THE VETERAN
Vietnam Veterans Against the War

VOL. 17 No. 2
SPRING - '87

SPECIAL 4 pages
ON THE DECLINE IN CARE AND SERVICES-
STARTING ON p. 8

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IN GEORGIA
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Platoon
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Black Veterans and the Economy p21

PLUS-
FRAGGIN'
WAR STORIES
AND MORE

20 YEARS
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

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

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

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 Casualties, Winter Soldier, and The Veteran (for sale, even)

6 PM '87. Dinner inside the hall. No long-winded 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.
Did you see "Platoon?" I suppose most of you did. One old soldier I met on the bus was stimulated by the scene early in the movie when the F.K. makes some 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 in the 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 after they'd go off to sandbag 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 on McCord AFB. Same same weather. Now I'm in Cam Ranh Bay. I'm 109 degrees in the shade. If I blink I start to sweat. I've just spent 30 or 40 days on leave, eating, drinking and growing fat. The day before, I had spent nineteen hours folded into a seat in a 707 flying across the pond.

I wanted to volunteer to work and sweat for the U.S. Army! Not me. I didn't even want to take the bus. I was against my principles to volunteer for anything. So I sat there and they came and took away that order and then there were only five of us. And they stopped coming after volunteers. We sat there and waited. "G'morning," said the Captain. 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 Speck patch and looks like he just got out of bed. Whereas the other hooches were all noisy and authoritarians 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 didn't give a shit what we were supposed to do.

I started getting the idea when the Speck handed each one of us a pair of gloves. We all kind of stood around looking at each other with a sinking feeling in our bellies. This is it, I thought. "You just pull tem out and I'll burn tem." I realize that during the entire history of mankind before flush toilets, in poor countries today, and in armies throughout history, this is how latrines have worked, and I dealt with. But that doesn't make it OK when it happens to you. We all sort of stared at each other, and then looked at our feet. This is what it really means to be shit on. Finally someone started to get a little busy. And 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 streetily under all the toilet seats. I supposed that since THE VETERAN is a newspaper with taste I need not go into detail and exactly describe the contents of the pots looked and smelled. Suffice it to say, my stomach felt the same way it does the drinking of nine or ten cans of cheap beer.

When our job was done, we sat on a nearby log and glibly watched the Speck pour gasoline into the pots and light them. Now we smelt our noses and gave our stomachs 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 better again, I asked the Speck how on earth he had to do this.

"Every day."
The guy who told me this was just temporary, I asked how long he had been doing this.

He gave me his own version anyway. "I was a thousand-yard stare and softly said, "Eight months.""

The Speck's short-time 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.

I know you've heard about TV preacher Oral Roberts announcing that God told him he was running out on his life unless his followers coughed up $8 million by May 1st, but if he needed the money for scholarships 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 the Lord about this. And She agreed. Something drastic needs to be done, and we liked what I said. So that's what I did.

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 Offense.

And 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 amnesia instead.

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

A. A Ronald Reagan puppet.
B. Senile.
C. An Ed Meese puppet.
D. Not a senile, just plain dumb.
E. A CIA puppet.
F. The original model for "smile" buttons.
G. Nancy's puppet.
I. A C-3PO 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 should 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 White back, referring to Ronnie Reagan's many fouples, he confessed, "Some of these are like a showboat brigade that follows a parade down Main Street cleaning up." Hey, I think I met this guy before. He was at 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 there is a arms attitude toward women. At least some powerful men in the respective governments do. Former White House Councilor to the President, Donald Regan has dethroned his wife 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 Barbara 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. Someone needs to pass these sex aid and then sometimes it's work for Don Regan's shoot. Rafsanjani also made the comments when Western women were in a mess because they had given more and more liberty to women. Maybe he was referring to Nancy Reagan because she seems to have played a role in ostentatious her billabller, Donald Regan. But he does have a point: Nancy Reagan would be more pleasant if she would just head to toe.

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| TURN TO NEXT PAGE |
Snake Oil Democracy

THE SELLING OF REAGAN'S WAR

San Rafael del Norte, following an August 1985 contra attack. Mourning the dead has become a daily reality.

Jack Elder
San Antonio VVAV

"Americans love the idea of a thing far more than the thing itself" (quoted in Harper's, 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. The lies are more than common deception. They are lies calculated to confuse 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 spokes-

person was Maurice Inman, general counsel 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 militarization of the legal 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 knew then and 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 inform Mr. Inman's audience. that Central Americans need to be aware of the Administration's intense ef-

fects to manipulate public per-
ception 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 Presi-

dent, 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, had the effect of thoroughly muddying any responsible debate on Central America. As so well expressed by Elliot Abrams' speech, "An End to Tyranny in Central America," (12-9-86) followed the next day by President Reagan's speech "Safeguarding Human Rights" (12-10-86) was to sug-

gest that 1) democracy is actu-

ally taking root in Central America and 2) that human rights not only exist but that they are being safeguarded. Both conclusions leaned 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 "de-

