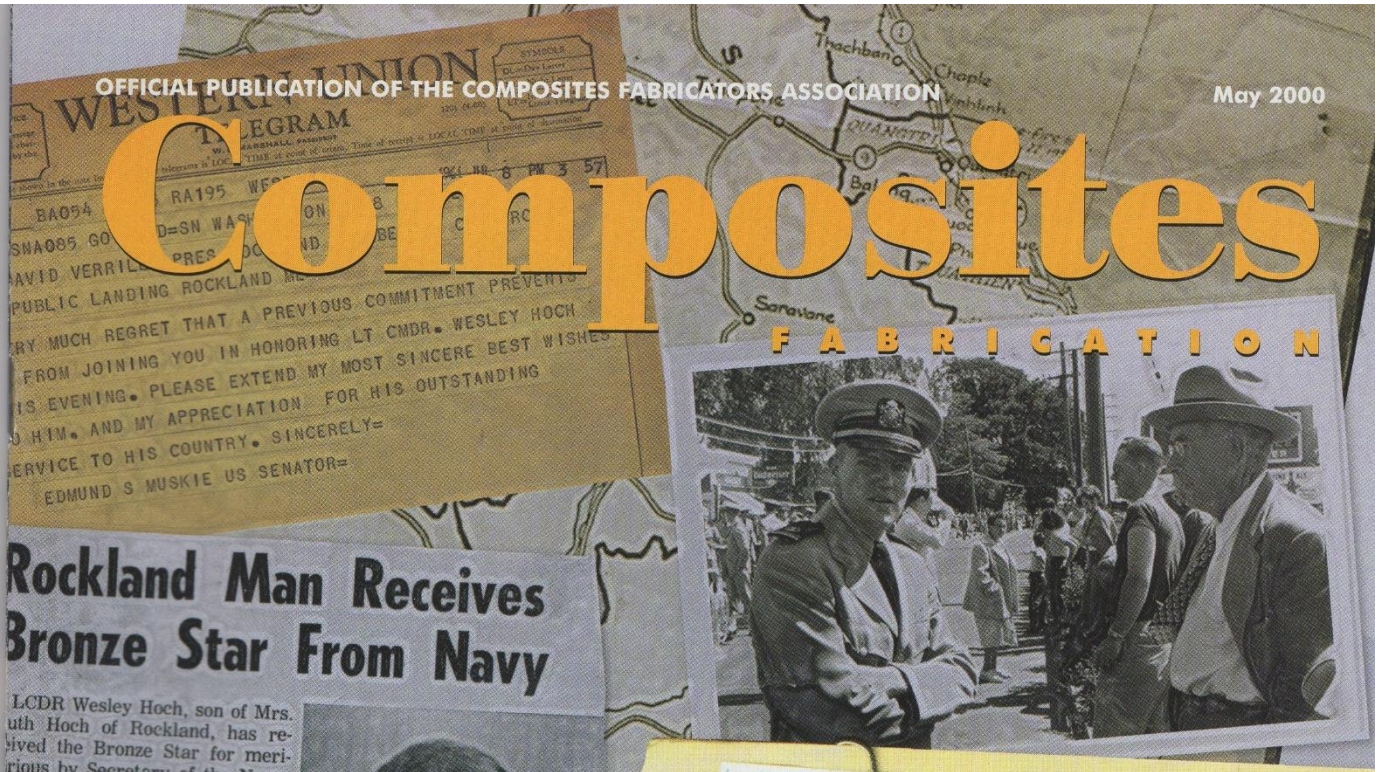
OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE COMPOSITES FABRICATORS ASSOCIATION

May 2000

Composites FABRICATION



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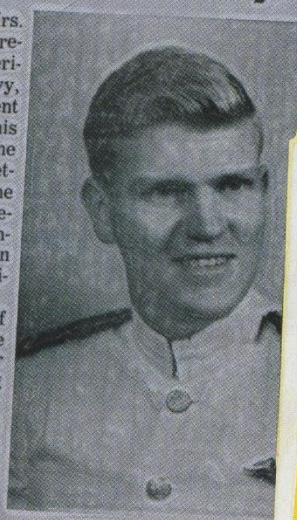
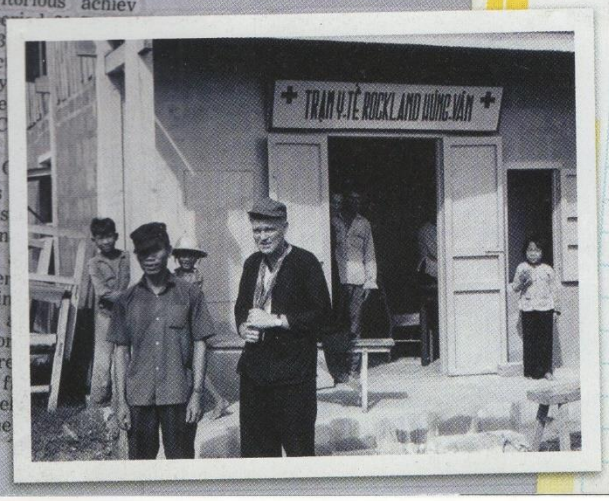


LCDR Wesley Hoch



"Composites Industry Legends"

CFA's Lifetime Achiever: Wes Hoch

Composites
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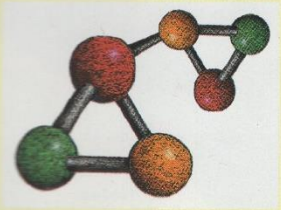
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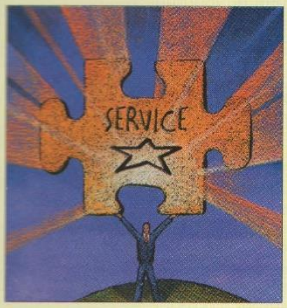

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COMPOSITES FABRICATORS ASSOCIATION
1655 N. Ft. Myer Drive, Suite 510 • Arlington, VA 22209 USA • (703) 525-0511 • (703) 525-0743 (fax) • (703) 525-0659 (auto attendant) • cfa-info@cfa-hq.org • http://www.cfa-hq.org
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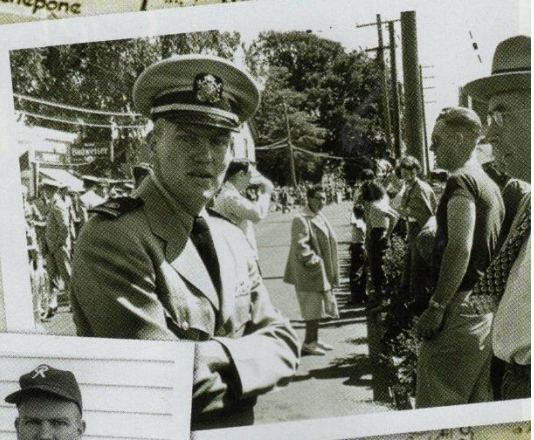

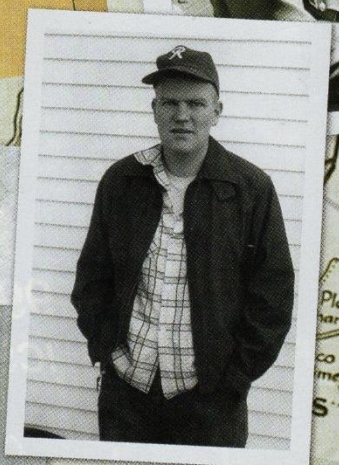

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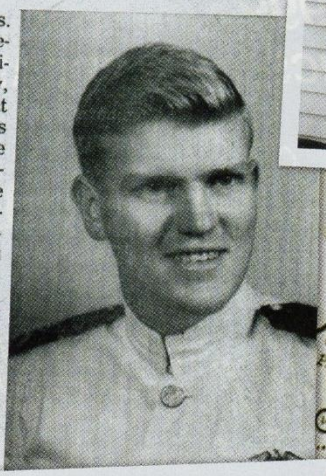
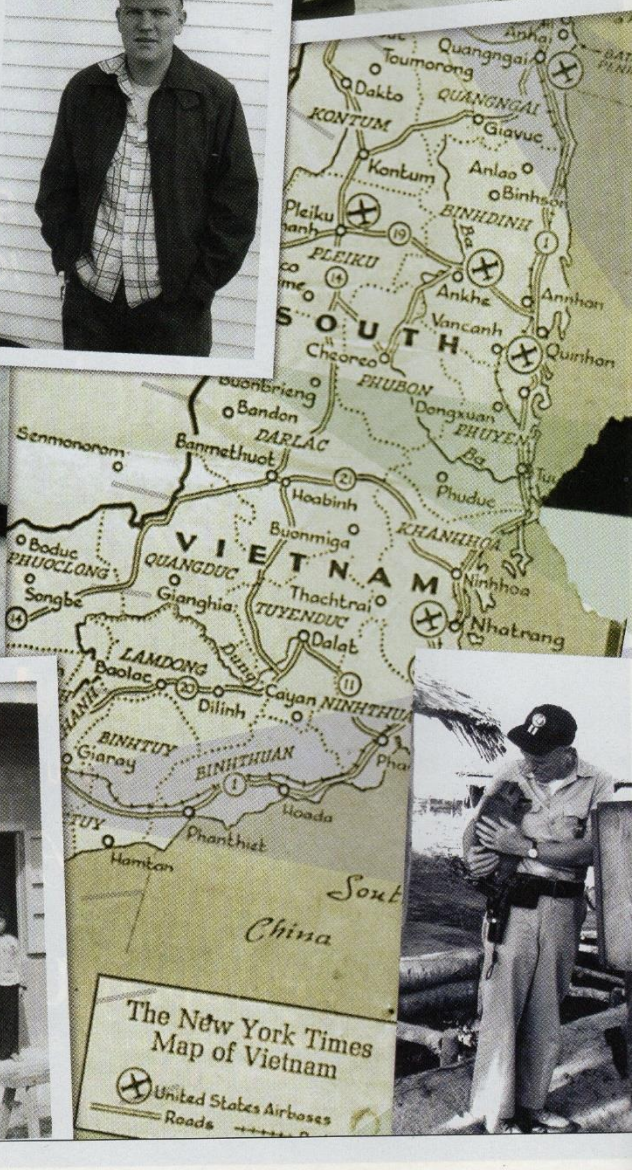




"Composites Industry Legends"

"Make me whole Dai Uy"

A Search for the Man in North End's Wes Hoch

Part 1 of 2

By Andy Rusnak
Editor, *Composites Fabrication* magazine

This is another story in Composites Fabrication's series to celebrate legends of the industry, their lives and the history of their accomplishments. Wes Hoch is CFA's 1999 Lifetime Achievement Award winner.

