THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

50¢

VOL. 17 No. 2 SPRING ~ 87

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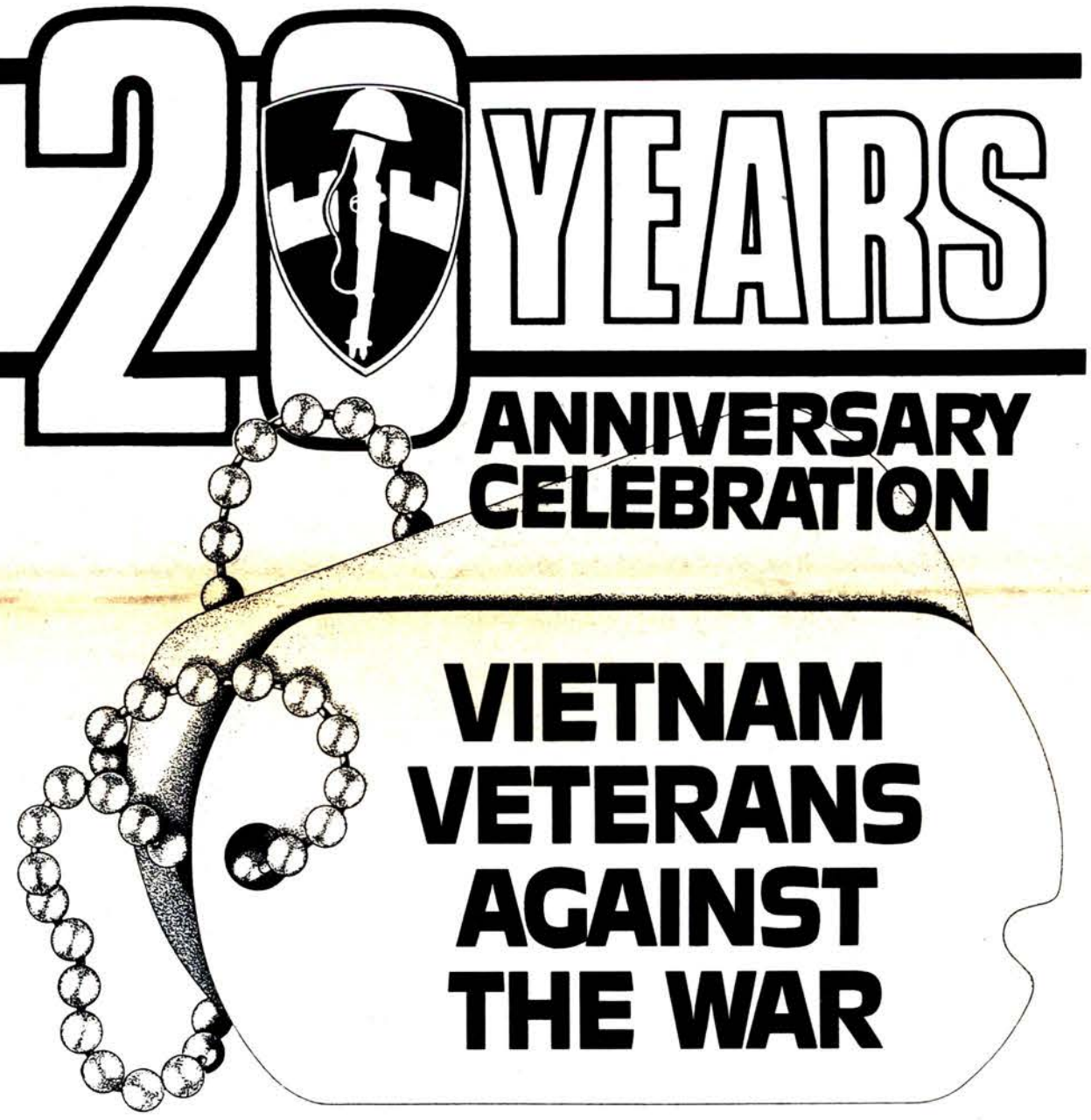
PLUS~ FRAGGIN'~ WAR STORIES AND MORE



Founded in 1967, VVAW Pioneered
Post Traumatic Stress Rap Groups and
Work on Agent Orange
From the 60's to the 80's
20 Years of Struggle for Veterans, Peace and Justice

JOIN US SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 1987, Chicago, ILLINOIS

INFO./R.S.V.P. (312) 386-1413/327-5756

Noon: A memorial service at the Vietnam Veteran Memorial Fountain, whose theme will be 20 Years of Fighting for Peace, No more Vietnams!

3 PM: Assemble at church lawn for an outdoor Vet Fest. Singing by Vietnam Veteran singers and others, politicians praising VVAW, other groups praising VVAW, VVAW praising VVAW, fun, beer, remembrances..... Memorabilia from VVAW's past will include gifts from the Indochinese; old banners from VVAW demos; buttons; photos; films; videos and collections of *First Casualty, Winter Soldier* and *The Veteran* (for sale, even).

6 PM 'til: Dinner inside the hall. No longwinded speeches—just a welcoming intro followed by twenty toasts during dinner: one for each year, remembering our past. After dinner, dancing to live music mixed with discussion, joking and general merriment.
An after-hours bar has been secured for those who can't get enough merriment.

Call or write for your Reservations.

Vietnam Veterans
Against the War
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FRAGGIN'

Sp 5 Willy(Ret.)

A.K.A.

Bill Shunas

Did you see "Platoon?" I suppose most of you did. One old memory that came back to me was stimulated by the scene early in the movie when the FNG makes his new friends while on the shit-burning detail.

My first two or three days in Vietnam were spent in a Replacement Company in Cam Ranh Bay. I landed one afternoon, and the next morning there were over a hundred of us assembled under this shelter on the company grounds. We weren't getting any travel orders that day, so they were using us on work details. Every few minutes an E-6 would come over and ask for eight or ten or fifteen volunteers, and off they'd go to fill sandbags or cut the general's grass or whatever the hell they were doing.

Now here's the picture. Back home in Chicago it was early spring. The temperatures were 45 or 50 degrees. Then I go to Seattle to fly out of McCord AFB. Same-same weather. Now I'm in Cam Ranh Bay. It's 90 degrees in the shade. If I blink I start to sweat. I've just spend 30 or 40 days on leave, eating, drinking and growing fat cells. The day before, I had spent nineteen hours folded into a seat in a 707 flying across the pond.

Did I want to volunteer to work and sweat for the U.S. Army? Not me. I didn't even want to be there. Besides, it was against my principles to volunteer for anything. So I sat there and they came and took away one group after another. Then there were only five of us. And they stopped coming after volunteers. We sat there and waited. An hour passed, and I was becoming satisfied and smug. I'd outsmarted the Army again.

After all that time, this guy comes up to the five of us. He's wearing a Spec5 patch and looks like he just got out of bed. Whereas the other honchos were all bossy and authoritarian sounding, this guy is meek and timid. At first I didn't even realize he had come for us. But he had, and he puts us in a truck, and off we go with him. He didn't even say what we were going to do, and even after we stopped by this latrine I still wasn't sure what it was that we were supposed to do.

I started getting the idea when the Spec5 handed each one of us a pair of dirty, stinky gloves. We all kind of stood around looking at each other with a sinking feeling in our hearts. "C'mon," said the Spec5. "You just pull 'em out and I'll burn it."

I realize that during the entire history of mankind before flush toilets, in poor countries today and in armies throughout history, this problem had to be dealt with. But that doesn't make it OK when it happens to you. We all sort of looked at each other and then looked at our feet. This is what it really means to be shit on. Finally someone started to move and we all sheepishly went around to the back of the latrine and started to do our duty.

What we had to do was pull out these pots which were about one third of a 55-gallon drum placed strategically under all the toilet seats. I supposed that since THE VETERAN is a newspaper with taste I need not go into detail about exactly how the contents of the pots looked and smelled. Suffice it to say, my stomach felt the same way it does the morning after a night of drinking nine or ten cans of cheap beer.

When our job was done, we sat on a nearby log and gloomily watched the Spec5 pour gasoline into the pots and light them. Now a new smell reached our noses and gave our stomaches another turn. We sat there until the fires were out. When the pots had cooled and we had put them back in place and we were done and felt slightly human again, I asked the Spec5 how often he had to do this.

"Every day."

Thinking that maybe this was just temporary, I asked how long he had been doing this.

He gave me his own version of the thousand-yard stare and softly said, "Eight months."

The Spec5's shortime calendar had 117 days left--117 days of burning shit. He said he was used to it. I guess he was. I supposed he's somewhere in the World now with a wife and kids. What does he say when his kids get to be twelve or thirteen and find out about Vietnam and ask, "What did you do in the war, Daddy,?" Well, I guess we all did our part for freedom and democracy.

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I know you've heard about TV preacher Oral Roberts announcing that God told him time was running out on his life unless his followers coughed up $8 million by March 31st. I think he needed the money for scholar-ships at his medical school or something.

Anyway, this got me to thinking. The VVAW National Office is always crying about a shortage of money. Sometimes it's tough to make ends meet. And they always have to beg the chapters to send in their dues and donations. So I had a little talk with with God, and She agreed. Something drastic needs to be done, and we liked what good ol' Oral was doing.

So if all of you don't pay your dues by September 1st, something drastic is going to happen to someone. I thought I'd volunteer. I think I'll volunteer Barry Romo--well after all, it should be a National Officer. If you all don't pay your dues by 1 September, God will call Barry to the Great Beer Hall in the Sky. If this seems like too drastic a measure for everyone, maybe I could ask for a lighter sacrifice. Maybe God could strike Bill Davis with anorexia instead.

* * * * * * * * * * *

Okay, kids, time for your civics quiz for this month. This will be a two-part quiz. The first question is multiple choice.

Ronald Reagan is:

A. A Donald Regan puppet.
B. Senile
C. An Ed Meese puppet.
D. Not senile, just plain dumb.
E. A CIA puppet.
F. The original model for "smile" buttons.
G. Nancy's puppet.
H. A General Electric life-size wind-up doll.
I. A NSC puppet.
J. Dead--that's really an alien in the White House.
K. A Howard Baker puppet.
L. All of the above.

Part 2. Essay. Answer this question:

When and why didn't I know what they told me when they shouldn't have told me but didn't tell me because I'm not supposed to really know because I don't understand this stuff in reality I had my fingers crossed behind my back so it doesn't count and I'm not really a security risk because they never told me in the first place and I can't leak it to the press because they knew I never knew what Ollie told me?

Life must be hard for those in the White House. Ask former chief of staff Donald Regan. A While back, referring to Ronnie Reagan's many foulups, he confessed, "Some of us are like a shovel brigade that follows a parade down Main Street cleaning up." Hey, I think I met this guy before. Back in Cam Ranh Bay. He said he only had 117 days left, but really, he's still on duty.

** ** ** ** ** **

What else do the U.S. and Iran have in common besides dealing arms? One thing is that have a similar attitude towards women, at least some powerful men in the respective governments do. Former White House Chief of Staff and chief power-broker Donald Regan has put his shovel down long enough to put his foot in his mouth a couple of times.

During the arms talks Regan said that women would be more interested in things like what Nancy Reagan and Raisa Gorbachev were wearing rather than caring if their husbands were going to destroy the world. Then, another time he said we couldn't impose sanctions against South Africa because it is a source of diamonds and American women would never give up their diamonds.

He sounds like a more sophisticated version of Iranian Parliament Speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani, the guy on the other end of the arms deal. Rafsanjani recently declared that Iran should be using force to make sure women are covered from *head to toe. His reason was* that this was due to women having smaller brains which meant that they had to play a different role in society. What this had to do with intellectual capacity and why their role meant that they should be covered up wasn't exactly clear. But then, nothing much coming out of Iran seems to be clear. Sometimes it's money for contra aid and then sometimes it's work for Don Regan's shovel.

Rafsanjani also made the comment that Western countries were in a mess because they had given more and more liberty to women. Maybe here he was referring to Nancy Reagan because she seems to have played a role in ousting his fellow bullshitter, Donald Regan. But he does have a point: Nancy Reagan would be more pleasant if she were covered head to toe.

GRENADE OF THE MONTH

As long as we're talking about religious nuts like Oral Roberts and Rafsanjani, why don't we give the Grenade of the Month to the Reverend Jerry Falwell for a sermon he gave about the unemployed last July 4th. Falwell said, "We feed them and encourage their laziness and their worthlessness, and you can't give them ajob because they can make more money on unemployment."

He hasn't got his facts right since, thanks to his buddy Nancy's husband, most unemployed don't even get compen-

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Snake Oil Democracy
THE SELLING OF REAGAN'S WAR

San Rafael del Norte, following an August 1983 contra attack. Mourning the dead has become a daily reality.

--Jack Elder
San Antonio VVAW

"Americans love the idea of a thing more than the thing itself" (quoted in Harpers, Dec, 1986).

Strategic misinformation, "lies with a purpose" if you will, has become an important tactic in this Administration's campaign to win the "hearts and *minds" of Americans as regards* our foreign policy in Central America. These lies are more than common deception. They are lies calculated to confound liberals, shift the center point of the debate on Central America, create phantom enemies, and bolster the isolation and ignorance with which most Americans view developments to the south.

In October, 1985, I spoke at a conference on Sanctuary in Hanover, New Hampshire, sponsored by Dartmouth College. The sole Administration spokesperson was Maurice Inman, general consul for the Immigration and Naturalization Service. In the course of his address, Mr Inman attacked the sanctuary movement with many charges which by now have become standard right-wing ammunition against sanctuary. One of his charges, however, retains special interest today because of the continuing revelations of illegal arms transfers to the contras while the Boland Amendment was in effect. Specifically, Mr Inman accused those involved in providing Sanctuary for Central Americans of engaging in "particularized morality", that is, being selective about which laws they would or would not obey. We know now that even as Mr Inman spoke, the sale of weapons to Iran and the transfer of funds to the contras had been going on for at least three months. The charge of "particularized morality" against Sanctuary activists was not merely inappropriate but in fact perfectly descriptive of the covert foreign policy operations being carried out by the CIA and by that basement contra himself, LTC Oliver North.

The episode in Hanover may of itself be of small importance but it means, as I tried to point out in my remarks following Mr Inman's speech, that we are faced with two very different languages that seek to describe the reality of Central America. Those who seek to inform themselves about Central America need to be aware of the Administration's intense efforts to manipulate public perception of the crisis that grips Central America.

Between December 1985 and June 1986, 20 speeches on U.S.-Central American relations were pronounced by the President, the Secretary of State and various under-secretaries and deputy secretaries of the State Department. This barrage of policy statements, coinciding with the debate in Congress over aid to the contras, has had the effect of thoroughly muddying any responsible debate on Central America. The effect of Elliot Abrams' speech, "An End to Tyranny in Central America," (12-9-85) followed the next day by President Reagan's speech "Safeguarding Human Rights" (12-10-85) was to suggest that 1) democracy is actually taking root in Central America and 2) that human rights not only exist but that they are being safeguarded. Both conclusions clash head on with what the Church, human rights organizations and the people of Central America tell us is happening in the region.

It is crucial to note what a central role the theme of "democracy" plays in these Administration policy statements. The "idea of the thing" assumes center stage but what we are really seeing is a head without a body, an idea without any corporal counterpart. "No Delay For Democracy" (6-13-86), "A Democratic Vision of Security" (6-13-86), and "Why Democracy Matters in Central America" (6-24-86) all have very little to do with promoting participatory democracy in the region. What they do share is the concern that U.S. interests (national security, access to raw materials, debt repayment) be protected at any cost. To a great degree the American public accepts the idea, refuted by all the evidence, that economic, social and political progress is setting the stage for a lasting peace in the region. If we accept this crafty notion then the Administration is free to accuse Nicaragua of threatening the well-being of fledgling Central American "democracies" thus justifying a major escalation of hostilities against Nicaragua. On a related front, the Administration can claim that all Central Americans who come to the U.S. must be economic migrants since the onset of the "Paz Americana" has eliminated any need for rebellion. The corollary of this claim is that anyone who assists Central Americans is acting in an overtly political and illegal fashion.

The problem with these claims is that they are based on a distorted set of theses which have been intentionally created to reinforce the fear and the ignorance with which most of us have tended to view developments in Central America. Even when proven false, the claims that the Administration makes for our client states ("fair elections," "human rights improvements," or "effective agrarian reform") have the unfortunate effect of having some credibility in the current national discussion on Central America. That shred of credibility is often enough to immobilize people who would otherwise clearly recognize the need to be in solidarity with the people of Central America who have vowed to settle for nothing less than liberation from imposed economic, political and social structures.

Well-educated, well-meaning people constantly lament the inability of our country to absorb large numbers of refugees from Central America. These same people, however, refuse to acknowledge the violence that pervades the region and that is a major cause of the exodus in the first place. Others, equally well intentioned, suggest that more economic, not military, aid is needed to solve the problems in Central America. These people, too, cannot see that more economic aid only serves to reinforce structures that created the social tensions leading to rebellion. Rather than prop up these structures we ought to be pleased to see them come crashing down.

As long as we let the strategic misinformation of our government and our own fears color our thinking and our actions we will be unable to respond to the challenge presented to us by the events unfolding in Central America. And as we stand immobilized, afraid to question, to speak out, or to act, we shouldn't be surprised by the ridicule other nations view us with nor by the incessant and needless toll of orphans, widows, prisoners, desaparecidos, and refugees that are generated by our capitulation to this campaign of strategic misinformation.

Marching Against Reagan

April 1987 will once again bring veterans out to march on the Western White House in Santa Barbara, California. Including in this year's actions will be a vets march on the vacation home of Vice-President Bush in Kennebuck, Maine.

This is the third consecutive year for actions in front of the Western White House. This year VVAW, as a member of the Veterans Peace Coalition, will partipate. We need to draw as many veterans from VVAW as possible for a religious observance on Sunday, April 19 (Easter) and for the march on the following day.

The demonstration is being organized by the Veterans Speakers' Alliance and other California-based veterans' groups. The base camp will open on Saturday, April 18th, at El Capitan State Beach on Highway 101, about 15 miles from Santa Barbara. You will need a sleeping bag; camping will be in two group areas. They are trying to get a couple of company-size tents for those without tents.

The main theme of the demonstration is NO INTERVENTION IN CENTRAL AMERICA! We all know another war like Vietnam is heating up; veterans have a duty to try to stop it.

A lot of you go back a long ways with VVAW. We hope to make good use of our time in California by recontacting people about getting VVAW together again out west. We think it can and should be done; we need input from all you people in the field; some of you have been on our mailing list for a long time.

The contact on the West Coast for these events is the Veterans' Speakers Alliance (415) 981-4846, or, for VVAW, VVAW Milwaukee (414) 963-0398. If you plan to join us, please let VVAW know.

The East Coast march in Maine is planned for the 19th of April; for more information contact Jerry Genesio, (207) 797-2770.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

FRAGGIN'

sation or welfare. Anyway, Jerry later compared the unemployed to his dogs, saying: "One of the members of the church, a wealthy businessman gave me two Irish Setters. He told me what kind of meat they needed and where I could buy it and so on. When he left I went to the store and got me a 50-pound bag of Purina and I put it out for them and sure enough, they would not eat it. But four days later, they did. And if we get these bums hungry enough, they'll work."

I guess his religion and his God are against feeding the poor. I suppose that's not as noble as standing in front of a TV camera and begging for money like Falwell or threatening to die like Oral Roberts. But then again, most of us are not among the chosen few like Jerry Falwell.

FACING THE PEOPLE IN NICARAGUA

--Chuck Winant

The "Cara del Pueblo" is a weekly event in Nicaragua and a completely alien custom to North Americans. The idea of these events is that the responsible people of government, from the local libarian to the president of the republic make themselves available to the people for questions, criticism, and suggestions. Though usually these are private affairs for the Nicaraguan people, occasionally they are open to the foreign press and public; and the fact that this custom is never written about in the U.S. press shows how little we North Americans understand democracy when we see it.

