

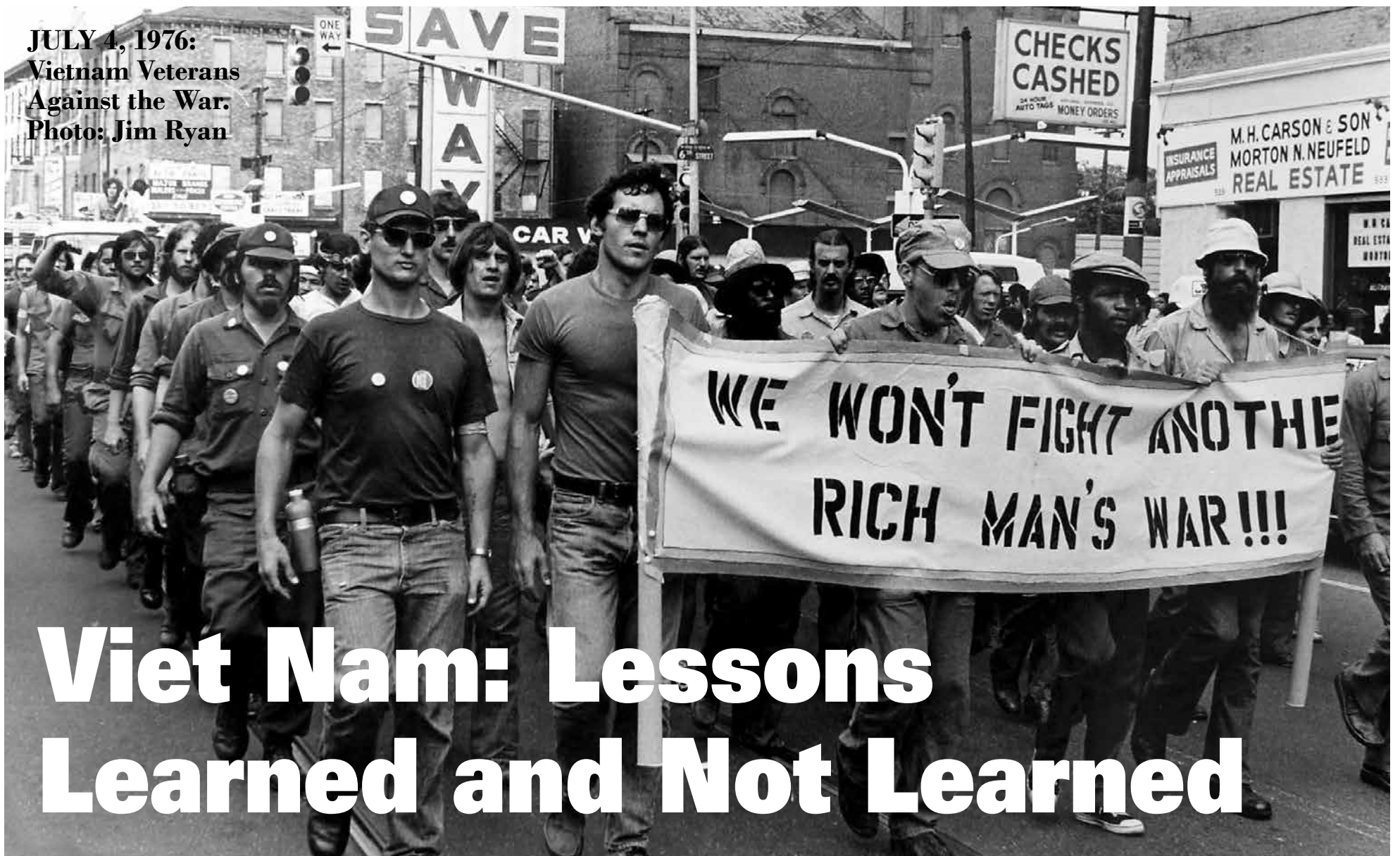
The Vietnam War: A Film Everyone Can Embrace?

Camillo Mac Bica on the Ken Burns/Lynn Novick Documentary Series, page 3

FULL DISCLOSURE

TRUTH ABOUT AMERICA'S WAR IN VIET NAM

JULY 4, 1976:
Vietnam Veterans
Against the War.
Photo: Jim Ryan



Viet Nam: Lessons Learned and Not Learned

By W.D. Ehrhart

On Memorial Day 2012, standing in front of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., President Barack Obama gave a speech announcing the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War. The entire speech is far too long to repeat here, but let me give you a few key passages:

“One of the most painful chapters in our history was Vietnam—most particularly how we treated our troops who served there. You were often blamed for a war you didn’t start, when you should have been commended for serving your country with valor. You were sometimes blamed for the misdeeds of the few, when the honorable service of the many should have been praised. You came home and sometimes were denigrated, when you should have been celebrated. It was a national shame, a disgrace that should have never happened.

“And so a central part of this 50th anniversary will be to tell your story as it should have been told all along. It’s another chance to set

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A PUBLICATION OF VETERANS FOR PEACE

Introduction

Pentagon Lies vs. Harder Truths About the War

One hundred generations ago, the Greek dramatist Aeschylus said it best: “In times of war, truth is the first casualty.” The American War in Viet Nam is no exception. Lies are layered onto lies, from the supposed attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin to the scuttling flights of choppers off the rooftops of Saigon—years and years of lies.

And now the Pentagon is concocting the ultimate lie—a fabrication of history woven to convince us and our children that our immoral military adventure in Southeast Asia was a noble undertaking. As many of the authors in this publication point out eloquently, this Pentagon glorification is not only undeserved but dangerously deceptive. The little lies gathered to form the Big Lie are put together by design to hide crimes of the worst magnitude—crimes against humanity, war crimes.

The intent of these lies is to make noble and heroic not only that war but also current and future wars, which in these times especially, is fraught with peril for our very survival. It is that crucial. It is time

to set the record straight.

A radically honest accounting of this war and the inevitable conclusion that follows is essential—that the war was not merely a series of unfortunate mistakes and miscalculations, but was based on intentional and calculated politically motivated lies calculated to hide crimes of the worst magnitude, and a betrayal of trust that would make our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines complicit in those crimes.

The Department of Defense has set out to mislead the public about the American War in Viet Nam and to offer a patriotic framework for that moral debacle. We are also concerned that *The Vietnam War*, the much heralded 10-part documentary by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick will, perhaps unintentionally, reinforce that view unless voices of those who have reached a different conclusion are heard.

Presidents want to cast past wars in favorable terms in order to launch into new wars of their own making. President Obama was no exception—as Bill Ehrhart points out, the commander-in-chief wanted



us all to breathe a sigh of relief and accept our military aggression into Viet Nam as a noble undertaking that all of us should be proud of and willing to see repeated.

Many of us who fought in that war and those who fought against it remember a different war: one of unbridled aggression, one of soul-sinking depravity as well as individual acts of heroism, but an experience so deeply ingrained in our psyches that 50 years later we wake in cold sweat. It was not a battle fought for freedom and democracy and not one that we are proud of.

And, lest we forget, this war, which was supposed to turn boys into men, was not fought in a playground sandbox. It was fought in a country of human beings like all of us, who wanted their independence from foreign colonial powers, who wanted to live in peace, who were truly mystified by our intentions, who saw their bodies, beloved families, land, and villages torn apart for no good reason.

The U.S. soldiers who were sent to fight, the citizens who struggled against this military madness, and those Southeast Asian people who were on the receiving end of the American Empire's war have something in common. We have all been scarred. And we have honest stories to tell that do not support the noble narrative the

Pentagon wants the public to believe.

Here are articles and photographs that tell the real story of that war. They come to you from U.S. and NVA soldiers, from resisters and rice farmers, from children of soldiers, from nurses, and from innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire.

Some narratives come in the form of letters that were placed at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall), written directly to The Wall as a way of saying what was deepest in our souls and sharing our pain, anguish, love, and even sometimes hope, with those who died too young.

As veterans, we refuse to shrink from the truth that this American War in Viet Nam was based on deception and war crimes by the highest levels of our government. We know we may rekindle deep emotions and even grief with these words and pictures, but we feel that the acceptance of truth in all its dimensions is necessary if the human race is to survive. It is a hard walk, but we invite you to take it with us, this walk of truth. And perhaps, just perhaps, one day it may lead to a walk of peace.

Doug Rawlings

U.S. Army, Viet Nam, 1969–70

Tarak Kauff

U.S. Army Airborne, 1959–62



Veterans For Peace and the Vietnam Full Disclosure Project



Veterans For Peace, founded in 1985, is a global organization of military veterans and allies collectively building a culture of peace by using our experiences and lifting our voices. We inform

the public of the true causes of war and the enormous costs of wars, with an obligation to heal the wounds of wars. Our network of over 140 chapters worldwide works to educate the public, advocates dismantling the war economy, provides services to assist veterans and victims of war, and, most significant, end all wars.

The Full Disclosure campaign is a Veterans For Peace effort to speak truth to power and keep alive the antiwar perspective on the American War in Viet Nam. It is a clear alternative to the Department of Defense's efforts to sanitize and mythologize the U.S. role in the war, which legitimizes further unnecessary

and destructive wars.

In 2012, President Obama announced a plan for a 13-year commemoration funded at \$65 million: “As we observe the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War ... we pay tribute to the more than 3 million servicemen and women who ... pushed through jungles and rice paddies, heat and monsoon, fighting heroically to protect the ideals we hold dear as Americans.” It is what the President and the Department of Defense don't say that's significant.

Rather than conducting an honest evaluation to learn from the U.S. intervention in Viet Nam, the DoD is promoting an *ex post facto* justification of the war without acknowledging the terrible destruction and damage done to the Vietnamese people and land. Neither does the campaign confront the lasting impact of this conflict on U.S. soldiers and their families—from loss of life and physical disabilities and illnesses to the transmission of birth defects caused by Agent Orange to their progeny. Our government does not men-

tion the millions of Vietnamese, including women and children, who were captured, tortured, displaced, and killed. There is no representation of the heroic U.S. soldiers who resisted the war, nor any honest acknowledgment of domestic protest, nor any tribute to the voices and postwar reconciliation activities of many antiwar veterans. For more information, visit vietnam-fulldisclosure.org.

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Burns' and Novick's *The Vietnam War* Honest Reappraisal or New Obfuscation?

The following article was written in anticipation of the release of Ken Burns' and Lynn Novick's 18-hour 10-part documentary, scheduled to be aired in September 2017 on PBS television.

By Camillo Mac Bica

Much has been written and many documentaries made about the American War in Vietnam including the highly acclaimed 1983 effort by PBS, *Vietnam: A Television History*. Though not without its shortcomings, that 13-part documentary series was well crafted, meticulously researched, carefully balanced, and thought-provoking.

In September 2017, PBS will air the highly anticipated—being touted as the definitive—documentary about the Vietnam War, directed by respected documentarians Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. The goal of this 10-episode, 18-hour project is, according to the directors, to “create a film everyone could embrace” and to provide the viewer with “new and revelatory” information and insights. They intend the film to provide the impetus and parameters for a much needed national conversation about this controversial and divisive period in American history.

The film will be accompanied by an unprecedented outreach and public engagement program, providing opportunities

for communities to participate in a national conversation about what happened during the Vietnam War, what went wrong, and what lessons can be learned. There will be a robust interactive website and an educational initiative designed to engage teachers and students in multiple platforms.

‘[T]he troubles that trouble us today’ are a direct consequence of our reluctance to admit the hard truth of U.S. criminality and of the appropriation of memory to portray this nation’s involvement and our soldiers’ behavior in Vietnam as honorable and noble.

In an interview and discussion of the documentary on Detroit Public TV, Burns describes what he hopes to accomplish as a filmmaker, “Our job is to tell a good story.” In response and in praise of Burns’ work, the interviewer offers his view of documentary. “The story that filmmakers like yourself, the story that storytellers create, are the framework that allows us to understand the truth because the truth is too unfathomable to take in all at once.” To which Burns quickly adds, “And there are many truths.”

My hope is that Burns and Novick,

in “creating their story” of the Vietnam War, will demonstrate the same commitment to truth and objectivity as their PBS predecessor. I hope that they have resisted the less than subtle pressure from what many historians and veterans see as a government-sponsored effort to sanitize and mythologize the U.S. involvement in

this tragic war, as illustrated in President Barack Obama’s proclamation establishing March 29 as Vietnam Veterans Day:

The Vietnam War is a story of service members of different backgrounds, colors, and creeds who came together to complete a daunting mission. It is a story of Americans from every corner of our Nation who left the warmth of family to serve the country they loved. It is a story of patriots who braved the line of fire, who cast themselves into harm’s way to save a

friend, who fought hour after hour, day after day to preserve the liberties we hold dear.

Based upon Burns’ and Novick’s recent *New York Times* op-ed, several interviews with the filmmakers, and the “Special Preview” and numerous video clips from the series posted at the documentary’s PBS website, there are, in my view, serious grounds for concern.

LOWERING EXPECTATIONS

In their op-ed, Burns and Novick expressed their own skepticism as to whether, despite a decade of careful research and analysis and 18 hours of documentary, their viewers will come away with a more accurate understanding of the war:

There is no simple or single truth to be extracted from the Vietnam War. Many questions remain unanswerable. But if, with open minds and open hearts, we can consider this complex event from many perspectives and recognize more than one truth, perhaps we can stop fighting over how the war should be remembered and focus instead on what it can teach us about courage, patriotism, resilience, forgiveness, and, ultimately, reconciliation.

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Documentary

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After nearly 50 years of hindsight, building on the work of previous researchers, having access to new, comprehensive, and formerly unavailable information, archives, and recordings, it is disappointing when the filmmakers state that “many questions remain unanswered.” That does not inspire confidence in the skill, thoroughness, and research capabilities of the documentarians. More troublesome, perhaps, is the claim that “we must recognize more than one truth,” as it smacks of perspectivism, the idea that truth is relative and all opinions of individuals with different, even opposing, viewpoints are equally valid. This may explain, I think, why Burns and Novick can claim to have created “a film everyone could embrace.” If the premise of the documentary is that truth is perspectival, relative not objective, then one may argue for the validity of accepting the “truth” that most benefits us, that makes us look just, courageous, patriotic, resilient, and exceptional. And if, as the PBS interviewer notes, truth is “unfathomable” until placed in the proper framework, truth becomes the perspective of the filmmakers and how they choose to “create” and fashion the “story.”

DOCUMENTARY AS THERAPY

Perhaps I am expecting too much. Documentary is a human endeavor after all, and despite the best of intentions, inevitably expresses the viewpoint and biases, however implicit, of the filmmakers. As

with much historical reporting, memoirs, and documentaries, there is a tendency on the part of the historian, writer, and documentarian, intentionally or not, to tread lightly when recording and analyzing the motives of their political leaders and the actions of their countrymen so as not to offend by appearing unpatriotic or disrespectful of the sacrifices of members of the military who “fought hour after hour, day after day to preserve the liberties we hold dear.” Burns and Novick, not insensitive to how their nation and countrymen are portrayed, indicated their hope that their documentary will provide the impetus for a much-needed national reconciliation between supporters and critics of the war and, perhaps more important, contribute to the healing of veterans who suffered and sacrificed so much on behalf of their country:

If we are to begin the process of healing, we must first honor the courage, heroism, and sacrifice of those who served and those who died, not just as we do today, on Memorial Day, but every day.

Burns’ and Novick’s expectation that their documentary will be therapeutic and their belief that veteran healing is contingent on others honoring their courage, heroism, and sacrifice is misguided on so many levels. My fear is that this misunderstanding of the wounds of war, specifically PTSD and moral injury, will inform, influence, and bias the presentation of fact. Documentary history is not an established therapeutic modality. It is not nec-

essarily suited to effect healing and reconciliation. Rather, the goal and function of the historian and documentarian is to accurately depict the relevant issues and events—in this case, the causes and justifications for the war, why and how the belligerents became involved, the manner in which the war was conducted, etc. It may be the case that accurate, historical reporting and clarification of facts may, as a collateral effect, be therapeutic by putting the war and the experience into perspective and enabling veterans and nonveterans alike to understand what transpired and thereby come to grips with their personal

million Vietnamese, and the description of U.S. involvement in the war as an ill-fated effort to save South Vietnam from hordes of invading North Vietnamese Communists illustrates a not-so-tacit pro-intervention bias and begs the historical questions of why the war was fought, its legitimacy, and its outcome. Objectivity (or at least neutrality) in documentary requires that we not accept without question assumptions that are fundamental to what the documentary is alleging to investigate, such as the legitimacy of South Vietnam as a separate country and U.S. justification for its involvement in the war.

More troublesome, perhaps, is the claim that ‘we must recognize more than one truth,’ as it smacks of perspectivism, the idea that truth is relative and all opinions of individuals with different, even opposing, viewpoints are equally valid.

responsibility, if any, for the horrors of the war. But this therapeutic consequence of documentary and history, should it occur, is a secondary, not the primary intended effect of such an undertaking.

PART OF THE SOLUTION OR PART OF THE THE PROBLEM

In the *New York Times* op-ed, Burns and Novick set the stage for their discussion of the Vietnam War by referencing an address delivered by President Gerald Ford in 1975 at Tulane University in New Orleans. They write,

As the president spoke, more than 100,000 North Vietnamese troops were approaching Saigon, having overrun almost all of South Vietnam in just three months. Thirty years after the United States first became involved in Southeast Asia and 10 years after the Marines landed at Danang, the ill-fated country for which more than 58,000 Americans had died was on the verge of defeat.

Referencing the sacrifice of some 58,000 of its own citizens, while ignoring completely the deaths of over three

In truth, South Vietnam was an artificial construct made possible by the intervention of the United States in violation of the provisions of the 1954 Geneva Accords that forbade foreign intervention during the interim period of national reconciliation following the defeat of the American-funded French colonialists at Dien Bien Phu. The accord required a democratic election to unite all of Vietnam within two years—an election that was prevented by Saigon’s puppet regime and its U.S. overlords for fear that Ho Chi Minh would emerge victorious. Consequently, rather than describing the North Vietnamese as “overrunning” an “ill-fated country,” it would be more historically accurate, not merely a different perspective, to describe the end of hostilities as the liberation of the occupied south.

REMEMBERING

Since Burns and Novick choose to quote noted Vietnamese writer Viet Thanh Nguyen in their op-ed, allow me to quote some more of Nguyen’s commentary on remembering the war. He writes, “Emotion and ethnocentrism are key to the memory industry as it turns wars and ex-

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Documentary

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periences into sacred objects and soldiers into untouchable mascots of memory.”

The validity of Nguyen’s assessment of how the war is remembered and memory appropriated to enhance a political agenda and subvert the historical record is illustrated by one U.S. veteran’s testimony posted on the documentary website. Vincent Okamoto, in remembering his experiences as an infantry company commander in Vietnam, extolls the merits of the soldiers under his command:

Nineteen-year-old high school dropouts from the lowest socioeconomic rung of American society,” he remembered. “They weren’t going to be rewarded for their service in Vietnam. And yet, their infinite patience, their loyalty to each other, their courage under fire, was just phenomenal. And you would ask yourself: How does America produce young men like this?”