mocracy" plays in these Admin-

istration policy statements. "Praise of the thing" assumes cen-
ter stage but what we are really seeing is the dissemination of an idea without any corporeal counterpart. "No Delay For Democratic Democracy," "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 de-

mocracy in the region, what they do share is the concern that U.S. interests (national sec-

urity, access to minerals, materials, debt repayment) be protected at any cost. To a great degree the Administration public relations campaign-projects the idea, refuted by all the evi-
dence, 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 Central American "proponents" by justifying a major escalation of hostilities against Nicaragua. On a related note, 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 premises 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 of the Administration make for our client states ("fair elec-
tions," "human rights improve-
ments," or "effective agrarian reform") have the unfortunate effect of having some credibility in the current climate of confusion on Central America. That shred of credibility is often enough to embolden the leaders who would otherwise clearly recognize the need to be in solidarity with the people of Central Amer-

ica 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 in-

famy of our society and the absen-
tee numbers of refugees from Central America. These same people, however, continue to fail to know the violence that pervades the region and that is now making a major contribution to the events in the first place. Others, equally well intentioned, suggest that more economic aid only serves to reinforce structures that created the social tensions leading to revolution. Habits of thought and social structure that we ought to be pleased to see them coming crash-

ing down.

As long as we let the strat-

cetic misinformation of our gov-

ernment and our own fears of our third world and our actions we will be unable to re-

spond to the challenge presented to us by the events disengaging in Central America. And as we stand immobilized, afraid to respond to the challenge, to act without a set, we shouldn't be surprised by the ridicule other nations make of us with their abundant, unper-

sistent and needless toll of or-

phans, widows, prisoners, des-

aparecidos, and refugees that are generated by our capitulation to this campaign of stra-

tetic misinformation.

Marching Against Reagan

April 1987 will once again bring veterans out to march on the Western White House in Santa Barbara, California. In-

cluding in this year's actions will be a vets march on the vac-

cant home of Vice President Bush in Kennebunk, Maine.

This is the third consecu-

tive year for an action in front of the Western White House. This year VVAV, as a member of the Veterans Peacemakers Network will participate. We need to draw as many veterans from VVAV 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 veteran's groups. The base camp will open on Saturday, April 18th, at El Rancho State Park on Highway 101, about 15 miles from Santa Barbara. You will need two sleeping bags as sleeping 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 AMER-

ICA! We all know another war like Vietnam is heating up and we have a duty to try to stop it.

A lot of you go back a long time with VVAV. We hope to make good use of our time in California by recontacting people who may have been in touch and LAB, VVAV, Milano (415) 963-0398. If you plan to join us, please write VVAV.

The East Coast march in Maine is planned for the 19th of April; for more information contact Jerry Genealo, (207) 297-2770.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Fragging

sation or welfare. Anyway, Jerry later compared the unem-

ployed to his dogs, saying: "One of the members of the church, a well-to-do business executive, he had two Irish Setters. He told me what kind of meat they needed and I could buy it and so on. When he left I went to the store and got me a 50-pound bag and took it to the church for them and sure enough, they would not eat it. But four days later, they did. And if we give them hungry hungry, 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 giving food to the poor 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 re-

spir, the local government, from the local librarian to the president of the republic make themselves available to the peo-

dle for questions, criticism, and suggestions. Though usually these are private affairs for the Nicaraguan people, occasionally they are held in the primary school courtyard, under the trees.

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

On one side of the event was Daniel Ortega, Dora María Téllez, Murillo Ortega, the entire junta municipal of Somoto, and representatives for agriculture, transportation, housing, finance, the Sandinista Party, the trade unions, the Zone and the Region. There must have been 30 people on the two-foot-high stage.

On the other side were the people of Somoto and a few other towns: campesinos in ragged clothes, old vets in ponytails, old women in wizened and dignified ones, cowboys in leder gentry garb, barefoot kids, lawyers, mechanics, and other professionals. In a word, Nicaragua.

Some of the people came in their Sunday clothes and banners, like the numerous Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs and the Sandinista Youth. Folks came on horseback, foot, outh, vehicle, bike and wheelchair, the last no mean feat given the nature of Somoto's streets. I came in a crowded 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 news-
paper 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 Num-

ber One, this is 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, 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 Nicaragua, Managua or anywhere is because people like them live along the border. The youth of the cities, however, are in the U.S. people who live in a "pre-revolutionary" situation and have no control over their own government. "Those people are the heart of North America," he said. "Reagan and his people have no haven, we have come to a war zone to attend this Cara del Pueblo—for their peace is more than words, it is con-

crete practice."

The Somoto party responsi-

bles' 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 microphone, but the party chief did it. He was about 25 years old.

The first citizen spoke up, an old woman in a tattered but threadbare dress. She has a son in prison for being part of a contra band. He wanted him out. Ortega gave an incomplete answer about the woman, listening intently.

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

"Yes," she said, "he's all right except he has to go and get the TB drug that couldn't get out." (Unless you're a Yan-

kee mercenary like Haenfuss, the Popular Tribunals are back-

loaded about nine months to a year.)