"He woke up and she was standing over him with a knife." CFA's even-tempered Associate Director, Sabeena Hickman rushed to the end of her sentence. On the phone from the North East Composites Conference in Portland, Maine, she ventured intrepid tales from the life of Wes Hoch, founder of North End Marine. Apparently, the previous evening he'd turned an impromptu dinner into a lounge for fire-roasted anecdotes.

"You should do a story on him," she said.

Acting on its own, my gullible mind immediately handed me images of Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* and Hemmingway's Africa. The romance was mid-20th century, a rite-of-passage through a barely penetrable jungle from where I stood as an adolescent after reading Papa's *The Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber*. Beyond long hair, rebellion, and Alice Cooper, the mythic romance of beating the drum and "becoming a man" wasn't something I, nor others in my generation, could avoid forever, although it seems we never get past the addled age of 18 and "Don't know what I want." Today's trite-of-passage Gen-X males seem even further from the definition than post WWII boomers. Becoming a man now is obsolete, a nostalgic naiveté far removed in cultural gigabytes — the lament of a lost urinal to the unisex toilet in a cyber café that used to sell cigars.

I added Hoch to the list, made a file, conducted roundabout inquiries, and paid attention in the meantime to everything I heard and saw.

Several months and projects later, I walked into Hickman's office and asked for Hoch's number. From memory, she jotted it down as a smile tickled the corners of her mouth. For some time, she's bonded with Wes Hoch, his tales of Vietnam, his paternal guidance and adventurous spirit.

"He is a good lion isn't he?" Macomber said. His wife looked... at both these men as though she had never seen them before.

One, Wilson, the white hunter... medium height, sandy hair, stubby mustache, a very red face and extremely cold blue eyes... [H]is shoulders sloped in the loose tunic he wore with the four big cartridges held in loops where the left breast pocket should have been...

Francis Macomber was tall... dark, his hair cropped like an oarsman, rather thin-lipped and... handsome. He was dressed in the same... safari clothes Wilson wore except his were new, he was... good at court games, and had just shown himself, very publicly, to be a coward.

Rain beats against the window on a chilly December morning at Boston's Logan International Airport. In an hour I'll board a Colgan Air, Beechcraft Turbo 1900C and fly to Rockland, Maine to meet with Wes Hoch, a confirmed search for mid-20th century manhood.

"Before I ask Wes to come up on stage to receive this honor, I'd like to say a few words," CFA President-elect and Hoch protègè Jonathan Spaulding had said, introducing Hoch to the crowd of 2000 in Chicago at COMPOSITES '99. "His generous heart and loyalty to employees, his optimism and good nature, his absolute commitment to ethical business practices are hallmarks of Wes Hoch. Our Board of Directors has made a very worthy choice. Please help me welcome CFA's 1999 Lifetime Achievement Award winner, Mr. Wes Hoch."

As I watched the ceremony I was preinspired to step over the gracious gold watch words and see... *Robert Wilson... carrying his short, ugly, shockingly big bored .505 Gibbs and grinning.*

Through the applause, Hoch lithely strode to the stage. Clearly uncomfortable in the limelight, he and Spaulding shook hands and posed for a photo. Hoch skipped down the platform steps and returned to his seat. Tight scheduling precluded any acceptance speech, which was probably OK with him. Although appreciative, what it looked like he wanted was to be mildly annoyed, to swoosh away all personal attention with a slight wave of the hand so everyone could return to more important endeavors.

When Hickman returned from Maine in June, she continued to spread anecdotes of Hoch's life.

"Is he coming to COMPOSITES'99?" I asked.

"No, his dog is having surgery," she replied.

When you're 67 and have lived Wes Hoch's life, you're entitled to whatever platitudes beyond human relations an 85-pound Samoyed can offer. "Love" nuzzled his way into Wes' life as a puppy 13 years ago, along with Ivan and Billy, and a female, Kish.

In mid October, however, two weeks before COMPOSITES '99, Hoch was voted to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award, prompting CFA Executive Director Missy Henriksen to extend a special invitation, which Hoch accepted. Despite convention fever, I fancied meeting the man I could

And above a 1963 snapshot I saw several months later of Hoch kneeling with some 30 Vietnamese children, he had written on masking tape the caption: "With the people. What the whole thing was about."

Lt. Wesley Hoch

Red Vietnamese Put High Price On Maine Man

Telegram News Service

GLEN COVE—A young Navy officer from Glen Cove and his companion, a gunner's mate, regard as "a dangerous compliment" the reward of 500,000 piasters placed on each of their heads by the Viet Cong (Communist Vietnamese).

Lt. Wesley Hoch, 31, son of Mrs. Ruth Hoch of Glen Cove, and Gunner's Mate 1. C. Joseph Pritchard of Georgia are advisers to a Viet Nam junk fleet, and the only Americans on the 40-mile-long Island of Phu Quoc at the southerly tip of Viet Nam.

For nearly four months they have been working closely with Lt. Tran Binh Sang, commander of the 161-boat junk fleet consisting mainly of small, low-powered craft, with an occasional larger, better armed boat.

Their job is to advise the Viet Nam force in stopping Viet Cong junks and troop transports bent on amphibious assaults. Sometimes the South Vietnamese, chesis tattooed with "Sat Cong" (Kill Communists) attack shore villages.

At the same time Hoch and Pritchard have to defend their island with about 30 sailors, knowing there are over 250 men of the Viet Cong ready as they often do to attack at the first sign of relaxation.

Stars and Stripes reported Al Kramer, who visited the Navy men, found that out. They tried to entertain him with a movie shown on a bed sheet. In the middle of the picture the Viet Congs blew up the power lines in a harrassment raid. There was a delay in the film while the Americans went off to battle.

With the advice of Hoch and Pritchard, who insist on living in the same quarters and eating the same food — some of which would be questionable back home—as the Vietnamese, the junk force in one month captured more prisioners than an entire Army Corps.

The pair also spend much

only think of as the Great White Hunter.

"Wes is here, you want me to introduce you?" Hickman asked on day two of COMPOSITES '99. She'd found me wandering aimlessly, distributing convention newsletters.

"Sure, I said," dropping the last bundle on a nearby counter.

We walked to the front of the exhibit hall and there he stood ... *Wilson looked at him appraisingly.*

"It's good to meet you Wes," I said offering my hand while struggling to find a way under a profusely tentacled brow only to find a fierce pair of intelligent blue eyes in the sideways snort a Captain gives an AWOL sailor. We headed off toward small talk. "I remember the first couple conventions," he said loosely. "You could've held them in a bathroom." I laughed. His humor was witty, from the radio age of Jack Benny one liners. When I told him I wanted to dig into his life, he replied, "That's a wild one."

The next day, before the awards ceremony, I saw Hoch perched atop a shoeshine stand, a young man swiftly buffing his black loafers. I said hello as I passed by, distributing more newsletters. I don't think he recognized me although his expression was of a man who saw and remembered everything.

Wes wrote a book he never had published about Vietnam. It was a mix of his experiences there, many things were dangerous, but he wrote about them in a comical way. That's the way he is.

— Dave Hoch

"She" was really a "he," and it wasn't a knife, but a machete. "Mot lie caffee Dai Uy?" the skittish man asked again.

"If you do you'll have to clean it up," Hoch humored, pushing sleep from his brain while looking into the curious eyes of his new houseboy Lo who was poking him with a machete. It was February, 1963 and Hoch was prostrate on a board bed inches above a dirt floor infested with flies, roaches, and enterprising rodents, his new home, a dilapidated and abandoned French penal colony on the island of Phu Quoc, Vietnam.

Hoch finally linked "caffee" to "coffee" and so initiated an 18-month relationship few American men ever know — a penurious, inquisitive Vietnamese man determined to serve and protect, if need be, with his life, and a gentle, willful American cowboy who traded his sailor suit for black pajamas.

Through the stinging rain, through the gray shadow of window in the trailer-sized terminal at Rockland (Owl's Head) Airport, I spot the Captain's face. Dressed in a red fleece jacket, khakis, and sailing moccasins, I shake hands again with Wes Hoch, then throw my gear into the back seat of his green, 325i BMW sedan.

It took five easy minutes in the passenger seat before I felt the tough Hemmingway myth wash away in the desperate remnants of a three-day blow drenching the Pine Tree State. Part of me — the fledgling Macomber part — struggled to hold on, but a ghostly and overpowering relief quickly kindled a warm opportunity to discover Wes Hoch the real man. Certainly, at times throughout his life, times he now quietly sets aside, he *must've* appeared as Wilson the Great White Hunter/Adventurer. Throughout that first day, however, he gave his Lifetime Achievement Award acceptance speech several times in several variations, and it became impossible to see him as other than the magnanimous, benevolent human being he is.

"There were a lot of people responsible for my success," he'd said.

"Without people like Steve, and Eric, and Arthur and Donna, you know, all the people that worked for me, no less my friends and family, well, they're the reason you achieve things. You don't just go out and start achieving. I was a very small part of it."

