He was greatly disturbed by the conditions he encountered. His reaction was swift. Upon his return he was determined to find a way to bring help to the disabled. In 1991, he established VNAH with the help of a small group of supporters.

During 1992, Disabled American Veterans participated in a visit to Can Tho, Prosthetics and Rehabilitation Center. A private group donated eight prefabricated artificial limbs and VNAH purchased several more at a cost of $800 per limb. Noted during this visit were several major considerations. Not only was there a need for proper services to remove prosthetic items, but also quality of wheelchairs and prosthetic devices needed improvement. Later in the year, Disabled American Veterans made the first large donation of $50,000, which launched a pilot project to manufacture prosthetics on-site in Vietnam with available raw materials and supplies. This enabled VNAH to reduce the cost to $25 and custom fit each limb to the amputee.

In 1994, VNAH hosted several U.S. government delegation visits to the Thu Duc center production facility, which included representatives from the departments of Defense, State, and Veteran Affairs as well as prominent members of Congress. VNAH secured its first major grant of $250,000 from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the first of many that would allow the organization to expand its efforts.

In 1996, VNAH hosted a delegation of Vietnamese officials to visit the U.S. President’s Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities (CPEDP), Para­ lyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and others to exchange information on barriers-free access and employment of the disabled. VNAH expanded renovation efforts at Thu Duc center that resulted in improved space for housing and vocational training. VNAH organized and delivered donations of com­puter equipment, instructional tools, medi­cal equipment and supplies, and clothing.

During 1998, VNAH secured two new major grants from the U.S. Agency for Interna­tional Development: the first for technical assistance programs to greatly expand the facility, the first grant, the Prosthetics and Rehabilitation Program, will support their primary mission to provide wheelchairs and prosthetics to the disabled, as well as mental and medical and educational personnel, manufactur­ing technicians and other volunteers at the three main centers at Can Tho, Thu Duc and Ho Chi Minh City. The second grant, the Barrier Free Access Project, will support their expanded mission to establish a full time technical advisor in Hanoi who will coordinate disabilities programs and policies on the national level. Both grants are for a 27-month period, which will provide funding through the year 2000.

In 1999, VNAH and the CPEDP jointly announced the opening of a new Office of Disability Technical Assistance in Hanoi. This new office will help lead an ef­fort to advance the full social and economic integration of Vietnamese with disabilities into all aspects of life. It is a unique public and private partnership that brings together a U.S.-based nonprofit voluntary organiza­tion, VNAH, with CPEDP and the USAID, both public organizations. The project will focus on the design and imple­mentation of policies and programs that benefit the disabled. The project will work in close cooperation with the Vietnamese Committee on Reconstruction of Construction and other Vietnamese entities.

Disability Policy & Program Project The Disability Policy and Program Project (DPP) is an unprecedented coop­erative effort to advance the full social and economic integration of disabled Vietnamese into all aspects of life. It is a unique public/private partnership that brings together a U.S.-based U.S. veterans association, a Vietnamese veterans association, a Vietnamese government agency and a Vietnamese governmental agency.

Vietnam has one of the highest, if not the highest, disability rates per capita in the world. Since 1991, the United States has provided prosthetic assistance to disabled Vietnamese through private voluntary orga­nizations such as VNAH. This DPP is a direct and logical follow on to these efforts.

Project Plan An Office of Disability Technical As­sistance has been established in Hanoi. A team of American disability experts will work from this office. It will be the focal point for ef­forts to expand and improve Vietnamese programs, policies and opportunities for people with disabilities. The technical ad­visors will work with relevant Vietnamese government ministries, other nonprofit or­ganizations and private sector resources through a variety of activities:

- Promote implementation of the recently enacted Disability Ordinance.
- Help to establish a Vietnamese Na­tional Committee on Disability to coordi­nate all government activities for the dis­abled.
- Assist the Ministry of Construction to implement "barrier-free" access in the construction of all new public facilities.
- Encourage people with disabilities to take on leadership roles in the design and implementation of policies and programs.

While USAID has provided initial funding for the project, additional support is needed to meet requests for technical assist­ance as well as to provide training and em­ployment opportunities for the disabled.