"This war is a terrible thing," Ortega said. "It divides the Chamorro family which runs the political gemut from the editor of El Buey to a retired FIN officer. Those who want no part of the revolutionary process are free to leave Nicaragua," then she turned up arms against it will be killed or imprisoned."

He consulted with someone from the top of the Integ-

ror 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 state-

ment 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.

But on the other hand, that no matter what this guy did, he will be out of jail decades before Leonard Peltier or any of the other Indians, and that state will not take his life. Ob-

viously, there's a lack of "law and order" here.

The woman was really pissed and it showed. He was

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Marching for Freedom in Georgia
VETS AGAINST KLAN

---Elton Manzione
Mid-Atlantic VAVV

The Mid-Atlantic Chapter of VAVV, including members from Athens 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 re-visions. Remember in ‘Nam we didn’t give a damn what color that guy was, just as 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 ears 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 VAVV 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 “Hoi Chi Minh traitors” but were silenced by a show of Silver Stars, Purple Hearts, etc. Black guardsmen gloomed 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 organizations interviewed our members. But it wasn’t until we marched and chant-chanted that the real attention came our way. Starting with a chorus of “Hi Dee Hi Dee Ho. We’re just here to let you know, Hi Dee Hi Dee Hi Dee Ho. 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-protesters, 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 god-damned 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 court-house roofed dozens of marchers, still arriving, saluted us, gave us clenched fist signs, applauded and generally made us proud to be VAVV. 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 earholes 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 VAVV 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 promen 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.

—Joan Combs

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---INCOMING---

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"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.
VVAV 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 Accord. 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 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 1978. 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 recognized 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 antiewar message by the GIs of the First Air Cavalry in Vietnam.)
We shoot the sick and the young, the lame,
We do our best to kill and maim,
Because the kills all count the same,
Napalm sticks to kids.

Ok, cart rolling down the road,
Passants 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 sticks to kids, 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.

(NVAW had a substantial membership among GIs in Vietnam, particularly following an ad which Playboy Magazine carried for the organization. The following paragraphs, let alone from the first issue of The First Casualty, says all about 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

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. We are sorry if this was not possible to have delivered this mail.

Sincerely,
W.L. Hinspeter
Lieutenant Colonel, AGC
Commanding 1 Enclosure

(November 1971)

Vietnamese Veterans Against the War raise demonstred flat salutes and release black balloons during Oct. 30 University of Michigan football game in Ann Arbor. Almost two-thirds of the crowd supported the autumn action.

* Some 75,000 football fans in Ann Arbor and millions of TV viewers across the country participated in witnessed a dramatic expression of antiewar sentiment during the halftime show at the University of Michigan homecoming football game Oct. 30. As the announcement read a statement saying, "This war be coming unless a date is set now for the withdrawal of all American forces," about 100 Vietnam veterans lined up on the edge of the field. After releasing black balloons, each with a white band reading "The world is not worth fighting for" and "The war is not worth fighting for," the crowd stood in complete silence for the Observation Tower's " Hard Pumper." The event, which had been in the cards for the past two years,

DOES IT HURT INSIDE?

This article is taken intact from the 1971 edition of "The First Casualty," VVAW's earliest newspaper; this is from Volume II, Number 1, Post August, 1971. There has been a lot of work done on post traumatic stress since this article was written, but the article is another 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 until 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 continuous coming home to the U.S. and its effects on the population.

This 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 in being developed, certain sessions, some puzzling questions are beginning to be answered.

Dr. C.F. Shanta, post professor, and Clinical 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 "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 symptoms in World War II.

Two of particular interest—

unusual group cohesion, and
counter-insurgency training (with habitual use to universal terror as chief weapon).

Dr. Shanta 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 PFC 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. The last day of his life was May 24, 1972. Van Dale Todd died. He was a very active member of the San Francisco VVAW committee and one of the 18 people who occupied an Air Force Recruiting Station in San Francisco, was a former member of the 191st Airborne and served in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970.

Van, along with all the other brothers and sisters of VVAW wanted and worked unceasingly to "end man's inhumanity towards his fellow man." A war 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 blindeye 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 "chemical cacon" 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 felt was inferior 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 Cemetery 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 legacy of peace and the sacrifices he made 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 last 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-Clemons
Washington, DC

While most of us sit list

cening helplessly to reports of

illegal insider trading, of drugs

tied to the Federal Reserve's

$1 trillion bailouts or the tune of "more profits" while

continuing to lead our jobs

overseas, often in countries

where we unemployed veterans

fought so that workers can be

exploited. The threat of nu-

clear 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 mil-

lions; and struggle for the

right to vote can still land you in

jail, especially if you are of

color. Wages 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

American homeless and child

villaged reefs are still being stolen with go-

vernment approval. Further, ra-

cial, sexual and against antago-

nism continue to rise as we fight

over crumbs.