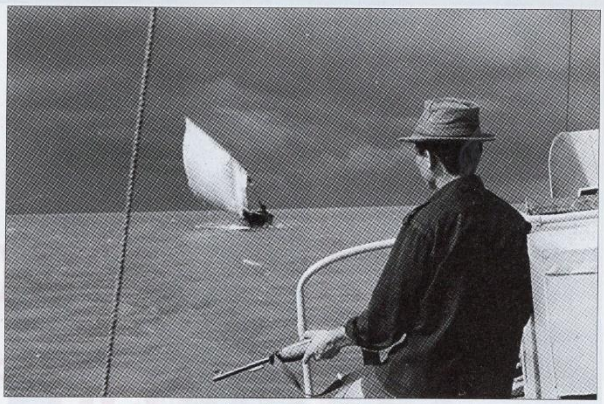
(And above a 1963 snapshot I saw several months later of Hoch kneeling with some 30 Vietnamese children, he had written on masking tape the caption: "With the people. What the whole thing was about.")

Spaulding's remarks in Chicago returned simple and true: "Wes' positive attitude has served as his compass," making him even more intriguing — there are no perpetual bulls to fight, lions to shoot, or marlins to wrestle. No unhappy childhoods. The man with seven cats who secretly contributes hundreds of dollars each Christmas to a local family in need, the man who loves the fluttering, sunny side of nature enough to want to bequeath his 27 acres of prime real estate to the Audubon Society, is as solid as the granite boulders defending the New England coast against the almighty surge of the Atlantic.

"Bull malarkey," he'd growl. Of course he really does wave off glowing praise that way, as so much bull. Maybe because Hoch's route to manhood compared to Hemmingway's delivers a knock down punch in the merry tale of two pugilists.

From Owl's Head airport, we cut through the damp, brown landscape. Hoary apparitions, as lingering mist, form in the fields and on the taut bare limbs of oaks and maples.

"I only bring it out on special occasions," Hoch says of his BMW.



Junk patrol in Vietnam.

"I usually drive a small Toyota truck."

Although beguiled like most in his generation by the spirit of speed, handling, power designs, and meticulous engineering (he gave up, actually gave away, his '98 Yamaha FJ-1100 motorcycle a year ago), Hoch is dubious of material rewards, preferring to brush fiberglass dust off his sleeves everyday. I want to say thanks, I'm a truck man myself, but I don't. As it turns out we spend a fair amount of time in the Bimmer over the next two days touring Hoch's past.

A few winding roads later we approach the town of Rockland

("Wes Hoch..." continued on p. 26)

procurement and design supplement available to us today for reducing the cost of ownership of fiberglass vessels. It embodies techniques for design, fabrication and quality control that represent a compilation of the best experience and techniques from firms and individuals with nationally recognized expertise.

At Corporate Engineering in Bayer Corporation, we implemented RTP-1 on all our routine fiberglass tank purchases since its introduction in 1989. The great majority of our fiberglass vessels were then made to its requirements and are stamped with the ASME/RTP-1 stamp to ensure compliance with the standard.

Sure, it's front loaded in investment cost, compared to marginal integrity units, but it pays back handsomely over the years in higher reliability, reduced maintenance, and extended service life."

What about fabricators who claim to manufacture product to RTP-1 specifications, but offer a reduced price and no official stamp? It is speculative whether such products do not and cannot provide all of the benefits of an ASME stamped product. No stamp means reduced protection for the purchaser; you did not buy an RTP-1 product, meaning you did not buy the best available control technology (BACT)! In all cases, according to the ASME products that were "made to RTP-1 standards", without a stamp, did not follow all requirements of RTP-1. There is no control over which requirements are, or are not, followed if the equipment is not stamped. This is an obvious contravention of both the spirit and requirements of RTP-1.

The 1990s have been a decade of intense competition with companies focusing on core competencies and ruthlessly downsizing their operations to remain competitive. At the same time, the legal and ethical implications of safety and environmental issues have remained as pressing as ever, if not more so. The ASME RTP-1 standard exists to provide purchasers of corrosion-resistance composite equipment with the easiest, safest and most economical method of purchasing quality FRP equipment. *–CFA*

Joe Gates is Vice President of Products and Services for AN-COR Industrial Plastics, Inc. and Chairman of Managing Corrosion with Plastics - A Sub-committee for the NACE 2000 in Orlando, FL. His 30 years of involvement in corrosion resistant composite work includes design, manufacture and installation of scrubbers, vessels, pipe, stacks and related custom equipment. Additionally he provides user sites with Inspection & Maintenance Service of their FRP equipment. A graduate of SUNY Buffalo in Civil, Mechanical & Business; he is active in composite technology & specification development with TAPPI and a newly formed ASME Pipe subcommittee.

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3 *Process Industry Practices (PIP) is part of the Construction Industry Institute (CII)* based at the University of Texas in Austin, including more than thirty Engineering and End User Firms who have adopted these practices. Log onto their website at: www.PIP.org

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("Wes Hoch..." from p. 15)

where Hoch was born. Through the intermittent stroke of wiper blades he chats on the area's historic significance, the Andrew Wyeth Museum and the way the town used to be called Shore Village before the deepest limestone quarries in the world became a local economic and political force.

"Lots of buildings in Washington, DC were built with Maine limestone," Hoch points out. Having, at one time, been to every country in the world, he takes obvious pride in promoting home turf. What he neglects to tell me is that when he returned home from Vietnam, the town of Rockland honored him with a Wes Hoch day, and presented him with keys to the city.

We turn down Masonic and into the short gravel driveway of Dave and Isabel Hoch. Dave is Wes' older brother.

"He's as much of a character as I am," Hoch says jokingly, stepping out of the car. "So only believe half of what he tells ya."

As I stride over Meanie, a big black and white cat lounging on the wet sidewalk, it's becoming evident Hoch's humor ranges beyond Jackie Gleason one-liners, that his philanthropy is built upon a foundation of humility and sometimes rises to an expression of self-effacing banter.

Still, he'll shake off such attention as more bull malarkey.

Hoch introduces his sister-in-law and brother, and we're led into the living room.

Dave settles in an easy chair, Isabel returns to the kitchen, and Wes excuses himself to run errands. This is peculiar strategy on Wes' part, but by now I understand he has to ease into the spotlight. Besides, Dave is the family archivist, and next to a huge Bible on the glass coffee table is a scrapbook fat with old photos and faded newspaper clippings.

"My father came up the stairs, this was over at 29 Broad Street, around the corner from here, and he said 'We got a surprise for you,'" Dave recalls with relish. "I remember going down stairs with him, and there was mom in bed holding up this fat little red thing. Well, that was Wes. He was born at home in 1932."

Raymond Hoch, a quietly analytical man according to Wes and Dave, gave his three sons all their abilities. It was spring, 1927, when Raymond, the oldest son of a German immigrant steelworker, was asked by his manager at Dragon Cement near Bethlehem, PA, to relocate to the company's Thomaston, Maine plant. A lab chemist

Raymond Hoch, a quietly analytical man according to Wes and Dave, gave his three sons all their abilities. It was spring, 1927, when Raymond, the oldest son of a German immigrant steelworker, was asked by his manager at Dragon Cement near Bethlehem, PA, to relocate to the company's Thomaston, Maine plant.

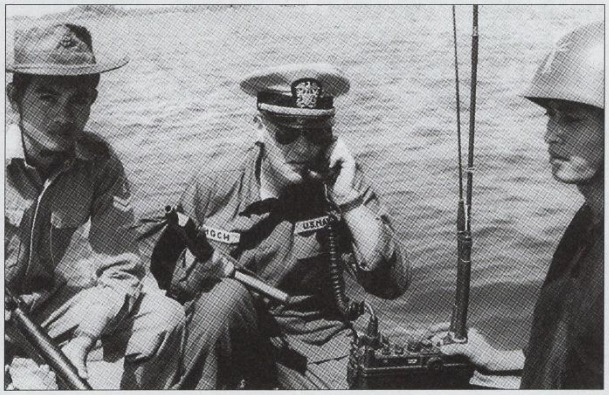
by trade, Hoch agreed and soon found an apartment in Rockland where, one day, killing time on small town streets, he spotted the vivacious Ruth Koster.

"They fell in love and got married," said Dave, as he repositions himself on the easy chair, a ready twinkle in his eye. "Dad was really a quiet man. He kind of enjoyed just sitting back, watching and listening to life go by. But he could quiet a room by the tone of his voice if he had to. Mom, she was the opposite. She was like Lucy Ball, gregarious, singing for the different churches around town. She managed a women's store in Rockland, always kept us in shenanigans. It was a very happy household."

Behind me, Isabel interrupts her husband's narrative to offer up chicken salad sandwiches at the same time antique clock chimes float from the mantle. The old steepled town, the venerable, waxy smell of 200-year-old houses, a family history still intact, the threads in people's voices. Having a 'way of life' is written in Dave's ministerial countenance, and in Wes' soul, Wes who has come home again more than anyone in the Hoch family.

(Whoops! As the story progresses, another easy sentiment, and, of course, the mental picture of Wes modestly reminding me of more bull. Focus on work!)

It was Christmas morning, 1941, and the three Hoch boys — Dave, Wes, and young brother Bill — spotted boxing gloves under the tree. Images of Jack Dempsey rocked through Wes' mind as he flicked stinging jabs at Dave's head, fooling around. The space next to the old black cook stove in the kitchen had been converted into a ring.



"Dad told me not to box," remembers Wes, restlessly returning to the conversation, pressing back against the couch cushions in anticipation of a belly laugh.

"I don't know why he got us boxing gloves if he didn't want us to box," Dave adds. "Anyway, I got mad and hit Wes so hard he went out the kitchen window onto the porch, took the window and all."

Wes cackles with laughter.