Recently, I went to one of these events, held in the town of Somoto, ten miles or so from "democratic" Honduras where our death squads and contra roam. The meeting was held outside in the primary school courtyard, under the trees.

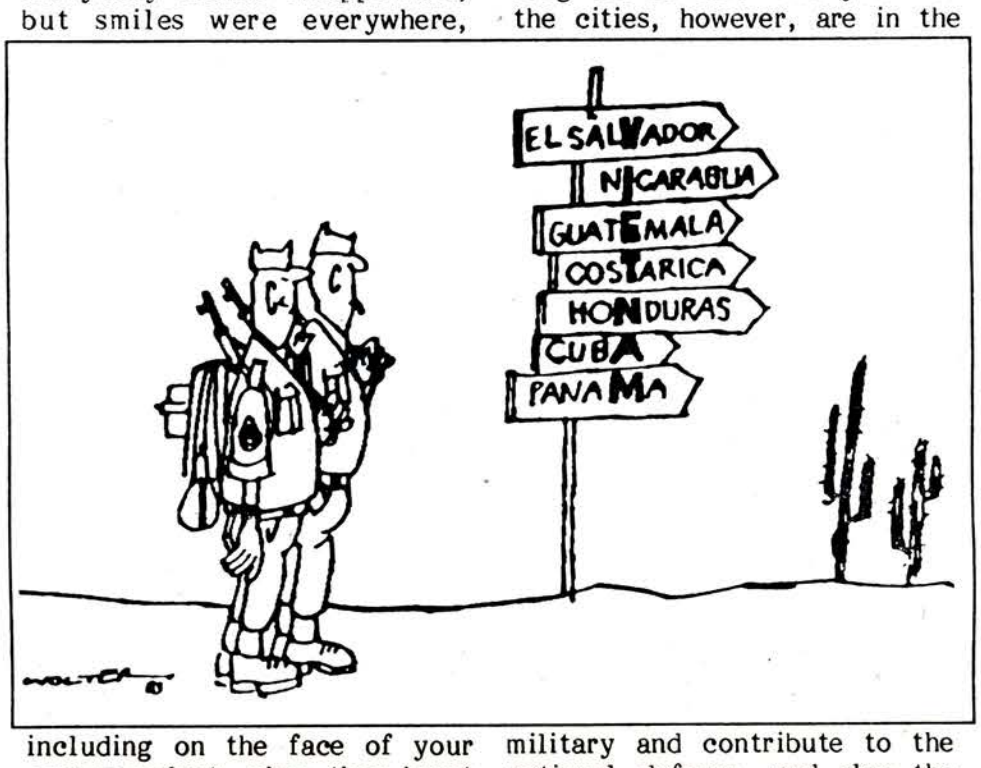
On the official side of the event was Daniel Ortega, Dora Maria Tellez, Murillo Ortega, the entire junta municipal of Somoto, and the responsibles for agriculture, transportation, housing, finance, the Sandinista Party, statisticians, etc, for the Zone and the Region. There must have been 30 people on the two-foot-high stage.

On the popular side were the people of Somoto and a few other towns: campesinos in ragged clothes, old vets in patched fatigues, wizened and dignified dones, cowboys in landed gentry garb, barefoot kids, lawyers, doctors, mechanics, and other professionals. In a word, Nicaragua.

Some of the people came in organized groups behind banners, like the numerous Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs and the Sandinista Youth. Folks came on horseback, foot, crutch, vehicle, bike and wheelchair, the last no mean feat given the nature of Somoto's streets. I came in a comfy press bus after a free breakfast at the press center, getting from Managua to Somoto in comfort in three hours, rather than in two hot, dusty days.

Folks waited around and gathered chatting. The newspaper was hotly discussed, as there was major fighting going on east of Somoto along the border, and the mighty President of the World's Greatest Democracy was tangled up in yet another web of murder and lies, only this time the press was choosing to write about it.

Ortega being Enemy Number One in the eyes of the world's largest terrorist state, certain means of defense were deployed to assure that the people could have this day with their elected President without having it interrupted by the forces of "democracy and freedom." The main defense was two graceful M124b helicopter gunships which made two passes around Somoto's bordering mountains and disappeared. Everybody looked disappointed, but smiles were everywhere,



including on the face of your correspondent, when they burst over the roof of the school at about 50 feet and flared out to land in the baseball field.

Everybody gathered around them, stopping, unasked, 50 feet from the birds. The big canopies opened, and the pilots and gunners climbed out. I noticed in particular the way that a lot of older people looked at those lads. They were very proud of them; it was palpable, the grinning, combatative joy that swept through the crowd. "Come on, Yankee, visit our mountains." Big crowd pleaser.

Ten out of ten people I interviewed saw the gunships as a concrete example of the support of the Soviet people and government in the face of brutal U.S. aggression against Nicaragua. I guess the fact that the U.S. is "promoting liberty" in the region is an idea over these peoples' heads.

After that, a caravan of jeeps arrived, carrying government wheels. I noticed low ratios of both bodyguards and "aides," compared to the drones who buzz around North America's numerous "leaders." Comandante Dora Maria drove herself. A three-star general looked at my Vietnam Vets Against the War t-shirt, looked at me, and bid me "good day."

Ortega started the Cara del Pueblo with a ten-minute monologue. The first thing he spoke about was the pain that the mothers of the war dead carry with them, pain that will never be erased even if the war were to end tomorrow. He was very solemn as he said this. Having seen enough politicians in my day--from Nixonic war criminals to consumer socialists--my bullshit alarm is pretty sensitive. It didn't go off.

He went on to say that the reason there is no fighting in Managua, Masaya or Leon is because people like them live along the border. The youth of the cities, however, are in the military and contribute to the national defense, and also the youth from the cities, as professionals, work in the border regions as technicians, medicos, and teachers, so that while much of the fighting occurs near the frontier, citizens from all regions (and classes, thanks to the draft) share the danger. This wasn't always so, and that is why the draft was instituted.

He went on to speak of the economic situation, the Peace Front (diplomatic efforts to get the U.S. off their necks), the fighting to the east (I remembered a triple funeral I attended here in 1984, three sons of Somoto who were in a platoon ambushed on the Jalapa road--more can be expected), health care, food prices. He spoke well and had obviously done his homework.

There was a delegation of upperclass yanks there from Seattle wearing suits and upscale dresses. Ortega again defined the difference between the U.S. government and the North American people (some of them anyhow) and said, "If the U.S. can spare $100 million plus for the contra, it's crazy that they can't spare the people of Nicaragua the same $100 million plus" to help alleviate some of the shortcomings he'd just spoken about.

For example, there is no diphtheria/typhus vaccine in Nicaragua. The contra blow up bridges, while the people of Nicaragua need more bridges, not less. He said nice things about U.S. cooperants in general and reminded people not to confuse the U.S. government with the U.S. people who live in a "prerevolutionary" situation and have no control over their government.

"These people are the heart of North America," he said. "Reagan and his people have no hearts. These people have come to a war zone to attend this Cara del Pueblo--for them peace is more than words, it is concrete practice."

The Somoto party responsible's job was to run around with the microphone to make sure the people had their voices heard--an interesting symbolic move. Anyone could have been the mike gopher, but the party chief did it. He was about 25 years old.

The first citizen spoke up, an older woman in a clean but threadbare dress. She has a son in prison for being part of a contra band. She wanted him out. Ortega focused his complete attention on the woman, listening intently.

"Have you visited your son in prison? Is he in good health?"

"Yes," she said, "he's all right but has no idea when he'll get out." (Unless you're a Yankee mercenary like Hasenfus, the Popular Tribunals are backlogged about nine months to a year.)

"This war is a terrible thing," Ortega said. "It divides families." He mentioned the Chamorro family which runs the political gamut from the editor of Barricada to a retired FDN honcho. "Those who want no part of the revolutionary process are free to leave Nicaragua," he said. "Those who take up arms against it will get killed or imprisoned."

He consulted with someone from the Ministry of the Interior which is responsible for the prisons, then turned around again and directed his attention to the campesino woman to tell her that in no more than a week she would receive a complete report on the crimes with which her son is charged, where exactly in the judicial process his case is, who is responsible for defending him, and a statement from the lawyer as to what has been done so far in her son's defense. There is an office of 30 people who do nothing but follow up on Cara del Pueblos.

I think that no matter what this guy did, he will be out of jail decades before Leonard Peltier or any of the Ohio 7, and no matter what, the state will not take his life. Obviously, there's a lack of "law and order" here.

The next person was really pissed and it showed. He was

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Marching for Freedom in Georgia
VETS AGAINST KLAN

--Elton Manzione
Mid-Atlantic VVAW

The Mid-Atlantic Chapter of VVAW, including members from Athen and Atlanta, participated in January's monumental civil rights march in Forsyth County, Georgia. The march came at an opportune time for the chapter to participate. Klan activity in the area surrounding Athens has been rising in recent years and we had previously taken part in small, local counter demonstrations. At a meeting in December, we had decided to make anti-Klan activity one of our priorities.

As the only bi-racial veterans' group in the area we were particularly sensitive to the Klan's racist ravings. Remember in 'Nam we didn't give a damn what color that guy was, just so long as he covered our asses and did his job. As veterans we found the Klan's increasing affection for wearing fatigues personally insulting. It was time, we decided, to show that 'Nam vets were not racist. We also hoped a militant presence of combat veterans would persuade the Klan that Civil Rights groups were prepared to defend themselves.

Initially we had been contacted to provide security for a caravan of more than 300 people and 100 cars from Athens to the March. With "Search and Avoid" foresight we planned a route which would bring the group to the staging area with a minimum of exposure in other areas of Forsyth County. Under such short notice (the march was planned in less than a week) it was the best we could do.

On arrival at the march we unfurled the chapter VVAW banner to the smiles and nods of several of the guardsmen called out to keep order. Several veterans in the crowd came and asked to march with us. Several of the counter demonstrators started chanting "Ho Chi Minh traitors" but were silenced by a show of Silver Stars, Purple Hearts, etc. Black guardsmen glowered at the hecklers.

The colorful banner seems to be an attention getter no matter where we are, and Forsyth County proved no exception. At the staging area, several news organization interviewed our members. But it was not until we marched and chant-chanted that the real attention came our way. Starting with a cadence of "Hi Dee Hi Dee Hi Dee Ho, We're just here to let you know, Hi Dee Hi Dee Hi Dee Hey, Civil rights won't go away," we were joined by several hundred of the marchers who responded to the chant. The TV crews went wild! As we neared the largest group of Klan counter-protestors, we changed to our version of "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again," complete with the chorus, "Johnny fought in Vietnam but he didn't fight for the goddamned Klan." At first the crowd was slow to respond to the blatantly provocative lyrics, but several hundred were soon singing at the top of their lungs.

As we stood on the courthouse square, dozens of marchers, still arriving, saluted us, gave us clenched fist signs, applauded and generally made us proud to be there. Several more 'Nam vets came up to talk with us.

After a seven hour march we still weren't finished. Security at the parking area where many demonstrators had left their cars was lax and carloads of rednecks were harassing people on the way to their vehicles. We took up positions in the parking lot protecting isolated demonstrators, particularly women and blacks who had been singled out for harassment. None of the rednecks responded to our invitations to step out of their cars.

Back home we were pleased at the immense play given VVAW in coverage of the march. We were mentioned in several papers, including the Miami Herald, and our banner was on the front page of every Georgia paper, as well as promi-nent in much of the TV coverage--especially the nationwide CNN. It was a good day for vets opposed to racism and intimidation. And we even gained several names for our mailing list.

Seen & Heard on PBS Vets' Special

INCOMING

....He speaks for a generation of Americans who were sent to fight in a war that is still not over for them...or for us." --George Vukelich, poet, author, WWII vet

... His songwriting cuts clean and deep into the heart of the American dream and reminds us of the struggles and hopes of our people... Whether he's writing about the world through the eyes of a Vietnam vet, a husband, a father, a poet, or a public employee, his insights and talents combine to create a moving listening experience." ---Kristin Lems

INCOMING--Music by Jim Walktendonk

SONGS FOR AMERICA Songbook

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"Jim Walktendonk is an American voice, with a message from an all-too-silent generation. He deserves to be heard and I urge you to listen." --Tom Paxton

"Jim Walktendonk's songs and singing stay with you because of the raw intensity and elegant style...." --Judy Gorman-Jacobs

"I found (CANU) most useful." Noam Chomsky. "I read it and I like it." Alexander Cockburn. Also recommended by the National Pledge of Resistance, Mobilization for Survival & Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

BIWEEKLY FOREIGN PRESS DIGEST

Central America News Update

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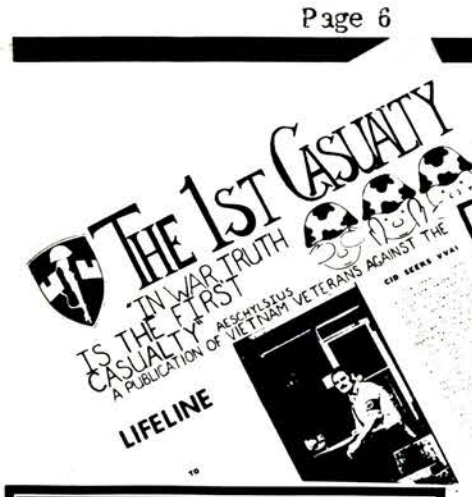
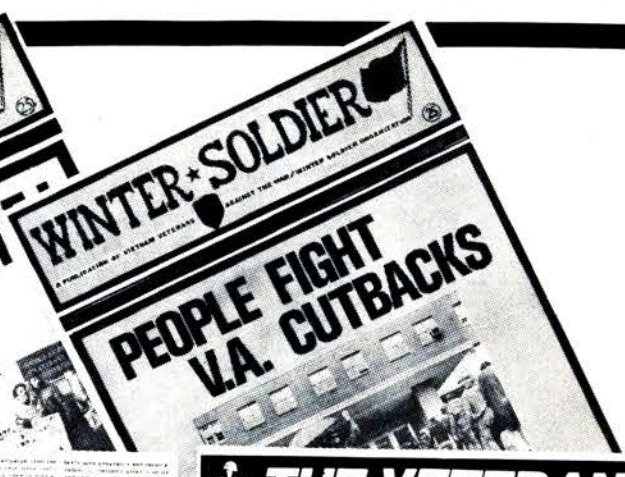




VVAW has been publishing a national newspaper for 17 years; **THE VETERAN**, as its been called since 1974, was first published under the name of The First Casualty and then as the Winter Soldier.

The first issue rolled off the presses in August of 1971. It may come as a surprise to some, but the lead article was on racism and riots then going on in Cairo, Illinois. Also covered was unemployment, the educational problems of Vietnam vets and the need for counseling for vets' problems with delayed stress (then called Post Vietnam Syndrome).

For the next two years, The First Casualty covered the anti-war activity of VVAW as well as printing short stories, poems and drawings by vets and active-duty GI's as well as demands for a decent economic shake for Vietnam vets. In 1973 the name was changed to Winter Soldier; color was added and each issue carried a poster on the back page.

VVAW continued to demand a complete end to U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia while abiding by the Paris Peace Accords. At the same time actions around vets benefits multiplied as the VA became a target of VVAW activities.

In 1975 VVAW declared "War on the VA." The war in Indochina was over but the problems of Vietnam veterans were just beginning. The GI Bill, disability pensions, VA care, delayed stress--all these became priorities for the organization because they were priorities for our members. In our newspaper appeared pioneering articles where we analyzed these problems years ahead of other organization's even being founded.

At the same time we never forgot our roots in Vietnam and the war; we never forgot that it could happen again. We began to talk about the oppression in South Africa in 1977; we started covering Central America and the dangers posed by U.S. involvement there in 1979.

VVAW can be proud of having the first Vietnam veteran publication. More important, we are proud that the issues--such as delayed stress (1970), Agent Orange (1971), Vets Centers (1972), Watergate (1973) and a host of others--that we first raised are now accepted and have, in some cases, been recognzied and dealt with.

We plan to build on that heritage. Help Us.

Starting from the top, left to right, are front pages of past issues starting in 1971, one from each year.

Reprints
From Vol. 1~No. 1

(The following items are taken from Volume 1, Number 1 of The First Casualty, VVAW's first newspaper; the date is August 1971. Although the world is different today than it was 16 years ago, much of what is in that newspaper is as true today as it was then.)

"Napalm Sticks to Kids"
(Poem was collectively written as an antiwar message by the GIs of the First Air Cavalry in Vietnam.)

We shoot the sick the young,
the lame,
We do our best to kill and
maim,
Because the kills all count the
same,
Napalm sticks to kids.

**

Ox cart rolling down the road,
Peasants with a heavy load,
They're all V.C. when the bombs
explode,
Napalm sticks to kids.

****

A baby sucking on his mother's
tit,
Children cowering in a pit,
Dow Chemical doesn't give a
shit,
Napalm sticks to kids.

*

CIA with guns for hire,
Montagnards around a fire,
Napalm makes the fire higher,
Napalm sticks to kids.

****

Drop some napalm on the barn,
It won't do too much harm,
Just burn off a leg or arm,
Napalm sticks to kids.

(VVAW had a substantial membership among GIs in Vietnam, particularly following an ad which Playboy Magazine carried for the organization. The following pair of letters, also from the first issue of The First Casualty, says about all there is to say.)

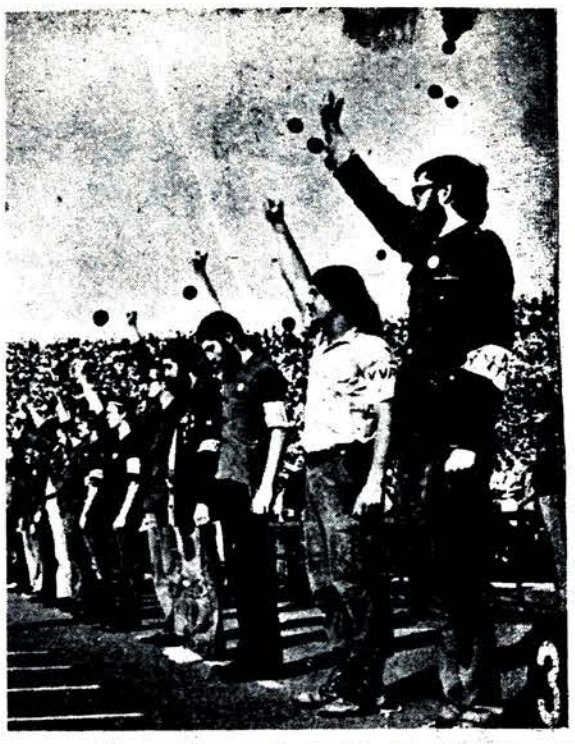
Hi,

To start with I'll introduce myself. My name is Mike Street. A friend of mine was telling all about your movement to Washington April 19. If you could, please send more information to me. I'm very interested in this. I hope to hear from you soon. The guys over here really appreciate what you are trying to do. We plan to spread it to all our friends in other units. You have a lot of support coming home soon. So keep fighting the pigs. And maybe we will end this damn war.

A fellow supporter.
PFC Michael Street
A BTRY 2/94 ARTD
APO S.F. 96317

Occupant
25 West 26th St 4th Floor
New York City, NY 10010

Dear Sir:
The enclosed mail, addressed to PFC Michael Street, bears your return address.
We are returning your mail because Private Street died on 6 June 1971. I am sorry that it was not possible to have delivered this mail.
Sincerely,
W.L. Hinspeter
Lieutenant Colonel, AGC
Commanding
1 Enclosure



NOVEMBER 1971

Vietnam Veterans Against the War raise clenched fist salutes and release black balloons during Oct. 30 University of Michigan football game in Ann Arbor. About two-thirds of the team supported the autumn action.