Disability Laws Adopted The Standing Committee of the Viet­namese National Assembly recently adopted a new comprehensive ordinance to assist the disabled. In a landmark decision the assem­bly approved the Laws for Disabled People, that contain eight chapters and 35 articles concerning, among other important issues, barrier-free access, allowances, preferential policies for education and employment. MOLISA and the Committee on Social Affairs of the National Assembly are among key government agencies coordinating this effort. Massive post-war construction and new infrastructure development offers an un­precedented opportunity to provide barrier­free access to new facilities. This law will assure Vietnamese with disabilities equal access to buildings as they assimilate into productive society. Over the past several years, VNAH has worked closely with the CPEDP and others, to share with Vietnamese officials the American ex­perience of formulating and implementing disability policy. Several provisions of the 1998 Americans with Disabilities Act are important components in the Vietnamese comprehensive laws.

VNAH coordinated several exchange missions and a National Conference on Disability in October 1997, in Hanoi, result­ing in high-level meetings, educational workshops and site visits in order to pro­mote viable policies to address and imple­ment disability programs in Vietnam. Since 1995, VNAH and the president's committee have jointly facilitated exchange visits, conferences and workshops for Viet­namese disability experts and government officials as they crafted a framework for dis­ability legislation. The National Assembly adopted the Disability Ordinance in No­vember 1998. Vietnam joins other nations to formally recognize the humanitarian and economic importance of supporting the rights and opportunities of people with dis­abilities.

Since 1992, VNAH has provided over 25,000 artificial limbs and wheelchairs to disabled children and adults in Vietnam. In cooperation with MOLISA and its regional prosthetics and rehabilitation centers, VNAH has donated custom-fitted prosthe­sics and wheelchairs to victims of polio, land­mines and accidents. Rehabilitation and vocational training services have helped the disabled regain their dignity and become productive members of society. The CPEDP is one of the U.S. premier dis­ability policy organizations. As an independ­ent U.S. government federal agency, it pro­motes public-private partnership between national and state organizations as well as individuals working together to improve the lives of people with disabilities by increas­ing their opportunities for employment.

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Most international humanitarian aid or­ganizations pride themselves on remain­ing above the fray: non-partisan, objective and silent on issues affecting the people for whom they provide vital assistance. We don’t,” said Bobby Muller, president of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF).

"VVAF finds it impossible to avoid embracing an advocacy role when human tragedy cries out not only for help in overcoming the aftermath of a crisis, but in adressing the root causes. The worldwide scourge of landmines is an example of an issue, which necessitated our active inter­vention and advocacy."

"Throughout our anti-landmine cam­paign, we were cautioned that we could be jeopardizing our funding for our all­important work in providing prosthetics and rehabilitation for victims of war. Combining effective and well managed humanitarian programs with strong and effective advocacy has now become a part of who we are as an organization.”

Helping Victims
Founded by a group of Vietnam veteran­es in 1980, the VVAF seeks to transform the experience of war suffered by America’s Vietnam veterans into programs of aid to others who have suffered the horrors of na­tional and international conflict. VVAF pro­grams concentrate on helping heal war-torn societies and providing assistance to the in­nocent victims of the conflict.
It should come as no surprise then that the VFVF is deeply committed to programs that aid landmine survivors. Unlike many humanitarian organizations that concentrate on the immediate emergency medical requirements of aiding landmine victims, the VFVF centers its efforts on aiding the victim in the aftermath of the accident. The organization takes a two-pronged approach to this task, funding and developing rehabilitation centers, and taking a strong political and social stand towards the issue of banning mines.

VFVF Aid Programs
The VFVF started their first aid program for landmine survivors in Cambodia in 1991. Since then, programs have grown to include Vietnam in 1993, El Salvador in 1994, and Angola in 1997. Each program is tailored to meet the special needs of each locality, but all four programs share common goals:

- Rehabilitation: In each country, VFVF has helped to open a rehabilitation facility that provides artificial limbs and wheelchairs to disabled survivors. VFVF also provides physical therapy and follow-up services to help ensure the proper use of the hardware distributed to victims, and to ease the transition back into society.

- Training: In addition to rehabilitation services, VFVF facilities offer job training, and in some cases workshops, for disabled victims to enable them to support themselves and reclaim dignified places in their societies.

