

Online Footnote Format

A Vietnam Presence: Mennonites in Vietnam During the American War

PREFACE TO THE ONLINE FOOTNOTE FORMAT

When doing my original writing and editing the text of *A Vietnam Presence*, I did significant footnoting. I then chose to prepare the material for publication without footnoting. However, whenever the source and dating of footnoted items seemed important, I included that specific information in the 2016 published text.

It now seems important that a footnoted format be made available for researchers and other interested persons. This text is not identical to the published edition. Some chapters in this footnoted version contain a bit more—or less—material than in the 2016 published edition.

This online footnoted format lacks some resources from the published edition. The **Introduction** contains the Forward, the Preface, a Table of Contents, and a list of acronyms used in the text. There are no maps.

The text is divided into three sections: **Book One**, 1954-1963, **Book Two**, 1964-1970, and **Book Three**, 1971-1975.

This online format contains no maps and no photographs; the published book has more than 170 photographs—most of them never before published.

The **Addendum** of this online format contains material from the published edition: a Brief Timeline, a Vietnam Fact Sheet, a Glossary of Vietnamese names and words, and Lists of Persons who served with Mennonite Central Committee, Vietnam Mennonite Mission, and Vietnam Christian Service. It also features an exhaustive Bibliography; the published version had only a brief Annotated Bibliography. This online format contains no index; researchers will need the published edition to easily find certain material.

A new section of **Statements** has been added. These were not included in the published book. These include policy statements, and letters and statements speaking out against the war.

A copy of the book with a footnoted text was placed in the archives at Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 2215 Millstream Rd., Lancaster, PA 19602 in “Luke S. Martin, Personal Papers.” It has not been possible for this online format to follow the same page numbering of that copy nor of the published edition.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) began working in Vietnam in 1954. The Vietnam Mennonite Mission began its ministries in 1957. During 1966-1972 MCC partnered with Church World Service and Lutheran World Relief in Vietnam Christian Service. This is a telling of the Mennonite story in Vietnam from 1954 to 1975.

I trust that you will find this online material useful.

- Luke S. Martin, 09-2020 – lukmarpa@gmail.com

*A Vietnam Presence:
Mennonites in Vietnam During the American War*

By Luke S. Martin

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DEDICATION

In recognition of my father, Daniel Hoover Martin,
who modeled a life of Christian integrity

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

- JESUS

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ORIGINAL FOREWORD

A Vietnam Presence: American Mennonites in Vietnam During the American War

During the 1960s and 1970s the small southeast Asian country of Vietnam was the focal point of much world-wide attention. Locally the struggle involved the principal world powers of Asia, Europe and North America, particularly the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union and its allies.

In the midst of the struggle on the ground in South Vietnam there was a small North American Christian group representing the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (now Eastern Mennonite Missions) who dared to establish a Vietnamese Mennonite Church. Living through violent conflict and its aftermath, the church has today become a network of thriving congregations.

This volume records this remarkable story of a developing church. Although billed as a memoir, *A Vietnam Presence* is also a reliable history. It also includes an account of the work of a partner service group, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The earlier established MCC provided an entrée for the launching of a mission program.

The author of this significant study story lived most of this story. He provides us with a wise, trustworthy and understated account. Luke Martin read widely in letters, diaries, reports, and published material while writing and digging deeply into his own memory as well as that of his colleagues. He hopes this work will encourage further exploration of Christian witness and service, especially by Vietnamese writers and others who examine such topics as relationships with other Protestant and Roman Catholic churches as well as Buddhist and other local religions.

Readers will be inspired by this contemporary mission story. They will discover the profound commitments of missionaries, how they engaged Vietnamese people, and communicated the realities of living in a war zone to their North American friends and sponsors. None caught their significance for the world-wide Christian movement better than William T. Snyder, then Executive Secretary of Mennonite Central Committee. In 1968 he observed that “There were no clearer peace positions being taken by Mennonites at home and abroad than that made by this small group of Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions people.”

Indeed there are few mission stories that provide such graphic detail on living through a war that ended in the transition to the new revolutionary government. This volume is a reminder not to forget the past but to also pray for the growing Christian movement in Vietnam.

- John A. Lapp, Executive Secretary Emeritus of Mennonite Central Committee,
co-editor of the *Global Mennonite History* series.