• Some 75,000 football fans in Ann Arbor and millions of TV viewers across the country participated in or witnessed a dramatic expression of antiwar sentiment during the half-time show at the University of Michigan homecoming football game Oct. 30. As the announcer read a statement saying, "There cannot be a real homecoming unless a date is set now for the withdrawal from Southeast Asia of all American forces," about 100 Vietnam veterans lined up on the edge of the field. After releasing black balloons, each symbolizing 15,000 war dead, the former GIs raised clenched fist salutes and stood at attention while the band played taps. The entire crowd stood in complete silence for the observance. "It was absolutely fantastic," said David Cortright, who has been working to implement the project for the past two years.

DOES IT HURT INSIDE ?

[This article is taken intact from The First Casualty, VVAW's earliest newspaper; this is from Volume II, Number 1, dated July, 1972. There has been a lot of work done on post traumatic stress since this article was written, but the article is a true today as it was when it was written 15 years ago.]

Until recently, psychological "disturbances" developing from combat experiences have been viewed as something that really affects only a few people. The classic example of a man suffering from "combat fatigue" has been with us since World War I. The word is never passed on about the people who, for one reason or another were able to maintain under such stress, and upon returning to their society are unable to adjust and go through their own form of "combat fatigue."

Today a phenomenon has developed from our current war in Vietnam in the form of the troops coming home and "talking about the war." Not only talking about what the war isn't but what it is as they lived it. As an outgrowth of this move on behalf of these returning veterans and current trends being developed in group sessions, some puzzling questions are beginning to be answered.

Dr. C.F. Shatan, past professor and Clinic Coordinator of the Post Doctoral Psychotherapy Training Program of New York University, while working in rap sessions with New York members of VVAW, developed a diagnosis of the situation calling it the "Post Vietnam Syndrome." The syndrome tends to be broken down to roughly nine different aspects, some or all of which can generally be relative to any individual.

1. Guilt feelings
2. Self punishment
3. Feelings of being a scapegoat
4. Indentification with the aggressor--no outlet for bitterness and hatred
5. Dead place in oneself--"psychic numbing"
6. Alienation--Xenophobia
7. Doubts about ability to love and trust other human beings again
8. Post Vietnam Syndrome is really distorted mourning arising out of active discouragement of open grief by the military in a climate of death.
9. Need to account for apparent absence of similar syndrome in World War II vets. Two are of particular interest--unusual group cohesion, and counter-insurgency training (with habituation to universal terror as chief weapon).

Dr Shatan also observed that "Vietnam vets need intensive working through of their experiences (debriefing) to overcome an official attitude of dehumanized 'antigrief'."

VAN DALE TODD

The first "official" American to die in Vietnam was James T. Davis, SP/4, Third Radio Research Unit, 1961, 25 years old.

One of the last "unofficial" American deaths caused by America's involvement in Vietnam is Van Dale Todd.

On Wednesday, May 24, 1972, Van Dale Todd died. He was a very active member of the San Francisco VVAW chapter and one of the 16 people who occupied an Air Force Recruiting Station in San Francisco. Van was a former member of the 101st Airborne and served in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970.

Van, along with all the other brothers and sisters of VVAW wanted and worked unceasingly for peace and an end to "man's inhumanity towards his fellow man." A world in which all men and women would enjoy freedom, justice, dignity, and the right to live, to learn, and to love. The right to be human.

His pleadings, protests and demonstrations consistently fell on the deafened ears and blinded eyes of the government that sent him to war.

His frustrations mounted, and finally he couldn't take the nightmares and the pain of this war anymore. In this state of extreme frustration he reached for the thing he perceived to be the answer: the "chemical cacoon" that this barbaric government provided him with.

Just prior to Van dropping these pills he talked about the way his outfit treated the Vietnamese women and children; he is another casualty of this genocide.

When the VA was contacted for help, we were told that his death was not directly service connected so the VA was not liable and would not help us.

Van was buried at Holy Cross Cemetary on May 27, 1972. VVAW made all the funeral arrangements; he was buried in his fatigues and VVAW button.

We will miss our brother, but he would not want us to mourn him.

We will not mourn this brother's death, WE WILL intensify the struggle to stop the war at home and abroad, remembering our brother's great love for peace and the many examples he set for us in California.

Van is one more victim of this government and should be counted among the millions who have been maimed and murdered. The best way to honor the memory of our brothers is to continue to work for peace and justice.

Homeless Veterans and America
STILL NO ROOM AT THE INN

--Rick Tingling-Clemmons
Washington, DC

While most of us sit listening helplessly to reports of illegal insider trading, of drugs linked to the President's Iran-scam/Contragate, of our great nation's status as a debtor--our modern Pied Pipers of industry (steel, auto, manufacturing) play the tune of "more profits" while continuing to lead our jobs overseas, often in countries where we unemployed veterans fought so thse workers can be exploited. The threat of nuclear war is ever-present as people struggle for survival. The effort to find drugs and dealers by the government is far greater than its efforts to find gainful employment for the millions; and struggle for the right to vote can still land you in jail, especially if you are of color. More babies die per thousand before the age of one in this great country than in a number of underdeveloped ones; justice in our courts is more Jim Crow than ever; and Native Americans' land and livelihoods are still being stolen with government approval. Further, racial, sexual and ageist antagonisms continue on the increase as we fight over crumbs.

Hunger and homelessness are feared as much as getting Aids as we live one paycheck and one sexual encounter away from disaster. And we find that one-third of the homeless men in our great nation are veterans; more vets have committed suicide than were killed in Vietnam; veterans comprise one of the largest subsets of incarcerated men of color....and all this makes me mad as hell.

Veterans in this country have been getting the short end of the stick as far back as "Shays Rebellion" following the Revolutionary War. Government militia were called in to put down veterans who had taken up arms against the opportunistic bankers who had foreclosed on and stolen the homes and farms of Vermont soldiers away fighting the war, leaving many of them homeless. And there were many other times such as earlier in this century when veterans and their families built a tent city on Anacostia Flats (now a predominantly black, very poor section of Washington DC with its own history including being home to Frederick Douglas. The veterans had come to their nation's capital from around the country during the Great Depression seeking a promised and badly needed bonus payment. When they refused to leave (many were already homeless as were so many others during the Depression) they were charged by cavalry units commanded by General Douglas MacArthur assisted by Eisenhower and Patton in their pre-general days.

It appears that we have not done much better than in the days of Mary and Joseph when there was no room at the inn.

According to a Draft Report from the Council of the City of New York Select Committee on the Homeless--Report on Homelessness and Veterans (February 10, 1987), chairperson A. Abraham Gerges states in the summary, "Almost one-third of all homeless men are veterans. Most of these homeless veterans suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a neuro-psychiatric disorder, which is the principle cause of their predicament.

Very few programs exist to help the homeless veteran, despite the vast array of social payments and benefits supposedly available to veterans. One program,a the Homeless Veteran project, provides outreach to the veterans in that city's shelters. Other than this, the government has no program specifically designed for homeless veterans. There is little attention given to this concern to date other than a homeless veterans shelter in Florida and one in California. Here in the District of Columbia, the Metropolitan Washington Union of the Homeless embarassed the Veterans Administration when they took the boards off a VA foreclosure and moved four homeless veterans into the vacant home. The vets were later evicted by the police. The VA subsequently offered to sell the city a number of such houses to be resold to veterans, a proposal that is still under negotiation. Despite a failure to capitalize on the long history of squatting in this country, the group (linked to the National Homeless Union, based in Philadelphia and led by formerly homeless organizer Chris Sprowal believes in moving beyond shelters; its motto is "Homeless, Not Helpless") forced a response by drawing public attention to the issue. One vet remarked, "They allocated enough moeny to put a Vietnam War monument downtown....now veterans are on the street. We're not taking it anymore."

The New York report further attributes veterans' homelessness to unemployment, generally poor education, and the fact that veterans are not immune to forces which cause homelessness in the general population. Homeless veterans additionally experience deinstitutionalization (getting out of prison, half-way houses, etc), your basic housing crunch (no housing available), and drug (including alcohol) abuse problems, according to the report. The report has already received its share of criticism from local veteran activist advocate groups in New York City, principally Black Veterans for Social Justice and the Veterans Upgrade Center.

Off the top, the report provides no overview of the systemic nature of homelessness, nor of the well-founded

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PHOTO/STEVE DALBER

Police arrest leader of the Chicago/Gary Area Union of the Homeless. The "crime": taking the boards off repossessed Veterans Administration homes to give to winter-battered homeless war vets.

My five-year-old daughter and I stood in the VA repossessed home still wearing our jackets and gloves to ward off the cold.

Possibly 40 homeless men and women and their supporters had "repossessed" this home from the repossessors. It was a nice home, a brick two-bedroom bungalow. It was empty not because there aren't thousands shivering and dying, but because the government has to reaffirm property over people.

My daughter went and talked to the homeless, mostly men, mostly vets--guys from the 25th, Marines, and even my unit, the Americal. They weren't derelicts or crazy or drug addicts, just human beings down on their luck--and their bad luck stemmed from policies of the U.S. government, not from their stars.

At eleven o'clock the police showed up, several hours after the takeover. To celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday holiday, 30 of Chicago's finest handcuffed and arrested four of the homeless.

My daughter couldn't understand: were the police making a mistake? Why were they arresting those nice guys she had been talking to? And why were they treating them so badly?

I couldn't explain to her that society really doesn't care about vets, Agent Orange poisoning, VA medical care, jobs and housing; all these were too expensive compared to MX missile programs or Star Wars. O yeah, we finally got our parade, even a movie, but we still haven't gotten justice unless justice is served by arresting people for getting out of the cold in a perfectly good home.

"Well, Jessi, wait until you're a little older and I'll explain it to you. But remember that those men weren't doing anything wrong to get arrested."

--Barry Romo
VVAW National
Office

and documented racial and class bias exhibited by the historical maldistribution of housing in this country, and who usually gets the short end of the stick. They merely needed to look at other parallel areas of veterans' problems such as those faced by atomic vets or Agent Orange victims, or those veterans who faced discrimination in the military, in the job and housing markets when they got out, and who ended up with long-term employment in a service career with no benefits, or those who now face retirement with no pension or social security benefits.

The Housing Situation

In recent years, a combination of gentrification, corporate and banking greed, revenue losses, and lack of government commitment to ensure the rights of its residents to housing have made the renovation or maintenance of low-income housing less and less profitable. National housing bills, past and present--1949, 1968, 1974, and other bills never met their goals according to Barry Zigas, National Low-Income Housing Coalition. A low-income policy statement adopted by the Coalition in March, 1984, took the view that "The federal government has the responsibility and the resources to ensure that adequate housing for low-income people is provided throughout the U.S.: in inner cities, in suburbs, in small towns and rural areas. Only the federal government can mount programs which provide uniform standards and protections, while leaving flexibility to states, local governments and other institutions, including the private sector, to adapt them to the range of housing needs which exist in our country. Further, ...federal housing expenditures should give highest priority to those with the most critical housing needs: people living in inadequate housing; people displaced or threatened with displacement for whatever cause; and people whose incomes are too low to bear the high cost of decent shelter."

Public housing wasn't even designed to be permanent in the first place. Initially proposed in the 1930's, in the midst of recovery from the Great Depression, it was designed to give construction jobs to thousands of unemployed workers and to provide them with temporary shelter until they could save money to find better private-sector housing. Consequently, the plumbing, the wiring, and even the structures themselves weren't always up to snuff. With the buildings still occupied year after year, the maintenance problems grew larger. Funds were cut which made some of the problems insurmountable.

Not all public housing facilities are collapsing. Some smaller agencies are able to control deterioration, mainly because their smaller size makes maintenance easier.

Yet, the overall picture is bleak. The Reagan Administration with its fiscal year '86 appropriation of $8 billion has presided over a 70% cut from the $30 billion program of 1981. The population in U.S. public housing is aabout 3.4 million (according to the Wall Street Journal) of whom the vast majority receive social security or other federal assistance benefits. About one-half are elderly and most of the rest are in families headed by women. It is a common belief that many families are forced to double-up, a theory substantiated, in part, by the criminally long waiting lists. Without this doubling up, the nation's homeless problem would be even worse than it is.

To add insult to injury, the giant military-industrial complex, an unholy alliance of the largest military-industrial monopolies and the militarist circles of the government apparatus have exerted decisive influence on the foreign policy course that keeps them in business and our country at or near war. Many of these wars are undeclared, as in Nicaragua, the Middle East, and other parts of the globe where the control of labor, markets and resources are key to U.S. imperialist interests who are getting rich in the name of fighting communism. The policy of bombs before books, houses, food and health care, has brought our nation to a new moral low, to say nothing of the unacceptable numbers of poor, reminescent of the Great Depression. Actors, artists, musicians and the American people in general have been far more compassionate than their government, raising and contributing to many aid concerts and other efforts to aid the hungry and homeless.

Yet these responses are only touching the tip of the iceberg. The response to our housing problems must be more comprehensive, beginning with the realization that the wheel has already been invented. A historical view of housing and the lack of housing show plenty of instances of workers fighting back. Wherever we want real change, we must **get organized!**

I am presently working on a project in Northern Virginia where 3,000 low-income Latino, Asian and Black residents are being evicted from the last remaining low-income developments in that area. Developers have had an orgy of buying low-income housing and gentrifying them under the code name "condo conversion." A lawsuit was filed charging racial discrimination. I and other organizers embarked on the long and delicate task of building a tenant-controlled organization and began a carefully planned-out media strategy. We got the media to follow us to the mayor's plush home, then to a city councilperson's; and two weeks ago, took over a city council meeting demanding decent and affordable housing and a halt to the evictions. Two days later a judge ruled in favor of the residents, halting evictions. This, however, is only the beginning.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Vets can work through their own organizations and support and work with other existing efforts. We can support the Jesse Gray Housing Bill (H.R. #918) which proposes the gradual construction of five million new public housing units over a 10-year period, restoration and rennovation of existing public housing units, employment opportunities for the residents and others through new construction and rennovation. The bill also places a ceiling on rental rates--25% of gross annual income. Another bill, H.R. #4 would appropriate $12 billion for low-income housing; while worth supporting, this bill is not as comprehensive an approach to solving the problems.

The National Low-Income Housing Coalition has a set of 8 principles which provide a useful focus for broad organizing efforts:

1. Make housing assistance an entitlement for all who need it;

2. Provide an adequate and affordable supply of housing;

3. Retain an improve the present housing stock to provide decent housing for lower income people;

4. Provide resident control of housing through a strong role for tenant organizations, limited equity cooperatives, community-based housing groups and home ownership;

5. End displacement of low-income people;

6. Strengthen and enforce fair housing laws and equal opportunity requirements;

7. Reform federal tax laws to reflect priority for aiding people with the greatest housing needs; and

8. Provide the financing needed to preserve, build and rehabilitate housing.

There is no single approach which, in and of itself, will solve our housing problems. Making decent, safe and affordable housing a reality will require a range of policies and programs. Housing is a right, not a privilege. The issue of homeless veterans is a subset of the larger housing crisis in this country, and a subset of the larger issue of fair treatment for veterans, a struggle which we know all too well. Yet, there is no progress without struggle, as Frederick Douglass said; and we as vets should join the struggle for quality housing for all because it is our struggle too.

As we continue to fight for a better life, for veterans and their families, we remember the men and women whose work has brought us to 1987 and the 20th Anniversary of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and we thank you all. You know who you are, and you ARE marvelous!

20 YEARS
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR
SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 1987
INFO.
(312) 386-1413/327-5756

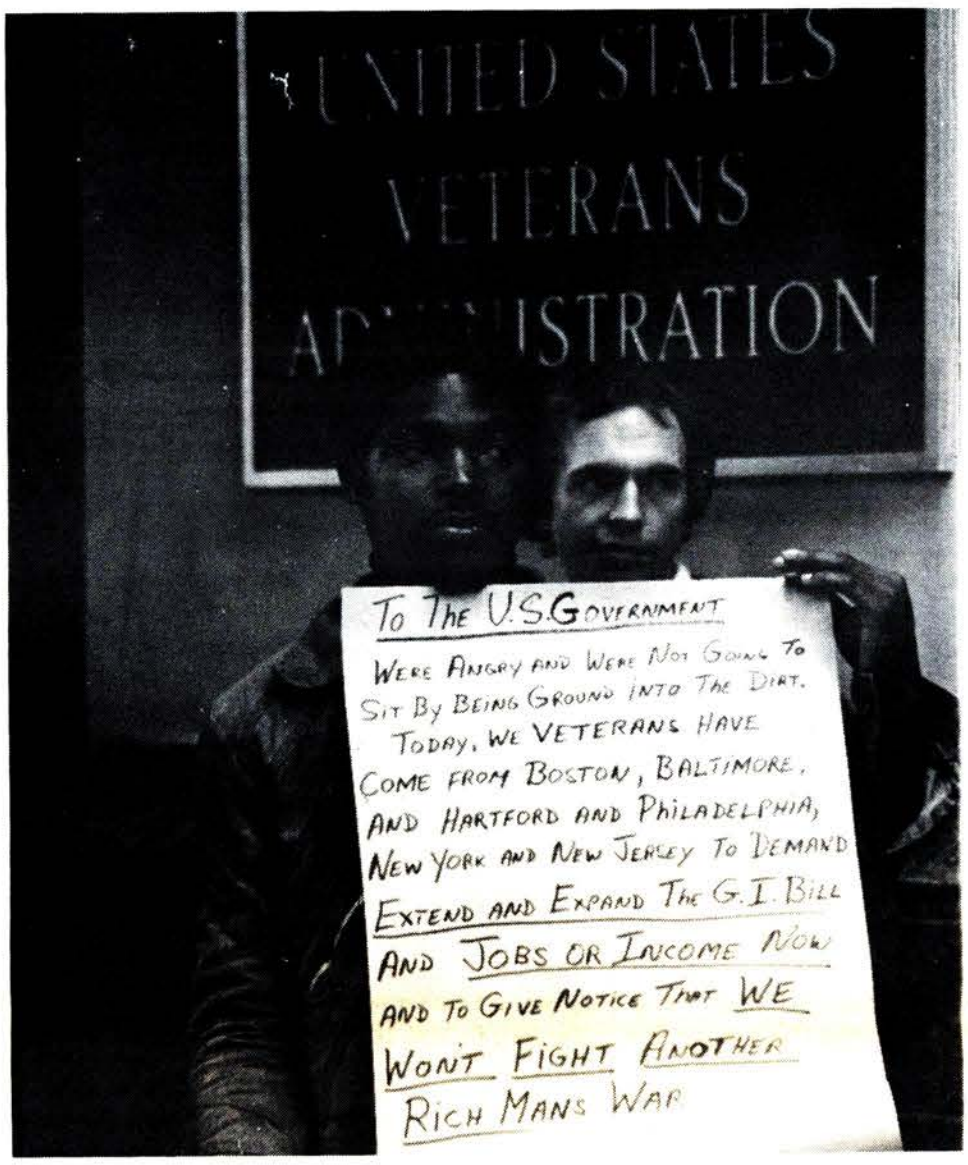
SLOW & DEADLY SLIDE

VA DOWN THE TUBES

--Bill Davis
VVAW National Office

"In mid-1985 the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), a national vets service organization, contracted with the American Health Planning Association to undertake a study of the impact of selected policy changes on veterans' healthcare. Although there had been almost continuous expansion in both vets benefits and eligibility for VA services for nearly half a century, the last decade has seen VA medical care budget remain essentially level in real dollar terms. In the mid-eighties, vets are facing the prospects of cut backs in funding allocations for VA medical care system and changes in eligibility standards for VA care."

From the Preface of
Veterans' Healthcare:
Actions & Interaction
Final Report



For those veterans who have been under the care of the VA hospital system and those people who have acted as watchdogs to monitor VA practices through the years, the results of the PVA study will not be shocking; the results will only add to the feeling of impending doom. The VA healthcare system is on the verge of major policy and treatment changes that could spell the end of healthcare for millions of veterans--of all eras.

