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 pressing need for more vehicles and transportation, but also the 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 Thua Duc center production facility, which included representatives from the departments of Defense, State, and Veterans 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) that will allow the first humanitarian assistance programs funded in Vietnam when the country opened diplomatic relations.

The first training programs were designed and conducted at the Thua Duc and Can Tho centers to improve the knowledge and skills of the technicians and production staff, which resulted in higher quality prosthetic devices and wheelchairs. VNAH organized its first air lift of donated pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, in conjunction with other relief organizations, in response to a major flood by the Mekong River.

During 1995 VNAH secured a grant from the Nippon Foundation of Japan to expand the rehabilitation and vocational training facility at the Thua Duc center. The foundation also supported water systems and a temporary patient-boarded facility to reconstruct project. Vietnam's Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) made its first $200,000 grant to support these efforts, bringing life back to a center that had been neglected. Improved facilities enabled VNAH to expand its efforts to develop a training component allowing the disabled to work in the manufacturing facility where they gained vocational skills. VNAH initiated outreach missions to bring services to remote villages and to remove roadblocks. VNAH participated in two more air lifts of nearly $7.5 million of donated pharmaceuticals and medical supplies.

In 1996, VNAH hosted a delegation of Vietnamese officials to visit with 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 barrier-free access and employment. Since 1997, the VA has expanded its efforts at the Thua 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 (USAID) that will allow their technical assistance programs to greatly expand. The first grant, the Prosthetics and Rehabilitation Project, will support their primary mission to provide wheelchairs and prosthetics to the disabled, as well as medical and educational personnel, manufacturing technicians and other volunteers.

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 rehabilitation 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.

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

Disability Policy & Program Project

The Disability Policy and Program Project (DPPP) is an unprecedented cooperative effort to address the full social and economic integration of disabled Vietnam­ ese into all aspects of life. It is a unique private/public partnership that brings together U.S.-based VNAH, PVA, CPEDP and USAID with the government of Vietnam, MOLISA.

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 DPPP 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 staff this office. It will be the focal point for efforts to expand and improve Vietnamese programs 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.

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

Disability Laws Adopted

The Standing Committee of the Viet­ nam 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 barrier-free access to new facilities. This law will assure Vietnamese with disabilities equal access to the buildings and environments as they assimilate into productive society.

Throughout 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 national disability law.

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 No­ vember 1998; Vietnam joins other nations in formally recognizing the humanitarian and economic importance of supporting the rights and opportunities of people with dis­ abilities.

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 prosthe­ sies and wheelchairs to victims of polio, land­ mines and accidents. Rehabilitation and vocational training services have helped the disabled regain their dignity and become productive members of society.

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It should come as no surprise then that the VVAF is deeply committed to programs that aid landmine survivors. Unlike many humanitarian organizations that concentrate on the immediate medical and psychological needs of landmine victims, the VVAF centers their 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.

**VVAF Aid Programs**

The VVAF 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, VVAF has helped to open a rehabilitation facility that provides artificial limbs and wheelchairs to disabled survivors. VVAF 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, VVAF facilities offer job training, and in some cases workshops, for disabled victims to enable them to support themselves and reclaim dignified places in society.

**Program Continuance—VVAF**

- VVAF takes great pains to ensure that all programs have strong potential for continuance by hiring and training local staff, many of whom are disabled, and by using as many locally available materials as possible.

- **Teamwork**—VVAF programs team with other humanitarian organizations and local government to ensure that they are able to provide a full range of rehabilitative services.

**Raising Public Awareness**

Recognizing that all of their aid is not enough to prevent new landmine victims, the VVAF takes a strong and outspoken position in the fight to ban landmines worldwide. In 1991, the VVAF founded the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, a coalition which compelled over 120 countries to sign the international treaty to ban landmines. The organization also serves as coordinator to the United States Campaign to Ban Landmines, a coalition of more than 300 organizations dedicated to building U.S. support for the international treaty to ban landmines.

The VVAF is currently using their access to landmine areas to coordinate a global mine survey to establish the scope and depth of the landmine problem in most of the twelve most heavily mined countries. The survey, which the VVAF hopes to complete in two to three years, will also gather data on landmine victims and the impact of mines on agriculture, commerce, and public health.

To further raise public awareness, the VVAF has published two books dealing with the horror of landmines. The first, *After the Guns Fall Silent: The Endangered Legacy of Landmines* details not only the physical damage caused by landmines, but examines the social and economic impact of landmine problems on affected societies. The second, *In Its 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 VVAF**

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

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**War Child**

In the desolate heights of Afghanistan, in the lush African savannas and steep Bosnian 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. And it also become common practice in some areas for small children to play in few reverse to retrieve landmines for resale.

Even if arms manufacturers deny that allegations of such landmines are designed to look like toys, they 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 become so used to landmines 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 B40 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.

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