Hunger and homelessness are

fueled by a lack of Aids as we live one paycheck

and one sexual encounter away

from disaster. And we find that one-third of the homeless

in our great nation are veterans;

more vets have committed suicide than were killed in Viet-

nam; 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 "Snaps Rebellion" following the

Revolutionary War. Government

militia were called in to put
down veterans who had taken up

arms against the oppressive.

bankers who had foreclosed on

and stolen the homes and farms of

Vietnam soldiers away fight-

ing 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

bottom-up housing) being left

home to Frederick Douglas.

The veterans had come to their na-

tion's capital from around the
country during the Great De-

pression 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 as-

sisted by Eisenhower and Patton

in their pre-general days.

It appears that we have

not done much better then in the
days of Mary and Josephine

when there was no room at the

inn.

According to a Draft Re-

port from the Council of the

City of New York Select Com-

mittee on the Homeless—Report on Homelessness and Veterans

(Feb 1987), chairperson

A. Abraham Gorges 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-psychi-

atric disorder, which is the

principle cause of their precip-

ation.

Very few programs exist to

help the homeless veteran, des-

pite the vast array of social

services and benefits supposi-

tely available to veterans. One

program, a Homeless Veteran

project, provides outreach to

the veterans in that city's shel-

ters. Other than this, the

government has no program specifically designed for home-

less 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 Met-

ropolitan Washington Union of

the Homeless has served the Vet-

erans Administration when they

took the boards off a VA fore-

closure and moved four homeless

veterans into the hottest home.

The vets were later evicted by

the police. The VA subsequen-

ty foreclosed on a number of

such houses to be resold to

veterans, a proposal that is still under negotiation.

Despite the fact that veterans have been capitalized on the

long history of squatting in this

country, the group linked to

the National Homeless Union,

based in Nashville, TN, has been

led by formerly homeless organi-

zer Chris Sprosal believes in

moving beyond shelters; its

name is Homeless ("Helpless"

forced a response by

drawing public attention to the

issue. One vet remarked, "They

allowed enough money to pay

a Vietnam War monument down-

town----now veterans are on the

street. We're not taking it any-

more."

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 popu-

lation. Homeless veterans ad-

ditionally experience deinsti-

tutionalization (getting out of prison, half-way house, etc.)

and your basic housing crunch (no

housing available), and drug

(including alcohol) abuse prob-

lems, according to the report.

The report has already received its share of criticism from local veterans activist advocates in New York City, primarily 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

PHOTO: STEVE DALKER

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 repos-

sessed 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 repossession. 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 denizens or crasy 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 time I showed up. To cel-

brate Martin Luther King's

birthday holiday, 30 of Chica-

go's finest handcuffed and ar-

rested four of the homeless.

My daughter couldn't un-

derstand: were the police mak-

ing 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 poi-

soning, 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 ar-

resting 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 remem-

ber that those men weren't do-

ing anything wrong to get ar-

rested."

---Barry Romo

VFW National Office

TURN TO NEXT PAGE
and documented racial and class bias, evidenced 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 victims or Agent Orange victims, or those veterans who faced discrimination in the military, in the job and housing markets where they got stuck, 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—1948, 1968, 1974, and other bills—never meet their goals according to Barry Zigas, National Low-Income Housing Coalition. A low-income policy statement adopted by the U.S. Senate Finance Committee in 1974 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, …

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 a fight against 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, reminiscent 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 concert 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 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 media strategy. We got the media to follow us to the mayors place, the tenant 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 renovation of existing public housing units, employment opportunities for the residents, and others. The law for construction and renovation. The bill also increases the ceiling on rental rates to 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 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, resident 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 regulations;
7. Reform federal tax laws to reflect priority for aiding people with the greatest housing need, and;
8. Provide the financing needed to preserve, build and rehabilitate housing.

There is no simple 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 issue is the need for veterans, a struggle which we know all too well. Yet this is no progress without struggle, as Frederick Douglass said; and 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 must 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!
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 prospect of cutbacks 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 services for veterans—of all ages.

The slow and deadly slide of VA healthcare beginning in the late 60's and early 70's, when 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 caregivers 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 discharges/springing project, a national veterans in prison project, GI and veterans counseling centers. Vets, at the same time, reminded 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 issue 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 1986 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 veteran 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 findings 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 seeking health care 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 hand 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—never ever again to 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 a three-fold reduction in the number of stay in VA facilities. Three years later, after the VA tried this approach, the real world invered and the number of veterans increased in the numbers needing to be treated. And this should be no surprise considering cuts in members of the medicaid by the Reagan Administration.

Undisturbed by such trifles, Ronald 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 must independently determine if they live or die. The future is bleak for vets of any new conflicts. They thought to include them at all: will they have to retrace the steps of Vietnam vets or even the Bonus Members of the 1930's to regain their benefits?

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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 as increased demand for VA services. It's not easy to grasp the fact that Vietnam vets entering their 40's are, as a group, "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 Distriet 17, was the most dramatic of the four areas studied. The crisis is not in the future there: it has arrived. 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 health care 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 discharges 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. Bed as it has been in the past with influx of rat-infested homes, corrupt officials and inspectors, with VA denial 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 our 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 dawning gray.