"Course it wasn't too warm outside," Dave continues. "Dad got angry, pulled the gloves off and stuffed them into the stove, squashed them right into the fire best he could, but they wouldn't fit. Whatever they were made of caused black smoke to pour out all

over the kitchen. While we were standing there being punished, we all got to laughing so hard we couldn't stop."

"Even when we did something wrong, we ended up laughing about it," Wes pitches between snorts. "That's the kind of household it was."

Walcott went in... He never thought Jack could have stood it. Jack put the left in his face... Jack's face was the worst I ever saw — the look on it! He was holding himself and all his body together and it all showed on his face, is how Hemmingway measured out the boxing brutality in *Fifty Grand.*

Tests of manhood came later for Wes, but it wasn't a tragically futile hunt for machismo. More like a love fest, and nowhere was his brand of virility defined more than in Vietnam.

And Vietnam was no malarkey.

Unbroken sun pours over the New England landscape the next afternoon as I climb back into the Bimmer to tour Hoch's past. It's an unusually warm day for mid-December, and we don't have far to go to reach the salty boundaries of childhood and the beginnings of North End Marine.

On Revolutionary Hill overlooking Glen Cove is an old Sea Captain's house that once belonged to Captain Gregory.

"He legitimately traded in molasses," says Hoch, glancing over as we ride by. "But he made his fortune smuggling rum up from the islands. Dad found some log books and lots of other old treasures in the attic."

In March, 1938, the Hoch family moved in. Wes was six, and lives there still with Love and his seven cats. He never married, Dave still calls him the "old bach."

From the Captain's hill, Glen Cove offers a serene, storybook setting. Fifty some years ago, on the beach, Wes and his brothers nailed half-rotted two-by-fours together, then paddled through bobbing lobster traps to reach Ram Island, about 500 yards off shore.

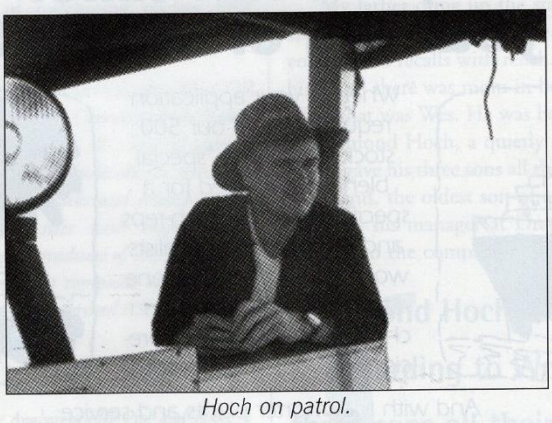
"As kids we'd start off early in the morning and get back late at night," Hoch remembers. "We'd follow the sea shore all the way to Lincolnville Beach and back." And we used to swim in Chikawauka Lake, then walk over Bear Mountain."

But there are higher elevations in the neighborhood now. Dropping the Bimmer down a gear, Wes climbs into a new development of million-dollar homes overlooking the cove and beyond. He is both fascinated and remorseful at the expansion of homes and money, fascinated with the bouncy nouveau riche and the sense that history is starting afresh; deeply disappointed that the landscape, dressed in memories, is being stripped. Wit and humor, in the nooks and crannies of daily existence, is always within reach, however.

"The rabbit died," Hoch bemuses, back at sea level, as we pass several adolescent boys near Rockland, britches belted low around their thighs.

"What?"

"Kids today, I don't know. When I was in high school, even to spell out the word S-E-X was taboo. We used to say, 'The rabbit died.' Well, there were a lot of dead rabbits around."



Hoch on patrol.

After the sweat of Vietnam, Wes decided Maine winters would have to be worked in slowly, so he packed up his unfinished memoirs and headed for Florida in search of an old sea mate.

Strip malls, Walmarts and giant parking lots are replacing century-old town homes along Rockland's Route One, late suburban sprawl. Wes signals, right turns onto a gravel lot, and comes to a crunchy stop in front of a flower shop.

"I can still see her standing there, ringing the bell," he says. Back in the late '30s, early '40s, the flower shop housed the one-room Hoboken school, grades one through five, a pot-bellied stove for warmth, fresh milk everyday from the farm, and a teacher named Hortence Bohndell.

"That's the switch section," Hoch points out. "She'd make you cut your own switch when you needed switching. And yea, I had to cut a few."

North toward Camden, past peeling birch trees, fields of belted Galloway cattle, we circle around "The School House" (now an office building) where Hoch attended seventh and eighth grade, and park down at the docks next to a statue of the town's famous furry forefather, Andre the seal. Old limekilns, charred offerings from another time, are stacked about, nestled in hillsides. Packed as quick lime in wooden casks and hauled away in the many schooners built here, the lime was later mixed with horsehair to make plaster.

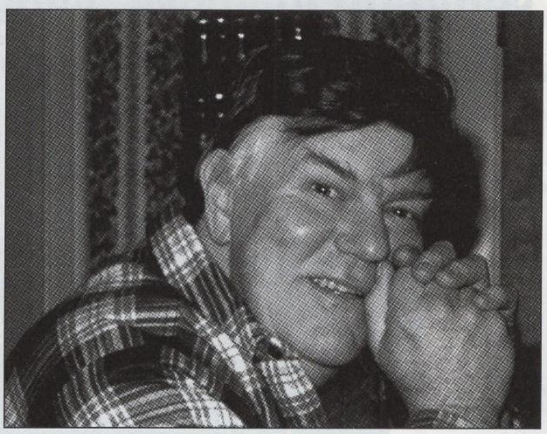
Idyllic lessons against puritan backdrops, a varsity letter in football at Rockland High, fresh ocean smells that place life and death, it's the kind of childhood you can never leave, though coming home again finds a different place. Onboard the SS Exporter in the middle of the North Atlantic, the summer of 1960, Wes received an urgent telegram from Dave. Their father was not expected to make it through the night. Hoch reached port in New York several days later where a police escort waited to rush him through four states to be at his father's side. He made it in time, but his father died of heart complications at 55. Brother Bill also died young at 39, suddenly, of

("Wes Hoch..." continued on p. 30)

("Wes Hoch..." from p. 28)

a heart condition.

When he did come home for good, after 10 years in the Merchant Marines and US Navy, after Vietnam and a maverick stint in Florida, Hoch started North End Marine on $50 and a whim.



"When he got back from Vietnam he started writing a book," Dave related during the interview in his living room. "Then he went to Philadelphia, he was in touch with someone who was going to help him publish. One day he called me, we were having a blizzard here, so I asked him how the weather was. 'Oh, it's beautiful, nice and warm,' he said. I told him the weather can't be that good in Philadelphia. He said he wasn't in Philadelphia, he was in St. Petersburg."

After the sweat of Vietnam, Wes decided Maine winters would have to be worked in slowly, so he packed up his unfinished memoirs and headed for Florida in search of an old sea mate.

"I never found him," Wes laughs. "I was writing my book and my funds were getting low. I spotted this ad in the St. Petersburg Times. Morgan Yachts wanted laminators, temporary office help, and janitors. I had no idea what a laminator was, but being a Navy commander I knew a little something about boats. But I didn't want to be boss anymore, all my life I'd been boss, I wanted to be a flunky. I wanted someone to tell me what to do, instead of me telling someone else and being responsible. So I stretched the truth when they asked about education and I applied for the janitor's job."

Hoch's foray into composites started with a toilet brush, just to make extra money, but he couldn't escape the work ethic he learned to wield killing chickens, shoveling manure, and milking cows after school and summers growing up in Maine. Once, he went to work as a herdsman for a farmer who raised a special herd of cows for the University of Maine. The Farmer also had a fifty-foot sailboat, and Hoch soon became part of the afternoon crew tightening winches, trimming the sails of the Lacora out of Camden. Later, he crewed on ocean yachts in the renowned race from Newport to Bermuda.

Hoch's foray into composites started with a toilet brush, just to make extra money, but he couldn't escape the work ethic he learned.

Although he never trusted himself to own a boat, a fear of seeing "red skies at night" the rest of his life, the "sailor's delight" of never returning, these early experiences on the Atlantic did much to excite his craving for adventure and love of the sea.

"They had the cleanest toilets they ever had," Wes continues. "That lasted about two weeks, then a supervisor came up to me and said, 'Well, you seem to catch on quick, we'd like you to become a laminator.'"

Begrudgingly, Hoch agreed. It only took one day on the job before he realized no one knew how to laminate, workers just dumped resin and catalyst together.

"So I went to this professor at the University of South Florida and I asked him, 'What is this resin and catalyst, how does it work?'" Hoch recalls. "And he explained the importance of precise ratios for proper catalyzation. All of a sudden, I could do things at Morgan nobody else could do. I'd been there a couple months and they put me in charge of building the '52, so I already had a crew back."

Sucked into the challenge, as he tells it in between belly laughs, Hoch easily distances himself enough from his past to slap on heaping measures of self-deprecating irony and humor. Courageously recognizing his own frailties, he sees the weaknesses, the natural sin in others. Somewhat paradoxically (at least somewhat anti-Wilson, the white hunter), self confession and humility is a big part of what makes him an attractive leader — Hoch's commitment to others becomes their commitment to him. "He doesn't like me to say it, but he's an exceptional person, no doubt about it," Dave had said, before Wes returned, sorting through a stack of newspaper articles. Once, as a merchant marine, Wes performed an emergency appendectomy at sea on a fellow sailor as the captain read instructions from a book.

"A couple of months later, I walked in on a Monday morning and Charlie Morgan told me I was the supervisor of the glass department," Wes continues to laugh. "I wasn't quite sure I knew what glass was, but my crew and responsibilities grew."

Five years at Morgan Hoch learned composites and boat building, and when he returned to Maine to start North End, there were those in Florida who felt compelled to follow him.