Okamoto’s admiration for the men he led in combat is certainly understandable. What must be pointed out, however, is that in most cases, the “19-year-old high school dropouts from the lowest socioeconomic rung of American society” of which Okamoto speaks did not choose to fight for their survival in a land they never knew existed for a cause they didn’t (and if they survived probably still don’t) understand. Nor did their behavior in combat demonstrate nobility and honor as he implies, but, rather, the tragedy of being young and poor in the United States. It indicates as well the

If the premise of the documentary is that truth is perspectival, relative not objective, then one may argue for the validity of accepting the ‘truth’ that most benefits us, that makes us look just, courageous, patriotic, resilient, and exceptional.

profound inadequacies of our country’s educational system, the unfairness of conscription (now the economic draft), the effectiveness of military training and the battlefield in developing small unit cohesion (the brotherhood/sisterhood of the warrior), and in conditioning soldiers to kill. Yes, it is true that patience, loyalty to comrades, and courage under fire may be character traits to be admired, but only when they are used in the service of just and moral goals and purposes. I think it safe to say that patience, loyalty, and courage in a terrorist, for example, are not considered virtues. Although I hope otherwise, judging by what Burns and Novick have said in their op-ed and by the film clips posted on their website, I question whether issues such as these will be explored in a fair and detailed way in their documentary despite their relevance to Mr. Okamoto’s question and, perhaps more important, to our understanding of the American war in Vietnam and of the U.S. propensity for war in general.



THE AUTHOR Camillo Mac Bica

LEGACY OF THE AMERICAN WAR

For more than a generation, instead of forging a path to reconciliation, we have allowed the wounds the war inflicted on our nation, our politics, and our families to fester. The troubles that trouble us to-

mentally flawed character. Without this mutual recognition, a genuine reconciliation will be difficult to achieve.”

Tragically, not only does this mythology prevent reconciliation, it may well be counterproductive to veteran healing, by providing a refuge in which veterans may avoid facing the reality of their experiences. Healing requires that we move beyond illusion and mythology. Just as tragically, it has allowed our leaders to ignore the lessons of Vietnam, to again portray militarism and war as palatable, to entice another generation of young people to enlist in the military, and to fight perpetual wars of choice in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

After much research as a philosopher studying the institution of war and even more soul-searching as a veteran striving

day—alienation, resentment, and cynicism; mistrust of our government and one another; breakdown of civil discourse and civic institutions; conflicts of ethnicity and class; lack of accountability in powerful institutions—so many of these seeds were sown during the Vietnam War.

While I believe Burns’ and Novick’s assessment of the state of our nation is accurate, what they seem not to realize is that this tragic legacy of the war in Vietnam can be explained in large measure not by a lack of patriotism or the failure of the nation to accord veterans the honor they so richly deserve. Rather, “the troubles that trouble us today” are a direct consequence of our reluctance to admit the hard truth of U.S. criminality and of the appropriation of memory to portray this nation’s involvement and our soldiers’ behavior in Vietnam as honorable and noble. Nguyen observes, “Any side in a conflict needs ... the ability to see not only the flaws of our enemies and others but our own fun-

to come to grips with the Vietnam War experience, I hesitate to speak of healing as I am not at all certain that healing is possible. I have realized that to restore the moral character of this nation and to achieve a measure of normalcy in my own life, what is required is not more of the mythology of honor, nobility, courage, and heroism, as Burns and Novick seem to suggest. Rather, we must have the courage to admit the truth, however frightening and awful it may be, regarding the immorality and illegality of the war in Vietnam and then to accept national (and perhaps personal) responsibility and culpability for the injury and death of millions of Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian people. We can, as Burns suggests, finally stop fighting over how the war should be remembered and reconcile our differences, but only if we realize that there are not “many truths” and “alternative facts” with which to make our involvement and our defeat more palatable. This is what history requires and what the documentary should work to clarify.

Despite the reservations I have expressed in this article, my hope is, of course, that, when viewed in its entirety, this documentary will prove more than propaganda and mythology intended to restore patriotism, national resilience, exceptionalism, and unity of purpose for further militarism and war. Regardless of whether my hope is realized, I plan to use this documentary in my course on war, either to provide insight and a historical basis for understanding the nature of war in general and of the Vietnam War in particular, or to demonstrate the manner in which historians and artists appropriate memory and distort truth to further the interests of the corrupt, the greedy, and the powerful. My hope is it will be the former.

Dr. Camillo Mac Bica is an author, activist, and professor of philosophy at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. His focus is on social and political philosophy and ethics, particularly as applied to war. He is a former U.S. Marine Corps officer, a Vietnam veteran, a long-time activist for peace and social justice, and coordinator of Veterans For Peace Long Island.



Remembering the Lessons of Vietnam

Rejecting the Pentagon's Revisionist History

Editors' note: This article was written about events in 2015 commemorating the 40th anniversary of the end of the Viet Nam War. We feel that the truths brought out in the article, not just about Viet Nam, but about present and future wars, are still relevant. We also sadly acknowledge the great loss of Rick Cohen who passed away last year not long after writing this.

By Rick Cohen

The Lessons of Vietnam program in Washington May 1 and 2, 2015, was not simply a commemoration of the end of the Vietnam War, but an effort to remember and recount narratives that would not have emerged from the Pentagon's revisionist history of the war the United States lost. Don North, who covered the war for ABC News, reports that the Pentagon was working up a theory that the war was lost not because of U.S. misjudgments and mistakes, but because of "disloyal journalists" and a "mised public." (North says that the Pentagon has since backed down on the bad-journalist/dumb-public explanation for the U.S. defeat by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.)

Last fall, 500 journalists, academics, and veterans took the Pentagon to task for attempting to issue a whitewashed version of the Vietnam War. Among the signatories to that complaint were the likes of Julian Bond, who helped establish the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; Tom Hayden, who was one of the Chicago Seven; Peter Yarrow of the folk trio Peter, Paul and Mary; Daniel Ellsberg of *Pentagon Papers* fame; and Larry Korb, a former high-level Defense Department official. All were at the Lessons of Vietnam program.

Despite the excellence of those Lessons of Vietnam discussions, there hasn't been much discussion within the nonprofit sector of the 40th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War or the 50th of the "start" of the war. It seems odd that the nonprofit sector would be quiet on this subject when

the Defense Department budget of today is eating up a huge proportion of federal budget expenditures, with leaders in both national political parties apparently signed on to giving the Pentagon more. It also seems odd, given that the bombing of Libya in 2011 (authorized by President Obama and then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton) seems to have turned out to be counterproductive, making Libya look daily like a failed state along the lines of Somalia or Yemen and serving as a major point of embarkation of African and Middle Eastern refugees in dangerous boats, leading to thousands of deaths; maybe people don't remember the people fleeing Vietnam in rickety boats and rafts as the United States decamped from its last Saigon stronghold. The continuing warfare in Syria, Ukraine, and other places also begs for the lessons that could and should come from an accurate historical analysis of America's huge misadventure. The nonprofit sector would seem to have many touchpoints of interest and contemporary application from an updated review of the Vietnam War history, both on the battlefields of Indochina and among the antiwar protests on the streets of this country.

PENTAGON OMISSIONS

An important read might be Jon Wiener's April 15, 2015, piece in *The Nation*, "Vietnam in the Battlefield of Memory." He reports that after meeting with Hayden and members of a group called the Vietnam Peace Commemoration Committee, the Pentagon dropped its plans to develop educational materials for schools offering its revised history of the war in favor of a plan to honor Vietnam War veterans. There was plenty to scrap in the Pentagon's plans (the Pentagon of President Obama and former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel), including:

- its timeline and fact sheets, which failed to take note of the critically important 1971 Senate testimony of then-head of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), now the Secretary of State, John Kerry;



BODIES OF U.S. PARATROOPERS of the 101st Airborne lie near a command post during the battle of An Ninh, September 1965.

- its count of 58,253 American deaths, but no mention of the three to four million Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians estimated to have been killed in the war;
- its failure to call My Lai a "massacre," as it most certainly was;
- the military's use of Agent Orange with its effects on Vietnam and on U.S. veterans; and
- the social effects of the war on veterans themselves.

Wiener suggests that rather than celebrate the 50th anniversary of the start of the war or the 40th anniversary of the end of the war by thanking Vietnam veterans, an apology is in order. He writes that the Pentagon might do better by saying to Vietnam veterans, "We're sorry you were sent to fight in an unjust and futile war; we're sorry you were lied to; we're sorry you lost comrades, and years of your own lives, and that you suffered the after effects for many more years; we're sorry the VA has done such a terrible job of taking care of you. On the other hand, we might say 'thank you' to the people who worked to end the war—and ask them to tell us about their experiences."

THE WORK CONTINUES

Maybe that needs to be extended to the groups that are working today to bring America's longest-ever military adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan to a close. As Kerry did with the VVAW in the 1970s, there are organizations today that involve active-duty and recently returned veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan in trying to end America's continuing wars, even if U.S. presence is increasingly through proxy armies or high-tech military means rather than American "boots on the ground." One is Iraq Veterans Against the War, not well known in many circles, but with some high-profile advisory board members, including Daniel Ellsberg, Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies, and Anthony Arnove, who co-edited with the late Howard

Zinn a primary source companion book to Zinn's *People's History of the United States*. Another is Veterans For Peace, whose advisory board members include Andrew Bacevich, the brilliant military historian at Boston University; Chris Hedges, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for *The New York Times*, now writing for Truthdig; Bill Fletcher, the former president of the TransAfrica Forum; Ralph Nader; Jeremy Scahill, author of *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army* and a founding editor of the Intercept with Glenn Greenwald; filmmaker Oliver Stone; philosopher and Union Theological Seminary Professor Cornell West; and, again, Bennis and Ellsberg.

GET THE WORD OUT

These legitimate and important organizations, led by active-duty military and recent veterans, should be better known, but the problem may be ours, in the media. North cites the famous comment by Mark Twain: "If you don't read the newspapers, you are uninformed. If you do read the newspapers, you are misinformed." In the media of the nonprofit sector, we have to do better with coverage of the nonprofits whose programs of research, advocacy, and direct action are aimed at trying to avoid prolonged repetitions of the often forgotten mistakes of the Vietnam War.

This article was originally published at NonProfitQuarterly.org.

Rick Cohen joined Nonprofit Quarterly in 2006, after almost eight years as the executive director of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. Before that, he played various roles as a community worker and advisor to others doing community work. He has also worked in government. Cohen pursued investigative and analytical articles, advocated increased philanthropic giving and access for disenfranchised constituencies, and promoted increased philanthropic and nonprofit accountability.



By Bill Bigelow

In the Academy Award-winning documentary *Hearts and Minds*, Daniel Ellsberg, who secretly copied and released the Pentagon Papers to the press, offers a catalog of presidential lying about the U.S. role in Vietnam: Truman lied. Eisenhower lied. Kennedy lied. Johnson “lied and lied and lied.” Nixon lied.

Ellsberg concludes: “The American public was lied to month by month by each of these five administrations. As I say, it’s a tribute to the American public that their leaders perceived that they had to be lied to; it’s no tribute to us that it was so easy to fool the public.”

The Pentagon Papers that Ellsberg exposed were not military secrets. They were historical secrets—a history of U.S. intervention and deceit that Ellsberg believed, if widely known, would undermine the U.S. pretenses in defense of the war’s prosecution. Like this one that President Kennedy offered in 1961: “For the last decade we have been helping the South Vietnamese to maintain their independence.” No. This was a lie. The U.S. government’s Pentagon Papers history of the war revealed how the United States had sided with the French in retaking its colony after World War II, ultimately paying for some 80 percent of the French reconquest. By the U.S. government’s own account, from Truman on, Vietnamese self-determination was never an aim of U.S. foreign policy.

Like today’s whistle-blowers Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, Daniel Ellsberg knew the consequences for his act of defiance. Ultimately, he was indicted on 11 counts of theft and violation of the Espionage Act. If convicted on all counts, the penalty added up to 130 years in prison. In June of 1971, Ellsberg surrendered to federal authorities at Post Office Square in Boston. Forty-two years



DANIEL ELLSBERG, “most dangerous man in America”

later, few of the historical secrets that Ellsberg revealed—especially those that focus on the immediate post-World War II origins of U.S. involvement in Vietnam—appear in any school curriculum.

Corporate textbook writers seem to

Camouflaging the Vietnam War: How Textbooks Continue to Keep the Pentagon Papers a Secret



OCTOBER 9, 1954: Victory parade in Hanoi

work from the same list of must-include events and individuals. Thus, all the new U.S. history textbooks on my shelf mention the Pentagon Papers. But none grapples with the actual import of the Pentagon Papers. None quotes Ellsberg or the historical documents themselves, and none captures Ellsberg’s central conclusion about the United States in Vietnam: “It wasn’t that we were on the wrong side; we were the wrong side.”

Textbooks resist telling students that the U.S. government consistently lied about the war, preferring more genteel language. Prentice Hall’s *America: History of Our Nation* includes only one line describing the content of the Pentagon Papers: “They traced the steps by which the United States had committed itself to the Vietnam War and showed that government officials had concealed actions and often misled Americans about their motives.” The textbook offers no examples.

Teaching students a deeper, more complete history of the American War—as it is known in Vietnam—is not just a matter of accuracy. It’s about life and death. On the third anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Howard Zinn, author of *A People’s History of the United States*, spoke bluntly about what it means when we fail to confront the facts of our past wars: “If we don’t know history, then we are ready meat for carnivorous politicians and the intellectuals and journalists who supply the carving knives.”

The “we” in Zinn’s quote refers especially to the young people who will be convinced or tricked or manipulated—or lied—into fighting those wars, even if it is only “fighting” by guiding remote assass-

ination drones from bases in a Nevada desert.

For almost 30 years, I taught U.S. history in high school. I began my Vietnam unit with a little-remembered event of Sept. 2, 1945. I showed students a video clip from the first episode of PBS’s *Vietnam: A Television History*, in which Dr. Tran Duy Hung, a medical doctor and a leader of the resistance to French colonialism, recounts the massive end-of-war celebration with more than 400,000 people jammed into Hanoi’s Ba Dinh Square. Japan had surrendered. The seemingly endless foreign occupation of Vietnam—Chinese, then French, then Japanese—was over.

Dr. Hung remembers: “I can say that the most moving moment was when President Ho Chi Minh climbed the steps, and the national anthem was sung. It was the first time that the anthem of Vietnam was sung in an official ceremony. Uncle Ho then read the Declaration of Independence. ...” Dr. Hung recalls that, moments later, a small plane began circling and then swooped down over the crowd. When people recognized the U.S. stars and stripes on the plane, they cheered, imagining that its presence signaled an endorsement for Vietnamese independence. “It added to the atmosphere of jubilation at the meeting,” said Dr. Hung.

I want my students to recognize the hugeness of this historical could-have-been. One of the “secrets” Ellsberg risked his freedom to expose was that the United States had a stark choice in the fall of 1945: support the independence of a unified Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh, which had spearheaded the anti-fascist resistance during World

War II, or support the French as they sought to reimpose colonial rule.

Think about all the suffering that might have been avoided had the U.S. government taken advantage of this opportunity. Howard Zinn quotes from the Pentagon Papers in *A People’s History of the United States*:

“Ho [Chi Minh] had built the Viet Minh into the only Vietnam-wide political organization capable of effective resistance to either the Japanese or the French. He was the only Vietnamese wartime leader with a national following, and he assured himself wider fealty among the Vietnamese people when in August-September 1945, he overthrew the Japanese ... established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and staged receptions for incoming allied occupation forces. ... For a few weeks in September 1945, Vietnam was—for the first and only time in its modern history—free of foreign domination, and united from north to south under Ho Chi Minh.”

In class, I brought this historical choice to life with my students through a role play, in which some students portrayed members of the Viet Minh and others represented French business/government leaders arguing before “President Truman” about the future of Vietnam. The role play depicted a make-believe gathering, of course, because the United States never included any Vietnamese in its deliberations on the future of Vietnam. Nonetheless, the lesson offers students a vivid picture of what was at stake at this key juncture.

Tragically, the United States consistently chose to side with elites in Vietnam, first French, then Vietnamese, as our government sought to suppress self-determination—perhaps most egregiously in 1954, when the United States conspired to stonewall promised elections and to prop up the dictator Ngo Dinh Diem.

Daniel Ellsberg allowed himself to be taken into custody, with no clear outcome in sight. A reporter asked him whether he was concerned about the possibility of going to prison. Ellsberg replied: “Wouldn’t you go to prison to help end this war?”

Right now, every high school student is learning either to accept or to question the premises that lead our country to wage war around the world. As Howard Zinn suggested, if students don’t know their history, then they are “ready meat” for those who will supply the carving knives of war. Fortunately, more and more teachers around the country recognize the importance of teaching outside the textbook, of joining heroes like Dan Ellsberg to ask questions, to challenge official stories.

This article was originally published at zinnedproject.org.

Bill Bigelow taught high school social studies in Portland, Ore., for almost 30 years. He is the curriculum editor of Rethinking Schools and the co-director of the Zinn Education Project. Bigelow is author or co-editor of numerous books, including *A People’s History for the Classroom* and *The Line Between Us: Teaching About the Border and Mexican Immigration*, and a contributor to *Teaching About the Wars*.



LATUFF 2006

‘Monkeywrenching’ the War Machine

By Mike Ferner

No overview of America’s war in Viet Nam can be complete without mentioning the G.I. resistance movement that mobilized thousands of active-duty service members in opposition to that conflict.

A standard about G.I. Resistance, first printed in the *Armed Forces Journal*, June 1971, is “The Collapse of the Armed Forces,” by USMC Col. Robert D. Heinl Jr. He states, “The morale, discipline and battleworthiness of the U.S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States.” More of this history can be found in *Vietnam War Bibliography: Morale, Discipline and Military Justice*, by Edwin E. Moise and also in David Cortright’s classic, *Soldiers In Revolt*.

These works and the sources they cite recount a history not widely known: that the resistance to the American War in Vietnam that involved mutiny, desertion, and even the killing of superior officers also included dramatic incidents of sabotage. The full depth and breadth of monkey-wrenching the war machine, however, will never be known because so much of it took place on quiet, desperate nights, carried out by frustrated and angry men and women of conscience.

Here is one large-scale act of sabotage cited by Heinl: “... three soldiers from Ft Carson, Colorado ... were recently indicted by a federal grand jury for dynamiting the telephone exchange, power plant, and water works of another Army installation, Camp McCoy, Wis., on 26 July 1970.”

One other spectacular sabotage for which a perpetrator has never been found happened on the carrier *USS Ranger* in 1972, when someone dropped some 6-inch bolts and a crowbar into the main reduction gear that transferred power from the engines to the propeller. To replace the gear assembly, some 10 steel decks had to be cut, the new gears lowered in place by crane and the decks re-welded in place. This kept the *Ranger* out of action for nearly six months during the height of the air war against Viet Nam.

“Collateral damage” from the *Ranger* incident happened on the carrier I was on, the *Hancock*, home-ported at the Alameda Naval Air Station in San Francisco Bay, and docked right next to the *Ranger*.

On my first day aboard, a fellow corpsman gave me a tour. Walking on the hanger deck where the A-6 and F-8 fighters were tied down, I noticed that between every pair of jets stood a Marine at parade rest, holding an M-1 rifle.

When I asked my friend what the Marines were doing, he replied, “Guarding the planes.” But I wasn’t prepared for his answer when I asked from whom? “Us,” he

said, smiling, explaining that sailors had taken to throwing handfuls of nuts and bolts into the plane’s air intakes which destroyed the engines when started.

Not long after that, when I started thinking about ways of keeping the ship from going back to Viet Nam I asked another swabbie how to get down to the reduction gear. “Forget it,” he said, “they’ve posted Marine guards on that, too.”

By the time the *Hancock*’s dry-dock maintenance was

Dear America

Remember me?