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' health care 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

Arthur Egendrof, a psychologist and nationally recognized expert in treating war trauma, shows us what Vietnam veterans can teach us about the human capacity to master life's most devastating circumstances. After graduating from Harvard, he served in army intelligence in Vietnam and, like many other veterans of that war, was deeply troubled on his return.

This book tells how he transformed that pain and helped hundreds of other veterans do the same.

Dealing from the Heart is a unique, moving, personal story that defies the usual logic of healing, not only for individual veterans, but for the American spirit. It is the first book a logical expert to tell from inside what it's like to face the pain of Vietnam and come out whole.

U.S. Senator John Kerry, Vietnam Veteran

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58,800 Dead Americans, 2 Million Dead Vietnamese

A HISTORY OF THE VOYET

More than any U.S. war since the Civil War, Vietnam divided America and made us re-examine 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 12 Vietnamese, wounding many 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. French forces 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 3,000 dead.

U.S. involvement in Vietnam during World War II saw the Americans as our allies. A group of OSS agents (later to become the CIA) made contact with anti-Japanese guerrillas in Southeast Asia. The French who had controlled the area were the "Vichy" French who, with their Mud loyals, 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. Of the three 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 flew over the capital 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; joining 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 prize 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 France 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 Montmartel 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 would be temporarily divided into north and south, with free elections to take place nationwide in 1956.

Advisory Group) to train a "nationalist" 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 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 desperate. More and more American troops were put in to replace Saigon troops who could not—or would not—get involved in the
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, masquer-

Adan 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 didn't.

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 land. We bombed hospitals to save orphans, we sprayed Agent Orange and destroyed the land in order to save crops, we lodged hamlets and sprayed water and turned Vietnam into a huge warehouse 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" in the hearts and minds of the American people. 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 were the groundbreaks in return for drugs, booze or women or all three. We also saw the enemy fight and had to admire both the 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 $129 in payment for a life.

We fought uphill, 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 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 grunts, 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, bivied, 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—or the reality—were worth the lives and the money being squandered. The war was lost on the battlefields of Vietnam and想象 of the American people.

During the war VVAW led tens of thousands of Vietnam vets in demonstrations against the war. No comparable group of Vietnam vets ever rose to challenge VVAW or our goals. When VVAW brought Viet- nam vets to protest Nixon's re-nomination, 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 the Thieu and Diem and Ky. In Nicaragua we pay mercenaries to burn, loot and kill and then call them "freedom fighters" in the names of our "forefathers." Heres 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 bought the government's lies. Vietnam was not a "mole 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 Honor winner and Marine commandant Sneadley 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 shouder 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

A National Veterans Organization Recognized as Tax Deductible.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War was founded in 1967 to help veterans and their families deal with the psychological and physical trauma caused by the Vietnam War. The organization was co-founded by veterans who were part of the American G.I. War Resisters League and the Vietnam Women's Liberation Front.

The organization has grown to include thousands of members across the United States and has been recognized by the IRS as a tax-deductible organization.

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T-SHIRTS

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ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ATTENDING VVAA'S 20th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION?

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

To help us plan, please reply to this letter with your interest and any other information you can provide. We will send you more information as it becomes available.

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

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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.

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T-SHIRTS

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I would like to become part of the monthly sustainer program. I will contribute $10 per month and will include a subscription to THE VETERAN.

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THE VETERAN

Membership Form

Fighting for Veterans, Peace, Justice since 1967

National Office
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DATE ____________________________

NAME ____________________________

ADDRESS ____________________________

CITY __________ STATE ______ ZIP ______

Dates of Service Branch Unit

Overseas Duty Date

Military Occupation Rank

VVAA welcomes all people who want to join in a veterans' organization to fight for peace and justice. Although many of our members are vets of the Vietnam-era, we want all veterans of all ages—as well as interested non-vets—to join to help prevent more Vietnam wars. Memberships requirements are participation in the life of the organization, and payment of $1 per month to the national organization with a $5 initiation fee.

VVAA 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.

Signature ____________________________

(Make checks payable to VVAA; all contributions are tax deductible)

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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, Senior Presidente, are, according to the perceptions of our revolutionary comrade 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 said.

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

"Well the responsible blew it. While it is true (and ominous) that the war launched by the U.S. causes a lot of problems, and in accordance to the perceptions of our revolution we do not need the military and the police (interestingly, the party officials tried to foist off all of these shortcomings on the war. He spoke for a long time about the "im-potency" of his office to do anything about these problems.

When he was through, Ortega confided with Doris 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 medical team visiting the village every week. 2) A school will be built within a month. A teacher will be found. 3) "Roll your water, comapnios, 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 had not received 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, and a woman wants that is his own. I don't want the land that I'm offered. I want my land back.