A quick swipe with a cold shrimp and Jonathan Spaulding taste tests the cocktail sauce as Wes Hoch walks through the front door. Spaulding has arranged a dinner for Hoch and early members of North End Marine. The rain outside is beating hard through the pitch of a cold northern night in one last attempt to suppress another defining moment for Wes Hoch, keep him alluringly inaccessible, but it's too late, the guests are arriving.

In 1972, the heliotropic Hoch left Florida to brave the Maine winters of his youth. With the help of several Morgan Yacht cronies who went with him, he teamed with designer Henry Scheel to fabricate a high-end 45-foot sailboat. They sold five in three years

before going bankrupt, but Hoch learned to manage risk, coupling lessons he'd learned in Vietnam with the ever-precarious business of boat building.

In a run-down shed, part of a decayed fish packing plant, on land owned by his brother Dave, Wes stored the "remnants" of the Scheel project until, with $50, he and a partner started building 23-ft. seining dories, the St. Pierre, and sold them to American and Canadian fishermen. The business eventually flourished, about 200 sold. Dave, however, unloaded the property and Wes set to crushing rocks in a quarry his brother also owned. With a new rash of Dory orders, Wes scoped out land on the edge of the quarry next to the Rockland city dump. Up went a leaky, ramshackle, tarpaper shed — no water, no electricity — convenient in location because whenever he needed a splintered, warped sheet of plywood to patch a hole in the wall, Wes rummaged through the dump.

In about a year, by 1977, Wes'd saved enough from sales of the St. Pierre to buy from Dave three acres of waterfront property in the north end of town, where he stayed until '79 when business became so good North End Marine relocated to its present spot in the Rockland Industrial Park. Although over the years North End built everything from generator sheds and mogul figures to church steeples and truck bodies, boat building gradually took a back seat to mold making, an even shakier, one-chance-to-get-it-right, venture. In the mid-80s, the company legitimately claimed itself the largest fiberglass marine tooling company in the world.

But in 1995, in what he deemed a "natural marriage," Wes sold the business to Sabre Yachts, and Spaulding took over management operations, as North End Marine became North End Composites. The company progressed from the early days when a couple of slapdash entrepreneurs cured dories in a rain-soaked shed, when winter temperatures sometimes dropped to zero or below and spray guns frosted over during gel coating, to today's CAD (computer aided design) and five-axis (Surfcam) driven, meticulously contoured, projects for hulls, decks, and novel components like a 23-foot centerboard for a 130-foot ketch. Hoch still keeps a modest office there — computer on a corner table, scattered reference materials, and a low-back chair — overlooking the tool-mold shop.

("Wes Hoch..." continued on p. 37)

In about a year, by 1977, Wes'd saved enough from sales of the St. Pierre to buy from Dave three acres of waterfront property in the north end of town, where he stayed until '79 when business became so good North End Marine relocated to its present spot in the Rockland Industrial Park.

("Wes Hoch..." from p. 31)

The closer he is to a place where he can get his hands dirty, the better he feels. Shuffling through the sweaty bustle of operators wielding handsaws or sanders, or splitting a group huddled around a mold engaged in creative how-to debate, Wes always draws a friendly punch on the arm or a witty remark. Half the crew he treats as sons, and they treat him as a father who holds a story book trust.

Picking and swiping, Arthur Berry and Steve Crane join Jonathan, Wes, and I in a battle for the shrimp in Spaulding's living room. The talk goes to catch-up and the good old days at Morgan and North End. Berry an aeronautical engineer and certified massage therapist has been retired now for seven years, while Crane still works at North End as Senior Composites Engineer, one of the best in the business according to Hoch. Missing is long-time associate Eric White who Wes impartially calls the "eternal pessimist" to his own eternal optimism, a balanced combination that provoked many years of engineering victories.

Woven between backslapping stories is the urgent reference to boat lengths — everything measured in feet, feet, feet. These are several of Wes' people, those to whom he attributes his success.

"The Disney project brought us all together at Morgan," chuckled Wes. "The submarine."

"Did Wes hire you at Morgan?" Spaulding asks, glancing over at Crane.

"Yes, in '69."

"Steven came along," Wes chuckles affectionately, "a snotty-nosed kid at the time, and the only reason he wanted a job was he had a corvette, and he knew that what we did had something to do with that car."

"Plus I needed a job to pay for it,' quips Crane who, hired as a laminator for $1.65 an hour, rapidly worked his way to crew chief under Hoch's tutelage.

"Nobody believed it, but we built a boat a day, a 41-footer," Wes remembers, then quickly turning to Berry asks, "Did I hire you?"

"No, Charlie Grissom hired me in '69."

"Charlie Grissom!" Wes busts into guffaws at the thought.

"He asked me, 'Can you use a body grinder?'" Berry continues. "It didn't matter if I could or not. It was the only qualification. 'Yes, Charlie,' I told him. Then he said, 'You're in.' And in three weeks he wanted to make me crew chief."

Berry and his wife built a live aboard 30-footer and, after a year cruising, wound up looking for work in St. Petersburg. He, like Hoch, although for different reasons, lied about his education level to get a job at Morgan, but wound up in the design department after a year, a move conducive to Berry's career plans.

Conversation shifts to the 13 Jules Verne submarines Morgan built for Disney and Spaulding rode as kid, and speculations on how much styrene Hoch, Berry, and Crane huffed "back when we didn't even know what styrene was." One story that emerges, however, is how Hoch moved a bed into his office, somewhat of an ironic coincidence considering it wasn't that long ago he slept in far more perilous and wretched conditions. *–CFA*

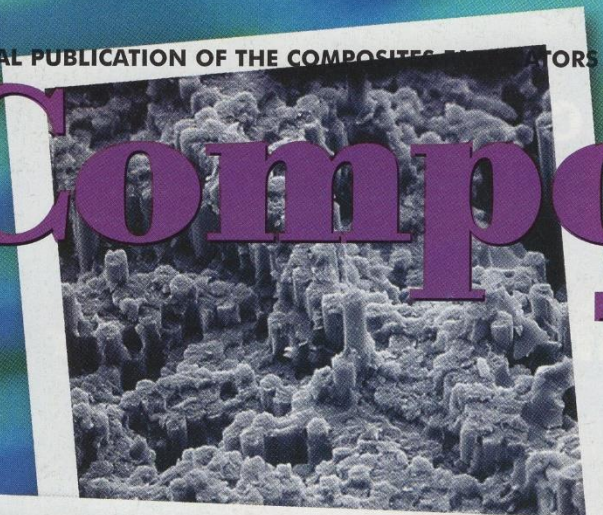
Part II of this story, Hoch's Vietnam experience, will appear in June.

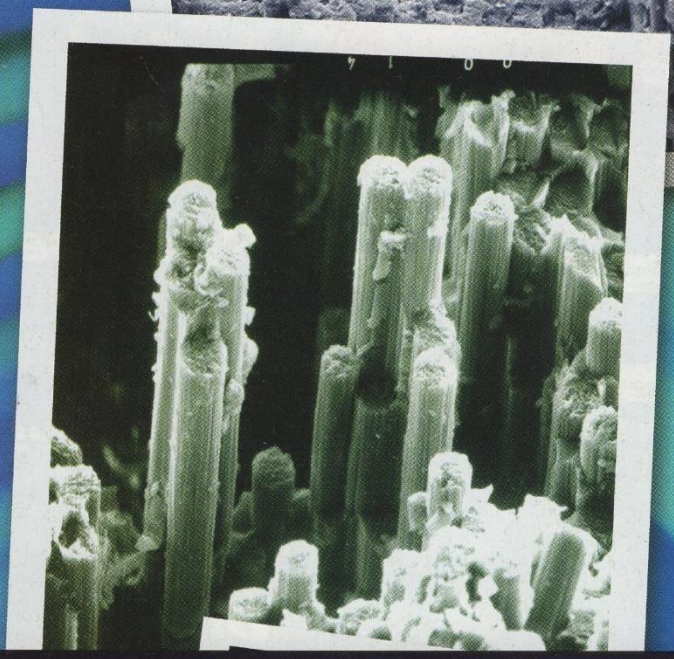
Andrew Rusnak is Editor of Composites Fabrication.

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE COMPOSITES FABRICATORS ASSOCIATION

June 2000

Composites FABRICATION





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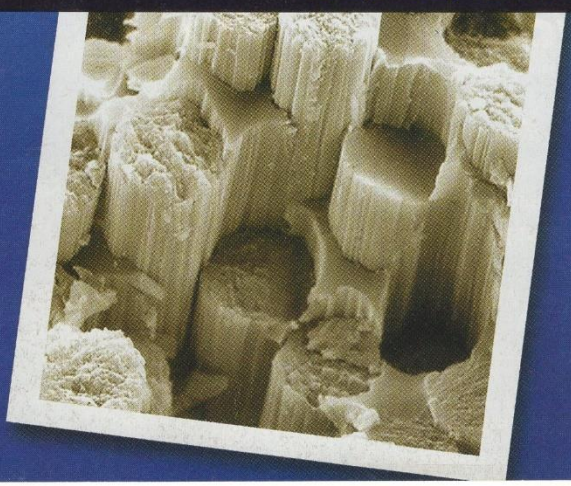

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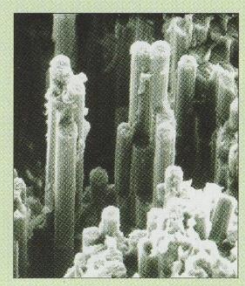

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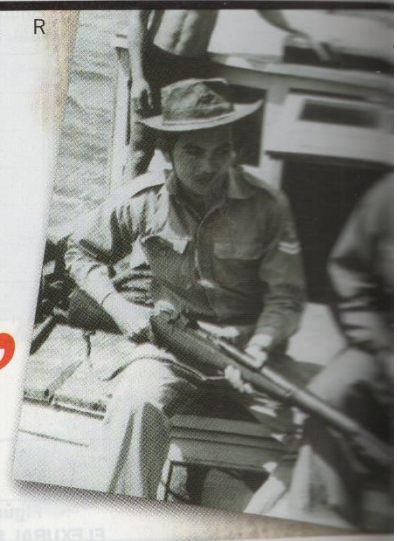
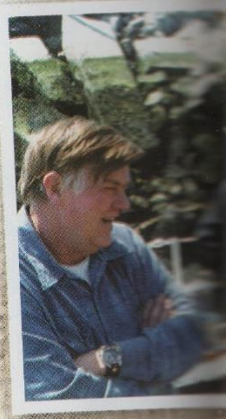


"Make me whole Dai Uy"

A Search for the Man in North End's Wes Hoch

Part II



This is the second and final installment of the Wes Hoch story. Hoch was awarded CFA's Lifetime Achievement Award in October of 1999. Part one ran in the May issue

By Andrew Rusnak
Editor, *Composites Fabrication* magazine

The First Notebook

It is not good for the Christian's health to hustle the Asian brown, for the Christian riles and the Asian smiles and he weareth the Christian down.