I was the girl next door.

Remember when I was 13, America, and rode on top of the fire engine in the Memorial Day parade? I’d won an essay contest on what it meant to be a proud American.

And it was always me, America, the cheerleader, the Girl Scout, who marched in front of the high school band ... carrying our flag ... the tallest ... the proudest ...

And remember, America, you gave me the Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizen Award for patriotism, and I was only sixteen.

And then you sent me to war, America, along with thousands of other men and women who loved you.

It’s Memorial Day, America. Do you hear the flags snapping in the wind? There’s a big sale at Macy’s, and there’s a big parade in Washington for the veterans.

But it’s not the American flag or the sound of drums I hear—I hear a helicopter coming in—I smell the burning of human flesh. It’s Thomas, America, the young Black kid from Atlanta, my patient, burned by an exploding gas tank. I remember how his courage kept him alive that day, America, and I clung to his only finger and whispered over and over again how proud you were of him, America—and he died.

done and we put out for sea trials, I was more familiar with the ship and had found a couple kindred spirits in the medical division. Unfortunately for the G.I. resistance movement, none of us was mechanically inclined and our late-night missions were limited to throwing everything over the side that wasn’t under watch or welded to a deck.

That didn’t stop us from using our limited medical authority to its fullest extent, however, and more than one division on the ship was reduced to a skeleton crew after we finished issuing “rack passes” at morning sick calls. That, and helpfully documenting any and every physical and mental diagnosis we could for sailors who wanted out, distributing antiwar literature and pamphlets on how to become a conscientious objector were the small ways we did what we considered our truly patriotic duty.

In the wildly popular (with the grunts) “FTA” show that toured military bases around the world during the period of greatest G.I. resistance, Jane Fonda did a skit with another troupe member, in which she played the First Lady, Pat Nixon.

Pat was looking out a White House window, telling Dick a large group of antiwar soldiers was approaching their front lawn.

“Well, we’ll just have to send out the 5th Marines, then, Pat.”

“We can’t Richard,” Pat replied, “It IS the 5th Marines!”

When you’re running an empire, you always want to know exactly who is guarding the guards.

Mike Ferner served as a Navy corpsman during the Viet Nam War and was discharged as a conscientious objector. He is a former president of Veterans For Peace and author of *Inside the Red Zone: A Veteran For Peace Reports from Iraq*.



And Pham ... He was only eight, America, and you sprayed him with napalm and his skin fell off in my hands and he screamed as I tried to comfort him.

And America, what did you do with Robbie, the young kid I sat next to on the plane to Viet Nam? His friends told me a piece of shrapnel ripped through his young heart—he was only seventeen—it was his first time away from home. What did you tell his mother and father, America?

Hold us America ...

Hold all your children America. Allen will never hold anyone again. He left both his arms and legs back there. He left them for you, America.

America, you never told me that I’d have to put so many of your sons, the boys next door, in body bags. You never told me ...

—Peggy Akers

Peggy Akers served as a nurse in Vietnam.

Working at the Intersection of G.I. Rights and Civil Rights

A lawyer looks back at the start of her career during the Vietnam War

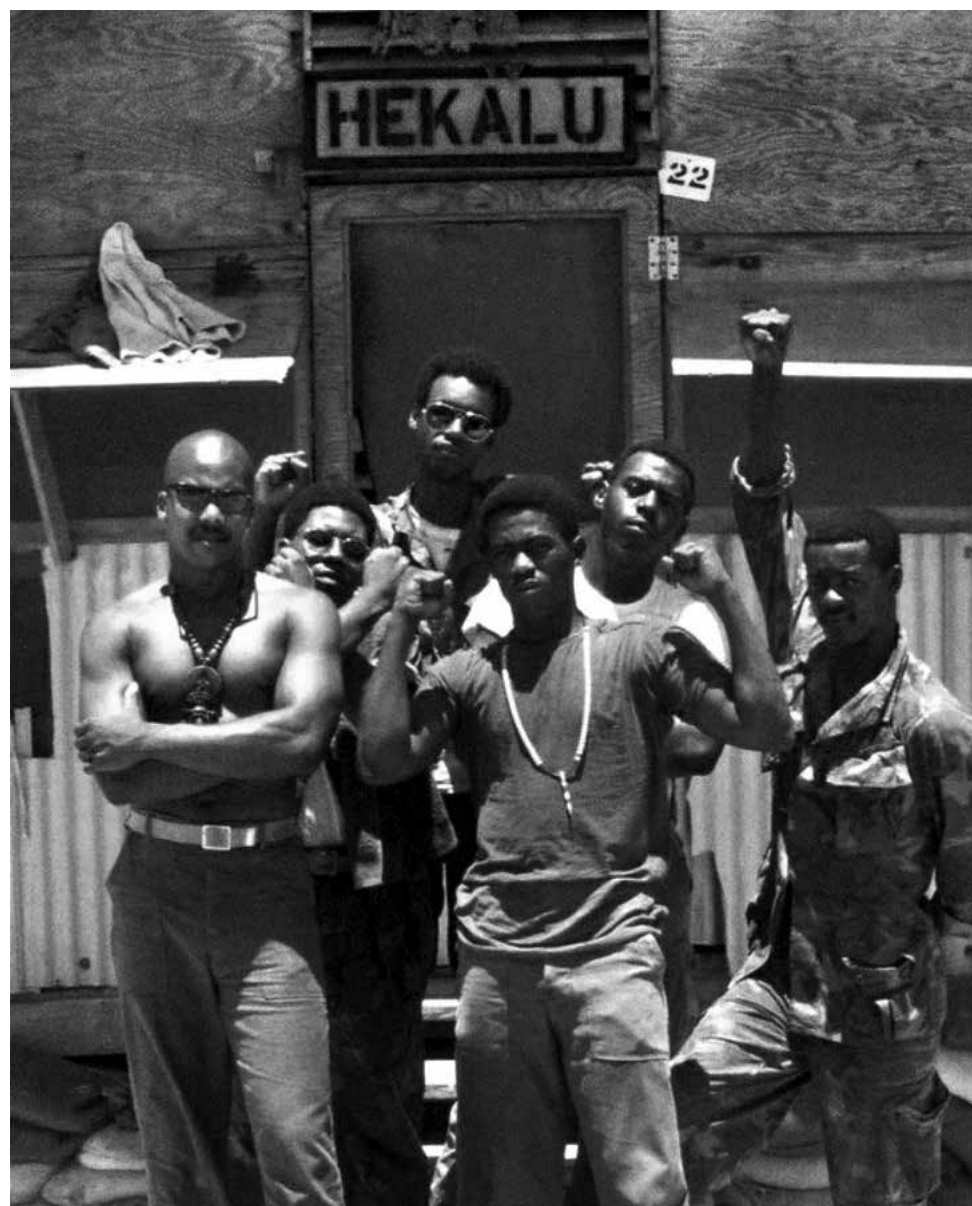
By Barbara Dudley

In 1971, just a month after graduating from law school, I and four other National Lawyers Guild members went to Southeast Asia with the guild's newly created Military Law Project to serve as civilian defense counsel for G.I.s who were facing courts martial for resisting the war. The military was reluctant to hold trials back in the States for G.I.s who were opposing the war, lest the folks back home were to understand the level of resistance, so, for the most part, the trials happened on bases in Asia, but military law allowed service members to have civilian defense counsel if any were available. We decided to make ourselves available.

Most of my cases were in courts on U.S. bases in the Philippines at Subic Bay

resistance to the war in Vietnam. In 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. gave a speech that riveted the nation but which is largely ignored today as King's legacy is sanitized and de-politicized.

"In the ghettos of the North over the last three years ... as I have walked among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action. But they asked—and rightly so—what about Vietnam? They asked if our own nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. ... I knew that I could never again raise my voice against



Only the black members of the unit were ordered out on patrol that day. They refused to go, thinking it a setup.

Naval Base and Clark Air Force Base. But in November 1971, I went to Vietnam for a few months to defend 13 black G.I.s against charges of "mutiny." These men had been part of a unit at a fire base near the demilitarized zone between north and south Vietnam. They had requested permission to go to Cam Ranh Bay, a large American base nearby, to attend a memorial service organized by the Black Panthers for some black children killed in a church bombing in Los Angeles. Permission had been denied, and they had been ordered out on patrol.

Racial tension permeated the American ground troops in Vietnam. The Black Panther Party was giving a voice to a growing radicalism among blacks. Black Panthers were brutally gunned down in their homes by police in Los Angeles and Chicago. Tanks and SWAT teams were becoming commonplace in U.S. cities. This tension was interwoven with the growing

the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government."

This was the background for the trumped-up mutiny charges against the G.I.s I was in Vietnam to defend. Only the black members of the unit were ordered out on patrol that day. They refused to go, thinking it a setup. While they were in their bunker that evening, stun grenades were tossed in, and when they came bursting out of the bunker in panic and confusion, they were met not by the enemy, but by their white counterparts and their lieutenant, and were arrested for mutiny. No one was hurt except one of the black defendants deafened by the grenade blasts. And no one disputed the basic facts. This, and the subsequent court martial, shaped my view of race relations in the U.S. military in Vietnam. Only by threatening to get the story published in the press back

home, was I able to keep all but one of the defendants out of jail, but all of the others received less than honorable discharges. No one was ever prosecuted for throwing the grenades.

It was not only black G.I.s who were re-

understood or wholeheartedly supported the undeclared war where they had been asked to risk their lives and where some 58,000 of their buddies would die.

Those months in Vietnam had a profound impact on me, in matters both in-

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bellling against the war from the inside. As it became clear that the United States didn't have a clear objective in the war, that there was no way to "win" without annihilating the entire Vietnamese population, more and more ground troops were reluctant to die for nothing. Hundreds of officers and non-commissioned officers were killed by their own troops while leading patrols; many others died of "unknown causes."

Many G.I.s were coming home and joining the antiwar movement. Others were coming home stoned. One of the most striking things about the G.I.s in Vietnam was how many were getting hooked on cheap and very available drugs, everything from marijuana to heroin. It was not hard to believe the rumors that the military was responsible for making those drugs available, to try to mollify a rebellious army. Mostly the Vietnam veterans were coming home disillusioned, home to a country where virtually no one

tensely personal and intensely political. If there was one mantra of that era that has stuck, it is that the personal is political. It was eerie being an American woman in Saigon in 1971. Saigon had already experienced the Tet Offensive, in which the Vietnamese nationalist forces had made it clear that they had the support of a significant portion of the south's population. It was just a matter of time before the United States would have to withdraw. There were no more U.S. troops allowed in Saigon. They were kept on their bases. I stayed at a gracious old French colonial hotel at night, having drinks at the bar with cynical journalists, and by day I rode a motor scooter out to U.S. Military Assistance Command Headquarters at Long Binh, about 30 minutes on an empty road that had been the site of fire fights the night before. Every morning I passed a beautiful if dilapidated French villa set back off the road which had been

continued on page 16...



A Day of Viet Nam 'Service'

By S. Brian Willson

Spring 1969: I am an Air Force Combat Security Police First Lieutenant, trained at Ft. Campbell, Ky., acting night security commander at Binh Thuy airbase in the Mekong Delta. Perhaps because I have been studiously examining daily intelligence reports, the Vietnamese base commander asks me to assist in assessing air strikes by newly U.S.-trained South Vietnamese pilots. He thinks that several of them might be Viet Cong with intent to sabotage missions or fly to Cambodia. Newly elected President Nixon has begun ordering "Vietnamization," creating pressure to produce elevated body counts. Bombing villages in "free-fire" zones is a sure way to accomplish that. I am surprised that I have been asked to perform a "safe" daytime duty outside the scope of my assignment by an officer not in my chain of command. I already spend many daytime hours in Can Tho city between night security duties to escape the diesel fumes and constant noise of aircraft landing and taking off. With much anxiety, I agree. I will be accompanied by a commander's sidekick, an English-speaking South Vietnamese lieutenant ...

The first assessment occurs on a hot and



NAPALM STRIKE on Vietnamese village. Photograph: Huynh Cong Ut

only a .38 sidearm stowed under my seat.

As we approach a tall grassy area on the left side, I see columns of dark smoke and notice a strong, acrid smell. We park. *What the fuck am I getting into now?* I ask myself. We walk a short path through tall grass. There I confront a scene of utter destruction. Immediately to my right, a water buffalo lies on its right side, bellowing shrilly in pain. It has a piece of

comes, clear as lightning: *This war is a fucking, evil lie!*

I don't know what I'm doing. I feel numb, but fueled by adrenaline. I gather composure to stand upright in an effort to assess the magnitude of the carnage. I estimate well over 100 bodies, perhaps 150, lying in an area the size of a small baseball field. Most appear to be young women and small children, a few elderly.

These vulnerable, undefended fishing and farming villagers had little chance to flee when quickly struck by U.S.-trained South Vietnamese pilots, flying at less than 300 feet, dropping 500- or 750-pound bombs followed by napalm—a turkey shoot. So many bodies ripped apart and charred. And, so, so many small children! At least half are motionless, apparently dead. Others are just barely alive, some moaning.

I burst out in tears again. My body is trembling when the lieutenant startles me, "What is your problem?" He is pleased with the "success" of the bombing. I can only guess how he can justify killing dozens of small children, young mothers, and grandparents—more dead Communists?! *Jesus*



SUSPECTED VIET CONG being kicked by South Vietnamese troops. U.S. forces often treated prisoners as badly, or much worse, in complete disregard of the Geneva Conventions.

I feel numb, but fueled by adrenaline. I gather composure to stand upright in an effort to assess the magnitude of the carnage. I estimate well over 100 bodies, perhaps 150, lying in an area the size of a small baseball field. Most appear to be young women and small children.

humid morning in mid-April. I nervously drive my jeep from Binh Thuy airbase to the Can Tho ferry landing with the Vietnamese lieutenant as my passenger. He is directing us to a site of a supposedly fresh bombing. The traffic is crazy—military and civilian vehicles zig-zagging and magically missing each other. We get on the next ferry with other military vehicles, Shell and Esso fuel trucks, motorcycles, and pedestrians. Soon we are crossing the wide Bassac River and land on the north riverbank village of Binh Minh in southern Vinh Long Province.

We merge into busy military traffic driving north on Highway 4. Soon I am directed to turn left onto a one-lane dirt road elevated above rice paddies. Somewhere in this vicinity I am told there is a target that has been hit. The lieutenant is fluent in English, but we barely talk. Smoke rises from several locations, a routine sight. An elderly woman carries containers on each side of a yoke balanced on her neck supported by her arms. Young boys walk water buffalo along the way. As I continue slowly driving, my anxiety rises as I experience intense fear. The lieutenant carries an M-16, but assures me there is no danger this time of day. I have

skull missing and a huge, three-foot-long gash in its belly. I vomit. I turn to my left and see countless human bodies scattered across the ground amid smoke from what appears to be vestiges of small burned thatched homes. I watch a small girl attempt to get up, then fall, crying. *Jesus Christ, this place really was bombed within the hour. And I'm supposed to assess the success, or not, of this bombing? Fuck! It's totally destroyed!*

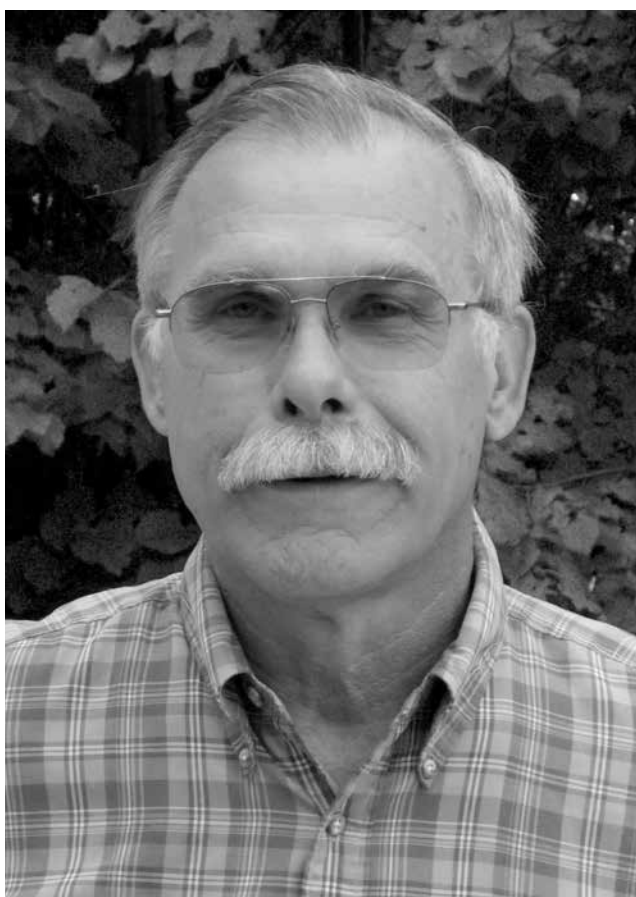
I stagger as I place a handkerchief over my face to block sickening smells—pungent burning flesh and lingering air droplets of napalm, and residue of exploded bombs. I gag up bile. I can walk no further because bodies are lying at my feet. I look down on the face of what appears to be a young woman. She is clutching three young, blackened and bloodied children, probably hers. Her eyelids have been singed off by napalm. I feel intoxicated as I stare into her open eyes. Is she alive? Her face is partially melted. *Oh, my God! Jesus Christ!* It's like she's my sister or something. I am shaking and crying. I gag again. I know in an instant that we are all connected, a truth that had up to then eluded my well-conditioned, protected Western mind. Another thought

Christ, the war is one massive, fucking lie.

I wipe snot from my nose but miss drooling saliva as I instinctively respond: "I just witnessed the death of my family." I wonder, *where did that come from?* I feel more related to these dead Vietnamese villagers than to anyone in the military I am part of. I pulled no triggers. I dropped no bombs. But I am part of a massive murder machine.

Just after high noon the lieutenant suddenly directs us to leave. We ignore villagers still alive. My shaking body climbs into the jeep and I begin to drive toward Highway 4. But soon I pull over because my trembling hands make it difficult to steer. I take a series of deep breaths, then continue. At Highway 4 I drive south in heavy traffic. At Binh Minh, as we wait in nervous silence for the next ferry, I feel my companion and I exist in two very different psychic worlds. At Can Tho, as I begin driving the remaining five miles to Binh Thuy, I have to stop once again, because my trembling hands make it difficult to steer. I take more deep breaths, then resume again. As we pass the U.S. Army's 29th Evacuation Hospital east of Binh Thuy, I burst into tears. "Shouldn't we stop and seek emergency medical assistance to aid those still alive?" The lieutenant adamantly says no. I argue emotionally that we should stop, but I am weak, both mentally and physically. I do not stop. Soon we are at Binh Thuy airbase, where in a few hours I will be back on duty as the lieutenant night security commander. *Oh, my god! Jesus, help me!* Suicide comes to my mind. I take a nap ...

Copyright © 2015 by S. Brian Willson. Used by permission of the author. S. Brian Willson is a Vietnam veteran, trained lawyer, long-time peace activist, and a veteran for peace. He is author of the memoir, *Blood On the Tracks* (PM Press, 2011), and the subject of a soon-to-be-released documentary film, *Paying the Price for Peace*, directed by Bo Boudart.



MARK FOREMAN, just before he was deployed to Vietnam (left) and today (right).

In the Mouth of the Beast

War's Truth Is in the Details

By Mike Ferner

It was pitch black, so I started feeling my way up the mountain with my hands leading me toward the sound of the moans. I found one Marine entangled in a bush and asked him if he was hit. He weakly said, ‘all over Doc.’

