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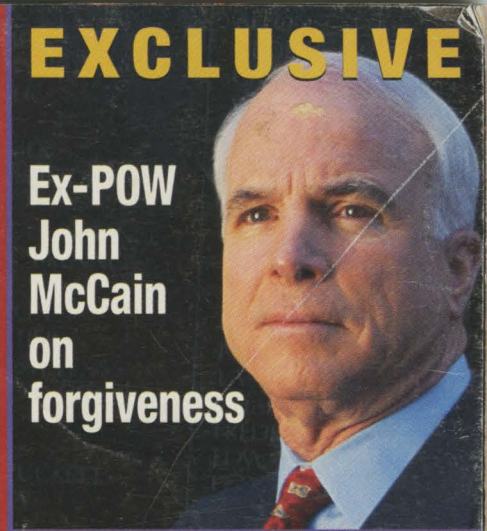
MAY 1, 2000

People

weekly

EXCLUSIVE

Ex-POW
John
McCain
on
forgiveness



VIETNAM TODAY

25 Years Later

A generation after the war's end, it's a country full of surprises—and remarkable stories



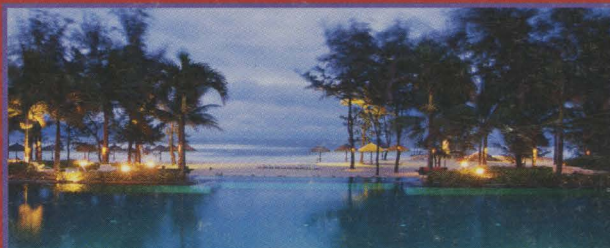
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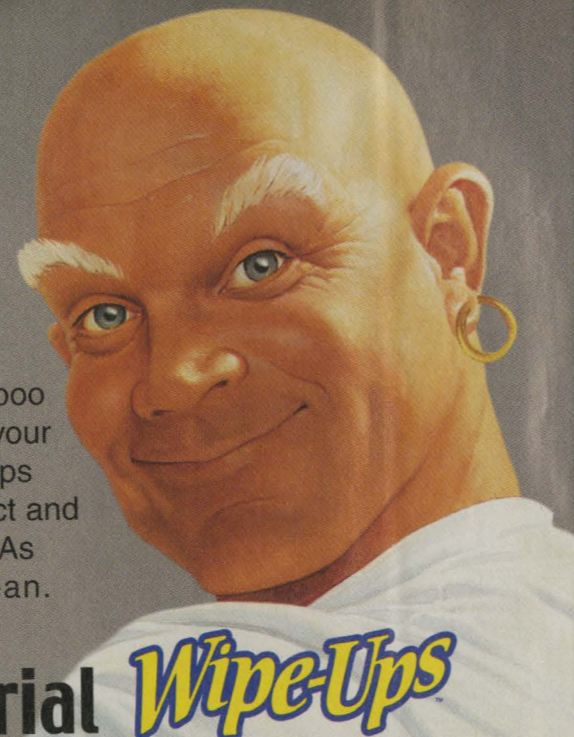


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Inside **People**

ERIC HERTER; (INSET) SHONNA VALESKA



PEOPLE's Vietnam team (in Hanoi last fall) included: (back row, from left) Taro Yamasaki, Mike Haederle, Les Stone, Joanne Fowler, Bonnie Johnson, Joe Treen, Patrick Rogers, Barry Lewis; (front, from left) Roger LeMoynes, Don Sider, Julie Dam, Debbie Bondulic, Linda Kramer, Ron Arias, Tran Thi Hoa (not shown: Leong Ka Tai).



Shonna Valeska (left), Daniel Okrent and deputy art director Helene Elek also worked on the issue.

The Vietnam War ended 25 years ago with the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. Yet even today the word "Vietnam" packs emotional resonance, both for Americans old enough to remember or to have been touched personally by the war and those who know it only from TV, movies and books.

Five years ago, PEOPLE published a major story tracking eight children who had been airlifted out of Vietnam during the final days of the war. All had started new lives in America with the help of charitable agencies here. After that story ran, we began searching for an opportunity to take another look at Vietnam. The 25th anniversary of the war's end seemed an appropriate time.

For many Americans, Vietnam stirs up powerful images; often, those images have been frozen in time. The goal of this issue is to look at what has—and has not—changed in a country that only a generation ago was at the center of politics, protests, dinner table debates and the nightly news. We present a candid portrait of Vietnam and its peo-

ple and look at several Americans who have dedicated their lives to helping rebuild a land where U.S. soldiers fought for nearly a decade.

After months of planning by assistant managing editor Bonnie Johnson and executive editor Joe Treen, who codirected this issue, we sent a team of eight reporters and seven photographers to Vietnam last fall to begin work. We took 36,000 photos under the direction of associate picture editor Debbie Bondulic and conducted 450 interviews. "Our mental images were of war and destruction, so we were surprised to find such energy and optimism," says Treen.

We housed our temporary PEOPLE bureau in a modern office-apartment building, once the site of the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" where American POWs were held. One of them, Sen. John McCain, writes exclusively for PEOPLE on his moving reconciliation with Vietnam (page 116). Another journalistic coup was a rare private interview with Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap (page 58), the commander of North Vietnamese forces during the war. You'll

read the touching story of an Iowa family who adopted a son from Vietnam (page 84) and meet PEOPLE senior writer Julie Dam, 28, who left Vietnam with her family in 1975 and writes about her first, emotion-charged trip back (page 105).

As it does with all foreign journalists, the country's Communist government required us to work with official translators and helped set up interviews with its citizens. Otherwise we were on our own. What we found was a warm reception among Vietnam's 77 million people, more than half of whom were born after the war. Says assistant managing editor Johnson: "I hope our readers are as surprised, moved and intrigued as we were."

Cornel Wallace

Managing Editor

People weekly

May 1, 2000 Vol. 53 No. 17

25 YEARS LATER

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Nguyen Thi Lop still grieves for her famously executed husband.



"He's full of wonder," Mike Donovan says of new son Sam.



Priests gather at Tay Ninh's Cao Dai temple, a tourist mecca.

Cover photographs by (clockwise from top left): Roger LeMoyné; Barry Lewis/Network/Saba (2); Leong Ka Tai. Upper right inset by Chris Usher



The future: Girls wearing traditional *ao dai* school uniforms negotiate the bustling streets of Ho Chi Minh City.