The slow and deadly slide of VA healthcare beginning in the 1960's continues on the road to oblivion in the 1980's. In the late '60's and early '70's, returning Vietnam veterans saw an acute shortage of the programs we needed most; we realized that things were not improving within the VA system as one President after another from the Nixon Administration on placed rubber stamp caretakers in position to survey the steady decline.

Vets needed help but came to understand that inevitably we would have to help ourselves. VVAW initiated, with the help of professionals, a nationwide rap-group network, a national discharge-upgrading project, a national veterans in prison project, GI and veterans counseling centers. Vets, at the same time, recognized the responsibility of the VA to pick up the check.

The bitter fighting for recognition of post traumatic stress as a veterans disability, improved benefits in other fields, and the lingering hell of Agent Orange herbicide poisoning was the order of the day. In hospital demonstrations, violent confrontations, tear gas, mace and beatings were all too common in the early and mid '70's. Sympathetic VA workers were slowly weeded out or pushed into obscurity. But, the work by many paid off. Programs were created and means of communication came into existence. Now began the battles to consolidate our gains and simply to find the way through the VA maze to use what we had won. Along the way our understanding of older vets and their specific healthcare problems grew. Now, the future of the VA, the implications of the PVA Study and the designs of the Reagan Administration place us side by side--the veteran population: under attack.

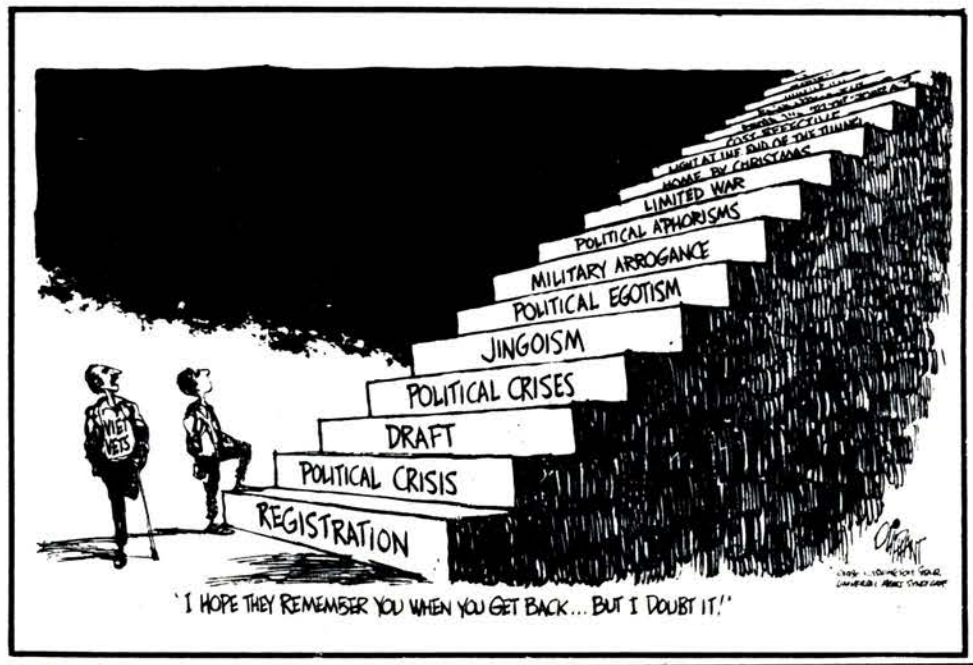
The study, released in January of 1987 was a meticulous, in-depth look at four VA medical districts--2 north and 2 south--ranging from District 2 (Upstate NY), District 17 (Illinois and portions of Indiana), District 12 (Florida) and District 24 (West Texas, New Mexico and Arizona). These areas, chosen for their high density of veteran populations, are also areas of high Vietnam-era veterans populations.

All four districts reflected the same problems in the categories reviewed. The study focused at one point on a major category frequently passed over or ignored--the needs of individual vets. The finding in the final report states, "Many studies directed at the future of vets healthcare have been conducted by many different groups. Such studies have almost universally dealt with costs and focused on the aggregate of all vets, when the real issues are need and the individual vet."

The National Academy of Sciences (1977) recommended that veterans requiring healthcare be phased into the existing community hospitals over time. This theory which came to be known as "mainstreaming" was supported at various times by vets' spokesman looking for a way to insure quality healthcare for vets. But that bubble has burst. In only a term and a half the Reagan Administration has successfully dragged down the national level of healthcare so drastically through budget cuts in health, education, welfare, that the VA cannot look elsewhere--not even at the university medical centers which have often been connected with VA hospitals: these too have been slashed to the bone.

In 1984 the Congressional Budget Office studied planning for future medical care needs for veterans. They concluded that, to cope with increasing demands for VA services, the solution was to decrease length of stay in VA facilities. Three years later, after the VA tried this approach, the real world intruded: there has been an increase in the numbers needing to be treated. And this should be no surprise considering cuts in medicare and medicaid by the Reagan Adminstration.

Undisturbed by such trifles, Ronnie and his boys quickly moved to restrict VA usage further. Through Public Law 99-272, passed in 1986, the VA now has three categories (A, B, and C) on which to determine which veterans are to be served based on conflict, age, type of disability and, most importantly, income. Nearly 14 million vets in categories B & C (who are earning $20 - $25 thousand, with or without dependents) are far too wealthy to need help by VA standards. The 30 million vets in category A fall into 7 other groups which may someday determine if they live or die. The future is bleak for vets of any new conflicts. No one thought to include them at all: will they have to retrace the steps of Vietnam vets or even the Bonus Marchers of the 1930's to regain their benefits?



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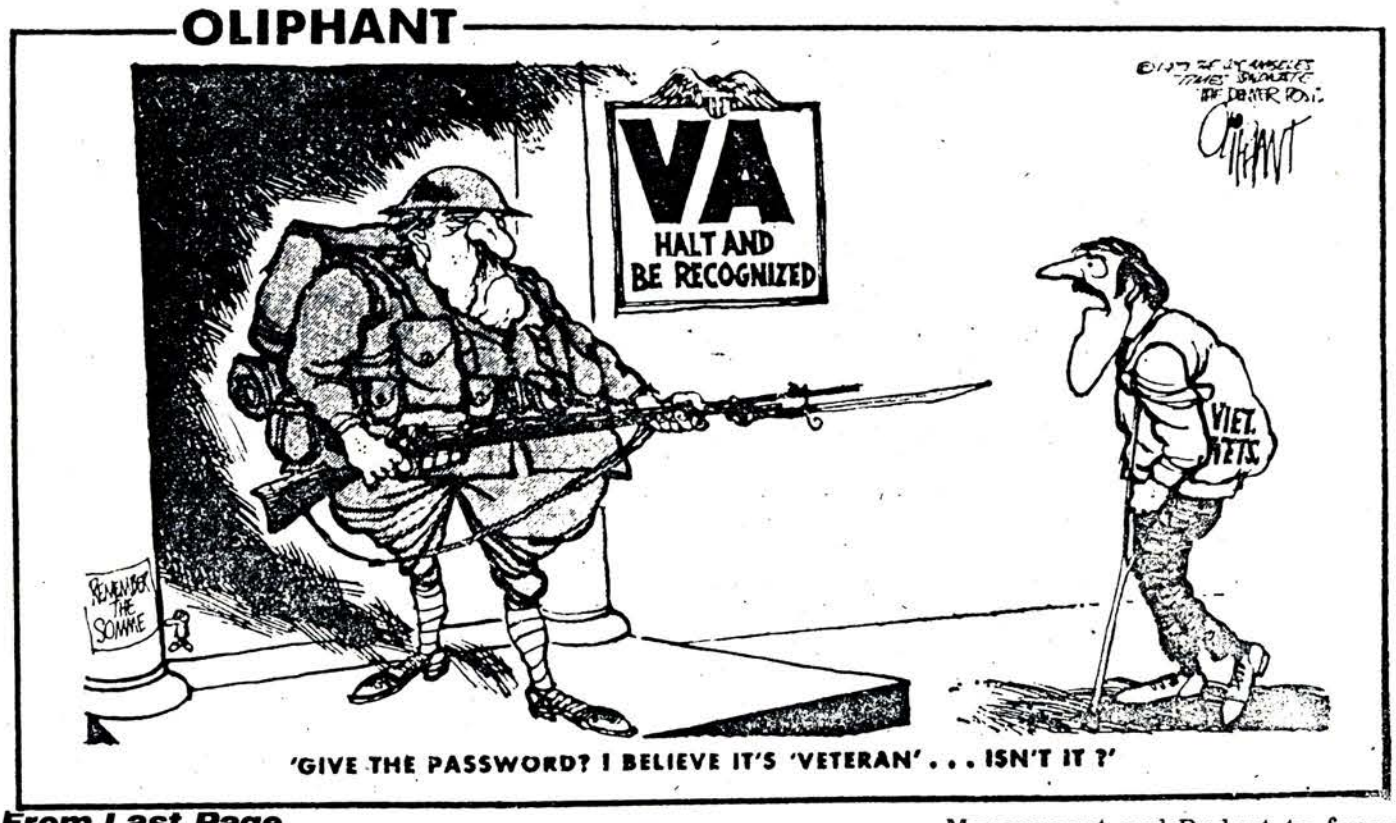


'GIVE THE PASSWORD? I BELIEVE IT'S 'VETERAN'... ISN'T IT ?'

From Last Page

With cutbacks the order of the day, all districts in the study show similar distress. Plans to close some VA Medical Centers, large or small, leave a vacuum of service and the total loss of specialized treatment--a mental facility closing with no room for those particular patients at other local or regional medical facilities.

The VA answer of "downsizing"--limiting available space and time of stay--is a failure in the face of increasing numbers being treated. Real numbers show that the same amount of resources are required for smaller numbers of sicker people. This is the proverbial "road to hell" without any good intentions.

All the studies to date failed to grasp one of the key elements of the PVA study--aging. The veteran population is aging more rapidly than the general population, primarily because there are clusters of veterans of the same age. In the districts studied younger vets are migrating from occupational necessity, thus pushing up the average age. The basic formula is simple: increased age =s increased demand for VA services. It's not easy to grasp the fact that Vietnam vets entering their 40's are, as a group, the "young vets." At this pace the VA will be a museum piece to be dusted off and viewed with nostalgia at the time when we need it most.

Chicago, within District 17, was the most dramatic of the four areas studied. The crisis is not in the future there: it has arrived. In Chicago there is a higher usage of the VA services by indigent, non-service connected vets than in any of the other districts studied. With healthcare for the public at large in crisis in Chicago and surrounding Cook County, reductions proposed by the Office of Management and Budget to force vets into "mainstreaming" are unrealistic--community healthcare facilities, to which vets would be shifted, are too sick themselves. The Reagan Administration's so-called "safety net" does not exist. It never did except in the minds of those in the White House.

Who gets the short end? As usual, the poor and minorities. In Chicago 36% of the VA medical center disharges were Black vets, a rate 2.7 times that for the VA system as a whole.

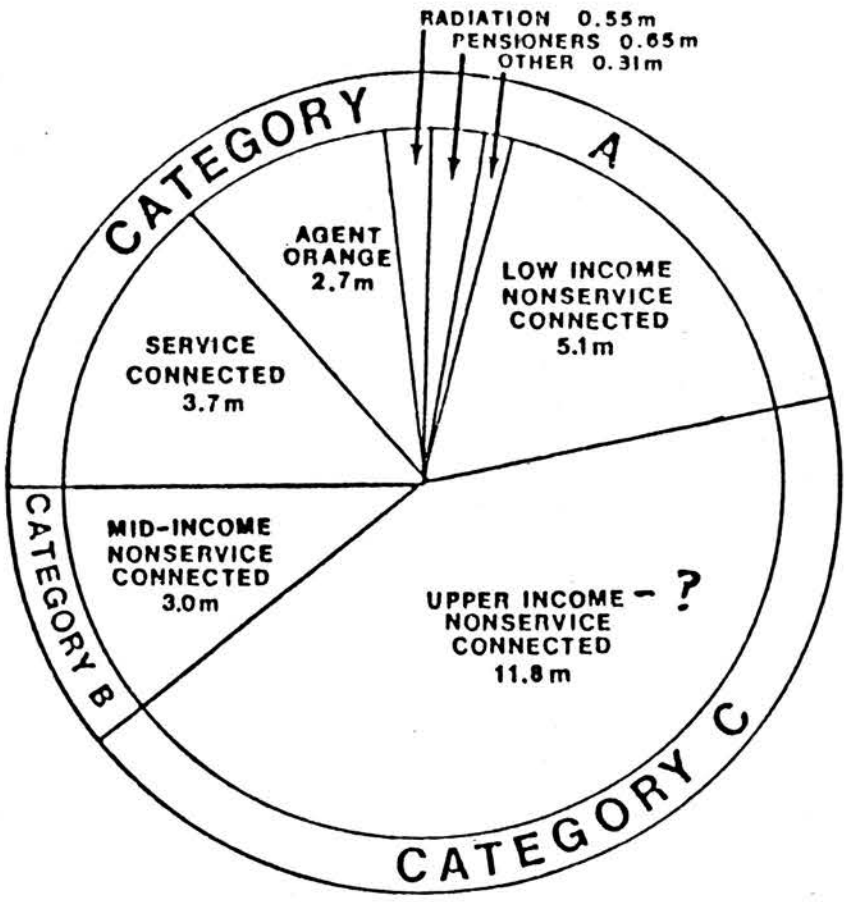
Bed space in nursing homes in the Chicago area, long a source of controversy, is seen in a new light. Bad as it has been in the past with filthy, rat-infested homes, corrupt officials and inspectors, with VA denials of wrong-doing as their "certified homes" make headlines fit for supermarket tabloids, things are getting worse. Vets of all eras, removed from their peer groups, the process of "dumping" vets at private sector nursing homes where unscrupulous managers rip off VA checks (along with social security, pension and whatever other checks might be coming in)--all of these things add up to a remarkable deal for vets! Now, even these wonderful havens of comfort, resting spots for those who served their country, are no longer available.

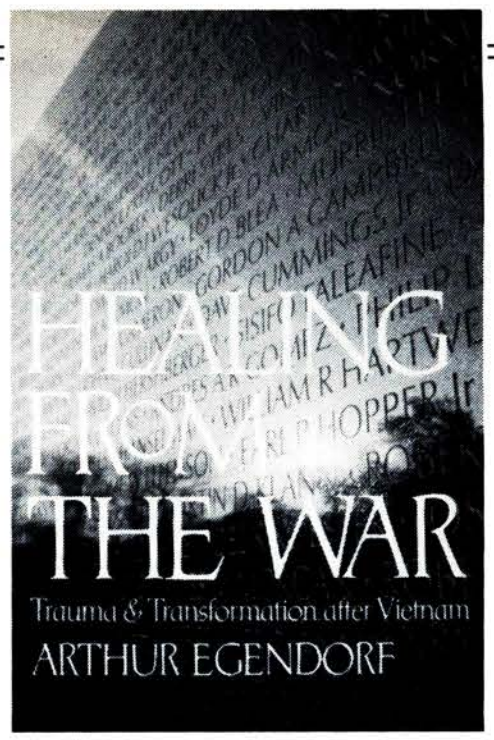
As vets have watched the slow decline of benefits for decades, it is difficult to accept that things can get worse, but a lot of veterans have found their health getting worse and the future is damn grim.

Veterans owe the Paralyzed Veterans of America and their research group a deep debt of gratitude for this body of work. Whether this report becomes a death knell for veterans' healthcare or a rallying point that is long overdue remains to be seen. The answer, though rhetorical, is simple. Veterans of all eras must unite to fight for decent benefits for ALL veterans; what is being done to vets of World War II today will be done to Vietnam vets tomorrow--if there's still a VA to do anything!

(More information on the PVA study is available from the:
Paralyzed Veterans of America
801 Eighteenth St NW
Washington, DC 20006)

Estimated Number of Veterans by Eligibility Category Established Under P.L. 99-272





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A HISTORY OF THE

More than any U.S. war since the Civil War, Vietnam divided America and made us reevaluate our society.

By any standard the American effort in Southeast Asia was a major conflict. Money, bombs and men were fed into a meat grinder whose purpose seemed to change at every Presidential press conference. Now with Platoon up for academy awards, with more Stalone and Chuck Norris movies; and with our deepening involvement in Central America, more and more questions about U.S. history and involvement in Vietnam are being asked.

U.S. involvement in Vietnam did not begin in the 1960's or even the 1940's, but in 1845. That's right--1845. In that year the people of Da Nang arrested a French missionary bishop for breaking local laws. The U.S. commander of "Old Ironsides" (the U.S.S. Constitution) landed U.S navy and marines in support of French efforts to reclaim their missionary.

Mad Jack Percival, the ship's captain, fired into the city of Da Nang killing 3 dozen Vietnamese, wounding more and taking the local mandarins hostage. He then demanded that the Catholic Bishop be freed in exchange for his hostages.

The Vietnamese were unimpressed. They refused his demand and waited. "Mad Jack" got tired of waiting, released his hostages and sailed away leaving the Bishop behind. One hundred and thirty years later Americans would again become tired of their involvement and leave Vietnam; unfortunately we would leave far more than 3 dozen dead.

U.S. involvement in Vietnam during World War II saw the Vietnamese as our allies. A group of OSS agents (later to become the CIA) made contact with anti-Japanese guerillas in Southeast Asia. The French who had controlled the area were the "Vichy" French who, with their Nazi leanings, supported the Japanese. Of the different Vietnamese nationalists, only the Viet Minh under Ho Chi Minh had the national network of underground organizations and guerillas fighting.

Ho Chi Minh met with the U.S. operative, Major Patti, and they agreed on joint anti-Japanese actions. The U.S. dropped supplies behind the lines to Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh helped Americans downed behind Japanese lines. The first American advisors helped train, equip and arm the Viet Minh. In 1945 the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was formed with Ho Chi Minh as the first President. American planes few over the capitol of Hanoi in celebration of the founding. The Vietnamese Declaration of Independence echoed that of the U.S.: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

"This immortal statement is extracted from the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. Understood in the broader sense this means: All people on earth are born equal; every person has the right to live, to be happy and free."

Ho Chi Minh asked the Americans to honor their commitment to independence, citing the Atlantic Charter and the UN Charter on self-determination.

Unfortunately the U.S. government was trying to improve relations with France both economically and diplomatically, and the French price was the return of former French colonies. U.S. relations with France turned sour. President Truman refused to answer letters or cables from Ho. The result was that Franch won the return of her former colonies (including Vietnam) in return for close ties with the U.S.

The French return to their former colony was not easy; first, they had to arm and use former Japanese POW's to establish a foothold, not a move to win much popular support. They were able to retake towns but not the countryside. In 1950, General Giap launched a general offensive against the French which, though it was premature, resulted in 6000 French killed or captured. What the French government described as a "victory," was portrayed by commentator Bernard Fall as France's "greatest colonial defeat since Montcalm died at Quebec."

France turned to the U.S. for aid; at first it was $10 million a year but it grew to $1 billion by 1954 so that by the time of the final French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the U.S. was footing 80% of the bill for the war.

With the French out, the U.S. moved in. According to international agreement, Vietnam was to be temporarily divided into north and south, with free elections to take place nationwide in 1956.

Ngo Dinh Diem, a Vietnamese Catholic living in Boston was chosen Premier of South Vietnam which was 95% Buddhist. The U.S. set up MAAG (Military Assistance and Advisory Group) to train a "nationalistic" Vietnamese force of a quarter of a million men. This force was largely made up of Vietnamese who had fought for the French. In 1956 the U.S. refused to go along with the elections because, in the words of President Eisenhower, "Ho Chi Minh would win 80% of the vote in a free election." U.S. involvement continued and so did U.S. money and men. American presence rose to 500 under Eisenhower and grew to 15,000 under Kennedy.