“It was too dark to see where he was bleeding, so I began feeling his head and face. There was a thick clump just below his left eye, so I tied a battle dressing over it, then tore his shirt open and found six sucking chest wounds. Air gurgled out of each of the holes when he took a breath. I put Vaseline gauze bandages over each hole to keep his breath from escaping. Next, I found a deep laceration on his right wrist, but it wasn’t bleeding. He was in deep shock and his circulatory system had shut down.

“Carrying him down the hill in the dark with my platoon sergeant, we finally reached a jeep that would take him to a helicopter landing zone to be medivac’d to a field hospital. Just as the driver started heading down the mountain, the Marine stopped breathing, but when I started mouth-to-mouth, I felt a mist of warm blood spraying into my face.

“I realized then that the thick clump I felt on his cheek earlier was actually his left eyeball. His throat was so clogged with blood that the air was blowing out his eye socket instead of reaching his lungs.

“I had to do a tracheotomy on him ... and fast. I yelled at the driver to stop, found my scalpel and cut a small, deep slit in his throat just under his Adam’s apple. I took a ballpoint pen out of my back-pack, took it apart, and inserted the hollow cartridge through the slit in his throat and began blowing air into his lungs. It worked! His lungs filled with air and the Vaseline gauze bandages held.

“Then his heart stopped. Again, I yelled for the driver to stop. My sergeant took over the breathing while I started closed cardiac massage. We came to the helicopter landing-pad, lifted him out of the jeep and continued our efforts plus trying to start an IV, but his blood vessels had collapsed.

“We kept trying to keep him alive until the medivac helicopter and doctor arrived, three hours later. After

checking him, the doctor looked up and said he’d been dead for two hours.

“I didn’t know when to stop trying to keep him alive. We weren’t taught to diagnose death in hospital corps school.”

Thus, at 19, was Mark Foreman introduced to war.

The son of a master plumber dad and a fulltime mom in Ames, Iowa, Mark graduated in 1966, “with lousy grades.” He dreamed of going to art school, but couldn’t afford college. So as a healthy 18-year-old he automatically fell into a demographic with many other young men—available cannon fodder. Before the year was out, he enlisted.

He chose the Navy hospital corps to keep out of the draft and avoid Vietnam, but didn’t learn until after boot camp and most of hospital corps school that corpsmen serve with the Marines and had a very short life expectancy in combat.

Regardless, he told his platoon leader upon arriving in

[H]e told his platoon leader upon arriving in Vietnam late in March 1968, ‘I won’t carry an M-16 and I won’t kill anybody while I’m over here, I’m going to save as many lives as I can. ... Even if they were going to kill me, I didn’t want to kill them because I knew it would destroy me,’ he said, adding, ‘I was a conscientious objector without knowing it.’

Vietnam late in March 1968, “I won’t carry an M-16 and I won’t kill anybody while I’m over here, I’m going to save as many lives as I can.”

“Even if they were going to kill me, I didn’t want to kill them because I knew it would destroy me,” he said, adding, “I was a conscientious objector without knowing it.”

Mark saw the brutality and madness of combat. The Marine he performed a tracheotomy on that night was killed accidentally by his own squad leader trying to show his men how to set up a trip-flare. The flare ignited accidentally and the sergeant tried putting it out with his flak jacket, forgetting it contained three grenades. They

exploded, injuring everyone in the squad and killing the one Mark worked on.

The night of May 8, Mark’s under-strength company of 83 Marines stumbled into an encampment of 1,500 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars. The NVA welcomed the Marines with a furious, 10-minute burst of machine gun and rifle fire, filling the air with thousands of red tracers. “The roar of that many machine guns was unbelievable. I thought my brain was going to explode.”

Then, as if on cue, the firing stopped. Mark and a fellow corpsman, Harry Bowman, heard the gut-wrenching screams from the wounded and climbed out from cover to bring them in.

Mark found one Marine sitting against a boulder whose “arms and legs were flailing as if he was being swarmed by bees,” he recalled.

“Something white was covering his face. As I got closer I could see it was a large portion of his brain. He’d been shot through the top of the head, splitting his skull wide open. Training never showed me anything like this. I crawled next to him and wrapped my legs around his torso while I tied two battle-dressings over the top of his head. But when I let go, he ripped the bandages off. I knew he couldn’t live much longer, but I called out for help. A Marine crawled over and I asked him to hold his arms while I replaced the bandages.”

For most of an hour, Mark worked on that Marine, listening to the wounded howling all around him. “The screaming was unbelievable ... it was overwhelming.”

“I felt like I was in a black tunnel ... I had just experienced a young guy with his brains hanging over his face ... it’s hard to admit what happened next ... I became paralyzed. My whole body was buzzing. I couldn’t move ... lost my hearing ... went blank into some kind of shock. I remember being conscious but my hearing went dead.”

The next thing he could remember was about eight or nine hours later.

“When I ‘came to,’ my senses started coming alive again. I could hear moaning now instead of screaming. But I knew everyone had to be on hair trigger and if I started crawling around I’d get shot by one of my own guys or the NVA. So I just crawled between the roots of a big tree with Harry. We didn’t talk. We just fell asleep.”

“I woke up just as dawn was giving form to the trees. The NVA opened up on us again with every thing they had. Again the roar. This time we were sitting ducks because it was getting light.”

Again, the shooting suddenly stopped. Again wounded Marines screamed for help. Mark and Harry crawled out from behind cover. Another burst of machine gun fire rang out and a Marine yelled, “Doc Bowman’s been hit ... they got Harry.”

Mark turned and saw Harry lying on his back on top of a big rock, 30 feet away.

“His arms and legs were hanging motionless. I crawled to him, grabbing his wrist to feel for a pulse. He was dead. I saw the bullet hole that went straight through his heart. I felt no emotion. The world had become insane and Harry was lucky to be done with it.”

Harry had been trying to reach a Marine whose left arm was blown off. Mark knew he would bleed out fast without a tourniquet so he reassured him, “You’re gonna be all right, I’m coming.”

“I’m OK doc, but I’m bleeding bad ... you gotta stop
continued on page 16 ...



Lessons Learned

... continued from page 1
the record straight.

“Because history will honor your service, and your names will join a story of service that stretches back two centuries.

“Finally, we might begin to see the true legacy of Vietnam. Because of Vietnam and our veterans, we now use American power smarter, we honor our military more, we take care of our veterans better. Because of the hard lessons of Vietnam, because of you, America is even stronger than before.”

These are only a few short excerpts from the president’s speech, yet even this little bit is so riddled with errors, distortions, and outright falsehoods that it is hard to know just how and where to begin.

Let me start by telling you that I am a veteran of the American War in Vietnam. I was not drafted. I volunteered for the U.S. Marine Corps when I was 17 years old, went to Vietnam when I was 18 years old, and earned the rank of sergeant by the time I was 19-and-a-half-years old. I was wounded in combat, and eventually received the Good Conduct Medal and an Honorable Discharge.

I also joined the antiwar movement after I finished my time in the Marines, joining my fellow students—none of them military veterans—at Swarthmore College in various antiwar activities and becoming active in Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I know something about how soldiers and veterans were treated when we came home, so let me start there.

I returned to the United States from Vietnam in March 1968, passing through San Francisco Airport and Philadelphia Airport in full military uniform. I repeated the same trip in June 1969 when I returned from my last posting—in Japan, as it happens—before I was released from active duty. On neither occasion was

I confronted by civilians out to denigrate and abuse me. No one called me “baby killer” or spat on me. When I later became active in the antiwar movement, I never once saw or heard any antiwar demonstrator blame the soldiers for the war, let alone act out verbally or physically toward soldiers or veterans.

As Vietnam War veteran Jerry Lembcke documents in his book, *The Spitting Image*, the myth of the spat-upon veteran is exactly that: a myth. There is not a single documented contemporary account of such behavior. All of these stories begin to emerge only after 1975, after the end of the war, when many veterans be-

speech in September 1980, when he said, “It is time we recognize that ours was, in truth, a noble cause.” In the post-Vietnam War, post-Watergate era, both trust in the U.S. government and belief in the justice of American military might as an instrument of foreign policy were badly shaken. Morale and discipline in the armed forces, as documented by Colonel Robert J. Heinl Jr., in “The Collapse of the Armed Forces,” were at an all-time low, and very few young Americans were eager to serve in a discredited military. When the U.S. attempt to rescue American hostages being held in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by Iranian revolutionaries ended in humiliat-

erans were treated. But this was a reality that few Americans, including many veterans of the war, could bring themselves to come to terms with. Haven’t Americans always been on the side of right and justice? Doesn’t the United States only fight wars as a last resort and only when forced to do so by aggressor nations led by evil leaders? How could a nation built upon “Give me liberty or give me death,” “all men are created equal,” and “of the people, by the people, for the people” have ended up waging a shameful, disgraceful war against a people who had done us no harm and had no reason to?

So when Reagan declared that “ours

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gan to claim, “This happened to me back then.” But memory is, at best, unreliable, and psychology readily demonstrates that people can convince themselves of things that never actually happened to them. For the most part, veterans came home to silence, returning not to grand victory parades and tickertape as their fathers had done after World War II, but one at a time to hometowns and cities that had hardly been touched by the events that had changed these veterans’ lives forever. It was isolating and lonely and without closure. But that is not the same as being vilified and abused and blamed.

But powerful people saw in the veterans’ pain and festering unhappiness an opportunity. It was an opportunity that Republican candidate for president Ronald Reagan seized upon in a campaign

ing disaster, the U.S. foreign policy elite became determined to restore the luster of American arms and the legitimacy of U.S. military intervention.

This is the context in which Reagan gave his “noble cause” speech, and he was elected in a landslide victory by the millions of Americans who did not want to believe what they had witnessed and lived through during the Vietnam War: the world’s most powerful nation pounding into rubble an agrarian people who plowed their fields with water buffalo and wanted nothing more than to be left alone—a war of aggression foisted upon the Vietnamese by arrogant men who thought they could bend the world into whatever shape they desired.

The “national shame, the disgrace,” was the war itself, not the way returning vet-

was, in truth, a noble cause,” millions and millions of Americans eagerly embraced his vision of the American War in Vietnam. The sentiment was reinforced over the next decade by the dedication of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington and hundreds of other similar memorials erected in state capitals, cities large and small, and local communities all over the United States along with “Welcome Home” parades belatedly honoring Vietnam veterans; by Hollywood movies such as *The Deer Hunter*, *Missing in Action*, and *Rambo*; the vilification of the antiwar movement as a bunch of dope-smoking hippie traitors; and the transformation of the American soldier from the instrument of a failed, unrealizable, even criminal foreign policy into an unappreciated and

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Lessons Learned

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much-abused victim.

The first of the Welcome Home parades took place in New York City on May 7, 1985. I watched part of it on television, and later wrote this poem:

PARADE

Ten years after the last rooftop chopper out of Saigon.

Ten, fifteen, twenty years
too late for kids not twenty
years old and dead in ricefields;
brain-dead, soul-dead, half-
dead
in wheelchairs. Even the
unmarked
forever Absent Without Leave.

You'd think that any self-
respecting
vet would give the middle finger
to the folks who thought of it
ten years and more too late—

yet there they were: the sad
survivors, balding, overweight
and full of beer, weeping,
grateful
for their hour come round at
last.

I saw one man in camouflaged
utilities;
a boy, his son, dressed like dad;
both proudly marching.

How many wounded
generations,
touched with fire, have offered
up
their children to the gods of
fire?
Even now, new flames are
burning,
and the gods of fire call for
more,
and the new recruits keep
coming.

What fire will burn that small
boy marching with his father?
What parade will heal
his father's wounds?

I found it all pathetic and sad, but apparently many of my fellow veterans were more than happy to accept these accolades, however belated and cynical.

For while this transformation of the veteran from unwitting perpetrator to American hero was taking place, U.S. policymakers were slowly but surely reasserting U.S. military intervention as a legitimate and necessary instrument of foreign policy. Reagan's intervention in Lebanon ended in disaster when hundreds of American Marines died in a suicide bombing, but Reagan was smart enough to cut his losses, and quickly displaced that setback with his successful invasion of the tiny

Caribbean island of Grenada, claiming falsely that the Cubans were building an airfield for Russian bombers and that the lives of U.S. medical school students were in jeopardy. This ridiculously lopsided affair was hailed in the halls of power and touted to the American people as a great victory, even though our "enemy" had a military force with the size and firepower of the Providence, R.I., police department, and our military was so unprepared that soldiers had to use tourist maps of the island and call the Pentagon on a pay telephone to ask for naval support.

By the time George H. W. Bush invaded Panama in 1989, few Americans questioned what Bush and Washington had named "Operation Just Cause." And when Bush committed over 500,000 U.S. military personnel to put the Emir of Kuwait back on his gold-plated toilet, most Americans didn't bother to ask why the U.S. ambassador to Iraq had said to Saddam Hussein in August 1990 that the U.S. had "no opinion in your Arab-Arab disputes." Or if Saddam's claims were true that the Kuwaitis were slant drilling and stealing Iraqi oil. Or why the United States had supported and protected Saddam all through the 1980s if he was such a tyrant. Operation Desert Storm might more accurately be called Operation Desert Stomp, so lopsided was this brief little war, but it was celebrated with a massive victory parade in Washington, D.C., and demonstrated for all the world to see that U.S. military might was once again a force to be reckoned with. As Bush triumphantly declared, "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all." Sadly enough, as the second Gulf War, our endless war in Afghanistan, and our interventions in Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Pakistan, and elsewhere make clear, Bush seems to have been right.

This rehabilitation of U.S. military legitimacy was, as I said, dependent upon rehabilitating the image of military service and the American serviceman (and now woman, too). By the late 1960s and early 1970s, as detailed by Heinl and in such powerful documentaries as *Sir! No, Sir!*, the junior ranks of the U.S. military were in something close

to full revolt against those who were ordering them to fight and die in a war that could no longer be explained as anything other than hopelessly wrongheaded and perhaps even criminally insane. What Americans saw on television in the late 1960s and early 1970s was not returning veterans being spat

with the least voice and the least clout in the American political system.

I teach high school at an elite private boys school where a year of kindergarten costs \$22,000; by the time the boys get to high school, their parents are paying \$35,000 a year—and this is for a day school and does

Toward the end of the American War in Vietnam, policymakers discovered that most Americans didn't really care about the death and destruction of others so long as it was not American kids who were doing the dying.

upon and denigrated, but thousands of veterans in the streets protesting the war they had fought, challenging the falsehoods foisted upon them and the American people, even hurling their medals onto the steps of the U.S. Congress.

The draft, by this time, had been thoroughly discredited as grossly unfair, and, within the military leadership itself, a large portion of the blame for the breakdown of the military was attributed to the draft and the number of young men who were in the military and sent to Vietnam against their will.

The solution to this problem—the lesson learned, if you will, by the military and the foreign policy establishment—was to get rid of the draft and replace it with an all-volunteer army. It took a decade and a half to build a new, more loyal and unquestioning military, but in conjunction with other efforts such as the rehabilitation of the Vietnam veteran as noble hero and the recasting of the Vietnam War as noble cause, the effort succeeded. The United States now has a relatively small military made up of a high percentage of careerists whose loyalty is to their armed service, whose ethos is defined by their unit identity and sense of comradeship, and who have minimal contact with the civilian society on whose behalf they are supposedly serving. Moreover, a high percentage of these soldiers are drawn from the lower economic strata, those groups

not include the cost of school lunch. While some of our boys do receive scholarship aid, the majority of their families range from financially well off to fabulously wealthy, and even our scholarship kids, by virtue of graduating from my school, have gained a distinct advantage in life.

I teach the children of the powerful and the influential, people with clout: captains of industry, political leaders, prominent citizens. And in my 14 years at this school, not one of my students—now numbering in the hundreds after so many years—has chosen to forego college and enlist in the U.S. military instead. Except for a very few who enter one of the service academies each year and eventually serve as officers, not one student I have taught here will ever serve a day in uniform, let alone be required to serve against his will, because he has no better options available to him.

Why should the parents of the boys I teach care what the U.S. government is doing in the world in our names and with our tax dollars? They and their children will never have to pay the blood price, which is now borne by less than one percent of the American people—mostly people the parents of my students will never meet or know or care about. Indeed, not a few of these parents and alumni benefit financially, directly or indirectly, from the system as it now operates. Where

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Lessons Learned

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do you think their wealth comes from?

Toward the end of the American War in Vietnam, policymakers discovered that most Americans didn't really care about the death and destruction of others, so long as it was not American kids who were doing the dying. The lesson was learned too late to apply it on a large scale in Vietnam, but the Reagan administration applied the principle to its wars in Central America, spending millions of dollars a day to crush popular revolutions in El Salvador and Nicaragua with only a tiny handful of U.S. lives lost in the process.

And now we have the modern miracle of drone warfare and Hellfire missiles, enabling us to kill anywhere in the world without having to put U.S. soldiers' lives in jeopardy or do anything more than, quite literally, lift a finger. Thanks to the lessons of the Vietnam War, the U.S. government has learned how to wage war with minimal domestic political opposition. Is this what Obama meant when he boasted that "the true legacy of Vietnam" is that "we now use American power smarter"?

Obama also bragged, "We honor our military more and take care of our veterans better." What does this mean? Every NASCAR auto race begins with a color guard and military flyover. Every baseball game and basketball game and even high school lacrosse match begins with the Star-Spangled Banner. At every Philadelphia Flyers ice hockey game, a serviceman or woman is ceremoniously given a Flyers team jersey with his or her name on it, and everyone in the arena stands and applauds. What are soldiers and veterans supposed to do with a Flyers jersey or a military flyover? Eat it? Put it in the bank? Pay the mortgage with it? As the saying goes, "Talk is cheap."

I call those empty displays "crocodile patriotism," meaningless posturing designed to make us all feel good about ourselves, less guilty about letting others bear the entire blood price of our government's military adventurism. Meanwhile, our servicemen and women and our veterans are committing suicide at the rate of 22 per day, according to the Veterans Administration, which also admits to a current backlog of 161,000 adjudicated claims, along with an additional 287,000 claims being appealed by veterans who believe their cases were not fairly settled.

Moreover, private organizations such as the Wounded Warrior Project and Vet-2Vet routinely ask for donations from the



American public in order to provide care and services to our veterans. If, as Obama claimed, "because of Vietnam and our [Vietnam] veterans ... we [now] 'take care of our veterans better,'" why do these private organizations need to exist? Isn't this what my tax dollars are supposed to be doing by way of the Veterans Administration? The U.S. government has enough money to own over 9,000 Abrams main battle tanks costing \$4.3 million each. Enough money to own 10 aircraft carrier battle groups with a whole new and larger class of carriers costing three times as much now under construction, 79 submarines, and 363 drone aircraft, but private organizations have to beg from the U.S. public because the government doesn't have enough money to adequately care for the veterans our president insists we honor and care for?

To my amazement and dismay, few of my fellow citizens seem to be asking themselves these questions. I think it is because they have been gulled into accepting and internalizing a version of history that is largely fiction. Indeed, if one goes to the Vietnam War Commemoration website itself, prepared and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense, one will find that the timeline for the Vietnam War begins only with Ho Chi Minh's declaration of Vietnamese independence on September 2, 1945. There is nothing about the 80 years of brutal and exploitative French colonial rule. Nothing about Ho's attempt to meet with Woodrow Wilson in 1919. Nothing about U.S. support of and collaboration with Ho during the latter stages of the Pacific War against Japan. Nor about Ho's letters to President Harry Truman in 1945 and 1946. Nor about the French naval bombardment of Hai Phong in November 1946.