— Rudyard Kipling,
an aphorism Hoch kept pinned
over his desk in Vietnam

If I should never do anything else in my life, I will be content knowing happiness I have given these people. I get medical supplies for them. I treat the sick, help the very poor, show love to those who need it. How little we Americans know of what we have, the freedom, liberty, and greatest government in the world. But all too many come and go and never know that they live in the dream world of millions of people such as those in this country.

— Hoch in a letter
to his mother

Compelled, I made one last desperate attempt to find traces of Wilson in Hoch's Vietnam era, the dark, idealistic hero of the American 20th century, some covert, nocturnal, John Wayne Rambo recon mission grunt, something apocalyptic. In Vietnam, *Boston Sunday Herald* reporter Stanley Eames called Hoch the "Great White Father." More malarkey? "Hoch is a good sailor and a good fighting man," he wrote in a May '64 article. "But his major contribution has been (he would blush and then curse at the label) as a social worker."

Before I left Maine, I asked Wes to send me some of the photos and clippings of those most formative, "fabulous" experiences of his life, including a copy of his unpublished book, *Dai Uy*. I sensed a little hesitation, as with all Vietnam Vets, the heart of darkness seizing the hero myth and torturing it, but the material was critical to the story, to who Wes Hoch is, or who else Wes Hoch was.

About a month after the interview, I found an email message from Wes titled, *Material for your Saga:*

Hope to have all the material in the mail to you on Monday, but just remembered it's a holiday, so it will be Tuesday morning. Once you get it, let us know what else you need and we'll try to get it to you. I'm doing fine. Will see the doctor this Friday and get the final results of all the testing. Basically, I was not taking my pills properly, only half of what I was supposed to take. I'll fill you in on "How to be stupid as you grow older" the next time we talk.

Wes.

With his signature comic spin, it immediately reminded me of something else I'd read in that same *Boston Herald* article written almost 40 years ago: "Last month, spurred by a $100 gift from Rockland's First Methodist Church, [Hoch] got some government cement and local labor and built a four-bed

Vietnam Veter
Feted At Rockla

ROCKLAND—This city honored its hero of the war in Vietnam with a testimonial banquet at the Thorndike Hotel Wednesday evening, and Lt. Cmdr. Wesley Hoch said before the dinner he would "rather face the Viet Cong than all those people out there. I'm not used to all this . . ."

But he came through with flying colors, and gained a standing ovation from 100 fellow citizens and visiting dignitaries for his accomplishments during the past 18 months in a remote jungle halfway around the world.

Hoch, son of Mrs. Ruth Hoch of Glen Cove, told the audience, "because of your efforts some people in Vietnam are warm tonight; because of your efforts there is a hospital . . ."

He referred to the Rockland Junior Chamber of Commerce project, Operation Cover, which resulted in sending some 300 blankets to Hoch for use by members of his Vietnamese task force; and funds sent by the Pratt Memorial Hospital of Rockland for construction of a small hospital on the Island of Phu Quoc.

"You people supplied these things," he said, "and I was just the tool with which they were solicited . . ."

He didn't mention the fact that it was his initiative which secured for villagers on the Island of Phu Quoc the following items in addition to the blankets and the hospital: Four tons of clothing from the Norfolk, Va. area; three tons of medical supplies from a number of major pharmaceutical houses; 555 pairs of shoes; contributions from lollipop and doll manufacturers; and motion picture films from Walt Disney.

The young naval officer assured the gathering that the State of Maine has received world-wide acclaim through the projects, but pointed out that the most important thing accomplished by the deeds was the fact that "it made it very difficult for the Viet Cong to come in and talk about the American capitalists and warmongers."

"There are 15,000 over there," he contin some of them are g all by dying for the c is a war that must a won . . ."

Hoch was presented the city by City Coun man Dale W. Lind earlier read a proclam claiming Wednesday Hoch Day" here and sented that framed pap guest of honor.

Hoch, introduced by Look Jr., after a nu speakers paid their was made an honorary of the Rockland Junior ber of Commerce by im past Jaycee President Foote Jr., and notified will be the local club's to be designated one three outstanding young the state when that annu cee competition arrives.

Bringing greetings fron John H. Reed was Nava tain Philip Anderson. Dyer of Rockland repre Congressman Stanley R. per, and the Maine Ma Academy, of which Hoch graduate, was represente its executive officer, Lt. C A. R. Philbrook.

Chamber of Commerce P dent W. David Verrill a the audience to "take a minutes to reflect upon this young man stands he exemplifies our Amer way of life . . ."

Master of ceremonies Paul Huber. Also seated at head table were Hoch's m er, and his brothers and t wives, Mr. and Mrs. Da Hoch and Mr. and Mrs. Willi Hoch.

Telegrams from guests una to be present were read by V rill and came from Sen. M garet Chase Smith, Sen. E mund S. Muskie, Congressm Clifford G. McIntire, Ar Redevelopment Administrati Field Representative Jerom Barnett, who formerly wa executive secretary of the Roc land Chamber of Commerc and Mr. and Mrs. James Mc Cammant.

dispensary which was dedicated with solemn ceremonies [on Phu Quoc Island]. Hoch is high on medicine for he believes, 'You can do as much with a bottle of pills as a company of rifles.'"

I finally received two packages about a month after the email. I opened one of the old vinyl scrapbooks Wes dug out of his attic, the same garret where Captain Gregory stored his logbooks and that overlooked Glen Cove. A damp, aged, fusty smell, like the cold rice and fish Hoch ate with his troops, exploded from the dozens of black and white photos, letters, yellowed newspaper and magazine clippings, telegrams from U.S. Senators, and Congressional Record entries. Everything in this first collection has a similar remarkable flavor, compressed over time, glue bleeding from the ink and film causing some memories to be bonded together to where peeling them apart threatens their legibility and, thus, their recollection. Black pajamas and barefoot, unique and unorthodox, Hoch dazzled the Vietnamese as well as his superior officers. Perhaps it was early enough in the conflict, he was an "early advisor," or, perhaps it was just his way of getting things done—Hoch emerged a true hero, no small feat compared to what later Vietnam vets went through when they returned home.

After high school Wes attended Severn Academy in Annapolis while Dave went to the Naval Academy nearby. Wes left Maryland and spent the next four years at the Maine Maritime Academy, Castine, graduating in 1953 with honors and a BS in marine engineering. Dave eventually left the Naval Academy and served a combat role in

the Korean War. Following several years at sea as a merchant marine on an around-the-world crew, Wes joined the Navy where he served until 1960 installing the distant early warning network before re-enlisting for merchant maritime service. In the middle of 1961 the Navy called him back for duty in Vietnam. By November of '63, as reported in the Navy Times, he'd made Lieutenant Commander. He received the Bronze Star with Combat and Distinguishing Service and the Vietnamese Medal of Honor, an unheard of accomplishment for an American.

Irate over the growing number of "derogatory remarks made about U.S. military officers in Vietnam," U.S. Republican Senator Margaret Chase Smith from Maine, implored the Senate to place into the record for October 21, 1963, a story written by *Boston Sunday Globe* reporter Orville Schell. The article, "A Legend in Remote Seas: Maine Navy Lieutenant Leads Viet Junks," was received without objection. Schell wrote: "He has a rare rapport with the junkmen with whom he works. They, in turn, are devoted to him. For Dai Wei Hoch (their name for him) is one of them—24 hours a day. He wants no escape to separate quarters, clean restrooms, Western food, military clubs, and air-conditioned rooms when 5 O'clock rolls around. Unlike so many other American advisors in Vietnam, Hoch lives, sleeps, eats and fights 24 hours a day, every day, with his junkmen. He refuses to accept any privilege he cannot give his men. He says he hates to see stuff sit in Saigon warehouses rotting when his men are cold at night, wet during the day, undernourished, and manning junks that are short of arms."

Going through the contents of the first notebook, my gullible mind acted up again. This time it was Lieutenant Willard (played by Martin Sheen) reading the dossier of Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando), in the back of a patrol boat making its way up the Mekong River in Francis Ford Coppola's film, *Apocalypse Now*. Willard was on a search and destroy mission, Kurtz's brain cells were locked in a little Nietzchean tango, blurring universally accepted boundaries for what makes common moral ground. Lieutenant Commander Wesley Hoch of Glen Cove, Maine, and now Phu Quoc Island, Vietnam seemed, according to all the press coverage, the antithesis of Kurtz, who could even be interpreted as a Wilson-gone-over-the-edge. Despite the reality-plus conditions beyond the big screen, Hoch closed a letter to his commanding officer with, "you always seem to be fighting for your principles and what you think is right. I'm sorry I don't have time [to write] much more, but we must get out of here before night for our present location isn't secure because of the Vietcong. I'll get this letter on a helo that is coming now."