He said, even 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 campesino 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 Somoista 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. Year after year 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 it, similar to the land we are taking, according to the companion of Agrarian Reform. For a year, he refused to move, for fear he 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 comapnio will accept this land, we will give him all the material necessary to build a house—roofing, cement, lumber, nails, everything." The man 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 they were very poor, but they did not have because of the revolution, the Frente Sandinista, its heroes and martyrs, and the Army. So the business men and their representatives 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 $7. 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 work about 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 machine on his head. He cost them more to donate the equivalent of $27 than it took for our "representatives" to cough up $100 million plus the cost of the guns.

The Cara del Pueblo went on for five solid hours on a Saturday. Ortega maintained an unperturbed expression, always keeping his body in his chair to fully face the citizen who was speaking. He didn't intervene in every conversation, merely saying very little in varying degrees, as the responsibilities to whom the questions were directed would speak for themselves.

It was an outstanding event, in my book. Of course, this is all propaganda and common sense on the President's part would lead to the unemployment line, if practised in the U.S. There isn't any need for a whole pack of highly paid paidos 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 capital, on a 70-hour week, Ortega gave his attention to Nicaragua's common citizens, as happens every week. Personally I got a chance out of the devastating looks on the faces of the yank bourgeoisie from Seattle. I'm sure they are very pleased, of course, that the Yanks are going to kidnap and torture, if necessary, upperclass anti-intervention movement is the feeling that the U.S. really does have the best with its own system is not so good in the world, blah, blah. To realize so clearly and graphically that the Sandinistas have it all over our own system was a shock for them. Their minds were blown; it 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 Carazo, the Contras had gone to yankee brigadistas dominated the mike for too long (as usual), each one asking for a party line, "Bueno, bueno, the Nicaraguan Revolution S.O.B.'s". Spare me. To my relief, Hoffman wasn't mentioned (this guy is really the best) and rather good messages of solidarity were conveyed.

Oké, said Ortega at the end, and everyone joined in friendly 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 and the people of Austria through the zonal mission. At the same time we know that many people smuggle beans and rice to sell in Honduras. Now that's right, and it's not good. Countries donate food and medicine to help the Cuban people to do this. We cannot, while we say we need these things, at the same time have the commercialization of outside the country for personal profit. This hurts all of us, everyone. So stop the people doing this. It's a job for the CDS (Sandinista Defense Committee) and for every citizen. Tiny steps toward the unification.

A few people were shy, several angry, one very angry, and all were interested in the problem as always is the case in the U.S. we 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 Ab的手, his guitar, and no one couldn't equal the cost of that song.

[Chuck Winant is a Vietnamese veteran—Mekong Delta '68-'69--living in Nicaragua. He's a correspondent for THE VETERAN and a member of the Material Aid Committee--Vancouver (MCVJ).]
One order of business was to deal with the Revolution-ary Community Party which showed up to play AT/VVAW (see article about VV/AV and the ICP elsewhere in this paper). The difficult group is still active on the West Coast and is doing support work for Ayatollah Khomeini. 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 opening the Coalition and to plan actions around the country. We started out with reports of activities of the groups present: 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 the third element - what kind of group we are. This is not a new organization but rather a coalition of existing peace groups. The motions reflected this: 1) One coordinator will be elected for one year on a rotating basis- elected 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 uncontested to be regional coordinators. A quarterly newsletter and minutes of each 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 Cross Point school system refused to run the ads which told the other side of the 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 affidavit which has been turned over to Senator Kerry and the Special Prosecutor in Washington: this affidavit 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 "Guerrilla Guard" to help 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 Reed, spoke on the April 25th demonstration in Washington, DC. Over 60 groups are part of the coalition and 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 20-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 381, 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 26, 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. Fretney, Milwaukee, WI 53212 (414) 963-6058. 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.
THE WAR ON WAR TOYS

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

For years 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 VVAV. The U.S. government, using the FBI, as in the Gainesville trial in Florida following the Republican National Convention in 1972. And, over the years, the other attacks have come from ultra-leftist-communist-type groups such as the Progressive Labor Party, NCLC, and off and on since 1974, the RCP, known as the RU or Revolutionary Union.

Few people have even heard of the RCP. They've attempted to steal the name of VVAV, which is a long and proud history, and which has a name known to many. Their use for VVAV has been demonstrated for years. Take a veteran with the credibility he has as a vet, and the added credibility which comes from being a member of 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 new support for the veterans 46-year Fast for Life in Washington, DC, and the growing movement against wars like Vietnam in Central America. All over America, small groups of veterans, many of them old VVAV people, have been becoming more active.

On the West Coast, in LA. Berkeley, and Seattle, a group calling itself "VVAV-Anti Imperialist" has reared its ugly head and says, "We are VVAV." A few of its members were once in VVAV 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 VVAV. The phrase "A.I." or "anti-imperialist" had to appear before the name VVAV with the disclaimer according to the court order.

These RCPites also used VVAV’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. For a few of us intend to let this kind of political sabotage continue. These shells of human beings are comparable to cultists, like Moonsies 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 VVAV 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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For more information, contact:
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(203) 889-5337 or 455-9621

NY/NJ VVAV members Ed Damato, Gary McArthur and David Klein.