A search of the Department of Defense website for references to Martin Luther King Jr. and his landmark 1967 speech, "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," turns up nothing. A search for Daniel Ellsberg and the *Pentagon Papers* turns up nothing. The most powerful anti-war movement in the history of our nation is all but invisible in the government's official commemoration of the Vietnam War, as if it had never even existed.

The entire website is riddled with such holes as well as distortions, misrepresentations, and falsehoods. The murder-

dren, along with their crops and livestock. The people we were supposedly defending in fact hated us, because we destroyed their forests with chemical defoliants, burned their fields with napalm, flattened their villages with 500-pound bombs, and called them gooks, chinks, slopes, dinks, and zipperheads, turning their sons into shoeshine boys and their daughters into whores. Is this what the president meant when he said, "You made us proud"?

But the new version of the American War in Vietnam does not contain any of these facts. It contains very few facts at all. Consider again the Department of Defense's 50th Anniversary Commemoration. Fiftieth anniversary of what? Apparently, the official version of the war does not begin until 1965 when the Marines first landed at Da Nang. Not when French soldiers returned to Vietnam aboard U.S.-flagged ships in 1945. Not when the United States began to pay the cost of the French War in 1950. Not when the United States plucked Ngo Dinh Diem from a Maryknoll seminary in New Jersey and installed him as head of a "nation" the U.S. created, hailing him as "the Winston Churchill of Asia." Not when John Kennedy sent "advisors" and air squadrons to Vietnam. Not when the United States backed a coup against Diem, nor when the U.S. Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution after being deliberately lied to about what had

The 'national shame, the disgrace,' was the war itself, not the way returning veterans were treated. But this was a reality that few Americans, including many veterans of the war, could bring themselves to come to terms with.

ous incident at My Lai shows up on the timeline, but it is not called a massacre; its account of the My Lai story says only one man—Lt. William Calley—was convicted of murder, and that he was sentenced to life in prison, but neglects to add that he served just three years under house arrest before being pardoned by President Richard Nixon. Meanwhile, the timeline includes the name of every American who received the Medal of Honor. Each Medal of Honor winner gets a multi-page entry describing in detail his heroism while the entry on My Lai receives three short sentences and Ho's declaration of independence is covered in two sentences.

The whole point, of course, is to whitewash what actually happened in Vietnam—what the U.S. did to the Vietnamese—and focus only on the nobility and heroism and sacrifice of America's Vietnam War veterans, who, as Obama says in his speech, "did your job. You served with honor. You made us proud." The official flag of the Commemoration says, "Service, Valor, Sacrifice," and "A Grateful Nation Thanks and Honors You."

During my 13 months in Vietnam, I regularly witnessed and participated in the destruction of civilian homes, the most brutal interrogations of civilians, and the routine killing of men, women, and chil-

happened in the Gulf of Tonkin and why.

But this is very much in keeping with Obama's insistence that "history will honor [Vietnam veterans'] service, and your names will join a story of service that stretches back two centuries." For the story Obama refers to is mythology, not actual history. It does not include 283 years of almost continuous warfare against the native peoples who were living in North America when Europeans first arrived and who needed to be removed and ultimately exterminated in order to make room for John Winthrop's "City Upon a Hill" and the Manifest Destiny of white Anglo-Americans. It does not mention that those gallant Texans at the Alamo were fighting for the freedom to keep their Black slaves. It does not mention that President James Polk deliberately provoked a war with Mexico in order to steal half of Mexico's land. It does not mention that wealthy American sugar planter Sanford Dole used the U.S. Marines to depose Queen Liliuokalani and steal Hawaii from the Hawaiians. It does not mention that Theodore Roosevelt and his powerful friends provoked a war with Spain in order to embark on the creation of an American overseas empire, then betrayed both the Cubans and the Filipinos. It does not mention that for much of the

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20th century, the U.S. government used the Marines in Central America and the Caribbean to create a favorable business climate and collect debts for Big Business, Wall Street, and American bankers. The words of Marine Major General Smedley Butler, two-time Medal of Honor winner, are worth repeating here:

"I spent 33 years and 4 months in the Marine Corps. And during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism. Thus I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international

banking house of Brown Brothers 1909–12. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras 'right' for American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested."

You won't find any mention of Butler in most U.S. high school history textbooks. Nor that U.S. financiers stood to lose vast fortunes if Germany had won the First World War. Nor that the Pacific War in World War II was mostly a matter of multiple empires competing for the same geographical territory. Nor that by the mid-1950s the United States had the Soviet Union ringed with nuclear missiles, all of them pointed at Moscow.

There is a great deal that escapes mention in American history books. My students are continually amazed by what they have never heard before in their lives. Most Americans have never heard the history of their country, a history that includes much to be proud of, but equally much to be ashamed of. The great American poet Walt

Whitman once said, "The real war will never get in the books." He was referring to the American Civil War, but it pertains equally to just about any and every American war. And as James Loewen makes clear in his book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, real American history will never get in the books, either. At least not in the books that most Americans read and accept as fact.

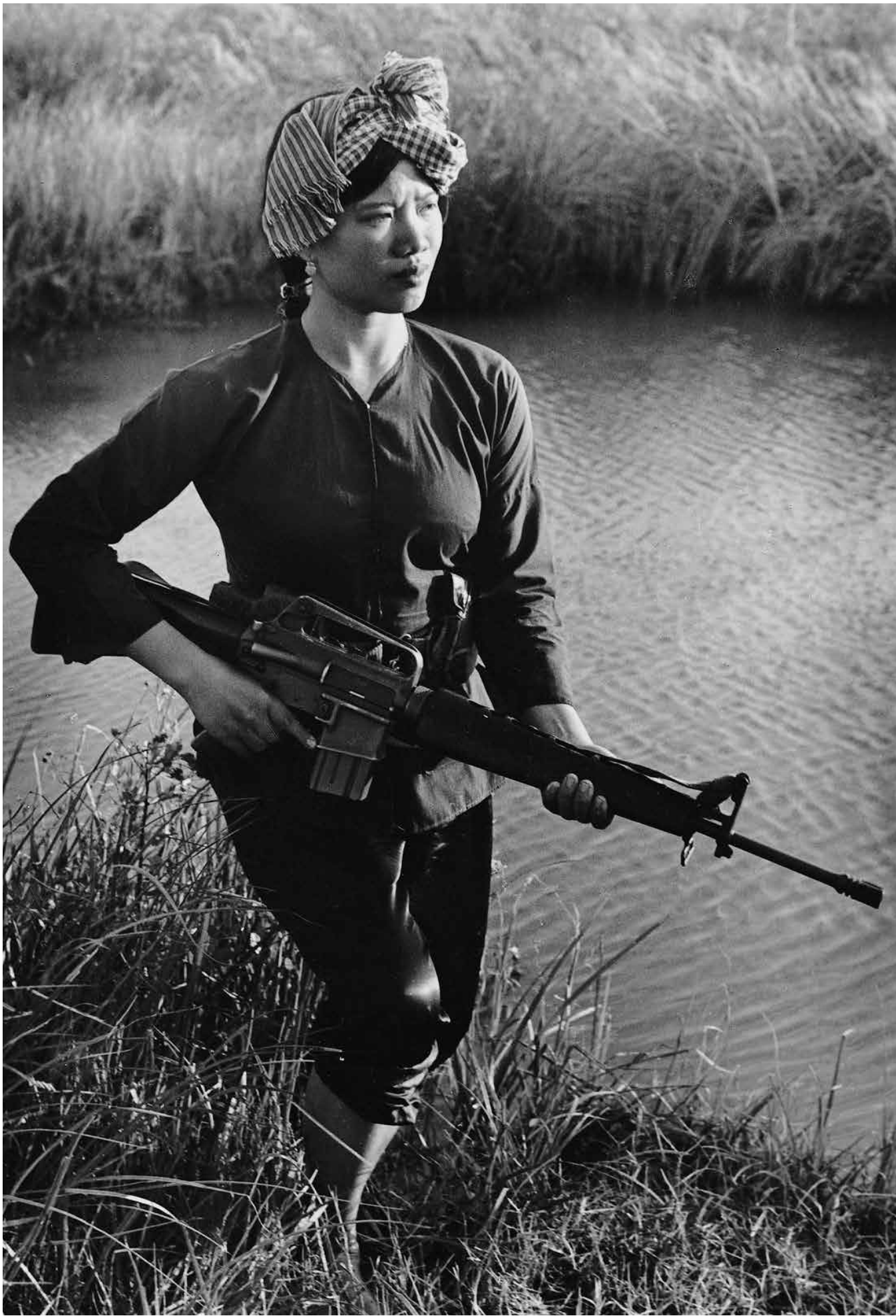
Thus, most Americans, if they think about the Vietnam War at all these many years later, are content to accept the fallacy that it was a noble cause fought by valorous young men who sacrificed for the greater cause of freedom against an evil communist enemy hell-bent on conquest, and that those same young men were unfairly abused and unappreciated by unpatriotic cowards when they returned home. Meanwhile, the wrong people learned their lessons well. By removing most Americans from any responsibility for or consequences of U.S. foreign policy, by placing the entire blood burden of U.S. foreign policy on the shoulders of a small segment of the American population—that segment with the least voice in

public affairs—the American military-industrial complex that President Dwight Eisenhower warned against, but did nothing to stop or change, can do whatever it wants to do in the world without fear of domestic political consequences.

The one lesson that no one in power in Washington seems to have learned is that no amount of military might can achieve goals that are incompatible with the beliefs, desires, and cultures of those at the other end of the rifle barrels and Hellfire missiles, and thus unrealistic and unachievable. If the Vietnam War did not drive home that lesson, certainly subsequent U.S. forays into Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Libya, and now Syria should have made that lesson clear. But there really is such a phenomenon as "the arrogance of power." We are watching it in action on a daily basis.

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Another Vietnam: Pictures from the Other Side

The North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front had hundreds of photographers who documented every facet of the war under the most dangerous conditions. Almost all were self-taught, and worked for the Vietnam News Agency, the National Liberation Front, the North Vietnamese Army or various newspapers. Equipment and supplies were precious. Processing chemicals were mixed in tea saucers with stream water, and exposed film was developed under the stars.

These photographers documented combat, civilian life, troops on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, resistance movements in the Mekong Delta, and the bloody impact of the war on the innocent.

Some were photographing to document history, while others strove to use their cameras as weapons in the propaganda war. Shooting clandestinely in the South, Vo Anh Khanh could never get his photos to Hanoi, but exhibited them in the mangrove swamps of the Mekong Delta to inspire resistance.

Many of these photographs have rarely been seen in Vietnam, let alone in the rest of the world. In the early 1990s, photojournalists Tim Page and Doug Niven started tracking down surviving photographers. One had a dusty bag of never-printed negatives, and another had his stashed under the bathroom sink. Vo Anh Khanh still kept his pristine negatives in a U.S. ammunition case, with a bed of rice as a desiccant.

One hundred eighty of these unseen photos and the stories of the courageous men who made them are collected in the book *Another Vietnam: Pictures of the War from the Other Side*.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT:

1973: A NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT GUERRILLA stands guard in the Mekong Delta. “You could find women like her almost everywhere during the war,” said the photographer. “She was only 24 years old but had been widowed twice. Both her husbands were soldiers. I saw her as the embodiment of the ideal guerrilla woman, who’d made great sacrifices for her country.” Photograph: Le Minh Truong/Another Vietnam/National Geographic Books

MARCH 1971: LAOTIAN GUERRILLAS CARRY supplies by elephant and foot to NVA troops near Route 9 in southern Laos during South Vietnam’s attempted interdiction of the trail. The invasion, Operation Lam Son 719, was intended to test South Vietnamese Army’s ability as U.S. support was winding down. It proved disastrous, with southern troops fleeing in panic. Photograph: Doan Cong Tinh/Another Vietnam/National Geographic Books

MAY 1975: ELDERS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH embrace, having lived to see Vietnam reunited and unoccupied by foreign powers. Photograph: Vo Anh Khanh/Another Vietnam/National Geographic Books

SEPT. 15, 1970: A VICTIM OF U.S. BOMBING, ethnic Cambodian guerrilla Danh Son Huol, is carried to an improvised operating room in a mangrove swamp on the Ca Mau Peninsula. This scene was an actual medical situation, not a publicity setup. The photographer, however, considered the image unexceptional and never printed it. Photograph: Vo Anh Khanh/Another Vietnam/National Geographic Books

1974: WOMEN HAUL HEAVY FISHING NETS on the upper branch of the Mekong River, taking over a job usually done exclusively by men. Photograph: Le Minh Truong/Another Vietnam/National Geographic Books

Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides

Following are excerpts from *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides* by Christian Appy, copyright © 2003 by Christian G. Appy. Used by permission of Viking Books, an imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. Appy's most recent book is *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* (Viking, 2015). Author Nick Turse calls it original and eye-opening, "a fresh lens for understanding the United States in the context of its most controversial conflict as well as its 21st-century wars."

Larry Heinemann

We lost the war because we didn't understand that [the Vietnamese] were poets.

We lost the war because the Vietnamese just flat out beat us. And we lost the war because we didn't understand that they were poets. That's true. In 1990, I went back to Vietnam for the first time. There was a literary conference in Hanoi. At one of the lunches, I sat next to this little bitty guy who turned out to be a professor of American literature at Hanoi University—Professor Nguyen Lien.

I asked him what he did during the war, and this is the story he told me. He said that his job was to go to Beijing and learn English and then go to Moscow University to read and study American literature. Then he went back to Hanoi and out to the Ho Chi Minh Trail and gave lectures on American literature to the troops traveling south. It was not like a six-week survey, just an afternoon, but he talked to them about Whitman, Jack London, Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald.

A lot of Vietnamese soldiers carried translations of

American literature in their packs. Le Minh Khue—a young woman who worked on the Ho Chi Minh Trail disarming unexploded bombs—carried Ernest Hemingway. Professor Lien asked me this question, "Now what Vietnamese literature did the American military teach to you?" I laughed so hard I almost squirted beer up my nose. I told Professor Lien that I would have been surprised if the U.S. Army had given us classes in American literature.

*Larry Heinemann drove an armored personnel carrier in the 25th Infantry Division from 1967 to 1968. In 1987, he won the National Book Award for *Paco's Story*, a novel about the lone American survivor of a Vietnam firefight.*

Nguyen Duy

There's nothing beautiful about [a rifle]—it's just an instrument of war, and I don't think there's anything beautiful about war.

When I was 20 years old, in 1968, I served in a communications unit. One of my jobs was to clean rifles. You know, we northern soldiers loved our AK-47s. They fold up really easily and they're extremely powerful. I cleaned them with genuine devotion and kept them in peak condition. They were always shining. One day while I was cleaning a rifle, my regimental commander walked by. The colonel said, "A beautiful weapon, don't you think?" I said, "There's nothing beautiful about it—it's just an instrument of war and I don't think there's anything beautiful about war." The colonel stared at me. He admired my skill as a poet, so he said, "Okay, but don't talk that way to anyone else."

I spent my childhood in the countryside where life was

very peaceful. When I was a young boy, I never imagined myself a soldier. I just wanted to lead an ordinary life like everybody else. We were poor, of course, but it didn't trouble us too much. During the time I was serving in the army, my mother's wish was to return to that poor, peaceful village. When I came back after the war, everything had turned upside down. That peaceful beauty had vanished. War had radically changed the nature of our society. There is a line in one of my poems that goes, "In the end, in every war, whoever won, the people always lost."

*Nguyen Duy is one of the most highly regarded Vietnamese poets of his generation. *Distant Road*, a selection of his poems, is offered by Curbstone Press.*

Dr. Le Cao Dai

We always sought a location that was in triple-canopy jungle—where there were three layers of leaves. Even in the middle of the day the sun couldn't shine through. But the Americans launched innumerable chemical spraying operations to defoliate the jungle.

Initially, we set up our hospital close to the place where the borders of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos meet. But it was too far from the front lines, so after about six months we had to move closer. It was the first of many moves during the war. We always sought a location that was in triple-canopy jungle—where there were three layers of leaves. Even in the middle of the day the sun couldn't shine through. But the Americans launched innumerable chemical spraying operations to defoliate the jungle. As soon as they sprayed nearby, I'd give the order to begin moving the hospital. Even so, we were sometimes spotted by U.S. helicopters or observation planes, and then the B-52s would inevitably attack that very night.

In 1970, I was allowed to return to the North for a medical meeting—a two-month trek from the Highlands. One of my former professors invited me to lunch and told me about dioxin. At the time, those of us at the front had no idea what kind of chemicals the Americans were spraying. We just knew that a few days later all of the leaves died. They'd spray over and over from C-123s that came in very low, almost at treetop level. All we could do was cover ourselves with plastic. The professor asked me if I'd ever seen cases of cancer. "Yes, of course," I said. He asked me for a piece of liver from someone who had died, to test for dioxin. I told him that was impossible. It would take two months to get it back, and even if you had some solution to preserve it in, you couldn't count on every porter to take proper care of it as it moved from post to post. It would almost certainly get lost or damaged.

But he was certainly on the right track. During the war, our soil, water, and food were all highly contaminated with dioxin. In 1973, a Harvard study measured the dioxin levels in our food. Fifty parts per trillion is considered the upper limit for safe food. That study found eight hundred parts per trillion in some places and a mean

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LE CAO DAI, M.D., one of Vietnam's premier researchers on the effects of Agent Orange, and a victim of its effects.

Perspectives

... continued from previous page

of two hundred. Now the food is much better and the soil is okay in most places except former U.S. air bases. Those places were heavily contaminated from storing the chemicals there, pumping them into the planes, and cleaning them out after spraying operations.

No one knows how many Vietnamese have died from diseases caused by Agent Orange, but according to our studies, one million people still suffer from cancers linked to Agent Orange exposure and there are about one hundred thousand people still alive with birth defects that we believe were caused by dioxin poisoning. We've seen many kinds of birth defects. ... In one study I did after the war, among veterans who had stayed in North Vietnam, about one percent of their children had birth defects. Among veterans who had been in the South the longest, the figure was about five percent. We have also found much higher rates of cerebral palsy among people exposed to dioxin.

We recognize, however, that our studies are not as strictly scientific as they should be. ... But even the anecdotal evidence is striking. Ten years after the war the chief of staff of the army, a three-star general named Cao Vinh Thang, died of liver cancer. During the war he and three other men had to go on a mission through a valley that was very heavily damaged by chemicals. It turned out that two of the other men also died of cancer. The only survivor went to war leaving behind a healthy, intelligent daughter. After the war, his wife gave birth to a deformed daughter with cerebral palsy. She is 27 now, and her mother and father have to take care of her.

Dr. Le Cao Dai conducted research on the medical effects of exposure to Agent Orange in the Vietnamese population. His experience went back to the French War. From 1966 to 1974 he directed the largest jungle hospital in the Central Highlands. His staff of 400 routinely cared for more than a thousand patients. The jungle "hospital" consisted of 250 small, half-buried bunkers topped with thatched roofs. Each bunker accommodated four or five patients, and a bomb shelter was dug into the side of every one at a depth of two meters. Bunkers were located at least 30 meters apart to prevent single bombing strike destroying the entire hospital. Dr. Dai passed away in 2002.

Ta Quang Thin

I think everybody, including myself, was sick of the war. We abhorred it. It was not only cruel, it was absurd. Foreigners came to our country from out of the blue and forced us to take up arms. Don't you think that's absurd?