ORIGINAL PREFACE

A Vietnam Presence: American Mennonites in Vietnam During the American War

For many years I considered sketching the work of the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (EMBMC) in Vietnam. After coordinating a study in the late seventies on the Vietnam ministries of EMBMC, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), and the MCC Peace Section from 1954 to 1975, friends suggested I prepare a readable story for the general public. There were other things to do at that time. However, after the release of James Klassen's book about his MCC experiences, *Jimshoes in Vietnam*, an MCC colleague sent me the following note:

"I hope someone writes about the history of the Mennonite mission in Viet Nam as well. I think there is much there which we all need to remember. Much work was done in a very difficult situation, and the story should be an encouragement to young people who need to be pushed a little in the direction of service. Luke, why don't you write a book?"

Rather than toss that note in the waste basket, I posted it on my bulletin board, and kept it for a few decades while I gave priority to other things.

Around 2006 I interviewed James Stauffer and wrote the story of his and Arlene's going to Vietnam. Only after I terminated my employment was I able to seriously research the Vietnam story in the archives of Eastern Mennonite Missions. When I invited historian John A. Lapp to critique my writing, he said I should also tell the Mennonite Central Committee story. I hesitated because of the enormity of the task, yet soon realized that I could not tell the EMBMC story without telling some of the preceding MCC story for MCC was involved in Vietnam three years before the first Mennonite missionaries arrived. This meant spending considerable time in the MCC files. Still my primary interest is to tell the story of the missionaries in their attempts to share the gospel and establish a church.

Besides the archival records I had access to personal letters sent from Vietnam to my parents along with a monthly newsletter prepared by the missionaries. Personal letters from James Stauffer, James Metzler, Paul and Esther Bucher, and journal entries from Paul Bucher and Margaret Metzler were very helpful. Stauffer's letters from 1957 to 1975 were particularly important. Paul Longacre who served with MCC also helpfully provided letters. I viewed official mission board minutes at the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society as well as prayer letters and feature articles.

Most of the Mennonite personnel who served in Vietnam are still with us today, so I had the opportunity to corroborate certain bits of information. However, I have chosen to rely primarily on written records—not interviews—believing that from these we can get a more reliable sense of the setting in which we worked a half-century ago. Regrettably I have not been able to read all the reports, personal letters and diaries of those who served with EMBMC and MCC.

I did not set out to write a definitive history of Mennonite missions in Vietnam. I wanted to focus more specifically on how Mennonite personnel in Vietnam carried out their ministries within the context of the American War. Mennonite missionaries, heirs of the Anabaptist Christians committed to a biblical pacifism, viewed the Vietnam landscape quite differently from many other American Christians in Vietnam. While we held an aversion to standard communist political structures, we could not view "the other side" as the enemy.

Who is my audience? Our children and the coming generation; I want our children to understand why we went to Vietnam, what we did and why we did it. I am writing for historians and missiologists; I want them to reflect on and critique the validity of what we did in Vietnam. I also want those who served with the American armed forces to read this story. Given the strong emotions generated by the Vietnam conflict, this story has ongoing relevance especially now when we are remembering events of fifty years ago.

My intention was to tell the story in an academic format that would satisfy the needs of those who want to probe deeper. However, my editor, Glenn Knight, convinced me that it must be written as a memoir. At the same time the Mennonite story in Vietnam began—after the signing of the Geneva Accords—I was beginning a life-transforming international experience in post-war Europe with the Mennonite Central Committee. Besides the invaluable insight and guidance of my editor, I want to acknowledge the helpful critique and encouragement of my Vietnam colleague Donald Sensenig and of John A. Lapp, MCC executive secretary emeritus. Rachel Metzler, my son Steven Martin, and my wife Mary Kauffman Martin proofread the manuscript. I thank Mary for her patience and support through this entire undertaking.

As I began writing, concerned that the resulting manuscript might be too voluminous, I asked an editor friend how long a book should be. “The subject will tell you how long the book should be,” she replied. A few of my Vietnamese friends who have difficulty distinguishing when to use *very* or *too* would say, “Your book is *too* long!” Rather than shortening the work or publishing multiple volumes, I chose to divide the work into three *books*. While the story is continuous, some readers may want to read the story as three separate volumes. Readers who want to research this story further will find information about sources and notes at the end of this book.

I title the first book *Engagement*, the story of how American Mennonites went to Vietnam and became involved with the Vietnamese peoples, both the dominant ethnic *Kinh* and the minority ethnic people in the Central Highlands of Vietnam around Ban Me Thuot. This was also the time when the United States of America chose to become deeply involved in the political and military life of southern Vietnam.