At the same time Diem was in trouble; former Viet Minh cadre helped to support a number of groups to oppose Diem and the French successor in Vietnam--the U.S.

The similarity between the French and the U.S. forces in Vietnam was, from the point of view of the Vietnamese, not only that both were foreign oppressors. Even our uniforms were similar, right down to the green berets. In fact, U.S. troops were known as "Frenchmen with money."

Buddhist unrest grew in the cities; in the countryside the National Liberation Front (the NLF, called the Viet Cong or VC by Diem and the U.S.) were killing Diem's cronies and consolidating power. The U.S. decided to back a coup of Vietnamese generals to topple Diem. Not only did the generals get rid of Diem and assassinate him, they also proceeded to kill off each other on a regular basis.

The situation was desparate. More and more American troops were put in to replace Saigon troops who could not--or would not--get involved in the

namese, more than $200 Billion Spent by the US

US WAR IN VIETNAM

fighting. The Saigon government had no real base other than the aid it got from the U.S., and we got exactly what we paid for: pimps, prostitutes, cowards and gangsters, masquerading as a government and a military.

This was bad enough. But it was coupled with the incredible arrogance on the part of the U.S. government and military leaders. They could not believe that Asians could stand up to the might and technology of the U.S. As the war progressed we went from one stage to another without any real change in the situation. Strategic hamlets, Vietnamization, search and destroy, pacification: all these programs had been tried by the French, but somehow the U.S. thought we could make them work. They did not.

The American people were not being told of the plans or the policies of the U.S. government. To the contrary: Lyndon Johnson ran as a peace candidate in 1964, saying, "I won't send American boys to do the fighting for Asian troops." Americans were told that Vietnam was two countries (omitting some 2000 years of history) and that the North was invading the South. And none of the information given out did anything to answer the questions of the 19-year-old American fighting the guerillas in South Vietnam. While Saigon's leaders were talked about as the Vietnamese versions of Jefferson and Lincoln, we saw the drug-pushing, the black marketeering and the torture cells.

Somehow, in order to save Vietnam we had to destroy it. All in all civilian casualties from U.S. actions ran from 100,000 in 1965 up to 300,000 in 1968, just from bombing and artillery. In addition millions upon millions of gallons of herbicides were sprayed over 6 million acres of land. We bombed hospitals to save orphans, we sprayed Agent Orange and destroyed the land in order to save crops, we burned hamlets to save villages and turned Vietnam into a huge whorehouse in order to save Vietnamese culture from Communism.

As GIs in Vietnam we saw the often stark realities of Vietnam and could compare them to the "truth" the American people were being told. We saw the corrupt Saigon generals making money hand over fist while their armies would not fight. We saw the hate in the eyes of the local villagers who never welcomed us as "liberators" bringing us bouquets of flowers as we had seen in World War II movies. The only Vietnamese who seemed to want us there wanted greenbacks in return for drugs, booze or women or all three. We also saw the enemy fight and had to admire both his bravery and tenacity in taking on U.S. tanks, planes and helicopters with grenades and rifles. We supposedly valued human life while our enemy did not; yet, we paid the owners of the Michelin plantations $600 for each rubber tree we damaged, while the family of a slain Vietnamese child got no more than $120 in payment for a life.

We fought up hills, winning what the press called "victories," but we saw half our friends die so that the company body count could go up to enhance the career of some lifer officer. And then we'd give up the hill and have to fight for it again later on. The war was not something to be won or lost by the grunt, but 365 days to be survived.

The U.S. tried everything to win. We dropped more than three times the total tonnage of bombs dropped by both sides in World War II. We conducted "Operation Phoenix" during which the CIA and Saigon government killed up to 200,000 suspected members of the Viet Cong. We defoliated 10% of the land, much of it permanently.

We bombed, bribed, shot, killed and burned for more than 10 years at a cost of $170 billion (and a future cost which is continuing to rise). And with all this, we still lost.

Nixon did not pull out because the U.S. was winning but because the Vietnamese were. Some generals today are saying we lost the war but never lost a battle--but what the hell did we "win" at Khe Sanh or in the Iron Triangle or in Laos or in Cambodia besides having some hole punched in some officer's promotion card.

The simple fact is that neither the American people nor the American GI's fighting in Vietnam thought that the goals--real or imagined--were worth the lives and the money being squandered. The war was lost on the battlefields of Vietnam and in the hearts and minds of the American people.

During the war VVAW led tens of thousands of Vietnam vets in demonstrations against that war. No comparable group of Vietnam vets ever rose to challenge VVAW or our goals. When VVAW brought 1500 Vietnam vets to protest Nixon's renomination, the Republican Party could only come up with 6 vets to support the war--and some of these did not support Nixon. Vietnam vets knew firsthand about the real war--and opposed it.

Today the Reagan Administration seems determined to get us involved once again, this time in Central America. In El Salvador the U.S. allies are just as brutal and corrupt as were Theiu and Diem and Ky. In Nicaragua we pay mercenaries to burn, look, rape and kill and then call them "freedom fighters" annointed in the names of our "forefathers." Reruns have always been big for Reagan fans.

Vietnam was not just a mistake; neither will be a U.S. venture in some other part of the globe except for the GI's who buy the government's lies. Vietnam was not a "noble cause" except for those who fought to Bring our Brothers Home after they had made the mistake of going. As for foreign aggression, hear the words of Medal of Honor winner and Marine commandant Smedley Butler:

"War is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes....How many millionaires ever shoulder a rifle?

"For a great many years as a soldier, I had the suspicion that war was a racket; not until I retired did I fully realize it.

"I was," said Butler of his own role in Central American intervention, "nothing more than a gangster for Wall Street."

Where We Came From,
Who Are We, Who Can Join

VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

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Vietnam Veterans Against the War began in 1967 to join the ranks of those who wanted an end to U.S. involvement in Indochina. Basic principles of the organization have continued ever since: we have fought against unjust wars, whether the U.S. invasion of Indochina or, potentially, El Salvador, or the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan. We have supported, by whatever means were possible, those who are fighting for their own liberation. And we have stood with veterans of all eras in fighting for the things we need, have been promised, and have been earned.

From its early days VVAW has operated on the knowledge that the government will give vets what we need only when forced to do so--that vets get nothing for nothing. We've learned that when one vet fights alone, there is a limited amount he or she can accomplish, but when veterans unite to fight together, we can do much. VVAW has seen some real successes: we helped to put an end to U.S. troops in Southeast Asia, we helped get Nixon tossed out of office on his ear, we helped to win (to a great extent) amnesty for war resisters. With other vets groups we helped to stir up enough public furor that the Veterans Administration took its first halting steps to look for an answer to Agent Orange poisoning, and recognized what VVAW used to call Post Vietnam Syndrome when we were leading rap groups in 1970 (and is now called "post-traumatic stress or delayed stress syndrome") as a service-connected disability.

VVAW has consistently stood with the interests of vets of all eras, especially Vietnam and Vietnam-era vets. Sometimes this has brought us into conflict with the "traditional" vets organizations. While they have tended to stand behind the U.S. government and its various war-like manueverings, VVAW has always asked "Why?" We've opposed moves toward war, fight against registration and the draft which will follow, opposed inflated defense expenditures, welcomed vets with "bad" discharges into the organization and fought to get the discharge system dropped entirely from the military.

We know what it means to have been used once by the government and its corporate backers, and then be thrown away with a bad GI Bill, wretched healthcare, Agent Orange ravaging our bodies, vivid memories of the war often ravaging our minds, no jobs, and all the multitude of other problems Vietnam vets often face. We do not intend to see our children go through the same thing in the next war for somebody else's profit!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

National Coordinators

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VVAW is a democratic organization. Chapters decide on local programs and projects under the general guidelines of the national program. Chapters elect local leadership and representatives to annual national meetings where major organizational decisions are made and national coordinators elected. These coordinators are responsible for day-to-day organizational leadership and publishing of THE VETERAN.

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ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ATTENDING VVAW'S 20th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

We are looking for old-time VVAW members, for friends of the organization, for people interested in supporting what VVAW has done (and is still doing) for the last 20 years. Our 20th anniversary celebration will take place in Chicago; the high point will be a dinner on Saturday, June 13th, 1987.

To help us make plans as well as possible we need a sense of how many people might be interested. If you think you might to come for the dinner or the weekend, please take the time to fill out the form below and send it to the VVAW National Office P.O. Box 408594, Chicago, IL 60640. This is not a reservation, just an expression of interest. We'll be in touch later.

I am interested in coming to VVAW's 20th anniversary.

Name _____

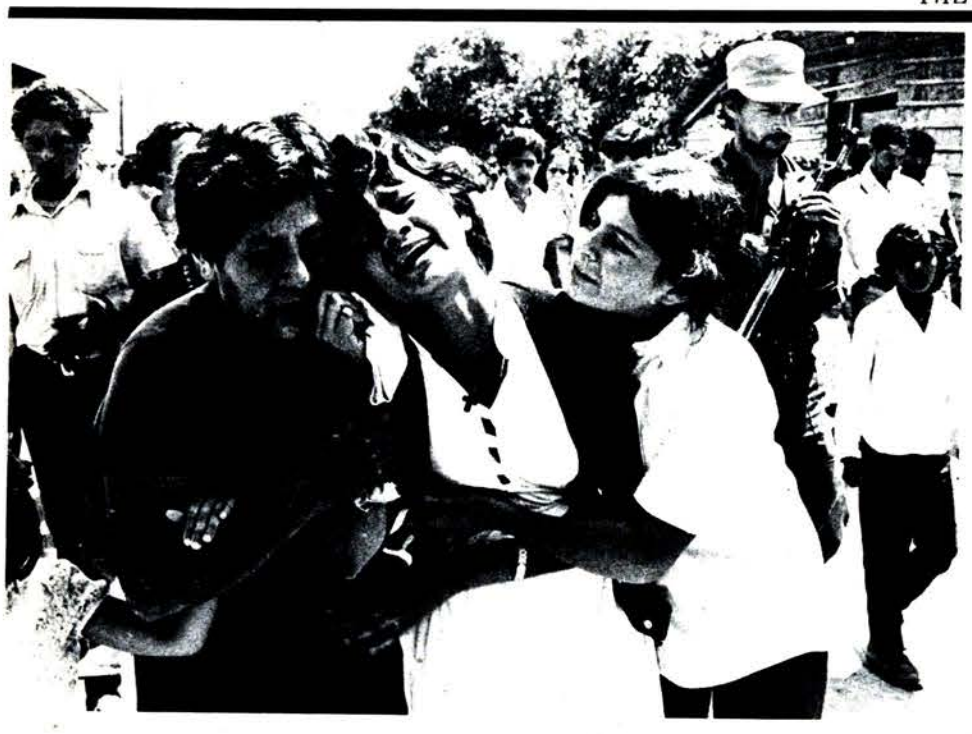
Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

__I can't come, but I'd like to contribute to help pay for someone who can come.

Comments, or names and addresses of people who might be interested. _____

_____



victims of the CIA's contra mercenaries.

CONTINUED FROM 5

Report from Nicaragua

an angry man and with good reason. His very small village has defended itself against contra attacks on numerous occasions. Also it grows a lot more food than it consumes. Much more. They have no drinking water plant, no health center, no school (a crime, he said, since there are 80 children there), no visits from the agrarian reform technicians about new farming techniques, nada. The people feel abandoned by the government which is very glad to buy its surplus produce.

"But the people, who, Senor Presidente, are, according to the precepts of our revolutionary comandante Carlos Fonseca Amador, to be the recipients of revolutionary progress, are waiting, patiently, for some sign that they too are a part of revolutionary Nicaragua." He was pissed.

Ortega turned to the zonal responsible of the FSLN. "Well?"

The responsible blew it. While it is true (and obvious) that the war launched by the U.S. causes a lot of problems, not to mention deaths and amputees, the party official tried to foist off all of these shortcomings on the war. He spoke for a long time about the "impotency" of his office to do anything about these problems.

When he was through, Ortega conferred with Dora Maria (the Minister of Health and the zonal officials responsible for health care. Then with those responsible for construction and education.

Result: errors of the Frente recognized. There will be a 1)medical team visitng the village every week. 2) A school will be built within a month. A teacher will be found. 3) "Boil your water, compa, we just can't provide a water plant at this time." Same with electricity. 4) Agrarian reform will visit regularly and assist. 5) The army will give more rifles and training and include the village defense concerns in its planning. Sandinista totalitarianism strikes again.

The sessions went on: a farmer complained that he could neither get his milk to the market nor get a truck to come pick it up. The next person castigated the high cost of higher education. Social security is too low for retired people to live on decently, a retired teacher said. (I think, well, that's a least understandable in a poor country like Nicaragua: it's incomprehensible and reprehensible in the richest nation on earth, and what's even more incomprehensible is why people stand for it.)

One fellow told the following story: I have a family of 10 children. We are campesinos, and for five years we have lived on a piece of land which we have improved and cultivated. Two weeks ago, my family and I were forcibly removed from this land. We have been offered other land, but a man wants the land he has worked, the land that is his own. I don't want the land that I'm offered. I want my land back.

This was spoken in a certain style of country speech used in story-telling, with grand statements and sweeping gestures, and it had the crowd in stitches, as well as most of the people on the stage.

Ortega, as he did with every single person speaking, turned his entire body to face the man directly, gave him his undivided attention, and didn't even smile at the man's story. "Well," he asked the junta municipal, "are things as this campanero says?"

A judge advocate rose and spoke. Yes, he knew the man's story; he had been dealing with the man and his family for over a year. It seems that his land is part of an old Somocista latifunda, seized by the Frente at the time of the Triumph. People who worked the land knew that its final disposition was undecided, and while the people had lived and worked the land for free all of this time, and improved it, it had always been clear that someday it might be used for something else.

A year ago it was decided that Madriz needed an orphanage for war victims, and because this land is accessible by road and has a year-round river next to it, the man was informed that the orphanage would be built there.

"The land to which we are giving him deed is similar to the land we are taking, according to the companeros of Agrarian Reform. For a year, he refused to move. We finally had to move him. I myself have visited both places, and while no two pieces of land are alike, they are most certainly similar. Everyone here knows the need for this orphanage."

A conference ensued, and then an official for the Ministry of Construction said, "If the compa will accept this land, we will deliver all the material necessary to build a house--roofing, cement, lumber, nails, everything."

Ortega said, "Well, is this acceptable?"

"Well, okay," the man said. Laughter.

Then a group of very poor campesinos got up en masse and said that though they are very poor, what they do have they have because of the revolution, the Frente Sandinista, its heroes and martyrs, and the Army. So the campesinos of their collective wished to present the President of the Republic of Nicaragua with a check for 50,000 cordobas to benefit the Army.

That's a lot of dough--about $17. Don't laugh--it's a lot of money for a dirt-poor rural cooperative where people work from dawn to dusk, and at night have to worry about having their houses set on fire or their stock killed or their children stolen by U.S. killers.

Ortega thanked them gravely, and from his manner you'd think they'd just laid a gunship or an anti-aircraft battery on him. He knows what that 50,000 cordobas cost these people in sweat and delayed purchases; it cost them more to donate the equivalent of $17 than it took for our "representatives" to cough up $100 million plus for the contras.

The Cara del Pueblo went on for five solid hours on a Saturday. Ortega maintained an absolute attention, always turning his body in his chair to fully face the citizen who was speaking. He didn't intervene in every question, only about half in varying degrees, as the responsibles to whom the questions were directed would speak for themselves.

It was an outstanding event, in my book. Of course, this sort of intelligence and common sense on the President's part would lead to the unemployment line, if practised in the U.S. Here in Nicaragua there isn't any need for a whole pack of highly paid assholes to call a press conference every time the President speaks to say "What the President meant to say was...."

So, for five hours, a few miles from the frontier, after a 70-hour week, Ortega gave his attention to Nicaragua's common citizens, as happens every week. I personally got a chuckle out of the devastated looks on the faces of the yank bourgeoisie from Seattle. I'm sure they are opposed to intervention; they probably work to aid the people of Nicaragua, but deep inside, most members of the (mostly) upperclass anti-intervention movement is the feeling that the U.S. really does have the best political system, the freest in the world, blah, blah. To realize so clearly and graphically that the Saninistas have it all over our own system was a shock for them. Their minds were blown; it was plain from their faces.

Ortega mentioned the yanks again at the wrap-up and invited them to ask a question or two. I held my breath, because at the last Cara gringos went to, yankee brigadistas dominated the mike for too long (as usual), each one asking for poor Eugene Hasenfus' release. Spare me. But to my relief, Hasenfus wasn't mentioned (this was before his release) and rather good messages of solidarity were conveyed.

Okay, said Ortega at the end, "We've all heard your concerns and gladly received statements of support. But look here. We have a problem here along the border, and it isn't just the war. We received 45 tons of beans and rice from Austria, a gift from the people of Austria through their government. At the same time we know that many people smuggle beans and rice across the border to sell in Honduras. Now that's not right, and it's not good. Countries donate food and medicines to us, and it costs their own people to do this. We cannot, while we say we need these things, at the same time have the same commodities being sold outside the country for personal profit. This hurts all of us, every one. So stop the people doing this. It's a job for the CDS (Sandinista Defense Committee) and for every citizen."

So there it is. Accountability. A few people were shy, several angry, one very angry, and all were interested in the process and all a part of it. We in the U.S. have a long way to go.

The "Hymno Sandinista" was sung. Tears come to me easily here; the "Hymno" always moves me. A mountain of dead Abrams, Reagans, or Norths wouldn't equal the cost of that song.

[Chuck Winant is a Vietnam veteran--Mekong Delta '68-'69--living in Nicaragua. He's a correspondent for THE VETERAN and a coordinator of Material Aid Committee--Vermont (MACV).]

VETERANS PEACE COALITION
NATIONAL REPORT

--John Lindquist
VVAW National Office

Last August VVAW and 12 other veteran peace groups met in Chicago to formalize the Veterans Peace Coalition. At the end of January the 2nd meeting was held at the office of Swords Into Plowshares in San Francisco. The Veterans Speakers Alliance helped set up the food, housing, and a good party on Saturday night.

The first order of business was to deal with the Revolutionary Communist Party which showed up to play AI/VVAW (see article about VVAW/AI and the RCP elsewhere in this paper). This weird cult group is still active on the West Coast and is doing support work for Ayatollah Khomeni. The meeting was delayed an hour while the discussion raged on. Finally the coalition voted not to allow this group into the Coalition. Its representative was asked to leave.

This meeting was set up to create a structure for operating the Coalition and to plan actions around the country. We started out with reports of activities of the groups present: the VFW Post 5588 in Santa Cruz, CA; the Veterans Against Intervention in Central America from Seattle; Veterans for Peace Inc; VVAW; Vietnam Veterans Peace Education Network; Veterans Speakers Alliance; and several independent veterans groups.

Over half the meeting was devoted to formalizing what kind of group we are. This is not a new organization but rather a coalition of veterans peace groups. The motions reflected this: 1) One coordinator will be elected for one year on a rotating basis; elections annually by the Steering Committee. 2) There will be 3 regional coordinators. Other motions dealt with annual dues and setting up annual meetings.

In the elections, Gerry Condon of VAICA in Seattle was elected coordinator for the first year. Jerry Genesio (Vets for Peace Inc), Barry Romo (VVAW) and Eduardo Cohen (Vets Speakers Alliance) were volunteered to be regional coordinators. A quarterly newsletter and minutes of each yearly meeting are part of the communication net which was set up.

During the meeting 3 guests gave reports to the Coalition.

Mary Lynn Price from Committee Against Registration and the Draft (CARD) in San Diego reported on and passed out example of ads which CARD ran in high school newspapers. The Gross Point school system refused to run the ads which told the other side of military life; the school system was sued by CARD. The 9th Circuit Court reversed the original decision, quite a victory. CARD figures the case will eventually end up in a trial because the Justice Department and Department of Defense both say that counter-recruitment is a danger to national security.