- Program Continuance: VFVF has published two books dealing with the horror of landmines. The first, After the Guns Fall Silent: The Enduring Legacy of Landmines, details not only the physical and economic damage caused by landmines, but examines the social and economic impact of landmine problems on affected societies. The second, In Our Own Words: The U.S. Army and Anti-personnel Mines in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, examines the impact of landmines on American personnel, and how the United States made landmines were used to devastate U.S. fighting forces during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

The Future of the VFVF
With the 1998 ratification of the international treaty to ban landmines, the VFVF started the Campaign for a Landmine Free World. The new campaign will allow the VFVF to provide vital leadership in the areas of victims' assistance, demining, and public education. As a part of this leadership role, the VFVF hopes to expand and improve its existing aid programs. And as the best leadership example of all, the VFVF vows, "As long as landmine victims require new or replacement limbs, VFVF will be there to help them."

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For all mine victims who live outside the provincial capitals, the journey to a rehabilitation clinic can be prohibitively expensive and extremely difficult, often involving a several day trek. Consequently, poorer children seldom receive the long-term care they need. Children require frequent medical checkups and new prostheses need to be fitted regularly because of a child's growth rate. Also, as a child amputee develops, the bone of the amputation site grows more quickly than the surrounding tissue, which may require reamputation, sometimes repeatedly.

Economically, child victims are a drain on limited resources, and the fact that they may be unable to contribute to the family to have a profound psychological effect on the child and on the family as a whole. Landmines can also have far-reaching effects on children when their parents are the victims. Loss of employment and the deprivation that can follow directly affect children. They may have to leave school to look after injured parents and supplement the family income.

Economic Cost
Landmines indiscriminately weapons and their destructive capacity does not end with the signing of a peace treaty. In fact, in a meaningless sense cannot be eliminated as publishers while walking home, precarious farmers and shepherds from working their fields, harvests humanitarian aid and hindered development and rebuilding following the end of the war.

As well as the disruption to agriculture and farming, the mining of dams and electrical installations affects the ability of a country to produce the power necessary for reconstruction. When transportation systems have been mined, it interrupts the movement of people and the flow of goods and services. This disrupts market systems, which in turn has a direct impact on employment and contributes to inflation.

Many landmines are designed to disable their victims rather than killing them. The kinds of wounds they inflict often require extensive treatment over long periods of time. The medical costs stemming from landmine casualties result in a significant economic burden both to the nation and to the mine victims and their families. The countries most contaminated by mines are often also among the poorest nations in the world. Their fragile economies are easily destroyed, the basic requirements for self-sufficiency denied them, and they quickly become an economic burden on the international community.

These countries seldom have the ability to fund the extensive demining programs that are essential if their economies are ever to recover. Only when these lethal toxicants have been removed will the war be finally over, and will it be possible to talk of peace in a substantive sense, only then will the long process of reconstruction and healing begin.

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War Child
In the desolate heights of Afghanistan, in the lush African savannas and steep Bonnian valleys, in cities and villages, tens of millions of landmines lie hidden; to be cleared, as one Cambodian surgeon put it, "one limb at a time." Anti-personnel mines primarily target civilians. Victims are invariably the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. It is the subsistence farmers, nomads, children at play, fleeing refugees and those returning home after the war to heavily mined villages and farm that are the most affected.

Effects on Children
Children's size and natural curiosity make them particularly vulnerable to anti-personnel mines. They are often too little to see mines that are clearly visible to adults. Unable to keep up with older members of the family when travelling by foot, children will stray off safe routes into minefields. They may not be able to recognize or read warning signs. Also, in many cultures, young children are required to perform jobs that are crucial to the economic survival of the family, such as tending livestock, scavenging, gathering firewood and collecting water. In heavily mined regions these simple tasks become fraught with danger. It also becomes common practice in some areas for small children to go barefoot to save a few pence to recover landmines for resale.

Even if arms manufacturers deny that allegations of some landmines are designed to look like toys, they rarely cannot be unaware of the appeal and attraction that their lethal products have for children. Brightly colored, oddly shaped, easy to pick up or kick, children will seldom resist the temptation to play with these new "toys."

In many heavily mined areas children have now become so used to landmines that they forget that they are lethal weapons. In northern Iraq, rural children commonly use mines as wheels for toy trucks and go-carts and in Cambodia they play boules with Bou 40 anti-personnel mines. Even when children understand the dangers, the risk element can prove a fatal attraction. For instance, in Afghanistan, a favorite game is to throw stones at "Butterfly" mines; the winner being the one whose stone causes the mine to detonate.

For children who survive mine accidents, the physical injuries are usually far greater; the emotional trauma much deeper, and the economic prospects significantly bleaker than for an adult victim. The majority of child mine victims have few prospects of going to school, of receiving counseling, of learning skills which could help them adapt to their new condition, or marrying when they grow up.