The second book, *Partnership*, describes the era when the United States made a fateful choice to pursue its objectives militarily and blundered into an inferno from which deliverance seemed impossible. During this time Mennonite missionaries and MCC personnel worked closely with the people of Vietnam and the community Mennonite church took shape.

The third book is the story of *Transition* when the Mennonite Mission encouraged the maturing church to greater independence. This was the era when the United States sought to extricate its military forces from Vietnam while continuing to exercise political influence. This period ended in a radical change with the triumph of the revolutionary forces.

Storytellers do not live in a vacuum. I have chosen to tell the story from the perspective of a Christian living within a community committed to the way of peace when the society around us was being torn about by conflicting loyalties. Rather than trying to ignore these realities, we chose rather to live within this struggle. Readers will easily identify a whole range of issues, problems and questions that we encountered in Vietnam which can become grist for discussion groups. Even though the Vietnam era had its special characteristics, many observations and learnings can be immensely useful in reflecting on our own time in the early twenty-first century. The heart of the story I tell is the experience of American Mennonites seeking to live out Jesus Christ’s gospel of peace in Vietnam when the United States of America engaged in a military conflict in which three million Vietnamese were killed.

- L. S. M.
October 2016

FURTHER INTRODUCTION

A few explanations should be given about terms. I am not fully consistent in the spelling of names. Although Vietnamese is a monosyllabic language, I use *Vietnam* rather than *Viet Nam*. But I have chosen to use *Ban Me Thuot* rather than *Banmethuot*. Today maps show it as *Buon Ma Thuot*. One of the larger minority ethnic groups is the Rhade people. There are various ways this is written: *Raday*, *E-de*, *Ra-de* and several other ways. *Saigon* is occasionally written as *Sai Gon*, but even Vietnamese generally write this as one word.

When writing Vietnamese names, the family name comes first, and the given name last, as in Nguyen Van Hai. But he is referred to as Mr. Hai, not Mr. Nguyen. Readers will recognize a duplication of names among the missionaries; there were two *Metzler* families, two *Jameses* and two *Lukes*. Although today's name of the mission agency is *Eastern Mennonite Missions*, I use *Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities*, (*EMBMC*), the name used before 1993.

Written Vietnamese has tonal markings which are used sparingly in this book. Interested persons can find the tonal and vowel markings for the Vietnamese names and words used in the Glossary. Readers should note that there are two *ds* in the Vietnamese alphabet—the *Đ/đ* which is similar to the English *d*, and the *D/d* which, along with *Gi/gi*, has the *ze* sound in the northern accent and the *ye* sound in the south. Thus the name *Dung* is pronounced *zoom* or *yoom*.

ACRONYMS

AFSC	American Friends Service Committee
ALM	American Leprosy Mission
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (South)
ACS	Asian Christian Service
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
C&MA	Christian & Missionary Alliance
CVA	Council of Voluntary Agencies
CWS	Church World Service
COR	Committee of Responsibility
CORDS	Civil Operations & Revolutionary Development Support
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CYSS	Christian Youth for Social Service
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North)
EACC	East Asia Christian Council
EAP	MCC Educational Assistance Program
ECVN	Evangelical Church in Vietnam
EMBMC	Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities
EMC	Eastern Mennonite College (University)
FCA	MCC Family Child Assistance sponsorship program

FOA	Foreign Operations Administration
FOR	Fellowship of Reconciliation
GVN	Government of Vietnam (South)
IPC	International Protestant Church
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IVS	International Voluntary Services
JAC	Joint Administrative Council (Mennonite Mission & Church)
JUSPAO	Joint United States Public Affairs Office
LWS	Lutheran World Relief
MAAG	Military Advisory Assistance Group (United States)
MAC-V	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (United States)
MBMC	Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
MEDA	Mennonite Economic Development Association
MILPHAP	Military Provincial Health Assistance Program
NAE	National Association of Evangelicals (United States)
NVN	North Vietnam
NLF	National Liberation Front
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OCO	Office of Civil Operations (United States)
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam (North Vietnam)
PMSI	South Indochinese Mountainous Country
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government
RVN	Republic of Vietnam (South)
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
SIL	Southern Institute of Linguistics
STEM	Special Technical and Economic Mission (US)
UBCV	United Buddhist Church of Vietnam
USAID	United States Agency for International Assistance
USOM	United States Operations Mission
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VMM	Vietnam Mennonite Mission
VNCS	Vietnam Christian Service
WEC	Worldwide Evangelization Crusade
WRC	World Relief Commission
WCC	World Council of Churches
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YSS	(Buddhist) Youth for Social Service