Bill Smith of the National Lawyers Guild was a Vietnam vet (Laos, 1959) who is now a lawyer active in the Guild in California. His report was a hard-hitting one about the use of the National Guard as a conduit for arms for the contras in Central America. He traced an affadavit which has been turned over to Senator Kerry and the Special Prosecutor in Washington: this affadavit showed how over $25 million in arms and lots of equipment was turned over to the contras in Honduras without ever having to get Congressional approval. He also spoke about the use of the "Auxiliary Guard" to round up Central American refugees in the case of an invasion of Nicaragua so that they cannot commit sabotage, the Reagan version of the Japanese internment camps during World War II.

The Director of the New Foreign Military Policy, David Reid, spoke on the April 25th demonstration in Washington, DC. Over 60 groups are part of the coaliation so far with a broad base of union and church groups. A refreshing fact was that no "Party" groups were allowed to join the Executive Committee. This fact, the Iran/Contra mess, plus worsening conditions in South Africa as well as Central America should give this demonstration a huge base. The coalition for April 25th thought it exactly right to pressure Reagan when he's weak. Stopping the war in Central America is possible, and battling for the survival of the VA hospital system plus decent benefits for all veterans is our duty. Groups in the VPC will be marching in Washington. For VVAW information, call VVAW in New York City or Jersey City.

The last phase of the meeting was about upcoming events by member groups. Vets for Peace is sending a 30-member delegation to Central America from May 2-May 18th; it will cost $1450 from Miami. The delegation will visit Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. If you want to go or need more information, contact Jerry Genesio, Box 3881, Portland, ME 04104 (207) 797-2770. At the time of writing this article, there are still open spaces. VFW Post 5588 and The Pledge of Resistance are doing their second annual vigil at the front gate of Fort Ord. This base is the home of the 7th Light Infantry, a probable unit to go to Nicaragua in case of war. This demonstration will be on February 28, 1987, but will probably recur in the future.

The Coalition endorsed an April 19th march on the Western White House near Santa Barbara, California. The last two years the Veterans Speakers Alliance and other vets groups have marched on Easter weekend. This year we hope to have a larger turnout. The base camp will be at El Capitan State Park, 15 miles from Santa Barbara on Route 101. For people on the East Coast who can't make it to California, there's a march at Bush's Eastern White House in Maine. More detailed information is available to those interested. VVAW hopes for a good turnout of members from western states who can't always get to VVAW events. For more information, contact John Lindquist or Ann Bailey, 3433 N Fratney, Milwaukee, WI 53212 (414)-963-0398.

I've been active in the veterans' movement since 1970. I've seen veterans coalitions come and go. Some have been messed up, some have done good work. The Veterans Peace Coalition has the capability of doing good work no matter how long it lasts. Energy by veterans against new wars like Vietnam, public speaking by vets in the schools, and 20th reunions by the best veterans organization ever cannot be energy wasted.

20 YEARS
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR
SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 1987
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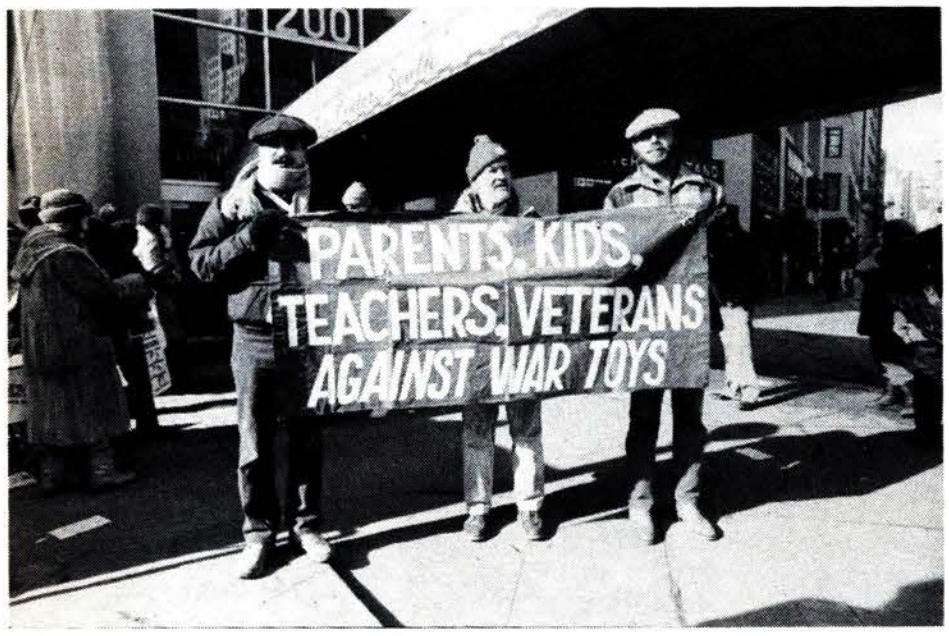
THE WAR ON WAR TOYS



NY/NJ VVAW members Ed Damato, Gary McArthur and David Klein. Photo by David Vita

--Dave Cline
NJ VVAW

On Saturday, February 14, a contingent of veterans and families representing VVAW joined with other concerned citizens in a demonstration in New York City. The target was the annual convention of the Toy Manufacturers of America; the issue was the dramatic spread of war toys.

The issue is important. Rambo, the movie character who single-handedly kills hundreds with an arsenal strapped to his body, is now a daily cartoon. There are Rambo action figures, guns, bow and arrow sets, bicycles, even lunch boxes. Rambo is just one of many new war toys being promoted by violent cartoons. There's GI Joe, given a new lease on life after almost disappearing after Vietnam; there are Gobots, Transformers, Silverhawks, etc. Then there's the flood of replicas of the latest military hardware: plastic M-16's, Uzi's, AK-47's, Mac-10's. Sales of war toys have risen 600% since 1982 to an estimated $1.2 billion in sales in 1985. They are the leading category of toys sold in the U.S. today. While kids may fantasize adventures involving fighting, today some companies are constantly pushing these products on kids using cartoons to advertize, all for the fastest and biggest of bucks.

War toys and cartoons insure that our society is saturated with the values of militarism, domination and dehumanization. Characters like Rambo shamelessly exploit the sacrifices of those of us who actually served. They glorify the horror that is war and ignore the physical and emotional cost of real combat. At the same time they are being promoted as role models for our children.

No one interested in attaining peace and justice should allow such militarization of the young to go unchallenged. We cannot have kids playing with these toys without knowing that it will have a profound effect on how they perceive the world around them. Do we want them to think that disputes and differences are best settled by force and violence? Children need to learn how to deal with aggression, but there are less destructive ways to do this than through war toys.

The campaign against war toys is being felt. Awareness is growing. A recent Educators for Social Responsibility conference on the issue was well attended. A large number of educators, child therapists and pediatricians have expressed their concern. At the NYC demonstration, representatives of some companies made a point of telling us that their companies didn't sell war toys. Coleco, the maker of Rambo figures, has had numerous picket lines at their Connecticut headquarters.

Those of us who fought in Vietnam have a stake in this fight. It is always the sons of veterans that end up going to the next war. Those who profited from our sacrifices are making a profit now and preparing our kids for another war. We have to say NO: DON'T BUY WAR TOYS!

For more information, contact:
Stop War Toys Campaign
N.E. War Resisters League
Box 1093, Norwich CT 06360
(203) 889-5337 or 455-9621

EDITORIAL

SCAB GROUP MISUSES OUR NAME

A second "VVAW" is creeping around the country. Sponsored, funded and fondled by the group which calls itself the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) this phoney VVAW bears small resemblance to the real organization. Some of its members are actually Vietnam vets; a few were once in VVAW; and they insist on misusing VVAW's name and insignia. There the resemblance ends.

I have been a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War since 1970. Since I have been in the organization, only two types of groups ever tried to destroy or takeover VVAW.

The U.S. government, using the FBI, as in the Gainesville Conspiracy Trial in Florida following the Republican National Convention in 1972.

And, over the years, the other attacks have come from ultra-left communist-type groups such as the Progressive Labor Party, NCLC, and off and on since 1974, the RCP, once known as the RU or Revolutionary Union.

Few people have ever heard of the RCP. They've attempted to steal the name of VVAW which has a long and proud history, and which has a name known to many. Their use for VVAW has been demonstrated for years. Take a veteran with the credibility he has as a vet, and the added credibility which comes from speaking for the oldest Vietnam veterans' organization; put him in front of a crowd to speak on the general question of "war," and you have the practical experience to boost whatever airy theory of world events the RCP is pushing at that moment.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War is 20 years old in 1987. Since 1978 and the Agent Orange movement many veterans organizations have been working together more closely than in the past. In August 1986, in Chicago, 13 anti-war veterans groups joined to form the Veterans Peace Coalition.

Off this energy grew support for the veterans 46-day Fast for Life in Washington, DC, and the growing movement against wars like Vietnam in Central America. All over America, small groups of veterans, some of them old VVAW people, have been becoming more active.

On the West Coast, in LA, Berkeley, and Seattle, a group calling itself "VVAW-Anti Imperialist" has reared its ugly head and says, "We are VVAW." A few of its members were once in VVAW but quit to join the RCP or other cults who feed off the energy of the peace movement, like Jim Jones did off the Kool Aid business.

Back in 1979 we sued this group for trying to steal our name and logo. They signed the court agreement just like we did. They agreed to print a disclaimer on all their literature and not to call themselves VVAW. The phrase "A.I." or "anti-imperialist" had to appear before the name VVAW with the disclaimer according to the court order.

These RCPites also used VVAW's name to raise funds for the RCP demonstrations and have even gone to coalitions, demanding speakers and then putting forward an RCP hack to preach, one who sometimes is not even a veteran.

We don't intend to let this kind of political sabotage continue. These shells of human beings are comparable to cultists, like Moonies or worse, like Nazis. They use the real problems of veterans to promote their own leaders.

With all the important veterans work coming up, we once again had to clear the air. We have a proud history in VVAW and will not take direct attacks on us by outsiders--left or right--lying down. This is probably why these people never show up where we are: they might have to look us in the eye.

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'I REALIZED WE WERE WATCHING TOTALLY DIFFERENT MOVIES' on PLATOON

--Barry Romo
VVAW National Office

Six friends and myself went to see "Platoon." Three Vietnam vets and one Grenada vet sat nervously as the speakers blared out old Beatles' songs and we waited for the lights to dim.

Behind us sat a gaggle of punks--not the kind with blue hair, but the suburban clean-cut Rambo variety. They were loud and offensive. That didn't bother us; as combat vets we were known to be loud and offensive on occasions. The content of their discussion was repulsive, however.

"Let's sit behind some gooks--we can kick their chairs and scare them during the movie!" Laughter and chuckles. "Look at all the Vietnam vets in here; they stick together, don't they?" "Yeh, man, I don't know if we should sit here." "Yeh, they are just like niggers, only they smell worse."

Before someone could declare their heads a free-fire zone, one of the vets said, "Shut your fucking mouths--NOW!" They did, except for one whose last whispered statement was, "I told you not to sit behind them; now we won't have any fun."

The movie was powerful. The only thing missing was the smell of shit burning. Memories mixed with adrenaline as every vet remembered scenes out of his past connected with images on the screen. At points I was exhausted as much from memories as from the movie.

At the end no one said anything. We waited for awhile trying to compose ourselves. The kids left immediately. You could tell the vets, hands thrust deep in their pockets, silent, alone with friends next to them.

We drove to dinner and only spoke sparingly of the movie. We ate dinner and talked about other movies. We went back to my house to watch cable. Only two hours later did we being to discuss "Platoon," and it wasn't until we did a piece for NBC 5 days later that we discussed it fully, and then it was for the camera and the commentator as well as for ourselves.

I spoke to other VVAW chapters about the movie; they liked it as well. In one city a vet broke down crying; another had seen it 6 times in 2 days.

I'm going back to see it. I think it is a great and powerful film on war, my war, but I'm not going to review that here. The Academy nominated it for awards; columnist after columnist has rightfully praised it.

What bothers me is those suburbanites behind us at the theatre. They weren't evil; they had obviously seen the movie before and thought enough of it to see it again. But what was painful for me is that it was fun for them; I realized we were sitting in the same theatre watching two totally different movies.

One movie on that dirty, worthless "little" war was no match for the Rambos, Chuck Norris and POW flicks. The reality of this movie was mixed with the nonsense of the others; they stole its message. Not that anyone would want the reality of "Platoon," but these youth could pick which reality they wanted--Rambo won.

I don't believe that we've lost. Our experience in talking to high schools proves that we can offer truth and break through layers of bullshit. Simply put, one movie is not going to turn the situation around no matter how good it is.

A real test of the authority of "Platoon" is the squeals of foul from rightwing vets. They complain of scenes depicting fraggings, brutality towards civilians, destruction of villages, and dope smoking. The right shows they either were not in combat or ahve become the "40-year-old men" we hated for reliving their youth in our blood. Hopefully they will will return to official military status, which will prove the film right on.

I don't know if I can take too many more war films. Either they are too real and fill me with memories and pain, or they are nonsensical and get me mad, angry, and steal my sleep.

There is a mini-series I would like to see on TV. Maybe ABC would run a series about a large country from across the sea with helicopters, tanks, and soldiers. They could set up a puppet government, maybe try to divide the country up into a couple of countries, indiscriminately kill farmers, break up families and destroy the local culture. Instead of calling it "Amerika," we can call it "Vietnam." Yea, and I'll probably win the lottery this week, too.

Oh yes--the best to Ollie Stone for one of the best 'Nam flicks yet.

Medical Aid For Vietnam

--Clarence Fitch
NJ VVAW

Recently 5 members of NY/NJ VVAW participated in a fund-raising dinner sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee to help provide medical aid for the people of Vietnam.

A film was shown chronicling the recovery of Kim Phuc. She was an 8-year-old girl when she became the victim of a U.S. napalm strike. A photo of her running, naked and badly burned became world famous at the time. Now in her 20's, she is still receiving treatment; she expressed her desire to see friendship between the people of Vietnam and America and hoped to be able one day to study in the U.S. Her feelings of forgiveness and hope for reconciliation were very moving.

The Vietnamese food was delicious and over $2000 was raised at the dinner. So far, AFSC has been able to raise funds and purchase $28,000 worth of basic anti-biotics and sulfa drugs, and ship them to the Phu Qhanh Provincial Hospital in Nha Trang.

Representatives of Vietnam expressed their gratitude for VVAW's continued interest in their needs. One said, "Your generosity is appreciated and will not be forgotten. We were once enemies in another time but through our sharing we can truly be brothers and sisters of the human family and heal the wounds of war."

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PLATOON MORE THAN A MOVIE

--Robert Anderson
Pittsburgh, PA

My friends are asking me what I think of Oliver Stone's new movie "Platoon," since they know I was a demolitions tech in the war. Most of them say the movie seems very realistic, giving them an understanding they didn't have before. I tell them there is more to the movie.

I was in the Air Force, but Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MAC-V) needed more support so they used people like me to back up the grunts on the ground. This wasn't what I signed up for but it was my duty, the fighting was getting heavy. This new job put me in close to the action, but luckily, not so close I couldn't get in and out fast. As a demo tech I set up and cleared explosive ordnance, in addition to being on a recovery team for downed aircraft. I was in the same general area, at the same time as the movie "Platoon" is framed.

Any man who went through such intnse, chaotic situations as we did will always have an emotional reaction to simple things like a helicopter flying overhead. It brings back a rush of vivid memories of things we'd like to forget. Like my friend Ralph who, while in a bunker, took a 122mm rocket motor in the head, or Joe who took my seat on a chopper and got a round through the floor on the next flight out to a crash site.

We learned to tell the difference in our sleep from a plane or chopper going out or limping back, patrols in trouble or just popping off rounds at shadows. There is an eerie beauty in the jungle at night as flares on parachutes drift with the wind. One night on a flight over North Vietnam we got zeroed-in on by ground fire. I looked down to see huge red tracer rounds--they seemed the size of basketballs--so close, streaking past my C-130 groaning to pull some altitude. We called in an air strike and the countryside lit up like the 4th of July as the F-4's, F-105's, and A-26's dove through the clouds. We often flew as bait, I found out later, to identify targets.

You never forget, or forgive things like that. Bomb craters were everywhere. In the dark, filled with water, you would drown in you fell in one. In "Platoon," the morning after the heavy firefight, enemy bodies are just bulldozed in. Mass graves and death everywhere were burned into our young minds. Friends and families of Vietnam vets should consider these things when vets say they are troubled.

In the theatre the night I went I saw several other vets knee-jerking to the action of the movie, unaware they were reacting. My wife Terry, a nurse at a VA hospital, says the movie will be hard for many of the vets to see when it shows in the wards. I don't care to see it again myself.

But I told the mother of a vet friend of mine to see the movie so she would understand a little of what her son went through. He was in a platoon; I don't know how he will handle the movie.

Some conservative critics, like martial artist Chuck Norris, have said "Platoon" unfavorably portrays our troops. True, not everyone had the same experience in the war, but enough men had such similar experiences to that of "Platoon" that the army basically ceased to function. I remember sitting on my bunk late one night listening to Armed Forces Radio tell me that we would all be home by next Christmas. Bob Hope even came with Racquel Welsh to make it true. I got to the show early and sat in the front row, too. A couple weeks later, after the surprise Tet offensive, I concluded, like many of my friends, that we were not winning this war--something was wrong. Now, Armed Forces Radio was saying we beat back the offensive, but most of us didn't really believe it by then. Besides, Bob Hope wasn't there to clean up the bodies.

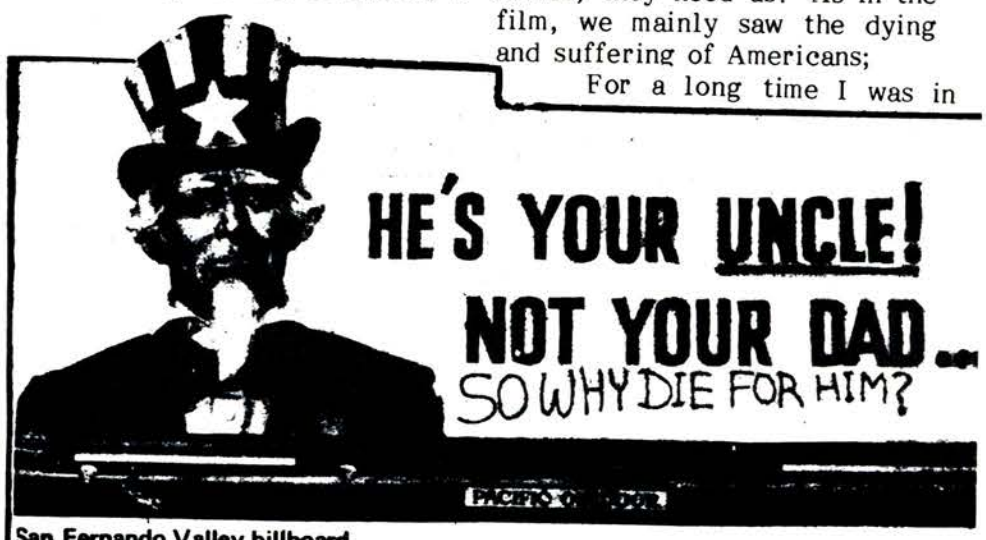
Like many vets I have stood before the Black Wall in Washington DC with over 50,000 names, finding friends. It came to me there, what size wall it will take to list the names of the one to two million Indochinese killed in the war. If our national trauma is so deep, I think now, how much greater must be theirs? I agree with liberal critics who have pointed out that neither Stone nor any over moviemaker has come close to showing the suffering of the war on both sides.