I was asleep in the jungle hospital when a male nurse woke me to tell me that Hue's blood pressure had gone down. Hue was one of our patients recovering from serious wounds in a postoperative care unit, a makeshift underground room with an A-frame roof made of logs and covered with a tarpaulin. So I got out of my hammock to go see him. I remember putting the stethoscope in my ears to listen to his pulse. I glanced at my watch and it was almost eleven o'clock. That's all I can remember.

Later my friends told me that we were hit by a bomb from a B-52. There were six of us in that room—myself, two male nurses, and three patients. I was crouched over Hue when the roof collapsed. It broke my spine and paralyzed me from the middle of my back down. They dug me out of the rubble the following morning. I was the only survivor. Somehow there was enough air to breathe and I



LÂM VAN LỊCH flew a MIG-17 in 1966 during the American War in Viet Nam.

was closer to the surface than the others, easier to dig out.

I stayed in the South another four years, treated that whole time in a jungle hospital, just wishing the war would end quickly. I couldn't communicate with my family for six years. Even if they had carried letters south, how would they have found us? We moved all the time.

In 1971, they were finally able to take me home. I was flat on my back in a hammock, two people at a time carrying me. They carried me the whole way back to the North. A third porter went along to relieve the other two. There were many stations along the way and I was relayed from one group of porters to another. It took us seven months. Of course it was very painful to be carried like that. I took painkillers but they didn't help much.

When I got home, I think everybody, including myself, was sick of the war. We abhorred it. It was not only cruel, it was absurd. Foreigners came to our country from out of the blue and forced us to take up arms. Don't you think that's absurd? We just wanted to be prosperous and live like other people. Of course we had to fight to protect our country, but we were really sick of the war. Deep down we didn't like it. Casualties were enormous. And not just that—our savings, our houses, our plants and animals, everything was wasted by that war. I have many memories, but I don't want to remember them. It sounds like a paradox to say that, but it's because I don't like war. I don't think anyone liked the war.

Ta Quang Thin was trained to be a doctor's aide and perform minor surgery. "Most of the wounds I treated were caused by artillery shells. Bombing also caused many shrapnel wounds and concussions." He was



GENERAL VÕ NGUYỄN GIÁP with Lam Van Lich.

wounded in Tay Ninh Province in 1967. "I spent a lot of time in that violent place."

one at a depth of six feet. Bunkers were located at least thirty yards apart to prevent a single bombing strike destroying the entire hospital. Dr. Dai passed away in 2002.

Lam Van Lich

I was away from home for 29 years. I gave my family a few days' advance notice that I was coming, but when I entered the house, I saw my older sister and mistook her for my mother. And when my mother came in, she didn't recognize me.

The war caused a lot of casualties and pain. Just take my family, for instance. When I returned to the South in 1975 I found that many of my own family members had been killed. The pain of those deaths was greater than the sadness I felt for participating in the killing. I was away from home for 29 years. I gave my family a few days' advance notice that I was coming, but when I entered the house, I saw my older sister and mistook her for my mother. And when my mother came in, she didn't recognize me. Even after I introduced myself, she kept saying, "Lich? Lich?" She didn't believe it. She insisted on examining my head. When she finally found a familiar mole, she cried out, "It's you!" Even though we were fully prepared for the reunion, we cried our hearts out. During the war my mother was arrested many times. All her sons were engaged in revolutionary activities, so the local government frequently took her in for questioning. For the protection of the family she didn't tell the younger members of the family about me. When I returned in 1975, many of my nieces and nephews didn't even know I existed.

Lam Van Lich was raised in Ca Mau, in South Vietnam. He left home at 15 in 1946 to fight the French. In 1954, he went to the North and was trained as a pilot.

Mark Foreman

... continued from page 7

the bleeding,” the Marine answered.

As he crawled around Harry's body, machine-gun fire hit Mark, knocking him down the hill head over heels.

“I felt like I'd been hit by a cement truck and electrocuted with 50,000 volts of electricity ... everything began to move in slow motion. I could see my right leg slowly spinning, as if it was made of soft rubber. That's when I knew I'd been hit in the leg.”

The bullet hit Mark just to the right of his groin, too high for a tourniquet, shattering his hip before exiting. He lay in the open, convinced he would bleed to death or be killed by the NVA. “I hoped it would be a good, clean shot. It would be a quick way to get the hell out of this insanity.”

That didn't happen but what did over the next five days came straight through Alice's looking glass.

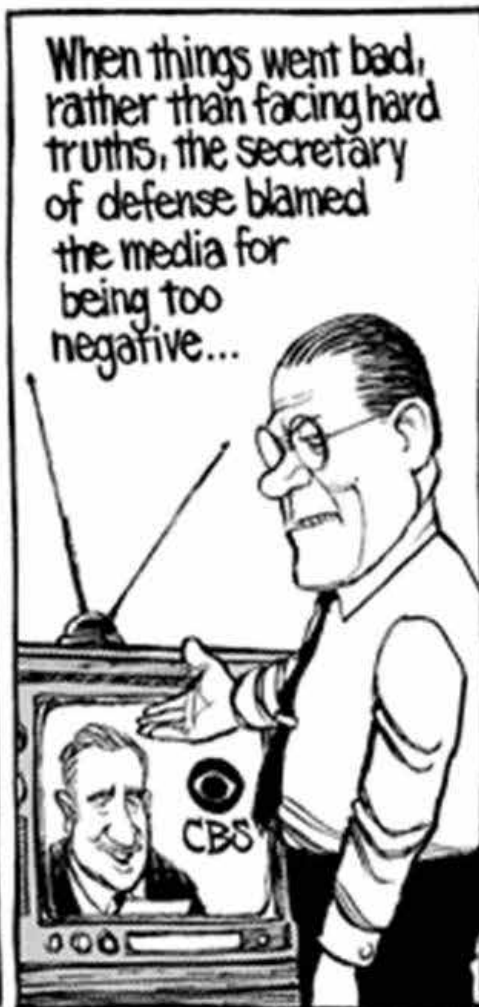
A Marine crawled into the open to pull Mark behind cover. Not a shot was fired. Others crawled out, piled some rocks around Mark and crawled back to cover.

Certain he'd bleed to death, he pressed a battle dressing to his wound anyway. An hour later he had a “moment of ecstasy” when he realized he'd survive if he could just get to a hospital.

That second day of the battle, over half the company was dead or wounded. Survivors started to become unwound. One stood up and walked as if strolling through the park. Others couldn't move.

A medivac chopper hovered above the trees, trying to send down a rope ladder. The NVA shot it down. Another attempt 30 minutes later met with the same results.

Orders came in to blow up enough trees to create a landing zone. For the next five days, engineers, constantly under fire,



Now, replace "the 1960s" with "2003" and read again...

blew up one huge tree a day.

During that time, a fighter jet flying 300 miles per hour dropped two 500-lb. bombs. The Marines' captain radioed the pilot, “You stupid, motherfucking idiot ... you just killed seven of my men.”

Artillery support came next, keeping the NVA at bay, but by the third day, with food and ammunition running low, five large boxes of supplies had to be dropped by plane. Only one fell inside the Marines' perimeter.

Two days later, 100 Marines made

it to the top of the mountain. The NVA had vanished. A medivac chopper descended through the opening in the trees close enough to take on Mark and other wounded. A second medivac helicopter with 36 Marines on it hit a tree branch as it pulled up, flipped over, killing the copilot and severely re-wounding the rest.

After six days and five nights of fight-

cides, homelessness and anti-social behavior. Fortunately, Mark was able to turn his horror and pain into compassion and service to others.

He used the G.I. Bill to attend the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts followed by 10 years carving stone, “the best post-Vietnam War therapy I could have had. It allowed me to create what I thought was

Defending G.I.s

... continued from page 5

converted into an orphanage. The hand-painted sign in front of the villa read in English, “Please don't shoot the orphans.”

I would get to the gate of MACV Headquarters at Long Binh and would be waved right through, not because the Military Police recognized me, but because I was a white American woman, hence presumed safe. When I would go to the jail to see my clients, I was treated with a patronizing chivalry by the guards, and told to be careful because my clients were desperate and violent. I was only 25 years old and fresh out of law school. Maintaining my dignity, composure and presence of mind took nearly all of my intellectual and emotional strength. What replenished me were my clients, who somehow managed to maintain their collective sense of humor along with courage and righteousness.

When the mutiny case ended, I returned to the Philippines, to the town of Olongapo, the base town outside Subic Bay Naval Base, where the Pacific Fleet was headquartered. There I and a Law-

yers Guild colleague represented sailors and Marines in courts martial and lived a somewhat surrealistic life in a town devoted primarily to pandering to sailors on leave. The Navy was none too happy to have us in town, and in an effort to keep us away from the enlisted men, banned us from all parts of the base other than the court and law library. Nonetheless, word spread rapidly that some American civilians were in town, and our house became the unofficial “G.I. Center” for the more courageous G.I.s who didn't mind the brass knowing about their opposition to the war. A lot of them just came by for the company ... we were a bit of home.

Barbara Dudley represented G.I.s during the Vietnam War, and then practiced law with California Rural Legal Assistance and the Agricultural Labor Relations Board. She has served as president and executive director of the National Lawyers Guild, as executive director of Greenpeace USA, and as director for strategic campaigns of the national AFL-CIO. She is currently the senior policy advisor to the Oregon Working Families Party and teaches part-time at Portland State University.

The night of May 8, Mark's under-strength company of 83 Marines stumbled into an encampment of 1,500 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars. The NVA welcomed the Marines with a furious, 10-minute burst of machine gun and rifle fire, filling the air with thousands of red tracers. 'The roar of that many machine guns was unbelievable. I thought my brain was going to explode.'

ing, only 20 Marines were able to walk out. “The rest of us were either dead, wounded, or gone mad,” Mark recalled.

“When I woke up three days after having the first of many surgeries there was a two-star general walking through the ward handing out purple hearts like candy to children. I wanted to throw mine in his face as hard as I could but was too weak.”

Mark's military experience was unusual. Of the millions of U.S. veterans, less than 1 percent actually experience combat. “So how can the general public have any idea how insane war is?” he asked. But, he added, every veteran goes through basic training where physical violence can be frequent and dehumanization is policy.

Mark Foreman's experience helps make sense of huge numbers of veteran sui-

beauty, every day for those 10 years.”

He earned degrees in art education and taught Milwaukee public school students for 20 years, until pain from his hip wounds became too severe. He retired in 2005 and will continue drawing 100 percent of his military pay, adjusted for inflation, for the rest of his life.

Mark co-founded the Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative, where he serves as volunteer outreach coordinator. He also serves as treasurer on the Veterans For Peace Board of Directors. Mark's memoir can be read at peaceinourtimes.org.

Mike Ferner served as a Navy corpsman during the Viet Nam War and was discharged as a conscientious objector. He is a former president of Veterans For Peace and author of Inside the Red Zone: A Veteran For Peace Reports from Iraq.

Agent Orange and the Continuing Viet Nam War

By Bill Fletcher Jr.

During a 2009 visit to Vietnam, I asked a retired colonel in the Vietnam People's Army about the notorious toxin "Agent Orange." The colonel, who was also a former leader in a Vietnamese advocacy group for Agent Orange's victims, spoke fluent English and was a veteran of the war with the United States. I asked him when the Vietnamese first realized the long-term dangers associated with the Agent Orange herbicide used by the United States. His answer was as simple as it was heart-wrenching: "When the children were born," was his response.

In an effort to defeat the National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese Army (the Vietnam People's Army), the United States concocted the idea that if it destroyed the forests and jungles, there would be nowhere for the guerrillas to hide. They thus unleashed a massive defoliation campaign, the results of which exist with us to this day. Approximately 19 million gallons of chemical herbicides were used during the war, affecting between 2 million and 4.8 million Vietnamese, along with thousands of U.S. military personnel. In addition, Laos and Cambodia were exposed to Agent Orange in the larger Indochina War.

Despite the original public relations associated with the use of Agent Orange aimed at making it appear safe and humane, it was chemical warfare and it is not an exaggeration to suggest that it was genocidal. The cancers promoted by Agent Orange (affecting the Vietnamese colonel I interviewed, as a matter of fact) along with the catastrophic rise in birth defects, have haunted the people not only of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, but also of the United States. Those in the U.S. military involved in the dispersal of Agent Orange and those who were simply exposed to it brought the curse home.

The U.S. government has refused to acknowledge the extent of the devastation wrought by Agent Orange. Ironically, it has also failed to assume responsibility for



the totality of the horror as it affected U.S. veterans, too often leaving veterans and their families to fight this demon alone.

Congresswoman Barbara Lee introduced House Resolution 2114, Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2015, "To direct the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide assistance for individuals affected by exposure to Agent Orange, and for other purposes." In many respects, this bill is about settling some of the accounts associated with the war against Vietnam. The United States reneged on reparations that it promised Vietnam and to this day there remain those in the media and government who wish to whitewash this horrendous war of aggression as if it were some sort of misconstrued moral crusade.

HR 2114 takes us one step toward accepting responsibility for a war crime perpetrated against the Vietnamese that, literally and figuratively, blew back in our faces as our government desperately tried to crush an opponent it should never have been fighting in the first place. For that reason, we need Congress to pass and fund HR 2114.

This bill should be understood as a down payment on a much larger bill owed to the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and to the U.S. veterans sent into hell.

For more information on HR 2114 and Agent Orange, see vn-agentorange.org, the website of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign.

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Bill Fletcher Jr. is a senior scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies, the immediate past president of Trans-Africa Forum, and national board member of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign. Follow him on Facebook and at billfletcherjr.com.

Stunted Minds and Crippled Bodies



NGUYEN THI HIN, 83 with her granddaughter, Pham Thi Tu Thuy, 13. Thuy's grandfather was exposed to Agent Orange.

You may notice that Agent Orange is mentioned in more than one of the articles in this publication. That's because the deadly killer is woven through the cruel fabric of that war and every generation of living beings that have come since.

About one million Vietnamese, including 100,000 children, are living with the after-effects of Agent Orange, now into a third generation. More than 13 million gallons of the herbicide laced with dioxin were dispersed from 1961 to 1971.

Stunted minds, crippled bodies, a lifetime of pain and social stigma along with impoverishment of families burdened with caring for the stricken are the legacies of a war crime for the ages. Genocide would not be too harsh a term for a strategy that destroyed forests and crops, poisoned water, denied food and shelter to whole regions and goes on killing and crippling generation after generation.

The U.S. government cared no more for its own than it did for the Indochinese in that war, as shown by the decades-long struggle it took for veterans and their families to get recognition and some compensation for the same kinds of disease and deformity that struck those we targeted. More of the "unintended collateral damage" of war?

For more information about children of U.S. veterans suffering from the multigenerational effects of Agent Orange, contact the Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Alliance, cofounded by Heather Bowser, born with webbed fingers and toes and missing her lower right limb; covvha.net.

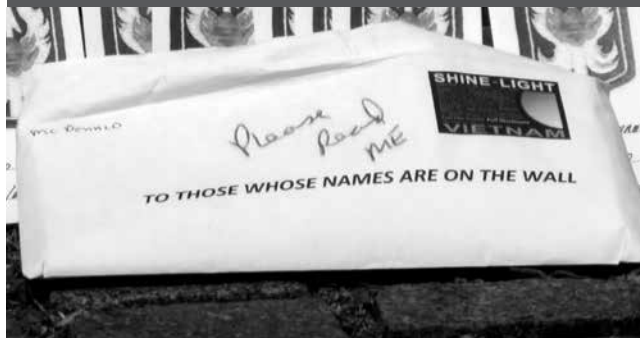
—Mike Ferner

The Decade the Rainforest Died

the deer did not stop running
leopards climbed into trees
that could not hide them
the douc langur
and the white cheeked gibbon
cursed at the metal gods
we flew raining on them
as they burned from napalm
elephants choked on the
smoke of gunpowder and poison
their steps a strange rhythm
as they tried to fly
the thunder of bombs
echoed the steps of elephants
tigers exploded
as they stepped onto landmines
in a forest covered with leaves
dead from Agent Orange,
fallen trees and
decomposing bodies of animals
and people
the earthworms were washed away
in monsoons
with soil that could
no longer grab onto roots
the Javan rhinoceros
and the wild water buffalos
that were still alive
wandered aimlessly
and weary with M16s and AK-47s,
we marched quietly and steadily
not knowing
why we were killing each other

—Tue My Chuc

Letters to The Wall



On Memorial Day 2015, we laid 151 letters and 32 postcards at the foot of The Wall. Each was enclosed in an envelope with a simple message inscribed on it: “Please read me.” These letters were written by “survivors” of this war—soldiers, wives, children, war resisters, conscientious objectors, sisters, and brothers. Of that number we have chosen a few to include here; some have been shortened to accommodate space limitations. Many visitors to The Wall read these letters over a two-day period. They are published in their entirety at vietnamfulldisclosure.org.

A Nurse's Turning Point

To All Vietnamese and Americans,

I am the daughter of a U.S. Marine who was killed on the beachhead of Guam July 22, 1944. In 1967, after graduating college, I joined the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps, went to Officers Indoctrination School in Newport, R.I., and began working at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in California. Oak Knoll had been constructed during WWII to care for the Marines wounded during battles in the Pacific.

I thought that I would become part of the healing process for the wounded; I thought that I would be able to undo the destruction of war and conflict in Southeast Asia. We had an amputee ward at Oak Knoll where the guys had their limbs attached to meat hooks, their raw, open wounds hanging, oozing infections so bad you could smell the sweet, sticky odor when you came into the unit. At night, they would talk with each other through their ongoing nightmares—“be careful, there’s a land mine there; go slowly, there’s a trip wire” as they wandered through the dense jungle—these youngsters, living on horror and fear. I was dedicated to getting them better and able to go out into life, but so many couldn’t—the psychological imprint of what they had seen and done couldn’t be cured by surgery and antibiotics, and the military didn’t believe that war caused psychological pain and damage so severe it would haunt them for life. We were an extraordinary team—physicians, nurses, corpsmen, and corpswomen—working long and difficult hours to heal our patients. I was training corpsmen who would be sent to the front lines, and so I became an instrument of war. I helped the military to function.

Like many others, Vietnam became a turning point in my life. It became personal, and I couldn’t live with myself and continue to be part of this death and destruction—done in my name, by my government. G.I.s and veterans were organizing a march for peace in the San Francisco Bay Area in October 1968. And so I joined them. We formed groups at Oak Knoll Hospital and would post posters and flyers announcing the demonstration—on the many barracks and wards. They were all torn down by morning. The nightly news had stories of the U.S. dropping flyers on the Vietnamese, urging them to go to “safe hamlets.”

So, along with a couple of friends, we loaded up a small plane and dropped flyers over multiple military installations in the San Francisco Bay Area, announcing the G.I. and Veterans March for Peace—and thousands showed up on October 12, 1968. We spoke out against



U.S. involvement in Vietnam; we demanded, “Bring the boys home.” We spoke about the old men in Washington sending the young to die. And we thought we’d stop the war. We really believed that the American people and the U.S. government would listen to us.

The fact that the war continued, that so many millions of Vietnamese and thousands of American soldiers lost their lives, continues to haunt me and make me question what else we could have done. How could we have stopped this insanity?

As a child, I spent many Sundays visiting my father where he is buried in Chicago. I watched my grandmother drop to her knees and talk to her son: “Look, here is your daughter—see how she’s grown,” and I’d walk away from the grave, embarrassed and confused.