Imagine driving the brass in Saigon crazy enough to draw a remote assignment as advisor to the Vietnamese Fourth Naval District Junk Fleet, being dropped from a plane onto the 40-mile long island of Phu Quoc at the southern tip of Vietnam, totally unaware of what to expect. "What the hell," Wes laughs. "The VC could have come up to me and said let's go, and I would've gone with them. I didn't know what was going on, nobody did."

Imagine finding six out of 60 junks in any kind of working condition, some of them rotting on the beach. Imagine taking responsibility with your men, fearless men with "Sat Cong" (kill communists) tattooed across their chests, to patrol an area from the tip of the Cambodian border to the tip of

("Wes Hoch..." continued on p. 18)

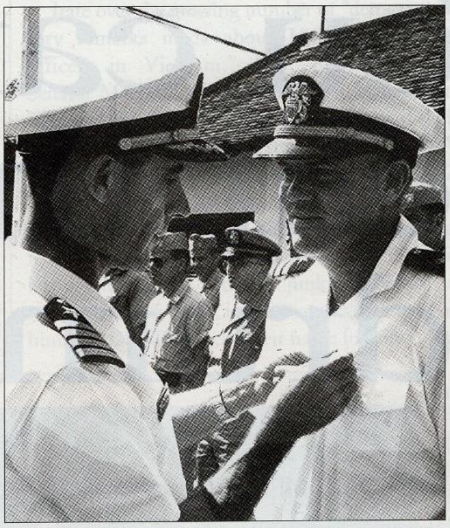
("Wes Hoch" from p. 16)

the Camau Peninsula, Gulf of Siam—thwarting insurgent amphibious assaults, attacking villages, confiscating enemy junks, disrupting supply lines, taking more prisoners in one month than an entire Army Corps. Imagine having to defend the primitive outpost-village-headquarters of An-Thoi with, at any given time, 30 junk force sailors against an estimated 250 Phu Quoc Vietcong. Hoch did this with an exorbitant price on his fiery red-topped head, a 500,000 piaster reward (about 7,000 1963 US dollars) for his death and another 500,000 for his Gunner's Mate First Class, Joe Pritchard, in a place where the locals wear torn rags, sleep on the ground, and eat a little rice when they are fortunate enough to have it. Imagine not being able to go anywhere, even to Saigon, without your bodyguard, Hai. Hoch attacked the Vietcong's means of survival—the faith of common villagers, the VC's source of food, shelter, and transportation.

Imagine the surprise of *Stars and Stripes* reporter Al Kramer when he visited Hoch and Pritchard for a story and was given red carpet treatment—a Jerry Lewis movie on a torn bed sheet, the real entertainment coming in the middle of the show when the VC started to attack. Hoch grabbed his carbine and spent the next 15 minutes in the chaos of exploding grenades and tracer fire. Imagine Deputy Senior Naval Advisor, Captain Phillip W. Porter's consternation when he decided to pay Hoch a visit and found him playing dentist, filling the teeth of local villagers. "I learned it at the Saigon dispensary on a two week leave, borrowed the equipment, and if I don't do it, who will?" Herald reporter Eames recorded Hoch's response to Porter's inflamed inquiry.

Imagine even more surprise on the faces of executives at Walt Disney, and toy and candy companies, when they received requests from Hoch for supplies, gifts, and entertainment for his adopted Vietnamese people. One Thanksgiving he bought and distributed 300 dolls that became more like treasured relics than toys for village kids, and his letter to Walt Disney claimed, "Mickey Mouse can stop this war." Eames wrote: "Fighting the eerie Vietnamese war in junks is strange by itself. Fighting it Hoch's way is a direct violation of every rule in every military book. He has all the ingenuity of a Sgt. Bilko, and he uses it ruthlessly to help the people he protects. He has reversed military practice far more drastically than the planners who advocate winning the hearts and minds of the people. And he demonstrates that what officialdom calls Psychological War and Civic Action help people and help win wars."

Imagine Ruth Hoch's expression when she received a letter from her son who wrote in part: "You ask if I need anything. Well, I could use the garbage to feed some of these poor people. I suppose it's difficult to understand there are people in the world who have nothing except one old dirty shirt and a pair of old torn pants you wouldn't use as rags. When it's time to sleep, they just lie down. If it rains, they get wet." And in another letter home: "It is hard when they carry the killed back or they get shot protecting me, for it's losing a friend and never seems right. But that is the price they must pay for freedom. Tomorrow I will bury another of my boys who died never knowing what it meant to live in a free civilized world. He only knew hunger and want." Imagine being called the "Santa Claus of South Vietnam Island"; being visited on Phu Quoc by General Stillwell and asked to join the Army; the Vietnamese Navy requesting a six-month extension on your tour of duty. Imagine an 80-year old Maine woman sending Hoch the blankets off her bed; Hoch playing with pet monkeys and a boa constrictor named Alice; capturing a VC junk, painting a red cross on it, calling it the Blue Goose and using it as a hospital ship; hiking two days through dense jungle to a remote village in an attempt to reach out to primitive people and honored with a meal of fresh, quivering monkey brains, a local delicacy.



> Fighting the eerie Vietnamese war in junks is strange by itself. Fighting it Hoch's way is a direct violation of every rule in every military book.

Imagine...imagine...imagine...

The communion with time and its lazy distant comfort, the first notebook became a utopian paradise of stories, a hard to leave island with hidden treasures in the middle of the century, the New Testament of Phu Quoc. And Wes Hoch became what mankind, if not men, should be in a place where the best and the worst of what we are compete for milk and blood in every thought, dream, and movement.

Notebook Number Two

The bull is gone. Hoch's growling, sometimes burlesque dismissal of his deeds leads one right to the door of his philanthropy. But by now I was almost afraid to open the second notebook, another vinyl folder with the U.S. School of Music monogrammed on the front containing 541 single-sided, double spaced, type written pages of Hoch's memoirs. Was Wilson hiding somewhere in these pages? Is he still important, even as myth? What about Kurtz? History has proved war plays havoc on a soldier's mind—life and death squeezed so close together. What about 'acts of Kurtz,' like Lt. Calley's My Lai massacre? Hoch told me during the interview he had his troops dress like Vietcong, go into villages, burn them down only to return the next day as South Vietnamese junkmen and rebuild them in a ruse of propaganda. The world, press, junkmen, and villagers new Wes Hoch one way, but how well did he know himself?

("Wes Hoch..." continued on p. 26)

("Carbon Fiber..." from p. 25)

and polyester resins. However, it has been determined that certain resins yield less contamination when processed by the various cutting and fibrillation methods. Xerox has used the Modar®, acryllic based resin from Ashland Chemical, with some success. Currently they are using a proprietary derivative of this resin system. Preliminary work at Xerox has evaluated these DFCs in low powered switching applications.

The third fibrillation method is a combination of mechanical cutting and "thermal" fibrillation. This method produces relatively long fibers of between 3 and 10 millimeters.

Most of us in the composites industry are very familiar with materials and processing information and theory. However, many of us a little bit weak in electrical theory. Therefore there may be some questions as to why a material like carbon fiber, with higher electrical resistivity (compared to metals) would be better than metal in an electrical contact application.

Apparently metallic contacts always have smaller areas of current conduction, referred to as "A-spots" where most of the energy will transfer across the contact. These areas conduct most of the current and they make up only a small amount of the overall available contact area.

As the current runs through these areas there is a localized heating of the contact area, resulting in a higher impedance at those contact points. Additionally, there are abundant chances for contamination to occur at the contact points. This adds up to a fairly high rate of failure for many electrical contacts.

So, what about DFCs? DFCs have much higher surface area for contact than metallic contacts. The fibrous surfaces provide for ultra-high contact densities. The length of the exposed fibers provide an "engagement length" which allows for multiple contact points on an individual fiber. DFCs provide high density of conduction sites, evenly distributed across the entire surface of the contact. They also have a low incidence of surface contamination! Metals tend to form various oxides or salts on the surface, depending on the environment. These oxides or salts can impede the electrical flow across the contact.

Carbon fibers are relatively inert, so they tend to resist the formation of any non-conductive surface films.

This all leads to an increased contact reliability for DFCs not available in traditional metal contacts. Generally, the usefulness of this type of contact will be in those applications where relatively high impedance losses can be tolerated. The application is particularly useful in low contact force applications. In certain applications where only moderate contact will be required to create a circuit, the ability to vary the fibrillation offers broad flexibility in contact design.

High voltage connections, non corroding battery terminals, interconnects for battery powered products like laptops and handheld devices, snap-in contacts for fluorescent light bulbs, low force connectors, security sensors, these are just a few of the potential applications for this new product.

The composites industry is truly unbounded in its efforts to find new and innovative applications for its continually emerging technologies. This is just one more example where "outside the box" thinking has opened a new frontier for composites products. ***–CFA***

("Wes Hoch..." from p. 18)

On the deck of the USS Monrovia APA-31, Operations Officer and Boat Group Commander Wes Hoch listened hard to the loudspeaker as President John Kennedy told the world the US would "halt Cuba's offensive build-up by a strict quarantine of all offensive military equipment." Hoch had just put 2500 US Marines on the beach in Guantanamo, and the Monrovia was poised in a "modified battle condition and anything the blockade might bring."

Sometime earlier, bored with routine, Hoch had put in for a new assignment as a member of a military advisory assistance group, something like France or Germany. With the Cuban missile crisis heating up, a radio messenger handed him transfer orders, and in the dim red light of the combat ready bridge of the Monrovia, Hoch learned that he was to report to the Commandant of the Eighth Naval District for transportation to Saigon, South Vietnam, as numerical relief to Lt. John Smith.

"I leaned over the wing of the bridge and wondered what the hell I'd done to get an assignment like this," wrote Hoch. "I wasn't even sure where Vietnam was. Vaguely I remembered reading something about it in the papers, but I hadn't paid much attention. I was mad as hell. If they wanted me to advise them on how to plow fields, I might be able to help them, for as a boy I grew up on a farm. But, I didn't have any idea what a junk force was."