"Platoon" is excellent in capturing how we Americans saw the people of Indochina. I did my share of passing out candy to kids, digging wells in the dry season and visiting church missions but out troops dehumanized them among ourselves with racist remarks like gooks, dinks, slopes. We kept telling ourselves, they need us! As in the film, we mainly saw the dying and suffering of Americans;

For a long time I was in torment: why did we lose the war? Like many returning vets I threw away all my uniforms. I kept the medals because my father kept his from World War II. I went to a state university on the GI Bill, looking for answers. I came to the conclusion that Stone recounts in "Platoon." We went to war with a mythical theory of containing Communism at the DMZ. Being from the South, the DMZ was the Mason-Dixon line for me. This theory kept us from seeing the Vietnamese were actually fighting their own war of independence. It was 1776 for them. We fought hard, but they fought harder. We Johnson and Nixon, but they had their George Washington in Ho Chi Minh. We had become the British redcoats while the National Liberation Front was their Green Mountain boys and the NVA was their continental Army. In world history, our two countries really have more in common than we realized.

Today, our Administration continues to see the world as an ideological crusade of West against East, causing them to justify support for things like apartheid, contras and cutting support for our workers and poor here without jobs. In the war, I saw our aid supplies given to the local military who lorded it over their own poor. My candy diplomacy was no match for the military who were taking over the farmer's land. I have noticed the countries where we fought communism or fascism and other local tyrants in the cause of democracy, are the same places our corporations rapidly move for cheap labor. There are no U.S. factories in Vietnam but I think there would be if we had won the war.

At the end of "Platoon" I think Stone says well why America's patriotic young men came back from this murky war throwing away our uniforms and dropping out of society, and why some have never made it back. The narrative says, in effect: we couldn't win; we fought among ourselves because we were the enemy. "Platoon" helps make clear that war is hell, especially if you're fighting for the wrong cause.



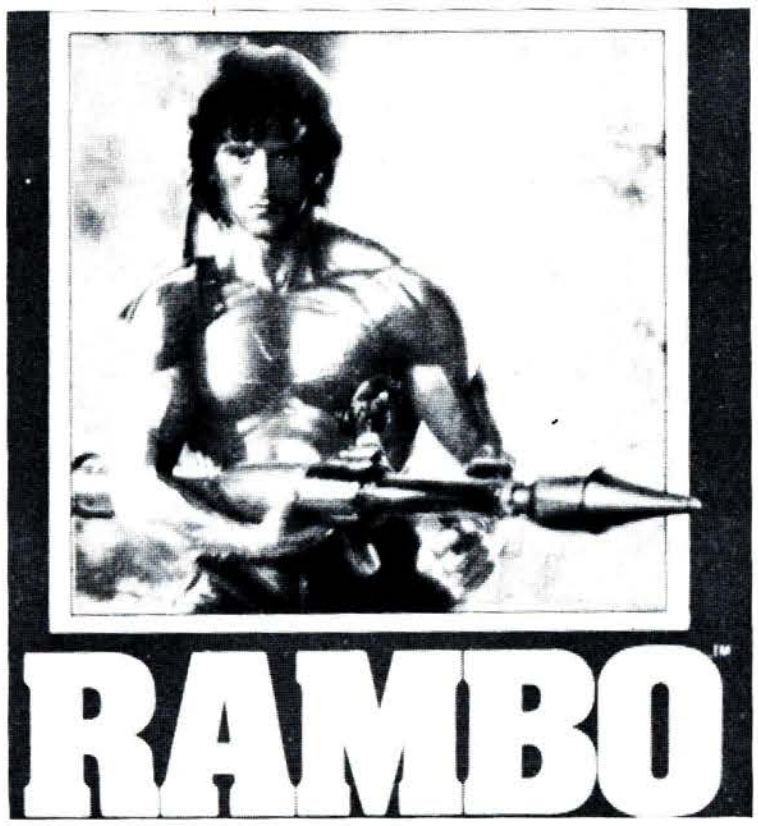
San Fernando Valley billboard.

Radio Hanoi Platoon

Radio Hanoi, the main radio station of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, commented favorably on the U.S. film "Platoon," which is about U.S. soldiers in the Vietnam War.

"The film depicts U.S. soldiers' crimes during the Vietnam War," Radio Hanoi said, "but it also relects the ideological struggle between the good and evil of the American GI who was still conscientious and humane." It points out that the film is very popular in the U.S. and has received eight Academy Award nominations including one for best picture. The film was written and directed by Vietnam War veteran Oliver Stone.
(From the Peoples' Daily World)

AN OPEN LETTER TO



--Ross S. Yosnow

Dear Sly,

I just got back from seeing "Platoon" and you wouldn't believe the crap that Oliver Stone put in that movie. I'm afraid that if too many teenage boys see it, there won't be much of a market left for your next, fine "Rambo" flick, and America might have trouble finding cannon fodder for a Nicaraguan adventure.

You see, Sly, "Platoon" has the nerve to show Vietnam as a *really unpleasant* place to be during the war. It also suggests that we lost that body-count driven conflict for reasons other than a lily-livered Congress and a left-leaning press. "Platoon" showed that you couldn't win a war when one side was there until they won, fighting against a bunch of guys who knew from the day they got there exactly when they were leaving--if they could just stay alive that long.

Worse yet, it actually leaves the impression that some of our boys didn't really believe in the war, and that some did drugs to try and forget what they were doing there. Can you believe that?

I know that to someone who doesn't even use steroids, let alone smoke the killer weed, that must come as quite a shock, but that's what the movie shows. Worse yet, Sly, it's true. And I ought to know. You see, I spent a year in Vietnam and Cambodia as a tank commander, and half the guys I knew smoked pot--or worse. And, as the movie shows, the pot smokers really were the guys who had friends from other races, and felt badly about destroying an innocent country.

But pot smoking isn't the worst of it. Unlike your terrific movies, which only show Commies getting zapped, "Platoon" really brings us down by showing guys in American uniforms being wounded and even killed. And these are white guys!

"Platoon" even has the audacity to show that Americans also killed other Americans in Vietnam. In fact, in 1972 the Department of Defense confirmed that 551 "fraggings," resulting in 86 deaths, occurred betwen 1968-1972. While I'm quite aware that this happened, I'm afraid that too much realism about the war may turn people off, then where would the Contras and the companies that make war toys be?

And speaking of war toys, what do you think about crazy groups like Veterans for Peace going around blaming you for the big increase in the sale of these toys? A kid couldn't handle one as big as the oversized gun that you carry anyway, so why blame you? Besides, didn't those bleeding hearts read the statement where you said you would never let your children play with those things? It's not your fault that Stallone the parent has no idea how much trouble Stallone the cultural icon causes. To paraphrase Dick Butkus, if you were that smart you'd be a doctor.

It seems that the one thing that "Rambo" and "Platoon" have in common is that they both upset Vietnam veterans. The difference is that "Platoon" upset them because it was so realistic while "Rambo" pisses them off because....well, who cares what they think? Everyone knows that those vets are chronic complainers anyway.

I guess that some of them are ticked off about the fact that you claim to be the voice of the Vietnam veteran, even though you sat the war out as a 4F coaching at a private girls' school in Switzerland before moving on to the University of Miami. But we know they're just jealous.

But don't you worry about that. Plenty of World War II vets were jealous of John Wayne but that didn't stop America's favorite celluloid soldier from leading every charge from Normandy to Anzio; and he was 4F too.

So go to Afghanistan with a clear conscience and help those freedom fighters rid their country of the Commie menace. Kill as many Russkies as you deem necessary, and don't worry about what those fuzzy-headed liberals think. And if Hollywood tries to make you look bad by nominating "Platoon" and Oliver Stone for Oscars, try to find comfort in what New York columnist Pete Hamill wrote the day the Duke died. "John Wayne was not a hero," Hamill reminded his readers. "John Wayne was an actor who played heroes."

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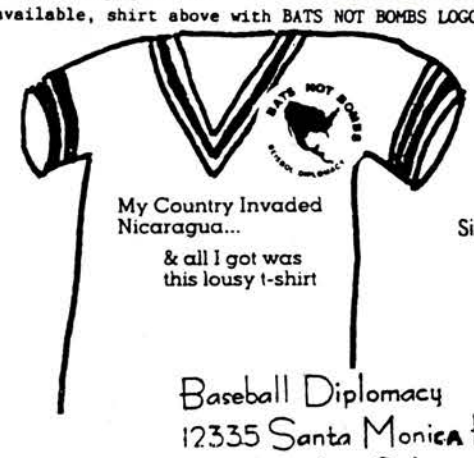

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Los Angeles, CA 90025

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT and the BLACK VETERAN

[Presentation to the Veterans Symposium, Midwest Minority Vendors Convention, Chicago, IL 2/7/87.]

--G. David Curry PhD
VVAW Chicago
Former CPT,USARV

Economic development can mean a lot of different things to black veterans of the Vietnam war.

Youths from poorer backgrounds in the Vietnam generation were less likely than middle-class youth to figure out how to avoid being assigned to a combat zone. The more disadvantaged social status of black Americans during the war translated into more hazardous, more personally damaging military assignments for black personnel than for white personnel. In comparison to non-veterans of the same age, World War II vets are "better off"; Korean vets and no "worse off"; and Vietnam vets are significantly "worse off" in terms of income and education. "Worst off" of all are minority vets in the inner cities.

Each year of education is worth significantly less in dollars of yearly income to Vietnam veterans and Vietnam-era vets than to non-veteran males of the same age. The image of a Vietnam veteran in a dead-end job with no future for economic or personal growth is a statistically accurate one for blacks and whites. So, one definition of needed economic development is the opportunity to leap from "managed" to "management" and the opportunity to start one's own business.

Unemployment or a continuous jumping from one low-paying, low-status job to another is more of a problem for black veterans than white veterans. The average unemployment rate in Chicago's white communities is 6.3 percent. In the black communities of Chicago, the average unemployment rate is 17.4 percent. So another definition of economic development is increasing the availability of jobs and even more importantly jobs with an income that can sustain the veteran's existence, give the opportunity to support a family, and provide the self-respect that comes with "a future."

It has been said, in reference to this country's history of slavery, that the greatest economic deprivation is the loss of freedom. The number of veterans who are currently incarcerated in this country is not known. It is known that veterans are more likely than non-veterans to report having "gotten in trouble with the law."

The U.S. is a country that is 20% black whose prison population is 60% black. At least in prison there is usually some degree of shelter and some kind of food available. For other thousands of veterans there is not even the security of prison. The American Legion has now estimated that approximately one-third of homeless persons in the U.S. are veterans under the age of forty. Research has shown than black communities on the average experienced higher Vietnam casualty rates than white communities. Each of those casualties constituted an irreparable cost to the black connunities where costs are already high. It must not be forgotten that these are communities where a black infant has a greater probability of being murdered than a white person of any age.

So, economic development for black veterans or their survivors does mean a lot of different things. It does indeed mean business and career opportunities. It does indeed mean increased availability of decent jobs. But it also has to mean that military service or crime can't remain the best and supposedly "smartest" alternatives for black youths. It also has to mean more imaginative, innovative, and collective ways of achieving food, shelter, safety, and hope.

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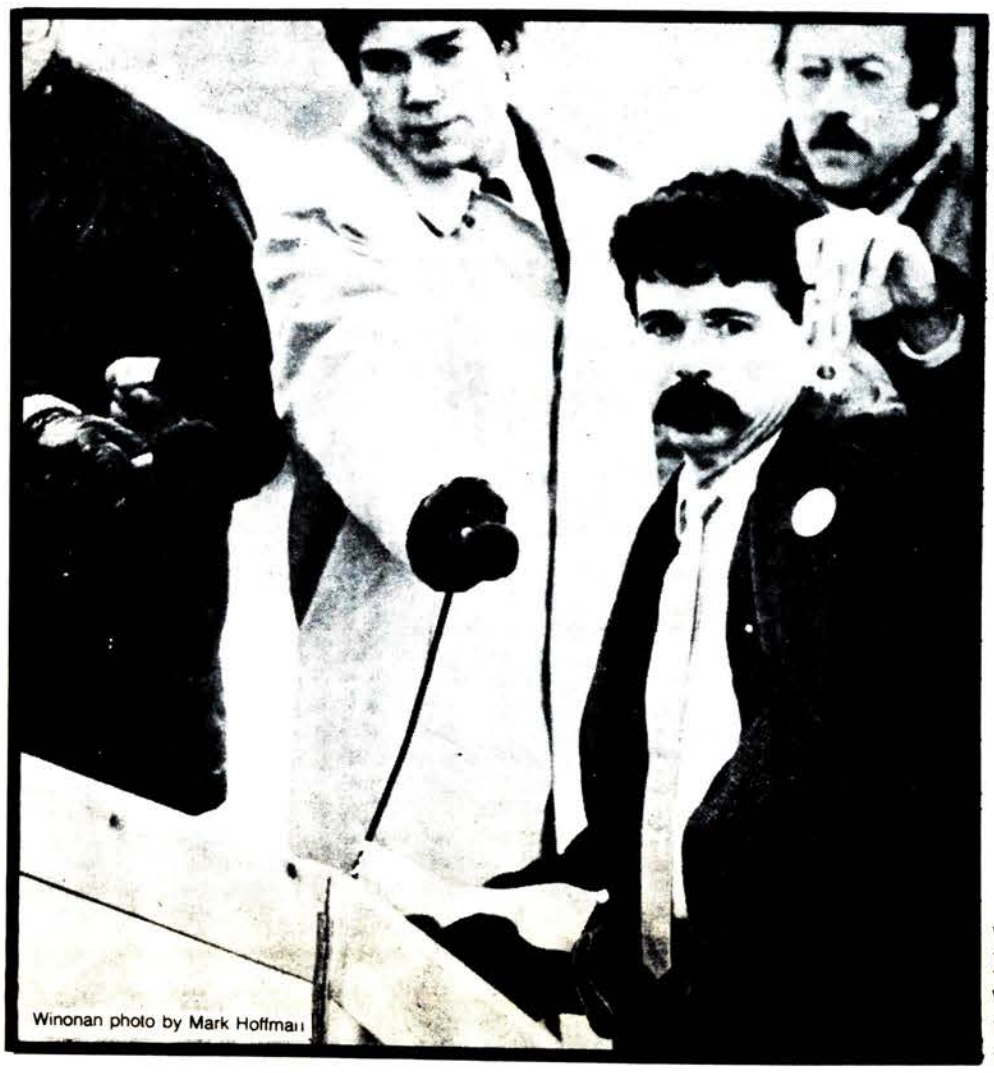


Winonan photo by Mark Hoffman

Winona Against WAR

--Billy Curmano
Minnesota VVAW

The bitter cold didn't dampen the spirits of about 40 demonstrators protesting U.S. involvement in Central American affairs on Veteran's Day in the small river community of Winona, MN. Five Vietnam veterans, Billy Curmano, Alan Schultz, Tony Brown, Roger Dahlen and Tom Biesanz, placed their medals and discharge papers in an open coffin with the questions, "How many more Nicaraguans? How many more Americans?" emblazoned on the side. The medals were later delivered to Congressman Tim Penny and passed on to President Reagan.

Each of the five spoke of the similarities between the tragedy of Vietnam and current Central American policy. They were hopeful that as a nation we had learned something from the Vietnam experience and would not allow our policy makers to repeat the all-too-familiar escalation. Substantial media coverage, including the Associated Press, kept the topic alive long after the demonstration ended with dialogs, debates and editorials.

The event also marked the end of a water-only 42 day sequentiala fast. Supporters had taken turns fasting for one day each in opposition to U.S./Contra aggression. Each of the fasters walked up and silently placed a single carnation on the discarded medals.

A solo trumpeter's somber "Taps" closed the moving ceremony sponsored by Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the Central American Resource Alliance. It contrasted sharply with the more traditional 21-gun salute held shortly after and a few yards up the mall.

CEDAR RAPIDS VVAW

Members of VVAW participated in week long activities against U.S. intervention in Central America. Along with other activities, Barry Romo of the National Office and Richard Tabia of Cedar Rapids VVAW, spoke to more than 11 local high school classes. They also held a local forum on Vietnam, Veterans and Central America at the local library.

Other groups involved were the Catholic Worker and The Pledge of Resistance.

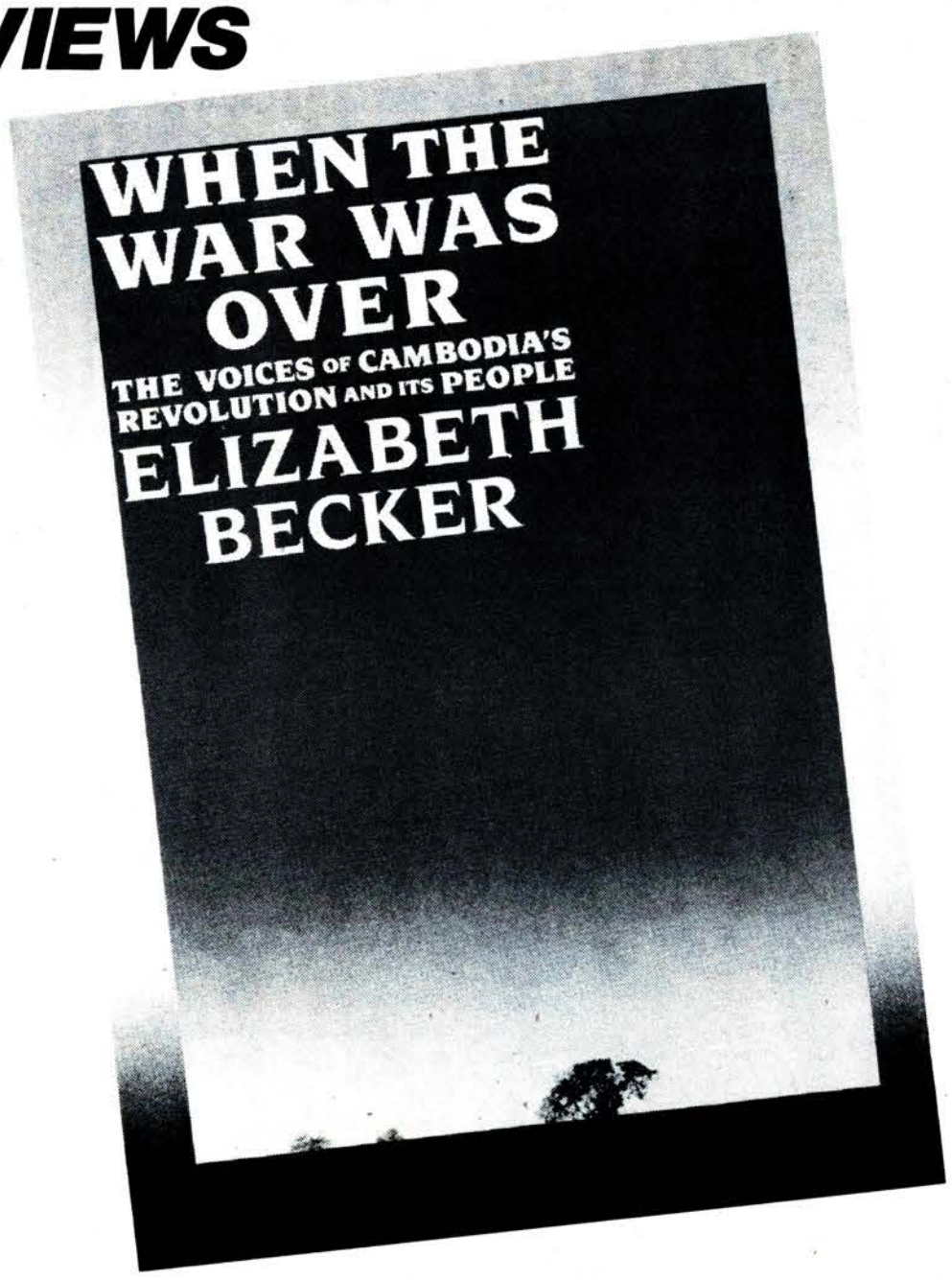
QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, asked if Sam Hall, the U.S. citizen arrested December 12 near a Nicaraguan air base with maps stuffed in his socks might be crazy:

"U.S. policy is mentally unbalanced, so it would not be strange if the mentally unbalanced might come here to carry it out."

