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University, which has quietly built itself into a destination site for those wanting to study one of the nation's most trying periods.

"There are people from 11 countries in Lubbock to talk about the Vietnam War," said the center's founder and director, James Reckner. "That's fairly bizarre."

Reckner seems surprised by the developments of the past 12 years. The center has amassed the world's most complete research collection about the war aside from that of the U.S. government, and the triennial conferences attract dozens of major players from the period.

Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the classified history of the buildup in Vietnam known as the Pentagon Papers in 1971; Luu van Loi, former assistant foreign minister for Vietnam and a close friend of Ho Chi Minh; Gen. Nguyen Khanh, former South Vietnam prime minister; and Phong made a lineup of living history, not to mention one that would create instant friction.

Reckner opened the conference with a warning: "We will have civil discourse. If anyone should be uncivil, the officers of the Lubbock Police Department will escort you from the con-

ference."

People laughed, but Reckner didn't. The Vietnam War, or the American War to the Vietnamese, can still generate a barrelful of red-hot emotions.

The fact that someone is as likely to argue as to agree is what draws many professors here.

Reckner organizes an exotic, tension-infused conference. Men who spent years in communist re-education camps, active-duty Vietnamese officers, former prime ministers and ambassadors, American combat veterans and bowtied professors all share the stage.

He enjoys having participants from the war at the conferences because they provide a constant reality check to academics who know the war through books and classrooms.

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*-James Reckner, director of the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University, on keeping emotions under control at the annual Vietnam conference*

"This is the only place I know where anybody is welcome," said Keith Taylor, a Cornell University professor and an expert in Southeast Asia. "Most conferences are specialized, where people already agree on things. Most of my colleagues, most of my students, aren't prepared to be in a mix like this."

A few hours later, Taylor was forcefully informed by an Army veteran that he was flat wrong - about everything.

The first conference was in 1993. Twenty-four speakers came, none from overseas. Former CIA director William Colby attended, though he had to pay his own hotel bill. The conference dealt exclusively with military topics.

This year, almost 100 presenters attended from 11 countries, including Canada, France, Denmark, Poland, South Korea and Australia. Their lectures topics included Lyndon B. Johnson, Amerasians, combat medicine, women in war and Vietnamese-Chinese relations. This time, the speakers' hotel bills were covered.

Wilbur Scott, a sociology professor at the University of Oklahoma who served in Vietnam, was particularly pleased to see the conference draw more anti-war viewpoints, something that

may have been missing in previous conferences.

"I'm still a participant in this with my own strongly held views," Reckner said. "I'm a hard-core conservative. At the same time, I'm an educator. I believe in the classic liberal idea of education."

Reckner came to Texas Tech in 1988 after a brief teaching stint at Texas A&M.

Shortly after he arrived at Tech's history department, Reckner asked 100 freshmen a series of questions about post-World War II history. Only one could identify the general most associated with the Vietnam War, Gen. William Westmoreland.

"I knew I had to teach a course on the Vietnam War," he said. "But I went to the library to prepare and found that our resources were remarkably sparse. They weren't enough to support an undergraduate course, let alone a graduate course."

The university gave Reckner \$300 a year to buy materials for the library, but he struck out on a far more ambitious plan - to create a place to gather and preserve material from the war, a place to study the war.

He called his idea the Vietnam Center. In October 1989, the board of regents approved the plan. The first donation to the archives were the letters from a Slaton, Texas, boy to his mother, from Vietnam.

"In the first years, we didn't get much support," he said. "The Vietnam Center was my briefcase then."

Twelve year later, if "center" implies building, it shouldn't. The Vietnam Center is in the basement of the math building, and the archives are in an annex of the main library.

Plans for a free-standing building have been delayed because of the \$20 million-plus cost, all of which must be raised privately.

But the staff numbers 36, although half of those are undergraduate and graduate students. The budget, for the first time boosted by federal money, has hit \$1.25 million.

Its collection includes 20,000 books, 30,000 photographs, 4 million pages of documentation and several thousand detailed maps of Southeast Asia.

Berkeley still has a notable collection of Vietnam-related material, as does Cornell. But in the view of many people, Tech's is incomparable. Much of the reason, they say, is because the center is in Lubbock, where Vietnam wasn't a dirty word in 1989.

"The climate here was conducive," said Ed Marolda, senior historian with the Naval Historical Center in Washington. "I'm not sure it could have been done anywhere but the Southwest."

# Air Force cadets face hackers in cyberbattle

by John Diedrich  
The Gazette (KRT)

The military's might increasingly depends on computers, but that created a target for the enemy.

Air Force Academy cadets are finding out this week how hard it can be to protect computers from bad guys. They are playing defense against some of the best hackers: computer experts from military and intelligence agencies.

It's the second annual Cyber Defense Exercise, a competition involving the Air Force Academy, the Military Academy at West Point, the Naval Academy, the Coast Guard Academy and the Naval Postgraduate School.

Students at each school are being attacked by the professionals and scored on how well they defend their systems. The competition began Monday and ends Friday. Computer defense is critical for the military, which has 2 1/2 million computers and is finding the number of cyber attacks is exploding.

In 2000, there were more than 23,000 attempted attacks, but officials refuse to say who was attacking. Last year, attacks jumped to more than 41,000, said Army Maj. Barry Venable, spokesman for Colorado Springs-based U.S. Space Command, which oversees computer defense.

Attacks are up, but the military has gotten better at defending their systems, Venable said. "We have information superiority," he said.

In a classroom at the Air Force Academy, 20 cadets are learning how to have that superiority. Two weeks ago they were given 13 computers and told to build defenses for them.

The computers were typical of the computers sold to consumers, full of holes that can be targeted by hackers to capture systems.

These computer science and computer engineering majors built such defenses as firewalls and e-mail protections, and studied hacking tools.

For many of the cadets in the exercise, it's the first time they have applied their book knowledge to defending computers.

"It's raw experience you can't get in the classroom," Steven Norris, a 21-year-old senior, said Tuesday. "You have to make mistakes. It's like a mechanic learning to fix a car in a book. You have to touch a car."

Norris and some of his classmates spent five hours or more a day in the lab this week, monitoring and responding to attacks by the "red forces."

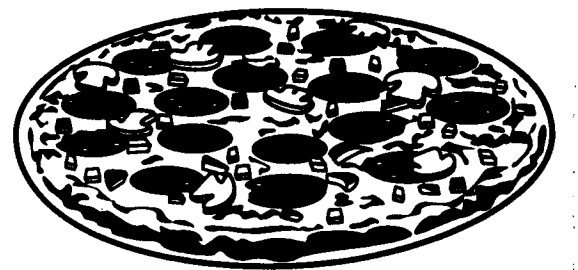
By late Tuesday, the aggressors successfully broke into one of the cadets' systems, costing them points in the competition.

Cadet Jay Ford, 22, a senior, plans to fly jets, but he finds value in the exercise.

"The problem is always there. Computer security needs to be a mindset, not just a series of practices," he said.

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