



**EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Hanoi, Vietnam**

October 27, 2015

AMBASSADOR

Dear Chairman Royce and Representative Lowenthal:

I recently paid a visit to the historic Bien Hoa cemetery, now known officially as Binh An People's Cemetery, to gauge conditions at this important site and pay my respects to the thousands of ARVN soldiers buried there. (Please see photo, below.) I know how important it is to so many people in your districts to participate in the cemetery's renovation and upkeep, so I wanted to take this opportunity to provide an update on our efforts to move this process forward.

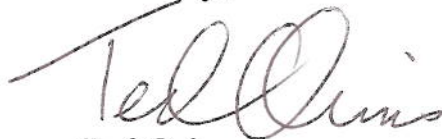
Let me first affirm that we understand how significant this issue is. The United States will always remember the sacrifice made by these soldiers. And for the families and friends of those buried there, as well as representative groups such as the Vietnamese American Foundation, the ability to participate in renovating Bien Hoa is particularly meaningful. Gaining written permission to access and improve conditions at the cemetery would help them close a difficult chapter of their lives and remove a symbolic but very real barrier to reconciliation. On the bilateral level, this issue resonates because it is emblematic of our efforts to honor the past even as we look to a stronger partnership with Vietnam in the future.

This has not been an easy problem to solve, but I believe we are getting there. Rena Bitter, our Consul General in Ho Chi Minh City, has met several times with the Binh Duong People's Committee, as did her predecessor, to discuss operational issues, and with good results. The cemetery continues to be reserved exclusively for ARVN soldiers, and graves are exhumed only at the request of the families of the deceased, as Representative Lowenthal saw in his April visit. And as I observed during my October 16 visit, a sizeable staff maintains the grounds, including the memorial to the fallen. Vietnamese officials at all levels understand our interest in this site and the fact that it is of great significance to many Americans.

Still, the conditions of individual graves vary widely, and more can be done to renovate the grounds. We have advocated for written permission for a representative group, such as the Vietnamese American Foundation, to have regular access to help upgrade the grounds and fix the many gravesites that are falling into disrepair. Consul General Bitter has sent a diplomatic note to the Binh Duong Provincial People's Committee emphasizing the importance of this request, and the People's Committee has agreed to meet with her in November to discuss it further. I also met with the Party Secretary of Ho Chi Minh City, Mr. Le Thanh Hai, who agreed to communicate to his colleagues in Binh Duong that progress on this issue would improve relations.

In sum, we are moving forward. I hope this information is useful, and I want to thank you for your longstanding commitment to promoting a resolution to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if we can be of further assistance, and we will keep your offices apprised as we make progress.

Sincerely,



Ted Osius

The Honorable
Edward R. Royce, Chairman,
Committee on Foreign Affairs,
House of Representatives.

The Honorable
Alan Lowenthal,
Committee on Foreign Affairs,
House of Representatives.

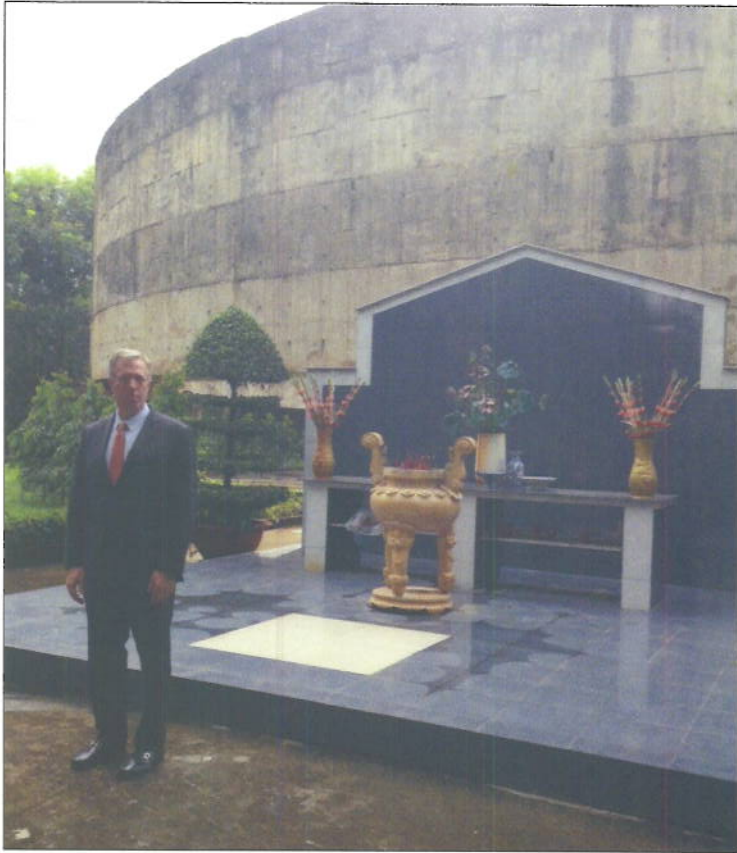


Photo: Ambassador Osius at Bien Hoa Cemetery Memorial