To all who have suffered, to all the family and loved ones who died and had their lives changed from the American War in Vietnam, I am so sorry we couldn’t have done more. We tried—and we’ll continue our struggle for peace and justice in this world in your name.

—Susan S.

If I Could Tell You the Reason Why

Dear brothers and sisters:

None of us can quite get it right. We keep trying to figure out what our relationship to you should look like. Psychologists, sociologists, historians, poets, painters, musicians, sculptors have all thrown their hats into this ring of fire. It may be impossible. But we keep trying. For your sake. For ours. Along the way, we put you into the hands of a brilliant young student, Maya Lin, to build us a wall. She has come the closest. Along the way, some have wrestled with concepts like “survivor’s guilt,” “PTSD,” “moral injury” to seek some clarity if not solace. They come close, too. You see, we care about you. We want to keep you in the conversation. We want you to know that we still think you can offer us a great deal.

Personally, I wonder this: did any of you cross paths with me from July of 1969 to August of 1970? Up in II Corps, up in the Central Highlands, down by the Bong Son River. Do you remember? I went one way, you the other. I survived, you didn’t.

Along the way over these years, along the way, I wrote this for you:

THE WALL

*Descending into this declivity
dug into our nation's capital
by the cloven hoof
of yet another one of our country's
tropical wars
Slipping past the names of those
whose wounds
refuse to heal
Slipping past the panel where
my name would have been
could have been
perhaps should have been
Down to The Wall's greatest depth
where the beginning meets the end
I kneel
Staring through my own reflection
beyond the names of those
who died so young
Knowing now that The Wall
has finally found me—
58,000 thousand-yard stares
have fixed on me
as if I were their Pole Star
as if I could guide their mute testimony
back into the world
as if I could connect all those dots
in the nighttime sky
As if I
could tell them
the reason why*

So, okay, you would have thought that the grief from your loss and the many Southeast Asian lives lost would have compelled us to put an end to war. That we would no longer send young men and women into ill-begotten conflicts to appease the blood thirst of some self-appointed armchair avengers bent on protecting their warped version of the American way of life. You would have thought.

I’ll spare you the details of wars mounted in our name since you left us. Trust me, though, that some of us have worked to stop them. We work to protect our children and grandchildren, to protect families we will never meet in

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lands far from here, to use your deaths as a means to say "no more." We have formed Veterans For Peace, partly in your memory, with the very lofty ambition of abolishing war. We oftentimes work in your name, for you. I'll admit that many times we feel like we are howling alone in the wilderness, but we will not desist. We owe that to you.

I'll be back, again and again, to walk alongside you for a short while. I will listen for your voices. I will touch your names and force myself to swing back through these many years and put myself in the place and time where and when we may have met. I promise you that I will take this opportunity to meld our spirits together, knowing that I grow stronger, in the doing so. And I will use that strength to abolish future wars. To stop the killing of innocents. In your name. That's the least I owe you. And the most.

Rest in peace.

Your brother,

—Doug R.

A Confluence of Memories

"Mourn the dead, but fight like hell for the living," said Mother Jones.

My father and my uncle both served in World War II and received their decorations, though neither ever spoke of the war, nor did I ask. As a boy, I played war with my older cousin, who went off to Vietnam.

Our idol was Audie Murphy; we both had his 3rd Infantry Division patch painted on our helmet liners.

So I was primed at a young age, ready to serve my country, a willing but unknowing patriot, dedicated to protecting and serving with honor my country 'tis of the flying red, white, and blue. I had a feeling of pride and glory, thinking I was doing the right thing to stop the spread of communism. The domino-theory prevailed, and I knew so little. ... "Be a good citizen ... trust your government."

So, as the sabers rattled and the flags unfurled for the almighty USA, I was one of those young men going off to war. I was 17 and, like so many others coming from low-income families, the military held promise ... a hopeful opportunity to gain knowledge, experience for future jobs, and the prospect of the G.I. Bill. High on my list was a chance to step away from the insanity of my



family. Sign me up, Uncle Sam!

I was stationed on the *USS Duluth* LPD 6 (landing platform dock), Amphibious Ready Group Alpha, U.S. Seventh Fleet, off Vietnam South China Sea in May 1967, and departed in November back to Subic Bay. With three companies of Marines, helos, and landing craft assault vehicles, we participated in seven amphibious assault operations. And according to Rear Admiral W.W. Behrens, USN, we "made a major contribution to our ever growing success in the war. ... Congratulations on a job well done."

Well, get your rubber boots on and roll up your pants, for this is more of the BS we continually get from those who spin the truth into propaganda. Let us not forget that "the first casualty when war comes is truth" (U.S. Sen. Hiram Warren Johnson).

I remember the napalm strikes, the Medevac flights out, the 16-hour-a-day workloads, the smells, the heat, the prison-like confinement of being on a ship in close quarters day in and day out, yet there is no one glaring event, rather a confluence of memories that flow down

the river, all weaving that tapestry I call Vietnam.

What I remember most are the stories of those I have encountered.

My colleague Ron, a psychologist, full colonel Army Reserve, who died of Agent Orange complications, leaving behind two young boys. ...

Tommy, served on ship with me, unable to manage, loses his home, living now in a small trailer provided by the church, his wife sobbing to me on the phone that disability benefits continue to be denied, yet our ship is listed on the Agent Orange: Mobile Riverine Force Alphabetized Ships List. ...

Russ, after a heavy firefight entering the village, picks up a small infant who dies in his arms, wondering what madness this is. ... Now he is a tireless witness for peace, working to stop the drones, to stop the killing of innocents. ...

My loving friend, Bill, the ironworker, two-tour 'Nam vet. We spent 15 years in men's group together, did Bamboo Bridge. ... I cried a lot of tears with you, Brother. Haunted by the continual memories of the war, caught in the cycle of addiction, unable to break free, gradually losing his mind, and living with his sister, unable to care for himself. ... I haven't spoken to you in three years. You may be dead by now, dear friend, I don't really want to know. ... My heart aches. ...

Jim B., you fearless fighter for 9/11 Truth and Depleted Uranium, I miss your passion, your conviction for speaking the truth. ... locks himself in the bathroom and with shotgun unloads his troubles. ...

So I still carry some survivor guilt, for the message I received was that if you were wounded, that was a partial sacrifice, but the only ultimate way to truly fully serve was to not come back at all. That level of insanity leaves little room for forgiveness and self-acceptance for the service that one was able to give.

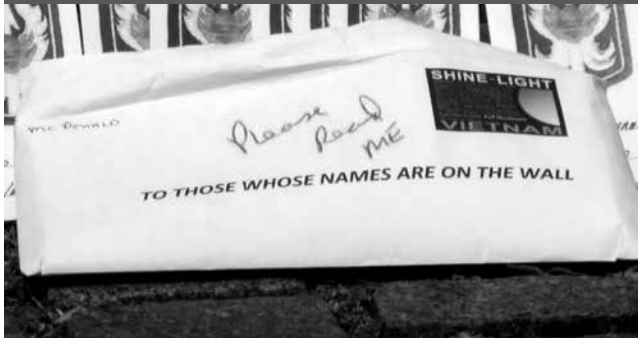
Of course, the participation in war needs to be reconciled with the cultural betrayal, the misdirected choice in submitting to such a misleading enterprise. "War is a racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives" (Smedley Darlington Butler).

So what I walk away with is opening my heart to carry the sorrow of all the stories that I've heard ... the suffering of humanity. I don't always feel that sadness but it is there, a low moaning wail of grief that never quiets itself, a manifestation of what we have done to grandmother

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Letters to The Wall



... continued from previous page

earth and all our relations, not just the two-legged.

I go to the top of the hill, leave tobacco, and say prayers for my helpers, the spirits of the land. I use the sweet grass to clear my mind, with Chanupa in hand, the sacred prayer pipe; I say my prayers to the great mystery, to grandmother, the four directions. I ask that my mind, body, spirit be strengthened in all ways, to serve, Mitakuye Oyasin, all my relations in a good way. Let it be so.

For all of you who have come down the road or rest in the fields, I will burn some extra sweet grass, sage, cedar and perhaps copal. Gently smell the sweetness, shake your weariness. May you take a breath of sweet mercy. I am On Belay,

—Douglas R.

Haunted Every Day

Dear So Many

There are more than 58,000 of you on this Wall, "so many." I remember the first thoughts of building a memorial to Vietnam Vets and I am so grateful for Jan Scruggs and the many others who made it possible. I contributed cash but they made it happen, so that future generations could see the names of "so many."

It has been nearly 44 years since I first saw the hills around Da Nang, since I saw the jungle at Chu Lai and the mud of the Mekong Delta. I was in the Navy, on the Westchester County LST 1167. To my knowledge I was a

replacement for one of the crew who was killed by a sapper's mine the previous November 1, 1968. I didn't want to be there. I never wanted to be there, but I was so grateful to my mother for making sure I was wearing Navy blue versus Army green, like so many of you.

My service was not yours. I was rarely in harm's way, sitting at the mouth of the Mekong River Delta. I was close enough to hear the roar of the fighter jets, the endless rhythm of those damn helicopters and the gut-wrenching thud of some faraway bombing run. I was close enough to see the tracers, the sparkling trail of VC rockets, and the eerie motionlessness of flares. I was close enough to be a spectator but you all were there. "So many" of you were there. And yet it haunts me every day.

I left the Navy after three years, nine months and 11 days, a number I will never forget. I went to college, got a job, got married, and had children. I had a good life working in offices in and around Washington, D.C. Every Veterans Day after The Wall was built, I would visit you all, look at the names of "so many" who I did not know personally but who I would cry out for and ask why. Why were you now just a name etched on a stone black wall, while I lived on? "So many," 58,000 etchings that seemed to go on and on and on. Why was I the lucky one to be left off The Wall? Why was I the one who would continue to go to ball games, enjoy a beer, drive a little too fast with the radio turned way up, make love, be a dad and a husband and now a grandfather? You, the "so many," would never hear the call of "G-pa."

I tried in my own way to honor your life. When the second Bush administration chose to go to war with Iraq, I marched, I wore "no war" buttons. After years of war I helped organize a vigil in Asheville to remember those young people who were now joining you, the "so many." When I became a teacher, I would show the students my picture of The Wall with "so many" names. I would try to bring it home to them by showing them the list of you from North Carolina. I would bring it down to two of you, Ricky Propst and Ricky Lowder who had learned in classrooms where they now learned, walked the halls where they now walked, played on the fields where they now played, lived in the community where they now were growing up, and died before their time. There were always two or three of my students who would notice



that Ricky Propst died on his birthday. They would also notice my voice would crack and a tear would trail down my cheek.

I tried, I still try to let people know you were real, you were young, you had futures, you were "so many" left behind. I worry The Wall is becoming a memorial to the Vietnam War and not you all who are on it. I worry that as we, the people who remember, age out, those able to rewrite history will promote Vietnam as an honorable endeavor. I worry now that people will misconstrue your honorable, brave service and your forever sacrifice with an honorable cause.

So I am now asking you, "so many," to come haunt the hearts and minds of the young today to stand up and say no. Say no to a life ended too soon; say no to "so many" with PTSD or TBI; say no to fighting an "enemy" more misunderstood than threatening; say no to war profiteers. If we don't go they can not war. So I am praying to you "so many," please come change the course of this country so that this time we can choose NOT to go, not to war.

With that just remember ...

You "so many" are never far from my mind and you are always in my heart.

May God Bless You and Keep You.

—Jim W.

Continue This Quest

This letter, posted at The Wall on Memorial Day, 2015 ... is framed in remembrance and respect for the two friends I knew best whose names are inscribed on this black granite memorial: Frederick Richard Ohler and Robert Randolph White, both killed in 1968 when all three of us were serving in the U.S. Army in Vietnam. I was the one who came home.

I share these thoughts with all the rest of us who survive today—those who fought in a war that nobody wanted, which few try to justify any more; and those who protested and helped end a tragic policy that took the lives of 58,000 other young Americans, and more than three million Vietnamese. Many of us fought and, later, protested also.

Rick and Bob, I remember the 1968 Tet Offensive, when your names were added to the list of American casualties, in April. And I remember that day seven years later, in April, 1975 when the war ended as the tank crashed through the gates of the presidential palace in Saigon. Amid a swirl of conflicting emotions, that day for me was unforgettable because of a clear hope that rose from the depths of my being: a new unshakable confidence that welled up from all that sadness and loss, that

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America had learned our lesson, that we would never embark again on such a misbegotten foreign venture, that we would never make such a tragic mistake, ever again. That lesson learned, for me, helped to make the pain of your loss, and the suffering of millions of others, somehow more bearable. I think that may have been true for others who had survived.

Now, as your names on polished stone reflect back at us, the survivors—a steady stream of family, friends, sympathetic visitors sharing more than three decades of loss and remembrance since the Memorial was dedicated in 1982—please know that we continue our efforts, however feeble and inadequate, to learn and apply the lessons of your sacrifice. Forgive our failures, but know that we are trying, in so many ways, to mark and honor your untimely departure and to atone for the suffering, to help heal those who lost so much—Americans, Vietnamese especially, and people of goodwill around the world who labored mightily to stop the madness of that war.

Know that we continue to try, as futile as the endeavor may seem, to bring America back home and to restore the soul of our nation. Since you died in 1968, our government has wandered the globe in search of a false security built on military conquest and economic domination, when Americans have known, deep in our hearts, that we should be seeking peace.

Today, four decades after the U.S. war in Vietnam ended, believe me when I say that we will continue this quest, to rightly assume responsibility for the devastation we have left in America's wake in Vietnam—tons of unexploded bombs, and the toxic poison of Agent Orange. We pledge to continue our efforts, though shamefully inadequate, to help heal Vietnam. And to sustain American veterans and their families who are still suffering the consequences of that war.

Rest in peace, my friends. Look over us and our frail efforts, comfort us with the knowledge that your spirits guide us, and help us persevere as we strive to make your ultimate sacrifice a loss that was not in vain.

—Chuck S,

If Resurrected from the Realm of the Dead

To Those Whose Names Are Here Memorialized:

You came from small towns and big cities, from different socio-economic backgrounds (though tilted, of course, toward the lower end of the income spectrum), from different ethnic and religious heritages. Some of you enlisted enthusiastically, believing you were saving “the Free World” from a communist menace; many of you, like myself, enlisted in order to “beat the draft”; but undoubtedly the majority of you were conscripted: “Take this rifle, son, or ... meet your cellmates for the next few years in this federal penitentiary.” A few of you were women, serving in a medical or perhaps clerical setting. Death, the Great Leveler, has here united you all.

But Death is not the only thing that binds you together. You were all victims of a national sickness, a belief that the United States of America has a God-given mandate to rule the entire globe, to its own economic benefit. You were all victims of a chain of monstrous lies that led to your deployment to a strange land that most Americans didn't know existed. The first of these was the fiction that there was a separate, sovereign nation called “the Republic of South Vietnam” that needed you to defend it against “aggression from the north.” Democrat, Republican, it mattered not: our national leaders lied to us again and again and perpetuated one of the most criminal wars of modern times. Not a single one of you should have been deployed to Vietnam in the first place. Not a single one! And thus, as surely as the uncounted millions of Indochinese killed by U.S. weaponry, each and every one of you is a victim of U.S. military aggression. And no one in the leadership of the war machinery, at any level,



has ever been prosecuted for their roles in this criminal undertaking. Not a single solitary one.

If resurrected from the realm of the dead you could be, what would you make of the state of the world today? Hey, what became of the USSR? A black man in the White House?!? That would be a shocker, no doubt. I hope you would be outraged that American troops are still deployed all over the world to maintain economic hegemony, and that they kill and get killed or maimed ... for what, exactly? To “defend freedom”? While our own dwindling freedom here at home is in mortal peril of being extinguished in the name of “our own protection”! While the streets of our cities and towns are patrolled by cops wearing full combat gear, generously donated by the Pentagon, an institution that spends millions of taxpayer dollars to persuade the generations following ours that the war that took your lives was far, far from the monstrous crime that it was. I hope you would be sufficiently appalled that the USA learned not a damned thing from its defeat in Vietnam, that you would actively resist current government policies. But that is a struggle we, the living, will have to pursue. Continue to rest in peace, brothers and sisters. Your fighting days are over.

—Greg L.

An Unforgiving Mirror

Reflections Fifty Years after the Escalation of the American war in Vietnam

It's not easy to look into a mirror these days. The years and life have left baggage under my eyes, sculpted lines on my face and left grey ashes in my hair. But I can do it.

The Vietnam War Memorial is an unforgiving mirror that I turn to for self appraisal. Did I live a good life? Did I make the right decisions, especially the most difficult one of my young life? Walk The Wall and you see in the polished surface those who died far from home, family and friends staring back through the flat reflection of your external form. Those names summon memories that command us to look at our real selves, the thinking, feeling self, and command us to consider our actions. Did I do right? Did I make the right decision? Why am I alive and my peers are not? Am I a good man? Am I a coward?

I chose to oppose the war and avoid the draft. I chose to live. I chose to give peace a chance. I became a teacher. I was ready to go to Canada but a sympathetic doctor helped me avoid service and stay close to my family. Oth-

ers were much braver than I'll ever be. I still don't know if my decision grew from roots of fear or conscience. History tells of a futile effort to preserve a government in the south of Vietnam, atrocities, obscene loss of life, calls to patriotism, a divided country, chemical warfare that still scars people and places, psychological damage, political awakenings and permanent damage to American world leadership. But the war did end. The protest movement sped our withdrawal.

So I return to have those names judge me or help me judge myself and to be reminded of lessons learned. I am no longer naïve. My vision extends beyond the political boundaries that divide us. Calls to patriotic action do not move me. I know that war is not to be entered into lightly. Most of all I know that we must follow our convictions with actions. Did I do enough? Not nearly. But I still have the chance to do some good. There is meaning to our lives because we can make a difference.

—Barry A.

Nobody Knew You Better

Dear Charlie,

It's Memorial Day, 2015, 40 years after your return from Vietnam. Wow!

You brought a Vietnamese wife, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, two sisters-in-law, a son, and a daughter. You moved into the house Bernie and Linda vacated for you!

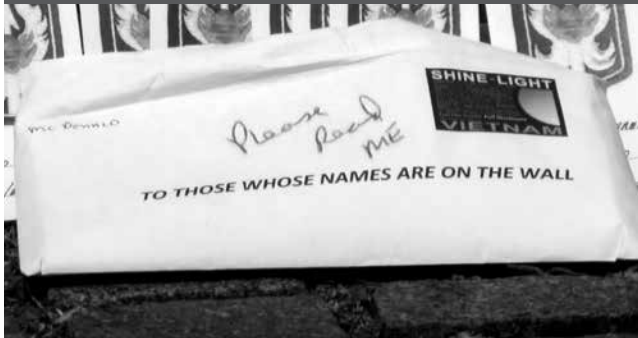
We graduated from Chofu High School on Kanto Mura Housing Annex in Tokyo in '68, and '69, respectively. You joined the Army in '69; I joined the Air Force in '70. We volunteered for 'Nam, and planned to be “lif-ers.” You went to Cam Ranh Bay; I received orders to Da Nang AB. Glad I didn't go there, where they were spraying Agent Orange like crazy!

Our paths diverged. My military time led me to oppose U.S. militarism. After 30 days in the stockade, I received an undesirable discharge for resisting. You returned to civilian life, but re-enlisted a short time later. On your second tour, you met Edrina in Italy, and remarried. Your three boys (Charlie, TJ, and Nathan) joined son Tham and daughter Mary in the world.

