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## Dee's Journal – Vietnam – by Dee Bird – 3/25/09

Dee is currently in Vietnam...

*We have had a couple of emotional presentations by faculty and a visiting Vietnamese lecturer on the Vietnam war. The students do not really understand what it is all about. They will probably have a better idea by the time they leave, having crawled through the Viet Cong tunnels and visited places like the UPI photographers' museum and the war history museum. So much history... Faculty on board (Americans) have mostly had some close encounters either of their own or of friends or relatives. Some of the students have parents who were in this generation, though for many of them, their parents were still in high school at the end of the war. I visited the Kwei River during my time in Thailand, to see the railway line that the Japanese wanted built from Burma to Bangkok. Dad was a prisoner of war there after being captured at the Fall of Singapore, so I had a pilgrimage of sorts to that area, traveling on the railway and visiting the war museum in the reconstruction of a prison camp. That was my version of what some students will know when they travel in Vietnam.*

*I will be going to Cambodia – I have always wanted to see Angkor Wat. My trip to Thailand included many very beautiful temples, and many temples, which had been destroyed by the Burmese – today they look much like Angkor Wat, so I am keen to see this Wonder of the World. I will also be visiting Phnom Penh and the killing fields, another pilgrimage such as one makes in one's lifetime to places like Auschwitz to help us remember what evil we humans are capable of committing.*

*It is exceedingly hot – and will likely be hotter still in Cambodia. I am running in the mornings, as early as I can (around 5:30) to beat the heat, but it is still sticky stinky hot. This morning was a six-mile day. Sandy, I will be a mess when I get home. That is the furthest I have run since the Marathon in Cape Town. I had earlier been doing two runs a day, but it is too hot now to run in the afternoon sun. You are right about Thailand – Kham – IT IS TOO HOT TO RUN A MARATHON THERE!!! Richmond will seem like a New England winter... see page 2 for more*

*.... From Cambodia*

*I have just returned from the Killing Fields in Cambodia. A visit there leaves one completely depleted. It is too hard to think of the inhumanity of humans... Too hard to understand why... In a way, I suppose I am glad not to understand how such torture and killing could take place... If we understand, have we also lost our humanity?*

*That ugliness was much moderated by visiting one of the seven wonders of the modern world, Angkor Wat, the largest religious complex ever created. It is amazing in its scope, and somewhat sobering to realize that today our society would be incapable of creating such architecture.*

*But oh my, it was HOT!!! Two of our students collapsed from heat stroke. No running there... I ran six miles today in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City). It was already 95 degrees at 5:30 a.m., and it just got hotter, and so humid that your clothes are perpetually drenched. I went to the War Museum here (once known as the War Atrocities Museum.) It too is a place filled with pain. But Vietnam is a youthful country with the majority of the population under 25 years old, so the "American War" as it is known here is little remembered, and Americans are greeted with great enthusiasm.*