Through the scratched window of a beat-up old Beechcraft, war far from his mind, Hoch marveled at the lush beauty of thick jungles separated by meticulous rice paddies and tiny rivers squirming every which way.

"I've never been here before, but I hear the Vietcong fire at anything without feathers, so we're going in low over the coast, and when we stop, get off fast," the crew chief shouted from the front of the plane. "I hope you make it."

Hoch's gear hit the makeshift runway in the jungle and he was pushed out after it.

"There I stood with my duffel bag, a first aid kit, some rations, and a roll of maps printed in French," wrote Hoch. "I sat down and yelled 'Hello,' then remembered the VC controlled 95 percent of the island."

With orders to report to An-Thoi, Hoch first confirmed his position on Phu Quoc, then figured the village of An-Thoi to be 35 miles to the south. In the blistering heat, he hoisted his duffel and weapons, and staggered a mile down the path to the village of Doung Dong where he finally convinced two Vietnamese boys, about 12 years old, with a broken down junk, to give him a lift. When they reached the Bay of An-Thoi, another young boy paddled out to get Hoch in a straw basket held together with buffalo dung and mud.

"Finally, out of desperation, I let go of the junk and lunged into the basket," Hoch remembers. "I landed in the bottom with water gushing in from all sides, and scurried to the center so it wouldn't capsize. For a moment, I thought I'd have to swim after all, but then the water stopper. Sticking my head over the edge of the basket, I saw at least a thousand people, dressed in black pajamas, and when they saw my head bob up they gave a great cheer."

Hoch'd retrieved the tethered basket from the young Vietnamese boys who'd gone to shore before him. He found a piece of wood and started paddling only to spin round and round in circles, making no progress toward shore until a five year old girl waded out and pulled him in. More cheers.

And so it begins, a detailed narrative laid bare... chicken feet and

("Wes Hoch..." continued on p. 27)

("Wes Hoch..." from p. 26)

heads floating in soup, disturbing dreams of firing squads, octopus and beetle bugs piled on counters, hoards of vampire mosquitoes, pet puppies most villagers wanted to eat, "sticky gobs of sweets on banana leaves," and everything covered with flies.

Through much of the story, Hoch wrestles with red tape to win the trust of the Vietnamese villagers of Phu Quoc, people he came to love and admire. There were, however, trips up river into the beating heart of darkness: "At exactly 5am ... we boarded our junk for Nam Can [where] an operation was in progress designed to bring the area under government control. The trip through Vietcong territory was something I didn't look forward to, for it was 13 miles up the Song Cua Lon river, a narrow river where we would be at their mercy. As we cautiously proceeded up the murky waterway, the sounds of the jungle were enough to scare you. Streaks of dawn were inching their way across the sky. In a small opening ... I saw three men and before I could yell to Sang, they opened fire and ripped holes in our cabin. I hit the deck and could feel the bullets ripping into the side of the junk."

And Wilson, with gun in hand, did indeed appear in flashes (how could he not, the untroubled side of the hero myth) between the lines that recounted blistering firefights: "Around midnight the stillness of the jungle was cracked wide open by the staccato of machine gun fire and the small compound resounded with explosions. We poured machine gun fire into the jungle. In the intervals, between rounds, I could hear drums in the background [which] made the whole episode more chilling. We dashed across the open ground and dove headfirst into our command junk ... the motor chugging, machine guns clattering. We revved up the diesel and came driving back behind the Vietcong position, opening up with every gun on the boat."

But at the end of the journey no trace of Kurtz appeared, no convenience in the surreal, only Hoch and his hard earned Christian morality. After a routine mission that included building a school in the village of Song Ong Doc, Hoch was glad to reach the provincial capital of Rach Gia, a place reported to be infested with the enemy. He managed a shower and invited several South Vietnamese officers out to a dinner of con-cur, tiny crabs first boiled then fried with fresh black pepper. Small, twisted and deformed children squirmed and begged around the entrance of the restaurant.

"They affected me deeply," Hoch wrote. "From the time they learned to move about they were alone, neglected, hungry, and forgotten in a land that has nothing to offer."

Much to the annoyance of his South Vietnamese counterparts, Hoch emptied his pockets and gave the children all his money.

After dinner, halfway to the base, Hoch returned to the restaurant to retrieve his sunglasses. He stopped along a dark canal and chucked a pebble into the still oriental pool. He followed the ripples into images of beggar kids and thoughts of his reputation for making waves wherever he went. For several months, he's contemplated bible verses

("Wes Hoch..." continued on p. 50)

("Wes Hoch..." from p. 27)

learned as a child in Maine, verses that seemed to have no power 10,000 miles away. As he turned to leave, he heard rustling in the brush and reached for his .45. It wasn't there, he'd left it on the Blue Goose. Remembering he never carried a gun in the provincial capital, he moved quickly toward a dimly lit street, ready to break into a full run to save his life. Something inside, however, caused him to whirl around.

"Who's there?" he shouted.

As the bushes parted, a gnarled, hunchbacked adolescent girl on crutches stumbled out, her bare feet "shapeless lumps, swollen, disfigured, almost useless."

Hoch's urge to run, he discovered, only vanished for a split second, for now he faced what he felt in his heart was a bigger danger.

"I'm sorry if I frightened you Dai Uy," she said, brushing aside her straggling hair.

In the shadows of the hot, vaporous alley, Hoch's spirit slumped to the ground. He knelt, held out his hands. "Come, come to Dai Uy," he said. "Where is your family?"

"Anyone who is kind to me is my family," she answered. "Tonight, you were my family when you gave me money at the restaurant."

"Little one, what is your name?" Hoch asked.

"Chu Lou," she responded.

"Well Chu Lou, I am going to take you and find you a home with one of my junkmen."

Chu Lou started to cry, pressed her hand to her face and said, "Dai Uy, I am not like other children. I cannot bring my troubles to others."

"I don't understand," Hoch said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Dai Uy, I wish to be like other children. I wish to walk and play. You can make me whole. I have heard of you from many in the city. They say you are like Buddha. Please, Dai Uy, make me whole."

Life is a constant adventure, I can't remember when it wasn't," Hoch said, as he parked the Bimmer. "Those people who retire and say they have nothing to do? There's so much to do I get a headache thinking about it."

We walk toward Main Street, turn the corner into the Thomaston Café and Bakery and, before ordering a couple Rubens, Hoch's niece, Jennifer, a pastry chef, engages her uncle by marriage in lively chat.

Everybody loves Wes, and it seems ridiculous to imagine this man holding, aiming, firing a gun at anyone. The night before he even accused me of being a "good person" because I picked up Spaulding's cat Ruger and stroked it.

"If I had it to do over again, I would've studied the arts, especially music," Hoch told me later in the car. Here's the man who befuddled his sailor buddies and went to the museum or opera during shore leave, instead of the bar. Here's the man who said, "Pi-R-squared means nothing to someone starving in Ethiopia, but if you can sing them a lullaby—that's universal." Here's the man who's completely taken with what makes us mortal.

Back and forth, soldier/missionary.

When meeting an exceptional person, one always expects to form some grand conclusion. Hemmingway's myth, the struggle, what I'd been carrying around since I first heard of Wes Hoch and his stories, now seems tantalizingly simple.

"Once he killed himself, I lost a lot of respect for him," Hoch says of the man who penned the Wilson and Macomber characters. "The way he supposedly hated his mother. My mum was the center of everything, it's hard to understand. I know it's a very complex all-or-nothing kind of thing. But he is on the list of things to do, to go back and re-read between the lines of his works."

Then, addressing me directly, Wes said, "I'm sure someone like you has a lot of respect for him, since he's a writer's icon."

Was I Macomber searching for manhood through journalism? It is complicated and, unlike Hoch's generation and maybe to our peril, too complicated for grand conclusions. In a simpler world, younger men can still admire older men—teachers, chiefs—even if they can no longer become them. Dai Uy means officer, chief, boss, depending on context. "Dai Uy number one," Lo claimed of the man who thrived on small, strenuous, and, to many of us, mysterious victories.

Secretary of the Navy Paul Nitzer, in Hoch's bronze star citation, put it in military terms: "For meritorious achievement... resulting in... denial to the Vietcong of ... effective bases of operations... furthered by continued harassing pressure... attacks against Vietcong lines and numerous personnel and material casualties were inflicted..."

And Wes, in between bites of his sandwich, thoughts of the bronze star 10,000 miles to the west, put it in his terms: "The best advice I ever got was from an old fisherman in Vietnam. He said your success in life is measured each night, if before you go to bed, you can say someone else is better off because of you. Vietnam changed me. I learned that possessions are not important. If I had a million dollars over there, there was nothing to buy. If a Vietnamese family lost their home in a storm, they'd cut some palm fronds and build a new one by nightfall. If you stop a minute and think, what's your life right now without people?"

A short while ago, a suspected heart complication thrust Hoch into a coma. Doctors told his brother Dave he wasn't expected to live and that he should maybe start making arrangements. The outlook appeared certain when Wes' kidney's started to fail. In an ambulance, on the way to Portland, however, everything miraculously started working again. Hoch came out of the coma expecting to remember a near-death experience. A devout Born Again, Christianity played a huge role in his life, from the time his mother held Sunday school classes at home to the time he sat distressed on a beach in Vietnam and a scrap of paper with the St. Francis of Assisi prayer blew into his lap.

"I didn't get all the lights and things, there was no long tunnel," he said disappointedly. "What I got was this gorgeous island, with blue-green water, and these big old red parrots all over the place."

When, several months later, I heard the poet Robert Bly declare that more Vietnam vets have died from the hands of suicide since the war ended than died fighting the war, I was handed a free ticket to Hoch's paradise. It can be a gorgeous place. **–*CFA***

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