You drank yourself to death (2005), though that mission took decades to accomplish. Tham lived with me on

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Letters to The Wall



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numerous occasions before he passed in Miami, a year after you. I was happy to be his uncle, and a source of support. He had called me from Texas, complaining. I invited him to live in Miami with me. Before his death at 33, he had finally gotten it together. He moved from my place to live in a place where he was paying his own rent for the first time, ha ha!

Tham inherited alcoholism, diabetes, and being overweight. We Irish-Catholic males seem genetically predisposed to this condition, but it killed you and your son. I am crying now as I type this letter, and I'm so angry at our government and the war corporations who dominate and control it.

Nobody knew you better than I, except Mom and Dad. We grew up in the same room; the next three boys shared a room. I'm upset you and Tham lived so briefly; it's been a decade since you passed. Now your daughter Mary (named after our mother) suffers from terminal cancer (related to chemical pollution in Vietnam where she was born?). She is stoic as she seeks joy in life now. I cry for her, too. I repeat the eulogy from Mummy's memorial ceremony, prior to her internment in Brockton, Mass., where you were born. At the ceremony you laid down your fatigue jacket (which I now wear), thanking her for keeping you warm when you needed help most. I repeat these words now for you.

Love, Patrick
"Just like the Wind" from Luciano's Where there is Life album
Just like the wind, people come and go
Staying a while on the face of the earth
Until tomorrow when it's time to go ...
... we didn't come here to build brick and stone
And the earth is not a permanent home
We're only here on a building journey
Today we're here and tomorrow we may not be.
But do good things and you will find
You can attain a peace of mind.
Just like the wind, people come and go.

Working for Peace

Dear Vietnam Memorial Wall,

I am writing to you to express my sorrow for the pain and agony inflicted 50 years ago on the Vietnamese people and on the American people by the elected leaders of the United States.

While you, The Wall, reflect the names of 58,000 U.S. military who died because of U.S. military action in Vietnam, you remind me also of those not named on The Wall—those six million residents of Southeast Asia who died during these military actions.

I served 29 years in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves and retired as a colonel. I also was a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and was assigned to U.S. Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. I was on the small team that reopened the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2001.

I was a part of the U.S. government for most of my adult life. However, in 2003, I resigned from the U.S. diplomatic corps in opposition to another war, the war

on Iraq.

After I resigned, I joined Veterans For Peace to be with fellow veterans who believe that dialogue and diplomacy are the keys to conflict resolution instead of war.

I wish I could be at The Wall on May 25 for the Memorial Day observances, but instead I will be in North Korea with a group of 30 international women, including two women Nobel Peace Laureates, who will be speaking with North Korean women about peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula.

After our days in North Korea, we will cross the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) by foot, only the third group in the 70-year history of the DMZ to walk across it. Once across the DMZ, we will be met by 2,000 South Korean women and then have several days with them discussing peace and reconciliation.

You have seen so much here at The Wall—families crying for their loved ones, buddies crying as they find the names of their friends, and persons who don't know anyone whose name is on The Wall, but who wanted to come to the Vietnam Memorial to remind themselves of the folly of war.

We think of other countries as "conflict countries" and provide programs for these countries.

We never stop to think that our own country is also a "conflict country" with a traumatized population whose younger generation knows nothing but war. I strongly believe that individually and as a country, we need assistance in stopping the propensity of our elected leaders to decide that war and occupation are the best ways to resolve their perceptions of threats to our country.

I will continue to work for peace around our world... and continue to challenge our own country to end the threat it poses to our planet in our politicians' thirst for war.

Peace of Wall,

—Ann W.

Wrong in So Many Ways

To the Americans Who Died in the Vietnam War

Perhaps you thought you were doing the right thing, fighting in a small distant country for president and country. It is the way we were all indoctrinated. When the country calls, you must answer. But the leaders of the country were dead wrong about fighting in Vietnam, and this Wall with your names etched on it speaks to the terrible loss of that savage, unnecessary war. I mourn your loss. I mourn the loss of possibilities cut off when your lives ended. You might have stayed home to live and love, to have children and grandchildren, to follow your dreams, but for that war.

The war was so wrong in so many ways. It was wrong for you, for the people you were ordered to kill, and for the soul of America. After that war, I don't see how we can ever be proud of our country again.

Some three million Vietnamese were killed in the war, fighting for their independence. Many were women and children. You and other Americans were sent halfway around the world because American leaders feared the communists, feared that countries in Southeast Asia would fall like dominoes to the communists. But Ho Chi Minh was more than a communist. He was a nationalist, leading his country to independence from colonial rule. A nationalist who admired Thomas Jefferson, he had once asked the United States for help in seeking that independence. We turned him down, turning our backs on our own history and your future.

Once Lyndon Johnson became president it was all escalation in Vietnam. General Westmoreland always wanted more men. They kept pulling young Americans from their lives and dreams to fight in the jungles of Vietnam. You know better than I do that it was a hopeless war fought for the delusions of a president who didn't want to lose a war. Of course, that's exactly what he and Nixon and Kissinger did. According to the rigged body counts on the nightly news, we were winning the war, but that was only until we lost.

What kind of a country could pursue such a war against peasants fighting for their freedom? The same kind of country that could drop atomic bombs on civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Sadly, in the years since you've been gone, our country has learned little about compassion.

America has continued to waste its treasure in fighting wars around the world, as well as its dignity, its goodwill, its youth and its future. I wish I could give you a more positive report on what America learned from the Vietnam War, but most of what it has learned seems intended to make wars easier to prosecute, such as relying on a poverty-driven volunteer army, ending the draft, embedding reporters with the troops, and not allowing photographs of returning coffins.

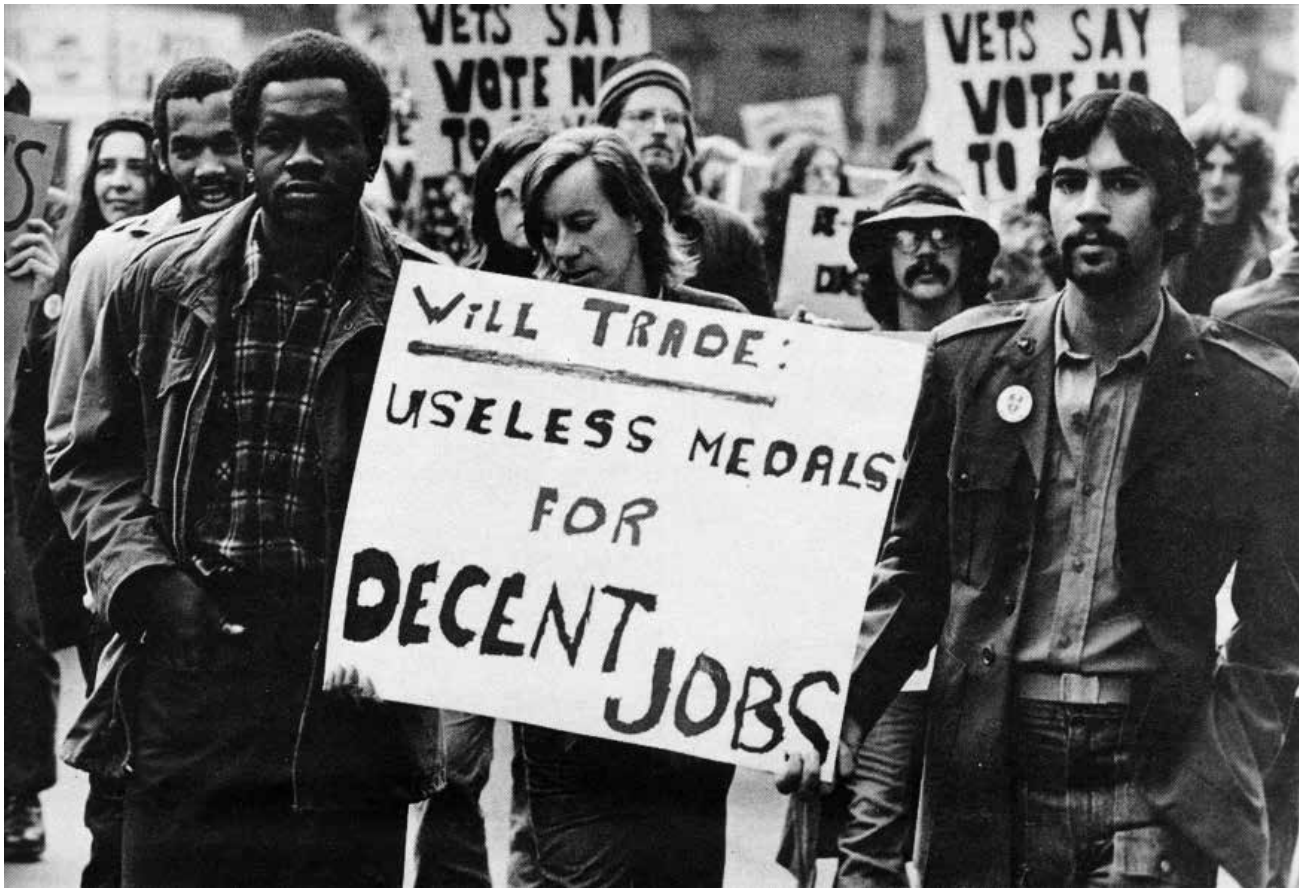
America has yet to learn that war is not the answer, that bombs do not make friends and military power does not bring peace. Our military budget is immense. When all is added in, it amounts to over a trillion dollars annually. Imagine what a difference even a fraction of those funds would make in fulfilling basic human needs.

I wish you were here to stand up and speak out for peace and justice, for a better, more peaceful country and world. We need you.

—David K.



Home-from-War Stories: Myth, Media and *The Vietnam War* Documentary Series



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR (VVAW) welcomed home by the Movement March in New York City in 1972.

By Jerry Lembcke

Stories of Vietnam veterans treated badly by war protesters proliferated around the time of the Persian Gulf War of 1991. They were the inspiration for the “yellow ribbon campaign” intended to signal that Gulf War veterans would be treated differently. My book inquiring into the origins and veracity of the stories about disparaged Vietnam veterans came out in 1998. Little did I imagine then that, 20 years later, versions of the same stories would figure in remembrances appearing on the 50th anniversaries of some important dates of the war in Vietnam.

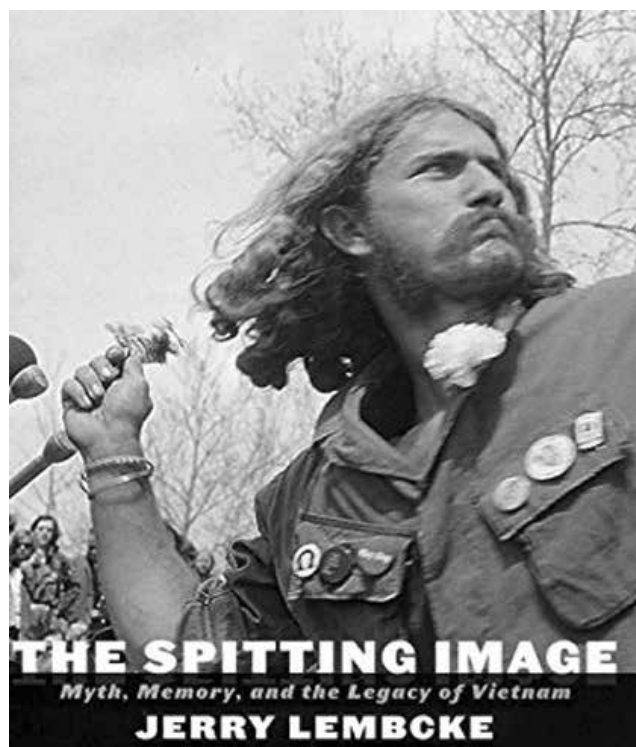
These stories reappeared, prominently, in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in the summer of 2017. The *Times* piece was written by veteran Bill Reynolds, who recounted his experience as an infantryman in a bloody Mekong Delta battle in 1967. Reynolds ended the account with the claim that he, “came home through San Francisco’s airport to throngs of hippies harassing me.” The *Post* story reported on a preview screening of Ken Burns’ and Lynn Novick’s forthcoming documentary on the war in Vietnam. Following the screening, veteran David Hagerman told Associated Press reporter Holly Ramer that his reception at the Seattle airport was so negative that he “walked into the nearest men’s room, took off my uniform, and threw it in the trash.”

Reynolds’s story strains belief. Civilian airlines brought troops back from Vietnam but they landed at military airbases like Travis. And there are no news reports or photographs from the war years that document his memory that “throngs of hippies” greeted veterans. Hagerman’s memory also raises eyebrows: the abandonment of military property—his uniform—was a serious offense. And despite the numerous versions of this story that circulate, there is no evidence such as photographs of bathroom trash cans draped with uniforms to support the claims. Military personnel had to be in uniform to fly home free, making it additionally unlikely that uniforms were shed in the manner described.

STALE LIES RECYCLED

Major news organizations have been taken to task before for giving voice to stories of denigrated veterans without tangible evidence. When the 25th anniversary of the war’s end was marked in 2000, a spate of them garnered similar press attention. News critic Jack Shafer, then editor of “The Fray” at Slate, criticized the *Times* and *U.S. News and World Report* for their reports, respectively that Vietnam veterans had been spat on by protesters and had abandoned their military clothing to avoid harassment.

When President Barak Obama spoke on Memorial Day, 2012, he recalled that Vietnam veterans had been “denigrated” upon their return home. “It was a national shame,” he said, “that should have never happened.” The President went on to pledge that the current generation



of veterans would be treated better. The next day, *Los Angeles Times* editor Michael McGough criticized the president for having “ratified the meme of spat-upon veterans”—an edifying myth, McGough said, but still a myth.

The questionable accuracy of the hostile-homecoming stories is suggested by data from those times. A 1971 survey by Harris Associates conducted for the U.S. Senate reported 94 percent of the veterans polled saying their reception from their age-group peers was friendly.

The problem with repeating these stories of doubtful

My book inquiring into the origins and veracity of the stories about disparaged Vietnam veterans came out in 1998. Little did I imagine then that, 20 years later, versions of the same stories would figure in remembrances appearing on the 50th anniversaries of some important dates of the war in Vietnam.

truth goes beyond the credibility of the journalism itself. It is, rather, the power of the stories to displace the public memory of the war and the nature of the opposition to it. The response to Reynolds’ article in the *Times* is a case in point: 48 of the 159 online comments, or 30 percent, focused on just 13 of the 1,500 words that he had written: “I came home through San Francisco’s airport to throngs of hippies harassing me.” Many more of the comments were of the “thank you for your service” variety that are meaningful only with the backstory of supposedly hostile homecomings as context.

Most importantly, the war that Reynolds had written about, and we need to think about, was occluded by his veteran-as-victim anecdote, a storyline that readers could not resist.

The story of Vietnam veterans defiled by activists has worked over the years to vilify the antiwar movement and even to discredit the many veterans who joined the cause to end the war. The stories fed a belief that the war had been lost on the home front. From the 1980s through the 2016 election, conservative politicians have run for office insisting that radicals on campuses and liberals in Congress had sapped American will to win in Vietnam; it is the wellspring of the resentment that Donald Trump tapped for his run to the White House.

President Obama’s 2012 Memorial Day speech announcing Pentagon funding for a 13-year series of Vietnam War anniversary commemorations renewed interest in the war and made the treatment of veterans the focus of that interest. Ken Burns’ and Lynn Novick’s film will keep the war in our conversations.

News coverage of the commemorations and the film will magnify this interest. Let’s hope that news coverage of the remembrances and reception to the film will temper alluring but dubious reports of unfriendly veteran homecomings with references to more historically grounded research.

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Jerry Lembcke is associate professor of sociology at College of Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. He is the author of The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam; CNN’s Tailwind Tale: Inside Vietnam’s Last Great Myth; and more recently Hanoi Jane: War, Sex, and Fantasies of Betrayal. He can be reached at jlembcke@holycross.edu.

My Gift at My Lai

By Mike Hastie

On the morning of March 16, 1968, U.S. military soldiers entered a quiet hamlet at My Lai, near Quang Ngai, and systematically murdered 504 innocent Vietnamese citizens, of which the vast majority were women and children.

The barbarity of the killing was a relentless frenzy, as everything in sight was destroyed.

The U.S. government made every attempt to lie about the My Lai Massacre, and for the most part succeeded, because only one U.S. soldier was held responsible, and his name was Lt. William Calley. The rest of the U.S. Military High Command who were mainly responsible were silently escorted away from prosecution.

Going through the war crimes museum and touching the engraved names of the 504 victims left an indelible shocking memory.

Shortly after I left the museum, a Vietnamese man who was of age to have fought in the National Liberation Front against the U.S. military unexpectedly came up to me and shook my hand and said something in Vietnamese that I did not understand, but more important, he had a forgiving kind look on his face.

His compassion was an intimate gift I never could have imagined.

His presence was unmistakable, and profoundly healing over time.

It was in that moment, I later realized, that I was born in America, but my heart is Vietnamese.



THE INFAMOUS DITCH AT MY LAI, where nearly 100 Vietnamese were murdered at point-blank range with automatic weapons. Photograph: Mike Hastie

Like the rest of the Vietnam War, there has never been any accountability by the U.S. government for the unfathomable number of war crimes that were committed on a daily basis throughout the war in Indochina.

Today is March 16, 2016.

Today is the 48th anniversary of the My Lai Massacre.

In late March 1994, I arrived at the My Lai site with three other Vietnam veterans. We were there for about four hours, which was about how long it took U.S. soldiers to murder 504 civilians in 1968.

The four of us traveled by vehicle from Quang Ngai to the massacre site, which took less than 30 minutes. None of us said a word during the entire drive. The most powerful emotion I was feeling was shame.

Being at My Lai was one of the most difficult experiences of my life.

The blatant lie of my core belief system was fully exposed.

In 10 days, on March 26, I will be traveling back to Vietnam with three other close friends, to once again make that drive into My Lai.

It has been 22 years since I was there. I am now a member of Veterans For Peace, a national organization committed to peace and justice.

We are currently involved in bringing full disclosure to the American people about the truth of the Vietnam War. Without our efforts, and the efforts of so many other people, the truth of the Vietnam War will be buried, enabling future U.S. generations to repeat that history.

As George Santayana once wrote: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

In loving memory to those who perished at My Lai—the truth will never be forgotten.

Mike Hastie was an Army medic in Vietnam.



Betrayal by the Money Changers

This is a picture of a Vietnam veteran at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Portland, Oregon. Moments after he touched the name of a friend who was killed in Vietnam, he broke down. Not only did he break down for his friend, but he broke down for himself. The still living carry a burden that is so overwhelming. It is a trauma that never receives a Purple Heart—never. Day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. The wound is called betrayal. It is a gunshot wound to the soul. Day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. Drip after drip after drip after drip. Betrayal is the insidious and pervasive wound that eats away the heart

and soul. The vet eventually drifts away from everything and everybody. That's what happened to a Vietnam veteran friend of mine. He left his home and went to a motel room. Drip after drip after drip. They found him the next morning. He had hung himself in the closet. Why did he do this? Because, Betrayal is the gunshot wound to the soul. Lying is the most powerful weapon in war. It drained everything from his life. The bleeding never stopped. This country never stopped the bleeding. Drip after drip after drip. Here rests in emotional silence, an American veteran known but to God.

—Mike Hastie



U.S. ARMY MEDIC MIKE HASTIE in Vietnam