

"Hanoi Hilton" Brick Provenance

The provenance of the bricks recovered from the Hoa Lo prison in Hanoi, Vietnam, also known as the Maison Centrale and the "Hanoi Hilton", is as follows:

In 1993, an American veteran of the Vietnam War who lived in Hanoi was passing by the location of the prison, and noticed the ongoing destruction of a large portion of the prison to make way for new high-rise structures. After stopping his car, and composing himself after the initial shock of seeing all these precious relics – these bricks - he proceeded to ask the demolition crew if he could have some of the bricks. The leader of the crew told him that he could have as many as he wanted because this unusable construction rubble was going to the dump anyway. It is an interesting case proving that "One man's trash is another man's treasure."

The bricks themselves are common red-colored construction bricks measuring approximately eight inches in length, four inches in height, and three and a half inches thick. Each is marked by the abbreviation "F. C. & Cie" and the word "Hanoi". An internet search reveals that F. C. & Cie was the trademark of a French silversmith and stands for the Foret Collin and Company. Additionally, the spelling of "Hanoi" is not in Vietnamese as it lacks essential tone and diacritical marks indicative of that language. In fact, it is written in French as a single word and includes two unusual dots similar to the German umlaut over the "i" in the word "Hanoi", which indicates a diphthong, or blending of the vowels "o" and "i" in French.

Since it is thoroughly documented that this company, Foret Collin and Company, manufactured all the metal features of the prison - doors and prison bars, it is apparent that it actually produced all the materials, including, the brick molds needed to construct the Maison Centrale prison around the beginning of the 20th Century. Based on the kiln marks and the French spelling of Hanoi, it is logical to presume that Foret Collin Company provided the molds to a local contractor in Vietnam to manufacture all of the bricks. Older Vietnamese people in the area interviewed when these bricks were recovered indicated that they had been told years ago that the actual brick kiln was located in the center courtyard of what became the Maison Centrale. In selecting the bricks, our benefactor chose only those bricks with the visible kiln mark "F . C. & Cie" and the word "Hanoi" as described.

Ambassador "Pete" Petersen, the first US ambassador to Vietnam following the Vietnam War; Navy Commander Everett Alvarez, the longest held POW; and Senator John McCain, who was shot down over Vietnam, are all recipients of one of these bricks as are more than forty other former American prisoners-of-war (POW) held in Vietnam, numerous US government agencies, and numerous Air Force veterans.

We believe these bricks are truly symbolic of the courage, service, and sacrifice not only of our prisoners-of-war, but also the more than fifty-eight thousand Americans that perished during the conflict as well as the millions of American veterans that answered their country's call-to-duty during the Vietnam War.