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THE MONITOR

VALLEY LIFE

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COMMUNITY COMINGS & GOINGS

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SUNDAY, JULY 1, 2012 | WWW.THEMONITOR.COM/SECTIONS/VALLEY-LIFE/

AT PEACE

Veteran couple returns to Vietnam, find beauty, healing

By AMY NICHOL SMITH
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Soldiers with AK-47s are not stationed at bridges, and the sandbag bunkers were demolished decades ago. Long gone are the sharp whistles of incoming rockets or mortars and the constant rattle of artillery fire. The smells of decaying cities and burning bodies have wafted away.

After more than 30 years, Vietnam veterans Doug and Cindy Young returned to find the country they knew as war-torn had healed and grown.

And since that first return trip in 2002, the Mission residents have fallen in love with Vietnam. Doug chronicled his experience through words and photographs in a book titled *Same River, Different Water: A Veteran's Journey from Vietnam to Viet Nam*.

Doug was an infantry officer in the U.S. Army who served two tours of duty in the Vietnam War.

"I was then, and I still am now, extremely proud of my service," the 68-year-old said.

Returning to the country he spent years fighting in hasn't been a way for him to denounce the war; rather it has been a rediscovery of a place and a culture he wasn't able to fully see in 1967.

"I felt sorry for the people at the time," the Mission resident said. "I had the distinct feeling that all they really wanted was to be left alone. And they didn't really give a damn about politics."

At the time, Vietnam's landscape was pock-marked by bullets, bombs and fire. Beneath the rubble, however, he still saw the beauty of the country.

Cindy served as a member of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. She worked in the neurosurgery ward of an evacuation hospital in Long Binh.

"We got all the head and spinal cord injuries," she said. "So that was pretty tough. A lot of fractured necks—they were never going to go home. So that was a pretty intense part of my experience."

She worked long hours and only had one day off each week.

In 1969, she met Doug and two years later, they were married back in the United States.

They lived in various places, including Atlanta, Ga., where Doug worked as a police officer and homicide detective. He also made a living as a freelance photographer.

It was his work as the director of the center for distance learning at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg which led to the idea of visiting Vietnam.

In 1995, Doug jumped at the opportunity to create an educational course online to remotely teach students, but

Doug and Cindy Young share a moment at their home recently, in Mission.

Vietnam photo by Doug Young. Above, a bride in red Ao Dai, a style of dress. Below, a woman is seen recently in a field of rice plants.

A boy prays recently at a church in Vietnam.

Above, a boy rides on a water buffalo. At left, a helicopter lands during the Vietnam War.

Same River, Different Water can be ordered at any bookstore, online or at Viva Life bookstore, 6601 N. 10th Street, McAllen.