BOOK REVIEWS

--Pete Zastrow
VVAW National Office



When the War Was Over: The Voices of Cambodia's Revolution and Its People is Elizabeth Becker's attempt to help us understand what went on in Cambodia during the incredible regime of Pol Pot. She makes much of that remarkable history a little more understandable; more may be told at some later date; much will no doubt never be told but will die with the revolutionaries whose plans for Cambodia destroyed the country they were trying to save.

Becker is well positioned to write such a book; she has a degree is Asian studies; she covered the war in Cambodia (the war that the U.S. waged against the Khmer Rouge) for the Washington Post; she is clearly filled with affection for the country of Cambodia and its people; and she was one of the only American reporters permitted into Cambodia during Pol Pot's short reign. That her visit to Cambodia was marked by men breaking into her hotel and shooting Scottish journalist (friend of the Cambodian Revolution--which didn't have too many) Malcolm Caldwell only seems fitting in a story complete with horror after horror.

Her own affection for the country is clear during her visit to Phnom Penh at the invitation of the Pol Pot government. Every sentence cries for the past, for the days when the Cambodian capital was a thriving and vibrant city instead of what is now an empty hulk. Several times she escapes her guards and guides and strolls the streets that she remembers well from having lived in the city. There is no one. Beautiful old buildings are empty or have been turned into storehouses. Occasionally yards have become gardens for the factory workers in the city in the short periods they are not working. It is, in short, utterly joyless; if this is living, better to be dead.

One of the book's most memorable characters says much the same thing. Komphot, a middle level bank employee and distant supporter of the Revolution, was one of the millions swept out of Phnom Penh when the Khmer Rouge cleared out the city. Wandering into the countryside, being stopped to write his biography several times, Komphot ended up in a distant village cooperative, surviving--barely. Intellectuals were killed; during nights in the village there would be sounds of footsteps, muffled cries, a body being dragged off; a "body was fading away" people would say, and at night no one but Khmer Rouge cadre would move. Komphot summed up his own future: "It is one thing to suffer to live, another thing to suffer only to die. I decided to give it two years. If nothing changed, I would commit suicide."

Komphot is one of the characters who made it out of Cambodia (he fled during the Vietnamese invasion). Many of the characters who speak through these pages did not get out but ended up in Tuol Sleng, the prison camp from which there was, apparently, no escape and no hope of leaving--in fact, as Becker tells the story, death was both the only and a most welcome release.

Becker returned to Cambodia after the Vietnamese had taken control; she clearly was given access to many of the records of this horrifying camp (there is no way to understand how the commanders of this camp could allow these records to continue--they even kept skulls of their victims). Confessions, followed through a period of months, would get more and more "complete," involve more and more people as torture increased. The groveling pleas for death in some of the final "confessions" are painful to read--we can only guess at the pitiful state of the person who could have written such a "confession."

Yet the personal stories--whether collected from survivors who she interviewed, or gleaned from what must be volumes of prison records--are one of the strongest parts of When the War Was Over. It is a strength that we in VVAW can well understand, since much of the effect we have when we speak comes from experiences we can recount. If a picture is worth a thousand words, one personal recollection is worth numerous statistics. And so we can see the devastating results of the Pol Pot revolution on individuals whose suffering is unspeakable. In the prison camp, higher and higher level cadre appear as the Revolution begins to devour its own. But the effect on ordinary Cambodians must touch anyone who reads the book: every structure of society that they knew is destroyed. A theory (never well explained) of catapaulting the country into the revolutionary vanguard works its destructive will on the people for whom, after all, the revolution is supposed to have taken place.

Becker helps us to understand the historical roots for Pot Pot's brutal approach to changing his country. A strain of feelingless violence runs through the history of Cambodia, the author notes, from the days of the Ankor empire centuries earlier. And Pol Pot and his fellow revolutionaries are well versed in history, though they are also selective in its application; an early treatise written by Pol Pot (then a student in Paris) is signed "The Original Khmer."

Despite the clear attempt to come to grips with Pol Pot, even tracking down the apartment he lived in during his student days in Paris, Becker is left with mostly question marks. Her trip to Cambodia was capped by a meeting (audience might be a better word) with the mysterious ruler. He seems to have been average at best, a hard-working party cadre from his early days, but never distinguished at anything. And then he was party chief and absolute ruler of Cambodia. What maneuvers took place inside the party, how Pol Pot emerged on top of men whose backgrounds suggest far greater abilities and accomplishments, none of these questions will probably be answered, ever.

Wherever he came from, however, Pol Pot and his followers turned Cambodia into a Hell. Despite a long-standing political axiom that one country has no business invading another, whether it's the U.S. in Vietnam or the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the Vietnamese move into Cambodia may have been the only way to save the country. Becker's book provides a good argument that this was the case.

Tour of Duty: Vietnam In The Words of Those Who Were There
edited by Cranston Sedrick Knight

Many people who have read any part of the rapidly growing collection of short works--poems, short stories, things like the "Recollections" which appear in each issue of THE VETERAN--must have wanted their own anthology. For each of us there are particular poems or stories which speak to us, which capture some familiar moment or make clearer some half-remembered emotion.

Knight has made his own selection; it must have been extremely difficult to say I want this poem and not that one. But the result is a splendid collection; the works are loosely arranged to follow both U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the course of a single tour. Occassionally there are jarring interjections as when we read a section of an LBJ speech or a quote such as "We are in Vietnam because the United States of America has a stake in freedom" (Hubert Humphrey).

Stories and poems and quotes bounce against each other, the arrangement providing a new look at some familiar items, and new poems and stories providing a new look at the experience that was Vietnam. That means a new look at ourselves.

Tour of Duty is published by SAMISDAT, Box 129, Richford, VT 05476.

Chemical Companies At It Again

Dow Chemical seems not to be satisfied with its fine record of Agent Orange destruction in Vietnam. Now, in Costa Rica, its pesticide DBCP has made more than 500 men working on banana plantations sterile.

CENTRAL AMERICAN TEACH-IN

--Reggie McLeod
Winona, MN

The focus was on U.S. policy in Central America during a three-day teach-in in Winona, Minnesota, in March. An information table at the university, movies, a concert, an art exhibition and a debate drew lots of attention from both the public and media in the southeastern Minnesota town of 25,000.

The art exhibition, "Art not Arms for Central America" was installed in the windows of of an empty storefront in downtown Winona from February 20 to March 24th. The exhibit included more than 40 paintings, photographs, sculptures, and drawings from over two dozen artists and school children. Artists from five states submitted work for the show. The show went on display in downtown La Crosse, WI, on March 25.

Two Vietnam vets, Billy Curmano, 38, a performance artist, and Tom Biesanz, 40, a ceramicist, organized the show.

"I'm overwhelmed by the response to 'Art Not Arms.' I've been given six more pieces since the show went up," said Biesanz the day after the show opened.

Curmano, who travelled to Nicaragua last year with other VVAW members, said he sees parallels between the Vietnam War and U.S. policy in Central America. "The Administration, from the start, has been using a disinformation campaign. I thought a show like this would help people to realize they are not alone in their opposition to what is happening there."

Singer/songwriter McDonald is a former member of the rock group Country Joe and the Fish. The group's song, "Feel Like I'm Fixin' To Die Rag" was a popular anti-war anthem in the late 1960's and early 1970's. McDonald's recent album,"Vietnam Experience" contains songs about his experience in the service as well as songs about veterans, Central America and the environment.

Curmano opened the show with his performance piece, "Midnight Babylon" in which he, during a sleepless night, confronts the horrors and foolishness of war and the arms trade. McDonald providing rousing entertainment full of songs and raps about Vietnam veterans' issues and life in the late 1960's.

Frank Graves, a former State Senator and member of the Republican National Committee, and Enrique Serra, chair of the Hispanic Caucus of the Minnesota Independent Republican Party, spoke in support of the current U.S. policy. Mary Turck, chair of the board of the Central America Resource Center and a teacher at Metro College and St Catherines College in the Twin Cities, and Ann Bailey, VVAW Regional Coordinator, spoke against current U.S. policy.

Graves started the debate by saying, "The first fact is that there is in this world a predatory nation, the Soviet Union, whose leadership understands that geography is destiny. Are you prpared to concede Central America to the Soviet Union?"

Turck asked, "Is it right for us to pay for the contra army whose stated targets are farmers, farm cooperatives and health workers?"

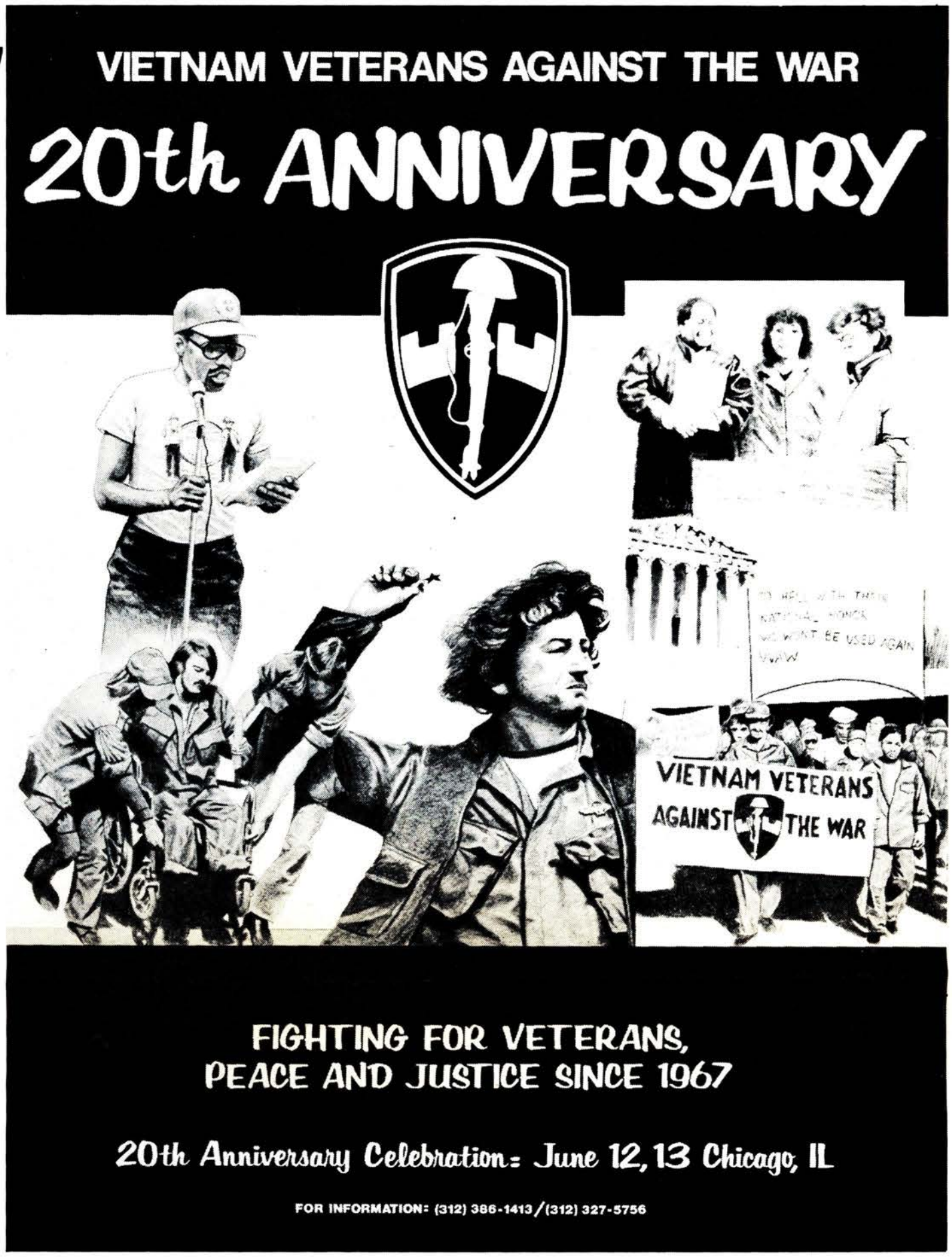
She rephrased Graves' question: "Are we willing to accede control of Central America to Central Americans, to the people in each of these countries?"

Replying to the question of what role the U.S. should play, Bailey pointed to recent history, the Vietnam War. "Our role was arrogant. We presumed a lot of things about the Indochinese people that were not true. We won every battle but lost the war because of bad policy."

Serra replied that nations should support the industrial and economic development of Central American countries without interference from the U.S., Cuba or the Soviet Union. Cuban advisors and Sandinista troops are repressing freedom in Nicaragua now, he said.

The debate aired a broad variety of views. Graves warned that the Sandinistas may invade Texas. Turck called upon an impressive array of facts and figures to illustrate that the U.S. government has little support for its policies from its own citizens, its allies or other Latin American countries. Serra, who grew up in Cuba and fled with his family after the revolution, warned that Nicaragua may become another Cuba. Bailey appealed to the audience's moral responsibilities and explained parallels between the Vietnam War and Central America.

The success of these events in Winona was testimony that people are concerned about what's happening in Central America and are ready to become involved in the process of examining and perhaps changing the unpopular policies of the Reagan Administration. It also showed the results of skilled organizing by six local groups--Central America Resource Alliance, Students for Social Responsibility, United Campus Ministries, Lutheran Campus Ministries, Newman Center and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.



This memorial poster is 18 by 24" on good stock and varnished. Available from the N.O. in a crush-proof container for $5.00 postage paid.

PERSONAL

To Tom from Virginia or WVA:

Lori from Coloma, Mich, who you met at the Chicago Vets March on June 13th, 1986, would like to hear from you again.

Write to her in care of:
Diedrie Hubshef
6371 Clymer Ave
Coloma, MI 49038

Vietnam Veterans Tell Their Story
RECOLLECTIONS

--Pete Zastrow
VVAW National Office

Just why we remember some things about the experience of Vietnam, some 20 years back, is hard to say. With some memories it's easy to understand: the kind of churning sensation in the lower gut which came from setting up for the night in a position that I was dead certain the hostiles knew about, with nothing for defense except a kind of prayer that whoever was running their operation didn't want a fight anymore than I did. But of all the episodes that stretched through the 364 days (and a wake-up) that were my Vietnam experience, I remember one that condensed, in one day, the utter absurdity of what our government was using us--its faithful servants--to do in Vietnam.

It must have been about May, 1968, when, in their wisdom, some higher authorities decided that the Montagnard village would have to be "relocated." That these hill people--treated like dirt by our Vietnamese allies--had lived in the same place for at least 800 years (4 times as long as the U.S. had existed) was unimportant. What was important, according to one American official, was that about 90% of the villagers were suspected of being VC sympathizers. Relocation would put them within sight of a Special Forces camp where there activities could be monitored.

I was the information officer (PIO) for the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Air Cav at that time. Moving day for an entire village was a story which could be used to make our Brigade command look good ("Hill folk saved from clutches of the Commies through 1st Air Cav" would make a fine headline) and that was our reason for existing. I jumped on a helicopter to cover the story.

LZ Joe was an almost abandoned airstrip--two paved slabs between a forest of evenly spaced rubber trees in an area 40 or 50 miles north of Saigon. A Special Forces camp was at one end. At the other end, a 1st Cav engineer unit had cleared some of the undergrowth between the rubber trees and had set up some large Army tents. When we got there at 8:30 or 9 o'clock in the morning, ox carts, filled way beyond capacity, were already arriving. A couple of Cav 2 1/2 ton trucks were bumping along paths bringing a few extra belongings.

I have no idea what home was like for Montagnards who were being forced to find a new home. It was not, I'm sure, Army tents tied to rubber trees. But they adapted quickly. Pigs were put in pens--squealing, for sure--next to the tents. Duck boards (narrow boards nailed across 2x4's to keep belongings off the ground and out of the mud) appeared as flooring for the tents and as porches. The Montagnards started scouting out the area under the wary eye of 1st Cav troops who did not want to get very far away from the airstrip clearing.

Still looking for a story, I did notice one family which had enjoyed the new territory by catching a long brown snake, now stuck between a couple of sticks and cooking in front of a fire at the doorstep of the tent. Only one family, that I saw, had to be told not to hurt the rubber trees (they wanted to cut one down) which no doubt belonged to some French millionaire, long departed from Vietnam.

Because I had the rank of captain, and because the command of the 1st Air Cav cared little about this operation, I was, through much of the day, the ranking U.S. officer on the spot. So I was the one who was told by the Special Forces commander that although the public reason for moving these folk was to protect them from the bad guys, the real reason was that they were 95% VC sympathizers and we wanted to watch them. And there were other perks to my position.

The newly located Montagnards--who had finished cooking the snake--invited me to join them for lunch. It was an honor; I could hardly say no. We had snake, freshly cooked, washed down with rice wine in not-too-clean glasses (though the rice wine would sterilize most anything) and leaves/salad. The meal was punctuated by many smiles (were they laughing at the silly American eating snake?), numerous children and, on my part, some strenuous efforts to swallow the gristly snake; I refused more in hopes they would enjoy it more than I.

This feast was only the first luncheon invitation I would receive for the day. In immaculate, freshly pressed fatigues, in drove the district chief, riding in his spit-shined jeep, sporting metallic reflecting sun glasses and PX-purchased polaroid. He too was a captain (in the Vietnamese army, though too important to be in actual service), younger than I; fairly well substantiated rumors said that he needed to stay in the district chief job for no more than a year to amass a fortune sufficient for permanent and elegant retirement.

Though he was paying only a brief visit to the new site of the village, his had been the first tent set up. It had chairs, unlike the Montagnard tent where we sat on the ground. For lunch, we were served French liqueurs, beer from a large ice bucket, and smoked salmon. Given the hardships of being in the "field," it was fine dining. No villagers, as far as I could tell, were invited.

But the best was yet to come. Who knows what military genius at First Air Cav Headquarters came up with the concept that the Montagnards needed entertainment to feel at home--or what SP4 with a keen sense of the ridiculous got the right orders put out. In any case, about 3:00 in the afternoon, a couple of Chinooks settled down on the airstrip; out of them came the men of the 1st Cav Division band, instruments in tow. Hustled along by some senior non-com band director not too comfortable with being quite so far away from the safety of Cav HQ's, the band set up in the middle of the new village and began a medley of tunes from "My Fair Lady."

The Montagnards looked amazed. I know I was. Here were people torn from their roots at the whim of a couple of Special Forces jerks, moved lock stock and barrel to a tent city with no provision for a way to earn a living, and finally serenaded with incomprehensible music from a culture as foreign as if it came from Mars. I could only ask myself (though not for publication) as we flew away from the area, how many hearts and minds had the U.S. won that day?

And yet what I still remember, more than the inherent stupidity of U.S. efforts, was the smiles on the faces of some of the Montagnards. Was it the smile of men who knew they better smile or the crazy Americans just might kill them, rape their wives and destroy their families--the smile of the terror-stricken--or were they the smiles of men who somehow knew that no matter what idiocies and indignities we might put them through, they were the winners and we--with helicopters and bands and district chiefs in our pockets--would surely lose.

(The following letter was written by a teacher of a class in which VVAW members had spoken.)

Dear VVAW,

I wanted to thank you again. You all had a tremendous impact. One student who was planning to enlist decided not to. They all wanted to talk about it and the military recruiters were shocked by the questions all my students asked.

The recruiters, of course, made it sound like a country club. One of my students said, "But really you train people to kill!" When I asked a student what he thought of you, he said "Oh, you're talking about those people who told the truth!!!"

Keep up the struggle.

Sincerely,
Dina Heisler
New York City