Photo by David Vita

"DON'T BUY WAR TOYS"

"SCAB GROUP MISUSES OUR NAME"
"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 veteran 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 begin 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 war 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.

On movie on the dirty, worthless "little" war was no match for the Rabobs, 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紛 from right-wing vets. They complain of scenes depicting friggings, brutality towards civilians, destruction of villages, and dope smoking. The right shows they either were not in combat or alive become the "40-year-old men" we hated for reliving their youth in our blood. Hopefully they 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 non-nonsense 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 "América," we can call it "Viet-nam." Yes, and I'll probably win the lottery this week, too.

Oh yes—the best to Oillie Stone for one of the best 'Nam flicks yet.
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 violence was over-the-top, 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 build the grunts on the ground. This was what I signed up for but it was not duty, the fighting was getting heavy. This new job put me in close to the enemy, so not so close I couldn't get in and out fast. As a demo tech I set up and cleaned 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 things, who went through the hell 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 landing back, patrols in trouble or just popping off rounds at machine gunners. 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 bullets squishing in the grass, the size of baseballs—so close, streaking past my C-100 gunnery to pull some altitude. We called in an air strike and the countryside lit up like the 4th of July as F-4's, F-105's, and A-10'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 wouldn't know if you fell in. In "Platoon," the morning after the heavy firefight, enemy bodies lay 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 re-experiencing. My wife Terry, a nurse at 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.

I am a conservative critic, like martial artist Chuck Norris, have said "Platoon" unflavourably portrays our troops. True, not everyone had the same experiences in the war, but enough men had such similar experiences to that of "Platoon" that the army basically failed 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 Raquel 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, and all that. 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 them 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 war as essentially fighting their own war of independence. It was 1776 for them. We fought hard, but they fought harder. Trick and Nixon, but they had their George Washington in Ho Chi Minh. We had 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, even though we never justified support for things like apartheid, contras and cutting support for our workers and poor here with the same time. In the war, we saw our aid supplies given to the local military who forced it over their own poor. My candy diplomacy was no match for the military who were taking over the farmer's land. But I thought the countries where we fought communism or fascism and other local tyrants is the same thing as what we're doing here. I was wrong.

At the end of "Platoon" I think Stone says well why American soldiers 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 bad, especially if you're fighting for the wrong cause.

Radio Hanoi
Platoon

Radio Hanoi, the main radio station of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, has given favorable commentary 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. "It also reflects the ideological struggle between the good and evil of the American GI who was thoughtless, barbarous and humane." It points out that the film is very popular in the U.S. and has received eight Academy Awards, including one for best picture. The film was written and directed by Vietnam veteran Oliver Stone.

(From the People's Daily World)
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 what they were killing--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 guilty about des- troying an innocent country.

But pot smoking isn't the worst of it. Unlike your ter-rific movies, which only show Connies getting zapped, "Pla- toon" really brings us down by showing guys in American uni- forms being wounded and even killed. And these are white guys!

"Platoon" even has the au- dience to show that Americans also killed other Americans in Vietnam. In fact, in 1972 the Department of Defense con- firmed that 551 "fraggings," re- sulting in 86 deaths, occurred between 1968-1972. While I'm quite aware that this happened, I'm afraid that too much realism about the war may turn people off to the idea that the Com- muns' and the companies that make war toys be?

And speaking of war toys, what do you think about the toy 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 overs- sized gun that you carry any- way, so why blame your Sid- es, 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 pare- phrase 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 both upset Vietnam veterans. The dif- ference is that "Platoon" upset them because it was so realistic while "Rambo" pleased them 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 you're just jealous.

But don't 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 Norm- mandy 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 those funny-headed liberals think. And if Hollywood tries to make you look bad by nominating "Platoon" and Oliver Stone for Oscars to find comfort in what New York col- umnist Pete Hamill wrote the day the Duke died. "John Wayne was no hero," Hamill reminded his readers. "John Wayne was an actor who played heroes."  

---Ross S. Yosow
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT and the BLACK VETERAN

--G. David Curry PhD
VVAV Chicago
Former CPT, USARY

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 America in the war translates 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 and Korean vets and no "worse off" and Vietnam vets are significantly "worse off" in terms of income and education. "Worse 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 journey from one low-paying job to another has become 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, good jobs with an income that can sustain the veteran's existence, give the opportunity to support a family, and provide the 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 "goten in trouble with the law."

The U.S. is a country that is 20% black whose prison population is 80% 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 that those who continue to rely on the average experienced higher Vietnam casualty rates than white communities. Each of those casualties constituted an irreparable cost to the black communities 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.

References

QUOTE OF THE MONTH
Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega asked if Sam Hall, the U.S. citizen arrested December 12 near a Nicaraguan airfield, with maps stuffed in his socks might be crazy: "If 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
VVAB 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 reign of Pol Pot. She makes much of that remarkable history a little more understandable, more may be told at some time. In Cambodia 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 in 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 to Cambodia during Pol Pot's reign. That her visit to Cambodia was marked by men breaking into her hotel and shouting Scottit 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. Most sentences cry 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, not even viving--barely. Intelectuals 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 cadres would move. Komphot summed up his own future: "It is one 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 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 skulks 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 treating plans for death in some of the final "confessions" are painful to read--we can only imagine 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 VVAB can only 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 seconds. After reading this, one can see the devastating results of the Pol Pot revolution on individuals whose suffering is unspeakable. In the camp, higher and higher level cadres appear as the Revolution begins to devour its own. But the effect of these stories must touch anyone who reads the book: every structure of society the Vietnamese destroyed. A theory (never well explained) of estapping the country into the revolutionary vacuum would work only for the people for whom, after all, the revolution was supposed to have taken place. Elizabeth Becker helps us to understand the historical roots for Pol Pot's brutal approach to changing his country. The strain of feelingless violence runs through the history of Cambodia, the author notes, from the days of the Khmer empire to the centuries earlier. And Pol Pot and his fellow revolutionaries are well versed in history, though they are also selective. Their narrative will on the people for whom, after all, the revolution is supposed to have taken place. Elizabeth Becker helps us to understand the historical roots for Pol Pot's brutal approach to changing his country. The strain of feelingless violence runs through the history of Cambodia, the author notes, from the days of the Khmer empire to the centuries earlier. And Pol Pot and his fellow revolutionaries are well versed in history, though they are also selective. Their narrative will on the people for whom, after all, the revolution is supposed to have taken place.

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 antology. For each of us there are particular poems or stories which speak to us, which capture some particular 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 country's single tour. Occasionally these are jarring interjections as when we read a section of an LBJ speech or a quote such as: "The war in Vietnam because the United States of America has a stake in freedom" (Hubert Humphrey).

Verses and poems and quotes bounce against each other, the arrangement providing a strange patchwork of some familiar items, and new poems and stories providing a new look at the experience that was Vietnam. But it means a new look at ourselves.

Tour of Duty is published by SAMOSAT, Box 128, Richmond, VT 05476.

Chemical Companies At It Again

Dow Chemical's not to be satisfied with its fine record of Agent Orange destruction in Vietnam, has made another promise. 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 an empty storefront in downtown Winona, from February 20 to March 24th. The exhibit included more than 40 paintings, photographs, sculptures, and drawings from 10 artists and school children. Artists from states submitted work for the show, and the show went on display in downtown La Crosse, WI, on March 25.

Two Vietnam vets, Billy Curmano, 38, a performance artist, and Tom Bieszcz, 46, a ceramicist, organized the show. "I'm overwhelmed by the response to 'Art Not Arms.' I've given six more pieces since the show went up," said Bieszcz the day after the show opened.

Curmano, who travelled to Nicaragua last year with other VVAM 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 70's. McDonald's recent album, "Vietnam Experience" contains songs about his experiences 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 horror and falseness 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 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 prepared to concede Central America to the Soviet Union?"

Turek 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 concede 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. Turek 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.

**PERSONAL**

To Tom from Virginia or VWA: 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: Diederie Hubshof 8371 Clymer Ave Coloma, MI 49038

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nator, spoke against current U.S. policy.

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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.
Vietnam Veterans Tell Their Story

Recollections

--Pete Zastrow
VVA National Office

Just why we remember some things and forget experiences of Vietnam, some 20 years back, is hard to say. With some memories it's easy to understand after an interesting sensation in the lower gut which came from setting up for the night in a position that I was determined to maintain, albeit about, with nothing for defense except a kind of prayer that whatever was running their operation didn't want anything more 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 ultimate absurdity of what our government was using--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 100 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 their activities could be monitored.

I was the information officer (PIO) for the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Air Cav at that time. Montagnard day was an entire week, but the story was a story which could be used to make our Brigade command look good ("Hill folk saved from clutches of the Communists through looks of the 1st Air Cav."

I'm not sure, 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, the shelter capacity, was already arriving. A couple of C-2 1/2 ton trucks were bumping along paths bringing a few more tons. I have no idea what home was like for Montagnards who were being forced to find a new one. At the other end, 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.

Although I could hardly say no, we had snacks, 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 gruelly snake. I refused more in

come. Who knows what military genius at 1st Air Cav headquarters came up with the concept that the Montagnards needed to be moved to new home--or what SP4 with a keen sense of the ridiculous got the right orders put out. In any event, about 6:30 that evening, a couple of Chinooks settled down on the airstrip, out of them came the men of the 1st Cav Division band, instruments in tow. Hushed along by some senior non-com band dir the smiles on the faces of some 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, servedlook stock and barrel to a tent city with no provision for a way to earn a living, and finally serenade with incomprehensible music from a culture as foreign as it if came from Mars. I could only ask myself (though not for publicity 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 tetto-striker--or were they the smiles of men who somehow knew that no matter what idolies and indignities we might put their people through the winners and we--with helicopters and bands and district chiefs in our pockets--would surely lose.

(Thelater 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. They offered the choice of "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 Heister
New York City